

C. H. Spurgeon's Expositions
Volume 2

C. H. Spurgeon's Expositions Volume 2

C. H. Spurgeon

Containing his readings from
Isaiah - Luke

WITH INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS ON SPURGEON'S
PREACHING AND EXPOSITIONS
BY
PRESIDENT JAMES A. GARFIELD

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FOREWORD

Perhaps the most widely read and often quoted preacher in history is Charles Haddon Spurgeon. His published sermons, totaling 63 volumes, demonstrate his remarkable gifts, his understanding of the Scriptures, his theological acumen, his mastery of the English language, his ability to illustrate the profound truths of the gospel with simplicity, and his tremendous intellect.

Spurgeon preached *Christ* passionately. Without question, he was, and through his written works continues to be used of God for the furtherance of the gospel around the world in a remarkable way. Spurgeon's deep, yet simple trust and understanding of his Lord and Savior, his great mercy, grace and love is evident in his writings. His great longing to have others come to know, trust, love and to worship the Lord Jesus Christ is also evident. To that end he labored tirelessly in publishing the gospel.

Unfortunately there is an aspect of Spurgeon's preaching and writing that is hardly known. Before preaching to thousands at the Metropolitan Tabernacle each Sunday, he gave a brief exposition of a lengthy passage of Scripture before his sermon. Many of these expositions were published at the end of his weekly sermons in *The Sword and The Trowel*. However, they have never before been published as a work to themselves. Three volumes are here published under the title *Spurgeon's Expositions*, containing a complete compilation of those expositions. While not every scripture of the Bible was covered in his transcribed expositions, this mammoth project has resulted in a 'virtual' concise Bible commentary.

At first glance, expositions of the same passage may appear repetitive, but you will find repeated expositions of the same passages to contain fresh comments each time that he read them. It could be the most valuable Bible reference material made available to pastors in a generation, and its value as a family devotional is

beyond measure. It is our prayer that these expositions will be blessed of God to the good of many for the glory of Christ.

PSALM 90:17. *And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.*

“Let not what we do for thee fall to the ground like a badly-built wall! Let not our work be consumed in the great testing fire, ‘but the work of our hands establish thou it!’” – (Taken from a Spurgeon exposition)

INTRODUCTION

The following observations were written by General James A. Garfield, later to become President of the United States, after visiting The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit and hearing a Spurgeon exposition and sermon from Job. It is a fitting introduction to these volumes of *Spurgeon's Expositions*.

“I did not intend to listen to Spurgeon as to some *lusus naturae* (freak of nature), but to try to discover what manner of man he was, and what was the secret of his power . . . At half-past eleven Spurgeon came in, and at once offered a short, simple earnest prayer, and read and helped the whole congregation to sing Watts' stirring hymn:

There is a land of pure delight.

“For the first time in my life I felt some sympathy with the doctrine that would reject instrumental music from church worship. There must have been five thousand voices joining in the hymn. The whole building was filled and overflowed with the strong volume of song. The music made itself felt as a living, throbbing presence, that entered your nerves, brain, heart, and filled and swept you away in its resistless current.

“After the singing, he read a chapter of Job, and then a contrasted passage from Paul, both relating to life and death. He accompanied his reading with familiar and sensible, sometimes expositional, comments; then followed another hymn, a longer prayer, a short hymn, and then the sermon from a text in the chapter he had read in Job 14:14, "All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come." He evidently proceeded upon the assumption that the Bible, all the Bible, in its very words, phrases, and sentences, is the word of God; and that a microscopic examination of it will reveal ever-opening beauties and blessings. All the while, he impresses you with that, and also with the living fullness and abundance of his faith in the presence of God and the

personal accountability of all to him. An unusual fullness of belief in these respects seems to me to lie at the foundation of his power. Intellectually he is marked by his ability to hold with great tenacity, and pursue with great persistency any line of thought he chooses. He makes the most careful and painstaking study of the subject in hand. No doubt fully as much of his success depends upon his labor, as upon his force of intellect. He has chosen the doctrines and the literature of the Bible as his field, and does not allow himself to be drawn aside. He rarely wanders into the fields of poesy (poetry), except to find the stirring hymns which may serve to illustrate his theme. He uses Bible texts and incidents with great readiness and appropriateness, and directs all his power, not toward his sermon, but toward his hearers. His arrangement is clear, logical, and perfectly comprehensible; and at the end of each main division of the sermon, he makes a personal application of the truth developed, to his hearers, and asks God to bless it. His manner is exceedingly simple and unaffected. He does not appear to be aware that he is doing a great thing, and I could see no indication that his success has turned his head.

“He has the word-painting power quite at his command, but uses it sparingly. I could see those nervous motions of the hands and feet which all forcible speakers make when preparing to speak; and also in the speaking, the sympathy between his body and his thoughts which controlled his gestures, and produced those little touches of theatrical power, which are so effective in a speaker. . .

“Every good man ought to be thankful for the work Spurgeon is doing. I could not but contrast this worship with that I saw a few days ago at Westminster Abbey. In that proud old mausoleum of kings, venerable with years and royal price, the great organ rolled out its deep tones, and sobbed and thundered its grand music, mingled with the intoning of the hired singers. Before the assembly of rich and titled worshipers, sat a choir of twenty persons. The choir boys in their white robes had just been fighting among the tombs and monuments of the nave just before the service began. However devout and effective their worship may be, it is very costly, and must be confined, to a great extent, to the higher classes. I felt that Spurgeon had opened an asylum where the great untitled, the poor and destitute of this great city, could come and find their sorrows met with sympathy; their lowliness and longings for a better

life touched by a large heart and an undoubted faith. God bless Spurgeon! He is helping to work out the problem of religious and civil liberty for England, in a way he knows not of.”

James A. Garfield
General of the Union Army
20th President of the United States

ISAIAH

ISAIAH 1:1-9

1, 2. *The vision of Isaiah the son of Amos, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me.*

The good and gracious God, having been treated ungenerously, makes his appeal not to men who themselves are guilty, but to the very heavens and each, calling on the silent stones of the field, and the trees of the wood, and the stars of heaven, to judge between him and his rebellious children. "I have nourished and brought up children" — taken a nurse's interest in them, shown a parent's love to them, "and they have rebelled against me."

3, 4. *The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward.*

More brutish than the brutes are men when they forget their God. The dog follows its master's heels, but man will not be obedient to his Lord. The ox knows his owner, and gives some sign of recognition when he sees him; but alas! the ungodly sons of men know not the God that made them, feeds them, keeps them alive. Where art thou, oh! backslider? Mingling once again with the people of God, let these words come home to you. There is a "Thus saith the Lord" in the prophets words to them; and thus saith the Lord to you. You have gone away backward, provoking the Holy One of Israel to anger.

5. *Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint.*

It was of no use chastising these people. They only sinned the worse for all the afflictions that were sent, and when the fire of affliction doth not melt the iron heart, what can do it? Why waste

the fuel upon them? Ye will revolt more and more; the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. They had been smitten, they had been afflicted, till the whole nation through and through had been brought low. Their head and heart had been made faint. And, oh! there are some that have passed through many trials and are none the better. They have seen poverty, and yet they go again to the sin that first brought them to it. They feel in their very bones the result of their transgressions, and yet they hug in their bosoms the serpent that has stung them.

6. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds and bruises, and putrefying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment.

The whole land of Israel was so destroyed through sin, it was like a body that is covered with sores that have not been touched by the surgeon's hand. Yet they do not repent.

7, 8. Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire: your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers. And the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers,

A mere shanty run up during the grape season, wherein the persons who took care of the vineyard found shelter from the rain.

8. As a besieged city.

For the same purpose.

9. Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah.

Yet, though they were reduced to this, they kept on with their sins. It really seems as if men would suffer anything for their sins rather than give them up. It is not always the pleasure of sin which seems to fascinate, but the very bitterness of sin seems sweet to some.

ISAIAH 1:1-20

This is a chapter which, I think, teaches an important lesson to those of us who desire the salvation of men, for it shows us how God sets about that work. He begins by exhibiting the sinner's sin to him before he proclaims mercy to him; and if we want to be the

means of doing good to men, it will not be by merely crying to them, “Believe, believe, believe;” but there must be a laying of the axe at the root of the tree of self-righteousness, and a cutting away of all trust in self. A man must realize his danger before he will desire to escape from it, and it is a mistaken kindness which refuses to set before him the peril in which he is. God, who is infinitely tender and inconceivably merciful, shows us, in this chapter, how to go to work with sinners.

1, 2. *The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me.*

“If they were simply my subjects, I could bear their rebellion better than I can now, for they are my children. I have nourished them, and brought them up; and after long and persevering kindness towards them, I might have expected some affection from them in return: but ‘they have rebelled against me.’ “

3. *The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.*

See how the Lord still owns the children of Israel as his people, though he contrasts their conduct with the behavior of the ox and the ass. So we see that, however far God’s people may have gone into sin, they are his people still, and he does not deny their relationship to him: “Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.”

4. *Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: What a terrible picture!*

A nation burdened with iniquity, as full of sin as their fathers were, and their offspring growing up like themselves. By hereditary transmission they have received a predisposition to evil that cannot be taken out of the blood except by divine power.

4. *They have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward.*

What a description this is of the state of the unregenerate, — even of God’s elect among them who are still crushed under the ruins of the fall! Peradventure, as I am reading this chapter, some poor soul here is saying, “That just describes me.” Well, let it describe you; and lament, and mourn, and humiliate yourself before

the Most High as you realize what is your sad condition. You have acted worse to God than an ass does to its master; you have behaved shamefully to him, and thus you have provoked him to anger. Do not think lightly of your sin, but let it weigh heavily upon your spirit; as you are “laden with iniquity,” God grant that it may be a heavy burden to you! The Lord next goes on to exhibit the sin of the people in the light of his chastisement. When a child sins, and does wrong, a wise parent uses correction to see whether he cannot overcome the evil tendencies; but, alas! there is no correction that will ever get sin out of the sinner. See what God did with these people, and what came of it.

5, 6. *Why should ye be stricken anymore? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment.*

“You are already in this terrible plight, and your sufferings are the direct result of your sins.”

7, 8. *Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire: your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers. And the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city.*

Now, to translate all this into plain English, I have known men who have been chastened for their sins, and by their sins; God has chastised them, and they have been severely chastised; but no obedience, no repentance, has followed upon the chastisement. Men have been brought, by their sin, from wealth to poverty, from competence to actual want. Have we not seen them by drunkenness brought to rags, and by vice brought to rottenness? Have we not seen men brought to the very gates of hell by their iniquities, yet still they have clung to those iniquities? They have begun to drink the cup of their own damnation, and even when they realized what they were doing, they have still clutched the burning chalice in their hands, and have willingly drained it to the last dregs. Oh, it is horrible, it is terrible, to see at what a cost men will ruin their own souls! They go to perdition as if they were at a steeplechase; no hedge is too high, and no brook too wide for them, and they ride to destruction at a desperate pace. If we who are God’s people were

half as earnest in serving him as the ungodly are in their efforts to be lost, what great service we should render to him! God reminded these people of all that he had done to them by way of chastening; yet no good had come of it.

9. *Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah.*

I am afraid that this verse applies to London at the present time. To what an awful extent has the sin of the people gone, and among those who commit it are many of the great ones of the earth. It is a crying iniquity, which may well make God angry. I marvel not that there are alarms, and all sorts of frightful rumors in the city which has become like Sodom and Gomorrah of old.

10. *Hear the word of the LORD, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah.*

Isaiah next goes on still further to expose the sin of the people; and, anticipating that they would say that they had been very religious, that they had attended the means of grace, that they had been observant of the outward ritual of God's sanctuary, he admits the truth of it all, and then shows what is the real value of it.

11, 12. *To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts?*

Have not some of you at times felt as if the Lord had said to you, "What right have you to be among my people?" For years, you have been worshipping professedly, but not sincerely. It is a wonder that the seat you sit on bears you up when your worship has been all hypocrisy, a delusion throughout; you have only given to God the external husk of devotion, the kernel of true heart-worship has never been there at all.

13, 14. *Bring no more with oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them.*

When God is wearied by a man's best things, what must his feelings be concerning the man's worst things?

15. *And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood.*

When even a man's prayers become an abomination in the sight of God, what must the man himself be? As long as men live in sin, and love it, God will not hear their supplications. Whether their hands are stained with blood, or whatever other sin it is of which they are guilty, until they forsake the evil, God will not answer their prayers. The Lord, having thus set before the people their sin, the aggravation of that sin in that they had continued in it after severe chastisement, and the further aggravation of it in that, all the while, they had professed to be true and faithful servants of Jehovah, though they had been in constant rebellion against him, he yet goes on to speak to them in this gracious fashion: —

16, 17. *Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.*

That is to say," Bring forth fruits meet for repentance, so that it may be seen that your heart is really changed, and that you desire better things, and things more pleasing in my sight." Then listen further to this marvelous message: —

18. *Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.*

There is not as much music, to a poor convinced sinner's ear, in a whole oratorio of Handel as there is in this one verse of Scripture. But your ear must be attuned to this music before you can appreciate its blessed sweetness. He only knows the music of mercy who knows the misery of sin. I think that must read this precious verse again: "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet," — we will not dispute about them; they are all you think they are, and much worse; — "though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

19. *If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land:*

“You shall not any longer be ‘as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city;’ you shall be no more desolate, but ‘ye shall eat the good of the land.’ I will take away from you my chastisement when I take away your sin. I will take care to feed you if you will but come back to me. There shall be feasting, and music, and dancing, instead of starving, and sighing, and sorrowing, if you will only return to your Father’s house: ‘If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land.’ “

20. *But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.*

So the Lord has mercy in his right hand for those who will turn from their sin; but he has a sword in his left hand for those who will abide in their iniquities.

God grant to us grace now to yield to the sweet reasoning of his love, and to turn from our sins, for his dear Son’s sake! Amen.

ISAIAH 1:1-20

1. *The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.*

During the time in which Isaiah prophesied, the worship of God was, upon the whole, maintained in Judah; yet, prosperous as the times appeared to be, there was visible to the eye of the Lord much iniquity. He who seeth not as man seeth, but who looks beneath the surface, and into the hearts of men, saw that the condition of the people was exceedingly unsatisfactory. Do not forget that these upbraiding words were spoken during the reigns of comparatively good kings, and try to imagine how the Lord must have felt towards the people who lived in the reigns of bad kings.

2, 3. *Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.*

God’s own people were worse than the brutes that perish; they had no gratitude towards their Maker and Preserver. Am I not addressing many persons of the same kind, who have little or no thought concerning him who made them, and who supplies all their

wants? God seems here as if he were tired of appealing to his people, so he speaks to the heavens and the earth, as if he knew that even inanimate things would be more capable of feeling than hardened Judah was.

4. Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward.

If I am now addressing any who have backslidden from God, let them take these words of his to heart, he observes how you have forsaken him; he feels grieved at your provoking him; he mourns over your going backward from him. May you be moved by the Holy Spirit to mourn, too!

5. Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint.

One of God's ways of bringing people to himself is by chastisement sad affliction. He had tried that method upon Judah; he had used his rod so long that, at last, he exclaimed, "Why should ye be stricken any more?" What is the good of my sending any more affliction upon you? "Now, whenever the rod is of no more use, there will be a sharper instrument to follow. When men can no longer be chastened for their good, the axe of execution is ready to be brought forth. What a sorrowful description is here given of the people of Judah and their land!

6-8. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and purifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment. Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire: your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers. And the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city.

The Lord had suffered invaders to pillage the land until it was almost reduced to a desert, yet, even then, the people did not, and would not, bow unto their God. It is a terrible thing when sickness, or loss of property, or frequent bereavements do not bring men to their knees. Unsanctified afflictions prophesy certain condemnation

to us. “He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.”

9. *Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah.*

The state of the country, even under godly kings, had become so bad that, if there had not been a remnant according to the election of grace, there would have been no help for the land and its inhabitants, and they would have been burnt up, like Sodom and Gomorrah.

10-15. *Hear the word of the LORD, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of God, ye people of Gomorrah. To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me; saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of ram, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them; And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood.*

It is very possible for people to be outwardly very religious, and yet really to be very wicked. The fact is, that the multiplication of rites and ceremonies, the observance of forms, and feasts, and fasts, and new moons, and all the rest of mere external ritual, — may rather indicate an increase of sin than an increase of anything else. Often, in proportion as men's hearts get further and further away from God, they have more and more of outward ritual, more Roman rags on the priest's back, more smoking intense, more gorgeous architecture; — more of all the externals of religion, the less they have of the internal and eternal. If a man is conscious that he needs something in the shape of godliness, and he knows that he has none of it in his heart, he often tries to get it outside; but this is what God says: —

16, 17. *Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; Learn to do well;*

Repentance, practical change of life, renewal of heart, the giving up of evil, the following of right, this is what the Lord approves. Otherwise, all your fripperies and trickeries of worship are loathsome to him. Think you that your finest music is sweet to the ear of him who listens to the angels everlasting song? Do you imagine that you can build temples worthy of him who made the heavens and the earth? What careth he for temples made with hands? He despises all material things where the heart goes not with them, but purity, holiness, true spiritual worship, — these are the things in which he delighteth.

17. Seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.

This is better than all your incense, or the fat of rams and he goats.

18. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

This, too, is what God loves, — confessed sin, pardoned by his infinite mercy and grace.

19, 20. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.

ISAIAH 1:1-20

May we be instructed of the Holy Ghost while we read this inspired Scripture!

1. The vision of Isaiah the son of Amos, which he saw—

Prophets were called seers, they saw what they were called to say; and every true preacher of Christ must first be a seer of Christ. He must see, that is, realize for himself; and then he must tell to others what he has seen. This Book is about “the vision of

Isaiah the son of Amos, which he saw

1, 2. Concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the Lord hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me.

It is an appeal of God to inanimate creation to bear witness to the ingratitude that he had received, as if it was of no use any

longer to speak to men. The appeal is stated very solemnly and impressively, "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth for the Lord hath spoken. I have nourished and brought up children," cared for them, loved them, fed them, "and they have rebelled against me." The ingratitude of a child is something shocking; and the ingratitude of man to God is of that character.

3. *The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.*

Men are more brutish than the beasts that perish. The lower animals, as men contemptuously call them, acknowledge the hand that feeds them; but men receive the bounty of God through long years, and yet live as if there were no God at all, and feel no gratitude to him whatsoever. Israel was God's peculiar people, highly favored, and greatly indulged, and this made it all the worse for the Lord to be able to contrast them and the brute creation: "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider."

4. *Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward.*

Thus the prophet spoke to the people of his day, and we may say much the same to the people of our own time. The professing church of God has gone away backward, forsaken the doctrines of truth, and turned aside from the purity of its life. God have mercy upon the world when the church itself becomes thus defiled!

5. *Why should ye be stricken any more?*

What is the use of chastisement to such people? It is supposed that punishment is always healthful, and that we grow the better for it; but God says, "Why should ye be stricken any more?"

5, 6. *Ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment.*

The nation had been so beaten that it was covered all over with bruises and sores. It seemed to be of no use to afflict Israel any more; and there are some persons in the world who have been

chastened in every conceivable way, and yet they are none the better. There are graves in the cemetery where lie asleep those they love; the house that was their joy has long ago been sold, and they have not a roof to call their own; they have been themselves at death's door by fever and by other diseases; and yet all that God's rod has done for them has come to nothing. The old Roman lictors carried an axe bound up in a bundle of rods; and, when the rods had been tried, and had failed, then came the axe. And if the milder forms of chastisement do not bring men to repentance, sooner or later will come the axe of destruction. Thus the prophet says it was with sinful Israel:—

7, 8. *Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire: your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers. And the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city.*

The land had been so harried and worried by invaders that it was little better than a poor shanty; the nation was comparable to a poor hut which the Arabs put up in the vineyard just to sleep in: "As a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city." -

9. *Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah.*

And this is true of London as well as of Jerusalem. If there had not been a remnant of godly ones still left, "we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah."

10, 11. *Hear the word of the LORD, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah. To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats.*

These people were a very religious people, although a very wicked people; and it is a strange thing that, when nations have become demoralized, and injustice reigns supreme at the same time, Ritualism and outward pomp and external religion come to the front. This is a wretched business, to give to God the husks when the kernel has long ago gone. What cares the Lord for "burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts . . . the blood of bullocks, or of

lambs, or of he goats,” when men have left off doing that which is right in his sight? The Lord may well say to those who bring offerings to him under such circumstances, “To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me?”

12. *When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts?*

“Who invited you to come to my courts?” says God. “Who asked you to pretend to worship me, when you are living in sin, and your hearts are not reconciled to me?”

13. *Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting.*

If you are hypocrites, if your hearts are not right with God, you may multiply your church-goings, and your chapel-goings, and your sacraments; but all these are only a provoking of God to anger. There is nothing in it all that he could possibly accept; he cannot endure it. He says, “It is iniquity, even the solemn meeting.”

14, 15. *Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood.*

This is plain speaking; but God never sends velvet-tongued men as his messengers. They who are called to testify for God speak out boldly, and faithfully denounce the sins of the day in which they live. Blessed be God for Isaiah and for men like him! When men are committing crimes, when they are oppressing the poor, when they are living in the daily practice of injustice, when they indulge in secret drunkenness, when their whole life is a lie, they may do what they will, but God will not hear their prayers. While we keep sin in our hearts, it is in vain for us to stretch out our hands unto God. He is a holy God, and he seeks holy hearts and holy lives; and nothing short of these can be acceptable to him.

16, 17. *Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.*

This is what God asks for: “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.”

18—20. *Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: but if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.*

May the Holy Spirit make us to be willing and obedient, that we may “eat the good of the land”; and may none of us be found refusing God’s gracious invitation, and rebelling against his authority, lest we perish in our sins!

ISAIAH 1:2-19

2, 3. *Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the Lord hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.*

Heaven and earth might well be called to witness such strange ingratitude as this of which the Lord had to complain.

4. *Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward.*

What a terrible indictment, and every word of it was true!

5-9. *Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment. Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire: your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers. And the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city. Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very*

small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah.

As the prophet's vision proceeds, the true state of the people is seen.

10-15. *Hear the word of the LORD, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah. To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood.*

They were horribly wicked people, they could hardly have been worse; so bad that even their prayers were not fit for God to hear; yet he says, —

16-19. *Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land:*

What blessed words of mercy! Oh, that every one of us may prove them true in our own case, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

This exposition consisted of readings from 2 Chronicles 33:1-20; And Isaiah 1:2-19.

ISAIAH 2

1, 2. *The word that Isaiah the son of Amos saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.*

What grand hopes are kindled in our bosoms by words like these. The church has always been as a city set on a hill that cannot be hid, but still she has not been known in all parts of the world, and she has never been known with that universal eminence which attaches to the things of this world — the things of pomp and show. But the day shall come when she shall be the highest of the high. Her mountain shall be established “on the tops of the mountains,” — when she shall be best known of all the known, and shall become what she was always meant to be — the metropolis of the whole world, the center to which all kindreds shall flow. Not the Jews alone shall then possess the oracles of God, but all nations shall flow unto it.

3. *And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.*

In these happy days which have, in a measure, begun, but which in their fullness have not yet dawned upon us, the Spirit of the Lord will work in the hearts of multitudes of men a desire after God. They will be willing to worship him: they will say, “Let us go up to the mountain of Jehovah”: they will be anxious to learn what he would teach. This shall be the reason why they go, — “He will teach us of his ways.” They shall not only wish to learn, but be quick to practice: “and we will walk in his paths.” Sometimes we have to complain of the masses of mankind forsaking the worship of God altogether; and too often those that together with some inferior motive, — not that they may be taught of God; and even some that are, in a manner, taught, are slow to obey. The Lord teaches them by his ministers but they do not walk in his paths. Blessed days when all this shall be reversed, and the multitudes shall flock to the church and to the Christ!

4. *And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.*

They shall not save their weapons for future use, or believe in the theory that the best way to preserve peace is to be prepared for war; but they shall beat their swords into plowshares and turn their

spears into pruninghooks. The spirit which created war shall be conquered. “Whence wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence even of your lusts?” When lust and envy and hatred shall be dethroned and the spirit of Christ shall be dominant over the world, then shall they learn war no more. “O happy day! O long-expected day begin!” Let each one of us labour mightily according as the Spirit worketh in us to bring about a consummation so devoutly to be wished.

5. *O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the LORD.*

The Jew shall come. Long rejecting the Messiah, yet shall he with the Gentile, and walk in the light of Jehovah. Now the theme changes. We are led to see why it is that a happy state of things does not obtain at this moment, and did not obtain in the land of Judah. Sin — sin is the cause of the mischief — idolatry — the setting up of something in the place of God.

6. *Therefore thou hast forsaken thy people the house of Jacob, because they be replenished from the east, and are soothsayers like the Philistines, and they please themselves in the children of strangers.*

The nations then had their soothsayers and fortune-tellers, and the people of God ought not so to have degraded themselves, but they did, and therefore they provoked him, and they sought out foreigners and entered into league with them, whereas the Lord had bidden them be a people separate unto himself. It always goes ill with those who profess to be God’s people when they forget their separated character and join with the world.

7, 8. *Their land also is full of silver and gold, neither is there any end of their treasures; their land is also full of horses, neither is there any end of their chariots: Their land also is full of idols;*

How these things generally go together. If a nation prospers and gets wealthy, it is so apt to seek for itself external worship of a gaudy kind. It must then have its ritualism and its idols, for if men have their gold and have their chariots, the simple worship of the unseen God seems to be beneath the dignity of their taste.

8, 9. *They worship the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made: And the mean man boweth down, and the great man humbleth himself: therefore forgive them not.*

Mark the indignant spirit of the prophet, as if he had been an Elias, or had the mind of a John Knox of later days. It seemed as if he could not ask God to forgive such a stupendous folly as the setting up visible objects of worship, and the turning away from the true invisible God. O idolatry, what an accursed sin thou art, and how rampant art thou in this land at this day!

10-12. *Enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty. The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day. For the day of the LORD of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low:*

Whatever God does or does not do, there is one role of his procedure from which he never deviates, namely, to cast down the proud and those who boast themselves, from their high places. He condescends to the humble, and he hath a tender eye to the contrite, but wherever man, the creature, dares to think himself great, God will bare his arm to overthrow him, or puff at him — for a puff will do it — and he shall pass away.

13-16. *And upon all the cedars of Lebanon, that are high and lifted up, and upon all the oaks of Bashan, And upon all the high mountains, and upon all the hills that are lifted up, And upon every high tower, and upon every fenced wall, And upon all the ships of Tarshish, and upon all pleasant pictures.*

No matter what it is that man sets up, however good or great, if he dares to bring it into competition with God, God's hand is against him, and he will break it in pieces. Whenever God comes out of his secret place this is always the end of it. He came against Babylon and against Nineveh. Ay, ask the traveler who has wonderingly descended into those vast mounds, "Where are those mighty monarchies now?" Where is the power of Sennacherib and where the might of Nebuchadnezzar? They have gone. The dust is their sole monument. Turn ye, in later days to the great power of Rome, and as one walks through Some, that vast mausoleum of an empire, where one treads, at every step, upon an empire's dust — what think ye but that God has broken the iron kingdom, and made what seemed to be an omnipotent power to pass away from off the face of the earth?

Woe unto all that is great and all that is high and all that exalts itself above God. Whether a temporal power, or a spiritual, it shall pass away like a dream of the night, or a vision of the air, for the Lord is, and all else is nothing.

17-20. *And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low: and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day. And the idols he shall utterly abolish. And they shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth. In that day a man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which they made each one for himself to worship, to the moles and to the bats;*

The worshipper of idols shall be ashamed of them. The precious metal shall not save them — the work of art for which so many plead. “It is true the thing is defiling and idolatrous,” say some, “but look at the skill, the taste, the handicraft, the precious metal.” When God makes bare his arm, they shall fling even gold and silver to the moles and to the bats.

21, 22. *To go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the tops of the ragged rocks, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth. Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils; for wherein is he to be accounted of?”*

What a rebuke this is to kingcraft and to priestcraft especially. “Wherein is he to be accounted of?” Ye may lay what hands ye will on him, and ye may gird him with what robes ye please, and ye may pour upon him your anointing oil and your sacred chrisms; but what is he, after all, but a man whose breath is in his nostrils? Cease ye from him, “for wherein is he to be accounted of?”

ISAIAH 2:6-22

6. *Therefore thou hast forsaken thy people the house of Jacob, because they be replenished from the east, and are soothsayers like the Philistines, and they please themselves in the children of strangers.*

It was God’s command that they should keep themselves separate, and worship him only; but, in the reign of this man Ahaz, they began to practice all the foul arts of the nations round about

them. They had “soothsayers like the Philistines,” — men who pretended to divine future events from the flights of birds, or from the entrails of victims, and a thousand other things; they went into witchcraft, and the unhallowed arts of the heathen.

7-9. Their land also is full of silver and gold, neither is there any end of their treasures; their land is also full of horses, neither is there any end of their chariots: Their land also is full of idols; they worship the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made: And the mean man boweth down, and the great man humbleth himself: therefore forgive them not.

The poor men worshipped these idols, and the rich did the same. All over the country the people were bowing before some symbol or other, instead of worshipping the unseen God in spirit and in truth. Therefore the prophet foretold that something terrible would happen to them: -

10-16. Enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty. The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day. For the day of the LORD of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low: And upon all the cedars of Lebanon, that are high and lifted up, And upon all the oaks of Bashan, And upon all the high mountains, and upon all the hills that are lifted up, and upon every high tower, and upon every fenced wall, and upon all the ships of Tarshish, and upon all pleasant pictures.

These people were wealthy through the natural riches of their land, and through commerce with other nations; they were the veterans of art according to the fashion of the times: and now God declares that, because they were proud, all their treasures should be destroyed and the things wherein they boasted should be taken away from them.

17, 18. And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low: and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day. And the idols he shall utterly abolish.

They set them up at every street corner, they put them even before the house of God itself. On every green hill, and in every grove, they worshipped with filthy rites that can scarcely be thought

of without a blush; but God declared that he would sweep them all away, and so he did when he visited the land in his fierce anger.

19-22. *And they shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth. In that day a man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which they made each one for himself to worship, to the moles and to the bats; To go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the tops of the ragged rocks, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth. Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of?*

Extracted from an exposition covering 2 Chronicles 28:1-5, 16-27 and Isaiah 2:6-22.

ISAIAH 5:1-7

1. *Now will I sing to my wellbeloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My wellbeloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill:*

You and I, dear friends, are placed in a position where we have very choice opportunities of glorifying our God, we are like “a vineyard in a very fruitful hill,” most favourably placed for fruitfulness. The Well-beloved had a vineyard in a very fruitful hill:

2. *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.*

Is that my case? Is it your case, dear friend? Has even our religion been a false thing? Has it been like wild grapes or poisonous berries? Have we been at times right only by accident, and have we never carefully and sedulously sought to serve our Lord, or to bring forth fruit to his praise? O Lord, thou knowest!

3-6. *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:*

There is no destruction like that which comes when God destroys the fruitless vineyard. When a human enemy or the wild boar out of the wood lays it waste, it may be restored again, but if, in righteous wrath, the Divine Owner of the vineyard himself lays it waste, what hope remains for it? “It shall be trodden down; and I will lay it waste:” —

6, 7. *It shall not be pruned, nor digged; but there shall come up briars 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.*

This passage has a special reference to God’s ancient people, and one cannot read it without noting how literally this terrible threatening has been fulfilled.

This exposition consisted of readings from SOLOMON’S SONG 8:11-14; ISAIAH 5:1-7; AND LUKE 13:6-9.

ISAIAH 5:1-19

1. *Now will I sing to my well-beloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My Well-beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill:*

The Song of the Vineyard is by no means a joyful song. It is, indeed quite the reverse. It is pitched in the minor key and has a painful theme. This suffices to prove that all our hymns need not consist, as some affirm, of direct praise to God. Such a notion is not according to Scripture, for many of the Psalms are not of that character. There are songs that can be sung to the edification of one another, and that is, in part, the design of sacred song. We speak to ourselves, as well as to God, in Psalm and hymns and spiritual songs. “My well-beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill.” The members of the Church of God are placed in a position where they have very choice opportunities of glorifying God; they are like a vineyard in a very fruitful hill, most favourably placed for fruitfulness.

2. *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.*

The vineyard was well chosen as to situation, the vine was carefully selected. Everything was done, by walling it, to protect it from intruders. Every preparation was made for the gathering in of the fruits. The winepress was there; yet, when the time came for grapes sweet and luscious, it brought forth wild grapes. You know what that means. Has it been so with us? Have we rewarded the Wellbeloved thus ungratefully for all his pains? Have we given him hardness of heart, instead of repentance, unbelief, instead of faith; indifference, instead of love; idleness, instead of holy industry; impurity, instead of holiness? Is that my case? Is it your case, dear friends? Has even our religion been a false thing? Has it been like wild grapes or poisonous berries? Have we been at times right only by accident, and have we never carefully and sedulously sought to serve our Lord, or to bring forth fruit to his praise? O Lord, thou knowest! Let us judge ourselves in this matter that we be not judged.

3, 4. *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?*

O you that profess to be his people, what more could Christ have done for you? What more could the Holy Spirit have done? What richer promises, what wiser precepts, what kinder providences, what more gracious patience? “Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?” Whence came this? The stock was good, the husbandry was wise. Whence came these wild grapes?

5, 6. *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 briars and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.*

“I will tell you what I will do.” He does not wait till the men of Judah have given their verdict. There was no need of any. The case was all too sadly clear. “I will take away the hedge thereof. and break down the wall thereof.” Those providences which guard men from sin shall be removed. You shall be allowed to sin if you like — and as you like. Your will shall have its freedom to the full. “And it

shall be trodden down: and I will lay it waste.” There is no destruction like that which comes when God destroys the fruitless vineyard. When a human enemy or the wild boar out of the wood lays it waste, it may be restored again, but if in righteous wrath, the Divine Owner of the vineyard himself lays it waste, what hope remains for it? What fearful words, “It shall be trodden down: and I will lay it waste.” “It shall not be pruned, nor digged; but there shall come up briars and thorns.” Nothing happens worse to a church or to a man than to be altogether without affliction, — no pruning, no digging, no restraints, no prickings of conscience, no smittings with rod. “I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.” That is the worst of all!

7. 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.

Oh, when those who profess to be God’s people live ungodly, dishonest, unchaste, ungracious lives, God is greatly grieved. His anger burns against such a church and against such a people. And well it may. “He looked for judgment,” for they professed to be taught of God; “but behold oppression.” He looked “for righteousness,” for they said they were righteous; “but behold a cry.” The passage has a special reference to God’s ancient people, and one cannot read it without noting how literally this terrible threatening has been fulfilled.

8-10. *Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth!*

In mine ears said the LORD of hosts, Of a truth many houses shall be desolate, even great and fair, without inhabitant. Yea, ten acres of vineyard shall yield one bath, and the seed of an homer shall yield an ephah. When men are covetous after the things of this world, God has a way of making them to be filled with disappointment and with bitterness. Woe unto any man who has any god but the living God, or who lives for any object but to glorify the Creator. Upon such a man woes shall come innumerable.

11-12. *Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; that continue until night, till wine inflame them! And the harp, and the viol, the tabret, and pipe, and wine, are*

in their feasts: but they regard not the work of the LORD, neither consider the operation of his hands.

The covetous man was intoxicated with greed. Here is a man intoxicated with strong drink. It is never too early, it is never too late, for men to drink who once are carried away with this passion. They rise up early; they continue until night; and then, when they are inflamed with lust, all sorts of evil pleasures are sought after, and Satan leads them captive at his will. Woe unto such! Now, it was because there were covetous men who were idolaters, because there were luxuriously living men who were drunkards, who had crept into Jerusalem and lived there, and spread evils among the people — it was for this that God declared that he would lay his vineyard waste. Are there none such in the Church of God today? Ah, me! I fear there are professors who do not let it be known openly, but who in secret follow after these things.

13-14. *Therefore my people are gone into captivity, because they have no knowledge: and their honourable men are famished, and their multitude dried up with thirst. Therefore hell hath enlarged herself, and opened her mouth without measure: and their glory, and their multitude, and their pomp, and he that rejoiceth, shall descend into it.*

What a wonderful description that is of the Church of God when it goes wrong, when there is evil in it. Then evil multiplies itself greatly in the earth, and hell has to be made bigger, as it were. As one old preacher said, “They go to hell in droves.” There is none to stay them. When the Church itself goes wrong, then the world is like that herd of swine that ran violently down a steep place to perish in the waters. Down, down they go! Oh, dreadful sight! Oh, terrible doom that falls upon the ungodly! Would God the Church were well awake to see the danger of mankind, and that she so lived that God could bless her to the salvation of men.

15-16. *And the mean man shall be brought down, and the mighty man shall be humbled, and the eyes of the lofty shall be humbled: But the LORD of host shall be exalted in judgment, and God that is holy shall be sanctified in righteousness.*

For whoever may stain himself with sin, God will not. We may think lightly of sin, but he never does. We may be so foolish as to tolerate iniquity in ourselves and wink at it in others, but God will not do so. Even when sin was laid on Christ he smote him to the

death. Though he was not guilty of any sin, yet, when our sin lay there, God turned away his face from his Son, and he died; and, if he spared not sin in his Son, think you he will spare it in us? Ah, no! He is a just God, and he will clear his hands of any complicity with iniquity. The sixteenth verse is the song of Hannah, that greatest of ancient poetesses. It is the song of Mary, who copied it from Hannah, "He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away."

17. Then shall the lambs feed after their manner, and the waste places of the fat ones shall strangers eat.

It is ever so. There is always room for the tender, and the gentle, and the weak, when God smites the haughty and the strong.

18. Woe unto them that draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as it were with a cart rope:

"Woe unto them." When we get a woe in this Book of Blessings it is sent as a warning, that we may escape from woe. God's woes are better than the devil's welcomes. God always means man's good, and only sets ill before him that he may turn from the dangers of a mistaken way, and so may escape the ill which lies at the end of it. Mayhap "Woe, woe, woe," though it should sound with a dreadful din in our ear, may be the means of leading us to seek and find our Saviour, and then throughout eternity no woe shall ever come near to us. "That draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as it were with a cart rope." This is a very singular passage. It is not very easy to understand it at first sight. Here are some who are said to draw sin "with cords of vanity," which are slender enough, and yet they also draw it "as with a cart rope," which is thick enough. They are harnessed to sin, and the traces appear to be fragile, insignificant, and soon broken. You can hardly touch them, for they are a mere sham, a fiction—vanity. What can be thinner and weaker than cobweb-cords of vanity? Yet when you attempt to break or remove them, they turn out to be cart ropes or wagon traces, fitted to bear the pull of horse or bullock. Motives which have no logical forge, and would not bind a reasonable man for a moment, are, nevertheless, quite sufficient to hold the most of men in bondage. Such a slave is man to iniquity, that unworthy motives and indefensible reasons which appear no stronger than little cords nevertheless hold him as with bonds of steel, and he is fastened to

the loaded wagon of his iniquity as a horse is fastened by a cart rope.

19. *That say, Let him make speed, and hasten his work, that we may see it: and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come, that we may know it!*

Blaspheming God, and rushing on the bosses of his buckler, defying him to smite them. And all this came from dallying with sin, from drawing iniquity with cords of vanity Beware of the eggs of the cockatrice. Remember how drops wear stones, and little strokes fell great oaks. Do not play with a cobra, even if it be but a foot long. Keep from the edge of the precipice. Fly from the lion ere he springs upon you. Do not forge for yourself a net of iron, nor become the builder of your own prison-house. May the Holy Ghost deliver you. May you touch the Cross, and find in it the power which will loose you and let you go.

This exposition consisted of readings from ISAIAH 5:1-19, AND PSALM 121:1-7.

ISAIAH 6

1-4. *In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the LORD sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke.*

Isaiah was awe-stricken by this vision of the glory of the Lord. It was a sight such as few eyes have ever seen. Isaiah was never actually in the holy place, for he was no priest, and therefore he could not stand there; but it was in vision that he saw all this glory, and it was a vision that must have remained upon his memory through the rest of his life. The holiness and the glory of God struck him at once.

5. *Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.*

There was, indeed, enough to make him say, "Woe is me!" A sinful preacher, an imperfect preacher, among a sinful and imperfect

people, he felt as if the society in which he moved was the reverse of the society in which God dwells. Pure seraphim cry, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts;" but as for us, our very talk is unholy: "a people of unclean lips."

6, 7. *Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: and he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.*

The live coal from off the altar does not represent the holy flame which burns in the prophet's heart; but it represents purgation, cleansing, participation in the sacrifice, and the putting away of sin. With a blister on his lip, Isaiah stood silent before God.

8. *Also I heard the voice of the LORD, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?*

Here we have the Divine Trinity in Unity. "Whom shall I send?" There is Unity. "Who will go for us?" There is the Trinity. God is seeking a messenger to deliver his message to men.

8. *Then said I, —*

Stammering it out with the blistered lip, —

8. *Here am I; send me.*

Isaiah did not know the errand; perhaps, if he had known it, he would not have been quite so ready to go; who can tell? But God's servants are ready for anything, ready for everything, when once the living coal hath touched their lip. I thank God that I was never called to such a work as Isaiah had to undertake.

9, 10. *And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.*

That was no gospel ministry; it was a ministry of condemnation. The house of Israel had rejected the prophets, and had rejected God; and in the fullness of time would reject God's own dear Son. When Isaiah in vision looked forward to all this, he was sent not to soften, but to harden; his word was to be a savour of death unto death, and not of life unto life.

11, 12. *Then said I, Lord, how long? And he answered, Until the Cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man,*

and the land be utterly desolate, And the LORD have removed men far away, and there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land.

This was a heavy task. for the prophet; he had no tidings of God's relenting, no tokens of divine mercy.

13. *But yet — “*

You never get this deep bass note of divine justice without having a “but yet” to accompany it.

13. *In it shall be a tenth, and it shall return, and shall be eaten: as a teil tree, and as an oak, whose substance is in them, when they cast their leaves: so the holy seed shall be the substance thereof.*

When the oak sheds all its leaves, it is not dead; there is living sap that will again cause the tree to be verdant. Though the nation was to be brought very low, there was still to be left a remnant according to the election of grace. Sin never reaches such a point in God's people but what grace triumphs. Still, where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. This is a terrible chapter; it shows the sovereignty of God in a lurid light, and reveals how, when sin comes to a certain point, the Lord gives men up, and leaves them to the blindness of their heart, so that even the means of grace, the prophetic message, becomes a means of condemnation to them. Now we are going to read in one of the many places in the New Testament in which this passage is quoted.

This exposition consisted of readings from ISAIAH 6.; MATTHEW 13:10-17; AND LUKE 18:35-3.

ISAIAH 6

1. *In the year that King Uzziah died*

You remember him, that leprous king, that king who had thrust himself into the priests' office, and was smitten of leprosy, and shut up in a separate house during the rest of his life. In the year that he died Isaiah saw a greater King, whom no defilement can ever touch, a King that reigneth and lives for ever, though Uzziah dies.

1. *I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.*

Whenever you read in the Old Testament that any man saw the Lord, understand it of the Second Person of the Divine Trinity, the Lord Jesus Christ. He makes himself as we have said, visible to men, and God in him.

2. Above it stood the seraphims: each on had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly.

There are the spirits that dwell in the presence of God, nearest to him, and as he is a consuming fire they come to be like him, for the seraphims are burning ones, consumers, burning and shining lights, who wait upon God, who is light of life. Notice how humble they are in that presence; they cover themselves before that Infinite Majesty.

3, 4. And one cried upon another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke.

And if even the voice of a seraph moved the very foundations of the temple, what will the voice of God do when he shall speak once more? According to that word, he shall shake not only earth, but also heaven. What awe and trembling should be upon us when we wait upon God, if even the posts of the dove move! “Then said I, woe is me!” All God’s saints do this when they get a view of him. There was never a boastful thought in any man’s mind in the presence of God. They that talk of their own purity have not known God, neither seen him. How could they! This is the cry of all the purified when they come into the presence of God “Woe is me, for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips.” What made him think of lips, but the voice of the seraphim as responsively they cried to one another, “Holy, holy, holy”? Then he thought of his own lips. Oh! brothers and sisters, what impurity comes out of our lips, perhaps more there than anywhere else is the impurity of the heart discovered in our idle words, our evil words.

5-7. Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts. Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.

Just where he felt the impurity, there he felt the expiation. His lips were unclean, and now a touch of the altar coal, a

communication from the great Sacrifice, hath taken all his iniquity away, and his sin is buried.

8. *Also I heard the voice of the lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I, send me.*

Observe the unity and the plurality, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Upon what theory, but that of the doctrine of the Trinity can we explain so singular a change from the singular to the plural “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I. send me.” This man, so lowly now, so purified with the vision of God, just seen by him, how cheerfully does he spring forward at the word of invitation. “Here am I, send me.” Now see what a sorrowful mission God, in these next verses, assured Isaiah that his ministry so far as the conversion of the Jews were concerned, would be altogether fruitless; they would not receive his testimony.

9, 10. *And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.*

What a ministry, dark with insufferable light! So bright, so clear, that men should have willfully to harden their hearts, and shut their eyes if they did not understand and receive it.

11, 12. *Then said I, Lord, how long? And he answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate, And the LORD have removed men far away, and there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land.*

So it happened, as you know, the people were carried away captive; they still refused, they would not believe even, till Christ came, and then the destruction of Jerusalem, and the sweeping clear of their country was the final stroke of God. “But yet in it shall be a tenth.” There is always a gleam of light from God’s grace in the thickest darkness of his justice. God hath his tithe.

13. *But yet in it shall be a tenth, and it shall return, and shall be eaten: as a teil tree, and as an oak, whose substance is in them, when they cast their leaves: so the holy seed shall be the substance thereof.*

And, therefore, the Jewish nation is not destroyed, but still exists, and the Church of God is not destroyed, despite all that happens to it. There is a substance in it, according to the election of grace, for which may God be praised.

This exposition consisted of readings from JOHN 12:37-50; ISAIAH 6. JOHN 12:37-50.

ISAIAH 7:1-16

1, 2. *And it came to pass in the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, that Rezin the king of Syria, and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, went up toward Jerusalem to war against it, but could not prevail against it. And it was told the house of David, saying, Syria is confederate with Ephraim. And his heart was moved, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind.*

They were tossed to and fro, bent, thrown down, as the trees of a forest in a tornado. They had already felt the power of these two confederate kings, and they were terribly afraid. David himself would have had confidence in God; but “the house of David” had gone far astray. Ahaz had cast off the fear of God, and he had therefore great fear of men.

3. *Then said the LORD unto Isaiah, Go forth now to meet Ahaz, thou, and Shear-jashub thy son,*

Shear-jashub was but a child; and why Isaiah was to take his son with him does not appear, except that his name signifies, “The remnant shall return,” and it was part of the prophet’s message that the remnant, the people who had been carried away captive, should return.

3. *At the end of the conduit of the upper pool in the highway of the fuller’s field;*

God knows the exact spot where his servants shall meet with the men to whom he sends them. There is a corner where the fuller’s field just juts upon the upper pool; there Isaiah will meet king Ahaz, and there he is to speak to him. Is there any spot just by the Elephant and Castle” where God means to meet with some soul tonight? I pray that it may be so.

4. *And say unto him,*

The prophet is told the word he is to speak as well as the place where he is to deliver the message. Isaiah knew that he was soon to go and deal with men of hard, heart and deaf ear. The other day we read the sixth chapter of this prophecy; and we noted the hard task that Isaiah had to perform. Now he is beginning his work with the man whom the Bible calls, "That king Ahaz," as if it could not say anything bad enough of him, but had merely to mention his name, and everybody would know who was meant.

4. *Take heed, and be quiet; fear not, neither be fainthearted for the two tails of these smoking firebrands, for the fierce anger of Rezin with Syria, and of the son of Remaliah.*

Their kingdoms were dying out. They were like burnt-out firebrands; they made a little smoke, but within a very short time there would be nothing left of them, and Ahaz need not be afraid of them.

5-9. *Because Syria, Ephraim, and the son of Remaliah, have taken evil counsel against thee, saying, Let us go up against Judah, and vex it, and let us make a breach therein for us, and set a king in the midst of it, even the son of Tabeal: thus saith the Lord GOD, It shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass. For the head of Syria is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is Rezin; and within threescore and five years shall Ephraim be broken, that it be not a people. And the head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is Remaliah's son.*

God did not intend it to grow any bigger. These two little kingdoms of Syria and Ephraim were to keep as they were until they were destroyed.

9-12. *If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established. Moreover the LORD spake again unto Ahaz, saying, Ask thee a sign of the LORD thy God; ask it either in the depth, or in the height above. But Ahaz said, I will not ask, neither will I tempt the LORD.*

He put his refusal very prettily, as men often do when they want to say an evil thing. He refused to accept a sign from the Lord, under the idle pretense that it would be tempting God. We never tempt God when we do what he bids us. There is no presumption in obedience. It was an idle compliment, to conceal the impudence of his heart. The Lord invited him to acknowledge Jehovah as his God: "Ask thee a sign of Jehovah thy God." But Ahaz said, "I will not

ask, neither will I tempt Jehovah.” He did not say, “Jehovah, my God”; and his silence meant dissent.

13. *And he said, Hear ye now, O house of David;*

Observe, the prophet does not say, “Hear now, O Ahaz as if God would not deal with Ahaz on his own account, but only because he was of the “house of David.” The Lord remembered his covenant with David. God sometimes blesses men for the sake of their fathers. He might not hear a word that they had to say; but he remembers their fathers, and the amity and comity which there was between himself and their fathers.

13, 14. *Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also?*

Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, A wonderful sign this!

14, 15. *And shall call his name Immanuel. Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good.*

Whereupon a wise commentator says that, before children are able to learn, their parents should look upon the very feeding of them as a means of making them to know the difference between good and evil.

16. *For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings.*

This was the sign-manual. Judah could not be destroyed, for our Lord was to spring out of Judah; and this was the sign that Judah must stand, because Immanuel must be born of that nation, and the time for this great event was fixed by the Lord. Until a child is some few years of age, he does not distinguish between good and evil; but in a shorter time than it would take a child to come to years of responsibility, God meant to cut off both those kings, and he did so. This was a very wonderful prophecy, and ought to have filled Ahaz with great delight, and with confidence in God; but it did nothing of the kind.

Now we are going to read more of the story of this king Ahaz.

This exposition consisted of readings from ISAIAH 7:1-16, AND 2 CHRONICLES 28:1-16.

ISAIAH 9:1-7

The last verses of the eighth chapter picture a horrible state of wretchedness and despair: “And they shall pass through it, hardly bestead and hungry: and it shall come to pass, that when they shall be hungry, they shall fret themselves, and curse their king and their God, and look upward. And they shall look unto the earth, and behold trouble and darkness dimness of anguish; and they shall be driven to darkness. But see what a change awaits them !

1. Nevertheless the dimness shall not be such as was in her vacation, when at the first he lightly afflicted the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, and afterward did more grievously afflict her by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the nations.

Read the fine translation of the Revised Version: “But there shall be no gloom to her that was in anguish.” What a marvelous light from the midst of a dreadful darkness! It is an astounding change, such as only God with us could work. Many of you know nothing about the miseries described in those verses, but there are some who have traversed that terrible wilderness; and I am going to speak to them. I know where you are: you are being driven as captives into the land of despair, and for the last few months you have been tramping along a painful road, “hardly bestead and hungry.” You are surely put to it, and your soul finds no food of comfort, but is ready to faint and die. You fret yourself: your heart is wearing away with care, and grief, and hopelessness. In the bitterness of your soul you are ready to curse the day of your birth. The captive Israelites cursed their king who had led them into their defeat and bondage; in the fury of their agony, they even cursed God and longed to die. It may be that your heart is in such a ferment of grief that you know not what you think, but are like a man at his wit’s end. For such as you there shines this star of the first magnitude. Jesus has appeared to save, and he is God and man in one person: man that he may feel our woes, God that he may help us out of them. No minister can save you, no priest can save you — you know this right well; but here is one who is able to save to the uttermost, for he is God as well as man. The great God is good at a dead lift; when everything else has failed, the lever of omnipotence can lift a world of sin. Jesus is almighty to save! That which in itself is impossibility is possible with God. Sin which nothing else can remove is blotted out by the blood of Immanuel. Immanuel, our

Saviour, is God with us; and God with us means difficulty removed, and a perfect work accomplished.

2. The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.

Jesus came to Galilee of the Gentiles, and made that country glorious, which had been brought into contempt. That corner of Palestine had very often borne the brunt of invasion, and had felt more than any other region the edge of the keen Assyrian sword. They were at first troubled when the Assyrian was bought off with a thousand talent of silver; but they were more heavily afflicted when Tiglath-pileser carried them all away to Assyria, for which see the fifteenth chapter of the second book of the kings. It was a wretched land, with a mixed population, despised by the purer race of Jews; but that very country became glorious with the presence of the incarnate God. Even so, at this day his gracious presence is the day-dawn of our joy.

3. Thou hast multiplied the nation, and not increased the joy: they joy before thee according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil.

The Revised Version reads, "Thou hast increased their joy." If Christ comes to you, my dear hearer, as God with us, then shall your joy be great; for you shall joy as with the joy of harvest, and as those rejoice that divide the spoil. Is it not so? Many of us can bear our witness that there is no joy like that which Jesus brings.

4. For thou hast broken the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, as in the day of Midian.

Your enemy shall be defeated, "as in the day of Midian." Gideon was, in his dream, likened to a barley-cake, which struck the tent of Midian, so that it lay along. He and his few heroes, with their pitchers and their trumpets, stood and shouted, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!" and Midian melted away before them. So shall it be with our sins, and doubts, and fears, if we believe in Jesus, the incarnate God; they shall vanish like the mists of the morning. The Lord Jesus will break the yoke of our burden, and the rod of our oppressor, as in the day of Midian. Be of good courage, ye that are in bondage to fierce and cruel adversaries; for in the name of Jesus, who is God with us, you shall destroy them.

5. For every battle of the warrior is with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood; but this shall be with burning and fuel of fire.

When Jesus comes, you shall have eternal peace, for his battle is the end of battles. "All the armor of the armed man in the tumult, and the garments rolled in blood, shall even be for burning, for fuel of fire." This is the rendering of the Revision; and it is good. The Prince of peace wars against war, and destroys it. What a glorious day is that in which the Lord breaketh the bow and cutteth the spear in sunder, and burneth the chariot in the fire! I think I see it now. My sins, which were the weapons of my foes, the Lord pile in heaps. What mountains of prey! But see! He brings the fire-brand of his love from the altar of his sacrifice, and he sets fire to the gigantic pile. See how they blaze! They are utterly consumed for ever.

6. For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

How is it that the Lord Jesus becomes glorious in our eyes; And he whose name is Immanuel is now crowned in our heart with many crowns, and honoured with many titles. What a list of glories we have here! What a burst of song it makes when we sing of the Messiah: "His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace"! Each work sounds like a salvo of artillery. It is all very well to hear players on instruments and sweet singers rehearse these words but to believe them, and realize them in your own soul, is better far. When every fear and every hope, and every power and every passion of our nature fill the orchestra of our heart, and all unite in one inward song unto the glorious Immanuel, what music it is!

7. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever.

The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this. If Christ is your Saviour he must be your King.

"But know, nor of the terms complain,
Where Jesus comes he comes to reign:
To reign, and with no partial sway;

Lusts must be slain that disobey.”

The moment we really believe in Jesus as our salvation we fall before him, and call him Master and Lord. We serve when he saves. He has redeemed us unto himself, and we own that we are his. A generous man once bought a slave-girl. She was put upon the brook for auction, and he pitied her and purchased her; but when he had bought her he said to her, “I have bought you to set you free. There are your papers, you are a free woman.” The grateful creature fell at his feet and cried, “I will never leave you; if you have made me free I will be your servant as long as you live, and serve you better than any slave could do.” This is how we feel towards Jesus. He sets us free from the dominion of Satan, and then, as we need a ruler, we say, “And the government shall be upon his shoulder.” We are glad to be ruled by “Immanuel, God with us.” This also is a door of hope to us That Jesus shall be the monarch of our hearts is our exceeding joy. To us he shall be always “Wonderful.” When we think of him, or speak about him, it shall be with reverent awe. When we need advice and comfort, we will fly to him, for he shall be our Counselor. When we need strength, we will look to him as our Mighty God. Born again by his Spirit, we will be his children, and he shall be the everlasting Father. Full of joy and rest, we will call him Prince of Peace. Are you willing to have Christ to govern you? Will you spend your lives in praising him? You are willing to have Christ to pardon you, but we cannot divide him, and therefore you must also have him to sanctify you. You must not take the crown from his head; but accept him as the monarch of your soul. If you would have his hand to help you, you must obey the scepter which it grasps. Blessed Immanuel, we are right glad to obey thee I In thee our darkness ends, and from the shadow of death we rise to the light of life. It is salvation to be obedient to thee. It is the end of gloom to her that was in anguish to bow herself before thee. May God the Holy Spirit tell of the things of Christ and show them unto us, and then we shall all cry —

“Go worship at Immanuel’s feet!

See in his face what wonders meet!

Earth is too narrow to express His worth, his grace, his
righteousness.”

ISAIAH 14

1. *For the LORD will have mercy on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own land: and the strangers shall be joined with them, and they shall cleave to the house of Jacob.*

This promise had a measure of fulfillment when Israel was brought back from Babylon; and still is it true that, when God's people come to their worst, there is always something better before them. On the other hand, it is equally sure that, when sinners come to their best, there is always something terrible awaiting them. The apostle Paul wrote to the Romans, "God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew;" and his declaration agrees with this prophecy, "The Lord will have mercy on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own land." I believe that there will be a far grander fulfillment of this prophecy in that day when God shall bring back his chosen people to their own country, and then shall be the fullness of blessing to the Gentiles also: "The strangers shall be joined with them, and they shall cleave to the house of Jacob."

2. *And the people shall take them, and bring them to their place: and the house of Israel shall possess them in the land of the LORD for servants and handmaids: and they shall take them captives, whose captives they were; and they shall rule over their oppressors.*

The chosen people have the worst of it now in many parts of the world, but they shall have the best of it by-and-by; they shall not always be trampled on, their time of uplifting shall come at the last, sad there is nothing after the last; that which is last, lasts for ever.

3, 4. *And it shall come to pass in the day that the LORD shall give thee rest from thy sorrow, and from thy fear, and from the hard bondage wherein thou wast made to serve, that thou shalt take up this proverb against the king of Babylon, and say, How hath the oppressor ceased! the golden city ceased!*

O child of God, thou shalt by-and-by have a glorious season of rest! Today is thy time of labour; thou art now under hard bondage; but thou shalt yet come forth into the fullness of thy liberty in Christ Jesus. In that day, Jehovah himself shall give thee rest from all thy grief and fears; thou shalt obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. This was a great prophecy for Isaiah to utter, for, in his day, there was no power on earth equal to that of Babylon. That great city abounded in palaces and extraordinary

wealth, and its power was such that no kingdom could stand against it. For a while, it broke in pieces all those who fought against it; yet God broke Babylon in his own time; and here is a song of rejoicing in anticipation of its overthrow, "How hath the oppressor ceased! the golden city ceased!"

5. *LORD hath broken the staff of the wicked, and the scepter of the rulers.*

No power can ever be permanently strong that is founded upon wickedness; sooner or later, it will have to come to an end. A falsehood may array itself in the garments of wisdom and strength, and go forth to fight hopefully for victory; but, in the end, it must die. The stone of truth will find out the giant's brow, and lay him headlong in death.

6, 7. *He who smote the people in wrath with a continual stroke, he that ruled the nations in anger, is persecuted, and none hindereth. The whole earth is at rest, and is quiet: they break forth into singing.*

The Babylon, that none could resist, becomes herself destroyed and there is no one to come up to her assistance. Go at this day, and see where the owl dwells, and mark the habitation of the dragons, and say to yourself, "This is Babylon, the great city that was the queen over all nations; but she did evil in the sight of the Lord, and spake extremely proudly; and, behold, Jehovah hath crumbled her in the dust; and, now that Babylon is gone, 'the whole earth is at rest, and is quiet: they breath forth into singing.'"

8. *Yea, the fir trees rejoice at thee, and the cedars of Lebanon, saying, Since thou art laid down, no feller is come up against us.*

For the cruel kings of Babylon cut down the nations as the woodman with his axe fells the trees of the forest; but when the power of Babylon was broken, peace and quietness reigned everywhere, O brethren, what a blissful day it will be when the modern Babylon is taken away also, for to this hoar she is the troubler among the nations! Wherever the blight of Popery comes, there is evil, there is oppression, there is bondage; and only when Romanism shall be utterly swept sway, and cast like a millstone into the flood, will it be said, "The whole earth is at rest, and is quiet: they break forth into singing." Here is a very wonderful picture of the king of Babylon going down to the grave.

9, 10. *Hell from beneath is moved for thee to meet thee at thy coming: it stirreth up the dead for thee, even all the chief ones of the earth; it hath raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations. All they shall speak and say unto thee, Art thou also become weak as we? art thou become like unto us?*

It is a fine pictorial representation of the spirits of departed kings lifting themselves up from their beds of dust, and saying, "Art thou, king of Babylon, that slew us, also come here? The mighty conqueror, art thou thyself conquered, and brought to the grave?"

11-15, *Thy pomp is brought down to the grave, and the noise of thy viols: the worm is spread under thee, and the worms cover thee. How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit.*

God hates pride with a perfect hatred. He drives his sword through the very heart of it, and cuts it in pieces. None can be great and mighty, and boast of what they are able to do, without provoking the King of kings to put forth against them some of his great power. Oh, let none of us talk about climbing to heaven by our good works, or getting there by our merits, lest it should happen to us also that we should "be brought down to Hades, to the sides of the pit."

16-18. *They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, and consider thee, saying, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms; That made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof; that opened not the house of his prisoners? All the kings of the nations, even all of them, lie in glory, every one in his own house.*

That is, they lie in state, each one in the mausoleum of his family. They went down to death, and they were buried with all the honour and glory that were supposed to be due to their high position.

19. *But thou art cast out of thy grave like an abominable branch, and as the raiment of those that are slain, thrust through with a*

sword, that go down to the stones of the pit; as a carcase trodden under feet.

So total, so terrible, so disgraceful, was the destruction of Babylon, that no honour or glory remained to it.

20-22. *Thou shalt not be joined with them in burial, because thou hast destroyed thy land, and slain thy people: the seed of evildoers shall never be renounced. Prepare slaughter for his children for the iniquity of their fathers; that they do not rise, nor possess the land, nor fill the face of the world with cities. For I will rise up against them, saith the LORD of hosts,—*

And he has done it. It seemed the most unlikely thing to happen; but the Lord spake, and it was done; and all the glory of Babylon was swept away. “I will rise up against them, saith the Lord of hosts,” —

22-27. *And cut off from Babylon the name, and remnant, and son, and nephew, saith the LORD. I will also make it a possession for the bittern, and pools of water: and I will sweep it with the broom of destruction, saith the LORD of hosts. The LORD of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand: that I will break the Assyrian in my land, and upon my mountains tread him under foot: then shall his yoke depart from off them, and his burden depart from off their shoulders. This is the purpose that is purposed upon the whole earth: and this is the hand that is stretched out upon all the nations. For the LORD of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? and his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?*

And God did this to the Assyrians in the day when Sennacherib invaded the land, and the angel of destruction slew the whole host in one night. What a striking simile the Lord uses here! “This is the hand that is stretched out upon all the nations. For the Lord of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? and his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?” Conceive in your mind the picture here drawn,— Jehovah himself puts out the hand of his almightiness, and challenges the nations to stand up in opposition to it.

28. *In the year that king Ahaz died was this burden.*

About this time, the Philistines had plucked up courage, and had invaded Judah.

29. *Rejoice not thou, whole Palestina, because the rod of him that smote thee is broken: for out of the serpent's root shall come forth a cockatrice, and his fruit shall be a fiery flying serpent.*

Ahaz was defeated, but Hezekiah was raised up to be the leader of the LORD's people.

30. *And the firstborn of the poor shall feed, and the needy shall lie down in safety: and I will kill thy root with famine, and he shall slay thy remnant.*

If God's enemies have a bright day or two, it shall soon be showery weather with them. They may for the moment exult over God's people, but he knows that their day of reckoning is coming.

31. *Howl, O gate; cry, O city; thou, whose Palestina, art dissolved: for there shall come from the north a smoke, and none shall be alone in his appointed times.*

That is the way the Babylonians would come running down from the north. No one would be able to hide himself from them, not a single person would find a shelter, or escape from their terrible adversaries.

32. *What shall one then answer the messengers of the nation? That the LORD hath founded Zion, and the poor of his people shall trust in it.*

Though the passage seems dark at first, yet it is full of consolation to the people of God, and is of similar import to that other gracious promise: "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn."

ISAIAH 26

1. *In that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah;*

God would have his people to be a singing people. They often sigh; they should oftener sing. God makes their songs, and appoints the song for the day, and so helps them to cheer the darkest day with some melodious music.

1. *We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks.*

Jerusalem may fall, her walls may be destroyed till not one stone is left upon another; but still, “we have a strong city.” In the salvation of God, we live and are safe. Our place of defense shall be the munitions of rocks. The eternal purposes of God shall guard the safety of his people.

2. Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in.

This city is for the righteous, for those who keep the truth of God. They are to dwell in this city; not fighting in the open, not wandering in the plains, but dwelling at ease behind the massive walls and bulwarks which God himself has appointed in his salvation.

3. Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.

This is our city; by faith, we enter into the purposes and promises of God, and there we dwell in perfect peace. The adversary may thunder outside the walls; but what of that? He may threaten that he will capture the city; but how can he do so when the Lord is there? This is a sweet, sweet verse; may you all get the very marrow of it! “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.”

4. Trust ye in the LORD for ever:

Not sometimes, but always; not for a certain number of days during your season of trial, but if the trial should last a lifetime, “trust ye in the Lord for ever.”

4. For in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength:

If he could fail you, you would do well to be looking out for another shelter; but since his strength is everlasting, let your faith be also everlasting. Lives there a man who has fully trusted in God, and yet has been confounded? Is there one anywhere who has really relied upon the invisible power of Jehovah, and yet has found him fail in the hour of need? It cannot, and it shall not be.

5, 6. For he bringeth down them that dwell on high; the lofty city, he layeth it low; he layeth it low, even to the ground; he bringeth it even to the dust. The foot shall tread it down, even the feet of the poor, and the steps of the needy.

This is always God’s way,-overturning the great and the proud, and casting down the mighty works of men, so that he who trusteth

in man, and maketh flesh his arm, soon finds himself in a pitiful condition. All the proud, who glory in their own power, shall be as when a city is battered down, and the very dust is trodden by “the feet of the poor, and the steps of the needy.”

7. The way of the just is uprightness: thou, most upright, dost weigh the path of the just.

God makes a plain path for his own people; and he, knowing their way, forms a right estimate of it. Let them never fear for a moment that he will condemn them because of the condemnation of their fellow men; he takes care himself to weigh the path of the just, and his scales cannot err.

8,9. Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O LORD, have we waited for thee; the desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee. With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early: for when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.

You notice that the song given to us in this chapter is all concerning God. We are bidden to trust in him, we are told how safe are they that do so, we are shown how futile is all strength apart from him, and now the desire of his saints is set forth as being toward him, and toward him alone.

10. Let favour be shewed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness: in the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the LORD.

Until men are changed in heart, and renewed in nature, they will not see God. If you could transport them to the land of uprightness, where there would be no sin to tempt them, yet even then they would not know the Lord. Still is our Saviour’s message true, “Ye must be born again.” O unconverted men and women, we look upon you through our tears, because you are incapable of everything that is good and right until the Lord in covenant mercy renews your hearts, and brings you to know him! Of the ungodly man it is truly declared, “In the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the Lord.”

11. LORD, when thy hand is lifted up, they will not see: but they shall see, and be ashamed for their envy at the people; yea, the fire of thine enemies shall devour them.

There are some people who will not see; and, as the old proverb hath it, there are none so blind as those that will not see; but they will one day be made to see, if not to their salvation, then to their everlasting shame and confusion. They shall be made to see that, after all, there is a God, and that he is strong to punish the ungodly, and to overthrow his adversaries. I pray that no one of you may refuse to see by the light of the gospel until he is forced to see by the blaze of the judgment-day; yet, alas! there will be such.

12. *LORD, those wilt ordain peace for us: for thou also hast wrought all our works in us.*

That is a delightful verse. Here is an ordination spoken of; for God has ordained peace for his people, and they must have it, and they shall have it. On the other hand, his people ordain glory for him, for they declare, "Thou also hast wrought all our works in us." Thus we also sing,-

"And every virtue we possess,
And every victory won,
And every thought of holiness,
Are his alone."

13. *O LORD our God, other lords beside thee have had dominion over us: but by thee only will we make mention of thy name.*

"O Lord, how sadly, how long, how grievously, did those other lords domineer over us; but from this time forth we will know no name but thine; and, when we mention it, it shall be by thy grace, and by thy power alone, that we even put our trust in thy wondrous name!

14. *They are dead, they shall not live; they are deceased, they, shall not rise: therefore hast thou visited and destroyed them, and made all their memory to perish.*

Yes, our lusts are all dead; they will never live again, thank God. The Sword of the Spirit has slain them: "they are deceased." We want to have nothing more to do with them, we desire that the very memory of them should perish.

15. *Thou hast increased the nation, O LORD, thou hast increased the nation: thou art glorified:*

God is always glorified in the increase of his people, therefore, we should, above all other reasons, pray for the increase of the Church because God will be thereby glorified.

15, 16. *Thou hadst removed it far unto all the ends of the earth. LORD, in trouble have they visited thee, they poured out a prayer when thy chastening was upon them.*

That is true of hypocrites; but it is also sweetly true of some whom God is bringing to himself. Child after child has died, loss after loss has broken down the business; now they turn to God. Oh, it is a blessed loss that makes us find our God! What we gain is infinitely more than what we have lost. What a mercy that God is willing to hear us in the time of trouble, that all our putting-off and rejection of him do not make him put us off! I remember one who wished to hire a conveyance to go to a certain town, and he went to the place where he could hire it, and asked the price; he thought that it was too much, so he went round the town to other people, and found that he could not get it any cheaper; but when he came back to the place visited first, the man said to him, "Oh, no, no! I will not let my horses to you. You have been round to everybody else, and now you come back to me because you cannot get what you want elsewhere; I will have nothing to do with you." That is man's way of dealing with his fellow man; but it is not the Lord's method of dealing with us. When you and I have gone round to everybody else, the Lord still welcomes us when we come back to him. Yes, just as harbours of refuge are meant for ships in distress that would not have put in there except for the storm and danger, such is the mercy of the Lord God in Jesus Christ. If you are forced to accept it, you are still welcome to it. If you are driven to it by stress of weather, you may come in, for the harbour was made for just such as you are.

17, 18. *Like as a woman with child, that draweth near the time of her delivery, is in pain, and crieth out in her pain; so have we been in thy sight O LORD. We have been with child, we have been in pain, we have as it were brought forth wind; we have not wrought any deliverance in the earth; neither have the inhabitants of the world fallen.*

Ah, no! all the agonies of a mind, all the troubles of a soul, cannot save it. This is the work of grace; this is the gift of God. What a mercy it is that such a cheering promise as this next verse contains comes in just here

19. *Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise.*

That note of resurrection comes in as a word of comfort to the most dispirited, the most despairing. As the dead shall live because of Christ, even so is there hope for you who are driven to a very death of despair. You cannot live by your own power; your hopes are all gone, dead and buried, and you yourself lie helpless and lost; but as the Lord will raise the dead from their graves, so will he give you hope, and bless and save you, if you come and trust in him.

19-21. *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. Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast. For, behold, the LORD cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain.*

The blood of the murdered shall cry to God from the ground, as did Abel's. The slain in battle shall not be forgotten. God will come and punish the earth for its iniquities. Blessed are they that bide themselves in Christ, till the indignation be over past.

ISAIAH 26

1. *In that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah; We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks.*

God is the great source of song; he "giveth songs in the night." He can make the saddest heart to break forth into praise. One part of the prophecy concerning Christ's coming was, "Then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing." The Lord might have caused us to utter nothing but groans if he had pleased; but, instead of doing so, he delights to fill our mouths with joyous songs. Let us from our heart sing this ancient song: "We have a strong city." The Church of God is a city which has a heavenly citizenship, and other unique privileges; and it is wondrously protected, for the promise in this passage is now fulfilled: "salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks."

2. *Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in.*

The city is not closed against the righteous; and if we know and love the truth, and especially-, if we know and love him who is the

Truth, the gates are always open to us, and we may enter the city, enjoy its privileges, and share its protection.

3. *Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace,—*

“Peace, peace,”—that is the form of the Hebrew, and it means a double peace, the perfection of peace,—a great depth of peace, the reality of peace, peace upon peace belongs to the man who trusts in the Lord. Are you vexed, and worried, and perplexed, dear friend? Are you tossed to and fro as upon a stormy sea? This verse shows you the way in which you may obtain perfect peace: “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace,”—

3. 4. *Whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the LORD for ever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength:*

Nothing can be too hard for him, for he has “everlasting strength.” Nothing can ever happen in the future to overthrow him, for his is not decaying strength, but “everlasting strength.” Hold on to that strength, ye children of God; you may even suck honey out of this “Rock of Ages” (see margin); for there is indescribable sweetness in it: “Trust ye in the Lord for ever:”—not only sometimes, but always;—“for ever,” because there is strength in God for ever.

5, 6. *For he bringeth down them that dwell on high; the lofty city, he layeth it low; he layeth it low, even to the ground; he bringeth it even to the dust. The foot shall tread it down, even the feet of the poor, and the steps of the needy.*

You see, there is one city which God builds, and another city which he pulls down. Observe this solemn truth:” For he bringeth down them that dwell on high; the lofty city, he layeth it low;”—that city which is perched on the hill of self-righteousness, and lifted, as it were, almost to heaven by the pride of man,—God will pull it down. It is part of God’s glory to lift up that which is down, and to cast down that which is up; for when men exalt themselves, they shall be abased; and when they humble themselves, they shall be exalted. “He bringeth it even to the dust. The foot shall tread it down.” Oh, if there is anyone here who is trusting in himself, depending upon his own good doings, and reckoning that he will be saved by his own merits, you will have to come down from that high place, my friend; that fine castle of yours will be; left without one

stone upon another, and the poorest child of God in all the world shall set his foot upon the loftiest pinnacle of your grand palace. God will bring it down so that “the feet of the poor, and the steps of the needy,” shall tread on it.

7. The way of the just is uprightness:

Or, as it might be better rendered, “The way of the just is an even path.” The righteous shall steadily and safely stand in it, while others find themselves sometimes up and sometimes down, and their path shall be slippery and perilous.

7. Thou, most upright, dost weigh the path of the just.

God judges us by weight, not by appearance; not by what we seem to be, but by what we are in the balances of the sanctuary.

8, 9. *Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O LORD, have we waited for thee; the desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee. With my soul have I desired thee in the night;*

Some poor darkened spirit will, I trust, be able to join in this utterance of the prophet. It is night-time with you now; you are not enjoying the light of God’s countenance; but be very thankful that you can say, “With my soul have I desired thee in the night.” If you are not a child of God, you will be able to do without God; but the fact that some of you cannot be happy except you are living in the light of God’s love, proves that you belong to him. A child can be content without a stranger’s smile, but if the one who is looking at him is his father, just because he is his father’s child he must have the assurance of that father’s love, or else he cannot be happy.

9, 10. *Yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early: for when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness. Let favour be shewed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness: in the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the LORD.*

There are none so blind as those who will not see, and there are plenty of such people about. They say that they cannot see this, and they cannot see that; but the truth is that they willfully shut their eyes, and disregard the everlasting light.

11. *LORD, when thy hand is lifted up, they will not see: but they shall see, and be ashamed for their envy at the people; yea, the fire of thine enemies shall devour them.*

You know what our Lord Jesus said concerning the rich man, “In hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his, bosom.” He would not look at Lazarus while he was lying at his gates, but now he is obliged to look at Lazarus lying in Abraham’s bosom. He would not relieve him, nor give him even a crumb from his table, but now he begs that Lazarus may be sent, to dip the tip of his finger in water, to cool his parched tongue. “They will not see” now; no, “but they shall, see, and be ashamed for their envy towards the people of the Lord.

12. *LORD, thou wilt ordain peace for us:*

We may be attacked and assailed for a little while, we may be tossed to and fro; but “Thou wilt ordain peace for us:”

12. *For thou also hast wrought all our works in us.*

We have no works in which we can glory; for even if we have an abundance of good works, they are all God’s work in us, and we give him all the praise for them; and because he has thus wrought in us, we expect that he will give us peace.

13-15. *O LORD our God, other lords beside thee have had dominion over us: but by thee only will we make mention of thy name. They are dead, they shall not live; they are deceased, they shall not rise: therefore hast thou visited and destroyed them, and made all their memory to perish. Thou hast increased the nation, O LORD, thou, hast increased the nation: thou art glorified: thou hadst removed it far unto all the ends of the earth.*

The Jews were scattered and diminished. When they sinned against God, they were exiled; but when the Lord returned to them in favor, he multiplied them, and brought them home again.

16. *Lord, in trouble have they visited thee, they poured out a prayer when thy chastening was upon them.*

And it was well for them that they did so. God’s true child does not get angry against his Father when he whips him; but, being chastened, he begins to pray; and blessed is that chastening that drives us to our knees: “They poured out a prayer when thy chastening was upon them.”

17, 18. *Like as a woman with child, that draweth near the time of her delivery, is in pain, and crieth out in her pangs; so have we been in thy sight, O LORD. We have been with child, we have been in pain, we have as it were brought forth wind; we have not wrought*

any deliverance in the earth; neither have the inhabitants of the world fallen.

Here is the poor Church of God in sore trouble; she says she has been disappointed, her bitterest pangs have not brought her what she expected. What shall happen then? God will interpose.

19. *Thy dead men shall live,—*

We shall rise with all that belong to Christ at the first and blessed resurrection, and all our dead hopes and our dead expectations shall rise too.

19. *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.*

As the soft showers cause the buried bulbs to spring up, so will God's gentle grace fall on men's hearts, and they shall arise, though they seemed to be dead before; and at the last great day, the sound of the archangel's trumpet shall be like a soft vernal shower which brings up the flowers of the earth, and—

“From beds of dust, and silent clay,
To realms of everlasting day,”—

the bodies of the saints shall rise. O blessed hope! let us look for its fulfillment. Let us make this a part of our song. There is a city that hath foundations, and there is a resurrection which will enable us to enter into that city, to dwell there for ever. Oh, come let us sing of the New Jerusalem, and of the white-robed multitudes that shall dwell therein.

20. *Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee:*

Enter into the secret Chambers of communion with your Lord, where you shall be shut out from the world. Enter into the chambers of defense, where God will guard you. Enter into the chambers of devotion, where God shall meet with you.

20, 21. *Hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast. For, behold, the LORD cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain.*

ISAIAH 26:1-14

1. *In that day* —

Or, rather, as we may read it now, “In this day” —

1-3. *Shall this song be sung in the land of Judah; We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks. Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in. Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.*

Here is the song which we are to sing in this gospel day. The theme of it is God, and the city which he has builded, and which he has given to us to be our heritage for ever. “We have a strong city;” yes, beloved, a very strong one, for, although the devil has exercised all his ingenuity for these thousands of years, he has not been able to destroy it. He has thrown in the bombshell of persecution; he has tried to undermine it with his subtlety and cunning of false doctrine; but he has not been able to do anything effectually against the strong city yet. “We have a strong city;” and she is just as strong now, after all the desperate attacks that have been made upon her walls, as ever she was. Against her, the gates of hell cannot prevail. The Church of Christ is never in danger. “We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks? After noticing the security of the city, the prophet bids us “open the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in.” It is the gospel minister’s business to seek to open the gates; it is the Christian’s business, in some sense, to open the gates; yea, we should all of us be endeavoring, if possible, to “open the gates, that the righteous nation —that is, the righteous people “may enter” into the Church. But, after all, the Lord Jesus Christ is the great Opener of the gates; he opens the gates to let his people in. And, mark you, they do not all come in at one gate. The command is, “Open ye the gates.” Some come in by means of one doctrine, and some by means of another. We are not all converted by the same agency. Some come in at the Sunday-school gate; others come in at the gate which is kept by pious parents; many come in at the gate of the preached Word; but all the gates should be open: “Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in.” The prophet next describes the peaceableness of this city. The gates are open, but no enemy ever enters in: for he says to the Lord, “Thou wilt keep him in peace, — peace,” as the original has it, in double peace. “Thou

wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee.” There is nothing like staying the mind on God. If you stay the mind on anything else, you cannot have perfect peace, for that something else may fail you. If you trust in horses and in chariots, horses may tire, and the wheels of the chariots may break; but he who trusteth in the Lord shall dwell “in perfect peace.” Let the earth be all in arms abroad, the believer dwells “in perfect peace,” “because he trusteth in thee.”

4, 5. *Trust ye in the Lord for ever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength: for he bringeth down them that dwell on high;*

Some of you dwell so much “on high” that you do not believe the doctrine of original depravity; you are very good by nature, according to your own ideas. Well, remember this declaration of the prophet: “He bringeth down them that dwell on high.” Others of you boast of your free-will capacity, and you think you have power to do anything without the assistance of the Holy Spirit. Ah! but “He bringeth down them that dwell on high.” Others of you do not know what a doubt or a fear is, but you wrap yourselves up complacently in your self-sufficiency, and say, “We are secure,” Ah! but “He bringeth down them that dwell on high.”

5. *The lofty city, he layeth it low;*

No one can lay God’s city low, but God can lay the lofty city low.

5-7. *He layeth it low, even to the ground; he bringeth it even to the dust. The foot shall tread it down, even the feet of the poor, and the steps of the needy. The way of the just is uprightness: thou, most upright, dost weigh the path of the just.*

God “weighs the path of the just” in scales. We read elsewhere that God weighs the spirits, and weighs our actions; here we are told that he “weighs the path of the just.” Those words, which were used by the prophet when he went to Hezekiah and said, “What have they seen in thine house?” would serve for a very striking text. But it is still more important to consider what God has seen in our house and in our hearts, for God weighs our actions; he weighs our private thoughts and our public deeds; he “weighs the path of the just.” But, according to the prophet, “the way of the just is uprightness,” even after it is weighed. Notwithstanding all the sin that is mixed with it, in the main it is “uprightness” ascending towards God.

8, 9. *Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O LORD, have we waited for thee; the desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee. With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early: for when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.*

Alas! it is often the case that, when God's "judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness" for a little while, and then forget it. All too often, they are like the child who merely learns his lesson by rote, and repeats it under the fear of the rod, and then forgets all about it on the morrow. They "learn righteousness," but, soon, the effect of the warning is all gone, and then God sends fresh judgments upon the earth to teach the inhabitants further lessons.

10-12. *Let favour be shewed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness: in the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the LORD. LORD, when thy hand is lifted up, they will not see: but they shall see, and be ashamed for their envy at the people; yea, the fire of thine enemies shall devour them. LORD, thou wilt ordain peace for us: for thou also hast wrought all our works in us.*

Troubled saint, what a precious passage this is for thee! Poor, tempest-tossed soul, what a glorious utterance! "Lord, thou wilt ordain peace for us." There shall come an ordinance from God, that his people shall have peace: "Thou wilt ordain peace for us: for thou also hast wrought all our works in us;" so they must be good works, but those works which God did not work in us are bad ones.

13, 14. *O LORD our God, other lords beside thee have had dominion over us: but by thee only will we make mention of thy name. They are dead, they shall not live; they are deceased, they shall not rise:*

Many of us can look back to the time when we made idols of business and of worldly things; but now these lords are dead, and they shall not live again; they are buried out of our sight, and they shall not rise from their graves.

14. *Therefore hast thou visited and destroyed them, and made all their memory to perish.*

And a blessed thing it is when the memory of our sins does perish, and we have no desire to be enslaved by them again.

ISAIAH 26:20, 21

We will read a short passage in the Book of the prophet Isaiah, commencing with the twenty-sixth chapter, and the twentieth verse.

20. *Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast.*

There is never a flood for the wicked without an ark for the righteous. Never shall a storm sweep over the earth till God hath prepared a great rock wherein his people may be hidden.

21. *For, behold, the LORD cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain.*

The earth has often covered up the evidences of human guilt. Blood shed in battle has soaked into the soil, and men have forgotten the violence of tyrants and conquerors, but the earth shall disclose her blood. Sin, though it be sown in the earth, shall spring up like wheat, but to a terrible harvest. "Be sure your sin will find you out."

This exposition consisted of readings from ISAIAH 26:20, 21; AND 27:1-9.

ISAIAH 27:1-9

1. *In that day the LORD with his sore and great and strong sword shall punish leviathan the piercing serpent, That is to say, he will punish those who are like leviathan; the proudest, the greatest, and the most powerful sinners shall not escape divine justice.*

God's laws are not, like cobwebs, meant to catch the little flies while the great ones break through, but he will strike leviathan, he will surely punish the mightiest sinners of the earth.

1. *Even leviathan that crooked serpent;*

Hard to come at, difficult to find, he shall not escape the sword of the Lord.

1. *And he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea.*

If men should try to hide from God in hell itself, yet would he find them out; there is no possibility that any offender shall escape his all-seeing eye.

2, 3. *In that day sing ye unto her, A vineyard of red wine. I the LORD do keep it; I will water it every moment lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day.*

Thus the Lord reveals the tenderness of his love to his Church. Then follows a remarkable passage in which, it seems to me, we have the plan of salvation plainly set out. First, here is man at enmity with his Maker.

4. *Fury is not in me: who would set the briers and thorns against me in battle? I would go through them, I would burn them together.*

Men who are at enmity with God little know how terrific is the force of his strength. They are like dry thorns when the fire catches them, and nothing burns more readily. The bush upon the common, when some wild youth sets light to it, suddenly blazes up, crackles, and is gone; so will it be with the ungodly. God has but to go through them, and they shall be destroyed. But now comes a message of mercy.

5. *Or let him take hold of my strength,*

This is what the repenting and believing sinner does, he lays hold of Christ, he takes the strength of God to be his defense, and then the strong God, instead of being a terror, becomes a comfort to him.

5, 6. *That he may make peace with me; and he shall make peace with me. He shall cause them that come of Jacob to take root:*

Taking root should be well looked after by the Christian. Some professors have no root; they are all leaf and flower, but they have no root, and consequently they soon wither and die. Happy is that man who is rooted and grounded in the faith!

6, 7. *Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit. Hath he smitten him, as he smote those that smote him?*

No; God smites his people, but he never smites them as he does their enemies. He smites his people, as old Trapp says, with the palm of his hand, as a man may smite his child; but he smites his enemies with his fist, as one would dash his foe to the ground. There is a great difference between the chastisements of God's people and the righteous judgments that fall upon the wicked.

7, 8. *Or is he slain according to the slaughter of them that are slain by him? In measure, when it shooteth forth, thou wilt debate with it:*

God always chasteneth his people in measure; he makes a debate about it; he weighs their troubles in scales, and their sorrows in balances.

8. *He stayeth his rough wind in the day of the east wind.*

He never sends too many troubles at a time; if the east wind is blowing, he does not send his rough wind. We have much to thank God for, that he times our troubles, had they come an hour before, they might have been too much for us; had they been kept back a week longer, they might have overthrown us. God knoweth when to chasten his people, and he will always chasten them at the right time.

9. *By this therefore shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged; and this is all the fruit to take away his sin;*

When one of the old Puritans was afflicted with a very painful disease, —perhaps the most painful to which flesh is heir, — he kept crying out, “The use, Lord? The use, Lord? Show me the use of it.” This should be the point at which the Christian should always aim.

9. *When he maketh all the stones of the altar as chalkstones that are beaten in sunder, the groves and images shall not stand up.*

You see, the Israelites had piled up stones, and held them in veneration, but when God brought them back to himself, they counted those stones to be but as common chalkstones of the valley. It is a good thing for us when our sins bring us no pleasure, when they are only like common stones of the street. When we break our images, and dash down our idol-gods, we show that we prize them no longer. The Lord make this to be the issue of all our trials! Then will we bless him for our troubles so for our chief mercies.

This exposition consisted of readings from ISAIAH 26:20, 21; AND 27:1-9.

ISAIAH 35

1. *The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them;*

They shall be so glad that they shall inspire gladness where all was desolation, and brooding, melancholy batwing, and dragon’s howl. “The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them.”

1. *And the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose.*

God’s people are a happy-making people. They are a blessing in themselves, and they shall be a blessing to others, till all shall say,

“These are the seed that the Lord hath blessed.” “The desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose.”

2. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, they shall see the glory of the LORD and the excellency of our God.

A wonderful sight to see, for there is one of the most lovely sights in the world when the glory and excellency of God are to be seen in the works of his grace in his own people. It is such a sight that it makes men first rejoice in their hearts, and then rejoice with their tongues. They shall “rejoice with joy and singing,” which is the double rejoicing of the heart and of the lip. Well, these must be a favored people who, wherever they go, can make others glad after this fashion. Brethren, they must be full or they could not overflow! They must be themselves alive, or else they could not quicken the desert places. They must themselves be in flower, blooming like the rose, or they could not make the wilderness so full of verdure. The Lord grant that we may be in that state that we may be able to go into the wilderness. There are some of God’s people that cannot trust themselves to go where they are wanted, because they have not grace enough. They are so weak that they are like the weak man standing on the river’s brink, who cannot leap in to pull out a drowning man for fear they should be pulled in themselves. But, oh! they are blest indeed who dare go into wildernesses and into the solitary places, and carry the transforming benediction of heaven with them till the wilderness changes its dress, and the brown of the sand gives place to the ruddiness of the rose, because God has come there with his people.

3. Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees.

Are there such here tonight? No doubt there are — weak at work, and weak at praying. The two things go together — weak hands and feeble knees. May they both be strengthened.

4. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense; he will come and save you.

It is very singular how salvation and vengeance are so often associated together in Scripture. It is the day of salvation,” and the day of vengeance of our God to comfort all that mourn.” Vengeance

upon the false is the best consolation to the true. When God smites the sham, even to the heart, then does he bless that in which the truth is found. "He will come and save you."

5, 6. *Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert.*

See what the presence of Christ does. See what the presence of Christ's people will do when he comes in them and with them. They make the wilderness rejoice. But, besides that, the dwellers that are found in the wilderness — these lame and deaf people — get the blessing. Oh! may God make us to be a desert to others of this sort.

7. *And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes.*

The greenest spots your eye ever rested upon are just there where the grass is so rooted in the morass that it is always green with a delicate tinge, and the reeds and rushes spring up abundantly. O God, make poor parched hearts to become like this! You barren ones, you desolate ones, he can give you the best verdure that is possible. Your hearts shall be as green and fresh as the spots where there is grass with reeds and rushes.

8. *And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein.*

Oh! what a blessing that is to us poor fools! We should err anywhere. To err is human, and we seem to have come in for a double share of it. The more we look at our lives the more we see the folly of our hearts. What a mercy it is that when we walk in the way of faith, in the way of Christ, fools as we are, we shall not err!

9, 10. *No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there: And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.*

Like frightened things. They kept us company part of our road, but, when the Lord appeared they took to themselves wings and fled away. We could not tell where they were gone to. We were

surprised to find that they had quite vanished. Oh! for the appearing of the Lord tonight to his mourning people who may be here.

This exposition consisted of readings from ISAIAH 35. HEBREWS 12:1-6.

ISAIAH 40

1, 2. *Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem.*

The loss of comfort is no small loss. God would have his people happy. They are in the best condition for serving him, and less likely to be overcome by the temptations of the world, when the joy of the Lord is their strength. Therefore, three times over he bids his ministers comfort his people. O Triune Jehovah, help thy servant now to fulfill this commission!

2. *And cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished,*

After all beloved, you have not to fight your own battles. Under one aspect, you may have to do so; but the great fight is already over, that fight which is so much greater than all others, that the lesser ones are scarcely worthy of the name of warfare. You have but to scatter the foes whom your great Captain has vanquished, and to march boldly onward because he has cleared the way before you.

2. *That her iniquity is pardoned:*

Oh, when that is the ease, what does it matter about the warfare? Brethren, if you have a sense of sin forgiven, you may well bear the way. The sting is gone from death itself when sin is pardoned; and, therefore, it is certainly gone from life as well

2. *For she hath received of the LORD'S hand double for all her sins.*

If the Lord's ancient people could thus be comforted in their seasons of sorrow, how much more may we be cheered when we think of all the blessing which has come to us through the sorrows of our great covenant Head! All is settled now. "It is finished," was our Saviour's cry from the cross. Our debts are all paid, so we may well be comforted.

3. *The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.*

You have not to turn the wilderness into a garden; you have only to make "a highway for our God." It is the presence of God that you want, O sorrowing soul, O mourning Church! Let the Lord but come

to you, and then all shall be well. Your business is to give heed to the cry, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God."

4. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low:

That is what must happen to you who are very great and highly exalted, you will have to be made low. But as for the lowly ones, they shall be exalted. It is in this way that God comes to his people, marching over hills that have been overthrown, and over valleys that have been filled up, and leveled to make a highway for the King.

4, 5. And the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain? and the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.

That is the great purpose and end of nature, of providence, and of grace, that the glory of the Lord may be revealed. It is revealed; but many men do not see it. Yet it is God's purpose that all flesh shall see it together." Do we all see it, dear friends? Are we not far too apt to take glory to ourselves, and to make out that we are strong, that we are wise? Ah! Too often, that is the case, so it is the Lord's work to put an end to all that folly, so that nothing shall remain but the glory of the Lord, that all flesh may see it, and see nothing else.

6-8. The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field: The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.

So, you see, there is a withering work to be done by the Spirit of God, withering up all the glory of the flesh to the intent and purpose that the glory of God's Word may be revealed, and that Jehovah himself may be seen in his majesty and might. This is the great battle of all the ages. Sometimes men have set up a golden calf to be worshipped; at other times, blocks of wood and stone; but idolatry is universal wherever man is found. We are all far too prone to trust in something else instead of in God; and God is always jealous of these rivals of his,—these Dagon that dare impiously to stand in the presence of the ark of the Lord.

9. *O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!*

That is the point which we need to reach, where we may see God,—where we may be conscious of his presence,—where we may trust in his grace,—where we may lean on his arm. And, oh! we need to have the voice very much lifted up before we can hear this cry, “Behold your God!” We run after this sight, and that, and the other, and forget him who alone is worth seeing. “Behold your God,” you who are sorrowing, you who are perplexed, you who are sorely burdened, behold your God, and you shall be strengthened and comforted.

10, 11. *Behold, the Lord GOD will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.*

This is what the good Shepherd is constantly doing. Nobody else can do it. He alone can protect the weak, who are his lambs, and succor those whose inward sorrows bring them into deep distress; and there is nothing which he cannot do, for he is omnipotent. Then, why do you not trust him? You remember what the Lord himself says, by the mouth of Jeremiah: “Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord. For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited. Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green: and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.” Now comes a verse by which we are taught the greatness of God:—

12. *Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?*

Who has done all this but God? Then, after that, is there anything too hard for him to do? And who is so worthy of your confidence as this Omnipotent One? Oh, let the thunder of his power make you ashamed of the weakness of your unbelief!

13, 14. *Who hath directed the Spirit of the LORD, or being his counsellor hath taught him? With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and shewed to him the way of understanding?*

Dost thou want greater wisdom than his? Art thou perplexed because thou canst not understand all mysteries? What would thy wisdom and understanding be if they were placed side by side with his? A single drop of water, compared with all seas and oceans, has a larger magnitude than all thy powers have compared with the greatness of thy God, and all his glorious attributes. Trust him, then, and let him lead thee whithersoever he willeth.

15. *Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket,*

All the nations—Jews and Gentiles, the vast multitudes of China, and India, and all other nations,—all these are but as a drop of a bucket,—the one drop that trembles on the bucket's brim when all the rest of the water is gone.

15. *And are counted as the small dust of the balance:*

That little imperceptible dust that does not turn the scale of an ordinary balance, and for which you would need the most sensitive scales in order to discover its presence. That is all that the whole of the nations of the earth are in comparison with God; yet, sometimes, we fancy that one man is so great that all must give way to him. Whereas, if we trust in God, and think as God thinks, a whole nation will be to us as a drop of a bucket, or as the unseen dust of the balance. Well did Dr. Watts sing:—

“Great God! how infinite art thou I
What worthless worms are we!
Let the whole race of creatures bow,
And pay their praise to thee.
“Thy throne eternal ages stood,
Ere seas or stars were made;
Thou art the ever-living God,
Were all the nations dead.”

15, 16. *Behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing. And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering.*

There, set Lebanon itself on a blaze; let all its forests of cedar be the wood to burn the sacrifice, and all its cattle the victims upon the altar; yet are they but as a child's toys in the sight of the all-glorious Jehovah. There is nothing in them that can satisfy his infinite heart.

17, 18. *All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity. To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him?*

Now, children of God, do not miss the meaning of this passage by saying that it relates to the heathen. True, it does; but not to them alone. When the heathen liken God to stocks and stones, they scarcely act worse than some of his people do; for, sometimes, we do not even think as well of our God as we do of ourselves. Ye, being evil, are constantly supplying your children's wants, yet you doubt whether God will supply yours. You liken him to an ungenerous father, or to a forgetful and faithless friend, one who changes with the wind. Oh, dear friends, have you not so likened him? If so, let the rebuke to the heathen be also a rebuke to you. This is what the heathen do:—

19, 20. *The workman melteth a graven image, and the goldsmith spreadeth it over with gold, and casteth silver chains. He that is so impoverished that he hath no oblation—*

No precious metal,—

20-26. *Chooseth a tree that will not rot; he seeketh unto him a cunning workman to prepare a graven image, that shall not be moved. Have ye not known? have ye not heard? hath it not been told you from the beginning?*

Have ye not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in: that bringeth the princes to nothing; he maketh the judges of the earth as vanity. Yea, they shall not be planted; yea, they shall not be sown: yea, their stock shall not take root in the earth: and he shall also blow upon them, and they shall wither, and the whirlwind shall take them away as stubble. To

whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high,— Look at the stars,—

26, 27. *And behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth. Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the LORD, and my judgment is passed over from my God?*

You see, it is another form of that same sin of forgetting God, or thinking little of God. It does not matter much whether it takes the form of atheism or of idolatry, it is the same kind of evil; it is getting away from God, or neglecting him; and, in our case, when we get depressed in spirit, and fancy that God forgets us, it is the same sinful nature working in the same sinful manner. May God help us to forsake every form of evil!

28, 29. *Hast thou not know? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint;—*

Come now, faint heart, and swoon away at his feet. Come to him in all your weakness; do not try to conceal it, but trust him to remove it: “He giveth power to the faint;”—

29. *And to them that have no might he increaseth strength.*

What a mercy it is to have no might that God may increase our strength! What a curse it is to be so strong in yourself that you do not go to the Strong for strength!

30. *Even the youths—*

With all their vigor: “Even the youths”—

30. *Shall faint and be weary, and the young men—*

Though more confirmed in strength: “the young men”—

30, 31. *Shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles;*

That is their first mode of progression, in which, perhaps, there is more flight than is good for them: “They shall mount up with wings as eagles;”—

31. *They shall run, and not be weary;*

That is an improvement upon the flying; but they shall still further improve their pace, for running is not the best pace at which a man can go. Enoch did not run with God, but he walked with him;

and so, as we grow in grace, we shall advance, from flying to running, and from running to walking. This is the wise, sober, steady mode of going to heaven.

31. *And they shall walk, and not faint.*

The Lord help us to attain to that blessed rate of progression, in which we shall “walk, and not faint,” for his dear Son’s sake!

This exposition consisted of readings from ISAIAH 40.; AND MATTHEW 16:21-23.

ISAIAH 40

1. *Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.*

“They need it, and they shall have it. Mind, O my servants, that you give it to them: Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.”

2. *Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD’S hand double for all her sins.*

The first meaning of these words was that, as Jerusalem had passed through a time of great tribulation, she should have a season of rest, but the grand gospel meaning to you and to me is, that our Lord Jesus has fought our battle, and won the victory for us, that he has paid our debt and given to divine justice the double for all our sins, and therefore, our iniquity is pardoned. This is enough to make anyone happy, one would think. It is the best thing that even Isaiah could say, or that God himself could say by the mouth of Isaiah, when his object was to comfort the Lord’s tried people.

3, 4. *The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain:*

When God means to come to men, nothing can stop him or block up his road. He will level mountains, and fill up valleys, but he will come to his people, somehow or other. And when he comes to them, if he finds many crooked things about them, he will make the crooked straight, and the rough places he will make plain.

5. *And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.*

And, since he has spoken it, it must come to pass. “Hath he said, and shall he not do it? “With him, to say anything is to will its accomplishment.

6-8. *The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field: the grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever. Yes, the dearest ones that we have are but flesh, so they wither, and pass away like the green herb. Have you been bereaved, my believing friend?*

Well, you may still say to your Lord, in the words of our hymn, “How can I bereaved be, Since I cannot part from thee?” The mower with the sharp scythe cuts down the grass, but he cannot touch the secret source of our hope, and joy, and confidence in God, and, above all, he cannot touch the God in whom we confide.

9. *O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!*

If the chief, the best, the holiest city has found her God, if Jerusalem has been thus favored, let her sing the gladsome tidings, over the hilltops, to the most distant cities of the land, and say to them, “Behold your God “If you have seen your Lord, beloved, proclaim the good news to those who have well nigh forgotten that there is a God, say to them, “Behold your God. He is still to be seen, by the eye of faith, working graciously in the midst of the earth.”

10-11. *Behold, the lord GOD will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.*

He knows their weakness, their weariness, their pain, and how incapable they are of speedy and long traveling; he is very tender and pitiful, and he will gently lead them.

12-14. *Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the*

hills in a balance. Who hath directed the Spirit of the LORD, or being his counsellor hath taught him? With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and shewed to him the way of understanding?

And yet, beloved, we sometimes act as if we were God's teachers, as if we had to instruct him what he should do, and because we cannot see our way, we almost dream that he cannot, and because we are puzzled, we conceive that infinite wisdom must be at a nonplus; but it is not so. He was full of wisdom when there was no one with whom he could take counsel, and he is still wise in the highest degree.

15. *Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket,*

Not a bucketful, but just a drop that remains in the bucket after you thought it had been completely emptied.

15. *And are counted as the small dust of the balance:*

Remember that this is said of "the nations." China, India, Europe, Africa, with all their teeming multitudes, are only like the small dust of the balance that is blown away by the slightest puff of wind.

15,16. *Behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing. And Lebanon*

With all its forests of cedar: "Lebanon" —

16. *Is not sufficient to burn,*

Think of all the cedars of Lebanon as being on a blaze, like some great forest fire, yet not being sufficient to supply the wood for God's altars.

16. *Nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering.*

Whether it be the wild or the tame beasts that are on that mountain range, they are not sufficient for a burnt offering unto the Most High.

17. *All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity.*

As if they were the mere shadow of something, and had no more influence over him than as if they did not exist.

18. *To whom then will ye liken God?*

This is a strong argument against idolatry, against the worship of God under any visible form whatsoever: “To whom then will ye liken God?”

18. *Or what likeness will ye compare unto him?*

The heathen did make these supposed likenesses of God. Here is a description of the process by which they manufactured their idol gods.

19. *The workman melteth a graven image, and the goldsmith spreadeth it over with gold,*

The rough metal is cast in a certain fashion, and then the goldsmith puts on it his thin plates of gold,

19. *And casteth silver chains.*

To adorn it.

20. *He that is so impoverished that he hath no oblation —*

The poor man, who cannot manage to make a god of gold,

20. *Chooseth a tree that will not rot;*

A good piece of heart of oak or enduring elm.

20. *He seeketh unto him a cunning workman to prepare a graven image, that shall not be moved.*

Fix it firmly, drive the post down far into the earth, so that it may be an immovable god.

21-26. *Have ye not known? have ye not heard? hath it not been told you from the beginning? have ye not understood from the foundations or the earth? It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in: That bringeth the princess to nothing; he maketh the judges of the earth as vanity. Yea, they shall not be planted; yea, they shall not be sown: yea, their stock shall not take root in the earth: and he shall also blow upon them, and they shall wither, and the whirlwind shall take them away as stubble. To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high,*

Suppose it to be night time: “Lift up your eyes on high,” —

26. *And behold who hath created these things,*

These wondrous worlds, these stars that bespangle the firmament.

26. *That bringeth out their host by number:*

For God knows the number of them all, and the name of every separate world that moves in the vast expanse of space.

26. *He calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might for that he is strong in power; not one faileth.*

They are not propped up with pillars, nor hung upon some mighty ropes, yet they continue to occupy the spheres appointed to them by God. He hangeth the world upon nothing, and keeps it in its place by the perpetual out-going of his power.

27. *Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the LORD, and my judgment is passed over from my God?*

What! when he has not forgotten one of all those mighty hosts of stars, and when not a sparrow falleth to the ground without his notice, how can you dream that he has forgotten you, or that your way is hidden from him?

28-31. *Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.*

ISAIAH 40:1-17

1, 2. *Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath receiveth of the LORD'S hand double for all her sins.*

God would have his people happy. He knows that we are not in strong, vigorous state, neither do we honour his name while we are lacking in holy joy. Let the sinners be uncomfortable. Let them be "like the troubled sea that cannot rest"; but as for God's people, it is his great joy that they should be happy. He bids his servants again and again to comfort them. Sometimes we are in a condition of warfare, and we are under the chastising rod but now the Lord appears graciously to his servants, and he says, "Your warfare is

over: your chastisement is ended.” Now the Lord returns in mercy, and he grants a sense of forgiven sin.

3. *The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.*

You know this was John the Baptist coming to proclaim the Saviour. That was the best comfort God’s people could have — the coming of the Lord. So it is now. The joy of the Church is the coming of the Lord, and to each one of us the greatest source of joy is the drawing near to us of our Lord. If he appears to us, our winter is over, our summer’s sun has come. If Christ be with us, the time of the singing of birds has come, and our heart is glad.

4, 5. *Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.*

Wherever Christ comes, it is so. All things are right at his appearing, and if the Lord do but manifest himself to us tonight, each one, we shall find the crooked things made straight. We shall see the mountains of difficulty leveled, and the deep depressions will all be filled up and there will be a causeway along which the Lord triumphantly shall ride to display the greatness of his power. There is nothing that shall hinder the coming of the Lord to us, and when he comes, there is nothing that shall stand against him

6-8. *The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field: The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.*

Now that is a cry that we all need to hear — the death-cry of all creature-confidence for man at his very best is only like grass in the flower. It will be mown down in due time, but if the scythe comes not near it, yet will it fade in its season, for it is a transient thing, and every hope and confidence which is based upon that which is seen must be temporal and must pass away. All the joy that you have tonight — all the hope and all the confidence you have which is based upon an earthly thing — must by degrees all disappear.

Nothing is eternal but that which springs out of the eternal. Unless our hope be in the Lord alone, that hope will at some time or other fail us; and this is a cry we need to hear because, until we are sick of the creature, we shall not turn to the Creator. Till we have done with false confidences, we shall not make God our trust.

9. *O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Juda, Behold your God!*

Look away from these fading things and behold your God. Look away from the brightest joy you have, though it be, like the meadow, all besprent, with many coloured flowers, and look to your God, and to your God alone. “Behold your God” — your God in Christ; your God who has come through the wilderness, making a highway for himself, that he may come to you, Rejoice in Christ your Saviour, and you shall have a joy that never shall be taken from you.

10, 11. *Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd:*

Do you belong to the flock tonight? Then let this comfort you. Never mind about the fading flowers. “He shall feed his flock like a shepherd.” He has brought you into the pasture tonight. Depend upon it, he has not led you by a wrong way. And now, though your soul be hungry and thirsty, you shall not lack, for “he shall feed his flock like a shepherd.”

11. *He shall gather the lambs with his arm,*

The feeblest, first. The most care, for those that want most care. “He shall gather the lambs with his arm.”

11. *And carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.*

Your sorrow is to come, It is to yourself alone known. None can sympathize with you. He will gently lead you. There is no overdriving with Christ. Sometimes his ministers in order to get God’s people right one way, overdrive them another, and it is possible while rebuking the hypocrite, to cause grief to the sincere believer, but our Lord is a better shepherd than the under shepherds are at their very best. “He shall gather the lambs with his arm, carry

them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.”
Oh! what a blessed helper we have! Let us rest in him.

12-17. *Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance? Who hath directed the Spirit of the LORD, or being his counsellor hath taught him? With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and shewed to him the way of understanding? Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing. And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering. All nations before him are as nothing, and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity.*

Who would not trust such a God as this — this only God? How well may we be content to turn away from the fading creatures to this eternal Lord and put our trust in him! Indeed, the wonder is that we do trust the creature, and the wonder still is that we do not trust the mighty Creator.

Faith, which seems so difficult, after all, is nothing better than sanctified common-sense. It is the most common-sense thing in all the world to trust in Omnipotence — in infinite, unchanging love — in infallible truth. To trust anywhere else needs a great deal of justification, but to trust in God needs no apology. He well deserves it. O my soul, trust thou in him.

This exposition consisted of readings from ISAIAH 40:1-17; 25-31. JOHN 1:29-42.

ISAIAH 40:9-11

40:9-11. *O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God! Behold, the Lord God will come with a strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.*

This office of Christ makes glad the hearts of those who have to preach it. To lift up our voice and to proclaim to others the good

tidings is grateful service. It is the joy of the church that Jesus, the Lord God Almighty, is strong for the defense of his people, and at the same time tender towards their infirmities. Let us rejoice and be glad in him. Now let us hear what our Shepherd saith by the mouth of the prophet Ezekiel. After he has been complaining of the hireling shepherds — the false ones who sought the fleece and not the flock, who did not feed the sheep nor care for them, nor had any tenderness toward them; he goes on to show what he will do for his own.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 23., ISAIAH 40:9-11, EZEKIEL 34:11-25.

ISAIAH 40:25-31

25, 26. *To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might; for that he is strong in power; not one faileth.*

There is no other power that hangs yon lamps of heaven in their places, and keeps them ever burning, except the power of his Word. This whole round earth of ours hangs on nothing but the bidding of the Most High. I remember how Luther used to console himself in troublous times by saying, “Look at yonder arch of blue. There is not a pillar to hold it up, and yet whoever saw the skies fall?” Nothing but the power of God keeps them up. My soul, if all the worlds were made by his word, canst not thou hang on that word? If all things do exist but by the will and word of thy Father, can he not support thee, and canst thou not trust him? Oh! this confidence in the invisible and eternal ought to be natural to us as God’s children. But alas! here is our great sin — that we frequently trust in an arm of flesh and forget our God.

27. *Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the LORD, and my judgment is passed over from my God?*

He forgets no star amongst the myriads, no creature amongst the multitudes. He has marked in his book the track of every single atom of air, and every particle of dust, and every drop of spray, and how canst thou be forgotten?

28, 29. *Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth,*

fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint:

He loves to pour out into empty vessels. He does not give his power to the strong, but “he giveth power to the faint,” and the more faint thou art, the more room for his strength. Trust thou in him. If thou art burdened that thou canst not stand, lean on him. The more thou dost lean, the better will he love thee. He delights to help his people. “He giveth power to the faint.”

29-30. *And to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall:*

We sometimes wish that we were as young as some, and that we had all their overflowing spirit — all the effervescence of their juvenile ardor. Ah, well! we need not wish for it, for mere mortal power shall droop and die, and earthly vigor cease, while such as trust the Lord shall find their strength increased. “Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall.”

31. *But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles;*

That is very much when they begin. They are all for flying; and God gives them a glorious flight, land they are so happy and so delighted. But they will do better than that.

31. *They shall run, and not be weary;*

Is that better than flying? Yes it is — a better pace to keep up, but God enables his servants at length to keep along the road of duty and to run in it. But there is a better pace than that.

31. *And they shall walk, and not faint.*

It is a good, steady pace. It is the pace that Enoch kept when he walked with God. Sometimes it is easier to take a running spurt than it is to keep on day by day walk, walk, walk, in the sobriety of Christian conversation.

Many under excitement can run a race, but it is the best of all to be able steadily to walk on, walking with God the Lord. The Lord bring us to that pace. “They shall walk and not faint.”

This exposition consisted of readings from ISAIAH 40:1-17; 25-31. JOHN 1:29-42.

ISAIAH 41:1-18

God enters into a controversy with those who had fallen into the worship of idols.

1. Keep silence before me, O islands; and let the people renew their strength: let them come near; then let them speak: let us come near together to judgment.

He challenges them to a debate. He gives them breathing time — bids them prepare themselves, and come with the best arguments that their minds could find.

2, 3. Who raised up the righteous man from the east, called him to his foot, gave the nations before him, and made him rule over kings? He gave them as the dust to his sword, and as driven stubble to his bow. He pursued them, and passed safely; even by the way that he had not gone with his feet.

Who was it that raised up Cyrus, and who made him strong to defeat the foe? Did the false gods do it? Could they claim any share therein? He puts it to them.

4. Who hath wrought and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? I the LORD, the first, and with the last; I am he.

Long before Cyrus was born, God thus spoke of him. It is declared what work he should do. What better proof could there be that God is God? Do the false gods foretell the future? Are their oracles to be depended upon? Yet the Lord's word is true and standeth fast for ever. "I Jehovah, first, and with the last, I am he."

5, 6. The isles saw it, and feared; the ends of the earth were afraid, drew near, and came. They helped every one his neighbour; and every one said to his brother, Be of good courage.

When men fight against God, they get united. What a very sad thing it is that God's children should ever fall out. There is one sin that I never heard charged upon the devils namely, the sin of disunity. Of all the evil things we have heard, I have never heard that among the principalities of the pit there has ever been any division into sects and parties. Oh! sad that in this respect we should fall short of them. The enemies of God helped everyone, his neighbour, "and everyone said to his brother, Be of good courage."

7. So the carpenter encouraged the goldsmith, and he that smootheth with the hammer him that smote the anvil, saying, It is

ready for the soldering: and he fastened it with nails, that it should not be moved.

What a sarcastic description of god-making this is! There is the carpenter, and then the goldsmith to spread the plates of gold over the wood, and then it is soldered, and it has to be fastened with nails. The simple facts about the making of gods are sufficient to pour ridicule upon idolatry. God deliver us from idolatry of any form or shape, whether it comes from Rome or Canterbury. May we have no symbol — no visible object of worship whatever, but get rid of all that, and before the great invisible Spirit let us bow, worshipping him in spirit and in truth. For the least touch of the symbolical soon leadeth on to the idolatrous, and what at the first seemed harmless soon cometh to be harmful so that well doth the law say, “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image for I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God.” Oh! to keep clear of this great and heinous sin!

8, 9. *But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend. Thou whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, and called thee from the chief men thereof, and said unto thee, Thou art my servant; I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away.*

The people of Israel were reserved by God that they might worship him. While other nations went to their idols, the Israelites were to be his servants, chaste in heart towards himself. It is so with the Lord’s believing people. Ye are elected and selected, chosen and ordained, and set apart. You may fear the Lord, and not give your hearts to any other. May God grant that we may be true to this our sacred trust. Notice how very sweetly in this text the Lord alludes to his friendship to Abraham, “The seed of Abraham, my friend.” When the Lord makes a friend of a man, he means it, and he keeps up that friendship to his children and his children’s children. Happy are they who have a father who is a friend of God. Just as David did good to Mephibosheth for the sake of Jonathan, so, doubtless, many blessings come to the children for the sake of their parents. The Lord keepeth mercy to the third and fourth generation, yea, and throughout all generations to them that keep his covenant.

10. *Fear thou not; for I am with thee:*

What cause for fear now? If I am with thee, thou needest not fear all the men on earth, nor all the demons of the pit. Fear thou not, for I am with thee.”

10. *Be not dismayed; for I am thy God:*

“Thy God.” Lay the stress there if you will, or “thy God, therefore thine all-sufficient helper — thine immutable, faithful, everlasting friend.”

10-12. *I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. Behold all they that were incensed against thee shall be ashamed and confounded: they shall be as nothing; and they that strive with thee shall perish. Thou shalt seek them, and shalt not find them, even them that contended with thee: they that war against thee shall be as nothing, and as a thing of nought.*

Go on, then, child of God. All thy foes that resist thy salvation shall disappear before thy onward march. “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” Advance to meet thy cares, and God shall take thy cares away. Only be thou strong and of a good courage, and rest in the everlasting arm, and thou shalt be more than a conqueror.

13, 14. *For I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee. Fear not, thou worm Jacob,*

Poor worm! How can it take care of itself? Even a bird can destroy it. “Fear not, thou worm Jacob.” You know what a worm does for its defense. It is all that it can do: it hides itself in the earth. Hide thyself in thy God. Get thee into the rock, and there be hidden till the danger be overpast. “Fear not, thou worm Jacob.”

14. *And ye men of Israel; I will help thee, saith the Lord, and thy redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.*

How many times the Lord puts it, “I will help thee”! How again and again, he saith, “Fear not”! For despondency is deeply graven in some spirits. There are some minds that seem to gravitate that way again and again, and again; and even the divine assurances have to be given repeatedly before they feel comfort. have any of you been troubled because your children do not learn the first time you teach them? See how you are towards your heavenly Father! how many times he has to teach you, line upon line, precept upon precept — here a little, and there a little; and if he hath patience with our infirmities, we may very readily have patience with the infirmities of our little ones.

15. *Behold, I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument having teeth:*

He will make poor feeble worms to be like that great corn-drag which they were accustomed to draw over the straw to bruise out the wheat.

15, 16. *Thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and shalt make the hills as chaff. Thou shalt fan them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them: and thou shalt rejoice in the LORD, and shalt glory in the Holy One of Israel.*

Truly, when mountains are beaten into chaff, and blown away with the winnowing fan, there is room for rejoicing and magnifying God. If there were no difficulties, there would be no victories. If we had no trials, we should have no tests of Jehovah's strength; but out of our afflictions we get our joys. The deeper our sorrows, the higher our exultations when God helps us through them.

17 *When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the LORD will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them.*

What a blessed promise that is! God thinks of poor and needy men. When they are in their greatest extremity, with nothing to quench their thirst, and they are ready to die, then he is pleased to make the rocks run with rivers, in order that they may be supplied.

18. *I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water.*

ISAIAH 41:1-20

1. *Keep silence before me, O islands; and let the people renew their strength: let them come near; then let them speak: let us come near together to judgment.*

God invites people to argue with him. He bids them first "listen" to him, and then speak to him. They had been worshipping idols, so the Lord shows them that the idols are nothing, and that all worship paid to them is a lie. He begins by asking a question:?

2. *Who raised up the righteous man from the east, called him to his east, gave the nations before him, and made him rule over kings? he gave them as the dust to his sword, and as driven stubble to his bow. He pursued them, and passed safely; even by the way that he had not gone with his feet.*

These words are supposed to allude to Cyrus, who came “from the east”, and conquered “the nations”, and then did good to the house of Israel. It was God who spoke of Cyrus long before he was born. What idol god has been able to utter any prophecy? Only the Most High who lives in heaven can foretell things to come. One of the best proofs of our holy religion is to be found in the prophecies which have been fulfilled to the letter in various countries, and at different periods. Now, when they dig up old stones, that have been hidden for hundreds of years from the eyes of men, they see the proofs of how God saw into the future, and bade his prophets foretell the things that should be hereafter.

4. *Who hath wrought and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? I the LORD, the first, and with the last; I am he. The isles saw it, and feared; the ends of the earth were afraid, drew near, and came.*

They helped every one his neighbour; and ever one said to his brother, Be of good courage. So the carpenter encouraged the goldsmith, and he that smootheth with the hammer him that smote the anvil, saying, It is ready for the soldering: and he fastened it with nails, that it should not be moved.

A very graphic picture of the making of an idol. The people were afraid of Cyrus, so they began to appeal to their gods. A pretty god it must have been that had to be made by a carpenter! Then the wood had to be covered with gold plates by the goldsmith, and the god would not be complete without the help of a man smoothing with a hammer and a smith smiting upon an anvil. When it was made, they had to solder it to keep it together; and they had to get nails to fasten it in its place lest, like Dagon, it should fall down and be broken. This is nothing but literal truth; yet what sarcasm it is upon idolatry! What good can come of idols that are made by men, idols that cannot move, and must be fixed in their places with soldering irons?

8. *But thou, Israel, art my servant,*

You do not worship idols; you worship Jehovah, the living and true God.

8. *Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend.*

What a title for God to give to a man, “Abraham my friend”! Could not we also endeavor to get into God’s friendship, where

Abraham was; to trust and love God much; to talk with him much, and enjoy high and holy fellowship with him?

9. *Thou whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, and called thee from the chief men thereof, and said unto thee, Thou art my servant; I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away.*

To many here this verse will come home very sweetly. God is your God. and you are God's servants. he has chosen you; he will never repent of his choice; his election is never changed. "I have Chosen thee, and not cast thee away;" and you have chosen him, and you will not cast him away. By his grace, you will never leave your God, nor forsake the ways of Christ. May his mercy keep you faithful, even to the end!

10. *Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God:*

Where God is, there is no cause for fear: "Fear thou not; for I am with thee." That is a grand argument. "Be not dismayed; for I am thy God." Everything we need lies within the compass of those words.

10. *I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.*

Beloved believer, are you weak tonight? Claim this precious promise, "I will strengthen thee." Have you something to do that is quite beyond your strength? Take hold of this comforting word, "I will help thee." Are you ready to slip? Do you feel as if you must fall? Lean on this gracious message, "I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." Do not let these precious pearls lie at your feet to be trodden on; pick them up, and wear them, and beautify the neck of your faith with them.

11. *Behold, all they that are incensed against thee shall be ashamed and confounded: they shall be as nothing; and they that strive with thee shall perish.*

Your sins, your temptations, everything that would keep you out of heaven, and drive you away from God, the Lord will overcome all these enemies of yours, and deliver you.

12, 13. *Thou shalt seek them, and shalt not find them, even them that contended with thee: they that war against thee shall be as nothing, and as a thing of nought. For I the LORD thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee.*

That is the second time that we have had that precious promise to forbid our fear; first in verse 10, and now in verse 13, “I will help thee.”

14. *Fear not, thou worm Jacob,*

You are earthly, groveling, weak, like a worm; yet even you need not fear:

“Fear not, thou worm Jacob.”

14. *And ye men of Israel; I will help thee,*

That is the third time that we have had that promise, “I will help thee.” “Ring that silver bell again,” says the Holy Spirit to Isaiah, “let it comfort my tired ones.” “I will help thee.”

14. *Saith the LORD, and thy redeemer, the Holy one of Israel.*

I was wonderstruck, as I looked at this verse, to find it put “Thou worm Jacob, I will help thee, saith the Lord, and thy God,” that is the Hebrew word which is translated “Redeemer”, “Thy next of kin.” Is the next of kin to a worm the Almighty God? Does he undertake to be our Brother, to pay the redemption price for us, because he is our Kinsman? So the text says. Let us drink in the comfort of it: “Thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.” In order to become our Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel himself became “a worm, and no man.”

15. *Behold, I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument having teeth: thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small. and shalt make the hills as chaff.*

The Easterns drag a wooden machine over the corn to fetch out the grain from the ear. This is called a corn-drag, and they put teeth in it, similar to the teeth of a harrow. God said that he would turn his Church, his people, into a new corn-drag, with teeth sharp and tearing, and that they should go against their difficulties, which were like mountains, and against their trials, which were like hills, and they should thresh them small, and make them to be like chaff.

16. *Thou shalt fan them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them: and thou shalt rejoice in the LORD, and shalt glory in the Holy One of Israel.*

All difficulty is gone, torn to pieces small as chaff, and then winnowed away, as the chaff is blown from among the heap on the threshing floor. What a promise this is! You who fear God, believe

it, go and practice it, and see if God does not make your greatest difficulties utterly to disappear. Now come two sweet verses:?

17. When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water.

See what God can do. Men are thirsty, they have no water; and lo! of a sudden, behold rivers, fountains, springs, pools, floods; for God does nothing in halves. He is an all-sufficient, overflowing God. When he gives, he gives like a king. He does not measure his gifts of water by the pint and by the gallon; but here you have pools, and springs, and rivers. When he has given waters, he will give trees to grow by the waters. When God gives blessing, he makes other blessings to spring out of it.

19. I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the shittah tree, and the myrtle, and the oil tree; I will set in the desert the fir tree, and the pine, and the box tree together:

Making a paradise of streams of water and lovely trees, evergreen trees of the most comely aspect, and of great variety. See what God can do. Where there is a wilderness, where there were hills and valleys, and all was dry and parched, he makes woods and forests, rivers and fountains. He can do all things. Oh, that we had faith in him! But we forget him: we turn not to him; we look everywhere but to God; we try every method except that of trusting in the living God. Have we a God? If so, why do we act as we sometimes do? Martin Luther was a very cheerful man, as a rule; but he had terrible fits of depression. he was at one time so depressed that his friends recommended him to go away for a change of air, to see if he could get relief. he went away; but he came home as miserable as ever; and when he went into the sitting-room, his wise wife Kate, Catherine von Bora, was sitting there, dressed in black, and her children round about her, all in black. "Oh, oh!" said Luther, "who is dead?" "Why," said she, "doctor, have not you heard that God is dead? My husband, Martin Luther, would never be in such a state of mind if he had a living God to trust to." Then he burst into a hearty laugh, and said, "Kate, thou art a wise woman. I have been acting as if God were dead, and I will do so no more. Go and take off thy black." If God be alive, why are we discouraged? If we have

a God to look to, why are we cast down? Let us rejoice and be glad together; for God will do all that he has promised, for this reason:?

20. *That they may see, and know, and consider, and understand together, that the hand of the LORD hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel hath created it.*

God wants you to know that he is at work on your behalf. he wants you so to trust him as to see how his promises can be applied to your case, and what his right hand can accomplish even for you. Let us trust him tonight with all our hearts.

ISAIAH 41:8-20

8. *But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend.*

Let us, for the time being, forget the people to whom this message was addressed, and see whether it might not be spoken to ourselves. Come, my friend, art thou truly God's servant? Dost thou delight to do his will, and to walk in his ways? If so, then thou art God's chosen; for, wherever there is the true spirit of obedience to the Lord, it is the result of his grace, and grace never comes except from the well-head of electing love. If thou art God's servant, thou art God's chosen. Then, see to it that thou dost walk and live as one of the seed of Abraham, whom God calls, "my friend." It was very touching, the other day, to notice how the Queen spoke of one who was her servant, but who had gained the friendship of his royal mistress. So the Lord Jesus Christ said to his disciples, "Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth: but I have called you friends." May we so faithfully serve him that it will be fitting for the Lord to speak of us in all three of these terms: "Thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend."

9. *Thou whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, and called thee from the chief men thereof, and said unto thee, Thou art my servant; I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away.*

May the Lord just now say that to each one of you who are his servants! Especially, may he say the latter part of it, "I have not cast thee away"! Many times, he might have done so if he had dealt with us according to our deserts. "Dismiss me not thy service, Lord," is a prayer we ought often to put up, for, in that service, we are far from

perfect. I think I speak for all sane Christians; — I do not undertake to speak for certain insane ones that abound at this time, — but I believe that all sane servants of the Lord confess that they are such poor servants that their wonder is that they have not been dismissed from his service. Yet it is sweet to hear him say, “I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away.”

10. *Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God:*

Oh, the riches of that word, “I am thy God”! That is more than “Thy Friend, thy Helper.” “I am thy God.”

10. *I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; —*

First, “I will give thee strength, and then I will use my own strength on thy behalf: ‘I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee;’” —

10. *Yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.*

The poor child of God seems to cry, “Lord, thou sayest, ‘I will help thee,’ but I can hardly stand; I am such a babe, I have not yet learned to stand alone.” “Well, then,” says God, “I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.” Are any of you afraid that you will slip with your feet? Are you put in very perplexing positions, so that you hardly know which way to turn? Then rest on this sweet promise, “Yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.”

11. *Behold, all they that were incensed against thee shall be ashamed and confounded: they shall be as nothing; and they that strive with thee shall perish.*

The Lord Jesus Christ will put to rout all the enemies of his people. Their sins and their sorrows, their foes and their woes, shall alike be scattered to the wind.

12. *Thou shalt seek them, and shalt not find them, even them that contended with thee: they that war against thee shall be as nothing, and as a thing of nought.*

You know how it happened to Pharaoh and all his hosts; the Israelites could not find them after the Lord had overthrown them in the Red Sea. The psalmist sang, long afterwards, concerning the Egyptians who were drowned, “There was not one of them left.” So shall it be with all those whom you now fear and dread; God shall appear, and work such a deliverance for you that you shall wonder

where your trouble is. It shall be drowned, utterly washed away, like the Egyptians whom the children of Israel saw no more.

13, 14. *For I the LORD thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee. Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel; I will help thee, saith the LORD, and thy redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.*

You must not miss those charming words, dear friends. Let me read them again. Some of you will want them, so do not miss them. There is some medicine here that you will need, may be, before long: “Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel; I will help thee, saith the Lord, and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.”

15. *Behold, I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument having teeth: thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and shalt make the hills as chaff.*

You know the corn-drag was made rough at the bottom, as though it had sharp teeth, and when it was drawn over the wheat after it was spread out on the threshing-floor, the grain was separated from the chaff. So God tells his people, if they trust him, that he will make them into a threshing instrument having teeth, and they shall thresh, not ordinary harvests, but shall thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and make the hills as chaff. No task is too hard for God’s people to accomplish when God is with them; difficulties vanish, and their fears are driven before the wind, when God strengthens them.

16. *Thou shalt fan them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them: and thou shalt rejoice in the LORD, and shalt glory in the Holy One of Israel.*

Come, ye that are drooping in spirit, here is God’s promise to you that you shall overcome all your difficulties, and then shall rejoice in God. “Oh!” say you, “I could rejoice in God if he enabled me to do that. Put the “if” away, and believe that he is about to help you, and anticipate the victory he is going to give you by singing the song of faith.

17. *When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, —*

They have come to such a state that they cannot even tell their wants; they do not know how to speak to others about their grief, or

even to describe it to themselves. “Their tongue faileth for thirst.” What then?

17. *I the LORD will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them.*

“But, Lord, they could not speak. Didst thou not say, ‘Their tongue faileth’? Yet thou sayest, ‘I the Lord will hear them.’” It shows, dear friends, that a groan is a prayer, a sigh is a prayer, and that, even if we cannot get as far as to sigh or groan, our very hunger and thirst make up a prayer before God: “I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them.”

18. *I will open rivers in high places,-*

That is an unusual place to find rivers; but God does strange things when he shows mercy to the poor and needy: “I will open rivers in high places,” —

18. *And fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water.*

There shall be enough and to spare; there shall be an abundance of the water of which before they could not find a single drop. When God is gracious to a soul, he is gracious. When his mercy is made to enter a man’s heart, then he pours floods upon him. No little grace will God bestow, but endless grace, and boundless grace, “and crown that grace with glory, too.”

19, 20. *I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the shittah tree, and the myrtle, and the oil tree; I will set in the desert the fir tree, and the pine, and the box tree together: That they may see, and know, and consider, and understand together, that the hand of the LORD hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel hath created it.*

May these gracious promises be fulfilled in you and me, that we may praise our faithful covenant-keeping God for ever and ever! Amen.

ISAIAH 42:1-6

1. *Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.*

Verily this prophecy is concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. Observe the title which he takes. He is called the servant of God.

The Father calls him his servant. Above all others is Christ the servant of the Highest deigning to become the servant of servants, though he is the King of kings. "Whom I uphold" — which may be read two ways. According to some renderings it should be, "Whom I lean upon" — as if God leant the full weight of his glory upon Christ, and gave over the work of grace into his hands, that is, if the passage be read passively. If actively, it runs as in our text, "Whom I uphold." And both are true. God leans upon Christ. Christ draws his strength from God. They co-work, and mutual is the glory. "Mine elect." That is first. "My choice one," for there is none so choice as Christ. "My elected one," for Christ is the head of election. We are chosen in him from before the foundation of the world so that specially does God call him "Mine elect." "In whom my soul delighteth." The delight of the Father in the Son is infinite. He delighted in his person. Now he delights in the work which he has accomplished. The delight of the Father is in Christ, and he delights in us because we are in him. If, indeed, we are members of Christ, he is well pleased with us for Christ's sake. "In whom my soul delighteth." "I have put my Spirit upon him." That was publicly done when he was baptized in the Jordan. The Spirit without measure rests and abides on him, our covenant head. "He shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles." Rejoice then, ye Gentiles. You are no longer excluded. At first the word came to the Jews only, but he has given the man, Christ Jesus, who has brought forth judgment to the Gentiles.

2-3. *He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth.*

Jesus was gentle, retiring, meek, quiet. His testimony was a very powerful one, but not a noisy one. He sought no honour among men. He frequently forbade the healed ones to tell of his miracles. He rather retired than came into public notice. He was not contentious. He did not seek to put out the Pharisees, who were like smoking flax. He was never hard towards the tender ones, but always gentle as a nurse among her children. Now it is very often found that, where there is quietness and meekness, there is, nevertheless, great firmness of purpose. Noise and weakness go together, but quietness and strength are frequently combined. So read the next verse.

4. *He shall not fail He shall not faint.*

So it may be.

4. *Nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law.*

This quiet, gentle Christ goes on pushing on his empire and extending his dominion till these far-off islands of the sea already know his power and the day comes when the whole round earth shall be obedient to his sway. O blessed Christ, how glad we are to think that, when we are discouraged, thou art not, and, when we fail and faint, thou dost not. Thou holdest on for ever, like the sun who cometh forth from his chamber in the morning, and stayeth not till he has run his race.

5, 6. *Thus saith God the LORD, he that created the heavens, and stretched them out; he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein: I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles;*

Thus the great God commissions Christ. Thus he declares that the eternal power and Godhead will back him up till the Gentiles shall perceive his light, and the people shall be brought into covenant with God.

ISAIAH 42:1-17

This book might well be called “the gospel according to Isaiah,” for it is full of evangelical truth.

1. *Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.*

Of whom speaketh the prophet this, but of the Messiah — Jesus of Nazareth? He was upheld by the mighty power of God. He was the Lord’s chosen. The Spirit of God rested upon him, and this day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears, for he hath brought forth righteousness to the Gentiles.

2. *He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street.*

He shall be no clamorous seeker after applause. He shall not shout as those that seek for the mastery. Now the Saviour was quiet, gentle, meek. humble. When he lifted up his voice, it was for God

and for the sons of men — not for himself. He was meek and lowly of heart.

3. *A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth.*

How exactly these words describe the Lord Jesus! He was so gentle that he did not break or break off the bruised reeds. We read that he did not answer the Scribes and Pharisees. They were so powerless — such bruised reeds in his esteem — such worthless, smoking flaxes — that he let them alone until bye-and-bye he came to bring forth judgment unto victory. And now the weak, the feeble, the gentle the poor in spirit, shall never find Christ deal hardly with them. “The bruised reed he will not break: the smoking flax he will not quench.”

4. *He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth; and the isles shall wait for his law.*

Oh! what a blessed thing it is that we have a Saviour to trust, who will not fail, and he is one who will never be discouraged. He will carry out the salvation of his people, and never give it up as a hopeless case. Poor sinner, if he begins with you, he will not fail nor be discouraged; nor will he even with the whole earth. He will not take back his hand till surely all flesh shall see the glory of the Lord. He who has undertaken man’s redemption is not feeble of spirit and easily baffled. He shall not fail or be discouraged.

5, 6. *Thus saith God the LORD, he that created the heavens, and stretched them out; he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein: I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles;*

See what God has made his Son, Jesus Christ. If you want to get to Christ in the covenant of grace, you have only to lay hold on Christ, for fist is given as a covenant to the people. He is the embodiment of the covenant — the sum and substance of it — the seal of it — the surety of it. He is, indeed, the covenant itself. And if you want light, you have only to get Christ. He is the light of the world, and here we are told that God has given him for a light to the Gentiles.

7. To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house.

Hear this, you melancholy ones, you that are desponding, you that cannot get out of the prison of bad habits, or shake off the chains of sin. Behold a liberator has come — one whose very business it is to open the fast closed cells of sin, and set the captives of Satan free.

8, 9. *I am the LORD: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images. Behold, the former things are come to pass, and new things do I declare: before their spring forth I tell you of them.*

One great proof of the truth of the deity of Jehovah is that he can foresee and foretell, so that long ere events happen he makes them known. Now Isaiah, by God's Spirit, told the Israelites concerning Christ hundreds of years before Christ came; and yet the terms are so express that one might almost think that they were written after the event. But doth not God know; and is not he God who sees through the mists of ages, and looks upon the things that are to be as though they were? Verily he is God.

10, 11. *Sing unto the LORD a new song, and his praise from the end of the earth, ye that go down to the sea, and all that is therein; the isles, and the inhabitants thereof. Let the wilderness and the cities thereof lift up their voice, the villages that Kedar doth inhabit: let the inhabitants of the rock sing, let them shout from the top of the mountains.*

For the coming of Christ is the coming of music into the world. When he did hang upon the cross, there were lighted up new stars to cheer earth's night. Nay, what if I say that the sun itself had risen then to chase away the darkness once for all? O Lamb of God. Creation made the angels sing; but redemption makes us fallen men to sing, for it lifts us up to sit among the angels, through thy meet precious blood.

12. *Let them give glory unto the LORD, and declare his praise in the islands.*

Now for his enemies. While God is thus graciously dealing with men, he determines to make an end of the powers of evil.

13. *The LORD shall go forth as a mighty man, he shall stir up jealousy like a man of war: he shall cry, yea, roar; he shall prevail against his enemies.*

Do not imagine that the gods of the heathen will always sit on their thrones that the powers of anti-Christ will always darken the earth. Ah! no. God will bestir himself ere long.

14. *I have a long time holden my peace; I have been still, and refrained myself: now will I cry like a travailing woman; I will destroy and devour at once.*

Oh! what a time will that be when God comes forth in the splendor of his power to put down all the hosts of evil.

15. *I will make waste mountains and hills, and dry up all their herbs; and I will make the rivers islands, and I will dry up the pools.*

What a terrible God he is! When he once puts forth his hand for deeds of justice and of vengeance, who can stand before him, but yet how his mercy walks arm-in-arm with his justice?

16. *And I will bring the blind by way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them.*

Oh! the condescension of God that even when his right arm is bared for war, and thunder girds his cloudy ear, yet still he stoops out of the chariot of wrath to look after poor, blind, helpless souls, and lead them in the way of peace and mercy. But as for his enemies: —

17. *They shall be turned back, they shall be greatly ashamed, that trust in graven images, that say to the molten images, Ye are our gods.*

This exposition consisted of readings from ISAIAH 42:1-17; 43:18-25; ROMANS 10:1-19.

ISAIAH 43:1-7

1. *But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.*

Observe the tender ties that bind our God to his people;—creation, the formation of them for his praise; redemption, the purchase of them for himself; and the calling of them by their name. The Lord

remembers the bonds which unite us to himself even when we forget them; he recollects his eternal love, and all the deeds of mercy that have flowed from it.

Though our memory is treacherous, and our faith is feeble, “yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself;” blessed be his holy name!

2. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee;

His presence is all that we need even in the deepest floods of tribulation; this he has promised to us. He does not say what he will do for us, but he does tell us that he will be with us, and that is more than enough to meet all our necessities.

2. And through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.

That is a wonderful picture of a man walking through the fire, and yet not being burned; but there was a greater wonder, that was seen by Moses, which may well comfort us. He saw a bush that burned with fire, and yet was not consumed. Now a bush, in the desert, is usually so dry that, at the first application of fire, it flames, and glows, and is speedily gone; yet you and I, who are, spiritually, just as dry and combustible as that bush was naturally, may burn, and burn, and burn, yet we shall not be consumed, because the God, who was in the bush, is also with us, and in us.

3. For I am the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee.

And he has given infinitely more than that for us who are his people now, for he gave his only-begotten Son that he might redeem us with his precious blood. Now that we have cost him so much, is it likely that he will ever forsake us? It is not possible.

4. Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life.

How sweetly this verse comes home to those whose characters have been disreputable! As soon as they are truly converted to Christ, they become “honourable.” “Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable.” God does not call his people by their old names of dishonour, but he gives them the title of “Right Honourable,” and makes them the nobility of his Court. “Unto you

that believe, he is an honour; “ and you have honour in him and from him.

5-7. Fear not: for I am with thee: I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth; Even every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him.

The Lord seems to dwell upon that note of the creation of his children for his own glory. This accounts for many of our troubles, and for all our deliverance's; it is that God may be glorified by bringing his children through the fires and through the floods. A life that was never tested by trial and trouble would not be a life out of which God would get much glory but they that do business in the great waters see the works of God, and his wonders in the deep, and they give him praise; and, besides, when they come to their desired haven, then they praise the Lord for his goodness, and God is thereby glorified.

This exposition consisted of readings from ISAIAH 43:1-7, 18-28; AND 44:1, 2.

ISAIAH 43:1-7

1. But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.

“Fear not,” is a command of God; and is a command which brings its own power of performance with it. God, who created and formed us, says to us, “fear not,” and a secret whisper is heard in the heart by which that heart is so comforted that fear is driven away. “fear not: for I have redeemed thee.” that is a good reason why we should never fear again; redemption is a well of consolation, and the redeemed of the Lord have nothing whatever to fear.

2. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee;

The godly have the best company in the worst places in which their lot is cast.

2. And through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee:

The godly have special help in their times of deepest trouble.

2. When thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned;

The godly are the subjects of miracles of mercy in seasons of greatest distress.

2. *neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.*

Thou shalt come out of the furnace as the three holy children did, with not so much as the smell of fire upon thee; for, where God is, all is safe: “thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.”

3. *for I am the LORD thy God, —*

This is the grandest possible reason for not fearing. fall back upon this when you have nothing else upon which to rely. If you have no goods, you have a God. If thy gourd is withered, thy God is still the same as he ever was: “for I am Jehovah, thy God,” —

3, 4. *the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour : I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life.*

All that, God has given; if it were not enough, he would still add to it. He has redeemed us, so there is no need of more; but if there were, God would go through with it even to the end.

5. *fear not: for I am with thee:*

This is the second time that the blessed words, “fear not,” ring out like the notes of the silver trumpet proclaiming the jubilee to poor trembling hearts: “fear not, for I am with thee.” the Lord seems to say to each troubled believer, “My honour is pledged to secure thy safety, all my attributes are engaged on thy behalf right to the end; yea, I am myself with thee; wherefore, fear not.”

5-7. *I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth; even every one that is called by my name:*

Whatever happens, God will be with his Church. His own chosen people shall all be gathered in. there shall be no frustration of the divine purpose. from East or West, north or South, all his sons and daughters shall come unto him, even every one that is called by his name.

7. *for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him.*

And God will be glorified in his people; the object of their creation is the glory of their God, and that end shall, somehow or other, be answered in the Lord's good time. Now I want you to notice the other side of the question. God says, in the twenty-first verse, —

This exposition consisted of readings from ISAIAH 43. 1-7; 21-28; And 44. 1-5.

ISAIAH 43:1-7

In this chapter the Lord comforts his people. By his divine foresight he perceives that there are great and varied trials a little way ahead, and therefore he prepares them for the ordeal. They are to go through rushing waters and flaming fires; and he kindly bids them not to be afraid. How often in God's word do we read those tender, gracious words, "Fear not!" Should not the trembling ones listen to the voice of their God, and obey it when he saith to them "Fear not"? It is not right for you who fear God to fear anything else. Once brought to know the Lord, who can harm you? Abiding under the shadow of the Almighty, what danger need you dread? Nay, rather, be of good comfort, and press forward with peaceful confidence, though floods and flames await you. To encourage his people to rise superior to their fears, the gracious God goes on to issue matchless promises: "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee." Present good- "I will be with thee" absent danger- "they shall not overflow thee." God stays his people's hearts by his own promises. In proportion to their faith those promises must lift them up. If you do not believe the promise, you shall not be established by it; but if, with childlike confidence, you accept every word of God as true, then his word shall be to you the joy of your heart, and the delight of your spirit, and you shall be a stranger to fear. The Lord proceeds, after giving those promises, to set before them what he himself is, and what he has done for them, and what they are to him. He is speaking, of course, to Israel; and he says of Israel, his chosen nation, "I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee." What cause for fear now remains? All believers are of the true Israel. Abraham was the father of the faithful. The faithful, or the believing, are therefore Abraham's seed, according to the promise. The seed was not after the flesh, else would the children of Ishmael have been the heirs of the covenant; but the true seed was born

according to promise, and in the power of God; for Isaac was born when his parents were old, by faith in the power of God. Isaac was not the child of flesh, but he was born according to promise, so that we who are not born of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God, by his Spirit, and according to the divine promise, are the true children of Abraham. We are the spiritual Israel. Though after the flesh Abraham be ignorant of us, and Sarah acknowledge us not, yet are we the true seed of him who was the father of believers. The literal Israel was the type of those chosen and favored ones who by faith are born again according to promise. To these heirs according to promise the Lord saith, "I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee." Let us now meditate on this passage verse by verse.

1. *But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.*

"Fear not," is a command of God, and is a command which brings its own power of performance with it. God, who created and formed us, says to us, "Fear not," and a secret whisper is heard in the heart by which that heart is so comforted that fear is driven away. Observe the tender ties that bind our God to his people;- creation, the formation of them for his praise, redemption, the purchase of them for himself, and the calling of them by their name. The Lord remembers the bonds which unite us to himself even when we forget them; he recollects his eternal love, and all the deeds of mercy that have flowed from it. Though our memory is treacherous, and our faith is feeble, "yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself;" blessed be his holy name!

2. *When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.*

"When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee." The godly have the best company in the worst places in which their lot is cast God's presence is all that we need even in the deepest floods of tribulation; this he has promised to us. He does not say what he will do for us, but he does tell us that he will be with us, and that is more than enough to meet all our necessities. "When thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon

thee.” That is a wonderful picture of a man walking through the fire, and yet not being burned; but there was a greater wonder, that was seen by Moses, which may well comfort us. He saw a bush that burned with fire, and yet was not consumed. Now a bush, in the desert, is usually so dry that, at the first application of fire, it flames, and glows, and is speedily gone: yet you and I, who are, spiritually, just as dry and combustible as that bush was naturally, may burn, and burn, and burn, and yet we shall not be consumed, because the God, who was in the bush, is also with us, and in us. “Neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.” Thou shalt come out of the furnace as the three holy children did, with not so much as the smell of fire upon thee; for, where God is, all is safe.

3. *For I am the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee.*

“For I am the Lord thy God.” This is the grandest possible reason for not fearing. Fall back upon this when you have nothing else upon which to rely. If you have no goods, you have a God. If thy gourd is withered, thy God is still the same as he ever was: “For I am Jehovah, thy God.” “I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee.” And he has given infinitely more than that for us who are his people now, for he gave his only begotten Son that he might redeem us with his precious blood. Now that we have cost him so much, is it likely that he will ever forsake us? It is not possible.

4. *Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life.*

How sweetly this verse comes home to those whose characters have been disreputable! As soon as they are truly converted to Christ, they become “honourable.” “Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable.” God does not call his people by their old names of dishonour, but he gives them the title of “Right Honourable,” and makes them the nobility of his Court. “Unto you that believe he is an honour;” and you have honour in him and from him.

5-7. *Fear not: for I am with thee: I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my*

daughters from the ends of the earth; Even every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him.

“Fear not: for I am with thee.” This is the second time that the blessed words, “Fear not,” ring out like the notes of the silver trumpet proclaiming the jubilee to poor trembling hearts: “Fear not, for I am with thee.” The Lord seems to say to each troubled believer, “My honour is pledged to secure thy safety, all my attributes are engaged on thy behalf right to the end, yea, I am myself with thee, therefore, fear not.” “I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, my daughter from the ends of the earth; every one that is called by my name.” Whatever happens, God will be with his Church. His own chosen people shall all be gathered in. There shall be no frustration of the diving purpose. From east or west, north or south, all his sons and daughters shall come unto him, even every one that is called by his name. “For I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him.” And God will be glorified in his people; the object of their creation is the glory of their God, and that end shall, somehow or other, be answered in the Lord’s good time. The Lord seems to dwell upon that note of the creation of his children for his own glory. This accounts for many of our troubles, and for all our deliverances; it is that God may be glorified by bringing his children through the fires and through the floods. A life that was never tested by trial and trouble would not be a life out of which God would get much glory, but they that do business in the great waters see the works of God, and his wonders in the deep, and they give him praise; and, besides, when they come to their desired haven, then they praise the Lord for his goodness, and God is thereby glorified.

ISAIAH 43:1-19

1. *But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel,*

The Lord reminds us that he first created us, and that he afterwards molded us; we are like Jacob by nature, but he has made us Israel by grace.

1. *Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.*

Redemption is a deep well of comfort. If the Lord has indeed bought us with his blood, he will not think lightly of us; and if he has called us by name, and declared that we belong to him, we may rest assured that he will not lose his own property, but that he will preserve it to the end.

2. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.

The Lord does not promise us immunity from trial and trouble; we shall have to go through waters and rivers, and shall have to pass through fires and flames; it is through much tribulation that we must enter the kingdom of God; but he does promise that no harm shall come to us from it all. "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God;" — that waters, rivers, fires, and flames bring us benefits and blessings, and that they shall none of them bring a course upon us.

3, 4. For I am the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable,

God puts honour upon his beloved ones; they were in themselves dishonourable, for they had nothing of goodness about them until the Lord imparted it to them.

4. And I have loved thee:

God loved his ancient people Israel; he has always loved his Church; and he loves believers still.

4, 5. Therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life. Fear not: for I am with thee:-

It is enough for a child that his mother is near him, or that his father is with him; then is it not enough for you, O child of God, that God is with you? Israel was scattered when Isaiah wrote this prophecy, and would be afterwards scattered far and wide over the face of the earth; so God gave this comforting assurance, "fear not: for I am with thee." —

5, 6. I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth;

God's chosen ones have wandered very far away from him, but the great Shepherd of the sheep, who bought them with his blood, will gather them, and there shall be one flock and one Shepherd.

7. Even every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him.

Three expressions are here used concerning the man who is called by God's name. First, "I have created him," — made him out of nothing. Then, "I have formed him" — fashioned him, made him into his proper shape. The last sentence may be read, "Yea, I have completed him." When God begins his work in us, we are in the rough; as he goes on working in us, we gradually take the form of his dear Son; and by-and-by he will complete us, and then we shall wake up in his likeness. Blessed be his name for this!

8. Bring forth the blind people that have eyes, and the deaf that have ears.

Some think that the Lord refers here to those who were once blind, but to whom he has given eyes; and to those who were deaf, to whom he has given ears. Many of us are of that order. One thing I know is that, whereas I was once spiritually blind, now I can see; and another thing I know is that, whereas I was once spiritually deaf, now I can hear the voice of God.

9. Let all the nations be gathered together, and let the people be assembled:-

As though there was to be a great debate as to who God is, and what God is, he first summons all his people whose blind eyes and deaf ears he has opened, and then he calls for all the nations to be gathered together, and gives them this challenge: —

9. Who among them can declare this, and shew us former things? let them bring forth their witnesses, that they may be justified: or let them hear, and say, It is truth.

Where else have we any true knowledge of God except in his Word and among his people? The myths and mysteries of the heathen, how dark how indistinct and shadowy they are! What true prophecy did their oracles ever give? Ask Greece and Rome, the most polished of the ancient nations, what did their so-called gods ever foretell? Let them bring any holy book of theirs which reveals the future, and which is true.

10. Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD,-

The chosen people of God have become witnesses for Jehovah that he, and he alone, is the true God; that he, and he alone has truly foretold the future. Let the heathen prove that their gods have done the same if they can; we know that they cannot. “Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, —

10. *And my servant whom I have chosen:*

That great Servant of God, you know his name, even Christ Jesus the faithful and true Witness, bears better witness for God than the whole nation of the Jews, or the Lord’s chosen people in all ages, can bear.

10, 11. *That ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I, even I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no saviour.*

Look the whole world over, and see where there is any Saviour for sinners except Jesus Christ. Does any other religion even profess to have a Saviour? Destroyers they have, but where is their Saviour?

12. *I have declared, and have saved,*

“I said that I would save, and I have saved.”

12. *And I have shewed, when there was no strange god among you: therefore ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, that I am God.*

When, in Hezekiah’s day, the idols had been destroyed, God told Hezekiah that he would deliver him from Sennacherib, and he did so.

13. *Yea, before the day was I am he;*

When there was no day, there was the Ancient of days.

13. *And there is none that can deliver out of my hand: I will work, and who shall let it?*

(who shall hinder it?)

“When he makes bare his arm,
What shall his work withstand?

When he his people’s cause defends,
Who, who shall stay his hand?”

14. *Thus saith the LORD, your redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; For your sake I have sent to Babylon, and have brought down all their nobles, and the Chaldeans, whose cry is in the ships.*

Up the broad river Euphrates, and down to the Persian Gulf, Babylon and Chaldea gloried in their greatness, but God sent the

Medo-Persian power to break them in pieces for the sake of his people, that Cyrus might let them go free.

15-17. *I am the LORD, your Holy One, the creator of Israel, your King. Thus saith the LORD, which maketh a way in the sea, and a path in the mighty waters; which bringeth forth the chariot and horse, the army and the power; they shall lie down together, they shall not rise: they are extinct, they are quenched as tow.*

Like the wick of a lamp, soon put out. Here is, probably, an illusion to the overthrowing of Egypt at the Red Sea; they came out with their horses and chariots, but they were made to lie down together in the sea. God overcame his people's enemies then, and he can and will do the same to the end of the chapter.

18. *Remember ye not the former things, neither consider the things of old.*

Do not look merely upon what God has done; but look to the future, and remember that he is able to do the same again.

19. *Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert.*

O dear child of God, have you got into the wilderness, and have you no comfort there? Are all your wells dried up? God will work a new miracle for you, you shall have a new manifestation of his gracious power.

ISAIAH 43:1-25

1. *But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.*

I cannot pause to comment upon each of the precious sentences here, but every word is full of marrow and fatness. Ask the Lord to enable you to feed upon each sentence as it passes before your mind.

2-5. *When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. Since thou was precious in my sight, thou hast been*

honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life. Fear not: for I am with thee:

That always seems to me to be the master-consolation: "I am with thee." What more does the most troubled heart need than God's presence?

5. *I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west;*

O Church of God, thine elect members shall all, in due time, be fetched in, however far they may have wandered!

6, 7. *I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth; Even every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him.*

And that in a double sense, for God's people are twice made; — made first in creation, but marred by the fall; and then new-made as "new creatures in Christ Jesus."

8. *Bring forth the blind people that have eyes, and the deaf that have ears.*

There are plenty of them, for our proverb is true, "There are none so blind as those that will not see, and none so deaf as those that will not hear." But even to such people as these God makes his appeal.

9. *Let all the nations be gathered together, and let the people be assembled: who among them can declare this, and shew us former things? let them bring forth their witnesses, that they may be justified: or let them hear, and say, It is truth.*

God challenges all the false gods and their worshippers to produce a single fulfilled prophecy, — to show one instance in which they have truly and correctly foretold any event or a chain of event; but all Jehovah's prophecies have been fulfilled, or will be, in due season.

10 -13. *Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I, even I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no saviour. I have declared, and have saved, and I have shewed, when there was no strange god among you: therefore ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, that I am God. Yea, before the day was I am he;*

and there is none that can deliver out of my hand: I will work, and who shall let it?

It is a great blessing to know that the Lord is God; and not merely to know that as a matter of fact, but to feel it, to realize it, and to trust in God and act towards him conscious that he, and he alone, is the living and true God.

14-17. *Thus saith the LORD, your redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; For your sake I have sent to Babylon, and have brought down all their nobles, and the Chaldeans, whose cry is in the ships. I am the LORD, your Holy One, the creator of Israel, your King. Thus saith the LORD, which maketh a way in the sea, and a path in the mighty waters; Which bringeth forth the chariot and horse, the army and the power; they shall lie down together, they shall not rise: they are extinct, they are quenched as tow.*

You know what happened to the army of Sennacherib when it came against Jerusalem. Horses and chariots were there in vast numbers, and all the pomp and pageantry of a vast host of armed men; but they slept their last sleep, from which they never rose again, when the angel of the Lord flew through their ranks. So was it with Babylon itself. When the set time came, that long-established empire, with its colossal power, was swept away like a vision of the night. It blazed like tow, and then was quenched for ever. What cannot God do for his people when he uplifts his almighty arm?

18. *Remember ye not the former thing, neither consider the things of old..*

For something better is going to be done in the future than all that God has done in the past. He will eclipse all his previous achievements, and outdo the mightiest of his own miracles.

19, 20. *Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it. I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert. The beast of the field shall honour me,*

As it slakes its thirst at an unwonted spring, —

20. *The dragons and the owls:*

Alarmed and startled, as God's people pass by on their way to the land which God would give them, —

20-22. *Because I give waters in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert, to give drink to my people, my chosen. This people have I*

formed for myself; they shall shew forth my praise. But thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob; —

Have any of you restrained prayer of late? Has your path to the mercy-seat been but little trodden? Then, listen to God's gentle rebuke: "Thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob;" —

22. *But thou hast been weary of me, O Israel.*

Weary of God! Have any of us grown weary of fellowship with him, weary of his truth, weary of his day, weary of his service? Oh, what strange ingratitude this is on our part!

23. *Thou hast not brought me the small cattle of thy burnt offerings; neither hast thou honoured me with thy sacrifices.*

There are some of God's people, at any rate, who forget to offer their sacrifices unto God. If they do love Christ at all, their love is not practical, not self-sacrificing; it does not lead them to bring love-gifts unto him.

23. *I have not caused thee to serve with an offering, nor wearied thee with incense.*

"I have made no irksome tax of it. I have not demanded anything of you. I have left it to your own free will to give according as your love suggests."

24. *Thou hast bought me no sweet cane with money, neither hast thou filled me with the fat of thy sacrifices: but —*

Alas! instead of good, there has been evil.

24. *Thou hast made me to serve with thy sins,*

What! made God our servant, when we ought to have served him? Alas! I fear it is often so even with some of his own people.

24. *Thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities.*

O sirs, how sad it is when God's people are weary of him and he is weary of them! What shall we read after this? Surely the next sentence will be a thunder-clap, and a lightning flash will blaze out of the sacred page! Listen, and be amazed at the mercy of the Lord.

25. *I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.*

What a blessed God to deal so graciously with his ungrateful erring people!

ISAIAH 43:14-28

14-16. *Thus saith the LORD, your redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; For your sake I have sent to Babylon, and have brought down all their nobles, and the Chaldeans, whose cry is in the ships. I am the LORD, your Holy One, the creator of Israel, your King. Thus saith the LORD, which maketh a way in the sea, and a path in the mighty water;*

Great events in history all have some connection with the Church of Christ. We may not always be able to see it, but we may rest assured that it is so. The rise and fall of empires have a great deal to do with the chosen people of God. So here he reminds them of what he did in the ancient days when he smote Egypt at the Red sea, and made a path for his people through the mighty waters.

17. *Which bringeth forth the chariot and horse, the army and the power; they shall lie down together, they shall not rise: they are extinct, they are quenched as tow.*

There is a little blaze and a little smoke, and then all is over with the tow. So shall it be with those who set themselves up against the Lord; he shall confound their wisdom, and humble their pride.

18, 19. *Remember ye not the former things, neither consider the thing of old. Behold I will do a new thing;*

What God has done once, he can do again; but he can also make yet grander and more marvellous displays of his power and grace than he has ever yet given.

19, 20. *Now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert. The beast of the field shall honour me, the dragons and the owls: because I give waters, in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert, to give drink to my people, my chosen.*

If then, O child of God, thou art in sore distress; if all around thee is comfortless as a waste, howling wilderness; yet do not despair; God can make a way for thee even there, and can supply thy needs. He can open up a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the midst of the desert; joy and rejoicing may come to thee even in the depths of thy distress.

21. *This people have I formed for myself; they shall shew forth my praise.*

He will not be disappointed in his people. He made them that he might get glory out of them, and he will surely have it; none shall be able to prevent it.

22-24. *But thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob; but thou hast been weary of me, O Israel. Thou hast not brought me the small cattle of thy burnt offerings; neither hast thou honoured me with thy sacrifices. I have not caused thee to serve with an offering, nor wearied thee with incense. Thou hast brought me no sweet cane with money, neither hast thou filled me with the fat of thy sacrifices: but thou hast made me to serve with thy sins, thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities.*

Remember that this is the wearied Lord who is speaking, the Lord whose patience seems to be well-nigh exhausted by the provocations of his people; yet how wonderful is his message to them!

25, 26. *I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for my own sake, and will not remember thy sins. Put me in remembrance. Let us plead together: declare thou, that thou mayest be justified.*

“If thou hast anything to say in thine own defense, out with it. Come to me, and let the cause of this quarrel be removed; let me hear thy plea if thou hast one.”

27, 28. *Thy first father hath sinned, and thy teachers have transgressed against me. Therefore I have profaned the princes of the sanctuary, and have given Jacob to the curse, and Israel to reproaches.*

God justifies himself for his heavy strokes upon Israel, tells them that the reason lay in their own sin.

This exposition consisted of readings from ISAIAH 43:14-28; AND 44:1-8.

ISAIAH 43:18-25

18, 19. *Remember ye not the former things, neither consider the things of old. Behold, I will do a new thing: now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert.*

Do not imagine that what God has done in the past will never be repeated. It will be excelled: he will do yet greater things. Of all the mercy and love which God has shown, we may say that these are only prophecies of what he yet will reveal. There are now things yet

to come wherein the splendor of his mercy shall be yet more clearly seen than in all the former things.

20, 21. *The beast of the field shall honour me, the dragons and the owls: because I give waters in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert, to give drink to my people, my chosen. This people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise.*

However barren may your soul be, and however all your surroundings may seem to be stamped with death, God can come and make you happy and blessed, and surround you with delights, and he will do it in order that in you, whom he has formed for himself, his praise may be seen.

22. *But thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob.*

Prayer has been neglected: praise has been suspended. There has been an ungracious negligence in the service of God. “Thou has not called upon me, O Jacob.”

22. *But thou hast been weary of me, O Israel.*

“You thought the service long — thought the time for prayer came round too soon — refused to give to my cause, and said it was a tax. Thou hast been weary of me, O Israel.”

23. *Thou hast not brought me the small cattle of thy burnt offerings; neither hast thou honoured me with thy sacrifices. I have not caused thee to serve with an offering, nor wearied thee with incense.*

“I have not taxed thee. I have not drawn upon thy resources heavily.”

24. *Thou has bought me no sweet cane with money, neither hast thou filled me with the fat of thy sacrifices:*

“I left thee to give or not to give, that thy free will might be seen in all thy deeds of love, but nothing has come of it. On the contrary.”

24. *But thou hast made me to serve with thy sins, thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities.*

A solemn charge this, which God lays against his people. Now see the next verse and read it with wondering eyes.

25. *I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.*

He has pointed out the fault: he has shown that he is not forgetful of it; and then he pronounces absolution. The transgression is put away. Blessed be his name! Now let us turn to the New

Testament, and read in the Epistle to the Romans, the 10th chapter, and we shall there see the way in which pardon is brought home to the soul.

This exposition consisted of readings from ISAIAH 42:1-17; 43:18-25; ROMANS 10:1-19.

ISAIAH 43:18-28

18, 19. *Remember ye not the former things, neither consider the things of old. Behold, I will do a new thing;*

It is a very profitable thing to remember the things of old; it is greatly beneficial to us to study what God did in years and ages long gone by; yet God intends to do for us something in the future that shall eclipse all the past. Especially was this true in Isaiah's day, for the coming of Christ, which was then in the future, was to be such a sun-rising of mercy that all the stars of blessing, that had shone before, would seem to be lost in the brightness of his appearing. Dear friends, do not always dwell on the past. You who are getting gray are very apt to say that the former things and former times were better than now. Do not say so, but believe this promise of Jehovah, "Behold, I will do a new thing."

19, 20. *Now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert. The beast of the field shall honour me, the dragons and the owls.*

I have sometimes laid hold of this text, and have been comforted by it concerning the conversion of the very worst of men. Some people say, "What is the good of going among blasphemers and profane persons with the Word of God?" Well, if the beast of the field, and the dragons, and the owls, shall honour him, we need never think of leaving any of the sons of men to perish. It is not what they are, but what God is, that should give us confidence concerning them. Even if they were worse than they are, the omnipotent grace of God would still be able to reach them, and to convert them; let us have no doubt about this matter.

20. *Because I give waters in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert, to give drink to my people, my chosen.*

Oh, the wonders of the love of God! Wherever he has a chosen people, there every mercy shall certainly come. If they are in the wilderness, waters shall come to them; if they are in the desert, rivers shall flow to them; but drink they shall have till they come

where they can drink to the full at the living fountains of water at God's right hand.

21. *This people have I formed for myself; they shall shew forth my praise.*

Here is this same note again. Yet mark what kind of people they had been,-a people whom God had greatly loved, but who had backslidden from him. They had wandered very far away from God, yet still his purpose of love did not change: "This people have I formed for myself; they shall shew forth my praise." What a blessed "shall" that is, uttered by One who knows how to make it good by deeds of mighty grace!

22. *But thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob; but thou hast been weary of me, O Israel.*

They were not much like Jacob, for he prayed at Jabbok, and became Israel, who wrestled till he prevailed, saying to the angel, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me." Yet here are people who hear the same name,-"Jacob" and "Israel", yet God has to say to them, "Thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob. Thou hast been weary of me, O Israel."

23. *Thou hast not brought me the small cattle of thy burnt offerings; neither hast thou honoured me with thy sacrifices.*

Is that true of any of you? Have you restrained prayer, and have you also stinted God in your offering? Whereas he gave his Son for you, have you refused the small cattle of your burnt offerings?

23. *I have not caused thee to serve with an offering, nor wearied thee with incense.*

"I have laid no tax upon you; I have not demanded so much of your income as the condition of your being members of my Church. I have left it to your love and gratitude to bring your freewill offerings unto me."

24. *Thou hast bought me no sweet cane with money,*

No calamus or incense that should sweeten the temple of God,-

24. *Neither hast thou filled me with the fat of thy sacrifices: but*

Oh, this "but-but"!

24. *Thou hast made me to serve with thy sins,*

You have made a servant of your Master,-treated your Redeemer as if he were your slave!

24. *Thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities.*

Oh, what a terrible verse this is about a people whom God had formed for himself, and who shall yet show forth his praise! Alas! this is how they sometimes are still, -indifferent, ungrateful, presenting him no tokens of love; but, on the contrary, disobedient, grieving him, and vexing his Holy Spirit. What will he do with them now? “Cut them off, and reject them,” says one. Yes, that is how men would do; but that is not what God will do.

Listen

25. *I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.*

You have forgotten his mercies; but he will forget your sins. You have grieved him, but he still has a tender heart towards you. He will blot out your sins. Oh, how this ought to melt us! How this ought to encourage us to begin again in better style, and to be much in prayer, and much in holy service, and much in self sacrifice!

26-28. *Put me in remembrance: let us plead together: declare thou, that thou mayest be justified. Thy first father hath sinned, and thy teachers have transgressed against me. Therefore I have profaned the princes of the sanctuary, and have given Jacob to the curse, and Israel to reproaches.*

This exposition consisted of readings from ISAIAH 43:1-7, 18-28; AND 44:1, 2.

ISAIAH 43:21-28

21. *This people —*

That is, God’s own people: “This people” —

21, 22. *Have I formed for myself; they shall shew forth my praise. But thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob; but thou hast been weary of me, O Israel.*

The very people whom he had formed for his praise forgot to pray to him, ceased to remember him, grew weary of him. Oh, how sad is this and how great is the longsuffering of God, that he bore with them so long.

23. *Thou hast not brought me the small cattle of thy burnt offerings; neither hast thou honoured me with thy sacrifices. I have not caused thee to serve with an offering, nor wearied thee with incense.*

God has laid no tax on his people. He does not ask any hard thing of us; and yet, notwithstanding that, we have been slack in his

service. His yoke is easy, and his burden is light, yet our shoulders have been unwilling to bear them.

24, 25. *Thou hast bought me no sweet cane with money, neither hast thou filled me with the fat of thy sacrifices: but thou hast made me to serve with thy sins, thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities. I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.*

That is a very astonishing verse, wherever we might find it; but to find it in such a connection is a wonder indeed. These people had wearied God, yet even then, he said, "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions." Note on what a sure and blessed ground he puts it: "for mine own sake." The Lord could not do anything for such sinners as we are for our sakes, for there is nothing deserving about us but in order that his mercy may be the more clearly seen, and his faithfulness and immutability may be displayed, he says, "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins."

26-28. *Put me in remembrance: Let us plead together: declare thou, that thou mayest be justified. Thy first father hath sinned, and thy teachers have transgressed against me. Therefore I have profaned the princes of the sanctuary, and have given Jacob to the curse, and Israel to reproaches.*

This exposition consisted of readings from ISAIAH 43:21-28; AND 44:1-23.

ISAIAH 43:21-28

21. *This people have I formed for myself; they shall shew forth my praise.*

But A sorrowful "but"; and the strain sinks from a triumphant shout to a doleful lamentation: "But " —

22. *But thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob; but thou hast been weary of me, O Israel.*

How sad it is that those who have been loved so much, should make such a shameful return for it all!

23. *Thou hast not brought me the small cattle of thy burnt offerings;-*

No kids of the goats, or lambs from the fold, —

23. *Neither hast thou honoured me with thy sacrifices. I have not caused thee to serve with an offering, nor wearied thee with incense.*

“I have not been a cruel taskmaster, or tyrant, demanding of thee more than thou couldst give.”

24. *Thou hast brought me no sweet cane with money, —*

“No calamus has sent forth its perfume from mine altar,” —

24. *Neither hast thou filled me with the fat of thy sacrifices: but thou hast made me to serve with thy sins, thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities.*

These are the people whom God had loved so long and so well, those upon whom he had set his unchanging affection; yet they acted thus shamefully. What will follow upon such conduct as this? their swift destruction? No. Listen to the Lord’s gracious message,

25. *I, even if, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.*

Here is a great wave of mercy washing away everything that could bear witness against the people of God.

26-28. *Put me in remembrance: let us plead together: declare thou, that thou mayest be justified. Thy first father hath sinned, and thy teachers have transgressed against me. Therefore I have profaned the princes of the sanctuary, and have given Jacob to the curse, and Israel to reproaches.*

This exposition consisted of readings from ISAIAH 43. 1-7; 21-28; And 44. 1-5.

ISAIAH 44

This evening, we will read two chapters from Isaiah’s prophecy, the forty-fourth and the fifty-fifth, and a few verses from the twenty-third chapter of the second Book of Samuel. May the Lord bless all these passages to us as we meditate upon them!

1. *Yet now hear, O Jacob my servant; and Israel, whom I have chosen:*

See, the chapter begins with a “yet.” There is a great deal in God’s “yets.” Notwithstanding all the sin and provocation mentioned in the previous chapter, the Lord still reveals his mercy and goodness to his ancient people.

2, 3. *Thus saith the LORD that made thee, and formed thee from the womb, which will help thee; Fear not, O Jacob, my servant; and thou, Jesurun, whom I have chosen. For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground:*

Be not cast down, ye thirsty souls, think not that you must perish of drought, you who are like the parched earth; God is ready to bless, and to bless largely, too: "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground."

3, 4. *I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring: And they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses.*

God's grace to our children is also grace to us, for there is nothing that we desire more than to see them saved. It will be well for all of us who are parents to grasp this promise, and to plead it before God, — "Lord, send such floods of thy grace that our children may grow like the willow trees that flourish wherever the brooks and rivers wander!"

5. *One shall say, I am the LORD'S; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the LORD, and surname himself by the name of Israel.*

They shall come in different ways, but they shall come unto the Lord. Some can perhaps only write out their resolve to be the Lord's, while others can boldly speak it, whoever may hear; but they shall come when grace is given to them.

6, 7. *Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts, I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God. And who, as I, shall call, and shall declare it, and set it in order for me, since I appointed the ancient people? and the things that are coming, and shall come, let them shew unto them.*

God claims to be the one great source of all true prophecy. He challenges the gods of the heathen to arrange future providences, or even to foretell what those providences will be.

8. *Fear ye not, neither be afraid: have not I told thee from that time, and have declared it? ye are even my witnesses. Is there a God besides me? yea, there is no God; I know not any.*

God himself, who knoweth all things, knows of no other God beside himself indeed there is no other, and there can be no other. The unity of the Godhead must be accepted by us; we cannot think

of there being two Gods, since the one living and true God filleth all space. Now the Lord, through the prophet, holds up to ridicule the unreasonableness and folly of those who worship graven images.

9, 10. *They that made a graven image are all of them vanity; and their delectable things shall not profit, and they are their own witnesses; they see not, nor know; that they may be ashamed. Who hath formed a god,*

The very question is absurd.

10, 11. *Or molten a graven image that is profitable for nothing? Behold all his fellows shall be ashamed: and the workmen, they are of men:*

Doth man make God? What kind of a god must that be that man can make?

11, 12. *Let them all be gathered together, let them stand up; yet they shall fear, and they shall be ashamed together. The smith with the tongs both worketh in the coals, and fashioneth it with hammers, and worketh it with the strength of his arms: yea, he is hungry, and his strength faileth: he drinketh no water, and is faint.*

This maker of a god is faint! How utterly ridiculous is the idea that one who can make a god should himself be faint.

13-16. *The carpenter stretched out his rule; he marketh it out with a line he fitteth it with planes, and he marketh it out with the compass, and maketh it after the figure of a man, according to the beauty of a man; that it may remain in the house. He heweth him down cedars, and taketh the cypress and the oak which he strengtheneth for himself among the trees of the forest: he planteth an ash, and the rain doth nourish it. Then shall it he for a man to burn; for he will take thereof, and warm himself; yea, he kindleth it, and baketh bread; yea, he maketh a god, and worshipping it; he maketh it a graven image and falleth down thereto.*

It has often happened that, when this passage has been read in the hearing of idolaters, they have been convinced by it of their folly. It is a very simple description of what takes place in an idol-maker's workshop; yet, simple as it is, it shows the absurdity of the idea of worshipping that which can be made by man's hands.

16-18. *He burneth part thereof in the fire; with part thereof he eateth flesh; he roasteth roast, and is satisfied: yea, he warmeth himself, and saith, Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire: And the*

residue thereof he maketh a god, even his graven image: he falleth down unto it, and worshippeth it, and prayeth unto it, and saith, Deliver me; for thou art my god, They have not known nor understood:

There must be a failure of knowledge or understanding where such folly as this is possible.

18. *For he hath shut their eyes, that they cannot see; and their hearts, that they cannot understand.*

They have been so full of sin that God has given them up to judicial blindness, and hardness of heart has come upon them as a punishment for their rebellion against the Most High.

19, 20. *And none considereth in his heart, neither is there knowledge nor understanding to say, I have burned part of it in the fire; yea, also I have baked bread upon the coals thereof; I have roasted flesh, and eaten it: and shall I make the residue thereof an abomination? shall I fall down to the stock of a tree? He feedeth on ashes:*

He is like a madman who takes to eating ashes: —

20, 21. *A deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand? Remember these, O Jacob and Israel; for thou art my servant:*

You who fear God, remember these things, and keep clear of idolatry, —the setting up of crucifixes, the hanging up of crosses or any kind of symbol whatever. Even though it be merely the simple triangle, or the sacred Alpha and Omega, away with it, for the people of God must be clear from even the slightest traces of idolatry. See how many so-called Christian churches are nothing better than congregations of idolaters, such as the Church of Rome, and even the Greek Church the one with her images and her relics, and the other with her pictures and her icons. We must have none of these things, for the command still stands, “Thou shall not make unto thee any graven image, nor any likeness of anything that is in the heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them.” In days like these in which we live, the people of God should be more particular than ever not to countenance any form of idolatry lest, by slow degrees, we come back to the old abominations which God abhors.

21-23. *I have formed thee; thou art my servant: O Israel, thou shalt not be forgotten of me. I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee. Sing, O ye heavens; for the LORD hath done it: shout, ye lower parts of the earth: break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein: for the LORD hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel.*

Glory be to his holy name, it shall be our delightful occupation, as long as we live, to glorify him who “hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel.” Now turn to the fifty-fifth chapter of this prophecy; might we not almost say, the fifty-fifth chapter of this gospel?

This exposition consisted of readings from ISAIAH 44. AND 45; AND 2 SAMUEL 23:1-5.

ISAIAH 44

In this chapter, God encourages his Church by a promise of the visitation of his Spirit. Oh, that it may be fulfilled to us also!

1-3. *Yet now hear, O Jacob my servant; and Israel, whom I have chosen: Thus saith the LORD that made thee, and formed thee from the womb, which will help thee; Fear not, O Jacob, my servant; and thou, Jesurun, whom I have chosen. For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring:*

That is exactly what we need. Oh, that God would thus revive his Church! A little while ago, you saw the earth become dry and brown and bare, the very pastures were chapped and parched, and opened their mouths to cry for rain. What could we have done if the clouds had still withheld their nourishment? But at last down came the refreshing showers, and all the face of nature was revived. What we have had upon our fields, we need upon our churches; nothing will do for our souls but a visitation of the Spirit. Let us pray for it. Come, Holy Spirit, heavenly rain, pour out thy life-giving treasures upon thirsty souls even as the floods have been poured out upon the dry ground. Here is a divine promise, let us plead it: “I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring.”

4. And they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses.

You must often have noticed how you can trace the course of a brook by the willow trees that grow upon its banks. When you cannot see the brook from a distance, you can see the willows. So, wherever the Spirit of God comes, young people are converted, we see our children growing up in God's fear, and we know that this is the result of the Spirit's working.

5, 6. One shall say, I am the LORD'S; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the LORD, and surname himself by the name of Israel. Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God.

This is spoken in the Lord's usual majestic style; does it not remind you of the words of our Lord Jesus as recorded in the Book of the Revelation? "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty." How can he be less than divine who rightly adopts the same style which Jehovah uses in the Prophets: "I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God"?

7. And who, as I, shall call, and shall declare it, and set it in order for me, since I appointed the ancient people? and the things that are coming, and shall come, let them shew unto them.

The great God challenges all pretended gods to compete with him, and to show that they have ever prophesied or foretold the future. One of the greatest proofs of the inspiration of Scripture, and that our God is the only living and true God, is that the prophecies hitherto have been literally fulfilled. Go to Bashan, or to Edom, or to Sidon, or to Egypt, and wherever you go, you will see that whatsoever the Lord said concerning the ancient nations and peoples and cities has been carried out to the very letter.

8. Fear ye not, neither be afraid: have not I told thee from that time, and have declared it? ye are even my witnesses. Is there a God beside me? yea, there is no God, I know not any.

"There is no God" in the world but Jehovah, the one living and true God whom we adore.

Now follows that very wonderful passage descriptive of the making of idols, which we have often read. If there are any of you who worship crosses, and crucifixes, or any other visible objects, please to recollect that God's command is spoken as much to you as to any other idolaters. We may not worship anything that can be seen or handled, for this is the law laid down by God himself: "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them." Here, then, is God's description of idol gods

9. *They that make a graven image are all of them vanity;*

They must be very empty-headed and foolish people, or they would not worship a thing which they have graven with their own hands.

9. *And their delectable things shall not profit; and they are their own witnesses; they see not, nor know; that they may be ashamed.*

Idolaters are just as wooden and doltish as their idols, or else they would know better than to worship them.

10-12. *Who hath formed a god, or molten a graven image that is profitable for nothing? Behold, all his fellows shall be ashamed: and the workmen, they are of men: let them all be gathered together, let them stand up; yet they shall fear, and they shall be ashamed together. The smith with the tongs both worketh in the coals, and fashioneth it with hammers and worketh it with the strength of his arms: yea, he is hungry, and his strength faileth: he drinketh no water, and is faint.*

Here is a god-maker, with his tongs, and his coals, and his hammers; yet this god-maker gets hungry and faint! Here comes another.

13. *The carpenter stretcheth out his rule; he marketh it out with a line; he fitteth it with planes, and he marketh it out with the compass, and maketh it after the figure of a man, according to the beauty of a man; that it may remain in the house.*

Fancy a god-maker with his rule and his line, his planes and his compasses! What fine irony there is here.

14. *He heweth him down cedars, and taketh the cypress and the oak, which he strengtheneth for himself among the trees of the forest; he planteth an ash, and the rain doth nourish it.*

The forest is growing stuff to make gods with out of ash, and oak, and cedar, and cypress.

15. *Then shall it be for a man to burn: for he will take thereof, and warm himself;*

He cuts up part of the tree for fuel, and warms himself with it.

15-17. *Yea, he kindleth it, and baketh bread; yea, he maketh a god, and worshippeth it; he maketh it a graven image, and falleth down thereto. He burneth part thereof in the fire; with part thereof he eateth flesh; he roasteth roast, and is satisfied: yea, he warmeth himself, and saith, Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire: and the residue thereof he maketh a god, even his graven image: he falleth down unto it, and worshippeth it, and prayeth unto it, and saith, Deliver me; for thou art my god.*

And have not we seen hundreds of persons adoring a doll, or a little picture said to be a likeness of the virgin, or something of that kind? Ah, me! that even under the garb of Christianity the lowest kind of idolatry should still be common amongst our fellow men; God grant that none of us may ever fall into this deadly evil!

18-20. *They have not known nor understood: for he hath shut their eyes, that they cannot see; and their hearts, that they cannot understand. And none considereth in his heart, neither is there knowledge nor understanding to say, I have burned part of it in the fire; yea, also I have baked bread upon the coals thereof; I have roasted flesh, and eaten it: and shall I make the residue thereof an abomination? shall I fall down to the stock of a tree? He feedeth on ashes:*

As madmen will sometimes devour ashes, so surely men who worship things that they have made or bought must be mad: "He feedeth on ashes."

20. *A deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?*

If thou shalt worship the crucifix, or anything else that is visible, thou art dishonouring thyself, and thou art breaking the law of God. Remember that, "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." He will have no similitude. This

he abhorreth with his whole heart, and will hold no one guiltless who worships an idol of any kind. Even though the man has reverentially and sincerely bowed before it, he is transgressing against God. These are the false gods; now we shall read of the one true God

21. *Remember these, O Jacob and Israel; for thou art my servant: I have formed thee;*

“Thou hast not formed me, as these idolaters make their gods; but I have formed thee.”

21. *Thou art my servant: O Israel, thou shalt not be forgotten of me.*

God does not forget his people. If you are trusting in him, you may forget him through your infirmity, but because of his infinite love, he will never forget you.

22. *I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud; thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee.*

First he pardoned their sins, and then he bade them return unto him. What a wonder of mercy this is—free grace removing sin, and then the sweet constraints of gratitude drawing the forgiven sinner near his God!

23. *Sing, O ye heavens, for the LORD hath done it: shout, ye lower parts of the earth: break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein: for the LORD hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel.*

Pardoned sin is enough to make even the rocks sing; mountains, trees, forests, and even the lower parts of the earth, are made to echo with song when sin is blotted out.

24. *Thus saith the LORD, thy redeemer, and he that formed thee from the womb, I am the LORD that maketh all things; that stretcheth forth the heavens alone; that spreadeth abroad the earth by myself;*

God does everything by his own unaided strength. With whom took he counsel when he formed the universe? Who instructed the Ever blessed when he made the heavens and the earth! He did it all by his own wisdom and power.

25. *That frustrateth the tokens of the liars, and maketh diviners mad: that turneth wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish;*

This is what he does to those who boast and think that they know better than he does. But simple hearts, that will believe his Word, shall know his will, and shall grow wise unto salvation.

26-28. *That confirmeth the word of his servant, and performeth the counsel of his messengers; that saith to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be inhabited; and to the cities of Judah, Ye shall be built, and I will raise up the decayed places thereof: That saith to the deep, Be dry, and I will dry up thy rivers: That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid.*

This Book of the prophet Isaiah was written long before the days of Cyrus; yet he is here mentioned by name, and the prophecy of what he would do is here given. We know how completely this prophecy was fulfilled; and the Lord who uttered it, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is our God for ever and ever. He shall be our guide even unto death, blessed be his holy name! Amen.

ISAIAH 44:1, 2

1, 2. *Yet now hear, O Jacob my servant; and Israel, whom I have chose: Thus saith the LORD that made thee, and formed thee from the womb, which will help thee; Fear not, O Jacob, my servant; and thou, Jesurun, whom I have chosen.*

He comes back to that point again, you see: "Israel whom I have chosen, Thus saith the Lord that made thee." See the deep argument for infinite love. God will not forsake the work of his own hands. "I have formed thee, and chosen thee; therefore, fear thou not, but come to me anew, and serve me henceforth with all thine heart."

This exposition consisted of readings from ISAIAH 43:1-7, 18-28; AND 44:1, 2.

ISAIAH 44:1-5

1-5. *Yet now hear, O Jacob my servant; and Israel, whom I have chosen: Thus saith the Lord that made thee, and formed thee from the womb, which will help thee; Fear not, O Jacob, my servant; and thou, Jesurun, whom I have chosen. For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring: And they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses. One*

shall say, I am the Lord's; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel.

There are different ways of making the same profession of attachment to the Lord. All do not acknowledge in the same way their faith in God, but it is a great blessing when our offspring do acknowledge it. Let us end our reading with that sweet blessing upon our children: "I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring. May it come to pass in all our families, for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

This exposition consisted of readings from ISAIAH 43. 1-7; 21-28; And 44. 1-5.

ISAIAH 44:1-8

1. *Yet now hear, O Jacob my servant; and Israel, whom I have chosen:*

After all these charges, you see, the love of God to his chosen people is still the same. Well might Paul say, "I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Sin is an exceedingly evil and bitter thing, but even that shall not divide us from the love of God, for, "while we were yet sinners, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." So herein grace triumpheth over sin, and layeth our follies beneath its feet.

2-8. *Thus saith the LORD that made thee, and formed thee from the womb which will help thee; Fear not, O Jacob, my servant; and thou, Jesurun, whom I have chosen. For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing is on thine offspring: And they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses. One shall say, I am the LORD'S; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the LORD, and surname himself by the name of Israel. Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts, I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God. And who, as I, shall call, and shall declare it, and set it in order for me, since I appointed the ancient people? and the things that are coming, and shall come, let them show unto them. Fear ye not, neither be afraid:*

have not I told thee from that time, and have declared it? ye are even my witnesses. Is there a God beside me? yea, there is no God; I know not any.

Now turn to Psalm 85. This Psalm is dedicated to the chief musician. It is a Psalm worthy of the ablest musician. It is to be sung with care; they are well instructed who can understand it, and enter into the experience it describes. It is called- A Psalm for the sons of Korah. I have often reminded you, dear friends, that, when Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, went down alive into the pit, the sons of Dathan and Abiram perished with their fathers, but we read, "Notwithstanding the children of Korah died not" We cannot tell why, we must set it down to the sovereign grace of God: and if it were so, then I can see why they henceforth became singers in the sanctuary. "A Psalm for the sons of Korah." You will sing best who wonder most at your salvation. You who can see no reason for it, except the sovereign goodness of God, will have sweet voices tuned with gratitude wherewith to praise God. The first verse of the Psalm contains a happy memory

This exposition consisted of readings from ISAIAH 43:22-28, 44:1-8; AND PSALM 85.

ISAIAH 44:1-8

1-3. *Yet now hear, O Jacob my servant and Israel, whom I have chosen. Thus saith the LORD, that made thee, and formed thee from the womb, which will help thee; Fear not, O Jacob, my servant; and thou, Jesurun, whom I have chosen. For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring:*

"Think not that I am anxious to punish you for your sin. Only return to me, and I will be delighted to bless you. I will help you out of your troubles; I will supply your needs; and not only so, but I will bless your children generation after generation."

4, 5. *And they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses. One shall say, I am the LORD'S, and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the LORD, and, surname himself by the name of Israel.*

God still has power over human hearts; he can bring back to himself his wandering children.

6. *Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God.*

He gathered up all into himself: as he is the first and the last, where is there space for any other god? He, therefore, would have all our hearts; he would have us love, and adore, and serve him, and him alone.

7. *And who, as I, shall call, and shall declare it, and set it in order fore, since I appointed the ancient people? and the things that are coming, and shall come, let them shew unto them.*

If these idols be gods, let them prophesy, and tell what is to happen in the future; but they cannot even speak to one another.

8. *Fear ye not, neither be afraid: have not I told thee from that time, and have declared it? ye are even my witnesses, is there a God beside me? yea, there is no God; I know not any.*

This exposition consisted of readings from ISAIAH 43:14-28; AND 44:1-8.

ISAIAH 44:1-22

1-2. *Yet now hear, O Jacob my servant; and Israel, whom I have chosen: Thus saith the LORD that made thee, and formed thee from the womb, which will help thee; Fear not, O Jacob, my Servant; and thou, Jesurum, whom I have chosen.*

God cannot bear his people to be sad, he delights to drive away fear, trembling, and mistrust. He loves faith, for faith brings confidence, hope, rest. So he says to us, "Fear not, fear not, be not afraid." It is God himself, who made us, and who chose us, who says to us, "Do not fear." Come, dear hearts, lay aside your disquietude, if God bids you cast away fear, will you not do it? Nothing hushes a babe to sleep like its mother's voice. Let God's voice hush you into sweet and blessed calm whenever you are troubled and full of fear.

3. *For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground:*

God will never do anything by halves. He will not only send rain, but the waters shall pour down from the sky. He will not merely moisten the surface of the dry ground; he will send floods to saturate it. God is great in giving his grace. When once you reach the region of grace, you have entered the region of plenty, even the

riches of God's unspeakable grace. If, dear friends, you have at this time no spiritual power, and unction, and favor, and love, you may have it, for here is the Lord's own promise, "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground."

3. *I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring:*

Is that your great burden,--trouble about your boy? Does your dear girl grieve you? Well, he who blesses the father and the mother will bless the children; the God of Abraham is the God of Isaac. Pray that this promise may be fulfilled to you, that your need may get a share of that spirit of grace which has been given to you.

4. *And they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses.*

You can track a stream by the willows; standing on a hill, and looking down the valley, you can tell where the little brook winds, for there are the willows. So shall it be with your children; they shall spring up by the waters of grace, and be a joy and a blessing.

5. *One shall say, I am the Lord's*

That is the brave son who comes out boldly, and avows his faith: "One shall say, I am the Lord's."

5. *And another shall call himself by the name of Jacob;*

That is the one who goes and joins the church, and does not say much about it; but he has united himself with the Lord's people: "and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob."

5. *And another shall subscribe with his hand unto the LORD, and surname himself by the name of Israel.*

He cannot speak much, but he can write; he is not so bold as the others, perhaps, but he is quite as true: "Another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord." It does not so much matter how our children are converted so long as they really are converted, and as to the particular way in which they join the church, we have only to bid them seek the guidance of God's Word and his Spirit, and follow wheresoever they lead. Pray earnestly, dear friends, that the Lord will bless your children. I thank God that most of the members of the church, known to me, have their children saved; there are many families that are altogether in the church. There are others which have not that privilege yet, but, dear friends, you may have it;

ask believingly, act faithfully, watch hopefully, and you shall see it joyfully ere long.

6, 7. *Thus saith the Lord the King of Israel, and his redeemer the Lord of hosts, I am the first, and I am the last, and beside me there is no God. And who, as I, shall call, and shall declare it, and set it in order for me, since I appointed the ancient people and the things that are coming, and shall come, let them show unto them.*

Jehovah challenges the idol gods to utter a prophecy. Let them tell the future if they can; but they cannot. Prophecy is ever the mark of the one living and true God.

8-11. *Fear ye not, neither be afraid: have not I told thee from that time, and have declared it? ye are even my witnesses. Is there a God beside me? yea, there is no God; I know not any. They that make a graven image are all of them vanity, and their delectable things shall not profit, and they are their own witnesses, they see not, nor know; that they may be ashamed. Who hath formed a god, or molten a graven image that is profitable for nothing? Behold, all his fellows shall be ashamed: and the workmen, they are of men: let them all be gathered together, let them stand up; yet they shall fear, and they shall be ashamed together.*

Well they may. Men who pretend to make a god, ought to be ashamed.

12. *The smith with the tongs both worketh in the coals, and fashioneth it with hammers, and worketh it with the strength of his arms:*

What irony! God-making, with hammers and bellows!

12. *Yea, he is hungry,*
This god-maker is hungry!

12. *And his strength faileth: he drinketh no water, and is faint.*

The god-maker is getting faint. There is a sarcasm about this description which ought to convince the most blind devotees of an idol.

13. *The carpenter stretcheth out his rule, he marketh it out with a line; he fitteth it with planes, and he marketh it out with the compass, and maketh it after the figure of a man, according to the beauty of a man; that it may remain in the house.*

A god in the house! A god shut up in a room! A god that has been made with compasses and planes! How ridiculous it seems!

14. *He heweth him down cedars, and taketh the cypress and the oak, which he strengtheneth for himself among the trees of the forest: he planteth an ash, and the rain doth nourish it.*

The raw material for a god is an ash, a watery tree: "The rain doth nourish it."

15-17. *Then shall it be for a man to burn: for he will take thereof, and warm himself; yea, he kindleth it, and baketh bread, yea, he maketh a god, and worshippeth it, he maketh it a graven image, and falleth down thereto. He burneth part thereof in the fire; with part thereof he eateth flesh; he roasteth roast, and is satisfied: yea, he warmeth himself, and saith, Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire: and the residue thereof he maketh a god,*

Oh, the folly of idolatry! Perhaps you do not see your own folly, you who are worshipping yourselves. A man who worships his belly is a worse idolater than the one who worships a god of wood. A man who worships gold and silver, if that gold and silver should take the shape of sovereigns and shillings, is not a bit more justified in his idolatry than if he had made it into the shape of a calf, and had bowed before it in idolatrous homage and reverence.

17-20. *Even his graven image: he falleth down unto it, and worshippeth it, and prayeth unto it, and saith, Deliver me; for thou art my god. They have not known nor understood: for he hath shut their eyes, that they cannot see; and their hearts, that they cannot understand. And none considereth in his heart, neither is there knowledge nor understanding to say, I have burned part of it in the fire; yea, also I have baked bread upon the coals thereof; I have roasted flesh, and eaten it: and shall I make the residue thereof an abomination? shall I fall down to the stock of a tree? He feedeth on ashes:*

Mad people have been known to do even that, they have thrust cinders into their mouths; and this is what everybody does who is not trusting in the living God: "He feedeth on ashes."

20, 21. *A deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand? Remember these, O Jacob and Israel;*

Think of these false gods, and be ashamed of them.

21, 22. *For thou art my servant: I have formed thee; thou art my servant: O Israel, thou shalt not be forgotten of me. I have blotted*

out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sin: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee.

These wooden gods have done nothing of the sort. Come back to the true God, and worship him, and be happy in his love.

ISAIAH 44:1-23

1, 2. *Yet now hear, O Jacob my servant; and Israel, whom I have chosen: Thus saith the LORD that made thee, and formed thee from the womb, which will help thee; Fear not, O Jacob, my servant; and thou, Jesurun, whom I have chosen.*

You see, the Lord goes on to show his people that, if they were in trouble, they had brought it upon themselves. If the sanctuary had been degraded, it was because both themselves and their teachers had transgressed against God. But, after he has justified his wrath, he still goes on to talk of mercy; and, oh with what plenteousness of love does he address these wandering people of his!

3. *For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring:*

Here, O ye needy souls, ye who thirst after mercy is a rich promise for you! How plenteously does God bestow it! “I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground.” Your needs cannot be so great as the divine supply. All the Lord asks is that you should be willing to receive his mercy, willing that your emptiness should be filled out of his fullness.

4. *And they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses.*

They shall spring up where there were none before, and grow very quickly. These are our young converts, I trust that we shall have many such springing up “as willows by the water courses”?

5, 6. *One shall say, I am the LORD’S, and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the LORD, and surname himself by the name of Israel. Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God.*

That is a great truth, always to be kept in mind, that there is no God beside Jehovah. Let us beware of ever attempting to set up, in our own hearts, any god save the one living and true God.

7-12. *And who, as I, shall call and shall declare it, and set it in order for me, since I appointed the ancient people? and the things that are coming, and shall come, let them shew unto them. Fear ye not, neither be afraid: have not I told thee from that time, and have declared it? ye are even my witnesses. Is there a God beside me? yea, there is no God; I know not any. They that make a graven image are all of them vanity; and their delectable things shall not profit; and they are their own witnesses; they see not, nor know; that they may be ashamed. Who hath formed a god, or molten a graven image that is profitable for nothing? Behold, all his fellows shall be ashamed: and the workmen, they are of men: let them all be gathered together, let them stand up; yet they shall fear, and they shall be ashamed together. The smith —*

Note how the Lord holds up to mockery and scorn the makers of idol gods. He shows the process of god-making, the making of idol gods but his words may be equally well applied to the making of Virgin Mary and the various saints, crucifixes, and all other lumber of this kind in the idolatry that galls itself Christian: “The smith” —

12. *With the tongs both worketh in the coals, and fashioneth it with hammers, and worketh it with the strength of his arms: yea, he is hungry, and his strength faileth: he drinketh no water, and is faint.*

That is one of these god-makers, you see; a man who makes an idol god, yet who himself gets thirsty by reason of the heat of the coals in his forge. A fine god it must be that he makes! Next comes the carpenter.

13, 14. *The carpenter stretcheth out his rule; he marketh it out with a line; he fitteth it with planes, and he marketh it out with the compass, and maketh it after the figure of a man, according to the beauty of a man; that it may remain in the house. He heweth him down cedars, and taketh the cypress and the oak, which he strengtheneth for himself among the trees of the forest: he planteth an ash, and the rain doth nourish it.*

They like some choice wood out of which to make their gods. So we see that these idol gods grow in the woods first, and then,

afterwards, they need a carpenter's rule, and line, and compass, and plane in order to shape them according to his taste, or the order of his customers.

15-17. *Then shall it be for a man to burn: for he will take thereof, and warm himself; yea, he kindleth it, and baketh bread, yea, he maketh a god and worshippeth it; he maketh it a graven image, and falleth down thereto. He burneth part thereof in the fire; with part thereof he eateth flesh; he roasteth roast, and is satisfied: yea, he warmeth himself, and saith, Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire: And the residue thereof he maketh a god, even his graven image: he falleth down unto it, and worshippeth it, and prayeth unto it, and saith, Deliver me; for thou art my god.*

Did ever sarcasm — truthful and proper sarcasm — go further than this? Idolaters in various lands have frequently been convinced of the absurdity of their worship as they have read this very remarkable piece of inspired writing.

18, 19. *They have not known nor understood: for he hath shut their eyes, that they cannot see; and their hearts, that they cannot understand. And none considereth in his heart, neither is there knowledge nor understanding to say, I have burned part of it in the fire; yea, also I have baked bread upon the coals thereof; I have roasted flesh, and eaten it: and shall I make the residue thereof an abomination? shall I fall down to the stock of a tree?*

Shall I, an intelligent being, worship gold, silver, wood, or brass, however excellent may be the workmanship of it? Shall I, an immortal being, cast myself down before a piece of bread, and worship that, as some do who first worship, and then eat their god. Oh, what strange infatuation!

20. *He feedeth on ashes: a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand!*

The prophet concludes that madness must have laid hold upon the minds of men, or they never could have fallen into the debasing superstitions which degrade them all over the world. Yet, even in this present century old superstitions have come back to our country; it is strange that here, where so many martyrs were burnt, the sons of these martyrs should actually be willing to go back again to the beggarly elements and superstitions of the olden times. The

Lord have mercy upon this land, and deliver it from all forms of idol worship!

21, 22. *Remember these, O Jacob and Israel; for thou art my servant: I have formed thee, thou art my servant: O Israel, thou shalt not be forgotten of me. I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee.*

Out of all the world, God had a chosen people, his own Israel, to whom he revealed himself, but they also turned aside unto idols, yet here he bids them return to him. Even to this day, they bear their protest against idols bravely. I would to God that they also knew the Christ of God, and worshipped him. All believers are the true Israel after the spirit, and are to maintain for ever the glory of the one only living and true God.

23. *Sing, O ye heavens; for the LORD hath done it: shout, ye lower parts of the earth: break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree the therein: for the LORD hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel.*

This exposition consisted of readings from ISAIAH 43:21-28; AND 44:1-23.

ISAIAH 45

While we are reading this chapter, and thinking of Cyrus, the Lord's anointed deliverer for Israel, let us not forget the greater Deliverer of whom the hymn writer sings,

“Thus saith God of his Anointed;
He shall let my people go Tis the work for him appointed,
Tis the work that he shall do;
And my city He shall found, and build it, too.”

1. *Thus saith the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut;*

It was thought impossible for any foreign troops to enter Babylon; yet the gates were found open, and the army of Cyrus marched in, and took possession of the city.

2, 3. *I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in piece the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron: and I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden*

riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the LORD, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel.

Whenever God calls a man to do any work, however difficult and even impossible it may seem to be, he will certainly accomplish it, because he will have God with him. The Lord will gird his loins, and make him strong, and all the forces of providence shall work towards the accomplishment of the divine end. Has God given thee any work to do? It may be a much easier task than that of Cyrus; so, as the Lord enabled him to succeed in his great enterprise, thou mayest have confidence that his power is sufficient to give success to thee also. It may seem to be presumption for thee to undertake such a work; yet, if thou art called of God to do it, go on without a shadow of doubt, for he will make the crooked places straight, and break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron. We must not forget that, whatever God did in relation to Cyrus, was done with an eye to the welfare of his own people.

4. For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me.

And all the powers and princes, that arise in this world, God can use for the good of his Church. All the nations, and kingdoms, and powers the be, are only like so much scaffolding for the building of God's own house, and he makes use of them as he pleases, though, often, they know not what he is doing with them.

5, 6. I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the LORD, and there it none else.

This was intended to correct the mistake of Cyrus, who probably was a fire-worshipper, — a believer in the two great forces of good and evil, which were supposed to be equally eternal and powerful, which the Persians regarded as the god of good and the god of evil. So the Lord says:

7. I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things.

There are not two distinct principles that are omnipotent; and though God is not the Author of moral evil, yet whatever there is of

evil, which causes us pain and loss, is under his control. There are not two gods, but only one living and true God.

8-10. *Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness: let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together, I the LORD have created it. Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? or thy work, He hath no hands? Woe unto him that saith unto his father, What begettest thou? or to the woman, What hast thou brought forth?*

God, on the ground of his being Creator, demands that he shall not be questioned by human wisdom, nor dictated to by human pride. He is the one supreme sovereign and Lord of all, and he may do absolutely as he pleases. It is a joy and delight to us that he always wills to do what is just and right. Still, his divine prerogative must not be abridged in any way whatever. The potsherds, that he hath made, must never question the action of the great Potter who hath made them; hath he not power to mould and fashion the clay exactly as he pleaseth?

11, 12. *Thus saith the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker, Ask me of things to come concerning my sons and concerning the work of my hands command ye me. I have made the earth, and created man upon it: I, even my hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded.*

When we think of this, we ought to worship God alone, and trust him alone, and pay all loyal homage to him. What can there be that is comparable to the Creator of all things? There is not so much as a grain of dust, nor a single fly, that is self-created, or man-made; but everything hath come from God and exists because he wills it. Therefore, give to the Lord the glory that is due unto his name, and rest in his power, and trust in his might.

13. *I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways: he shall build my city, and he shall let go my captives, not for price nor reward, saith the LORD of hosts.*

And so Cyrus did. It was through him that Jerusalem was rebuilt, and the captive Israelites were delivered.

14, 15. *Thus saith the LORD, The labour of Egypt, and merchants of Ethiopia and of the Sabeans, men of stature, shall come over unto*

thee, and they shall be thine: they shall come after thee; in chains they shall come over, and they shall fall down unto thee, they shall make supplication unto thee, saying, Surely God is in thee, and there is none else, there is no God. Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour.

This is a most merciful arrangement, for, if God did not hide himself, none of us could exist. The full blaze of his divine countenance would be our destruction. God said even to Moses, "Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me and live." But it is also partly in judgment that God sometimes hides even that measure of his presence which, at other times, he reveals in love. But even then, though he is hidden, he is still there. As the blue sky is up yonder, though it is long since you saw it, so is God ever present even though we cannot see him. The mountains, when hidden in darkness, are as real as they are in the light of day; and God is as truly near to his people, to preserve and succor them, when they do not see him, as when they do.

16-19. *They shall be ashamed, and also confounded, all of them: they shall go to confusion together that are makers of idols. But Israel shall be saved in the LORD with an everlasting salvation: ye shall not be ashamed nor confounded world without end. For thus saith the LORD that created the heavens, God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established, it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited: I am the LORD; and there is none else. I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth: I said not unto the seed of Jacob, See ye me in vain: I the LORD speak righteousness, I declare things that are right.*

It is a very consolatory thing for us to be told, not only what God has said, but also what he has not said. Be you sure of this, that there is nothing in the secret book of God's decrees, and nothing in the sealed book of prophecy, which is contrary to the gracious covenant promises which God has revealed to his people in his Word. He does not say one thing, and mean another. You may rest assured that all the revelations that are yet to be given, if there are to be any, (and there are some who are always talking about fresh light breaking from the Word!) will never contradict that which has been revealed of old. God did not tell his ancient people anything which contradicts what he has told us. The poorest and meanest of his people, who have been able to spell out, in the Word of God, their

right and title to the divine inheritance, may rely upon it that, if any wise man comes to them with some wonderful discovery which contradict the Bible, he simply comes with a lie, for God has nowhere contradicted what he has plainly revealed in the Scriptures.

20, 21. *Assemble yourselves and come; draw near together, ye that are escaped of the nations: they have no knowledge that set up the wood of their graven image, and pray unto a god that cannot save. Tell ye, and bring them near; yea, let them take counsel together:*

What wooden god has ever foretold the future? What idol of brass or stone had a word to say about the coming of Cyrus? Not one.

21-25. *Who hath declared this from ancient time? who hath told it from that time? have not I the LORD? and there is no God else beside me; a just God and a Saviour; there is none beside me. Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else. I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear. Surely, shall one say, in the LORD have I righteousness and strength: even to him. Shall men come, and all that are incensed against him shall be ashamed. In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory.*

ISAIAH 45

The first paragraph concerns Cyrus, and the great work for which God raised him up.

1-4. *Thus saith the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut; I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron: And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the LORD, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel. For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me.*

A remarkable prophecy, issued long before the time of Cyrus, foretelling that he should conquer Babylon, and destroy it; and, though for many a day Cyrus knew nothing about the Most High God, yet was he used, in the Lord's hand, for wonderful purposes. Sometimes, a man may have been used of God for great ends without his own knowledge. When, however, he comes to the discovery of that fact, as he may if he will but think it over, should he not reverently bow before the Most High, and worship him who, though unknown to him, had been his Helper and his Friend?

5, 6. *I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me. That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the LORD, and there is none else.*

Those who believe in idols think that there may be lords many and gods many, but he who is a true follower of Jehovah knows that there can be no other god beside him. He filleth all space, and there is no room for another. There is but one Creator, one Preserver, and one God, who alone is to be worshipped.

7. *I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil. I the LORD do all these things.*

Cyrus was a believer in two gods, — one the god of light, and the other the god of darkness. Hence this declaration from God's servant, the prophet, that there was no prince of darkness who was a god, but that all things were made by the one Most High God.

8-11. *Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness: let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together; I the LORD have created it. Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? or thy work, He hath no hands? Woe unto him that saith unto his father, What begettest thou? or to the woman, What hast thou brought forth? Thus saith the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker, Ask me of things to come concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands command ye me.*

Note the tone which God uses. He speaks like a God, and claims to be above the questioning of his creatures. These verses remind us of what the apostle Paul wrote: "Nay but, O man, who art thou that

replies against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? “God is the great Sovereign over all, and he claims a sovereign’s place. He doeth as he wills, but he always wills to do that which is just and right.

12-17. *I have made the earth, and created man upon it: I, even my hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded. I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways: he shall build my city, and he shall let go my captives, not for price nor reward, saith the LORD of hosts. Thus saith the LORD, The labour of Egypt, and merchandise of Ethiopia and of the Sabeans, men of stature, shall come over unto thee, and they shall be thine: they shall come after thee; in chains they shall come over, and they shall fall down unto thee, they shall make supplication unto thee, saying, surly God is in thee; and there is none else, there is no God. Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour. They shall be ashamed, and also confounded, all of them: they shall go to confusion together that are makers of idols. But Israel shall be saved in the LORD with an everlasting salvation: ye shall not be ashamed nor confounded world without end.*

If you are God’s people, you have a God of whom you need never be ashamed, and one who will not leave you to be ashamed of your confidence and hope. Those that trust to false gods will be ashamed; those that rest upon themselves will be confounded; but stay thyself upon God, O man, and thou shalt never be ashamed, world without end!

18, 19. *For thus saith the Lord that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited: I am the LORD; and there is none else. I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth: I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain; I the LORD speak righteousness, I declare things that are right.*

Here is the glory of our God, — that his every word is true, and that he has never said, in any place, that which contradicts what he has spoken in public to his people. You may safely rest upon the God who is always the same, who never plays fast and loose with his promises, or speaketh anything in secret contrary to his pledged

word. He is as true as he is sovereign; therefore, stay yourselves upon him.

20, 21. *Assemble yourselves and come; draw near together, ye that are escaped of the nations: they have no knowledge that set up the wood of their graven image, and pray unto a god that cannot save. Tell ye, and bring them near, yea, let them take counsel together: who hath declared this from ancient time? who hath told it from that time? have not I the LORD?*

He challenges all the idols to prove that they had uttered any true prophecy, — that they had spoken about Cyrus, or anybody else, from ancient times, so that the prophecy was literally fulfilled. There were dark double-meaning oracles, with which the false priests mocked their votaries, but the true words of God — his ancient prophecies — proved him to be the only real and true God.

21-23. *And there is no God else beside me, a just God and a Saviour. there is none beside me. Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else. I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.*

Glory be to God, it will be so in the latter days. It shall come to pass that the truth shall be universally triumphant, and the one God, who made the heavens and the earth, shall be worshipped both by heaven and by earth, without any discordant note.

24, 25. *Surely, shall one say, in the LORD have I righteousness and strength even to him shall men come; and all that are incensed against him shall be ashamed. In the LORD shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory.*

ISAIAH 45:1-16

1-4. *Thus saith the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut; I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron: And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the LORD, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel.*

For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me.

Long before the period of Cyrus's birth, this prophecy was written by Isaiah, and surely it must have flashed solemn conviction upon the heart of the king when he came to read words like these, in which his very name was mentioned, and all his exploits and successes, with which he vanquished his enemies, captured their strong places, and cut the gates of brass in pieces. Our God has all things present before him. To him there is no future. All things are in one eternal now with him, and hence he tells to his prophets the things that shall be.

5. *I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me:*

It is a wonderful subject — the providential government of God over princes and potentates that know him not — how he raised up Cyrus on the behalf of his people, that they might be delivered; and though Cyrus did not know it, yet was he, as it were, an instrument in the hand of God — moved according to the divine will.

6, 7. *That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the LORD, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness, I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things.*

It was to correct the Persian mistake into which Cyrus had fallen of a duplicate deity — one power creating light and another power creating darkness. “No,” says Jehovah, “I am God alone.”

8, 9. *Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness: let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together; I the LORD have created it. Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker!*

As many do in these days. Tongue-valiant men, who dare accuse the Most High and arraign him at their bar.

9. *Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth.*

Let them strive with their equals, but who is he that shall come into conflict with the eternal God?

9, 10. *Shall the clay say to him that fashioned it, What makest thou? or thy work, He hath no hands? Woe unto him that saith unto his*

father, What begettest thou? or to the woman, What hast thou brought forth?

Quarreling with God is waste of time, is audacity and presumption. It must end in disaster to us, for the Lord is Lord of all.

11-13. *Thus saith the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker, Ask me of things to come concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands command ye me. I have made the earth, and created man upon it: I, even my hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded. I have raised him*

That is Cyrus.

13-14. *Up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways: he shall build my city, and he shall let go my captives, not for price nor reward, saith the LORD of hosts. Thus saith the LORD, The labour of Egypt, and merchandise of Ethiopia and of the Sabeans, men of stature, shall come over unto thee, and they shall be thine: they shall come after thee: in chains shall they come over, and they shall fall down unto thee, they shall make supplication unto thee, saying, Surely God is in thee; and there is none else, there is no God.*

No other God. The day shall come in which this shall all be true, when men shall relinquish their idols, and believe in that one great invisible God, the maker of all things. For the present we see not this.

15. *Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour.*

Throughout these long and weary years, man has forgotten or blasphemed his Maker, and God has sat still and borne it in the majestic patience of his infinity.

16. *They shall be ashamed, and also confounded, all of them: they shall go to confusion together that are makers of idols.*

ISAIAH 48

1. *Hear ye this, O house of Jacob, which are called by the name of Israel, and are come forth out of the waters of Judah, which swear by the name of the LORD, and make mention of the God of Israel, but not in truth, nor in righteousness.*

There always were false professors, and I suppose there always will be till Christ comes. A Judas was among the twelve apostles, and we cannot wonder that we find such in every church, but what a

dreadful thing it is to wear the name of God, and yet not really to serve him, to be called Christians, and yet not to be like Christ! It must be a very God-provoking thing to be called by his name, and then insult it by not being true to it.

2. *For they call themselves of the holy city, and stay themselves upon the God of Israel; The LORD of hosts is his name.*

They profess to trust him, but they do not love him; “they call themselves of the holy city,” but they certainly are not holy citizens. Ah me that God should have to speak to men upon such a matter as this! It is self-evidently wicked, but they will not see it.

3. *I have declared the former things from the beginning; and they went forth out of my mouth, and I shewed them; I did them suddenly, and they came to pass.*

There is no better proof that God is God than that his prophecies have been fulfilled. Only the eternal can see into the future. He has done so, and every word of his either has been fulfilled, or will yet be fulfilled.

4, 5. *Because I knew that thou art obstinate, and thy neck is an iron sinew, and thy brow brass; I have even from the beginning declared it to thee: before it came to pass I shewed it thee: lest thou shouldest say, Mine idol hath done them, and my graven image, and my molten image, hath commanded them.*

See the care of God towards the most obstinate of men. He knows that they will pervert things, so he prevents them as far as it is possible to do so. He tells them what is to happen, that they may not afterwards say that their idol gods have done it. Ah, dear friends, God has taken great interest in many of us! He has, as it were, laid his plans to keep us out of sin; and yet often we have broken out, and have gone over hedge and ditch in the ways of sin. We have seemed resolved to do evil; we have been desperately set on mischief; hence he speaks of us as being “obstinate.” “Thy neck is an iron sinew, and thy brow brass.” Will God ever speak in mercy to such people as these? We shall see as we read on.

6-8. *Thou hast heard, see all this; and will not ye declare it? I have shewed thee new things from this time, even hidden things, and thou didst not know them. They are created now, and not from the beginning, even before the day when thou heardest them not; lest thou shouldest say, Behold, I knew them. Yea, thou heardest not;*

yea, thou knewest not; yea, from that time that thine ear was not opened: for I knew that thou wouldest deal very treacherously, and wast called a transgressor from the womb.

What a description! Treacherous, false, yea, very treacherous, beyond the usual degree of treachery; transgressors from our very birth, inured in sin. The very heart is wrong, and all that comes out of us is, therefore, wrong. And now, what follows?

9. *For my name's sake will I defer mine anger, and for my praise will I refrain for thee, that I cut thee not off.*

"I cannot spare thee for thine own sake; but I will spare thee for my name's sake. I cannot spare thee because of anything good in thee; but I will spare thee because of good in myself." If God can glorify himself by your salvation, he finds a blessed motive for saving you, and, since there is no desert in you, he will fall back upon his own glory, and save you for his own name's sake.

10. *Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction.*

Thou sinful one, yet one of his own children, he will refine thee again and again, and he will glorify himself by saving thee.

11. *For mine own sake, even for mine own sake, will I do it: for how should my name be polluted? and I will not give my glory unto another.*

This verse ought to ring like music in the ear of one who is seeking mercy, and who cannot find out how mercy can come to him.

12, 13. *Hearken unto me, O Jacob and Israel, my called; I am he; I am the first, I also am the last. Mine hand also hath laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand hath spanned the heavens: when I call unto them, they stand up together.*

What a great God is he whose right hand spanned the heavens, making the arch of the sky, as it were, with the span of his hand!

14. *All ye, assemble yourselves, and hear, which among them hath declared these things?*

He still dwells upon prophecy. God claims that he is God because he foretold all that happened, which the idol gods could not do.

14-15. *The LORD hath loved him: he will do his pleasure on Babylon, and his arm shall be on the Chaldeans. I, even I, have*

spoken; yea, I have called him: I have brought him, and he shall make his way prosperous. Come ye near unto me, hear ye this, I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; from the time that it was, there am I: and now the Lord God, and his Spirit, hath sent me. Thus saith the LORD, thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. I am the Lord thy God which teacheth thee to profit, which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go. O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments!

God again breaks out in lamentations over his wandering people! Not only is he ready to forgive them; but he grieves to think that they should have brought so much sorrow on themselves.

18, 19. *Then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea: thy seed also had been as the sand, and the offspring of thy bowels like the gravel thereof; his name should not have been cut off nor destroyed from before me.*

All manner of possible good would have been yours had you not rebelled against God; and as you have lost it, God grieves that it should be so.

20. *Go ye forth of Babylon, flee ye from the Chaldeans, with a voice of singing declare ye, tell this, utter it even to the end of the earth, say ye, The LORD hath redeemed his servant Jacob.*

What a grand message for anyone to tell! Tell it, tell it, tell it everywhere, that Jehovah hath redeemed his people.

21. *And they thirsted not when he led them through the deserts:*

Neither shall you thirst, O redeemed one, when you are in the desert!

21. *He caused the waters to flow out of the rock for them:*

Most unlikely places shall yield you succor.

21. *He clave the rock also, and the waters gushed out.*

And yet, to finish up the chapter, stands this remarkable sentence: —

22. *There is no peace, saith the LORD, unto the wicked.*

O God, have mercy upon us, and let us not be numbered with them!

ISAIAH 49

1-3. *Listen, O isles, unto me, and hearken, ye people from, far; The LORD hath called me from the womb, from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name. And he hath made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me, and made me a polished shaft; in his quiver hath he hid me; and said unto me, Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified.*

Our Lord became, by his incarnation,-by his very birth so marvelous and mysterious, He became that servant of Jehovah by whom God would be glorified. He was, as it were, hidden away, like a sword in its master's scabbard,-concealed and protected, like an arrow hidden in its owner's quiver,-until the time came for God to use him, and then God did use him both as a sharp sword and as a polished shaft.

4. *Then I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain: yet surely my judgment is with the LORD, and my work with my God.*

The Jews, as a nation, were not gathered unto Christ, the highly favoured people, as a whole, did not believe in him. He was expressly sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, yet John was obliged to write, "He came unto his own and his own received him not." So few became his personal followers that it really appeared as if his life-work had been a failure; but he did what all God's true servants must do, he referred his work to the Lord. He said, "Surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work (or, my record) with my God." If we are faithful, that is all that our gracious Master requires of us; we are none of us bound to be successful. If we bear our sincere testimony to the truth, and everybody rejects it, our reward will be none the less in the day when the Lord calls us to give an account of our stewardship. If you, my brother or my sister, are loyal to him whose servant you are, when your Lord comes again, he will say to you, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

5, 6. *And now, saith the LORD that formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob again to him, Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the LORD, and my God shall be my strength. And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to*

restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.

Though Jesus seemed to fall with the Jews, he has succeeded in a far greater measure with the Gentiles, for great multitudes of them have gladly accepted him as their Saviour.

7, 8. *Thus saith the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel, and his Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers, Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the LORD that is faithful, and the Holy One of Israel, and he shall choose thee. Thus saith the LORD, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee:*

Jehovah will bless his Anointed, he will accomplish his great purposes of love and mercy through him.

8, 9. *And I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages, That thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Show yourselves.*

This is Christ's work today, to call out the forgotten ones who are hidden away in the oubliettes, of the Bastille of Despair. He comes and calls them, "Go forth, show yourselves;" and at his bidding they appear, even as Lazarus came forth from the grave at his command. Now listen; this is what becomes of those who come out of sin's prison at Christ's call. They become his sheep:-

9. *They shall feed in the ways,-*

On their way to the one great fold on the hill-tops of glory, they shall find suitable and sufficient pasture: "They shall feed in the ways,"-

9, 10. *And their pastures shall be in all high places. They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them.*

Now recall those verses from the Revelation that we read just now, and note what blessings the good Shepherd has prepared for his sheep even while they are upon this earth.

11-13. *And I will make all my mountain, a way, and my highways shall be exalted. Behold, these shall come from far: and, lo, these from the north and from the west; and these from the land of Sinim.*

Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth; and break forth into singing, O mountains: for the LORD hath comforted his people,

Well may heavens and earth and mountains sing when they have such a theme for their songs as this,

13, 14. *And will have mercy upon his afflicted. But Zion said, The LORD hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me.*

Zion said so, but it was not true; hear what the Lord says:-

15, 16. *Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands;*

However unnatural an earthly mother may prove, God will never forsake or forget one of his children.

“‘Yet,’ saith the Lord, should nature change

And mothers monsters prove,

Sion still dwells upon the heart of everlasting love.”

16-21. *Thy walls are continually before me. Thy children shall make haste, thy destroyer and they that make thee waste shall go forth of thee. Lift up thine eyes round about, and behold: all that gather themselves together, and come to thee. As I live, saith the LORD, thou shalt surely clothe thee with them all, as with an ornament, and bind them on thee, as a bride doeth. For thy waste and thy desolate places, and the land of thy destruction, shall even now be too narrow by reason of the inhabitants, and they that swallowed thee up shall be far away. The children which thou shalt have, after thou hast lost the other, shall say again in thine ears, The place is too strait for me, give place to me that I may dwell. Then shalt thou say in thine heart, Who hath begotten me these, seeing I have lost my children, and am desolate, a captive and removing to and fro? and who hath brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; these, where had they been?*

Oh, that we might often have such a glad surprise as this, and be made to marvel at the Lord’s gracious dealings with us!

22-26. *Thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people: and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders. And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers: they shall bow down to thee with*

their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet, and thou shalt know that I am the LORD: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me. Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive delivered? But thus saith the LORD, Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered: for I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children. And I will feed them that oppress thee with their own flesh; and they shall be drunken with their own blood, as with sweet wine: and all flesh shall know that I the Lord am thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob.

The enemies of the Lord's people are his enemies too, and he will overthrow them in his own good time, and make the whole world know that he is their Saviour and Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob.

This exposition consisted of readings from REVELATION 7:9-17; AND ISAIAH 49.

ISAIAH 49:1-17

In this chapter, we have not merely Isaiah speaking concerning the Christ of God; but it is the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah, who here speaks concerning himself.

1. *Listen, O isles, unto me; and hearken, ye people, from far;*

It is very remarkable how constantly the isles are spoken of in this Book of Isaiah, as if it had been foreseen that, in these far-off islands of the sea, the name of Jesus would be greatly magnified. "Listen," says the Messiah, "O isles, unto me; and hearken, ye people, from far."

1. *The LORD hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name.*

Christ Jesus our Lord was spoken of by the spirit of prophecy from his very birth, and long before it; and when he did come into the world, and was born of the Virgin Mary, the stars of heaven spake concerning him, and guided the wise men from the East to the place where the young child lay.

2. *And he hath made my mouth like a sharp sword;*

There are no words anywhere so piercing as the words of our Lord Jesus Christ. When you are giving quotations from various authors, you need never write the name "Jesus" at the bottom of any

of his words, for they proclaim their own origin. “Never man spake like this man.”

2. In the shadow of his hand hath he hid me, and made me polished shaft; in his quiver hath he hid me;

The great weapon of God against sin is his Son Jesus Christ. God has no such means of smiting evil, or effecting his purposes of love, as his own dear Son. This is the “polished shaft” which Jehovah delights to use.

3. And said unto me, Thou art my servant,

Above all others, Christ is the servant of God. He is a Son by nature, a servant by his condescension, a servant for our sakes.

3. O Israel, in whom I will be glorified.

It is very wonderful that the Redeemer should here be called “Israel.” It is not more wonderful, however, than that in another place his people should be called by his name. You remember those two passages in the prophecy of Jeremiah: “This is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS,” and “This is the name wherewith he shall be called, The LORD our righteousness.” There, the people of God take their Lord’s name; and here, Christ takes the name of his people, and himself deigns to be called Israel. Nor is this an unsuitable name for him, for it is he who wrestled on our behalf, and prevailed even as Israel did at Jabbok. Jesus is a greater Prince with God than Jacob ever was. Well, then, doth Jehovah say to him, “Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified.”

4. Then I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for naught, and in vain: yet surely my judgment is with the LORD, and my work with my God.

The Messiah, prophetically looking forward, complained that, during his life on earth, he seemed to labour in vain. The nation was not saved: “he came unto his own, and his own received him not.” He wept over the guilty city of Jerusalem; but those tears did not put out the fires of vengeance. He entreated men to turn to God, but they did not and they would not repent. He seemed to labour in vain, and spend his strength for nought, and in vain.

5. And now, saith the LORD that formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob again to him, Though Israel be not

gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the LORD, and my God shall be my strength.

Even though the Jewish nation be not yet gathered to Christ, his labour was not in vain. God will not suffer his Son to spend his strength for nought.

6. *And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.*

What a blessed word of cheer this is for us poor Gentiles! The favored children of Israel thought us to be little better than dogs; and, behold, we have been lifted up into the children's place. If Israel be not gathered, the Messiah hath become a light to the Gentiles, and God's salvation unto the ends of the earth. Yet we cannot help fervently praying, "Oh, that Israel might soon be gathered to Christ!" Her ingathering will be the time of the fullness of the Gentiles.

7. *Thus saith the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel, and his Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth,*

Who is this but our Divine Lord, Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ of God? These words are spoken of him whom man despised, of him who was despised and rejected of men, of him whom the nation abhorreth, for that favored nation still, alas! abhors the name of Jesus of Nazareth, and will not cherish towards the Christ anything but thoughts of contempt.

7. *To a servant of rulers,*

For, though he was the King of kings, and Lord of lords, he submitted to be a servant to the kings of the earth, and obeyed the rules of human governors. Yet,-

7. *Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the LORD that is faithful, and the Holy One of Israel, and he shalt choose thee.*

The day is coming when he that was spit upon shall be the admired of all mankind. No more the crown of thorns, but many diadems of glory shall rest upon his blessed head; and all men, with loud acclaim, shall salute him as King of kings and Lord of lords.

8. *Thus saith the LORD, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee; and I will preserve*

thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages;

It is the Lord Jesus Christ who shall establish all that is good, and cast down everything that is evil. He shall staunch earth's bleeding wounds, and repair her wilderness wastes. Where he comes, flowers spring up all around his blessed feet.

9. *That thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves. They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places.*

When Christ leads his flock, wherever they go they shall feed; and even if he leads them to the very tops of the hills, he shall make the pastures grow there for them. There is never a place where Christ leadeth us but what it is safe for us to go there. The Shepherd's feet make pasturage for the sheep that follow him; therefore, be not afraid to go wherever he leads you, but rather rejoice that he putteth forth his own sheep, and goeth before them, for "they shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places."

10, 11. *They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them. And I will make all my mountains a way,*

Where, naturally, there could not be a way, on those pathless summits of the loftiest Alps, the Lord says, "I will make all my mountains a way,"-

11. *And my highways shall be exalted.*

"I will throw up causeways." God will make a way for you to get at him if you want to get at him. If you are willing to make a way for God, he will make a way for you; the gulf shall be bridged, the mountain shall be leveled.

12. *Behold, these shall come from far: and, lo, these from the north and from the west; and these from the land of Sinim.*

"The land of Sinim" signifies China. Is it not strange that, in this Book, we should find mention of the land of Sinim, the country of China? But God has a people there, and they shall come to him. I was delighted, last Tuesday, to meet with a brother who had broken bread with us at the Lord's table; he was a poor Chinaman, so he had helped to fulfill this prophecy:

“These shall come from the west; and these from the land of Sinim.”

13-15. *Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth; and break forth into singing, O mountains: for the LORD hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted. But Zion said, The LORD hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me. Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee.*

Will God ever forget his ancient people, the Jews? Never! They forget their God, but Jehovah never forgets his chosen people: “They may forget, yet will I not forget thee.”

16. *Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands;*

“I cannot work, I cannot even open the palm of my hand without seeing the memorials of my chosen people: ‘I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.’”

16, 17. *Thy walls are continually before me. Thy children shall make haste; thy destroyers and they that made thee waste shall go forth of thee.*

For God is full of kindness to his people, and cannot forget them. Oh, that they would never forget him!

ISAIAH 49:1-23

1, 2. *Listen, O isles, unto me; and hearken, ye people, from far; the Lord hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name. And he hath made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me, and made me a polished shaft; in his quiver hath he hid me;*

Our Lord Jesus, that great Prophet of the Church, was in a special manner the Lord’s in the matter of his birth. A wondrous holy mystery hangs about his birth at Bethlehem, — he was, in that respect, the Lord’s in a very remarkable sense. “He hath made my mouth like a sharp sword.” You know how our Lord’s mouth, or the Word of his gospel that issues from his mouth, is like a sharp sword — how it conquers, — how it cuts its way, — how, wherever it comes, it pierces “even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” “In the shadow of his hand hath he hid me.”

You know how the protecting hand of God ever covered Christ, and how his gospel is ever sheltered by the providence of God.

3. *And said unto me, Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified.*

It is wonderful condescension on Christ's part to take the name of his Church so that he himself is called "Israel" in this passage; and there is another passage, equally remarkable, where the Church is allowed to take one of the names of Christ: "This is the name wherewith she shall be called, The Lord our righteousness." Such an intermingling of interests, such a wonderful unit is there between Christ and his Church, that these twain are truly one.

4. *Then I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain: yet surely my judgment is with the LORD, and my work with my God.*

Our Saviour did, in his earthly ministry, to a large extent labour in vain. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not." He was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, yet how few of them recognized him as the good Shepherd. He told his disciples that, after he returned to his Father, those who believed in him should do even greater things than he had done. That promise was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost; and since then it has been fulfilled over and over again in the history of the Christian Church.

5. *And now, saith the LORD that formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob again to him, Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the LORD, and my God shall be my strength.*

What though the Jews still reject the Messiah, their sin does not affect his honour. His glory is still as great as ever it was in the esteem of the Most High.

6. *And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.*

What a blessed passage this is for you and for me, beloved! Strangers to the commonwealth of Israel were we; but, now, we who were afar off are made nigh by the blood of Jesus, and so are made fellow-heirs with the seed of Abraham, partakers of the self-same covenant blessing as the father of the faithful enjoys. In this let us

exceedingly rejoice; and for this, let us praise and magnify the name of the Lord.

7. Thus saith the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel, and his Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth, —

What a true picture this is of the way in which the Jews still treat the promised Messiah! To this day, they gnash their teeth at the very mention of the name of Jesus of Nazareth; and the bitterest words of blasphemy that are ever uttered by human lips come from the mouth of Israel against the Lord Jesus: “him whom the nation abhorreth,”

7. To a servant of rulers, Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the LORD that is faithful, and the Holy One of Israel, and he shall choose thee.

The Father has chosen Christ to be the precious corner-stone of the eternal temple, and he has also chosen all the living stones that are to be joined to him for ever.

8, 9. Thus saith the LORD, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages; that thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves. They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places.

Dear brethren, what honour the Lord has put upon Christ! In proportion as he has been the despised of men, and the abhorred of the Jewish nation, God has made him to be his own delight, his Well-beloved. He displays through him the marvels of his saving power for his own glory. I pray that it may be displayed in our midst just now, and in the way mentioned here: “I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages; that thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness. Shew yourselves.” Come, beloved, after you receive such a message as this from God’s mouth, what prison can hold you? What darkness can conceal you? The word of Christ shall break your bonds asunder, and change your darkness into the glory of noonday. May this gracious work be done for any of you. who are prisoners here!

10. They shall not hunger nor thirst; —

To the woman at the well, Christ said, “Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst.” That is a parallel to this passage:

“They shall not hunger nor thirst; “ —

10. *Neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them.*

Oh, the wondrous sweetness of these exceeding great and precious promises! They are all concerning Christ, you see; undoubtedly, they are given with an eye to us, but yet much more with an eye to him, that he may be glorified in the deliverance and guidance of his people, in the protection of them from danger, and in the abundant provision for the supply of all their needs. It would not be for Christ’s honour to let you die of thirst, poor thirsty one; it would not glorify him to lead you where there were no springs of water. Be sure, then, that God will always do that which will glorify his Son, and he will therefore deal well with you for his sake.

11, 12. *And I will make all my mountains a way, and my highways shall be exalted. Behold, these shall come from far and, lo, these from the north and from the west; and these from the land of Sinim.*

From far-away China, they must come to Christ; the result of his death is not left to haphazard. Some say that his death did something or other, which, somehow or other, will benefit somebody or other; but we never speak: in that indefinite way. We know that Christ, by his death, did eternally redeem his people, and we are quite sure that he will have all those for whom he laid down the ransom price. He died with a clear intent, a definite purpose; and for the joy that was set before him, he “endured the cross, despising the shame.” “He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied.” The divine intent and purpose of the death of Christ cannot possibly be frustrated. He reigneth from the tree, and he shall win and conquer world without end.

13. *Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth; and break forth into singing, O mountains: for the Lord hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted.*

How? Why, by the very coming of Christ, by his birth at Bethlehem, and all the blessings which come with the Incarnate God, his afflicted ones are consoled, and all his people are divinely

comforted. Shall we not, then, rejoice in Christ, who is himself so full of joy that he teaches the very heavens to sing, and the mountains to break forth into praise?

14. *But Zion said, —*

Hear the lament of the poor Jewish Church, like a castaway left all alone, —

14. *The LORD hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me.*

When we are glad In the Lord, and are singing out our heart's joy, there is pretty sure to be someone or other who sorrowfully sighs, "The Lord hath forsaken me." — People say that there never was a feast so well furnished but that somebody went away unsatisfied; but God will not have it so at his festivals; and hence, the rest of the chapter shows how the Lord comforted this poor Zion, whose lamentation and mourning he had heard. Notice how he begins: —

15. *Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb?*

"Can a woman" — the tenderer parent of the two, — "forget her child," — her own child, her feeble little child that still depends upon her for its nutriment and life, — "her sucking child," — .

15. *Yea, they may forget, —*

It is just possible; there have been such monstrosities: "they may forget," —

15. *Yet will I not forget thee.*

"Yet, saith the Lord, should nature change,
And mothers monsters prove,

Sion still dwells upon the heart Of everlasting love."

How that gracious assurance should comfort the little handful, the "remnant weak and small" of God's people among the Jews! How it should also comfort any of God's servants who are under a cloud, and who have lost for a while the enjoyment of his presence!

16. *Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; —*

Where they must be seen, and where he can do nothing without touching his people while doing it. When a name is engraven on the hand with which a man works, that name goes into his work, and leaves its impress on the work.

16, 17. *Thy walls are continually before me. Thy children shall make haste; thy destroyers and they that made thee waste shall go forth of thee.*

Jerusalem, the very Jerusalem that is in Palestine, shall be rebuilt. God will remember her walls, and the Church of God in Israel shall yet rise from that sad low estate in which it has been these many centuries; and all God's cast-down ones shall be comforted, and his churches, that seem to be left to die, shall be raised up again, for our God is no changeling. His heart does not come and go towards the sons of men.

“Whom once he loves, he never leaves,
But loves them to the end.”

18. *Lift up thine eyes round about, and behold: all these gather themselves together, and come to thee.*

What are all converted Gentiles doing, after all, but coming to the one Church? It is no longer a matter of Jew or Gentile, but all who believe are one in Christ Jesus. Let poor Zion rejoice that she herself is enriched by the conversion of these far-off sinners of the Gentiles.

18. *As I live, saith the LORD, thou shalt surely clothe thee with them all, as with an ornament, and bind them on thee, as a bride doeth.*

Converts are the garments of the church, her bridal array, her ornaments and her jewels. I wish that all churches thought so; but many of them think that gorgeous architecture, the garnishing of the material building in which they meet, and the sound of sweet music, and the smell of fragrant incense and choice flowers, make up the dignity and glory of a church; but they do no such thing. Converts are the true glory of a church: “Thou shalt surely clothe thee with them all, as with an ornament; and bind them on thee, as a bride doeth.”

19, 20. *For thy waste and thy desolate places, and the land of thy destruction, shall even now be too narrow by reason of the inhabitants, and they that swallowed thee up shall be far away. The children which thou shalt have, after thou hast lost the other, —*

The children of thy childlessness, — so it runs, — the children of thy widowhood. It was strange that she should have children then; it is not so among in m, but it is so with the Church of God:

“The children which thou shalt have, after thou hast lost the other,”

20-23. *Shall say again in thine ears, The place is too strait for me: give place to me that I may dwell. Then shalt thou say in thine heart, Who hath begotten me these, seeing I have lost my children, and am desolate, a captive, and removing to and fro? and who hath brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; these, where had they been? Thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people: and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders. And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers: they shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; —*

I have heard this passage quoted as a reason why there should be a State Church, — that kings should nourish the Church, — Henry VIII., for instance, and George IV. It was poor milk, I am sure, that they ever gave the Church of God. Yet I have no objection whatever to this text being carried out to the full, — ay, to the very letter, — only mind where the kings are to be put. What place does the verse say that they are to occupy? “They shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet.” There is no headship of the Church here, nothing of that sort; the kings are to be at the feet of the Church, and that is what the State ought to do, submit itself to God, and obey his commands, and give full liberty to the preaching of the gospel. This is all that the true Church of Christ asks, and all she can ever fairly take if she is loyal to her Lord.

23. *And thou shalt know that I am the LORD.*

“Jehovah.” “Thou shalt understand the greatness of thy God, his infiniteness, his majesty, his all-sufficiency. ‘Thou shalt know that I am the I AM.’”

23. *For they shall not be ashamed that wait for me.*

Glory be to his holy name, none that wait for him shall ever have cause to be ashamed; may we all be of that blessed number, for Christ’s sake! Amen.

ISAIAH 49:13-26

13. *Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth; and break forth into singing, O mountains; for the LORD hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted.*

When God blesses his Church, he blesses the world through her. Hence, heaven and earth are invited to be glad in the gladness of the Church of God. Oh, that God would visit his church; nay, he has already done so, and I feel inclined to cry out, as the text does, “Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth: and break forth into singing, O mountains: for the LORD hath comforted his people.”

14. *But Zion said, the LORD hath forsaken me, and my LORD hath forgotten me.*

We often judge contrary to the truth; and when God is blessing us, we dream that he has forgotten us. Oh, wicked unbelief; cruel unbelief! It robs God of glory; it robs us of comfort. It snatches the song out of our mouth, and fills our soul with groaning: “Zion said, the LORD hath forsaken me, and my LORD hath forgotten me.”

15. *Can a woman forget the sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet I will not forget thee.*

The child is in a condition in which it reminds the mother of itself; her sucking child, her own child. Can she forget it? It is not according to nature, —

“‘Yet,’ saith the Lord, ‘should nature change,
And mothers monsters prove,

Zion still dwells upon the heart
Of everlasting love.’”

What is true of God’s Church as a whole, is true of every member of it. If any of you think that God has passed over you, one of his believing children, you think what is untrue. He cannot do it. It would be contrary to his nature. As long as he is God, he must remember his people.

16. *Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands;*

How appropriately Christ can say this when he looks on the nail-prints, “I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands”! As I said, this morning, Jesus can give nothing, he can take nothing, he can do nothing, he can hold nothing, without remembering his people: “I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.” How I love that verse of Toplady’s hymn that speaks of this blessed truth! —

“My name from the palms of his hands Eternity will not erase;
Impress’d on his heart it remains In marks of indelible grace:
Yes, I to the end shall endure,
As sure as the earnest is given;
More happy, but not more secure,
The glorified spirits in heaven.”

16, 17. *Thy walls are continually before me. Thy children shall make haste;*

There shall be many of them. Converts shall be added to the church in great numbers. They shall hurry up; they shall not be long in coming. Very often they delay too long. The promise is, “Thy children shall make haste.”

17. *Thy destroyers and they that make thee waste shall go forth of thee.*

I wish this were carried out. If it were, many of the churches of Christ, which are plagued with false doctrines and worldly habits, which are laying them waste, would be delivered from those curses. The enemies outside the walls, however malicious they are, will never be so mischievous as the traitors inside the fortress. Save Troy from the wooden horse, and save Zion from the traitors in her midst, that seek to do her harm.

18. *Lift up thine eyes round about, and behold; all these gather themselves together, and come to thee.*

There is a great company coming. The church is going to be increased. Have faith in God. We are not going to receive them now by ones and twos; we thank God we receive them by tens and scores. They are coming by hundreds and by thousands; let us expect them. By faith, let us see them even now coming.

18. *As I live, saith the LORD, thou shalt surely clothe thee with them all, as with an ornament, and bind them on thee, as a bride doeth.*

What an ornament to a church her converts are! These are our jewels. We care nothing for gorgeous architecture or grand music in the worship of God. Our true building is composed of our converts; our best music is their confession of faith. May God give us more of it!

19-21. *For thy waste and thy desolate places, and the land of thy destruction, shall even now be too narrow by reason of the*

inhabitants, and they that swallowed thee up shall be far away. The children which thou shalt have, after thou hast lost the other, shall say again in thine ears, The place is too strait for me: give place to me that I may dwell. Then shalt thou say in thine heart, Who hath begotten me these, seeing I have lost my children, and am desolate, a captive, and removing to and fro? And who hath brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; these, where had they been?

Sometimes a church is brought very low; there are no additions, there is no unity, everything is breaking up, and going to pieces. When God visits that church, what a change is seen! Then people come flocking to it, and the church wonders whence the converts came. May the Lord make us wonder in that fashion! It will take a great deal to astonish us, after all these years of mercy; yet the Lord can do it. It may be he will make these latter days to be better than the former. Though we have had nearly forty years of blessing together, he may yet increase it, and give us to rejoice yet more and more.

22. *Thus saith the LORD GOD, Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people; and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders.*

We do not mind how they are brought if they do but come; some in the arms, and some after the Oriental method of putting the child on the shoulder. When God lifts up his hand, great wonders of mercy and grace are wrought.

23. *And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers:*

It will take a long time before they learn that art, for kings and queens have generally been destroyers of the Church of Christ. Those will be grand days when kings shall be the nourishers of the Church, and queens her nursing mothers.

23. *They shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet:*

I have heard the first part of this verse quoted as an argument for the union of Church and State: "Kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and queens thy nursing mothers." I have not the slightest objection, if they will bow down to the Church "with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of her feet." What is proposed to us is that

the Church should bow down to the State, with her face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of the feet of the state, by becoming obedient to rules and regulations made by princes and parliaments. This is not according to the mind of God, nor according to the heart of his people.

23. *And thou shalt know that I am the LORD: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me.*

If we wait for Christ, for his coming, for the help which he brings, for the salvation that is wrought by him, we shall not be ashamed.

24, 25. *Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive delivered? But thus saith the LORD, Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered: for I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children.*

And I will feed them that oppress thee with their own flesh; and they shall be drunken with their own blood, as with sweet wine: and all flesh shall know that I the LORD am thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob. The mighty may hold their prey with a strong hand; but there is a stronger hand that will deliver the captive. It is Jehovah, the Saviour, the Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob, who says, "I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children." Here is a divine promise for every parent to plead: "I will save thy children." May the Lord give you grace to claim that promise, even now, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

ISAIAH 49:24-26

24. *Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive delivered?*

Yes, this shall happen when God makes bare his arm, and stretches it forth to rescue his captive people.

25, 26. *But thus saith the LORD, Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered: for I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children. And I will feed them that oppress thee with their own flesh; and they shall be drunken with their own blood, as with sweet*

wine: and all flesh shall know that I the LORD am thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob.

This is the promise of Christ to his Church, both the Jewish and the gentile Church. He will deliver her from all her afflictions and distresses, and her enemies shall feed upon their own flesh, or, they shall be overthrown by mutual enmities. As it was, of old when those that were confederate against Israel suddenly fell to quarreling, and slew each other, so is it, sooner or later, in the battle between truth and error. By-and-by, there is a split in the adversaries' camp, and they devour one another. Let any wrong thing alone, and it will break in pieces of itself. All real and abiding cohesion is gone when men seek to be united against the Lord, and against his Anointed. They shall confute one another, or they shall eat their own words, and so they shall, as it were, feed upon their own flesh.

This exposition consisted of readings from ISAIAH 49:24-26; AND 50.

ISAIAH 50

1. Thus saith the LORD,

There is always something weighty coming when you have this preface. If God speaks, we ought to hear with reverence, with attention.

1. Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement, whom I have put away? or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you?

God is here addressing his ancient people; they had been given up, as it were, left, forsaken. They compared themselves to a wife who had been divorced by her husband, or to children who had been sold by their father because of his extreme poverty. The Lord says, "Now, tell me, have I really put away my chosen people as a man in a pet puts away his wife? Have I really sold you to profit by you? What benefit is it to me that you are carried away captive, and that you are left without comfort?"

1. Behold, for your iniquities have ye sold yourselves, and for your transgressions is your mother put away.

It was not God's changeableness, but their own sinfulness, that had brought upon them all their sufferings. The Jews might have remained a nation in possession of their own land to this day, if they had not turned aside unto idols. It was not that God cast away his

people whom he did foreknow; but they cast him off, they sold themselves. Now, if any child of God has fallen into trouble of heart, and has lost his comfort, let him not blame God; his sorrow is caused by his own act and deed. And if any man or woman here should be in deep trouble brought on by sin, let them not set it down to their destiny, let them not call God unkind; but let them take the blame to themselves: “For your iniquities have ye sold yourselves, and for your transgressions is your mother put away.”

2. Wherefore, when I came, was there no man? when I called, was there none to answer?

It is Christ who is speaking here by the mouth of the prophet. When he came, there was “no man.” He could not find in all the nation any faithful one to help him in his great redemptive work. “He came unto his own, and his own received him not.” He preached repentance and faith throughout the land; but they cried, “Crucify, him! Crucify him!” They loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

2. Is my hand shortened at all, that it cannot redeem? or have I no power to deliver?

If you are in the worst plight in which you can be, God can still help you. Despair of yourself; but do not despair of him. If you have come to the very bottom of all things, and the last ray of hope is quenched in midnight darkness, God is still the same. Hear what he says to you, “Is my hand shortened at all, that it cannot redeem? or have I no power to deliver?” Can he not break the bonds of drunkenness? Can he not deliver the unchaste from their vile passions? Can he not pick up from the dunghill the outcast and the offcast? Is anything too hard for the Lord? Is the salvation of the greatest sinners impossible for him to accomplish? That can never be, for he is “mighty to save.”

2. Behold, at my rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a wilderness; their fish stinketh, because there is no water, and dieth for thirst.

God divided the Red Sea, he parted the Jordan asunder, and made a way for his people to pass over. He who has done this can do anything. When God takes up the case, impossibility is not in the dictionary. However great your sorrow, however deep your

misfortune, or however grievous your sin, if God comes to deal with it, he will make short work of all your troubles, and all your despair.

3, 4. *I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering. The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned.*

This is Christ speaking again. When he came here, though he found no man able to help him, none to come and join him in the redemption of his people, yet he gave himself up to the tremendous task. He became instructed of the Father. He was taught to speak a word to weary ones. “Never man spake like this Man.” There is no gospel like his gospel, no doctrine like his doctrine. He went to God in private “morning by morning.” He received his message from his Father, and he came and delivered it to the people. Oh, what a glorious Christ we have!

5. *The Lord GOD hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back.*

He had his ear bored, as slaves had when they would not go out free, but meant to remain with their master. Christ had a bored ear, an opened ear. He never rebelled against God’s will. He was obedient to the Father, even unto death. If you want to know how obedient he was, hear me read the next verse: —

6. *I gave my back to the smiters, and my checks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting.*

Now let me go back a little, and read again the third verse, “I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering.” “I gave my back to the smiters, and my checks to them that plucked off the hair.” It is the same divine Person, who musters the hosts of heaven till the very skies are blackened with the artillery of God, who here says, “I gave my back to the smiters, bowing down to the brutal Roman scourge, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair.” You remember the scene that I pictured last Sunday night, the whole band of soldiers mocking Christ, and even spitting upon him. That was the fulfillment of these words, “I hid not my face front shame and spitting.” That same Christ, without whom was not anything made that was made, whose face is the sun of heaven, whose glory is matchless and unsearchable, says, “I hid

not my face from shame and spitting.” Do not say, then, that God has no love to you. Do not say that he has cast you away as a husband divorces his wife. Talk no more as if there were no help for you, no means of your deliverance. Behold how low your Saviour stooped, how gracious he was to suffer so much for guilty men, and be encouraged to trust him. He who gave his back to the smiters says to you, “The chastisement of your peace was upon me, and with my stripes you are healed.”

7. For the Lord GOD will help me;

This is Christ still speaking. Though God himself, yet as the God-Man, looking to his Father for help in the dread struggle through which he went to save us, he declared, “The Lord God will help me.”

7. Therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed.

And he was not; he went through with all that he had undertaken. He drank our bitter cup till none of the dregs remained. He bore the terrible wrath of God, which else would have rested on it for ever; God helped him, and he bore it all.

8, 9. He is near that justifieth me; who will contend with, me? let us stand together: who is mine adversary? let him come near to me. Behold, the Lord GOD will help me; who is he that shall condemn me? lo, they all shall wax old as a garment; the moth shall eat them up.

Will any now come to battle against Christ, and hope to conquer him? Voltaire used to say, “Crush the Wretch!” but where is Voltaire now? And those who agreed with Voltaire, where are they now? But Jesus ever liveth and reigneth, and God is with him. He who shall once come to battle with our glorious Lord shall soon know the power of Christ’s weakness, and the omnipotence of his death.

10. Who is among you —

Here is a very blessed question. Christ, having passed through all the trouble that could be passed through, and having come out of it triumphant, now looks round on all his followers, on all the children of God, and he says, “Who is among you” —

10. *That feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God.*

Do you see the drift of it? Our Saviour trusted, and he was not confounded. He stayed himself upon God even when he said, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” and he came off a conqueror. Trust you in God, and you also will be victorious. Let your strength be drawn from that strong and mighty One who is pledged to help all who trust him, and you shall triumph even as Jesus did. Do you refuse to trust God? Then listen to this: —

11. *Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled.*

If you think to make yourselves happy in sin, go and do it. If you fancy that your own righteousness will save you, go and try it.

11. *This shall ye have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow.*

Your fire shall not warm you; your sparks shall not enlighten you; you will have to lie down to die, and you shall lie down in sorrow. O my dear hearers, the time will come when every one of us must put off this body, and lie down to die! God grant that we may none of us have to lie down in sorrow; but instead thereof, having trusted in God, may he light our candle for us in the last moment, that we may fall asleep in Jesus, and wake up in his likeness in the everlasting glory! May God bless to us the reading of his Word! Amen.

ISAIAH 50

This chapter might well have been written by our Lord Jesus Christ himself at the time when he was upon the earth.

1. *Thus saith the LORD, Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement, whom I have put away? or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you?*

There were some who said God had put away, like a divorced woman, his ancient people, that he had sold his children into slavery; but he says, “It is not so. Where is the bill of divorcement? To whom have I sold you?”

1. *Behold, for your iniquities have ye sold yourselves, and for your transgressions is your mother put away.*

That is to say, the nation, which was their mother, had lost the favor of God; not because of his capriciousness, but because their sins had cried aloud for justice and for judgment. It could not be that God should be in friendly relationship with such a people, so hypocritical, so false, so every way rebellious against him.

2. Wherefore, when I came, was there no man? when I called, was there none to answer?

Christ came to this world at a time when there practically seemed to be none left on the earth who were good for anything. The Pharisees, who were, outwardly, the most religious of men, were proud formalists and base hypocrites, and the whole nation had gone astray from God, so that Christ might well ask, “When I came, was there no man? When I called, was there none to answer?”

2. Is my hand shortened at all, that it cannot redeem? or have I no power to deliver? behold, at my rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a wilderness; their fish stinketh because there is no water, and dieth for thirst.

Here the Lord reminds them of what he did at the Red Sea. This same Christ, who came here, and found none to answer to his call, is the true God who was the Redeemer of Israel. He led the tribes through the Red Sea, drying it up by the word of his mouth, that there might be a way for his ransomed to pass through; yet, when this great Redeemer came to earth, so far as the most of men were concerned, there were none to welcome him. Even though he came in love and tenderness, there were none to answer to him.

3, 4. I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering. The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned.

Notice the wonderful contrast between the third verse and the fourth. It is the same “I” who says, “I clothe the heavens with blackness,” who becomes a scholar in God’s school, and bows his ear to listen to the teachings of the Father. “Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience.” He was so great that he counted it not a prize to be grasped to be equal with God, dividing the sea, and covering the heavens with blackness; yet he condescended to take

upon himself the form of a servant, and as a servant he received his instructions from the great Lord of all.

5, 6. *The Lord GOD hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting.*

That same Divine One was, in due time, veiled in human flesh; and, then, he, who covered the heavens with blackness, gave his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to them that plucked off the hair. Oh, wondrous condescension of our glorious Lord! I want you again to notice the contrast in this chapter; let me read two verses one after another, "I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering." "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting." I think anything · Imight say would only detract from the marvellous force of contrast which these words reveal between the Godhead and the humanity of Christ.

7, 8. *For the Lord GOD will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed. He is near that justifieth me; who will contend with me? let us stand together: who is mine adversary? let him come near to me.*

Christ is innocent, and therefore he defies all his accusers. Christ has suffered the penalty of the sin which he bore on our behalf; but he has so completely put it away that, notwithstanding our guilt, he defies all our accusers, and there rings through earth and heaven this bold challenge, "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."

9. *Behold, the Lord GOD will help me; who is he that shall condemn me? lo, they all shall wax old as a garment; the moth shall eat them up.*

The enemies of Christ shall all pass away, they shall be utterly destroyed. Now comes a blessed lesson for us. As Christ persevered in his great work even to the end, so let us do the same.

10. *Who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God.*

Let not the darkness keep you back any more than it did your Master, still go on, and stay yourselves upon your God.

11. *Behold, all ye that kindle a fire,—*

Listen to this, ye who live without God, yet think yourselves happy; ye who have no hope of the great hereafter, yet are content with the present: “Behold, all ye that kindle a fire,”—

11. *That compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and, in the sparks that ye have kindled.*

“Be happy while you may; have ‘a short life and a merry one,’ if that is your choice.”

11. *This shall ye have of mine hand;*

When your walking is done, see what will be the end of it—

11. *Ye shall lie down in sorrow.*

ISAIAH 50

1. *Thus saith the LORD, Where is the bill of your mother’s divorcement, whom I have put away?*

Sometimes, the headings to the chapters in our Bible give us the meaning of the passage. They are, of course, not inspired, and are merely put there by the translators but, sometimes, they are little comments upon the text. It is so in the heading of this chapter: — “Christ sheweth that the dereliction of the Jews is not to be imputed to him, by his ability to save, by his obedience in that work, and by his confidence in that assistance,” so that the Lord Jesus here speaks to the Jewish Church. The great Redeemer, “the mighty One of Jacob,” thus speaks to his chosen people Israel: “Where is the bill of your mother’s divorcement, whom I have put away?”

1. *Or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you? Behold, for your iniquities have ye sold yourselves, and for your transgressions is your mother put away.*

It was sin that caused the alienation between Israel and her God, and it is sin that is the cause of all the estrangement from God in the world. A sinful man, so long as he continues to live in sin, cannot love a holy God.

2, 3. *Wherefore, when I came, was there no man? when I called, was there none to answer? Is my hand shortened at all, that it can't redeem? or have I no power to deliver? behold, at my rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a wilderness: their fish stinketh, because there is no water, and dieth for thirst. I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering.*

What a glorious God this is who says that he has not divorced his people!

How mighty he is; yea, almighty! All power is in his hands. Notice who he is, for he goes on to describe himself: —

4. *The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned.*

Just as scholars learn from their teacher. It was a wondrous stoop for the Omnipotent to become a learner; but he descended lower than that.

5. *The Lord GOD hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back.*

This was another step in the ladder of Christ's humiliation, but he went lower still. Read the 3rd verse again, and then read the 6th. "I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering."

6, 7. *I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting. For the Lord GOD will help me, therefore shall I not be confounded, therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed.*

Even though he had to stoop so low as to endure shame and spitting, he knew that the ultimate result would be glory to God and to himself also. He had no thought of despairing. It had been already written of him, "He shall not fail nor be discouraged." He shall surely accomplish the work which his Father gave him to do. The next verse is probably the one from which Paul took that grand challenge of his, "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died," and so on. He takes out of the mouth of Christ his words of confidence and puts them into the mouth of all Christ's people.

8. *He is near that justifieth me; who will contend with me?*

Our Lord Jesus Christ was justified in his resurrection. He took his people's sin upon him, and therefore he had to die in their place; but his work was so complete that he was himself justified as well as all his people and he challenges anyone to lay anything to his charge.

8-10. *Let us stand together: who is mine adversary? let him come near to me. Behold, the Lord God will help me, who is he that shall condemn me? lo, they all shall wax old as a garment; the moth shall eat them up. Who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light?*

It is the Saviour still speaking, for he knew what it was to walk in darkness, and to have no light. And what terrible darkness it was, my brethren! What an awful thing it was to him to have so suffer the withdrawal of the light of his Father's countenance from him! He knows, therefore, what this trial means; and being full of compassion, he offers to us the kindest counsel if we are in a similar condition. What does he tell us to do? Harken, you who do love the Lord, yet who are in the dark.

10. *Let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God.*

In darkness or in the light, take heed that ye do this, when everything about you seems contrary to the divine promises, and your spirits are ready to sink, take heed to this good counsel of your Saviour: "Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God."

11. *Behold, all ye that kindle a fire,*
Ye who would fain save yourselves, —

11. *That compass yourselves about with sparks:*
Or, firebrands, —

11. *Walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks —*
Or, flambeaux —

11. *That ye have kindled.*

That will be the end of it. This grand illumination of yours, — all your good works, all your glorious intellect, and I know not what, — what will come of it?

11. *This shall ye have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow.*

God save us all from such a lying down so that at the last, for Christ's sake! Amen.

This exposition consisted of readings from ISAIAH 49:24-26; AND 50.

ISAIAH 51:1-13

1, 2. *Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged. Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you: for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him.*

This is for your comfort, dear friends. If God could make out of Abraham and Sarah so great a nation as that of Israel, what is there that he cannot do? Do you say that the cause of God is brought very low in these evil days? It is not so low as when there seemed to be none but Abraham faithful in the whole world; yet God made that one mighty man to be like a foundation upon which he built up the chosen people, to whose keeping he committed the sacred oracles; and if he did that, what can he not do? However low you may individually sink, or however weak you may feel, look back to Abraham, and learn from his experience what God can do with you.

3. *For the Lord shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord;*

Then what will her gardens be in those glorious days? When her very wilderness is like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord, what will her cultivated places be? Oh, what grand times are yet in store for the Church of the living God! Let us hope on, and pray on, and work on, never doubting; for, as John Wesley said, “the best of all is, God is with us;” and if he is with us, all must be well.

3. *Joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody.*

For God’s Church is no prison-house, no den of dragons, or cage of owls: it is a place for joy and gladness, for thanksgiving, and the voice of melody. Come, then, and let us bless the Lord with all our hearts. God is still good to Zion, and he will not desert her. He did much for Abraham; he will do much for us. We may find many precious things in the hole of that pit whence we were digged.

4, 5. *Hearken unto me, my people; and give ear unto me, O my nation: for a law shall proceed from me, and I will make my judgment to rest for a light of the people. My righteousness is near;*

my salvation is gone forth, and mine arms shall judge the people; the isles shall wait upon me, and on mine arm shall they trust.

God will not always be forgotten; man will not always trust to his fellow-man to save him, or put his confidence in the idols he has himself made. The day is coming when the King of Kings shall come to claim his own again, and his loyal people shall see the kingdom spread as it never has done yet. Blessed be his name, this promise shall certainly be fulfilled, “the isles shall wait upon me, and on mine arm shall they trust.” It is remarkable that there are so many prophecies made concerning the isles; and that it is in islands, at this day, that the gospel seems to have spread so marvelously. In our own British isles, in the isles of the southern seas, and in Madagascar, what wonders of grace have been wrought!

6, 7. *Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner: but my salvation shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished.*

What a mercy it is to get a hold of something that will never wear out, and that can never be dissolved, — something against which the tooth of time may fret itself in vain! This abiding, indestructible thing is the eternal salvation — the everlasting righteousness — which the Lord Jesus has wrought out and brought in for his people. Happy people who have this treasure for their eternal heritage!

7. *Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, —*

In the first verse of this chapter, there is a message for those who follow after righteousness; here is a word for those who know it: “Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness,” —

7. *the people in whose heart is my law; fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings.*

If you are true to God, they will be sure to revile you. A Christian should not expect to go to heaven in a whole skin; it is a part of the nature of serpents and snakes in the grass to try, if they can, to bite at the heel of the child of God, even as that old serpent, the devil, bit at the heel of him who has broken the dragon’s head. “Fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings,” for your Master suffered in the same fashion long ago.

8. *For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool: but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation.*

Let them snarl, and let them bite, if they will; they can do no harm to that righteousness which shall be for ever, or to that salvation which is from generation to generation.

9. *Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old.*

We long for God to come again upon the stage of action, to interpose in the world's affairs, and to let men see what he can do. Time was when he was to be found by the burning bush, or on the mountain's brow, or in the cave, or by the well, and earth seemed then like the vestibule of heaven. Come again, O Jehovah, great Lord and King, let thy goings be seen once more in the sanctuary.

9, 10. *Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon! Art thou not it which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; that hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over.*

Our prayer is that God may do all this over again; and the answer to our prayer is found in the following verse.

11. *Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion;-*

Just as they came out of Egypt of old, and with singing and with sound of timbrel, marched through the Red Sea, so shall God bring his people "with singing unto Zion; —

11. *And everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away.*

Just as Pharaoh turned his chariot to flee from Israel, and the depths covered him and all his Egyptians, so sorrow and mourning shall flee away from the redeemed of the Lord.

12. *I, even I, am he that comforteth you:*

Oh, the beauty and blessing of these glorious words! Let me read them again: "I, even I, am he that comforteth you."

12. *Who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass;--*

You see the grass, cut down by the mower's scythe, lying in long rows, and withering in the sun; are you afraid of that grass?

“no,” you say; “certainly not.” then, be not afraid of men, for they shall be cut down after the same fashion.

13. *And forgettest the Lord thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth; and hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? and where is the fury of the oppressor?*

Why! in the hand of God, and he can let it out, or hold it in, according to his infinite wisdom and almighty power. Why, then, art thou afraid? Is there any might in all the world except the might of the Omnipotent One? Can anything happen but what he permits? Be thou still, then, and rest in him: “Who art thou, that thou shouldst be afraid of a man that shall die, and forgettest the Lord thy Maker?” In thy fear there is something of egotism, something of thine own self. Lay that aside; and, as a babe does not feel itself wise enough to judge of danger, but sleeps calmly upon its mother’s bosom, so do thou. All is well that is in God’s hand; and thou also art in God’s hand if thou hast received his atonement in the person of his dear Son. Wherefore, give up thy heart to joy and gladness, and let sorrow and sighing flee from thee. Even now, let this be your happy song, as it is also mine,-

“All that remains for me Is but to love and sing,
And wait until the angels come to bear me to the King.”

ISAIAH 53

Mr. Moody was once asked whether his creed was in print. In his own prompt way, he replied, “Yes, sir; you will find it in the fifty-third of Isaiah.” A condensed Bible is in this chapter. You have the whole gospel here.

1. *Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed?*

Nobody ever does believe either prophets or preachers except through the work of God’s Spirit and grace. The Lord’s arm must be revealed, or else the truth proclaimed by his servants will never be accepted. All the prophets speak in these words of Isaiah, as if they all stood together, and lifted up this wail, “Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?”

2. For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.

This is Israel's King, the long-promised Messiah; yet when he comes to Bethlehem, see what "a tender plant" he is! Look at the house of David, almost extinct; and see what "a root out of a dry ground" is — "The stem of Jesse's rod." When Jesus comes before the sons of men, dressed in the garb of a peasant, a poor man, a sorrowful man, a man who had not where to lay his head, notice how men say, by their actions, if not in words, "There is no beauty that we should desire him."

3. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

We rightly sing, —

"Rejected and despised of men,
Behold a man of woe!

And grief his close companion still Through all his life below!

"We held him as condemn'd of heaven,
An outcast from his God;
While for our sins he groan'd, he bled,
Beneath his Fathers rod."

His own people, ay, his own chosen ones, turned away from him; and you and I did so till God's grace changed our hearts, and opened our eyes. But why was he "despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief"? Why was the Prince of Israel such a suffering man? He had no sin for which to be chastened. There was no evil in his nature that needed to be fetched out with the rod of correction. Oh, no! The answer is very different: —

4, 5. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But 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.

What a joyous note there is in that sorrowful line, "With his stripes we are healed"! Glory be to God, we are healed of our soul-sickness, cured of the disease of sin, by this strange surgery, not by stripes upon ourselves, but by stripes upon our Lord!

6. *All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

The general sin of the race, the special sin of the individual, all gathered, heap upon heap, mountain upon mountain, and laid by God on Christ. We sometimes sing, —

“I lay my sins on Jesus,
The spotless Lamb of God;
He bears them all and frees us From the accursed load.
I bring my guilt to Jesus,
To wash my crimson stains White in his blood most precious,
Till not a spot remains;”

and I will find no fault with that hymn; but the real laying of sin upon Jesus was effected by God himself: “The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

7. *He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.*

He never pleaded for himself. At the earthly judgment-seat, he said not a word for himself, so that even Pilate “marvelled greatly.” Oh, the eloquence of that silence! Truly it was golden. Omnipotence restrained omnipotence. Christ held himself in as with bit and bridle. “As a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.”

8, 9. *He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.*

Therefore he was allowed to be buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathaea. He was no felon, whose body must be cast out to the kites and jackals; but “He made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.”

10. *Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.*

Wicked men slew our Lord, and their crime was the blackest in the world's history; but, unconsciously, they were carrying out "the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God." "It pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief." Christ died for others, but he lives again; and through him a godly seed shall live for ever and ever: "When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand." He is made to prosper because he died.

11. *He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied:*

His death-pangs were birth-pangs: "the travail of his soul." He sees the multitude that shall be born through his death, and he is content.

11. *By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many;*

Dear hearer, will he justify you? Do you know him? If you know him so as to trust him, he has justified you; you are a justified man tonight. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." "By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many."

11. *For he shall bear their iniquities.*

They kick against this doctrine nowadays. They cannot bear it; yet it is the very marrow of the gospel, Christ bearing sin that was not his own, that we might be covered with a righteousness which is not our own, but comes from him. Paul, by the Spirit, put this great truth thus, "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."

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.*

Thanks be unto God for this great sacrifice!

ISAIAH 53

We will read, this evening, the fifty-third chapter of "the Gospel according to Isaiah," as we may very properly call it.

1. *Who hath believed our report?*

All the prophets reported that which had been revealed to them concerning Christ, they testified what they knew with regard to

Jesus of Nazareth, the suffering Saviour; yet how few, comparatively, of the Jewish people, —how few, indeed, of any people, compared with the great mass of mankind, accepted their testimony, and believed their report? No blessing can come through that report if it be not believed, and this is the sorrow of the Lord's servants in every age, that so many refuse to believe it. "Who hath believed our report?"

1. And to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed?

For God's power both produces and accompanies faith. No man believes in Christ except as the arm of the Lord is revealed, or made bare, so as to work faith in him. This is the great grief of God's ministers today, that so often we have to go back to our homes, and cry, "Who hath believed our report?" It is not a doubtful report, it is not an incredible message, it is not a matter of indifference to our hearers; but it is an all-important declaration the accuracy of which is guaranteed by the God of truth, yet who hath believed it? Oh, that the arm of the Lord were made bare in the hearts of multitudes of men! What was the reason of this unbelief in the case of the Jews to whom the prophet spoke, and of those to whom the Messiah afterwards came? It was the lowly estate of Christ that caused them to stumble, and they asked, in contempt, "Is not this the carpenter's son?" They looked for external pomp and martial prowess, so they could not perceive the internal beauty and majestic holiness of the Lord Jesus.

2. For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.

Christ hath both form and comeliness to the spiritual eye; but, to the carnal, he seems only like ordinary men, except that his visage is more marred than that of other men, and his form than that of any of the sons of men. "He hath no form nor comeliness." The ungodly look for something that can excite their admiration, or create mirth for them; and they see nothing of this in the Christ of God. But little can we blame them, for, not very long ago, many of us were ourselves just as blind as they now are. Do you not feel, beloved, that you can smite upon your breasts with deepest regret for the length of time in which you were blind to the beauties of your Redeemer? Alas! that the prophet's words were ever true of us,

“When we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.”

3. *He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.*

It was not only Christ’s humiliation, but his sorrow, which became a stumbling-block in the way of the unbelieving Jews. How could they, who were looking for an earthly deliverer to come in regal splendor, believe in a weeping Messiah? How could they delight in him from whom men hid their faces, when they were expecting a mighty leader before whom, all would submit themselves? Ah, friends, there was a time when we did not esteem the Lord, when we despised him! We also cared not for the Man of sorrows; though all his sorrows were borne on our account, we passed him by with utter indifference. O wretched heart! Well might I wish to tear thee from my bosom as I think that ever thou shouldst have been callous to thy Lord, the Well-beloved! It was a death indeed which thou didst call life, when thou didst live without thy Lord: “We hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.”

4. *Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows:*

What a discovery this truth seems to be! How it bursts upon the prophet and his hearers and amazes them! “Surely,” they say, “can it be really so that ‘he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows?’” Yes, it is indeed so; there is no accounting for the sufferings of the perfect Christ except by this explanation, that he was bearing our griefs, and carrying the sorrows that we ought to have carried for our own sin.

4, 5. *Yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But 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.*

If this does not teach the doctrine of a vicarious atonement, what does it teach? If Christ’s sufferings were not endured in our room, and place, and stead, what do these words mean?

6. *All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way;*

All sinning, but each one sinning in his own particular fashion. It is well to acknowledge the common guilt of all men, but it is the token of true repentance that it dwells mainly on its own special offense. Brethren, we have no occasion to find fault with one another, for “all we like sheep have gone astray.” But we have great reason for each man to find special fault with himself, for “we have turned every one to his own way.”

6. *And the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

What a mercy it is that every sort of sin — the sin of the mass, and the sin of the particular sinner, — has been laid by Jehovah himself upon his Only-begotten Son! “Jehovah hath made to meet on him the iniquity of us all.” Mark you, not merely “the chastisement” of which the previous verse spoke, but “the iniquity” itself; and albeit there are some who say that this cannot be, and that iniquity cannot be shifted from one person to another, it has been done, and there is an end of it.

7. *He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth:*

The sin laid upon him was none of his, and he might have repudiated it; but he did not; and even when the bitter result of sin came to him, and “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth.”

7. *He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.*

O friends, what infinite patience is here, — patience which endured woes unknown to us, for our Lord’s griefs and agonies were deeper than we shall ever be able to fathom! Yet to the end he bore all without a struggle. I went to see a friend, the other day, who has had a great number of sore afflictions, yet I found her singularly cheerful and content; and when I was speaking with her about the matter, she said, “I have for years enjoyed perfect submission to the divine will, and it was through what I heard you say.” So I asked her, “What did I say?” She replied, “Why, you told us that you had seen a sheep that was in the hands of the shearers, and that, although all the wool was clipped off its back, the shears never cut into its flesh; and you said that the reason was because the sheep was lying perfectly still. You said, ‘Lie still, and the shears will not cut you; but if you kick and struggle, you will not only be shorn, for God has

resolved to do that, but you will be wounded into the bargain.” O beloved, it is a blessed thing to lie still under the shears, so still as not even to bleat! “As a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.” May the perfect example of the Lamb of God teach us a holy submissiveness to the will of God!

8. *He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation?*

Are there none to speak up for Christ, none to bear testimony to the purity of his life and the sinlessness of his character?

8. *For he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken.*

Oh, dwell on that great truth! The doctrine of Christ’s substitution for his people is the brightest star in the galaxy of Revelation. No more cheering light ever falls upon a tearful eye than this, “for the transgression of my people was he stricken.”

9. *And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.*

He died, and was buried, because he had done no violence. Most men who have perished by judicial sentence have had to die because they have done violence, and because deceit was in their mouth; but here is One who is found guilty of nothing but excess of love, — loving sinners so much that he must give his life sooner than that they should perish.

10. *Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.*

Death, in our Lord’s case, was the way to the extension of life. He dies that he may see his seed, as he himself said to his disciples, “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.” For Christ, the path to prosperity was by way of adversity. The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand because it pleased the Father to bruise him. And, oftentimes, it shall be with the servant as it was with the Master; it shall please the Lord to bruise you, and put you to grief, that in after days the pleasure of the Lord may prosper in your hand.

11. *He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied:*

This is a clear proof that he shall live, and he shall triumph. All his griefs shall come to an end; and even the death-pangs of his soul shall be the travail by which multitudes shall be born unto him, so that his infinite heart shall be satisfied.

11. *By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many;*

By their knowledge of him, by their so knowing him as to trust him, they shall find justification; and “many” shall find it.

11. *For he shall bear their iniquities.*

We are told that the doctrine of substitution is a theory by which we explain the fact of Christ’s death, but that it is only a theory. It is not so, for it is of the very essence of the fact. It is by no means our explanation, it is God’s own declaration: “He shall bear their iniquities.”

12. *Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great,*
That is his Father’s gift.

12. *And he shall divide the spoil with the strong;*
That is the result of his own conquest.

12. *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.*

For ever blessed be his dear name! Amen.

ISAIAH 53

This is one of the chapters that lie at the very heart of the Scriptures. It is the very Holy of holies of Divine Writ. Let us, therefore, put off our shoes from our feet, for the place whereon we stand is especially holy ground. This fifty-third of Isaiah is a Bible in miniature. It is the condensed essence of the gospel. I thought that our beloved friend, Mr. Moody, answered with extreme wisdom a question that was put to him when he came to London some years ago. A number of ministers had come together to meet Mr. Moody, and they began to discuss various points, and to ask what were the evangelist’s views upon certain doctrines. At last, one brother said, “Would Mr. Moody kindly give us his creed? Is it in print?” In a moment the good man replied, “Certainly; my creed is in print, it is the 53rd of Isaiah.” It was a splendid reply. How could a man come closer to the very essentials of the faith than by saying, “My creed is in the 53rd of Isaiah”? I trust that many of you, dear friends can not

only say, "This is my creed," but also, "This is the foundation upon which I have built all my hopes for time and for eternity; this is the source of my sweetest consolation; this is the sun that makes my day, and the star that gilds my night." In these twelve verses there is everything that we need to teach us the way of salvation; God, the infinitely-wise Teacher, has revealed to us, within this short compass, all that is necessary to bring peace to troubled Spirits. First, the prophets speak:—

1. *Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed?*

This is a cause for sorrow upon sorrow, — for the prophets to have God's message to deliver, and yet for men to reject it, — for them to have to tell it, but to tell it in vain. Yet, dear friends, this has been the lot of some of God's most faithful servants in all ages, and we must not complain if it should be our lot also. I should not have voluntarily chosen to be Jeremiah, the weeping prophet; yet, methinks, no one of God's servants deserves greater honour than he does, for he continued bravely to deliver his Master's message even when none believed him, and all rejected his testimony. Isaiah links himself with all the other prophets who had been rejected, and he says, "Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?"

2. *For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground:*

This is why Christ was not received by those to whom he came, — and why the testimony of the prophets concerning Christ was rejected by those to whom it was delivered, — because he was not revealed to them as a towering palm-tree or widely-spreading cedar: but, like the humble yet fruitful vine, he was "as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground."

2. *He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.*

To carnal eyes, there was no beauty apparent in Christ, — nothing of the aesthetic, as men call it, and nothing of the pompous, nothing outwardly attractive. He came here in the utmost simplicity. Remember the angels' message to the shepherds: "And this shall be a sign unto you; ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." There was nothing of pomp or show

about him: “no form nor comeliness.” He made no display of scholarship, no presence of deep philosophy, nothing that the carnal mind hunts after; but the all-glorious Deity, revealed in human form, spake simple but sublime truth, and therefore men rejected him.

3. *He is despised and rejected of men;*

This was written long before he came to earth: “He is despised and rejected of men,” and, truly, though he is now in heaven, I need not alter the tense of the verb. I do not say, “He was despised,” though that would be true; for, alas! it is still true, “He is despised and rejected of men;” —

3. *A man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief:*

What a wonderful expression that is! Our blessed Lord had made the acquaintance of grief, he knew it, understood it, was familiar with it, — slept with it, — rose up with it, — walked the livelong day with it; and, hence, my brother or my sister, he knows your grief, and he can meet it; he is such a master Comforter because he was such a mighty Sufferer.

3. *And we hid as it were our faces from him;*

Shame upon us that we, who have been redeemed by him, — we, whom he has loved from eternity, — we, who now delight in him, — “we hid as it were our faces from him;” —

3. *He was despised, and we esteemed him not,*

Even we, to whom now he is all our salvation, and all our desire, — we, unto whom he is now most precious, — “we esteemed him not.”

4. *Surely he hath borne our griefs, —*

Can all of you say this? Can every one of us unite in the reading of this sentence, “Surely, he hath borne our griefs”? If you have truly learned that he bore your griefs, you may indeed bless his name, for it is the best news that ever reached your ears. Go and tell it to your fellow sufferers: “Surely he hath borne our griefs,” —

4. *And carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.*

They thought that God had smitten him, and so he had; but they wrongly supposed that there was something of sin in him that caused God to smite him, whereas he was “holy, harmless, undefiled;” and he was only stricken and smitten because he was bearing the sins of his people.

5. *But 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.*

Milton, Shakespeare, Cowper, and the whole of the poets that ever were or are, all put together, could not write four sentences like those in this verse. There is more meaning, more deep philosophy, more music, more to charm and satisfy the human heart, in those four sentences, than in the sweetest of merely human language. Let me read them again; and as I do so, let every one of us take each line to himself: — “But 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.”

6, 7. *All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.*

These words have been the means of the conversion of multitudes. You recollect, in the Acts of the Apostles, what that rich Ethiopian said to Philip when he read these words: “I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?” If we read this chapter over and over again, and so read it as to find Christ there, it will indeed be a blessed thing for us.

8, 9. *He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.*

All that he suffered was not because he was guilty, but because he was innocent. The only crime which I have ever heard rightly laid to his charge is that which the poet sweetly describes as “found guilty of excess of love.” It was indeed so. He loved us beyond all measure, and because of that love he died for us.

10. *Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief:*

The Lord was at the back of it all. Not Pilate, nor Herod, nor Judas, nor Jew, nor Roman, but Jehovah bruised him.

10. *When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.*

Here the strain changes altogether. From the depths of woe, we begin to rise with hopes of a glad result of all the suffering and sorrow and shame. Glory be to the name of Christ, he has a mighty right hand, into which God has placed that work which is according to his own good pleasure, — even the work of saving guilty men, and that work, in his prolonged days, until the end of time, shall prosper in the hand of the Christ of God.

11. *He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied:*

Christ did not die at haphazard, as some seem to think. A sure and glorious result must come of “the travail of his soul.” Such precious blood as his could not fall to the ground at a peradventure. Whatever the design of his gross was, it shall be accomplished. I could imagine failures in creation, if so it pleased God; but never in redemption.

11. *By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.*

That is the top and bottom of it all: “He shall bear their iniquities.” The red line of substitution runs through the whole chapter.

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.*

ISAIAH 53

1. *Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed?*

It is sometimes the lot of God’s most faithful servants to labour unsuccessfully. As old Thomas Fuller quaintly says, “He maketh some to be as the clouds that empty their rain over Arabia the stony while others are pouring down their showers over Arabia the happy.” Yet we are accepted with God, not according to our success, but according to our faithfulness. Still, no true minister of Christ can be contented unless men believe his report. It will be a

matter for sighing and groaning if unbelief be the only answer to our earnest declarations concerning Christ.

2. *For he —*

That is, Jesus —

2. *Shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.*

Carnal minds are unbelieving minds. They are so because the beauties of Christ are spiritual, and in their natural state they have not the power to discern them. Jesus Christ has no loveliness in the eyes of self-righteous, self-sufficient men. What do they want with a Saviour? What do they care for his atoning sacrifice? They cannot truly admire the love and the holiness of Jesus Christ, for they do not know their own unloveliness or their own unholiness. Alas! that God's own Son, who is the loveliest of all beings, should be without form or comeliness to unspiritual eyes.

3. *He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrow, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.*

While the Redeemer was here below, his state of poverty, obscurity, suffering, and shame, was of such a character that few would believe in him, and even those, who afterwards received him, at the first did not so. He was despised; and we, even we, his own people, esteemed him not. Christ has forgiven us for all this, but shall we ever forgive ourselves? O eyes, shall ye ever cease to weep over your former blindness? O heart, shalt thou ever cease to grieve over thy former hardness? He, who was heaven's darling, was despised and rejected of men, and we partook in the guilt, for we also despised and rejected him.

4, 5. *Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But 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.*

It is substitution, you see, all through, — Christ suffering instead of us, — the Innocent dying for the guilty, — the Lord of glory bearing the sin of rebellious men. Why do men cavil at this precious truth? It is their only hope of salvation. Why do we still have to say,

“Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?” But those who are enlightened from above, and led to see their own state of ruin, and their absolute need of a Saviour, will rejoice to know that the Lord hath laid help upon One who is mighty, and that he hath anointed his only-begotten Son to stand in our room, and place, and stead.

6. *All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

There is a universal sin: “All we like sheep have gone astray.” There is also a personal sin, a sin peculiar to each individual: “We have turned every one to his own way.” But Christ gathers up the sin, all kinds of sin of all sorts of men, and of his whole Church it is truly said, “The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

7. *He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not mouth:*

When a word could have released him, he would not speak it. His was indeed golden silence. Oh, the wondrous eloquence of that patient speechlessness when he stood before Herod and Pilate, and answered them not a word! He could have spoken with such authority as to have called legions of angels from heaven for his protection, or a single word of his could have destroyed his enemies, as the leaves of autumn lie withered and dead; but “he opened not his mouth.”

7, 8. *He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearer is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation?*

Who shall speak up for him? It was the custom of the Jews, when a man was condemned to death, to allow a certain interval, during which the heralds went through the streets, and made proclamation that, if any man knew any reason why the criminal should be spared, he should at once appear at the court, and declare it. Someone often came forward, with one plea or another, in arrest of judgment; but when our Lord was condemned to death, none would speak up for him.

8, 9. *For he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. And he made his grave with the wicked,*” —

Dying between two thieves, as though he had been the greatest criminal of the three: “He made his grave with the wicked,”

9. *And with the rich in his death;*

Lying in the new tomb of Joseph of Arimathaea.

9. *Because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.*

If he had used either violence or deceit, he might have escaped; but because he was harmless and true, therefore must he die.

10. *Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed,*

The grain of wheat, sown in the ground, abides not alone, but brings forth much fruit. Our blessed Saviour presented both soul and body as an offering for sin, but he knew what he was doing, for “he shall see his seed,” —

10. *He shall prolong his days, —*

Up from the grave did he arise in newness of life, and back to heaven did he return to life immortal: “He shall prolong his days,”

10, 11. *And the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied:*

Christ did not die in vain. He will never miss the great object of his death, you may depend upon that. Those drops of blood are far too precious to fall in vain upon the earth.

11. *By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many;*

That is, by their knowledge of him, by their trusting him, many shall be justified, and saved.

11. *For he shall bear their iniquities.*

How very express this is, — that Christ does not merely bear the punishment of his people, but their iniquities, too! There is a literal substitution of Christ in the place of his people, and a most distinct imputation of their sin to him, and of his righteousness to them.

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.*

Blessed Intercessor, let thine almighty intercession avail for each one of us, for thine own name’s sake! Amen.

ISAIAH 53

1. *Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed?*

The prophet seems to speak in the name of all the prophets, lamenting the general unbelief concerning Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The report concerning him is very clear. It comes from God: it is for our salvation. And yet how many disbelieve it! In fact, all do. Until the arm of the Lord is revealed, until he works upon the hearts of men, and they are led to believe in Jesus. And here is the difficulty of belief.

2. *For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.*

There was nothing about Jesus Christ to attract the attention of those who look for pomp and splendor. His religion is all simplicity; it is plain truth; there is nothing about it that is gorgeous to attract those who look after ritualistic vanities. To the most of men there is no beauty in him that they should desire him.

3. *He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.*

It was so with Jesus when he was here. He was the greatest of all sufferers: there were few that followed him; some of those who did betrayed him. There were few who would stand up for him he met everywhere with a repulse, and yet he came on an errand of love. He needed not to have come at all. Heaven surely was large enough for him; but such was his pity for the dying sons of men that he must needs strip off his royal robes and put on the robes of our mortal flesh.

4, 5. *Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But 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.*

He had not a pang to suffer on his own account, nothing to cause him grief in anything he had done: —

“For sins not his own, he died to atone;

Was love or was sorrow like this ever known?"

Scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet, peradventure, for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

6. *All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

Taken the full load of sin, the whole mass of human guilt, and placed it upon him. He was perfectly innocent, and yet was the sin of man heaped upon him. He was our substitute, standing in our stead: a wondrous truth was this!

7. *He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.*

And you know right well that our Master would not speak when he was charged before Pilate and Herod: he was eloquent — more eloquent in his silence than if he had used his ordinary language, which was wonderful, for “never man spake like this man,” and yet never man was silent as he for our sake.

8-10. *He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.*

Our blessed Lord and Master is to have a full reward for all his griefs, and an earnest of that reward is here tonight. He will receive this very night some born unto him by the new birth, who shall henceforth be his children, and who shall gladly say, “Here, Lord, I come myself to thee, for thou hast bought me by thy precious blood.” It is the joy of some of us that we belong altogether to Christ. We would not have another honour: we wish to live to him, loving him and serving him, as long as we have any being. And there are some here tonight who have not felt this, whom God, nevertheless, will make to feel it, for so runs the promise: —

11. *He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.*

That is the way he justifies them — takes their iniquities upon himself; and since a thing cannot be in two places at one time, when Christ takes our iniquities, they are gone, and we are just in the sight of God. He takes the burden, and we are unloaded, blessed be his name! “He shall bear their iniquities.”

12. *Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong:*

The dying Christ has risen again, and he is a great conqueror now, and divided the spoil. Those spoils are human hearts, and the true love and deep devotion of those he has redeemed. He shall have this: —

12. *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,*

And he is doing it now; pleading this very night that old prayer of his, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Oh! let you and I be pardoned with that plea.

ISAIAH 53

1. *Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed!*

It is no new thing for gospel ministers to be disappointed. Even Isaiah; the most Evangelical of all the prophets, who might well be placed at the head of the College of Preachers, feels compelled to say, in the name of all that sacred brotherhood, “Who hath believed our report?” The report was a very plain one, a very earnest one, and very full of noble matter. Men ought to have believed it, but they did not, and they never will unless God’s arm is revealed, for faith is the product of Omnipotence, and men never believe in Christ till God stretches out his arm. Where was the difficulty of believing the report about Christ? Isaiah tells us about him, and as we listen, we understand why so many believe not on him.

2. *For he shall grow up before him —*

That is, the Messiah shall grow up before God —

2. As a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.

When Christ came, he was very lovely to those who could judge of spiritual beauty. In form and comeliness, he was unrivalled, but not to carnal men; they said, "Where is his royal splendor? Where is the majesty of his kingdom?" As they looked upon the carpenter's Son, they said, "Where are his riches?" They heard him say that he had not where to lay his head, and they despised such a Messiah. As he spoke in simple parables to the people, they asked, "Where is his wisdom?" So, to carnal eyes, the Saviour had "no form nor comeliness."

3. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Oh, how sad it is that the Son of the Most High God, when he condescended to wear our nature, received such base treatment as this from the hands of men! How equally sad is it that his glorious and ever-blessed gospel should still be the object of contempt to multitudes of men! They will not have it; they will have their own philosophy, — their own falsehoods, rather let us say, — but Christ they despise, and they esteem not his gospel.

4. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows :--

Listen, ye sad ones, ye sorrowful ones! Let this sweet note charm you into joy: "He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows."

4. Yet we —

We, for whom he was the Substitute, for whom he smarted: "Yet we" —

4, 5. Did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But 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.

Wonderful medicine! Marvelous healing! Where shall we find the like? The Physician drinks the bitter draught, and so cures the patient; whoever heard of such a wonder as this? The Physician is put to death, and that great sacrifice heals the patient; whoever heard of such a thing as this before? The whole gospel in a nutshell lies in

this verse: "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."

Now comes another wonderful verse, such as Luther was accustomed to call "a little Bible." It begins with "all" and it ends with "all"

6. *All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

There is your only hope of eternal life, sinner. You are among the "all" who went astray; if you are a believer in Christ, you will be found among the "all" whose iniquities were laid upon him, and carried away by him.

7. *He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.*

Oh, the majesty of his silence! Never was eloquence equal to this: "He opened not his mouth."

8. *He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken.*

They ought to have been stricken; their transgressions deserved the heavy blows of the rod of God's wrath; yet, "for the transgression of my people was he stricken."

9. *And he made his grave with the wicked, —*

He was crucified between two malefactors.

9. *And with the rich in his death; —*

He was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea.

9. *Because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.*

For that very reason he was qualified to bear our sin; because he had no sin of his own, therefore he could bear ours, and he did bear ours, and died, "the Just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God."

10. *Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.*

Do not be afraid, then, about the kingdom of Christ. Its interests are safe enough, for they are in his hands, and God has given the promise that his pleasure shall prosper there.

11. *He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied:*

His death-pangs were our birth-pangs; and Christ shall see that which is born of his soul-anguish, and “shall be satisfied.”

11. *By his knowledge —*

Or, “by the knowledge of him,” —

11. *Shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.*

There is no meaning at all in this chapter if it does not teach that Christ did take upon himself the sin of his people, and did suffer in their room and place and stead. Let who will object to this doctrine, it is the gospel, the very heart and marrow of it; and there is nothing that can make a heavy heart glad until it sees sin removed by the death of Christ: “He shall bear their iniquities.”

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:*

He not only died, but he poured out his very soul unto death.

12. *And he was numbered with the transgressors.: and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.*

We shall do well also to read part of the 55th chapter of Isaiah after this 53rd; the one is an admirable preparation for the other

This exposition consisted of readings from ISAIAH 53.; AND 55:1-7.

ISAIAH 53

1-9. *Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed? For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him, he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But 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. All*

we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.

Those wicked men were his enemies because he did “the thing that good is.” They that rewarded him evil for good were his adversaries, even as they are ours.

10. *Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him;*

We might say the same of that tried child of God whose utterances we read just now: “It pleased the Lord to bruise him.”

10, 11. *He hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.*

What gracious gospel words these are, even though they were recorded under the old dispensation! Oh, how you who are full of iniquity, ought to catch at these inspired declarations, which so clearly set forth the substitutionary work of Christ on behalf of the guilty! If you realize your need of such a Saviour as he is, how these words ought to gladden your heart!

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.*

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 38, AND ISAIAH 53.

ISAIAH 53

Blessed passage; I hope you all know it by heart; it should be like the alphabet to every child. See how it begins.

1. *Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed?*

This is the continual cry of the men of God. The sent ones of God who come to bear testimony of the Lamb of God have no easy time of it. With broken heart they have to go to their Master, and say, “Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?”

2. For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.

Carnal minds never did see beauty in Christ, and never will. Christ as the great sacrifice is always rejected.

3-5. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But 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.

Blessed be his name. Some of us can say that with great delight: “With his stripes we are healed.”

6, 7. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.

“He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth.” Our blessed Master — there are his seven cries upon the cross, but not one word of murmuring, no complaint against his enemies — “He opened not his mouth: he is brought as the lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.”

8, 9. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.

10. Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his

seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

“Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him.” If ever there was a man whom God should have protected from every sorrow, and guarded from every stroke of injustice, it was Jesus; and unless it was for sins not his own he suffered, unless it was as a substitute for man, it was the most unjust of all heard of injustices that Christ should die at all.

11, 12. *He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. 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.*

“He shall see of the travail of his soul.” Oh! what a joy is this to us! He did not travail in vain. His pangs were as of a travailing woman; but the birth, the glorious birth that comes of it in the salvation of multitudes — this is his recompense.

This exposition consisted of readings from EXODUS 29:38-46; ISAIAH 53.

ISAIAH 53

This is a chapter which you have read hundreds of times, perhaps, I am sure it is one that needs no comment from me. I shall read it through with scarcely a sentence of comment.

1-9. *Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed? For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But 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. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth:*

he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he hath done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.

A strange reason for making his grave with tire wicked, and yet remember if it had not been that he had done no violence, he would not have been fit to be a substitute for sinners, and so he was numbered with transgressions-sots to redeem men.

10, 11, 12. *Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief; when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied; by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. 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.*

How clearly you have before you here our blessed Redeemer, and how strong are the expressions used by Isaiah to set forth his substitution. If he did intend to teach us the doctrine that Christ suffered in the place and stead of his people, he could not have used more expressive words; and if he did not intend to teach us that truth, it is marvelous that he should have adopted a phraseology so likely to mislead. Yes, we believe and hold it fast, that Christ did take the sins of his people verily and truly upon himself, and did in proper person make a complete expiation for the guilt of all his chosen, and in this we find our hearts' best confidence: —

“Our soul can on this doctrine live,
Can on this doctrine die.”

Have you and I an interest in this atonement, or must the complaint be made concerning us: “Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?”? While I was reading just now, could you say by faith, “Yes, surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows Have you an appropriating faith, which takes the sufferings of Christ to be its own? Do you now

humbly, but yet confidently, look to Jesus Christ, the great Burden-bearer on yonder tree, and know that your guilt was there? If so, rejoice, and walk worthily of your calling. If not, soul, you do not know the first letters of the alphabet of religion? May the Lord teach you, for his name's sake.

ISAIAH 54

The precious promises, contained in this chapter, belong in the first place to the Church of God; but, as that which belongs to the Church, really belongs to every member of it, we shall not be acting dishonestly with the Scripture if we, who are believers, personally take home to ourselves every drop of comfort that we can find here.

1. Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child:

Sing, even though thou art barren. Do not postpone thy song until God's promise is fulfilled unto thee; but sing even whilst thou art desolate and forlorn, and let faith pitch the key-note. Let me, therefore, entreat any of you, who are disconsolate and sad, to give heed to the words of the prophet, and even now begin to sing. Give to God songs in the night; imitate the nightingale, and sing though not a star is to be seen.

1. For more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the LORD.

After all, we who have the deepest sorrow have the highest joy, and if we are sometimes desolate, we need not wish to change with those who always keep the even tenor of their way. If we have great downs, we also have great ups; if the valleys be deep, blessed be God the hills are high, and the view from their summits is glorious. Let us be thankful even if our lot is a hard one, if we are the Lord's, "for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the Lord."

2, 3. Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes; For thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left; and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited.

This is another act of faith; — not only singing before the mercy comes, but getting ready to receive it before it is in sight, stretching

the curtains and the cords in order to have room to house the blessing which has not yet arrived. Carnal reason says, “When we have the children, we will enlarge the tent; when we have gathered the congregation, we will build a house of prayer;” but faith says, “I will enlarge my heart that it may be able to take in the blessing which is sure to come. I will be big with expectation. I will open my mouth wide, — not when I see the blessing, but before I see it, that God may place the blessing in my open, empty mouth.” May the Lord graciously give us enlarged expectations; for, according to our faith, so shall it be unto us!

4. Fear not; for thou shalt not be ashamed: neither be thou confounded; for thou shalt not be put to shame: for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more.

Here is a third line for faith to run upon, namely, that of courage. Before you are strong, before you have been lifted up out of your weakness, be of good courage, and fear not; for, if you walk by faith, and trust in the Lord with all your heart, you shall never have any cause to be ashamed of having done so. The Lord will always honour your faith because your faith honours him. Be of good cheer, for you shall yet have good reason to rejoice; and all those days, that you are now ashamed to think of, in which you lived without God, and without Christ, your days of sad and terrible widowhood, shall be so completely surpassed by the abundance of mercy which you shall receive from the Lord, that you shall not remember them any more.

5. For thy maker is thine husband; the LORD of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall he be called.

Oh, how blessed it is that Jehovah, Israel’s God, the Lord of hosts, is the God of the whole earth; so that we poor Gentiles may come and hide under the shadow of his wings; and what a joy it is to all believers that this great God has united us in the sacred bonds of marriage with himself! “Thy Maker is thine Husband.” Oh, what bountiful provision will such a Husband make for us! How well will he comfort us! How abundantly will he bless us! So let our hearts be glad in him.

6. *For the LORD hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God.*

Some of you know what it is to have had your affections betrayed, and your hearts broken by unfaithful friends. Now the Lord calls you to come close to himself, that you may prove his faithfulness, and so forget your past sorrows in your present and future joy.

7, 8. *For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the LORD thy Redeemer.*

These choice words do not need any explanation, this blessed plaster only needs to be applied to the wounded heart, and it will heal it at once. If the Lord will but speak these sentences into our souls, so that we may know that they are really meant for us, our rapture will be complete. Let me read these verses again: “For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith Jehovah thy Redeemer,” — thy God, — thy next of kin, — thine Advocate and Champion. What a blessed name is this, and what a wonderful combination is this, — Jehovah, thy next of kin!

9, 10. *For this is as the waters of Noah unto me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed;*

There is nothing really stable about them; all things that are visible must melt and flow away.

10. *But my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the LORD that hath mercy on thee.*

What gracious words are these! What majesty there is in such consoling sentences as these! They remind us of Mr. Paxton Hood’s lines, —

“All his words are music, though they make me weep, Infinitely tender, infinitely deep.”

11. *O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, —*

Where art thou? Hast thou come in here to seek the consolation thou canst not find anywhere else? Then see how God lays himself out to comfort thee; he has put into human language the true sympathy for thee that he feels in his heart; and again he says to thee, “O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted,” —

11. *Behold, I will lay thy stone, with fair colors, and lay thy foundations with sapphires.*

Thou shalt have done with the rough tossing of the troubled sea; and thou shalt come to land, — to a royal city which hath foundations of sapphire, — to a king’s palace where even the stones shall be stained with rich vermilion such as only princes use in their costly buildings: “I will lay thy stones with fair colors, and lay thy foundations with sapphires.”

12. *And I will make thy windows of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleasant stones.*

See what riches belong to the Church of the living God; and, as I have already reminded you, everything that belongs to the Church belongs to every member of it. So we expect to see our Lord’s face through a window of agate, and to go through a gate of carbuncle to meet him in the place of communion, which shall itself be enriched with all manner of precious stones. Yes, and everything that has to do with us, — even the very “borders” of our life shall be laid with “pleasant stones.” Happy are all ye who are the favorites of heaven, the beloved of the Lord. Blessed are ye even in your basket and your store; blessed in the common things of your life, as well as in the choicest parts of your Christian experience.

13. *And all thy children shall be taught of the LORD;*

Our children are often our greatest care. We ask, “How shall they be educated? Where shall we place our boys and our girls?” Put them under the care of God; for, as Elihu said to Job, “Who teacheth like him?”

13, 14. *And great shall be the peace of thy children. In righteousness shalt thou be established: thou shalt be far from oppression; for thou shalt not fear: and from terror; for it shall not come near thee.*

The man who has the fear of God within his heart need have no fear of anybody else.

“Fear him ye saints, and you will then Have nothing else to fear;

Make you his service your delight.
He'll make your wants his care."

15. *Behold, they shall surely gather together,*

You will have enemies, even if you lead the most blameless life that can be lived; for the absolutely blameless One had many cruel enemies who hounded him to death.

15. *But not by me:*

God is not with them, for he is on your side.

15. *Whosoever shall gather together against thee shall fall for thy sake.*

Oh, how often, and how mysteriously, and how terribly God has smitten the enemies of his people! The hand of the Lord has gone out against them as it went out against Sennacherib and his host, in the days of good king Hezekiah.

16. *Behold, I have created the smith that bloweth the coals in the fire, and that bringeth forth an instrument for his work; and I have created the waster to destroy.*

Even over the most wicked and the most powerful of men, there is the supremacy of God; and deep and mysterious though the doctrine is, yet divine predestination applies even to such sinners as Judas Iscariot, and the vilest of the vile in all times; and herein is our confidence, — that God is greater than death, and the devil, and hell, he is supreme above all the malice and craft and cruelty of the worst and the greatest of men.

17. *No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; —*

"No weapon" of any kind — however cunningly made, or however deftly handled, — "no weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper;" —

17. *And every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn.*

The tongue — that worst of weapons, whose wicked words are sharper than swords, — is like a condemned criminal.

17. *This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord,*

Did I not rightly say that these precious promises belong not only to the whole Church of God as a body, but also to each individual member of that Church?

17. *And their righteousness is of me, saith the LORD.*

If, then, your righteousness is found in God, in God you shall find everything else that you need for time and for eternity. God grant this unto each one of us, for his dear name's sake! Amen.

ISAIAH 54:1-10

1. Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the LORD.

This promise is made to the long-barren and desolate Gentile Church the may well sing, for God has visited her in mercy, and, at this day, her children are more numerous than those of the Jewish Church. We have waited, but we have been well repaid for our waiting, for we have a larger and richer blessing than God's ancient people ever enjoyed.

2-4. Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes; for thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left; and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited. Fear not: for thou shalt not be ashamed: neither be thou confounded; for thou shalt not be put to shame: for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more.

O child of God, have you passed through a time of great sorrow, in which the Lord seemed to desert you quite? Have all your hopes been blighted, and have all your joys fallen, like untimely figs from the trees? Yet the days of your rejoicing shall be many, you shall soon put aside your sackcloth and ashes, and dancing and holy gladness shall be your portion.

5. For thy Maker is thine husband; —

Rejoice, O Church of God, that thou hast such a husband! Rejoice, every member of the Church of God, that thou hast such a husband to help thee!" Thy Maker is thine husband;" —

5. The LORD of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall he be called.

Well might Paul write, in the Epistle to the Romans, "Is he the God of the Jews only? Is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also;" and Isaiah here says, inspired by the same Spirit who

taught Paul what to write, “The God of the whole earth shall he be called.”

6, 7. *For the LORD hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God. For a small moment have I forsaken thee;*

A moment is a small period of time, but it is made to appear still smaller by that little word “small.”

7, 8. *But with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the LORD thy Redeemer.*

Oh, what a blessed mouthful this text is! I might rather say, What a heart full! What a soul full! It fills, and overfills my soul, and gives me sweet content: “With everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer.”

9. *For this is as the waters of Noah unto me; for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth: so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee.*

See how our faithful and unchanging God lays the foundation for our hopes-“ In oaths, and promises, and blood.”

10. *For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the LORD that hath mercy on thee.*

Or, as the Hebrew has it, “saith the Lord, the Pitier.” Was there ever a sweeter title to comfort our hearts than this, “the Lord, the Pitier”?

This exposition consisted of readings from GENESIS 8:20-22; 9:8-17; AND ISAIAH 54:1-10.

ISAIAH 54:1-10

1. *Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the LORD.*

In this Western clime, we do not know all the misery which was felt by Eastern women who were childless; they were looked down upon and despised; yet here God bids them sing. And, dear friends, if you and I feel as if our hearts have become barren, so that we cannot think of God or raise our thoughts towards him as we would

desire; if we feel that we have become useless, and for that reason our spirit is greatly depressed, let us give heed to this sweet, this charming exhortation of Jehovah: “Sing, O barren soul; break forth into singing, and cry aloud;” for God can turn our barrenness into fruitfulness, and make us to rejoice exceedingly before him. If we are now sighing and crying because we are not what we ought to be, or what we want to be, God can, in the richness of his grace, make us all that we desire. Therefore let us begin to be joyful even before the miracle of mercy is wrought; let us have unbounded faith in God, and expect him to bless us, even while we are in our lowest state.

2, 3. *Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes; For thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left; and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited.*

This was good news for the poor Gentiles, who were so long spiritually barren, but whose seed was to spread all over the earth. This prophecy has been already fulfilled in a great measure, and the very wording of it is a direction to us if we desire to see the Church of God increased. Make ready for God’s blessing, you who are pining and groaning for greater things than these; God is about to bless you. Enlarge your tents; lengthen the cords, and strengthen the stakes; prepare for the coming blessing, for you are to have better and brighter days than you have ever yet known. Therefore be no more sad, but look forward with joyful anticipation to the good things in store for you.

4. *Fear not; for thou shalt not be ashamed: neither be thou confounded; for thou shalt not be put to shame: for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more.*

I am not going to interpret the passage in its strict connection, but to use it for our comfort and instruction. O you that are cast down, you poor trembling ones that fain would be at one with God, but feel as if you could not find him, believe in the Lord your God, and trust in his Son, Jesus Christ, for there are glad times coming for you! All your former dabs of sadness shall be forgotten, and you shall have such joy and delight as you can hardly imagine at present.

5. *For thy Maker is thine husband; the LORD of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall he be called.*

Oh, what a blessing that is! This is a wide-spread mercy: “The God of the whole earth shall he be called.” My soul, come and hide beneath the shadow of these earth-covering wings, for there is room for thee beneath their welcome shelter; and, once there, thou shalt not be banished from that sacred spot, for it is written, “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.” “Thy Maker is thine husband,” united to thee in eternal wedlock; therefore, be of good comfort.

6. *For the LORD hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God.*

Poor rejected one, has the world cast thee off? Do its sinful pleasures pall upon thee now? Listen: “The Lord hath called thee.” Thou art divorced from the world that thou mayest be for ever united to him.

7, 8. *For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the LORD thy Redeemer.*

What words of comfort lie here to those of the Lord’s people who have fallen into spiritual darkness, and come upon evil days! God still remembers you; his wrath is but for a moment, and will swiftly pass away; but his age-enduring kindness which sweeps across the boundless eternity shall be with you for ever.

9, 10. *For this is as the waters of Noah unto me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the LORD that hath mercy on thee.*

Oh, for grace, oh, for the help of the Holy Spirit to lay hold upon these precious promises, and to feed thereon!

ISAIAH 54:1-16

Try and suck all the sweetness that you can out of this chapter while we read it. The personal application of a promise to the heart

by the Holy Spirit is that which is wanted. The honey in Jonathan's wood never enlightened his eyes until he dipped the point of his rod into it and tasted it. Try and do the same. This chapter is the wood wherein every bough doth drip with virgin honey. Sip: taste be satisfied.

1-3. Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child; for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the LORD. Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes; For thou shall break forth on the right hand and on the left; and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited.

Yet, they are called upon to praise God before the mercy comes. "Sing, O Barren," whilst yet barren. Sing, O desolate one, while yet desolate; and thou who art narrowed and confined for space, thank God that he is about to enlarge thee, and begin already to stretch thy cords and strengthen thy stakes. We ought to act upon faith, and sing upon faith. The songs which are made at the sight of mercy are very sweet, but the songs that are sung before the mercy comes are those which are most acceptable to God. We may say of the sonnets of faith, "Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed."

4. Fear not; for thou shalt not be ashamed: neither be thou confounded; for thou shalt not be put to shame: for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more.

The dark past, the dreary past, shall be so obliterated with abounding mercy that they shall forget it. Thy memory of it shall not be painful. It shall only be as a foil behind the bright diamond of mighty mercy, if thou dost remember it at all.

5. For thy maker is thine husband;

Bound to thee by the dearest, closest, and most enduring ties.

5-7. The LORD of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall be called. "For the LORD hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God. For a small moment"—

Not "a moment," but "for a small moment."

7, 8. *Have I forsaken thee: but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment: but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee; saith the LORD thy Redeemer.*

This belongs to the whole Church of God. I know we might refer it all to the Church in general, but I invite you tonight to remember that what belongs to the Church as a body belongs to every member of that mystical body. Therefore, feast here. Be not afraid. Take these words as spoken to you even to you — by God the Holy Spirit.

9-10. *For this is as the waters of Noah unto me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the LORD that hath mercy on thee.*

What more can he say than to you he hath said? What surer pledges can he give? Oh! rest, rest, rest, sweetly rest, on this sure word of covenant love. Then let the mountains move. He told you they would. Then let the hills of your comfort sink. He told you they would. But even then, when earth itself doth reel, and the very pillars of the universe are snapped, he standeth still the same. “I have sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee.”

11. *O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colors, and lay thy foundations with sapphires.*

Built with jewels.

12. *And I will make thy windows of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleasant stones.*

They must be rare sights if the windows are so rare. If the windows be of agate, what are the sights that are seen through them? And if the very gates and doors are carbuncles what must there be in the house of love within? If the very borders and the outside fringes of the royal domains of heaven be of precious stones, what must it be to be there? Remember that the best thing in this world is trodden under feet in the world to come; for we are told that the streets are paved with gold. Men hunt after it here, and tread on it there, for they have nothing better there than this world can possibly afford them.

13. *And all thy children shall be taught of the LORD;*

It must be a greater privilege, than windows of agates and gates of carbuncle, to see our children — to see all the children of God — taught by his own Spirit.

13. *And great shall be the peace of thy children.*

That is the most precious pearl of all, with its soft radiance, precious to the soul.

14, 15. *In righteousness shalt thou be established: thou shalt be far from oppression; for thou shalt not fear: and from terror; for it shall not come near thee. Behold, they shall surely gather together, but not by me:*

Enemies will come, but God will not be with them.

15, 16. *Whosoever, shall gather together against thee shall fall for thy sake. Behold, I have created the smith that bloweth the coals in the fire,*

For he cannot blow any more than God lets him. He is God's creature. The maker of the weapons of war is still in the hands of God.

16. *And that bringeth forth an instrument for his work: and I have created the waster to destroy.*

When he does his worst, he is only doing what I meant he should do. The divine decree of God still, with its mighty circle, doth encompass the worst deed of man, and overrules it all for the good of his Church.

ISAIAH 55

Tonight we shall read that precious chapter of gospel invitation, the fifty-fifth of Isaiah, which, I hope, you all know by heart.

1. *Ho, every one that thirsteth,*

God would have the attention of sinners; he calls for it. Are not sinners eager for God? Oh, no! It is God who is eager for sinners; and so he calleth

“Ho!” Men pass by with their ears full of the world's tumult; and God calleth, again and again, “Ho! Ho!” Be you rich or poor, learned or illiterate, if you are in need, and specially if you feel your need, “Ho, every one that thirsteth.”

1. *Come ye to the waters,*

There are only in one place waters that can quench your thirst; and God calls you that way: "Come ye to the waters."

1. *And he that hath no money;*

Water is a thing that is sold, not given away, in the East; and he that needs it, must buy it. But he who buys of God, has nothing to pay: "He that hath no money."

1. *Come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.*

See how God's good things grow as we look at them. The first invitation was, "Come ye to the waters;" the next was, "Eat;" but this one speaks of "wine and milk." Our first idea of the gospel is very simple, it is water for our thirst. Soon we find that it is food for our hunger. Presently we discover it to be wine for our delight, and milk for our perpetual sustenance. There is everything in Christ; and you want him. Come and have him. There is no other preparation needed but that you feel your need of him.

"This he gives you;

'Tis his Spirit's rising beam."

What a cheering verse this is to begin with!

2. *Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not?*

If you spend your money for that which is not bread, you are likely to be disappointed. "Oh, but," you say, "I have made many an effort." Yes, I know you have; but, if you labour for "that which satisfieth not", I do not wonder that you are not satisfied. Let your past defeats drive you to your God. If you have failed hitherto, so much the more reason why you should listen to the Lord's message. He says to you,-

2. *Hearken diligently unto me,*

Salvation comes through the ear, more than through the eye. Hearken;

hearken; hearken diligently, with both your ears, with all your heart,

hearken unto your God.

2. *And eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.*

If we will hear, and will believe, we shall be satisfied; we shall be delighted; we shall be overjoyed. The Lord can take our thirst away, and give instead a delight in fatness.

3. *Incline your ear,*

Hold it near the mouth of the gracious Speaker. Be willing to hear what God has to say. Take out that wool of prejudice that has prevented you from hearkening to God's voice: "Incline your ear."

3. *And come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.*

"When thus you live, I will make an everlasting covenant with you. I am not the God of the dead, but of the living; and when once, through hearing the divine Word, you have come to life, I will be your God."

4. *Behold, I have given him—*

One greater than David, even the Beloved of the Lord, the Only-begotten, the Messiah Prince, the King of kings, even Jesus.

4. *For a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people.*

God did not give us an angel to lead us, but he gave us his Son; and he did not merely give us his Son to be an example, but to die for us, to bleed to death on our behalf, to be our Substitute, dying in our place and stead. "I have given him." This is the greatest wonder that ever was. "God so loved the world that he gave his Only-begotten Son;" not, "God so loved the saintly; God so loved the earnest; God so loved the moral;" but "the world", the commonplace, sinful world; he so loved those who lay dead in trespasses and sins "that he gave his Only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." And the Father, in giving his Son, gives him a promise:-

5. *Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee because of the LORD thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for he hath glorified thee.*

So, brethren, the gospel must succeed. Christ must have whole nations to come to him; they must come; they shall come; for God has glorified his Son, and he glorifies him in this among other ways, in bringing nations to his feet. The gospel is no experiment; there is not a question as to its success. There may be dark days just now,

and our hearts may sink as we look around; but the Father will keep his promise to the Son, and that encourages us to look up in the darkest hour. This fact, which is more than a promise, will never be altered, "He hath glorified thee."

6. *Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near:*

Oh, may the Holy Spirit make every word I read to be effectual with you! God himself speaks to you tonight, out of a Book which not only was inspired, but is inspired; and he says tonight, freshly from his own lip to you that have not rest of heart, "Seek ye the LORD while he may be found." He may be found; therefore seek him. "Call ye upon him while he is near." He is near; therefore call upon him.

7. *Let the wicked forsake his way,*

Do not let him wait till he has finished this thing, or done the other, or till he has so much to bring in his hand. Let him run away from his old master, and from his old way, and from his old self at once. May God help him so to do!

7. *And the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God,*

Whom we love, and in whom we trust, and who has pardoned us: "to our God."

7. *For he will abundantly pardon.*

The marginal reading is, "He will multiply to pardon." He will pardon, and pardon, and pardon, and pardon, and pardon, and pardon, ad infinitum. Enormous as the sin may be, God's pardon shall suffice to put it all away. Is this message too hard for you to believe? Oh, broken heart! does this divine truth seem to you to be too good to be true? Oh, trembling one! does it seem impossible that the righteous God can cast all your sins behind his back, and drown them in the depths of the sea? Listen still to our Lord's gracious words

9-11. *For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return*

unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.

God's Word is not ineffectual. If thou wilt hear it, it will bless thee. When God sends snow and rain, they go not back again. The earth receives them; they sink into her pores; they refresh her secret life. Receive thou, O black heart, the Word of God, as the earth receives the snow! O thou dry heart, receive thou the Word as the dry ground receives the shower. It shall not go back again; it shall sink into thine inmost soul; it shall save thee. God can save thee. Believe it; receive his Word into thy heart, and it shall save thee. Mark who you are, who are spoken to in the first and second verses, you who are thirsty, you who have no money, you who have laboured, and are disappointed with the fruit of your toil.

12. *For ye shall go out with joy,*

You poor people who are invited to come to the waters, you who have nothing of your own, "Ye shall go out with joy."

12. *And be led forth with peace:*

To some places you can "go" by yourselves; to others you must be "led"; but in either case you shall have "joy" and "peace."

12. *The mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing,*

They do not look like singing, do they? They look as if their only music would be the howling of the wild winds about their brow, or the roaring of the wild beasts along their sides; but for you, for you, ye thirsty ones, they shall break forth into singing.

12. *And all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.*

Trees seem to have little sympathy with weary hearts; but when weary heads find peace with God in Christ, as I trust some will tonight, then even the trees of the field seem to be in harmony with man, and they clap their hands in jubilant exultation.

13. *Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the LORD for a name,*

Yes, it shall make God's name great when you are converted; for you will talk about what the Lord has done for your soul, and that will bring God fame: "It shall be to the LORD for a name."

13. *For an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.*

O ye that thirst, O ye hungry, O ye unsatisfied, may the reading of this Word be blessed to you tonight! Amen.

ISAIAH 55

1. Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

Let no one ask whether he may come to Christ for salvation; he is bidden to come. Whoever wills to come, is welcome. "Ho!" says God, as men cry when they have goods to sell, and would attract the passer-by; and not merely to one does he speak, but to everyone: "Ho, every one that thirsteth," — whatever is the age he lives in, and to whatever age he may himself have attained: "Ho, every one that thirsteth." But is there anything to be had by those who do come? There is in God exactly that which every soul needs; first, "waters" for the thirsty. There is even more than absolute, necessities: "wine and milk," God has an abundance of grace, yea, a superabundance. He can give us all we need, and even more than we desire. Oh, turn not away when God the Father cries, "Ho!"

2. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.

Apart from God, there is nothing for us but destruction. We may spend our money, and our labour, too, but happiness is not to be found by the creature apart from the Creator, or by a sinner apart from the Saviour. God has so constituted the human mind that it cannot be perfect without him.

3. Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; —

It seems a very little thing to do, does it not? Simply to hear, — to incline the ear; yet that is the way of salvation: "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." Alas! nowadays, the mass of men will not hear God's message of mercy; they pass it by as if it were an old worn-out tale of which they knew quite enough, Hear, then, what God says to his poor forgetful creature: "I tear, and your soul shall live;" —

3. *And I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.*

Will God make a covenant with man? Can it be that he will strike hands with sinful man, and enter into league and compact with him? Yes, so he says; if men will but incline their ear, and come unto him, he will enter into covenant with them: "I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David." "But David is dead," says someone. Yes, I know he is; but the David here meant always lives, it is Jesus, the Son of God.

4. *Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people.*

Jesus Christ is the people's Witness and Leader; born among them, living among them, dying for them, living still to save them; and God declares that he gives this Christ to such as hear him, to such as incline their ear, and come unto him.

5. *Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee because of the Lord thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for he hath glorified thee.*

Brethren, our Lord Jesus Christ did not die in vain. He died to redeem his chosen people, and those whom he redeemed he will certainly have. Even though some reject him, others will not. God has power over human hearts; and where Christ's gospel is faithfully preached, and attended by the Holy Spirit's power, sinners must come to Christ. Their will shall sweetly yield to the supremacy of love. Even though they set themselves against Christ, yet they shall come when the Lord draws them; and glory shall be gotten to his holy name by the salvation of those who never even thought of being saved.

6. *Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near:*

"Seek ye the Lord while he may be found;" that is, now. "Call ye upon him while he is near;" he is near now. Wherever Christ is lifted up, and his gospel is proclaimed, there is he according to his promise, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

7. *Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.*

What a grand word that is! “He will abundantly pardon.” However abundant sin may be, God’s pardon is still more abundant. As Paul puts it, “Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.” Sin may be like the great mountains, but the mercy of God is like Noah’s flood, that rose above the tops of the highest hills: “He will abundantly pardon.”

8. *For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD.*

Oh, what a mercy it is to be taught to think God’s thoughts, and to be led in God’s ways! It is the entrance into a new life; it is something infinitely beyond the greatest elevation to which any ordinary life can ever reach by its own unaided power.

9-12. *For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.*

“For ye” — that is, ye who have heard God’s Word, and believed it, — “ye shall go out with joy.” Happy hearts help to make a happy world. He who has found his Saviour, and received God’s pardon, and learned God’s thoughts, shall find the whole world full of music to him, wherever he may be.

13. *Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the LORD for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.*

Wherever God’s grace begins to work, it cuts up thorns and thistles, and plants in place of them fir trees and myrtle trees. Oh, that his grace might renew each one of us! And, then, when that blessed work has been done, may we never cease to glorify that dear name by the power of which we have been changed!

ISAIAH 55

This chapter might very well have been found in the Gospel according to Matthew, or Mark, or Luke, or John, for it is so plain, so simple, and so full of Gospel teaching.

1. Ho, every one that thirsteth come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

Oh, the freeness of Gospel provisions; and, at the same time, their fullness, their plenty, their variety, their sufficiency! Here is a mention of “wine and milk.” It is not enough for the Lord to bid us “come to the waters,” but he invites us to partake of the choicest luxuries upon which the soul can be fed; he calls us to be filled even to the full, and to accept everything for nothing: “without money and without price.”

2. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not?

Why do ye act thus? Can you give any explanation of such folly? The gospel is consistent with the highest reason; and to believe in Christ is not a thing for which we need make any apology. It is a foolish thing not to believe in him,-a foolish thing to be living for the world,-to be spending our time and strength for thy attainment of some inferior object which can never satisfy the soul. This “wherefore” is not applicable to the Christian; it is applicable to the worldling; yet he often thinks himself the only wise man on the face of the earth, “Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not?”

2, 3. Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me:

What a stress these gospel passages lay upon hearing the Word! “Faith cometh by hearing.” All the sights, and all the shows, all the gorgeous processions, and all the external ceremonies in the world, will never convert a single soul; but God says, “Hearken diligently unto me. Incline your ear, and come unto me.”

3. Hear, and your soul shall live;

Do not cavil, but hear. Do not come to find fault with the Word; but “Come unto me,” saith the Lord; “hear, and your soul shall live.”

3. *And I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.*

What a surprising promise this is for God to make to men who are so poverty-stricken that they have “no money” in their hand, or in their pocket,-nothing in fact, that they can bring to him! Yet the Lord says, “I will make an everlasting covenant with you.” Will God enter into covenant with a poor sinner, and pledge himself, by promise and by oath, to do him good for ever? Yes, poor troubled, sinful soul, the Lord, in infinite mercy, is even now calling thee by his grace, I trust; and as surely as thou dost come to him, he will make with thee “an everlasting covenant, even the sure mercies of David.”

4. *Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people.*

God’s Witness of his great love to us is his own Son. You cannot doubt God’s readiness to receive guilty men, since Christ has come in the flesh.

You cannot doubt his love to sinners, since his only-begotten Son has come to be a Witness to it. Oh, for grace to range ourselves under his banner, and to follow his footsteps, for God has given him to be “a Leader and Commander to the people”! Nor shall he be a Leader without followers, nor a Commander without an army. Where is he to get his followers and his army? Read the next verse

5. *Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee because of the LORD thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for he hath glorified thee.*

Observe, there was no communion between Christ and these people, for he knew not them, and they knew not him. It is the Scriptural mode of expressing the great gulf between these; yet, he is to call them, and they are to run to him. He is to find his subjects and his soldiers among those who have hitherto been ignorant of him. What a gracious covenant promise this is! Under the guise of a declaration made to Christ, this is really a promise made to the elect of God, that they shall be brought back from all their wanderings, and be ranged in their ranks beneath the banner of their Lord.

6, 7. *Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.*

There must be conversion,-that is, a turning of the soul, and that must be manifest in the outward life. The wicked must forsake his evil way; but the change must go much deeper than that, there must be a real spiritual conversion. The unrighteous man must forsake his sinful thoughts; and, oh, how glorious it is when, after such a generous exhortation, and such a gracious invitation, God sends his Spirit to those whom he calls, to enable them to forsake their own way, and their own thoughts, and to turn unto him! Wherever there is any such a turning as that, it is certain that “he will abundantly pardon.”

8,9. *For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

I think, dear friends, that not only may the unconverted pick up many crumbs of comfort as they hear about the abundant provision of divine mercy, but that the tried people of God may also be much cheered as they think upon the greatness of the Lord’s plans for them. You do not understand, tried child of God, what your Heavenly Father is doing with you. A child cannot always comprehend his father’s purposes of love; it is not needful that he should. Every father may say to his son, “My thoughts are not your thoughts;” but with what an emphasis does our Divine Father say it to us! “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

10, 11. *For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater; So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.*

Such a promise as this ought to help us to preach in faith! How full our sermons ought to be of the Word of God; for it is not our word, but God’s Word, that is certain to be effectual to the salvation

of our hearers! I recollect McCheyne saying that you will generally find that it is God's Word, not man's comment on God's Word, that is blessed to the conversion of souls. There is a divine charm-a mystic power-about the very words of the Lord. I can never doubt the doctrine of plenary verbal inspiration, since I so constantly see, in actual practice, how the very words that God has been pleased to employ are blessed to the souls of men,-not merely their sense, but the very language. Sometimes, a plural instead of a singular noun, or one particular word, instead of its synonym, will be made, in the hands of the Spirit of God, the means of reaching some character which, otherwise, would not have been reached. Blessed be God that we do believe in his Book. We cannot, we will not, give up a jot or a tittle of it,-the dot of an I, or the cross of a t. We believe that no part of the Word of the Lord will return unto him void, but it shall accomplish all his good pleasure, and prosper in the thing whereunto he has sent it.

12. *For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace:*

That shall be your happy condition when you have once fed upon Christ. When you have entered into covenant with God, you "shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace."

12. *The mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.*

And many of us can testify that it is so. Once reconciled to God, all nature seems to wear another aspect. Whatever the weather is, it pleases us because it pleases him who sends it to us; and when we look upon the beauties of nature beneath the sunlight, there is a peculiar glory upon them; for the light of God, that shineth more brightly than the sun, is, to the believing eye, upon everything.

13. *Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree; and it shall be to the LORD for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.*

Wherever God's Word is, there are transformations. Miracles though we see them not in the natural world, are abundant in the spiritual realm. Conversion is the great standing proof of the presence of the Holy Ghost, and his abiding presence is the perpetual witness to the truth of the Gospel. Beyond all arguments from internal or external evidence, stands this one, the Word of God is effectual in the salvation of Sinners. Thorns are turned into fir

trees, and briers into myrtles; and, so, God is glorified, and “an everlasting sign” is thus preserved among us, “that shall not be cut off.”

ISAIAH 55

1. *Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.*

The description of gospel blessings grows sweeter as it advances. “Waters” first, “wine and milk” next, and still all “without money and without price.”

2. *Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.*

All your largest desires you will find in Christ; you shall have not only necessaries, but delicacies, delights that shall satisfy you to the full, you shall not be able to conceive of anything that shall be more rich and full than the grace of God.

3. *Incline your ear, and come unto me;*

This is the gate by which salvation enters into man, — Ear gate, by hearing and believing: “Incline your ear,” bend it forward as if you would catch every word; “and come unto me: — “

3. *Hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.*

Only think of a covenant made with needy sinners, thirsty sinners, God striking hands with guilty men in the person of Jesus Christ. It is a sure covenant, too; not made up of “ifs” and “buts” and “peradventures”, —but a covenant sealed with blood, and signed by him who gives an oath with it that he will never turn from it, that you may have “strong consolation.”

4. *Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people.*

He who is our greater David comes to us to bear witness of the immutable love of God, and to be to us our Captain and our King. Happy are the souls that accept this David to be their Leader. You remember how David, in the cave Adullam, gathered to himself “every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and

every one that was discontented, and he became a captain over them.” Even so, the great Antitype, David’s Son and David’s Lord is willing now to gather to himself those who are spiritually bankrupt, discontented, and weary with the world, and God says, “I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people.”

5. Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee because of the LORD thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for he hath glorified thee.

What joy this gives to you who love him! Jehovah has glorified his Son and given to him the power to call to himself a people that he knew not in a saving sense, and he shall so call nations that knew not him that they shall run unto him. We do not preach the gospel, dear brethren, at haphazard, we are sure of results. If we speak in faith, in the name of Christ men must be saved, they must run to Christ. It is not left to their option, there is a divine hand that secretly touches the springs of the will of men, so that, when Christ calls them, they run unto him. Oh, that he would just now call them, even those that are furthest off, that they may run unto him, and that he may be glorified!

6. Seek ye the LORD while he may be found,

In these happy gospel times when Christ is set forth on purpose that “he may be found.”

6. Call ye upon him while he is near:

And he is very near when the gospel is preached with holy unction, when Christians are praying, when hearts are breaking for the conversion of sinners, and when his Spirit is working in their hearts, that they may repent of sin.

7. Let the wicked forsake his way, —

It is a bad way, it is a downward way, it is a way that will end in destruction; do not follow it any longer: “Let the wicked forsake his way,”-

7. And the unrighteous man his thoughts:

“Thoughts!” says one, “we shall not be hanged for our thoughts.” Oh, but you may be damned for your thoughts! No man has really forsaken the way of wickedness until he hates the very thought of wickedness. If your thoughts run after evil, your tongues will soon utter evil, and your hands will soon do evil.

7. And let him return —

He is like one who has wandered from his father's house: "let him return." He is like the dove that flew away from Noah's ark, and was ready to faint: "let him return" —

7. Unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

What a blessed word "abundantly" is here! Abundant pardon to cover abundant sin, abundant provocation, abundant rejection of his Word!

8. For —

Saith God, as if he would not leave the prophet to speak any longer on his behalf; he himself appears upon the scene, and speaks: "For" —

8. My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD.

No doubt he refers here to the pardon of sin. Our thoughts are narrow; we find it hard to forgive great offenses, to forgive many offenses, to forgive many offenders, to continue completely to forgive, — all this is very difficult to men.

9. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Think of the biggest thought you ever had concerning God's forgiveness of sins; try again, let your thoughts rise higher still; ye cannot have reached the utmost height yet, "for as the heavens are higher than the earth," so are his thoughts and ways higher than yours.

10, 11. For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.

If you believe this great promise, you shall have the full benefit of it. Let this gracious rain drop on you, and it must refresh you. Let these blessed snowflakes come down on you, and they shall melt into your bosom, and remain there to bless you for ever; they shall not go back to God with their mission unfulfilled. As for us who preach that Word, or teach it in the Sunday-school, we may have a

full assurance that we shall not labour in vain nor spend our strength for nought. No, no; the raindrops go not on an errand that can fail, and the snowflakes that fall to the earth accomplish the end for which they are sent. Much more shall the purpose of God's Word be accomplished! Behold, it drops like the gentle rain; like snowflakes fly the messages of mercy from the lips of the Lord himself, and they shall not fall in vain, blessed be his holy name!

12. *For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.*

There shall seem to be joy everywhere when there is joy in your heart. When you receive Christ you have put everything round about you into its true position. The whole creation is a vast organ, and man puts his tiny fingers on the keys and evokes thunders of harmony to the praise of God. When the heart is filled with joy and peace, mountains and hills break forth before us into singing, and all the trees of the field clap their hands.

13. *Instead of the thorn —*

Which is everywhere today, pricking our feet and maiming our hands: "Instead of the thorn,"-

13. *Shall come up the fir tree,*

Where is the thorn then? I see it upon the bleeding brows of Christ; he has taken it away, and worn it as a crown.

13. *And instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the Lord for a name, —*

It shall make men know what he is like, what gracious power he has, what goodness dwells in him: it shall be to Jehovah for a name,"-

13. *For an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.*

That sign is exhibited, today, in the eyes of men. An evil and adulterous generation called for a sign, and this is the sign that God has given, — his converting grace in his Church. Instead of miracles, we have the work of the Holy Ghost in the hearts of sinners; and if any will not believe when this sign is sent to them, neither would they believe though one rose from the dead. It stands as "an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off."

ISAIAH 55

1. *Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.*

The description of gospel blessings grows sweeter as it advances. “Waters” first, “wine and milk” next, and still all “without money and without price.” We preach no narrow salvation: we rejoice in the covenant of grace; it is the backbone of our theology, but the gospel hath wide arms, and a loud voice, and persuasive tones: “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters.” In Christ there is a full supply for all our necessities, —bread and water; yea, there are luxuries sufficient for our largest desires, — wine and milk, and he wants us to bring nothing in payment for them: “without money and without price.” That is indeed free grace. Some people object to that expression, and say that it is tautology, for grace must be free; but we mean to keep on using it that all may know that grace is free, gratis, all for nothing.

2. *Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not?*

The less value there is in any religion, the more you have to pay for it. The pardon that cost a shilling is not worth a farthing, but that which costs us nothing is worth more than the whole world.

2. *Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.*

All that your largest desires can long for you will find in Christ. You shall have not only necessaries, but delicacies, delights that shall satisfy you to the full; you shall not be able to conceive of anything that shall be more rich and full than the grace of God. The gospel is “that which is good;” yea, it is the best food our souls can ever eat; it gratifies, it satisfies, and fills our spirits with holy joy and exhilaration.

3. *Incline your ear, and come unto me; —*

This is the gate by which salvation enters into man, — Ear gate, — by hearing and believing. “Incline your ear,” bend it forward as if you would catch every word; “and come unto me;” —

3. *Hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.*

Only think of a covenant made with needy sinners, thirsty sinners; God striking hands with guilty men in the person of Jesus Christ. It is a sure covenant, too; not made up of “ifs” and “buts” and “peradventures”, but a covenant sealed with blood, and signed by him who gives an oath with it that he will never turn from it, that you may have “strong consolation.

4. Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people.

He who is our greater David comes to us to bear witness to the immutable love of God, and to be to us our Captain and our King. Happy are the souls that accept this David to be their Leader. You remember how David, in the cave Adullam, gathered to himself “every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented, and he became a captain over them.” Even so, the great Antitype, David’s Son and David’s Lord, is willing now to gather to himself those who are spiritually bankrupt, discontented, and weary with the world, and God says, ‘ I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people.’”

5. Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee because of the LORD thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for he hath glorified thee.

What joy this gives to you who love him! Jehovah has glorified his Son, and given to him the power to call to himself a people that he knew not in a saving sense, and he shall so call nations that knew not him that they shall run unto him. We do not preach the gospel at haphazard; we are sure of results. If we speak in faith, in the name of Christ, men must be saved, they must run to Christ. It is not left to their option; there is a divine hand that secretly touches the springs of the will of men, so that, when Christ calls them, they run unto him. Oh, that he would just now call them, even those that are furthest off, that they may run into him and that he may be glorified! A Saviour without souls saved by him would be only a Saviour in name. A head without a body would be a very ghastly thing. A shepherd without sheep would be a man without occupation. A Christ anointed to save the lost, and yet no lost ones coming unto him, where would his glory be? But sinners, drawn by his almighty grace, run unto him, and so God glorifies him.

6. *Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near:*

In those happy gospel times, when Christ is set forth on purpose that “he may be found,” seek him, call upon him. He is very near when the gospel is preached with holy unction, when Christians are praying, when hearts are breaking for the conversion of sinners, and when his Spirit is working in their hearts, that they may repent of sin.

7. *Let the wicked forsake his way, —*

It is a bad way, it is a downward way, it is a way that will end in destruction; do not follow it any longer: “Let the wicked forsake his way.” —

7. *And the unrighteous man his thoughts:*

“Thoughts!” says one, “we shall not be hanged for our thoughts.” Oh, but you may be damned for your thoughts! No man has really forsaken the way of wickedness until he hates the very thought of wickedness. If your thoughts run after evil, your tongues will soon utter evil, and your hands will soon do evil.

7. *And let him return —*

He is like one who has wandered from his father’s house: “let him return.” He is like the dove that flew away from Noah’s ark, and is ready to faint: “let him return” —

7. *Unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon*

What a blessed word “abundantly” is here! Abundant pardon to cover abundant sin, abundant provocation, abundant rejection of his Word!

8. *For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my way, saith the LORD.*

“Saith the Lord,” as if he would not leave the prophet to speak any longer on his behalf; he himself appears upon the scene, and speaks: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts.” No doubt he refers here to the pardon of sin. Our thoughts are narrow. We find it hard to forgive great offences, to forgive many offences, to forgive many offenders, to continue completely to forgive, — all this is very difficult to man.

9. *For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thought than your thoughts.*

Think of the biggest thought you ever had concerning God's forgiveness of sins; try again, let your thoughts rise higher still; ye cannot have reached the utmost height yet, "for as the heavens are higher than the earth," so are his thoughts and ways higher than yours.

10, 11. *For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater; So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.*

If you believe this great promise, you shall have the full benefit of it. Let this gracious rain drop on you, and it must refresh you. Let these blessed snowflakes come down on you, and they shall melt into your bosom, and remain there to bless you for ever, they shall not go back to God with their mission unfulfilled. As for us who preach that Word, or teach it in the Sunday-school, we may have a full assurance that we shall not labour in vain, nor spend our strength for nought. No, no; the raindrops go not on an errand that can fail, and the snowflakes that fall to the earth accomplish the end for which they are sent. Much more shall the purpose of God's Word be accomplished! Behold, it drops like the gentle rain; like snowflakes fly the messages of mercy from the lips of the Lord himself, and they shall not fall in vain, blessed be his holy name !

12. *For ye shall go out with joy and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.*

There shall seem to be joy everywhere when there is joy in your heart. When you receive Christ, you have put everything round about you into its true position. The whole creation is a vast organ, and man puts his tiny fingers on the keys, and evokes thunders of harmony to the praise of God. When the heart is filled with joy and peace, mountains and hills break forth before us into singing, and all the trees of the field clap their hands.

13. *Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree,*

The thorn is everywhere today, pricking our feet and maiming our hands: but "instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree."

Where is the thorn then ? I see it upon the bleeding brows of Christ; he has taken it away, and worn it as a crown.

13. *And instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.*

It shall make men know what he is like, what gracious power he has, what goodness dwells in him: “it shall be to Jehovah for a name,” — “An everlasting sign.” That sign is exhibited, today, in the eyes of men. An evil and adulterous generation called for a sign, and this is the sign that God has given, — his converting grace in his Church. Instead of miracles, we have the work of the Holy Ghost in the hearts of sinners; and if any will not believe when this sign is sent to them, neither would they believe though one rose from the dead. It stands as “an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.”

ISAIAH 55

It is the language of infinite mercy, speaking to the abject condition of mankind. We have become naked, and poor and miserable through sin, and God, instead of driving us from his presence, comes loaded with mercy, and thus he speaks to us.

1. *Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.*

See the freeness of divine love! See how God, who knows the wants of souls, provides all things needful for them — water — the water of life, and as if that were not enough, the wine of joy, the milk of satisfaction, and he offers these freely. Yea, he stands like the salesman crying in the market, and cries, “Ho! ho! every one that thirsteth!” But, mark, there is no gain for him: the gain is for ourselves; for he saith, “He that hath no money, buy wine and milk without money and without price.” All that you want, dear friend God is ready to give you. Yea, he invites you to come and receive it, and presses upon you the good things of the covenant of grace. Why stand you back? Do you want these good things? Then, come and welcome. It is God who bids you come.

2. *Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not?*

Why do you seek to get comfort for your souls where you will never get it? Why do you try to content your immortal nature upon things that will die? There is nothing here below that can satisfy you. Why spend your money, then, for these things, and your labour for nothing?

2. Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.

God has real food for your soul — something that will make you truly happy. He will satisfy you, not with the name of goodness, but with the reality of it if you will but come and have it. You shall have fullness — you shall have delight — if you are but willing to come and receive it.

3. Incline your ear and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live;

Then who would not hear — who would not give attention — if by that attention life immortal may be received?

3. And I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.

Will God enter into covenant with sinful men — with thirsty men — with hungry men — with needy men — with guilty men? Ah! that he will. “I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.”

4. Behold, I have given him

That is the Son of David Jesus the Christ,” I have given him.”

4. For a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people.

If you want anyone to tell you what God is, Jesus Christ is the witness to the character of God. Do you want a leader to lead you back to peace and happiness — a commander by whose power you may be able to fight Satan and all the powers of darkness that hold you in bondage? God has given his Son to be such a leader to you. Oh! who would not enlist beneath his banner?

5. Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee because of the LORD thy God, and for the Holy one of Israel; for he hath glorified thee.

Here God speaks to Jesus, whom he has made a commander, and he tells him that he shall not be without a people, for those who never knew him shall come to him. There are some in this house

tonight who have not yet yielded themselves to Christ — some of whom he will say, “Tonight I must abide in thy house”; and when that voice of power is heard, their hearts will yield, and they will become the disciples of Jesus.

6. *Seek ye the LORD while he may be found,*

And that is tonight; for still the promise of finding is given to every one who seeks.

6. *Call ye upon him while he is near:*

And he is near, for in all places where his name is recorded, there he has promised to be. Wheresoever the gospel is preached, we have Christ’s word for it: “Lo, I am with you alway.” So, then, call ye upon him while he is near.

7-9. *Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

Oh! that we could rise to God’s thoughts — that we could speak his thoughts of love — that we could really believe that he is ready now to receive and forgive us, and could, therefore, fly into his arms without hesitancy or delay! God help us to do it!

10-11. *For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.*

Trust, then, in the gospel, which is the word of God, for it cannot fail you. Rest yourselves in the divine promise of pardon, for it cannot drop to the ground. It must accomplish the divine will.

12. *For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.*

“For,” if ye do this — if ye forsake your sins — if ye turn unto God — God can make such joy in the heart that all the world shall be full of joy. When a man feels that his sins are forgiven, then

nature seems replete with ditty, and the hills, and rocks, and trees all proclaim the presence of a gracious God. Until then, when the heart is heavy, nature seems dull and dreary; but, oh! may the grace of God so light up our hearts that all the world may be lit up for us.

13. *Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the LORD for the name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.*

This exposition consisted of readings from ISAIAH 55.; JEREMIAH 30:1-11.

ISAIAH 55

Hear these inspired words, dear friends, as though they came fresh from heaven, as though God himself spoke them at this moment out of the excellent glory, for indeed he does so. The Word of God never grows old; these messages are just as new as if the ink on the pens of the prophet and the psalmist were not yet dry.

1. *Ho every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters,*

This invitation is not given to you who are full, to you who can satisfy your own needs out of the buckets of your own righteousness. No, the prophet speaks to you thirsty ones, who feel an awful necessity which will not let you rest. Hunger you may appease; but thirst is terrible, none can bear its pangs long. “Ho, every one that thirsteth.” Whatever your age, sex, character, rank, or position in life, if you do but thirst, then the gospel stands with uplifted finger, and cries to you, “Ho!” as do merchants and traders who want to dispose of their wares.

1. *And he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.*

In the Lord Jesus Christ there is all you want, and more than you know that you want. As yet you only thirst, but here is bread for your hunger as well as drink for your thirst. Whereas “waters” might seem to satisfy your thirst, here is a superfluity of grace, an exceeding abundance of mercy: “Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.” Christ is as free as the air. As you have only to take in the air by breathing, in order to live by it, so have you only to receive Christ into your soul, and you live by him. As flows old Father Thames through the green meadows, and every dog may come and lap, and every ox may stand knee-deep in the stream,

for there is none to keep even an animal away, so is it with Christ: “Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.”

2. *Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread?*

Why are you so busy about your ceremonies, your work mongering, your feelings, none of which can yield food for your soul? Come to Christ, and buy without money the Bread of Life which came down from heaven.

2. *And your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.*

If we will but hear the gospel, and attentively hear it, “faith cometh by hearing,” and that faith leads us to Jesus Christ, and in him we find that which is substantial, solid, the very thing we need. We find in Christ all that is super-excellent, so that our soul delights itself in fatness. I have no lean Christ to preach to you, no half-starved salvation that will drag you into heaven, and save you “so as by fire.” But in coming to Christ, you are invited to “let your soul delight itself in fatness.” A Christian cannot be too happy; “the joy of the Lord” is beyond all description. You must taste it to prove its sweetness. As honey among the sweets, such is the joy of the Lord among joys; yea, as the sun and the lesser lights in the sky, such is the joy of Christ compared with all other delights that men can ever know. “Let your soul delight itself in fatness.”

3. *Incline your ear,*

You know what that means; bend forward, to catch the faintest utterance of the voice that is speaking.

3. *And come ‘unto me; hear, and your soul shall live;*

We do not live by sight; all the pretty things that you can see in a Romish place of worship will not save a single soul. The preaching of the gospel is God’s way of salvation: “Hear, and your soul shall live.” Christ rides into the City of Mansoul through Ear-gate. Take heed what ye hear, and take heed how ye hear.

3. *And I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.*

Think of God making a covenant with you; this is a very wonderful thing. You may almost leap for joy at the thought that God should ever enter into covenant with you. You think very little of yourself, and reckon yourself to be amongst the most obscure of

mankind; “yet,” says the Lord God, “I will strike hands with you, and be your Friend, and pledge my word to you; ay, and make a covenant with you, and an everlasting covenant it shall be, too. Surely, blessing, I will bless thee.” Oh, what a wonder of divine grace it is that God should enter into covenant with sinful man! “Even the sure mercies of David.” You know what David this is; this is the Son of David, the inheritor of great David’s name, “great David’s greater Son.”

4. Beheld, I have given him. for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people.

Jesus Christ is a witness to you of his Father’s love. I do not know how God could show his love more fully than he does in the life and death of his Son, Jesus Christ. Christ is the great witness of the Father’s love. Behold how he loves his people in that he gives his Son to die for them! Will you not clasp hands with God across this great sacrifice of his only-begotten Son? Let us do so now again as we have often done before. “I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people.” If he leads, let us follow; if he commands, let us obey. His command is, that we are to believe in his name, and to be baptized in his name; let us not be disobedient to any part of his holy will. Now comes a promise made to our great Leader, our Covenant Head

5. Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee because of the LORD thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for he hath glorified thee.

That is, Jehovah has glorified Christ. It is promised that multitudes shall come to him. “Thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not.” He never saw you in his house before, he never knew you to fall on your knees in prayer, but he is calling even you by his grace and by his gospel. You are here tonight, and he is calling you, even you; therefore, come to him at Once. There are some here who do not know Christ Jesus our Lord, they are strangers to his love and to his power to save, but the promise is that “nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee.” That implies speed, it is a double quick march. Oh, that many sinners would at once run to Christ! Some who often hear the gospel are very slow in coming to Christ; but I pray that some of you who do not know as much of it as they do may run to Christ at once, and be saved by him. It is a blessed thing to take Christ at the first time of asking. Love to Christ at first sight

is the wisest kind of love that can be. May it be largely bestowed on many of you! Listen to these next words

6, 7. *Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.*

Hear the music of the glorious message, “he will have mercy,” “he will abundantly pardon.” Return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon you, he will abundantly pardon you.

8, 9. *For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways, my ways saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

Perhaps you are thinking that he cannot forgive you, that he cannot possibly mean that he will blot out your sins; but he does mean it, ay, and he is willing to do it now. Oh, that you would come to your pardoning God, through Jesus Christ his dear Son!

10-13. *For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the LORD for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.*

Now let us read the 136th Psalm.

This exposition consisted of readings from ISAIAH 55, AND PSALM 136

ISAIAH 55

1. *Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.*

“Ho, ... come ye to the waters, ... to buy wine,” saith the Lord by his servant the prophet. It is just like it was at the wedding-feast at Cana, when the servants went to the water-pots, and found them full of wine. God often gives us more than we even think we need. Water would suffice to quench our thirst, but the Lord adds, “Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.” Wine and milk were among the blessings that old Jacob pronounced upon Judah, and they are symbolic of the special blessings which come to believers through Jesus Christ, who is our true Judah. He gives us joy, he gives us nourishment, he gives us everything we really need. Whatever you lack, you shall find it in Christ; you have nothing to do but to come for it. You have no money; but even if you had, the blessings are priceless, they cannot be purchased. The price of mercy is without price. This is all you have to do in order to receive it, come and take it, take it freely, come and take it now. Never did a salesman plead with a customer more earnestly than the Spirit of God here pleads with sinners, yet it is not God who is to be profited by the transaction. He gains nothing except the indulgence of his love, we are the eternal gainers by his gracious gift, yet the Lord saith, “Come ye,” and then again, “Come ye,” and then a third time, “Come.” When he saith, “Come, come, come,” who will refuse to come?

2. *Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread?*

All your care, your toil, your anguish of heart, are spent in a vain desire to get this world; and if you do get it, it is nothing more than bread, and bad bread, too; it cannot satisfy the cravings of your immortal spirit, why do you waste your time and money trying to get that which is not worth the having? Will you hunt after shadows? Will you pursue the wind?

2. *And your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.*

True religion gives substantial joy to the heart; it is no dream; it is a blessed reality, as those of us know who have tried it. If you will come and have it, you shall eat what is really good, and your soul shall find such a satisfaction in it that you shall delight yourself in fatness.

3, 4. *Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David. Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people.*

These words refer not only to David, but to Jesus, great David's greater Son. The next verse is spoken specially to him, not to us, yet as we overhear it, we suck comfort for ourselves out of it.

5. *Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee because of the LORD thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for he hath glorified thee.*

Christ must have a people. He did not die in vain. God will give him a following; he shall not be a Commander without troops; he shall not be a Leader without disciples. I shall preach tonight in strong confidence that many will be saved in this place tonight. Where there is faith, God will respond to it. Pray, you who are the people of God, that this promise may be kept. It is a promise to Christ, and the Father will keep his promise to his own Son. Be ye sure of this, he will glorify him, but he would have us pray for him. Let every heart that knows how to pray be breathing out the petition, "Father, glorify thy Son."

6. *Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near:*

There may come a day when he cannot be found, a time when he will not be near. When the great Judge of all has once said, "Depart," when once the Master of the house has risen up, and shut to the door, in vain will be all your seeking, and your praying, and your knocking at the door that will never open again. Therefore, "Seek ye Jehovah while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near."

7. *Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.*

The marginal reading is, "He will multiply to pardon." We multiply sin, but God's multiplication table goes farther than ours: "He will multiply to pardon."

8-11. *For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the*

earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. What comfort there is here for Christian workers, for you who proclaim God's Word! Yours is no hap-hazard business; look at the "shalls" in this eleventh verse: "It shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." When we make known God's Word, we are not drawing a bow at a venture we are not sowing seed which may or may not beget a harvest: it shall, it shall, it shall. God saith it three times. He is very fond of the number three, the Trinity is constantly revealed throughout both the Old and the New Testaments. When it is not spoken and declared so such doctrinally, you see its practical effect in the frequent threefold utterances of God.

12. *For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.*

There shall be demonstrative delight. All nature is in sympathy with the man who is in harmony with God; the world itself echoes to the joy of the little world within man's bosom.

13. *Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the LORD for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.*

We read, in the third verse, about "the sure mercies of David." To explain that phrase, let us read a few verses from the second Book of Samuel, and the twenty-third chapter. I might have selected another passage, but these being David's dying words will be the more striking.

This exposition consisted of readings from ISAIAH 44. AND 45; AND 2 SAMUEL 23:1-5.

ISAIAH 55

1, 2. *Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come buy wine and milk*

without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not?

Why have you sought rest where it can never be found? Why have you craved delights which can never satisfy you? Cease from such folly.

2. *Hearken diligently unto me, —*

Thus speaks the Lord Jehovah: “Hearken diligently unto me, —

2, 3. *And eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live, and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, —*

“With you” who have any desire for it, — “with you” who hunger and thirst after righteousness, and who have no other recommendation than that, poor as it is, — “I will make an everlasting covenant with you” —

3, 4. *Even the sure mercies of David. Behold, I have given him —*

The Son of David, — “great David’s greater Son,” — and God’s own well beloved and only-begotten Son, even Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. God says “I have given him” —

4-7. *For a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people. Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee because of the LORD thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel, for he hath glorified thee. Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.*

Blessed be his holy name!

8-13. *For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and making it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall, not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. For ye shall go out with joy and be led forth with peace: the*

mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the briar shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the LORD for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 23 and ISAIAH 55.

ISAIAH 55:1-4

It is the language of infinite mercy, speaking to the abject condition of mankind. We have become naked, and poor, and miserable through sin, and God, instead of driving us from his presence, comes loaded with mercy, And thus he speaks to us.

1. *Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.*

See the freeness of divine love! See how God who knows the wants of souls, provides all things needful for them — water — the water of life; and as if that were not enough, the wine of joy, the milk of satisfaction; and he offers these freely. But, mark, there is no gain for him: the gain is for ourselves, for he saith, “He that hath no money, buy wine and milk without money and without price.” All that you want, dear friend, God is ready to give you. Do you want these good things? Then come and welcome. It is God who bids you come.

2. *Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not?*

Why do you seek to get comfort for your souls where you will never get it? Why do you try to content your immortal nature upon things that will die? There is nothing here below that can satisfy you. Why spend your money then for these things, and your labour for nothing?

2. *Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.*

God has real food for your soul — something that will make you truly happy. He will satisfy you, not with the name of goodness, but with the reality of it, if you will but come and have it. You shall have fullness — you shall have delight — if you are but willing to come and receive it.

3. *Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live;*

Then who would not hear — who would not give the attention — if by that attention life immortal may be received?

3. *And I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.*

Will God enter into covenant with sinful men — with thirsty men — with hungry men — with needy men — with guilty men? Ah! that he will. “I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.”

4. *Behold, I have given him*

That is the Son of David — Jesus the Christ — “I have given him.”

4. *For a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people.*

If you want anyone to tell you what God is, Jesus Christ is the witness to the character of God. Do you want a leader to lead you back to peace and happiness — a commander by whose power you may be able to fight Satan and all the powers of darkness that hold you in bondage? Has all in Jesus Christ that I can need for time and eternity, and this can all be mine for the asking, and receiving. Shall we not ask and receive?

ISAIAH 55:1-7

1. *Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters,-*

To the waters which flowed from that smitten Rock of which we have been reading.

1-3. *And he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me:*

See, the way of salvation is through Ear-gate. We must hear the gospel, for it is not what we are to do, but what we are to receive that will save us; and we must come to God to hear it before we can receive it. “Faith cometh by hearing.” Give a very earnest ear, then, to the preaching of the gospel of Christ: “Hearken diligently unto

me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.” Again the Lord says, “Incline your ear, and come unto me.”

3. *Hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.*

Says someone, “I can understand God making a covenant with David; but will He make a covenant with me?” Yes, and after the same sure tenor, too: “I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.” God will promise to bless you, and save you, and keep you, and present you in glory in the day of Christ’s appearing; and this shall be a covenant which shall never be broken. Though all things else are changed, yet that covenant shall stand secure for ever. It will fill you with joy when you understand that such a covenant as this is made with you; and you will say, as David did, “Although my house be not so with God; yet He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure.” Oh, what a blessing it is to have a share in this covenant!

4. *Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people.*

“I have given him;” that is, David’s greater Son, the true David, “I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people.”

5. *Behold, thou —*

That is, Jesus, the Son of David: “Behold, thou” —

5-7. *Shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee because of the Lord thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for he hath glorified thee. Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.*

Oh, that many may put this blessed promise to the proof even now, for Christ’s sake! Amen,

This exposition consisted of readings from ISAIAH 53.; AND 55:1-7.

ISAIAH 55:1-11

1. *Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat: yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.*

Remark the wonderful condescension of God, that though the gifts of his grace are so precious that all the world could not buy them, yet he condescends to ask his creature to have those gifts. He stands, as it were, like one who has goods to sell, and he cries, "Ho! such and such a passer-by, turn hither: give ear in this way. Ho! everyone that thirsteth." If, then, there is any soul that wants God, O soul, God desires you infinitely more than you desire him; and he invites you to come to him. Do not delay.

2. *Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not?*

Seeking happiness in a thousand ways with much toil and trouble, but with bitter disappointment.

2. *Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.*

God invites his creature to listen to him. "Do," saith he "but lend me thine ear a little. Do but hearken diligently to what I have to tell you." Oh! should not God's message of love command the attention of all mankind?

3. *Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live;*

Salvation does not come to men through the eye, but through the ear. Not what you see in the finery of the priest or the altar. That can do you no good. But listen to the gospel. It is by ear-gate that God's mercy comes triumphant into the soul of man. "Incline your ear and come unto me. Hear and your soul shall live."

3. *And I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.*

Here God will strike hands with the sinner and enter into a compact with him — a covenant of mercy and of grace, through Jesus Christ, the Saviour.

4. *Behold I have given him for a witness to the people,*

To bear witness to men of what God is.

4. *A leader and commander to the people.*

For Christ loves the people, and he leads them rightly. He will lead them to glory.

5. Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee because of the LORD thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for he hath glorified thee.

The promise is to Christ. Today are these words fulfilled in our ears, for, in calling these British Isles to know Christ, God has given to the Lord Jesus a people that knew him not. What did our forefathers know of Jesus when he was here below? And yet in this land he has multitudes of hearts that love his name. Oh! that God would give this whole house full of souls to Christ tonight. What a casket it would make full of jewels! Oh! that the gracious Father would bestow it on his Son!

6-11. Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.

Therefore, we are not at all afraid about the success of the preaching of the gospel. Some will be saved tonight wherever Jesus Christ is preached. My dear unsaved hearer, will it be you? I pray it may be. May the Lord grant that this may be the last night of your unregeneracy, and be your spiritual birth-night. Some will be saved. Will you be of the number?

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 138.; ISAIAH 55:1-11; ROMANS 8:28-39.

ISAIAH 57

A lament for the death of the righteous — many of them put to death by persecution.

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.*

When there is a storm coming on, you may see the shepherds among the hills, gathering their sheep and taking them home, and when good men die in large numbers, and the Church's ranks are thinned, it is sometimes a token that bad times are coming on, and so God takes away the righteous from the evil to come. Oh! did men know what the world loses when a good man dies, they would regret it far more than the death of emperors and kings who fear not God. But as for those who are made righteous by the grace of God, they need not fear to die. To them it will be a rest — a sleep with Jesus — till the trump of the resurrection, and all the evil that will come upon the world will not touch them. They shall rest till the Master comes. Now, the rest of the chapter is a very terrible description of the sin of the people of Isaiah's day. And at last it contains a very brilliant display of the grace of God.

3, 4. *But draw near hither, ye sons of the sorceress, the seed of the adulterer and the whore. Against whom do ye sport yourselves? against whom make ye a wide mouth, and draw out the tongue? are ye not children of transgression, a seed of falsehood.*

Because this people so exalted against God and his gospel, God would not allow that they were the true seed of Israel at all. He makes them out to be a false, degenerate breed- and he asks them how they dare to sport against his prophets, and draw out the tongue, and make a wide mouth against those who spoke for the God of Israel.

5. *Enflaming yourselves with idols under every green tree, slaying the children in the valleys under the cliffs of the rocks?*

The Lord had said that they should offer sacrifice only on one altar at Jerusalem, and this to him alone, but they had set up altars under all the ancient oaks to worship all sorts of gods. In addition to this, they had gone so far after the cruel way of the Pagans, that they offered their own children in sacrifice in the valleys, under the cliffs and the rocks.

6. *Among the smooth stones of the stream is thy portion; they, they are thy lot: even to them hast thou poured a drink offering, thou hast offered a meat offering. Should I receive comfort in these?*

They had set up the smooth stones which they had found in the brook, and made them into altars — nay made gods of them, for when man wants to make a god, anything will do, whether it is the fetish of the cannibal, or the round robin of the ritualist. It little matters which. A piece of bread will do for a god, as well as a piece of stone. Anything will man worship, sooner than worship the great, invisible, eternal God.

7, 8. *Upon a lofty and high mountain hast thou set thy bed: even thither wentest thou up to offer sacrifice. Behind the doors also and the posts hast thou set up thy remembrance:*

Where they ought to have put up texts of Scripture and the remembrance of God's law, they had set up memorials of their false gods everywhere, for when men become superstitious and worship falsely, they seem to be far more eager about it than those who worship the true God. They go on all fours at it, and give themselves wholly up to their superstitions.

8, 9. *For thou hast discovered thyself to another than me, and art gone up; thou hast enlarged thy bed, and made thee a covenant with them; thou lovedst their bed where thou sawest it. And thou wentest to the king with ointment, and didst increase thy perfumes and didst send thy messengers far off, and didst debase thyself even unto hell.*

When they were in trouble, instead of going to God they went to the king of Egypt, that he might come and help them against the king of Assyria; but they would never turn to God. They loved idols, and so they trusted in an arm of flesh. They forgot the invincible arm which had overthrown Pharaoh at the Red Sea, and wrought such wondrous miracles for the deliverance of his people; and they made gods of the kings of the earth and trusted in them, “and didst debase thyself even unto hell.”

10. *Thou art wearied in the greatness of thy way;*

They did so much, and they were so superstitious, that they even wearied themselves with it.

10. *Yet saidst thou not, There is no hope: thou hast found the life of thine hand; therefore thou wast not grieved.*

So long as they did but live they did not think that there was any hope of anything better, and so they were not grieved for all their sin and all their trouble.

11. *And of whom hast thou been afraid or feared, that thou hast lied, and hast not remembered me, nor laid it to thy heart? have not I held my peace even of old, and thou fearest me not?*

This is the old trouble — that because God does not smite down sinners there and then they take liberties with him. They do not know that his patience — his slackness, as they call it — is long-suffering, because he is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance, and so he puts up his sword. Yet he says, “Have not I held my peace, even of old, and thou fearest me not?”

12. *I will declare thy righteousness, and thy works; for they shall not profit thee.*

They said, “Why, we are very righteous. Have not we got a god in every corner? As for our works, we have plenty of them. Have not we temples built everywhere, and altars set up on every hill and in every valley?” “Yes,” says God, “such is your righteousness. They shall not profit thee.”

13. *When thou criest, let thy companies deliver thee; but the wind shall carry them all away; vanity shall take them: but he that putteth his trust in me shall possess the land, and shall inherit my holy mountain;*

Oh! what a sarcasm! but how just. You that love not God, when you are in trouble, let your sins deliver you if they can. Let your pleasures comfort you.

14, 15. *And shall say, Cast ye up, cast ye up, prepare the way, take up the stumblingblock out of the way of my people. For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.*

We dwell in time, and by and by we are hurried into eternity but God always dwells in eternity. It is a very beautiful thought that he should have two dwelling-places. A blasphemer once met a humble Christian man, and he said, “Pray, is yours a great God or a little God?” “Well,” said he, “he is so great a God that the heaven of

heavens cannot contain him, but he condescends to make himself so little that he can dwell in my poor humble heart.” God has two temples. The one is the high and holy place: the other is the lowly and the humble place. May we have him in our hearts, and then shall we be in his heaven ere long.

16. *For I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth:*

God does not like being angry, and though sin provokes him, yet he feels not at ease when he is wrathful.

16. *For the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made.*

It would destroy them. Man could not bear God’s anger ever more.

17-19. *For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me, and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart. I have seen his ways, and will heal him: I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him and to his mourners. I create the fruit of the lips;*

God teaches men how to speak words of penitence, and faith, and prayer, and praise.

19. *Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near, saith the LORD; and I will heal him.*

He puts it twice over, because it is such a prodigy of grace that God should heal sinners that are so polluted with sin. He puts it over again. “I will heal him.”

20. *But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.*

“Work up” such is the word — “whose waters work up mire and dirt” continually, as it were, in a work, and bringing up its filthiness from the bottom — bringing it to the shore — taking away the brightness from every wave and the crystal blue from every drop. Its waters cast up mire and dirt.

21. *There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.*

ISAIAH 57:10-21

The prophet has been giving a very terrible description of the sin of the nation. We need not read it all, but at last he says this:

10. *Thou art wearied in the greatness of thy way;*

“Thou art wearied out with thine own way. Thou hast been so zealous in thy rebellion against God that thou hast actually fatigued thyself in the pursuit of evil.” That is a true description of those who have worn themselves out in the ways of sin.

10. *Yet saidst thou not, There is no hope: thou hast found the life of thine hand; therefore thou wast not grieved.*

Though they had hunted for pleasure, and had not found it, and had brought themselves into great distress, yet they would not give up the hope of, after all, succeeding in their rebellion. Oh, how obstinately are men set upon seeking satisfaction where it never can be found,— namely, in the pursuit of sin! These people were still alive, and they were content to be so; but they were not grieved although God had sorely chastened them.

11. *And of whom hast thou been afraid or feared, that thou hast lied, and hast not remembered me,—*

“Me, thy Maker, thy Friend, to whom thou must own thy very soul, unless that soul shall go down into the pit, ‘Thou hast not remembered me,’” —

11. *Nor laid it to thy heart? have not I held my peace even of old, and thou fearest me not?*

When God is very long suffering, and lets men alone in their sin; then, often, they quite forget him, and have no fear of him.

12. *I will declare thy righteousness, and thy works; for they shall not profit thee.*

If God once takes the self-righteous man’s righteousness, and explains what it really is, he will soon reveal to its owner that it is a mere delusion and sham, that will not profit him at all.

13. *When thou criest, let thy companies deliver thee;*

“When sickness, and depression of spirit, and death itself, shall come to you, and you begin to dread what is to follow, and cry to those who comforted you in your time of health, what will they be able to do for you?”

13. *But the wind shall carry them all away; vanity shall take them: but he that putteth his trust in me shall possess the land, and shall inherit my holy mountain;*

All confidence in men shall be blown away as chaff is driven by the wind; but faith in God wins the day.

14, 15. *And shall say, Cast ye up, cast ye up, prepare the way, take up the stumblingblock out of the way of my people. For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.*

That is a wonderful verse. You notice that the prelude to it explains the greatness and the holiness of God; and then, like an eagle swooping out of the sky even down to the earth, we find God coming from his high and lofty place to dwell with humble and contrite hearts. Not with the proud,—not with you who think yourselves good and excellent,— does God dwell; but with men who feel their sin, and own it; with men who feel their unworthiness, and confess it. I will read this verse again to impress it upon your memory: “Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.”

16. *For I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth: for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made.*

See the tender meaning of God’s message in this verse. He has been encouraging the guilty one, and making him feel the enormity of his ounces; and then he says, “I will not do that any more, lest I should crush him. He is too weak to bear any more punishment or reproof; therefore I will not any longer afflict him, but I will turn to him in mercy, ‘for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made.’”

17. *For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me, and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart.*

Here God shows that his chastening does not always produce a good result; for, sometimes, when men are tried on account of sin, they grow worse and worse: “I hid me, and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart.” What does God say of such a great sinner as that?

18. *I have seen his ways,—*

“I have seen that he goes from bad to worse when I afflict him. Now I will try another plan. ‘I have seen his ways,’”

18, 19. *And will heal him: I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him and to his mourners. I create the fruit of the lips; Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near, saith the LORD; and I will heal him.*

It is heart-melting to see the tenderness of God. “I will not further smite him, lest his spirit should fail before me. I will not continue to strikt him, because I can see that he only goes farther away from me the more I chastise him. I will deal with him in abounding love: ‘I will heal him.’” I believe that there is many a sinner who runs away from God thinking that the Lord is his enemy; and as God pursues him, he does not dare look back. He thinks that it is the step of the Avenger that he hears, so he flies faster and farther away from God; but when he does venture to look back, and ends that it is a loving Father’s face that is gazing upon him, oh! how he regrets his folly in running from him! Then he throws himself into the arms of the God of love, and wonders however he could have been the enemy of this his greatest Friend. May such a happy turn as that happen to some whom I am now addressing!

20, 21. *But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.*

They may have the semblance of peace, or a false peace, but nothing which is worthy of being called peace.

This exposition consisted of readings from ISAIAH 57:10-21; AND 58:1-11.

ISAIAH 58

1. *Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.*

See, friends, how stolid men are by nature. God’s messengers must not only speak, they must speak very forcibly, they must speak as with the sound of a trumpet, before men will hear them. Among the most stolid of all are those who think themselves God’s people, but who are not really and spiritually so. It is hard to reach the common sinner; but it is harder still to reach the baptized sinner, the man who professes to be a Christian, but who has only the name to live, while he is spiritually dead.

2. *Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways,*

They are careful to offer morning prayers, they would not go into their business without bending the knee to God; and they are eager and attentive hearers in the house of the Lord.

2. *As a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God: they ask of me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God.*

Is it not strange that men will often continue to take delight in the externals of religion, while they give their heart to their sins? Outwardly, they keep up with great regularity all the observances of religion; yet in heart they are far from God.

3. *Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge?*

They could not make out why they did not benefit by their religiousness.

They fasted, but they did not find themselves improved thereby. They afflicted their souls, yet they did not receive pardon for their sins, and they could not make it out. The Lord explained the mystery.

3. *Behold, in the day of your fast ye fled pleasure; and exact all your labours.*

It is very easy to abstain from eating food of a certain kind, yet you can make another kind of food just as palatable; and while you are yourself resting, you may be compelling others to work for you. What is this but hypocrisy? I think it is a common saying among the Arabs and Egyptians, when a man is very ugly in temper, "One would think that he was keeping a fast," because it often happens in long fasts that men grow irritable; what is the good of fasting when that is the only result?

4. *Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness:*

Even in their fasts, they disputed with one another; one said the fast should be on such a day, another would keep it on another day; and no doubt there are some professing Christians who are very zealous, mainly out of spite against other professors; they with as much zeal keep fast days or feast days the wrong way as others do

the right way. It is a pity when this sort of party spirit is mixed up with the observances of religion.

4. *Ye shall not fast as ye do this day,*

Some fasted in order to appear very religious. "Oh!" people would say, such a man must be very good, he fasts thrice in the week." That is a kind of fasting to which God has no respect. To feel pride while we fast with the stomach, is a poor way of showing how holy we are.

4, 5. *To make your voice to be heard on high. Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD?*

The mere appearance of sorrow, the outward garb of mortification,-what is there in that to please the Lord?

6. *Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?*

That is the kind of fasting which God cares for,-when a man leaves off oppressing those who toil for him, when he makes their tasks lighter, when he seeks their comfort, when he no longer grinds them between the millstones that threaten to crush the life out of them.

7. *Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?*

For they are your own flesh and blood. Though they may be total strangers to you, yet are they men like yourself. This is the fast that God delights in, when men take care to look after the poor, and to relieve the distressed when this is done,--

8. *Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shalt be thy reward.*

Do not take those promises out of their connection. Observe that they are made to those that clothe the naked, and feed the hungry, and care for the poor. If you have done this, then you can ask God to fulfill this promise, but not else. Then, when thou hast done this,-

9. *Then shalt thou call, and the LORD shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am.*

If you have cared for the needy, God will care for you when you are needy. Is it not his way to reward the gift of even a cup of cold water to one of his disciples? Has he not promised that he will give back again into our bosoms that which we have given to others for his sake?

9. *If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke,*
If you do not oppress anybody,-

9. *The putting forth of the finger,*

That is, the finger pointing scornfully to people, and the contemptuous enquiry, "Who are they?" -- looking down upon your fellows, who perhaps are far better than yourself,-you must put all that away.

9. *And speaking vanity;*

That constant idle talk of which some are so fond, that utterance of falsehood which many practice, that also must be put away.

10. *And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noon day*

Now mind again what I said just; do not go stealing with this promise without noticing the connection in which it is placed: "If thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity;" but not till then.

11. *And the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.*

What rich promises to the generous and the kind! There are some who scatter and yet increase, and there are others who withhold more than is meet, and it tendeth to poverty. These promises are distinctly made to those who care for the needy and suffering. My brothers and sisters, mind well what the Lord here teaches you, for these things are far better than fasting. Better than any outward ordinances whatsoever are real acts of kindness, for remember that the same God who said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind," made the second table of his law to run thus, "and thy neighbour as thyself."

12. *And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou*

shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in.

God's people are to seek to turn wildernesses into paradises. There is no part of the world so full of sorrow but the heart of the believer may bring gladness to it.

13, 14. *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;*

There is no doubt that a reverent, happy, joyful keeping of the Sabbath ministers greatly to spiritual advancement. Here is the promise made to those who delight in the Sabbath,-

14. *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.*

God help us to be observant of the precepts of this chapter that its promises may be blessedly fulfilled in our experience! Amen.

ISAIAH 58:1-11

1, 2. *Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins. Yet they seek me daily,—*

There are many nominally religious people who are full of sin. They have an external religion which allows them to live in rebellion against God. And such people are not easily convinced of sin. Hence the prophet is bidden to lift up his voice like a trumpet; yet, even if he does so, they will not hear him. There are none so deaf as those that will not hear; and these men are not wishful to hear what God has to say to them: "Yet they seek me daily," —

2. *And delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God: they ask of me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God.*

They are always in a place of worship if possible; they cannot have too many services and sermons; yet they have no heart towards God. O my dear friends, let us always be afraid of merely external religiousness! Genuine conversion, real devotion to God, true communion with God, these are sure things; but mere outward

religiousness is nothing but so much varnish and tinsel, it is indeed but the ghastly coffin of a soul that never was quickened unto spiritual life. This is the way these sham religionists talked about their religion, —

3. Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge?

When God rejects a man's religion, what must be the reason of it? Here is the explanation.

3. Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours.

“You fast, but you make your workmen toil on still; you determine that they shall not have one atom of their labour abated; and you make an amusement of what you call a fast: ‘In the day of your fast ye find pleasure.’”

4. Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high.

The best sort of mere external religion will soon turn sour. If you do not worship the Lord in a right spirit, God will loathe the very form of your service. Why, you might, by hypocrisy, make even prayer-meetings to be hateful in the sight of God; and the ordinances may be made as abominable to God as the mass itself. You can soon degrade sermon-hearing into mere listening to oratory, and the Sabbath-day may easily become an object only of superstitious and formal observance. The heart — the heart is everything; if that be wrong, it sours the sweetest things under heaven.

5. Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD?

Does God care for the externals of worship only? Is he satisfied with sackcloth and ashes, and the hanging down of the head like a bulrush?

6. Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?

Yes, this is true fasting before God; — not to demand your pound of flesh, and declare that you will have it; not to grind down the poor man to the last farthing; but “to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free.”

7. Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?

That is the kind of fast that the Lord approves,— to deny yourself that you may give to those who are in need.

8, 9. Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy reward. Then shalt thou call, and the LORD shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity;

That is, if thou shalt take away all oppression, all wrong-doing to men, all talking of falsehood and speaking vanity: “Then shall thy light break forth as the morning.”

10, 11. And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noon day: and the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.

What promises God gives to those who consider the poor and needy round about them! But if you shut your ears to the cry of the distressed, God will shut his ears to your cry.

This exposition consisted of readings from ISAIAH 57:10-21; AND 58:1-11.

ISAIAH 58:1-12

1,2. Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins. Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God: they ask of me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God.

And what a strange thing this is, that there are some people who take delight in the ordinances of God, and yet they are living in the most shameful sin. I must confess this remains a mystery to me. But I hear of some who will attend prayer-meetings and seem to enjoy them — who are to be found in the House of God whenever the doors are opened, and yet their characters will not bear the light. One would think that they would not wish to be told of their sins, and to come under a faithful ministry, and yet they do, and the more faithful that ministry is the more they seem to like it, and yet go on in their sins. Oh! what strange blindness is this which loves the light, and yet will not see by it — men that take to themselves water and much soap and yet will not wash — that heap up the bread about them as if they built a house with bread, and yet do not eat of it. Oh! infatuation most strange, to love the gospel apparently, and yet not to receive it into the heart so as to be changed by it. See how God talks to this religious people.

3. Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours.

They fasted, and then they said, “Why did not God accept our fasting?” Why, because they made their poor servants work up to the very last all that they could do. They never gave them any rest. They exacted all their labours, and they themselves, while they pretended to faint, were taking their pleasure,

4. Behold ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye do this day to make your voice to be heard on high.

They were fond of getting into religious disputes; and when they had a fast day they fell to loggerheads about different doctrines, and they got angry with one another, till they began to smite with the fist of wickedness, and they thought that a day spent in that manner would be acceptable to God. What kind of a God would he be?

5, 6. Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD? Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness,

That is, if by any dishonesty you have got a man in your power, set him free — if you have oppressed him, give him his rights. This is God's kind of fasting.

6. *To undo the heavy burdens,*

Not to exact from a man what you have no right to have, but what, perhaps, the law may allow you to get out of him. This is God's fasting — "to undo the heavy burdens."

6, 7. *And to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry,*

It is God's kind of fasting to give what you would have eaten yourselves, to let other's feast. "To deal thy bread to the hungry."

7. *And that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him: and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?*

When you know that there are poor persons, perhaps of your own kith and kin — and, in one respect, we are all of one flesh — when we know that there are such, and yet refuse to help them, it is idle to talk about fasting. But if we would see to this, then comes this promise.

8, 9. *Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy reward. Then shalt thou call, and the LORD shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger,*

That is, the scorning the poor man.

9-11. *And speaking vanity; And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noon day: And the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones:*

You see, by giving comes getting. According to the philosophy of God, it is by watering others that we get watered ourselves. God feeds the man that feeds others. He made fat the bones of the hungry. Now, God says he will make fat his bones. He satisfied the souls of those that were in drought as best he could, and now God will satisfy his soul in drought, and make him: —

11, 12. *And thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not. And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shall raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in.*

God help us to obey his precept that we may partake in his promise.

This exposition consisted of readings from ISAIAH 58:1-12, JEREMIAH 30.

ISAIAH 59:16-21

59:16. *And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore his arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it sustained him.*

Man's extremity was Christ's opportunity. There was no one left to save poor fallen manhood, no one who could lift a hand or a finger for our rescue; therefore, Jesus came, and fought, and bled, and died, and conquered on our behalf.

17-19. *For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloke. According to their deeds, accordingly he will repay, fury to his adversaries, recompence to his enemies; to the islands he will repay recompence. So shall they fear the name of the LORD from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun.*

Christ came once, and he is to come a second time, because he will be again needed here; and when he returns, he will ease himself of his adversaries, and speedily win the victory for truth and righteousness. Then shall the whole earth know what Christ can do.

19-21. *When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him. And the redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the LORD. As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the LORD; my spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the LORD, from henceforth and for ever.*

The Church of God shall have the Spirit of truth and the Word of truth ever abiding in her midst. God will not break his covenant by

withdrawing his Spirit from his Church. The Redeemer has come, and his work of redemption is accomplished. The Spirit also has come, but his work is not as yet done; it is being performed from day to day, and the Spirit will never be withdrawn while any part of his ministry remains unfulfilled. The consequence of all this is the glory of the true Church of the living God. There are better days coming for the cause of Christ and of truth. Listen, and be encouraged, all ye that are heavy of heart!

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 103; ISAIAH 59:16-21; AND ISAIAH 60:1-16

ISAIAH 60

This is a chapter full of good news, a prophecy of the bright days that are yet to come to this dark world. These dull days are not to last for ever. The reign of wickedness will come to an end, and earth shall have the bright sunlight of Jehovah's presence. The words are addressed to the Church of God;-it little matters whether to the Jewish or the Gentile Church; for, now, they are all one in Christ, and there is no distinction in the message to both Jews and Gentiles.

1, 2. *Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee.*

We have had abundant proof of the darkness, and of the grossness of that darkness, for these many centuries; now we are to look-and I trust that we can already see it in part,-for the arising of the Swan of righteousness, first upon the Church, and then upon the whole world.

3, 4. *And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising. Lift up thine eyes round about, and see: all they gather themselves together, they come to thee: thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be nursed at thy side.*

Or, rather, "shall be carried as by a nurse upon her side." The strong ones-the sons-shall come walking; the weaker ones-the daughters-shall be carried like children who need to be nursed; but they shall all come. Today, the Church of Christ has to "go." The message to Christ's disciples still is, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." The Church must send her

heralds far and wide to tell the good news; but a blessed change will be wrought when the nations will come to hear the story, flocking in crowds to listen to it, and Christ will be sought by those who never sought him before.

“O long-expected day, begin;
Dawn on these realms of woe and sin!”

5. *Then thou shalt see, and flow together, and thine heart shall fear, and be enlarged;*

First, the blessing shall seem too great to be real, and the Church shall tremble with fear; but, afterwards, she shall believe in it, and rejoice in it, and so her heart shall be enlarged.

5. *Because the abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee,-*

The sailors shall come to Christ in great numbers; and when they are converted, they will be the best of missionaries. Each ship shall be a floating Bethel, and every port at which they touch shall be the gladder for the good news they will have to tell: “The abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee,”-

5. *The forces of the Gentiles shall come unto thee.*

The soldiers, as well as the sailors, shall enter the service of the King of kings. Oh, what a happy day it will be when every soldier shall have enlisted beneath the banner of peace! Then they will be able to fight the good fight of faith every day, and to be the means of saving multitudes of precious souls. According to this verse, great importance is attached to the conversion of sailors and soldiers; God grant that some of us may live to see this prophecy fulfilled!

6. *The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah;*

Wealthy nations, of the Oriental type, who ride upon camels and dromedaries, and who have long been under the sway of the false prophet, Mahomet, shall yield allegiance to the Son of God.

6,7. *All they from Sheba shall come they shall bring gold and incense, and they shall shew forth the praises of the LORD. All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered together unto thee, the rams of Nebaioth shall minister unto thee: they shall come up with acceptance on mine altar, and I will glorify the house of my glory.*

Pastoral people-travelers from place to place in the wilderness shall come to Christ. There shall be no untamed nation, no barbarous people that shall continue to oppose the coming of that

glorious kingdom of the blessed God in those happy, happy days. As for the Church, she shall be so astonished that she shall cry out,-

8. *Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows?*

Or, "to their cotes."

9. *Surely the isles shall wait for me, and the ships of Tarshish first,-*

Tarshish was some country far away from Palestine; it is difficult to say exactly where it was, but the Phoenicians made their most distant voyages thither. It may have been this very island in which we live; and we know that they came hither for tin. It is a very remarkable thing that islanders have usually been the first people to be converted to Christ. If you will, at this moment, think of any places where true religion is strong and dominant, you will naturally think of islands. Then, the mention of ships shows what regard God has for sailors when he says, "The ships of Tarshish first"-

9, 10. *To bring thy sons from far, their silver and their gold with them, unto the name of the LORD thy God, and to the Holy One of Israel, because he hath glorified thee. And the sons of strangers shall build up thy walls,-*

And it is so today. Some, who were total strangers to God, and to his grace, have now become the most earnest ministers of Christ: "The sons of strangers shall build up thy walls,"-

10, 11. *And their kings shall minister unto thee: for in my wrath I smote thee, but in my favour have I had mercy on thee.*

Therefore thy gates shall be open continually; no alarms of war will cause them then to shut the iron gates.

11. *They shall not be shut day nor night;*

There shall be free access to Zion, to the Church, and to Christ himself, at all times.

11-17. *That men may bring unto thee the forces of the Gentiles, and that their kings may be brought. For the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted. The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee, the fir tree, the pine tree, and the box together, to beautify the place of my sanctuary; and I will make the place of my feet glorious. The sons also of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee; and all they that despised thee shall bow themselves down at the soles of*

thy feet; and they shall call thee, The city of the LORD, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel. Whereas thou hast been forsaken and hated, so that no man went through thee, I will make thee an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations. Thou shalt also suck the milk of the Gentiles, and shalt suck the breast of kings: and thou shalt know that I the LORD am thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob. For brass I will bring gold, and for iron I will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron

You see, it is better, and better, and better, for that is God's way with his people;-to bless them, and then to bless them over again, and again, and again, giving them grace upon grace, grace to qualify them to receive yet more grace.

17-22. *I will also make thy officers peace, and thine exactors righteousness. Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise. The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the LORD shalt be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory. Thy sun shall no more go down, neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the LORD shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended.*

Thy people also shall be all righteous: they shall inherit the land for ever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified. A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation: The LORD will hasten it in his time. Oh, that "his time" were come! The happy period is hastening on, and it will come at the right time. We ought not to be dispirited by delays, for it will surely come; it will not tarry a moment beyond the time appointed by God, blessed be his holy name! Amen.

ISAIAH 60

The subject of this chapter is, "The glory of the Church in the abundant access of the Gentiles, and the great blessings after a short affliction."

1. *Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee.*

The Church is like the moon, which shines with borrowed light. When God shines upon the Church, then the Church herself shines

by reflecting his light. The glory of Jehovah is her glory, if that be withdrawn, she is dark indeed; but when that shines into her, and through her, then her brightness is great indeed.

2, 3. *For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people; but the LORD shall arise upon thee and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.*

There is nothing that breaks the darkness except the light from God's face; and when that falls upon the Church, then the Church straightway begins to shine in the midst of the darkness, and multitudes come to the light, and even the great ones of the earth, the kings, come to the brightness of her rising.

4. *Lift up thine eyes round about, and see: all they gather themselves together, they come to thee: thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be nursed at thy side.*

There is no sign here of the Church of God being deserted, on the contrary, she shall become, through the grace of God, the center of attraction. Men shall come from distant lands to her, however far removed they were, they shall still come: "thy sons shall come from far." She shall also be increased by the accession of those near at hand: "and thy daughters shall be nursed at thy side."

5. *Then thou shalt see, and, flow together, and thine heart shall fear, and be enlarged; because the abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee, the forces of the Gentiles shall come unto thee.*

O, that we might live to see this happy day, when we shall feel a holy awe because of God's glory as revealed in his Church! This fear is not a servile dread but a holy awe of God, and then the heart shall be enlarged, we shall deal with great things, wish for great things, attempt great things, do great things, and see great things. "Thine heart shall fear, and be enlarged," for the sailor far away upon the sea, and the whole strength of the Gentiles shall come unto thee.

6, 7. *The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah, all they from Sheba shall come: they shall bring gold and incense; and they shall shew forth the praises of the LORD. All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered together unto thee, the rams of Nebaioth shall minister unto thee: they shall come up*

with acceptance on mine altar, and I will glorify the house of my glory.

These people had mostly been followers of false prophets, but they too shall forsake their fanaticism and their bigotry, and come to unite with the Church of God. Those least likely and furthest off from hope, shall be brought in by the sovereign grace of God.

8. *Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows?*

The Church is astonished; she asks, "Who can they be?"

9, 10. *Surely the isles shall wait for me, and the ships of Tarshish first, to bring thy sons from far, their silver and their gold with them, unto the name of the LORD thy God, and to the Holy One of Israel, because he hath glorified thee. And the sons of strangers shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee: for in my wrath I smote thee, but in my favour have I had mercy on thee.*

The Church of God is one continuously. At first, it was a Jewish Church, and it has never ceased to comprise within its bounds some members of the chosen race. But now, in these latter days, she has broken the narrow bonds of race, and from Tarshish and the distant isles of the sea, multitudes are already coming to the church of God, and they shall come much more numerous in the years that have not yet arrived.

11-14. *Therefore thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night, that men may bring unto thee the forces of the Gentiles, and that their kings may be brought. For the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish, yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted. The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee, the fir tree, the pine tree and the box together, to beautify the place of my sanctuary; and I will make the place of my feet glorious. The sons also of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee;*

Or, if they do not themselves come, their children shall; each generation shall include a remnant according to the election of grace; and, in due time, shall come the great ingathering.

14-22. *And as they that despised thee shall bow themselves down at the soles of thy feet, and they shall call thee, The city of the LORD, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel. Whereas thou hast been forsaken and hated, so that no man went through thee, I will make*

thee an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations. Thou shalt also suck the milk of the Gentiles, and shalt suck the breasts of kings: and thou shalt know that I the LORD am thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob. For brass I will bring gold, and for iron I will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron: I will also make thy officers peace, and thine exactors righteousness. Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise. The sun shall be no more thy light by day, neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the LORD shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory. Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the LORD shall be thine everlasting light and the days of thy mourning shall be ended. Thy people also shall be all righteous: they shall inherit the land for ever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified. A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation: I the LORD will hasten it in his time.

“Amen! Amen!” so say we, with all our heart.

ISAIAH 60:1-16

1-3. Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.

The Church of God is one, whether it be among Jews or Gentiles. That poor Church seemed left and forsaken; dark days came, and it looked as if the Church must even cease to exist, but it did not. Now, God has brought in many sinners of the Gentiles, and he will bring them in much more numerous in the future times of refreshing. They shall come in armies, in hosts, in nations, and the Church of God shall be exceedingly glorious.

4,5. Lift up thine eyes round about, and see: all they gather themselves together, they come to thee: thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughter shall be nursed at thy side. Then thou shalt see, and flow together, and thine heart shall fear, and be enlarged;

because the abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee, the forces of the Gentiles shall come unto thee.

All the strength of the land and of the sea,— the armies and the navies shall come and prostrate themselves before the Church of God. The supreme power on earth shall yet be the Christ in the midst of his Church.

6. *The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; all they from Sheba shall come: —*

The Easterns shall bow before the King; they that of old had some light shall come to the yet greater light. In those holy lands, which afterwards became so unholy, there shall yet be a return to the truth, and all the false prophets shall be expelled. Where Mohammed's crescent has cursed the nations, there shall shine again the Sun of righteousness, with healing in his wings.

6, 7. *They shall bring gold and incense; and they shall shew forth the praises of the LORD. All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered together unto thee, the rams of Nebaioth shall minister unto thee: they shall come up with acceptance on mine altar, and I will glorify the house of my glory.*

Wandering tribes of wild Arabs shall come and bow before Christ, and lay their wealth at his feet.

8. *Who are these that fly a cloud, and as the doves to their windows?*

The growing Church sees a greater multitude coming to her than even the populous East could muster; whence come they? Listen, brethren, and look around, and see for yourselves.

9. *Surely the isles shall wait for me, and the ships of Tarshish first, to bring thy sons from far, their silver and their gold with them, unto the name of the LORD thy God, and to the Holy One of Israel, because he hath glorified thee.*

In ships from these remote islands, and from countries that were dimly spoken of, in the East, as “lands of Tarshish,” far away, great multitudes were to come to Christ. Are they not coming today from this Ultimo Thule, this distant land beyond the pillars of Hercules, are they not coming to Christ “as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows”?

10-16. *And the sons of strangers shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee: for in my wrath I smote thee, but in*

my favour have I had mercy on thee. Therefore thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night; that men may bring unto thee the forces of the Gentiles, and that their kings may be brought. For the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted. The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee, the fir tree, the pine tree, and the box together, to beautify the place of my sanctuary; and I will make the place of my feet glorious. The sons also of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee; and all they that despised thee shall bow themselves down at the soles of thy feet; and they shall call thee, The city of the LORD, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel. Whereas thou hast been forsaken and hated, so that no man went through thee, I will make thee an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations. Thou shalt also suck the milk of the Gentiles, and shalt suck the breast of kings: and thou shalt know that I the LORD am thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob.

In God's good time, all this shall come to pass.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 103; ISAIAH 59:16-21; AND ISAIAH 60:1-16

ISAIAH 61

1, 2. *The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn;*

How condescending and how kind are the objects of our Saviour's mission — to put an end to sorrow. He looks out the mourners: they are the especial objects of his care, and all that he does has this for one of its grand objects — to comfort all that mourn. Surely if there be any troubled heart here, it may claim an interest in such a divine work as this. Jesus has come to comfort all that mourn. Shall he not comfort you?

3. *To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion,*

To make an appointment — an ordinance — a decree — concerning them; and it will be to this effect.

3. *To give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be*

called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified.

So it seems that God finds glory in the helping of his sad sick, sorrowful creatures. He gets glory out of making them: he gets higher glory out of new making them. Creation yields the moonlight glory; the new creation is a glory as of the sun shining in its strength. O ye mourners, may God grant you grace now to give glory to God by cheerfully accepting those wondrous blessings of grace which Christ has come to bestow.

4. *And they shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations.*

When mourning souls find comfort, and captive souls get liberty, they are full of life and full of energy, and they begin to restore what had become wasted and desolate. I warrant you that there is nothing for a church by way of medicine at all equal to pouring new blood into her by new-saved souls. They come among us with their new songs, like the sweet birds in summer, and seem to wake the morning with their gladsome music. They come among us like the dewdrops from the womb of the morning, sparkling in beauty, bearing the dew of their youth. May God send to many old churches that have got to be like old wastes, and some communities that have come to be like desolations — may he send to them these builders — these earnest, loving hearts to build them up.

5, 6. *And stranger's shall stand and feed your flocks, and the sons of the alien shall be your plowmen and your vinedressers. But ye shall be named the priests of the LORD.*

God's true Israel, his chosen, his elect — they may look upon all other men as their ploughmen and their vine dressers. Kings and queens rule the world for you. For you the merchant, with his keel, divides the sea; for you the ploughman ploughs the soil. As for you, though you have a hand in these things, they are not your main employment. Your occupation is a higher one than theirs — the service of your God. Ye shall be named the priests of the Lord.

6. *Men shall call you ministers of our God: ye shall eat the riches of the Gentiles, and in their glory shall ye boast yourselves.*

For all things are of God, and all things are yours through Jesus Christ. In that same day in which the Lord comforts mourners and

binds up their broken hearts, he gives them to enter into a sacred priesthood, in which they walk among the sons men as God's peculiar people — honoured above all the rest of mankind. Oh! the distinctions which distinguishing grace makes! How it lifts the poor from the dunghill and setteth him among princes, even the princes of his people! Christ has done great things, indeed, for us, for though we were as beggars, behold he hath made us kings and priests unto God, and we shall reign for ever and ever.

7. For your shame ye shall have double; and for confusion they shall rejoice in their portion:

You may be persecuted: your name may be cast out as evil, but when the Lord in mercy blesses and visits you, you shall have a wonderful recompense — more than you could have expected. “For your shame ye shall have double.”

7, 8. Therefore in their land they shall possess the double, everlasting joy shall be unto them. For I the LORD love judgment, I hate robbery for burnt offering; and I will direct their work in truth, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.

There are churches in the world that are not churches of God, and they supply their needs by forged demands from the people; but God hateth robbery for a burnt-offering. He accepts the willing gifts of his people, and with those who present them he makes an everlasting covenant.

9. And their seed shall be known among the Gentiles, and their offspring among the people: all that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the LORD hath blessed.

Oh! to have such distinguishing marks of character about us that all who see us may see that the blessing of God is upon us. And this will be quite consistent with poverty, with sickness, for in the poverty there will be content, and in the sickness and depression of spirit there will yet be such divine upholdings that men shall be astonished that their fellowmen shall be capable of such joy under such circumstances. They “shall acknowledge them that they are the seed which the Lord hath blessed.”

10. I will greatly rejoice in the Lord,

Brothers and sisters. I wish we could all catch hold of the spirit of this verse that each one of us would now say, “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord.”

10. *My soul shall be joyful in my God;*

What a precious sentence — “My soul shall be joyful in my God.”

10. *For he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.*

On those festive occasions the Orientals are wont to use all the wealth they have in decoration. The bridegroom decketh himself with a crown — puts on a tiara. He is a king for once. And the bride herself brings out all the many jewels with which Eastern women deck themselves. Now all this, in a high spiritual sense, we find in Christ. He is not merely covering to us, but ornament and beauty, adornment, exaltation, glory, honour. How beautiful a child of God looks in Christ I cannot tell you, but I believe that next to his dear Son, the most engaging sight to the divine Father is any one of his dear Children whom he sees in Christ. You know we all think our children lovely, and God knows his children to be so when he hath covered them with the robe of righteousness, and clothed them with the garments of salvation.

11. *For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations.*

This exposition consisted of readings from 2 SAMUEL 15:13-23; ISAIAH 61.; MARK 14:22-41.

ISAIAH 61

1. *The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me;*

These are the words of the Lord Jesus Christ the prophet, looking forward to the tune of his coming into the world, put them into his mouth; and in due time our Saviour read them, and applied them to himself in the synagogue at Nazareth as he said, “This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears:” “the Spirit of the Lord God is upon me;” —

1. *Because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,” —*

God has sent Christ to bind up the broken-hearted; then, will he not do it? Will he refuse, my broken-hearted brother or sister, to bind you up? O deeply-troubled, tempest-tossed spirit, will the Anointed One reject you, and refuse to fulfill his office upon you? never; it is both his name and his office to save, for he is called Jesus, the Saviour. O broken-hearted one, look to him; hear him say, at this moment, "Jehovah hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted," —

1. to proclaim liberty to the captives-

Where are you, poor, wretched bond-slaves of sin, lettered with the iron chains of despair? Christ proclaims liberty even to you. Trust him, and you shall be —

"Freed from sin, and walk at large,
Your Saviour's blood your full discharge."

"Jehovah hath sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives," —

1. And the opening of the prison to them that are bound;

There is a general discharge of prisoners; the time has come for it. Christ died to make it possible: he lives to perfect the emancipation of all for whom he died. He comes, by his Spirit, to give you the experience of it: "the opening of the prison to them that are bound."

2. to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn;

Oh, what precious words are these! Christ comes, commissioned of the father, "to comfort all that mourn."

3. to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified.

This message is spoken to all the Lord's people; but it has a special reference to the Jews, God's ancient people. Happy times are coming for them in the years that yet lie in the future, when they accept the Messiah whom they have so long rejected.

4. And they shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations.

In the days to come, Judea shall again be inhabited, and the ruined cities shall be built up once more. God will bring back his

ancient people, converting them to the true faith, and clothing them with glory. As for ourselves, this verse is true in another sense. If we believe in Jesus, that part of us which has been given up to waste shall yet be turned to usefulness, and to God's praise.

5, 6. *And strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, and the sons of the alien shall be your plowmen and your vinedressers. But ye shall be named the Priests of the Lord:-*

This was true of God's ancient people, but it is true of us also. Let us cast away our earthly cares, let our only care be to serve our God; for then, strangers shall stand and feed our flocks, and the sons of the alien shall be our ploughmen and our vinedressers; but we "shall be named the Priests of the Lord."

6. *Men shall call you the Ministers of our God: ye shall eat the riches of the Gentiles, and in their glory shall ye boast yourselves.*

God's chosen people are his children; all the rest of mankind are only his servants, and the servants must wait upon the children whether they like it or not. Even of the angels in heaven it is written, "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" All things are the servants of the man who is the servant of God. He who is consecrated to God shall find all things consecrated to him. When all that is yours works for God, then all things shall work together for good for you.

7, 8. *for your shame ye shall have double; and for confusion they shall rejoice in their portion: therefore in their land they shall possess the double : everlasting joy shall be unto them. for I the Lord love judgment, I hate robbery for burnt offering; —*

God cannot endure that we should sacrifice to him what we have gained by oppression and wrong-doing. Some men seem to try to cut themselves in halves, and then to say, "So much is to be secular, and so much is to be sacred." Do not you believe it; you are only one man, and what you are in secular things, that you are altogether. You cannot say, "So much is to be religion, and so much is to be business." If your religion is not your business, and if your business does not melt into your religion, there is not much that is good in you. We cannot say, "I shall do this because it is religion, and I shall do that because it is business." no, no; the man is one, and there is nothing to a Christian that can be marked off as secular; for all things are sacred to the man who truly serves God.

8, 9. *And I will direct their work in truth, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. And their seed shall be known among the Gentiles, and their offspring among the people: all that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the Lord hath blessed.*

A visible stamp of divine blessing shall be upon believers in Christ: “they are the seed which the Lord hath blessed,” and all men shall acknowledge that it is so.

10, 11. *I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels. For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown, in it to spring forth y so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations.*

So may it be right speedily, for our Lord Jesus Christ’s sake!
Amen.

ISAIAH 61

1. *The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,*

You know who it is that speaks these words, our Lord Jesus himself.

1, 2. *Because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn;*

The Divine Messiah comes to usher in the true jubilee, the blessed day in which the poor shall have the gospel preached unto them, and in which the broken-hearted shall find their brokenness healed. He comes to bring the captive ones back from the Babylon of sin, and to deliver from prison those who, because of their transgressions, are bound with fetters; in a word, he comes to proclaim that now is the accepted time, now is the day of grace, now is the year of jubilee. As for the adversaries of his people, unto them it shall be “the day of vengeance of our God,” for the Lord will deal

out to them, measure for measure, as they have dealt unto his oppressed and persecuted people.

3. To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty —

Or, “a coronet” —

3. For ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified.

When Jesus comes, he brings all things with him, for he is all things to his people, and they find their all in him. There is no sorrow at his coming to those who receive him; it is gladness, gladness repeated, and gladness multiplied. Not only doth joy come in one form, but in many, as the verses of this chapter so sweetly remind us, and that which comes is permanent, making those that receive it to be like long-standing trees, for they shall outlive their sorrows, and prove that they were planted of God for his own glory.

4. And they shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations.

Truly, God’s living Church today shall do all this. The Jewish Church became a waste, and God’s glory seemed to be trodden under the foot of his foes; but the true children of the promise, they who are counted for the seed, even as many as believe, who are thus the seed of believing Abraham, shall build up all these wastes, and happy shall they be in such joyous service.

5, 6. And strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, and the sons of the alien shall be your plowmen and your vinedressers. But ye shall be named the Priests of the LORD: men shall call you the Ministers of our God: ye shall eat the riches of the Gentiles, and in their glory shall ye boast yourselves.

Because of the sin of his people, the aliens and the foreigners trample upon them; but if you and I are truly of the holy seed, having living faith in Christ, we shall look upon the whole race of men as enduring all their care and toil on our behalf. They shall be our ploughmen and our vinedressers; but we shall be the ministers of God, the priests of the Lord, making use of every new invention, — traveling by steam, speaking by telephone, —using everything

for God's glory, letting men invent all they can, and we ourselves turning all things to account for the honour and glory of our God.

I know that there is another fulfillment of this test for God's ancient people, but this also is a fulfillment of it to us who are his spiritual people, his real children, born according to the promise.

7. For your shame ye shall have double; and for confusion they shall rejoice in their portion:

That is a sweet state of heart for any of us to be in, — to rejoice in our portion. Oh, what a wonderful portion we have to rejoice in! How blessed is the lot of God's chosen people! However small a part of our portion may be visible to the eye here below, yet we can sing, —

“All things are ours; the gift of God,
The purchase of a Saviour's blood;
While the good Spirit shows us how
To use and to improve them too.”

Instead of confusion such as once was the lot of the righteous, “they shall rejoice in their portion;”

7. Therefore in their land they shall possess the double: everlasting joy shall be unto them.

Here is another choice expression: “everlasting joy.” Theirs is not a transient joy, like the mirth of fools, which is as the crackling of thorns under a pot, but “everlasting joy shall be unto them.”

8. For I the LORD love judgment, I hate robbery for burnt offering; and I will direct their work in truth, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.

That is why they have everlasting joy. There would be no everlasting joy if it were not for the everlasting covenant. Those gentlemen who want to cut that word “everlasting” out of our Bibles will find that it will be a very long while before we shall agree to be despoiled of it; nay, we shall never consent to give it up. We shall always rejoice that we have God's everlasting love, and an everlasting covenant, and therefore that we shall have everlasting joy.

9. And their seed shall be known among the Gentiles,

They shall be discerned and distinguished. Just as surely as you may know a Jew anywhere in the world today, so shall men know the people of God. Though they wear no peculiar garb, yet their

speech shall betray them. There shall be a something about them which shall bear testimony to the fact that “they are the seed which the Lord hath blessed.” “Their seed shall be known among the Gentiles,” —

9, 10. *And their offspring among the people: all that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the LORD hath blessed. I will greatly rejoice —*

Not a little, for he is a great God, so “I will greatly rejoice” in him. “The Lord hath done great things for us,” let us therefore greatly rejoice in him. “I will greatly rejoice” —

10. *In the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God;*

Not only shall my lips be full of joy, but my inmost nature, the very essence of my being, “my soul shall be joyful in my God.” “In my God.” That is a stage higher than saying, “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord.” We do greatly rejoice in the Lord, but our very soul is joyful when we can each one call him, “my God.” That is a possession that the richest among you may well envy if you have it not.

10. *For he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.*

The loveliest sight in the world is one of God’s people. We sometimes sing, and sadly sing, concerning this earth, —

“Where every prospect pleases,
And only man is vile.”

But there is another side to that picture, for when the “man” is a true child of God, we can say, —

“Though every prospect pleases,
Yet man outshines them all.”

Well did the psalmist sing, “Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour.” Angels do homage to the renewed man; for the promise is, “They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.” You who are children of God need not wish to change places even with an archangel, for you are brother to him who sits upon the throne of God; you wear a nature that is akin to that of the Only-begotten, indeed, it is the self-same nature as his. Glory, then, in this

great truth, that you are covered with the robe of righteousness, decked with ornaments, like a bridegroom, and adorned with jewels, like a bride.

11. *For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations.*

They are sown in the earth at present; but, as the seeds come up in the springtime beneath the genial showers and the shining of the sun, so righteousness and praise shall in due time come up in a golden harvest on every hill and valley of this poor sinful world. Hasten it, O Lord, hasten it in thine own good time! Amen.

ISAIAH 63

1-6. *Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? This that is glorious in his apparel, traveling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save. Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the winefat? I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me; for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them into my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment. For the day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come. And I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me; and my fury, it upheld me. And I will tread down the people in mine anger, and make them drunk in my fury, and I will bring down their strength to the earth.*

It is a dark and terrible time; no one at God's side, his people discouraged, Edom triumphant. Then comes the one great Hero of the gospel, the Christ of God; and by his own unaided strength he wins for his people a glorious victory. He is as terrible to his foes as he is precious to his friends. He stands before us as the one hope of his ancient church. There is a picture Isaiah was inspired to paint. Now the prophet goes on to say: —

7. *I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the Lord,*

Are you, dear friends, mentioning the lovingkindnesses of the Lord; or are you silent about them? Learn a lesson from the prophet

Isaiah. Talk about what God has done for you, and for his people in all time: "I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the Lord." Let this be the resolve of every one of us who has tasted that the Lord is gracious.

"Awake, my soul, in joyful lays,
And sing thy great Redeemer's praise:
He justly claims a song from me,
His lovingkindness, oh, how free !
"He saw me ruin'd in the fall,
Yet loved me, notwithstanding all;
He saved me from my lost estate,
His lovingkindness, oh, how great!"

7. And the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord hath bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which he hath bestowed on them according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his lovingkindnesses.

This is a verse full of sweets; but I must not dwell upon it. My object at this time is to read much, and to say little by way of comments; so I cannot stay to pick out the sweetnesses here. There are very many. This passage is a piece of a honeycomb. Read it when you get home; pray over it, suck the honey out of it, and praise the Lord for it.

8. *For he said,*

In the old time, when God called his people out of Egypt, he said this.

8. *Surely they are my people, children that will not lie:*

Or, children that will not act deceitfully; or, will not deal falsely.

8. *So he was their Saviour.*

He thought well of them. He treated them as though they were trustworthy. He took them into his confidence. He said, "Surely they will not deceive me." This is speaking after the manner of men, of course; for God knows us, and is never deceived in us. We may deceive others; we may even deceive ourselves; but we can never deceive him.

9. *In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old.*

Happy Israel! These were her golden days, when she was faithful to God, and God communed very closely with her. Then God was very near to his people, so near that he is represented as carrying them in his arms. He could be seen in a bush; he could be seen in a cloud; he could be seen working with a rod; he was so familiar with his people.

10. *But they rebelled, and vexed his holy Spirit therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them.*

This was a great change in dispensation, though there was no change in the heart of God. He deals roughly with his people when they rebel against him. They would not be improved by tenderness, so now they must be scourged by his rod, and come under his displeasure. When men turn from God, he is “turned to be their enemy.”

11. *Then he remembered the days of old,*

His people were never out of his mind, even when they wandered away from him. He remembered the love of their espousals, when they went after him into the wilderness. He remembered the days of old, the happier days, when his people walked closely with him. They also remembered these days. It is strange that they should ever have forgotten them.

11. *Moses, and his people, saying. Where is he that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of his flock? Where is he that put his holy Spirit within him? That led them by the right hand of Moses with his glorious arm, dividing the water before them, to make himself an everlasting name? That led them through the deep, as an horse in the wilderness, that they should not stumble? As a beast goeth down into the valley, the Spirit of the Lord caused him to rest: so didst thou lead thy people, to make thyself a glorious name.*

Now comes a prayer suggested by their condition of sorrow and desertion.

15. *Look down from heaven,*

Thou art still there, though we have wandered. Look down upon us from heaven, O, Lord!

15, 16. *And behold from the habitation of thy holiness and of thy glory: where is thy zeal and thy strength, the sounding of thy bowels and of thy mercies toward me? Are they restrained? Doubtless thou art our father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel*

acknowledge us not; thou, O Lord, art our father, our redeemer; thy name is from everlasting.

That last sentence may be read, “Thy name is, our Redeemer, from everlasting.” This is a sweet plea with God: “We have offended thee; but we are still thy children. We have wandered from thee; but we are still thine own, bought with a price. Thy name of ‘Redeemer’ is not a temporary one; it is from everlasting to everlasting, therefore look on thy poor children again. Leave us not to perish.”

17. O Lord, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways, and hardened our heart from thy fear? Return for thy servants’ sake, the tribes of thine inheritance. The people of thy holiness.

Or, “Thy holy people.”

18, 19. Have possessed it but a little while: our adversaries have trodden down thy sanctuary. We are thine: thou never barest rule over them; they were no called by thy name.

“Thou didst give us the land by an everlasting covenant; but we have had it only a little while. Lo, the enemy has come in, and driven thine Israel away from her heritage! Can it be so, always, O Lord?” Happy times seem very short when they are over; and when they are succeeded by dark trials, we say, “The people of thy holiness, thy holy people have possessed it but a little while. Our adversaries have trodden down thy sanctuary. We are now become (for this is the true rendering of the passage) like those over whom thou hast never borne rule, those who were never called by thy name.” That is a sad condition for the church of God to be in; and I am afraid that it is getting into that condition now, sinking to a level with the world, leaving its high calling, quitting the path of the separated people, and becoming just like those whom God never knew, and who were never called by his name. It is a pitiful case; and here comes a prayer like the bursting out of a volcano, as though the hearts of gracious men could hold in the agonizing cry no longer: —

This exposition consisted of readings from ISAIAH 63-64

ISAIAH 63

Some of you will remember that chapter 62 ends with the announcement of the Saviour’s coming: “Say ye to the daughter of

Zion, behold, thy salvation cometh; behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him,” The present chapter describes his coming.

1. *Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah?*

Who can HE be, this mysterious personage, this friend of God’s people, this destroyer of their enemies? Who can HE be?

“Who is this that comes from Edom,
All his raiment stain’d with blood;
To the slave proclaiming freedom;
Bringing and bestowing good:
Glorious in the garb he wears,
Glorious in the spoils he bears?”

1. *This that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save.*

He that has come to save us is majestic in his person, but he is also mighty in his power to save. When we ask, “Who is this?” the answer comes to us, “I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save)” Listen to this, you who feel that you are great sinners, you who know that you need a mighty Saviour. Here is one able to do for you all that you need. He comes from the field of battle, from the place of conquest, where he has fought the fight on your behalf, and won for you the victory over sin, and death, and hell. Who is he?

“’Tis the Saviour, now victorious.

Traveling onward in his might;

’Tis the Saviour, oh, how glorious To his people is the sight!

Jesus now is strong to save;

Mighty to redeem the slave.”

2, 3. *Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the winefat? I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me:*

In all Christ’s redeeming work he was alone. None could help him to redeem his people. He must alone pay the ransom price. None could help him in his last great battle, when he stood forth as the sole Champion of all whom his Father had given to him.

“Death and hell will he dethrone,

By his single arm alone.”

3, 4. *For I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I*

will stain all my raiment. For the day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come.

It was the day of vengeance on the enemies of God, vengeance on sin and death, and hell; and it was the year of redemption for the great host of believers in Christ, for whom his garments were dyed in his own most precious blood. Notice how the great redeemer speaks of his chosen people; "My redeemed."

5, 6. *And I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me; and my fury, it upheld me. And I will tread down the people in mine anger, and 'make them drunk in my fury, and I will bring down their strength to the earth.*

Dear friends, I will not go into a full explanation of these verses just now; I have often explained them to you; but this is the one lesson that they teach, there is a Saviour "mighty to save." Nothing can destroy those who put their trust in him; he will overthrow every enemy of our souls if we take him to be our Saviour. Now the prophet speaks again

7. *I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the LORD, and the praises of the LORD, according to all that the LORD hath bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which he hath bestowed on them according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his lovingkindnesses.*

It is well to talk of God's love and God's mercy, for, if we afterwards speak of our own sin and unfaithfulness, it tends to set our sin in a clearer light, and we are the more ready to confess it, and to mourn over it. God has dealt well with us; and, therefore, that we have dealt ill with him, is the more shameful. See what he did for his ancient people, and behold in his action a picture of what he has done for his spiritual Israel.

8. *For he said, Surely they are my people, children that will not lie: so he was their Saviour.*

He thought well of them, he said, "They will be true to me." He loved them; he chose them; he put them in a place of trust and honour; he entered into fellowship and sympathy with them.

9. *In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old.*

This is what he did for them in Egypt, what he did for them in the desert. He was very near them, one with them, very tender to them.

10. *But they rebelled, and vexed his Holy Spirit; therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them.*

Hear ye this, ye people of God! This is what God will do to you if you rebel against him, and vex his Holy Spirit; he will turn to be your enemy, and will fight against you. If God's people will not yield to his love and his pity, they must suffer from his hand and his rod.

11. *Then he remembered the days of old, Moses, and his people, saying, Where is he that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of his flock? where is he that put his holy Spirit within him?*

God begins to think of the past, and of what he did for his people in the days of old.

12-14. *That led them by the right hand of Moses with his glorious arm, dividing the water before them, to make himself an everlasting name? That led them through the deep, as an horse in the wilderness, that they should not stumble? As a beast goeth down into the valley, the Spirit of the LORD caused him to rest: so didst thou lead thy people, to make thyself a glorious name.*

See what God did for his people in his tenderness and lovingkindness. Is it not strange that, after that, they rebelled against him?

15. *Look down from heaven, and behold from the habitation of thy holiness and of thy glory: where is thy zeal and thy strength, the sounding of thy bowels and of thy mercies toward me? are they restrained?*

If you are in trouble tonight, if you have lost the light of God's countenance, here are words for you to use in prayer to God.

16. *Doubtless thou art our father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not: thou, O LORD, art our father, our redeemer; thy name is from everlasting.*

Get a hold of this great truth, believer. Say, "God is my Father. He is my Father still; and though he smite me, though he frown upon me, I will not quit my hold on him; I will still plead his dear Son's name, and wait for his mercy, trusting in his grace."

17-18. *O LORD, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways, and hardened our heart from thy fear? Return for thy servants' sake, the tribes of thine inheritance. The people of thy holiness have possessed it but a little while: our adversaries have trodden down thy sanctuary. We are thine: thou never barest rule over them; they were not called by thy name.*

I pointed out to you, at the beginning of our reading, that this chapter appropriately follows the preceding one. It is itself most suitably followed by chapter 64. Indeed, the first verse of that chapter belongs to this one, and should not have been separated from it. God's people, in their low estate, recognized that deliverance must come from the Lord alone, so they prayed, "Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence, as when the melting fire burneth, the fire causeth the waters to boil, to make thy name known to thine adversaries, that the nations may tremble at thy presence!" God bless the reading of his Word, and give us his presence during the whole of the service, for Christ's sake. Amen!

ISAIAH 64

1,2. *Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence, as when the melting fire burneth,*

Or, much better, "as when the brushwood burneth"; for if God does but come to his people, they are ready to catch the flame, like the dry heather which is soon ablaze; and his enemies also shall be like brushwood before the fire.

2, 3. *The fire causeth the waters to boil, to make thy name known to thine adversaries, that the nations may tremble at thy presence! When thou didst terrible things which we looked not for, thou comest down, the mountain flowed down at thy presence.*

O Lord, come again! Thou didst come in the past; repeat thy former acts, and let us see what thou canst do for the avenging of thy people.

4. *For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him.*

God is ready to help. He has everything in preparation before our needs begin. He has laid in supplies for all our wants. Before our prayers are presented, he has prepared his answers to them; blessed be his name! You remember how Paul uses this passage, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit." The spiritual man is a privileged man.

5. Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness, those that remember thee in thy ways:

God does not wait for us to return to him. He meets us. He comes to us the moment that we turn our feet towards his throne. While we are, like the prodigal, a great way off, he sees us, and has compassion upon us, and runs to meet us.

5. Behold, thou art wroth; for we have sinned: in those is continuance, and we shall be saved.

In thy faithfulness, in thy love, in thyself, in thy ways of mercy there is continuance. This is our safety. What are we? Here is the answer: —

6. But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.

It is not a flattering picture that the prophet draws. Even our righteousnesses are like filthy rags, fit only for the fire; what must our righteousnesses be like? We, ourselves, are like the sere leaves on the trees; and just as the wind carries away the faded leaves of autumn, so our sins, like a mighty blast, carry us away.

7, 8. And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee:

That is a wonderful description of prayer. When a man rouses himself from sinful lethargy, and stirs himself up to take hold of God in prayer, he will become an Israel, a prince prevailing with God.

8. For thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities. But now, O Lord, thou art our father;

Adoption does not come to an end because of sin. Regeneration or sonship does not die out; it cannot die out. I am my father's son,

and so I always shall be; and if I am my heavenly Father's son, I shall never cease to be so.

“Now, O Lord, thou art our Father!” This truth must not be perverted into an argument for sinning; it ought rather to keep us from sinning, lest we should grieve such wondrous love.

8-12. *We are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand. Be not wrath very sore, O Lord, neither remember iniquity for ever: behold, see, we beseech thee, we are all thy people. The holy cities are a wilderness, Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. Our holy and our beautiful house, where our fathers praised thee, is burned up with fire: and all our pleasant things are laid waste. Wilt thou refrain thyself for these things, O Lord? Wilt thou hold thy peace, and afflict us very sore?*

The prophet touches the minor key, and weeps and wails for the sorrows of his people; but he does not neglect to pray. In the next chapter God breaks out, and says, “I am sought of them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not.” How much more quickly is he found of them who do seek him! Verily, God does hear prayer; and he will hear prayer; let us not cease to pray to him as we look round on the sad state of the professing church at this time, and with Isaiah let us cry, “Wilt thou refrain thyself for these things, O Lord? Wilt thou hold thy peace, and afflict us very sore?”

This exposition consisted of readings from ISAIAH 63-64

JEREMIAH

JEREMIAH 1

1-3. The words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiah, of the priests that were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin: to whom the word of the LORD came in the days of Josiah the son of Amon king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. It came also in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, unto the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah the son of Josiah king of Judah, unto the carrying away of Jerusalem captive in the fifth month.

Jeremiah was a young man when he was called to the prophetic office; and he was sent of God, as a young prophet, to help the young king, Josiah. His public life, therefore, opened somewhat happily. But, after the death of Josiah, wicked kings sat upon the throne, and it was the painful lot, and yet in some respects the choice privilege, of this weeping prophet to be sent upon his Master's errand, time after time, to a disobedient and gainsaying people, who wrought him only evil while he sought their good. The Holy Spirit, you see, is careful to note important dates in the history of God's servants; and you and I also should keep a record of the times when God sets us to work, and when he gives us special grace for the service to which he has called us.

4-6. Then the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations. Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child.

He was but young, and, when young men are called to be ambassadors for God, it behoves them to feel the weight of the responsibility that rests upon them, and to be conscious of their lack of experience, and of their want of fitness for the work. In that consciousness of unfitness, there often lies the evidence of their fitness for the task entrusted to them. Peradventure, out of weakness they shall be made strong; but if they do not feel their weakness, they are not likely to cry to God for help, or to receive it from him.

“Ah, Lord God!” said young Jeremiah, “behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child.”

7. But the LORD said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak.

Now, even a child can often speak anything that has been said to him; to repeat what he is told to say, is not beyond his capacity; and, after all, this is a Christian minister’s principal work. Somebody says, “We want thinkers.” Yes, so we do; but we want men whose thoughts shall be subordinate to the thoughts of God, ministers who do not come to utter their own thoughts, but to deliver their Master’s message, to tell to us what he has told to them. Is that sermon merely what you think, sir? Then, what do I care what you think? What is that to me, anymore than what I think may be to you. If, however, you can come to me, and say, “Thus saith the Lord,” I will give diligent heed to your message, and I am bound to receive it; but woe be to that minister whose word shall be other than this!

8. Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the LORD.

When a king sends an ambassador to a foreign court, he cannot usually go with him; but God’s ambassador always has his King with him. Oh, what courage he ought to have with such a Companion!

9. Then the LORD put forth his hand, and touched my mouth.

For you young brethren who are to be preachers of the gospel, I cannot wish anything better than that the Lord may touch your mouth in this way. In the old times that some of us remember, godly men used to pray that the Holy Spirit would be “mouth, matter, and wisdom” to the preachers of the Word. It was not at all a bad prayer, for it was a petition that he would give to his servants the right subject, the right spirit, and the right utterance, — that he would teach them how to speak, what to speak, and in what spirit to speak it.

9. And the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth.

That is a true picture of a Spirit-sent preacher of the gospel, — a man who has God’s words in his mouth. I said before that the minister must not utter his own thoughts, but here we see that he

must not even utter his own words. God's thoughts are best delivered in God's words; and the more of Scripture there is in our teaching, the more true, the more divine, and the more powerful, will it be.

10. *See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant.*

What a mysterious power rested on this God-sent messenger! Poor Jeremiah was often in prison, frequently at death's door, yet he was the master of nations and kingdoms, and the Lord gave him authority to root them up or to plant them, to throw them down or to build them up. What wondrous power God gives to those who faithfully preach his Word! Well might Mary Queen of Scots say that she was more afraid of John Knox's preaching than of all the armies that came against her.

11-14. *Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Jeremiah, what seest thou? And I said, I see a rod of an almond tree. Then said the LORD unto me, Thou hast well seen: for I will hasten my word to perform it. And the word of the LORD came unto me the second time, saying, What seest thou? And I said, I see a seething pot; and the face thereof is toward the north. Then the LORD said unto me, Out of the north an evil shall break forth upon all the inhabitants of the land.*

The Chaldeans and the Babylonians were like a great cauldron, boiling and seething, sending forth smoke and steam over the nations, and ready to scald Jerusalem to its destruction.

15, 16. *For, lo, I will call all the families of the kingdoms of the north, saith the LORD; and they shall come, and they shall set everyone his throne at the entering of the gates of Jerusalem, and against all the walls thereof round about, and against all the cities of Judah. And I will utter my judgments against them touching all their wickedness, who have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, and worshipped the works of their own hands.*

God tells Jeremiah that he was about to destroy Jerusalem because of the people's sin. He was not merely to foretell their doom, but he was also to tell the reason of it, — that it was the result of their sin, and especially of the sin of idolatry, to which mankind is ever exceedingly prone. It is most difficult to keep men to pure

spiritual worship, — the worship of the unseen God in spirit and in truth. They will get away, if they can, to some outward form or another. They will take the very bread of communion, and worship it; or the image of the bleeding Saviour, and make an idol of that. Somehow or other, they will have something visible, or tangible, as the object of their adoration. Men will fall into idolatry of one kind or another even to this day; and this is a God-provoking offense, from which may the Lord, in his mercy, graciously preserve all of us perfectly clear!

17. *Thou therefore gird up thy loins, —*

“Thou hast a hard task before thee, Jeremiah, a stern life’s work cut out for thee; ‘therefore gird up thy loins,’ “ —

17. *And arise, —*

“There must be no waiting, no idleness: ‘Arise,’ “ —

17. *And speak unto them all that I command thee:*

“Do not trim it at all, or pare it down, or omit distasteful portions; but ‘speak unto them all that I command thee.’”

17. *Be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them.*

We ought to be so afraid of God that we are afraid of nobody else. “Fear him, ye saints, and you will then have nothing else to fear.” Send all your fears to heaven, and there let them stop.

18, 19. *For, behold, I have made thee this day a defended city, and an iron pillar, and brazen walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, against the priests thereof, and against the people of the land. And they shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee, saith the LORD, to deliver thee.*

JEREMIAH 2:1-19

1-3. *Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying, Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the LORD, I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. Israel was holiness unto the LORD, and the firstfruits of his increase: all that devour him shall offend; evil shall come upon them, saith the LORD.*

God remembered what Israel used to be in those good days when the Lord alone did lead them and there was no strange god among them. Now he bids them remember from whence they had fallen, and repent and do their first works lest he come unto them in wrath. Oh, beloved, if you ever lived near to God — if you ever rested your head on Christ’s bosom, and have now wandered away from him and are spiritually cold and dead, begin to chide yourself; for the Lord himself, in the word before us, doth chide you. He calls you to a sorrowful remembrance of the position from which you have descended — the heights of grace from which you have come down. Breathe the prayer that he would restore you again. “Wilt thou not revive us again, that thy people may rejoice in thee.”

4, 5. *Hear ye the word of the LORD, O house of Jacob, and all the families of the house of Israel: thus saith the LORD, What iniquity have your father found in me, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain?*

He asks them whether there was any fault in him — any failure in keeping his promise, — whether he had dealt unjustly or unmercifully with them that they had thus gone away from him and walked after vanity.

6. *Neither said they; Where is the LORD that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, that led us through the wilderness, through a land of deserts and of pits, through a land of drought, and of the shadow of death, through a land that no man passed through, and where no man dwelt?*

Ought they not always to have remembered the wonderful wilderness journey where God seemed to multiply his miracles in the midst of their great necessities? Some of you have passed through a wilderness too, yet have you been richly supplied. You have had to admire the constancy of the divine goodness. God has not failed you ever, even in your worst circumstances. Do not let it be said of you that you never say, “Where is the Lord that brought us up out of the land of Egypt.” On the contrary, always fly to him when you are in time of trouble. Remember that this is the way to glorify God. “He shall call upon me and I will answer him “ is one of God’s own promises; and then he adds — “and he shall glorify me.”

7, 8. And I brought you into a plentiful country, to eat the fruit thereof and the goodness thereof but when ye entered, ye defiled my land, and made mine heritage an abomination. The priests said not, Where is the LORD? and they that handle the law knew me not: the pastors also transgressed against me, and the prophets prophesied by Baal, and walked after things that do not profit.

Was not this very shameful that in Canaan, which God had chosen beyond all countries for its fertility that he might give it to his own people for ever, there they began to set up idols, and altars to other gods? And the priests, whose lips ought to have kept knowledge, and the prophets who above all men were bound to have spoken in the name of the Lord joined the people in their sin. They even urged them to worship Baal — that dummy deity, unworthy of a moment's respect who should not have been so much as thought of by God's people. They ought not even to have taken the name of Baal into their lips. Do you not see yourselves here, O backsliders? If you ever knew the Lord and have gone back to the world, if you have submitted yourselves again to the powers thereof, and sinned with a high hand, have you not acted most shamefully towards your God? And ought you not, with a blushing countenance and weeping eyes to return to him and ask mercy at his hands?

9-11. Wherefore I will yet plead with you, saith the LORD, and with your children's children will I plead. For pass over the Isles of Chittim, and see; and send unto Kedar, and consider diligently, and see if there be such a thing. Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods? but my people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit.

How powerfully this is put! No other nation gave up its gods. Though they were no gods, but mere images of clay or gold, they would not change them. They stuck to their idolatries with wonderful pertinacity; but God's people gave up the true God to worship the demons of the nations round about. And is it not an unhappy thing that there are now some who at least call themselves God's people who go back to the world and seem to be more in love with it than ever they were? It is a horrible thing that is done. I have heard of a chieftain of an Indian tribe whose nephew was converted to the faith but who, after a short time, fell into sin and renounced his profession; the old chief used always to answer all the teaching of the missionary with this argument: "My nephew tried it and gave

it up. He ought to know.” Well, when this was told to the young man it broke his heart, and happily brought him back to the God he had forsaken. Perhaps there are some in the world who are gathering excuses for continuing in sin from the unhappy conduct of such as backslide. “Look at him,” say they, “how hot and zealous he was, and see what he is now.” Can you bear the thought, backslider? If there remains a spark of love to Christ in your soul, you will feel bitterly the sorrow that others should make an excuse for blasphemy and for rebellion against Christ, out of your evil conduct. Oh, pray tonight — “Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free spirit.”

12, 13. *Be astonished O, ye heavens at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the LORD. For my people have committed two evils they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.*

If a man should change for the better, his selfishness might be a little excuse for leaving his old love, but when he changes for the worse — leaves a fountain for a cistern — a flowing fountain for a broken cistern that holds nothing — why, there is madness in his sin. “Be astonished, O ye heavens and be horribly afraid.”

14-17. *Is Israel a servant? is he a homeborn slave? why is he spoiled? The young lions roared upon him and yelled, and they made his land waste: his cities are burned without inhabitant. Also the children of Noph and Tahapanes have broken the crown of thy head. Hast thou not procured this unto thyself in that thou hast forsaken the LORD thy God, when he led thee by the way?*

The people of Israel had got into a dreadful state of poverty and famine and oppression. Their enemies had so destroyed the land that it was full of lions that even yelled in the very streets where once men and women and children abounded. And God says to them, “Is not this the result of your own sin? Was it so when you lived near to me? Have you not brought this upon yourself by your sin?” So, child of God, if you are unhappy tonight — if you are mourning — if you cannot find comfort in the world — no comfort in God either, “hast thou not procured this unto thyself? When thou didst live near to God, when prayer was continual, when thou didst watch thy conduct, when thou didst go softly asking God to guide thee from day to day, was it not better with thee then than now. Then thy peace was like a river and thy righteousness like the waves of the

sea. If it be not so now, hast thou not procured this unto thyself in that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God when he led thee by the way?

18. *And now what hast thou to do in the way of Egypt, to drink the waters of Sihor? or what hast thou to do in the way of Assyria, to drink the waters of the river?*

For instead of going to the fountain of living waters, they were hoping to be helped by the Egyptians or helped by the Assyrians. Just as there are some Christians who try to drink the muddy waters of sinful pleasure and of carnal lust, they are beginning to think the muddy river very sweet and to like the taste of it. It is a deadly evil when professing Christians begin to do as others do, and to mix with the world and feel pleasure in it. There will be a blight upon you if you turn from God! Misery will dog your steps ere long, if you be indeed a child of God.

19. *Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the LORD thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord GOD of hosts.*

A very solemn passage. May we lay it to heart. Not only is there guilt in our sin for which we shall have to answer at God's judgment seat, but there is evil in it which will come swiftly upon our own heads even here, "Be sure thy sin will find thee out." The thing thou thinkest will be thy strength, will be thy scourge. What thou dreamest of as pleasure will prove to be thy plague. If thou hast ever known the joy of God's service all this shall be doubly true of thee: thou shalt never be able again to find satisfaction in the world, and God, the God whom thou didst once delight in, will let thine own wickedness correct thee, and thy backslidings reprove thee, because he wishes thee to come back again to his side, and to drink again of the living waters which thou hast so foolishly forsaken.

JEREMIAH 2:1-25

1-3. *Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying, Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem saying, Thus saith the LORD: I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness in a land that was not sown. Israel was holiness unto the LORD, and the first-*

fruits of his increase: all that devour him shalt offend; evil shall come upon them, saith the LORD.

God reminds his people of what they used to be in their first days, when they came out of Egypt. They had very sadly declined from what they then were. They were none too faithful to the Lord then; but they had fallen back even from that condition. Does not this passage come home to some of you who are not now what you once were? May the Lord graciously speak through these words to your ear, and to your heart, if you have backslidden from him in any degree!

4, 5. *Hear ye the word of the LORD, O house of Jacob, and all the families of the house of Israel: thus saith the LORD, What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain*

What faults have you to find with God, that you have left him? What fault have you seen in the ever-blessed Christ, that your love to him should have grown cold?

6, 7. *Neither said they, Where is the LORD that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, that led us through the wilderness, through a land of deserts and of pits, through a land of drought, and of the shadow of death, through a land that no man passed through, and where no man dwelt? And I brought you into a plentiful country, to eat the fruit thereof and the goodness thereof; but when ye entered, ye defiled my land, and made mine heritage an abomination.*

It is a sad charge against anybody that he forgets the care that God has taken of him in the days of his poverty and affliction. When a man becomes rich, and is surrounded by earthly comforts, it is a terrible thing that he should then forget God; or that, the more God does for him, the less he thinks of God. This is strangely ungrateful conduct, yet the children of Israel acted thus. They were better in the wilderness, -though they were bad enough there, -they were better in the wilderness than they were in Canaan, better on the desert sand than they were in the land that flowed with milk and honey. And there are some, nowadays, who were better in their poverty than they are in their prosperity, and some who were better by a long way in their times of sickness than they now are in their balmy days of health. Alas, that it should be so!

8. *The priests said not, Where is the LORD? and they that handle the law knew me not: the pastors also transgressed against me, and the prophets prophesied by Baal, and walked after things that do not profit.*

It is always ill with the people when the ministers go wrong. If the dogs do not protect the flock, but are dumb dogs that cannot bark, what is to become of the sheep?

9-11. *Wherefore I will yet plead with you, saith the LORD, and with your children's children will I plead. For pass over the isles of Chittim, and see; and send unto Kedar, and consider diligently, and see if there be such a thing. Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods? but my people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit,*

God bids them go to the West, across the Mediterranean, to Chittim, that is, probably Cyprus, or to go to the East, away there to Kedar, or Arabia, and see whether any Gentile nation ever changed its gods, which really were no gods. "And yet," says the Lord, "here is a people that knew the one living and true God, but they have turned aside to idols: 'My people hath changed their glory for that which doth not profit.'" O friend, if there is no truth in religion, I do not wonder that you give it up! But if you ever knew its blessed sweetness, if Christ was ever precious to you, if you did once enjoy the gospel of his grace, how is it that you have grown cold towards it, and declined from its ways?

12, 13. *Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the LORD. For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold-no water.*

To go away from the flowing fountain to the stagnant waters of a cistern, is great folly; but to go and hew out broken cisterns that can hold no water, but merely mock your thirst, is madness of the worst kind.

14. *Is Israel a servant? is he a home born slave? why is he spoiled?*

God made him to be his son, not his slave; but Israel went aside from God, and so became a slave, being carried away into captivity by the very nation whose gods the chosen people worshipped.

15, 16. *The young lions roared upon him, and yelled, and they made his land waste: his cities are burned without inhabitant. Also the*

children of Noph and Tuhapanes have broken the crown of thy head.

The Israelites went and worshipped idols, and then the very nations whose gods they worshipped invaded the land, and broke the crown of their head, or made them bald, which was to the Jews a mark of mourning or of disgrace.

17. *Hast thou not procured this-unto thyself, in that thou hast forsaken the LORD thy God, when he led thee by the way?*

You who are depressed in soul, you who have grown spiritually poor, you who are in great trouble of heart, listen: “Hast thou not procured this unto thyself?” Didst thou not make the rod for thine own back by going away from thy God? It was well enough with thee when thou didst trust in him; but now that thou hast turned aside from him, all these evils have come upon thee. “Hast thou not procured this unto thyself, in that thou hast forsaken Jehovah thy God, when he led thee by the way?”

18. *And now what hast thou to do in the way of Egypt, to drink the waters of Sihor?*

“The waters of the Nile;” or, as it may be read, “the waters of that muddy river.” The Israelites had suffered so much during their long captivity in Egypt, that one would have thought they would never have wanted to go near the house of bondage again: “What hast thou to do in the way of Egypt, to drink the waters of Sihor?”

18. *Or what hast thou to do in the way of Assyria, to drink the waters of the river?*

You are trying to find pleasure in the world, you are going to the resorts of sin, to seek amusement there. If thou art a child of God, “What hast thou to do in the way of Egypt, to drink the waters of Sihor? Or what hast thou to do in the way of Assyria, to drink the waters of the river?” What doest thou there, Elijah? Thou hast lost the comforts of religion by thy backsliding; and now thou art trying to make up for them by going into the world’s gaiety. It will never do; thou canst never fill thy belly with the husks that the swine do eat. If thou wert one of the swine, thou mightest do so; but if thou art thy Father’s son, it is only the bread in his house that will satisfy thy hungry soul.

19-25. *Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shalt reprove thee: know therefore and see that it is an*

evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the LORD thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord GOD of hosts. For of old time I have broken thy yoke, and burst thy bands; and thou saidst, I will not transgress; when upon every high hill and under every green tree then wanderest, playing the harlot. Yet I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed: how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me? For though thou wash thee with nitre, and take thee much hope, yet thine iniquity is marked before me, saith the Lord GOD, how canst thou say, I am not polluted, I have not gone after Baalim? see thy way in the valley, know what thou hast done: thou art a swift dromedary traversing her -ways; a-wild ass used to the wilderness, that snuffeth up the wind at her pleasure: in her occasion who can turn her away? all they that seek her will not weary themselves; in her month they shall find her. Withhold thy foot from being unshod, and thy throat from thirst, but thou saidst, There is no hope no; for I have loved strangers, and after them will I go.

God compares his erring people, in the delirium of their sin, to these wild creatures that cannot be tamed, but are driven by their ungovernable passions whithersoever they will. Alas, that men should be so sinful that God can only find a parallel to them in the wild asses of the wilderness! See, also, what despair will do for its victims. When a man says, "There is no hope," then he feels that for him there is no repentance. When he believes that God will not forgive him, then he will not turn from his evil ways. "Thou saidst, There is no hope: no, for I have loved strangers, and after them will I go." God save any here present who are getting into the clutches of Giant Despair! May they know the true goodness of God, and may that goodness lead them to repentance! Amen.

JEREMIAH 2:20-37

20-26. *For of old time I have broken thy yoke, and burst thy bands; and thou saidst, I will not transgress; when upon every high hill and under every green tree thou wanderest, playing the harlot. Yet I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed: how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me? For though thou wash thee with nitre, and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before me, saith the Lord GOD. How canst thou*

say, I am not polluted, I have not gone after Baalim? see thy way in the valley, know what thou hast done: thou art a swift dromedary traversing her ways; A wild ass used to the wilderness, that snuffeth up the wind at her pleasure; in her occasion who can turn her away? all they that seek her will not weary themselves; in her month they shall find her. Withhold thy foot from being unshod, and thy throat from thirst: but thou saidst, There is no hope: no; for I have loved strangers, and after them will I go. As the thief is ashamed when he is found, so is the house of Israel ashamed; they, their kings, their princes, and their priests, and their prophets, —

And there are many people whose repentance is of no more value than the shame of a thief, when he is found out. Oh, for something better and deeper than this!

26, 27. *So is the house of Israel ashamed; they, their kings, their princes, and their priests, and their prophets, Saying to a stock, Thou art my father; and to a stone, Thou hast brought me forth: for they have turned their back unto me, and not their face: but in the time of their trouble they will say, Arise, and save us.*

Some men never pray except in stormy weather. Their religion is wholly dependent upon their condition and circumstances. If all is going well with them, they bend not their knees before the Lord, but when they are in sore distress, and especially if they think they are likely soon to die, then they cry unto God, “Arise, and save us,” with no more true faith than these idolaters had when they cried to their powerless idols.

28-30. *But where are thy gods that thou hast made thee? let them arise, if they can save thee in the time of thy trouble: for according to the number of thy cities are thy gods, O Judah. Wherefore will ye plead with me? ye all have transgressed against me, saith the LORD. In vain have I smitten your children; they received no correction: your own sword hath devoured your prophets, like a destroying lion.*

So far from accepting God’s rebukes in the right spirit, and forsaking their idol gods, they even turned upon the Lord’s messengers and put his prophets to death.

31. *O generation, see ye the word of the LORD.*

“If you will not hear it, see it.”

31. *Have I been a wilderness unto Israel? a land of darkness? wherefore say my people, We are lords; we will come no more unto thee?*

“Do you not see,” says the Lord to these rebellious people, “how much I have done for you? Have you forgotten the numberless mercies I have lavished upon you? I have kept from you nothing that was really good for you. When you worshipped me in sincerity and in truth, you prospered exceedingly; but when you turned away from me, you made a sad mistake. See, then, the sermons which providence itself preached to you if ye will not hear what my prophets say to you in my name.”

32. *Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? yet my people have forgotten me days without number.*

The very beauty of a believer — his glorious dress — is his God. Then can we ever forget him; or all the precious things of the covenant of grace which he so freely bestows upon us? Can we — can we — have fallen so low as to forget the God to whom we owe so much? Alas, he can still say, “My people have forgotten me days without number.”

33, 34. *Why trimmest thou thy way to seek love? therefore hast thou also taught the wicked ones thy ways. Also in thy skirts is found the blood of the souls of the poor innocents: I have not found it by secret search, but upon all these.*

God’s ancient people had so completely turned away from him, and wandered so far from him, that they had practiced all manner of evil in order to prove their love for other gods. They even went among the heathen, and taught them to sin yet worse than they had sinned before. This was most shameful backsliding, a horrible evil in the sight of God.

35. *Yet thou sayest, Because I am innocent, surely his anger shall turn from me.*

The most guilty people are often the most self-righteous. The sinful nation, which ought to have pleaded guilty, here says, “Because I am innocent, surely his anger shall turn from me.”

35. *Behold, I will plead with thee, because thou sayest, I have not sinned.*

That is the great abuse of quarrel between God and men. Many a man still says, “I have not sinned,” although God’s law condemns

him, and the very office of the Saviour proves that the guilty one needed to be saved by One who was almighty. Self-righteousness is a thing which God utterly abhors.

36. *Why gaddest thou about so much to change thy way? thou also shalt be ashamed of Egypt, as thou wast ashamed of Assyria.*

First they trusted to Assyria to save them; and when that broken reed failed them, then they trusted to Egypt; and in a similar fashion, we go from one false hope to another, — from one carnal confidence to another, gadding about to change our way; yet, all the while, refusing to turn unto the Lord.

37. *Yea, thou shalt go forth from him, and thine hands upon thine head:*

Thou shalt go forth as a captive, with thine hands bound above thy head; or, like one in great pain or sorrow, thou shalt hold thine hands to thy head.

37. *For the LORD hath rejected thy confidences, and thou shalt not prosper in them.*

May God, in his mercy, save all of us from false confidences, both now and throughout our whole lives!

JEREMIAH 3:1-23

In this chapter, the sin of God's people is put in the strongest possible light. The figure used may be even said to be a coarse one, but man's sin is itself a coarse thing. The thoughts suggested in this chapter are not what the delicate might desire; but then there is no delicacy in sin.

1. *They say, If a man put away his wife, and she go from him, and become another man's, shall he return unto her again? shall not that land be greatly polluted?*

God himself seems here to be at a non plus. His people had gone away from him, they had acted unfaithfully to him, they had joined themselves unto other gods. The case was a very difficult one. If the Lord takes these people back again, will it not look like putting a premium upon sin? That is just the question that is constantly being raised. If God freely forgives great sinners, will it not look as if he treated sin too leniently? Will not free salvation, by faith in Jesus, lead to sin? The world says that it will; and even the Scripture seems to raise the question: "If a man put away his wife, and she go from

him, and become another man's, shall he return unto her again? Shall not that land be greatly polluted?" Yet Judah had been worse than the woman here described.

1. *But thou has played the harlot with many lovers;*

Here was an awful depth of sin, a terrible enormity of wickedness.

1. *Yet return again to me, saith the LORD.*

What a splendor of divine love is here revealed! I do not wonder that the question should be put, "How can God act thus, and yet be just?" He can do it, and yet be just, as we have often showed you; but, still, it is a very great wonder of grace.

2, 3. *Lift up thine eyes unto the high places, and see where thou hast not been lien with. In the ways hast thou sat for them, as the Arabian in the wilderness; and thou hast polluted the land with thy whoredoms and with thy wickedness. Therefore the showers have been withholden, and there hath been no latter rain; and thou hadst a whore's forehead, thou refused to be ashamed.*

This was very strong, rough language, but oh! how true it was! The people had gone astray from God into all manner of filthiness and pollution; and even when God had chastened them by withholding the showers till they were threatened with famine, they did not turn to him. They seemed to have a brow like adamant, they could not be made ashamed. There may be some persons of that kind in this assembly; if so, let them notice what God says: —

4. *Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me, My father, thou art the guide of my youth?*

Will not you come back again? You are invited to return unto the Lord, despite your wandering, your perverseness, your abominable iniquity. Will you not remember the better days when God was the Guide of your youth? You were not always what you are now. Will you not from this time cry unto the Lord, "My Father, thou art the Guide of my youth"?

5. *Will he reserve his anger for ever? will he keep it to the end?*

No, that he will not; there is none so slow to anger as our God, and there is none so ready to be rid of it as he is. He is a God ready to pardon, waiting to forgive, delighting in mercy. Even though the sin should be so foul that, as I read it to you, I seem almost to blush

in the reading, as you may in the hearing, yet, black as it is, God can put it all away in the greatness of his mercy.

5. *Behold, thou hast spoken and done evil things as thou couldst.*

Thou hast gone as far in sin as thou couldst go; only lack of power has prevented thee from being even worse than thou art. Yet this is the kind of people to whom God speaks in mercy, inviting them to return unto him.

6. *The LORD said also unto me in the days, of Josiah the king, Hast thou seen that which backsliding Israel hath done? she is gone up upon every high mountain and under every green tree, and there hath played the harlot.*

Building temples to false gods on every mountain and in every grove.

7. *And I said after she had done all these things, Turn thou unto me. But she returned not. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it.*

That made Judah's sin even worse than that of Israel; she saw this great iniquity in another, and yet went and committed it herself.

8, 9. *And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also. And it came to pass through the lightness of her whoredom, that she defiled the land, and committed adultery with stones and with stocks.*

Bowing down before idols made of wood or stone.

10-12. *And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but feignedly, saith the LORD. And the LORD said unto me, The backsliding Israel hath justified herself more than treacherous Judah. Go and proclaim these words toward the north, —*

What must these words be? Must they not be, "You have treated me so ill that I will never have anything to do with you again; even common decency requires that I should put you away from all hope for ever"? No; listen to these words, and be astounded: —

12. *And say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the LORD; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the LORD, and I will not keep anger for ever.*

Oh, the measureless mercy of these gracious sentences! Deep and black as the sin is, and fearful and terrible as is the description

of it, how bright, how clear is the immeasurable love which promises to put that sin away, and forget and forgive it once for all!

13. *Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the LORD thy God, and hast scattered thy ways to the strangers under every green tree, and ye have not obeyed my voice, saith the Lord.*

Confess that sad fact, acknowledge that you have thus sinned. Into the ear of God pour out the full confession of your criminality. He cannot ask for anything less than this; surely you cannot demur to it. If you have thus treated him, come and confess it with your head in his bosom, for he is willing to receive you even if you be the very biggest sinner out of hell.

14, 15. *Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion: and I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.*

When God once begins to pardon men, there is no end to it. He goes on to bless them with all that they need He makes them to be like the sheep of his pasture, who shall be richly and happily fed.

16. *And it shall come to pass, when ye be multiplied and increased in the land, in those days, saith the LORD, they shall say no more, The ark of the covenant of the LORD: neither shall it come to mind: neither shall they remember it; neither shall they visit it; neither shall that be done any more.*

You know that they had been accustomed to the old ceremonial religion, which was full of outward rites and forms. God says that, when he brings his erring people back to himself, they shall have done with all that mere externalism. They shall come to worship God in spirit and in truth, and to commune with him without the medium of the ark of the covenant or an earthly priest. They shall walk before him in the joy of their spirits; yet these, mark you, are some of the people who are described in this chapter as having defiled the house of God, and gone astray from him to their utter disgrace.

17. *At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the LORD; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem:*

Even to that very city that had become like a harlot, and was full of abominations.

17, 18. *Neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart. In those days the house of Judah shall walk with the house of Israel,*

There is no more quarrelling when grace comes in. Israel and Judah in the old days fought against each other; but when they alike taste of pardoning grace they shall love each other.

18-19. *And they shall come together out of the land of the north to the land that I have given for an inheritance unto your fathers. But I said, how shall I put thee among the children, —*

When God had said all this, he appears to have come to a pause, and even in his own heart the question seems to arise, How can he deal with these greatly sinful ones as his children? “I said, How shall I put thee among the children,” —

19. *And give thee a pleasant land, a goodly heritage of the host of nations? and I said, Thou shalt call me, My father; and shalt not turn away from me.*

God knew how to change the character and to change the heart, so that these filthy ones, who went farthest astray, should come back to him, and should become among the most holy, the most loyal, the most obedient of all his children. Oh, that his grace might work that miracle again in our midst! Remember what he did for Saul of Tarsus, that transcendent persecutor, how he made him to be the very bravest of his apostles; and he can at this moment take those who form the chosen body-guard of the devil and so change them that they shall become the soldiers of the cross, nearest to Christ, the great Commander. The Lord, by his servant the prophet, goes over this sad story again: —

20. *Surely as a wife treacherously departeth from her husband, so have ye dealt treacherously with me, O house of Israel, saith the LORD.*

But listen —

21. *A voice was heard upon the high places,*

The places where they had built the altars to the false gods: “A voice was heard upon the high places,” —

21. Weeping and supplications of the children of Israel: for they have perverted their way, and they have forgotten the LORD their God.

How pleasant to the ears of God is the weeping of his backsliding people! The happy God does not wish men to be sorrowful, but he is glad that they should be sorrowful for sin. Now that they have begun to bemoan their wanderings and their wickedness, they will come back to their God, so he says to them:

22, 23. Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings. Behold, we come unto thee; for thou art the LORD our God. Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains: truly in the LORD our God is the salvation of Israel.

So they come back to him, and find the salvation which they need.

JEREMIAH 3:6-25

Let us read part of the 3rd chapter of Jeremiah where God brings a solemn accusation against the two nations of Israel and Judah because they forsook the living God, and went after idols — neglected his pure and holy worship, and followed after the abominable rites of the heathen.

6, 7. The LORD said also unto me in the days of Josiah the king, Hast thou seen that which backsliding Israel hath done? she is gone up upon every high mountain and under every green tree, and there hath played the harlot. And I said after she had done all these things. Turn thou unto me.

Depth of mercy that God should bid such a polluted one return to him. “Yet I said, after she had done all these things, Turn thou unto me.”

7, 8. But she returned not. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it. And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also.

Some cannot be kept back from sin by the punishment of others, but they run into the fire in which others have been burnt, and so they aggravate their sin.

9. *And it came to pas through the lightness of her whoredom that she defiled the land, and committed adultery with stones and with stocks.*

That is to say, she gave her heart to false gods, and worshipped stones and stocks. And how it must anger the living God to see men turn away from him to worship blocks of wood and stone, instead of him and especially a people who have been instructed concerning the living God, and so commit the grossest act of disloyalty to him, and be rebellious to the lot degree.

10, 11. *And for all this her treacherous sister Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but feignedly, saith the LORD. And the LORD said unto me, The backsliding Israel hath justified herself more than treacherous Judah.*

The one sinned openly and persevered in it. The other pretended to repent and did not, and that pretended repentance was more hateful in the sight of God than even the daring and open sin of Israel. What next?

12. *Go and proclaim these words towards the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the LORD. And I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the LORD, and I will not keep anger for ever.*

The offense was foul. It is such a one as stabs at the heart of man's honour. It is an offense which a man will scarcely ever forgive, But God bids his wandering Israel come back, and proclaims mercy — free mercy — even to such gross transgressors.

13. *Only acknowledge thine iniquity,*

It is all he asks thee to do. Confess that thou hast done wrong. "Only acknowledge thine iniquity."

13. *That thou halt transgressed against the Lord thy God, and hast scattered thy ways to the strangers under every green tree, and ye have not obeyed my voice, saith the LORD,*

It was under the trees that they set up their altars to worship their false gods; so that they turned the graves, which should be full of beauty and sweet with song, into the places of idolatry, whereby God was provoked. But he says, "Only confess it. Come and lament it. Own that you have been guilty, and I will put away the sin."

14-16. *Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD: for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a*

family, and I will bring you to Zion: And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding. And it shall come to pass, when ye be multiplied and increased in the land, in those days, saith the LORD, they shall say no more, The ark of the covenant of the LORD, neither shall it come to mind neither shall they remember it; neither shall they visit it; neither shall that be done any more.

Evangelical repentance, when it brings pardon with it, usually puts a slight upon mere legal ceremonies. We need not the symbol when we get the substance. We need no ark of the covenant nor holy place at Jerusalem when once the Lord appear in plenteous grace to put away our sin.

17, 18. *At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the LORD; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem: neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart. In those days, the house of Judah shall walk with the house of Israel,*

Nothing unites people like the grace of God. Two men that have been pardoned by the same Saviour ought to love one another, and they will.

18, 19. *And they shall come together out of the land that I have given for an inheritance unto your fathers. But I said,*

After all this mercy, he seems to come to a pause, “But I said”

19. *How shall I put thee among the children, and give thee a pleasant land, a goodly heritage of the hosts of nations?*

Is it possible? Can it be done? These harlot nations that have defiled and polluted themselves with unutterable filthiness — can they be put among the children — the children of God?

19-22. *And I said, Thou shalt call me, My father and shalt not turn away from me. Surely as a wife treacherously departeth from her husband, so have ye dealt treacherously with me, O house of Israel, saith the LORD. A voice was heard upon the high places, weeping and supplications of the children of Israel: for they have perverted their way, and they have forgotten the LORD their God. Return ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings.*

Do you hear it? Do you hear God’s promise? Do you hear his command? “Return, ye backsliding children. I will heal your

backslidings.” Now for the answer. God grant that it may well up in your hearts.

22, 23. *Behold, we come unto thee, for thou art the LORD our God. Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains:*

We leave all false confidences. We forsake our earthly joys.

23, 24. *Truly in the LORD our God is the salvation of Israel. For shame hath devoured the labour of our fathers from our youth; their flocks and their herds, their sons and their daughters.*

They have not profited by worshipping idols. They have suffered through it.

25. *We lie down in our shame, and our confusion covereth us: for we have sinned against the LORD our God, we and our fathers, from our youth even unto this day, and have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God.*

There you see the repentance which the Lord commanded at his people’s hands, and wherever there is such a repentance as that there are sure to be acceptance and salvation. God grant us that repentance, and save us for his mercy’s sake.

This exposition consisted of readings from JEREMIAH 3:6-25; 4:1-29.

JEREMIAH 3:12-25

12-14. *Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the LORD; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the LORD, and I will not keep anger for ever. Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the LORD thy God, and hast scattered thy way to the strangers under every green tree, and ye have not obeyed my voice, saith the LORD. Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for I am married unto you:*

There is a mixed figure here, but there is no mixed sense: children and yet married unto him. The bond was a double one, they were begotten and betrothed. God cares little about the rules of human oratory and formal eloquence. If his meaning can only be made perfectly plain, he freely breaks through all such rules and regulations as we properly make for our talk. “O backsliding children I am married unto you.”

14. *And I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion:*

That is, “two of a tribe;” for the word “family” was used in a very large sense in those times, and comprehended perhaps the whole of one of the twelve tribes.

15. *And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.*

The backsliders when they come back shall not be left outside the fold, but they shall have shepherds to watch over them, and they shall not be left to a lean pasture, but they shall be fed with knowledge and understanding. This is fine fare for the hungry soul! Knowledge is good, but understanding is better. To know may be of little service unless we have the inner and deeper knowledge with it, and understand what we know. These pastors shall feed you with knowledge and understanding. They shall not only teach, but teach so that you cannot fail to learn.

16. *And it shall come to pass, when ye be multiplied and increased in the land, in those days, saith the LORD, they shall say no more, The ark of the covenant of the LORD; neither shall it come to mind: neither shall they remember it, neither shall they visit it; neither shall that be done any more.*

Ceremonial retreats into the dim background when the spiritual is in full vigor. They have come to God for themselves, and they need not now that saved ark of gopher wood lined within and without with gold. In the present day those that walk near to God think but little of the eternal. That which God commands they obey; but their confidence lies in himself. True religion is not a form, but a life, and the soul. Living near to God, is the main, the really essential thing.

17. *At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the LORD; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem: neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart.*

This is, I believe, yet to be literally fulfilled in Jerusalem itself; and spiritually also, to be fulfilled in the Church, when she shall not be behind the nations but become their head, and take the lead in all of blessing for mankind.

18, 19. *In those days the house of Judah shall walk with the house of Israel, and they shall come together out of the land of the north to the land that I have given for an inheritance unto your father. But I said, How shall I put thee among the children,*

As if God himself were at a pass and brought to a nonplus. These people had sinned so much, and they had been driven consequently to the ends of the earth. "I said, How shall I put thee among the children?"

19. *And give thee a pleasant land, a goodly heritage of the hosts of nations? and I said, Thou shalt call me, My father;*

When God gives us the spirit of children then it becomes easy for him to put us among the children. Where the nature of children is given by divine regeneration, the rights of children may well be given by adoption. "I said, Thou shalt call me, My Father."

19. *And shalt not turn away from me.*

I always look upon that second part of the blessing as being perhaps the richer of the two. The final perseverance of the saints forms the cluster of crown jewels that it found in the gasket of the covenant. "Thou shalt not depart from me. Thou shalt not turn away from me." Oh —

"If ever it should come to pass
That sheep of Christ could fall away
My fickle, feeble soul, alas!
Would fall ten thousand times a day."

But he that has begun the good work has promised to carry it on. There is our safety and our rest. "Thou shalt call me, My father; and shalt not turn away from me."

20-21. *Surely as a wife treacherously departeth from her husband, so have ye dealt treacherously with me, O house of Israel, saith the LORD. A voice was heard upon the high place, weeping and supplications of the children of Israel: for they have perverted their way, and they have forgotten the LORD their God.*

The worst of crimes — that a wife should be false to her marriage vows, and turn aside from her husband whom she is bound to love, and very seldom is it that a husband calls a treacherous wife back again, — but God in infinite mercy hateth putting away. He cannot bear divorce. He holds still to the object of his love, and therefore complains with a sweet fidelity of affection, of the

treachery of Israel; and while he is doing it a voice is heard upon the high places, weeping and supplications of the children of Israel, for they have perverted their way, and have forgotten Jehovah their God; and therefore what was there for them but sorrow. They were on their high places offering sacrifice and incense to their new gods, and instead of joy and holy psalms and hymns of delight, they were crying like the priests of Baal, and cutting themselves and torturing themselves. God heard it, weeping and supplications, not to him, for they had perverted their way. Their sorrow did not come from him, for they had forgotten the Lord their God. But that sorrow had something hopeful about it. They found no joy in their new gods, and derived no comfort from their backslidings.

22. *Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings.*

Oh, the wonderful mercy of God! He treats sin as a disease. It was a grand thought, that, on God's part, that he would not so much look upon sin as being a willful deed and crime, but would look upon it as a malady of the mind and soul. "I will heal your backslidings." And see the sweet answer that Israel gives to this.

22. *Behold, we come unto thee; for thou art the LORD our God.*

Oh, that that answer might come from every backsliding heart that is here tonight — that there might be a restoration of the wanderer to his God.

23. *Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains:*

See, they were trying to get it from their high places. They lifted up their voices to their gods, but they only learnt to mourn and weep. "In vain is salvation hoped for from the hills and from the multitude of mountains."

23-25. *Truly in the LORD our God is the salvation of Israel. For shame hath devoured the labour of our fathers from our youth; their flocks and their herds, their sons and their daughters. We lie down in our shame, and our confusion covereth us: for we have sinned against the LORD our God, we and our fathers, from our youth even unto this day, and have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God.*

May such repentance as that fall to the lot of any wanderers who listen now to my words.

JEREMIAH 4:1-29

1, 2. *If thou wilt return, O Israel, saith the LORD, return unto me: and if thou wilt put away thine abominations out of my sight, then shalt thou not remove. And thou shalt swear, The LORD liveth, in truth, in judgment, and in righteousness; and the nations shall bless themselves in him, and in him shall they glory.*

So he sets before them life and death. First, he begins with these words of encouragement. He begs them to come, for God is willing to receive them notwithstanding all.

3, 4 *For thus saith the LORD to the men of Judah and Jerusalem, Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns. Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: lest my fury come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings.*

They had the outward religion, but the Lord's servant bids them know that they must have heart religion. The heart must be purged: the inward must be cleansed. This they had no mind to. They would multiply their sacrifices and their outward performances, but as to cleanliness of heart, this they cared not for.

5-7. *Declare ye in Judah, and publish in Jerusalem; and say, Blow ye the trumpet in the land: cry, gather together, and say, Assemble yourselves, and let us go into the defended cities. Set up the standard towards Zion: retire, stay not: for I will bring evil from the north, and a great destruction. The lion is come up from his thicket, and the destroyer of the Gentiles is on his way: he is gone forth from his place to make thy land desolate; and thy cities shall he laid waste, without an inhabitant.*

This was a terrible prophecy. The Chaldeans, who had broken to pieces so many other kingdoms and powers, were on their way. The lion enraged, had leaped from his thicket and was about to tear, and rend, and do universal havoc; and if they did not turn to God, their whole land would be laid waste. One would think that such a heavy blow should have awakened them to a sense of their danger and their sin, but, alas! it was not so.

8, 9. *For this gird you with sackcloth, lament and howl: for the fierce anger of LORD is not turned back from us. And it shall come*

to pass at that day, saith the LORD, that the heart of the king shall perish, and the heart of the princes; and the priests shall be astonished, and the prophets shall wonder.

Universal fear would take hold upon them. If they would not rightly fear the Lord and turn to him; the time would come when, without exception, the greatest and the wisest of them, should be taken with a sudden panic.

10. *Then said I, Ah! Lord God! surely thou hast greatly deceived this people and Jerusalem, saying, Ye shall have peace; whereas the sword reacheth unto the soul.*

God promises them peace, but it was upon a condition which they did not fulfill. There was peace while they gave up their sin, but “There is no peace, With God, unto the wicked”: and so they missed it.

11, 12. *At that time shall it be said to this people and to Jerusalem. A dry wind of the high places in the wilderness toward the daughter of my people, not to fan, nor to cleanse, Even a full wind from those places shall come unto me: now also will I give sentence against them.*

What an awful line that is. “Now also will I give sentence against them.” They had been on their trial. They are found guilty. They will not repent. “Now will I proceed to pronounce their doom and give sentence against them.”

13. *Behold, he shall come up as clouds, and his chariots shall be as a whirlwind: his horses are swifter than eagles. Woe unto us! for we are spoiled.*

They began to cry out when they began to smart, and the prophet comes in again.

14. *O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved.*

There is ever that silver bell of mercy ringing out the note of invitation. “O Jerusalem, thy sorrows, thy destruction may yet be averted if thou wilt turn from thy darkness, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved.

14-18. *How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee? For a voice declareth from Dan, and publisheth affliction from mount Ephraim. Make ye mention to the nations: behold, publish against Jerusalem, that watchers come from a far country and give out their*

voice against the cities of Judah. As keepers of a field, are they against her round about; because she hath been rebellious against me, saith the LORD, Thy way and thy doings have procured these things unto thee; this is thy wickedness, because it is bitter, because it reacheth unto thine heart.

When “great judgments are abroad,” it always is on account of great sin. It was so in the case of Israel. “Thy doings have procured these things unto thee.” Oh! when the ungodly man begins to reap the result of his life —when, in his own body and in his own home, he begins to see what sin will often bring the drunkard to, let him hear these words: “This is thy wickedness. Thy way and thy doings have procured these things unto thee.” Now follows the lament of Jeremiah — one at the most wonderful pieces of sorrowful writing that will ever be read in your hearing.

19-21. *My bowels, my bowels! I am pained at my very heart; my heart maketh a noise in me; I cannot hold my peace, because thou has heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war. Destruction upon destruction is cried; for the whole land is spoiled: suddenly are my tents spoiled, and my curtains in a moment. How long shall I see the standard, and hear the sound of the trumpet?*

The dreadful blast of war, the blood-red flag of murder, flying through the land, while the Chaldeans slew right and left, young and old — we want to put ourselves into Jeremiah’s position to be able to realize the horror of this case.

22, 23. *For my people is foolish, they have not known me; they are sottish children, and they have none understanding: they are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge. I beheld the earth, and, lo, it was without form, and void: and the heavens, and they had no light.*

As if they had gone back to chaos — to the primeval darkness — to the first disorder ere God began to create.

24-29. *I beheld the mountains, and, lo, they trembled, and all the hills moved lightly. I beheld, and, lo, there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens were fled. I beheld, and, lo, the fruitful place was a wilderness, and all the cities thereof were broken down at the presence of the LORD, and by his fierce anger, For thus hath the LORD said, The whole land shall be desolate; yet will I not make a full end. For this shall the earth mourn, and the heavens above be*

black; because I have spoken it, I have purposed it, and I will not repent, neither will I turn back from it. The whole city shall flee from the noise of the horsemen and bowmen; they shall go into thickets, and climb up upon the rocks; every city shall be forsaken, and not a man dwell therein.

Now all this did happen. It all came to pass. Palestine, the glorious garden of God, was made as dreary as a wilderness. It is not much better now. It has scarcely recovered. God will re-gather them to the land one day, but oh! what a sight it was when God at last had ended his patience — poured out the vials of his wrath upon his once favored land.

This exposition consisted of readings from JEREMIAH 3:6-25; 4:1-29.

JEREMIAH 5:1-6

1. Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth; and I will pardon it.

It was a very wonderful offer, on the part of God, to forgive the inhabitants of the whole city of Jerusalem for the sake of one man; and it was all the more remarkable because he gave them time to make a thorough search to see whether such a person could be found: “if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth.” Into what a horrible state of guilt must the Jewish capital have fallen when there was not one man, even among the magistrates or the priests, who cared for that which was just and true. May God prevent London and England from becoming like Jerusalem and Judah! May truth and righteousness flourish in our land!

2. And though they say, The LORD liveth; surely they swear falsely.

Even those who assumed an appearance of being religious, and who said, “Jehovah liveth,”—even they were false swearers. To what a terribly sad state had the age come when its very religion was a lie, and its professedly holy things were thoroughly rotten!

3. O LORD, are not thine eyes upon the truth?

If there be any truthful man anywhere, God sees him. His eyes are upon him, he regards him with attentive delight, and he will take

care of him with the utmost vigilance. But what was the real character of these people?

Listen.

3. *Thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction: they have made their faces harder than a rock; they have refused to return.*

Nothing could make them act rightly; whatever God did with them, they still persisted in their iniquity.

4, 5. *Therefore I said, Surely these are poor; they are foolish: for they know not the way of the Lord, nor the judgment of their God. I will get me unto the great men, and will speak unto them; for they have known the way of the LORD, and the judgment of their God:*

But he found no improvement among them; they were even worse than the poor and ignorant, for he goes on to say,—

5, 6. *But these have altogether broken the yoke, and burst the bonds. Wherefore a lion out of the forest shall slay them, and a wolf of the evenings shall spoil them, a leopard shall watch over their cities: every one that goeth out thence shall be torn in pieces: because their transgressions are many, and their backslidings, are increased.*

Now let us continue our reading at verse 10, where we shall see that both the house of Israel and the house of Judah had turned aside from the Lord their God.

This exposition consisted of readings from JEREMIAH 5:1-6 and 10-31; and REVELATION 22:1-7.

JEREMIAH 5:10-31

10-12. *Go ye up upon her walls, and destroy; but make not a full end: take away her battlements; for the are not the LORD'S. For the house of Israel and the house of Judah have dealt very treacherously against me, saith the LORD. They have belied the LORD,—*

They have made it out as though God himself were a liar. They have contradicted him whose word is the truth itself. They have despised his threatenings, they have refused his invitations, they have disbelieved his promises: “they have belied the Lord,”—

12-14. *And said, It is not he; neither shall evil come upon us; neither shall we see sword nor famine: and the prophets shall become wind, and the word is not in them: thus shall it be done unto them. Wherefore thus saith the LORD God of hosts, Because ye speak this word, behold, I will make my words in thy mouth fire, and this people wood, and it shall devour them.*

It is a dreadful state of things when God turns from pleading with men to threatening them, when he ceases to invite them to return to him, and denounces them as transgressors against his laws. At such times, he makes the words that come out of the mouths of his prophets to be like fire, and men are utterly consumed by them as the stable in the field is destroyed by the devouring flames.

15-18. *Lo, I will bring a nation upon you from far, O house of Israel, saith the LORD: iris a mighty nation, it is an ancient nation, a nation whose language thou knowest not, neither understandest what they say. Their quiver is as an open sepulcher, they are all mighty men. And they shall eat up thine harvest, and thy bread, which thy sons and thy daughters should eat: they shall eat up thy flocks and thine herds: they shall eat up thy vines and thy fig trees: they shall impoverish thy fenced cities, wherein, thou trustedst, with the sword. Nevertheless in those days, saith the LORD, I will not make a full end with you.*

See how, in the midst of his wrath, God remembers mercy. He utters a terrible sentence concerning transgressors, and then he pauses, and says, “Nevertheless,”—listen to the gentle note of pity in that word,—“Nevertheless, in those days, saith the Lord, I will not, make a full end with you.” Still does he spare the guilty, and in his longsuffering he gives them further opportunities for repentance.

19. *And it shall come to pass, when ye shall say, Wherefore doeth the LORD our God all these things unto us? then shalt thou answer them, Like as ye have forsaken me, and serve strange gods in your land, so shall ye serve strangers in a land that is not yours.*

A man may often see his sin in its punishment. Because they had served strange gods, therefore the Lord sent them to serve strangers in a strange land. Remember, O transgressor, that thy sin will come home to thee in some form or other! if we sow the wind, we shall reap the whirlwind. “Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” Therefore, let us beware of scattering seeds of sin, for they will produce a terrible harvest of woe.

20, 21. *Declare this in the house of Jacob, and publish it in Judah, saying, Hear now this, O foolish people, and without understanding; which have eyes, and see not; which have ears, and hear not:*

And, alas! there are far too many of such people still about. They hear God's Word, yet it never reaches their hearts. They see what God's hand is doing all around them, yet they do not and they will not really see it as they should.

22. *Fear ye not me? saith the LORD, will ye not tremble at my presence, which, have placed the sand for the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it: and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it?*

There is a little belt of sand which checks the surging sea, and says to it, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed." Now, if sand, which is so weak a thing, can, nevertheless, control the mighty ocean within bounds, how readily ought you and I to be governed by God, and held in check even by the slightest intimations of his will!

23. *But this people hath a revolting and a rebellious heart; they are revolted and gone.*

God restrains the sea, but nothing seems to be able to restrain the sinfulness of man. He breaks ever every barrier that should keep him back; he is like a desolating torrent when he gives way to iniquity.

24. *Neither say they in their heart, Let us now fear the LORD our God, that giveth rain, both the former and the latter, in his season: he reserveth unto us the appointed weeks of the harvest.*

Though God gives timely and suitable seasons for the growth and in-gathering of the corn,—rain when it is needed to aid the upspringing of the blade, and fine weather for garnering the harvest,—yet many men see not the hand of God at all, and they are therefore not moved by gratitude to bless his name, and fear him to whom they are indebted for all that they receive. Oh, what an ungrateful and blind creature is man!

25. *Your iniquities have turned away these things, and your sins have withholden good things from you.*

Does any unconverted man here know what good things he has missed up to the present moment? Suppose you, my friend, were to be saved tonight, yet can you even imagine what joy you have lost through all the years of your past impenitence? Nothing can ever give back to you the years that have gone, or impart to you, in the future, the joy you might have had, but which you have missed. And, mark you, if there were no hell to be endured, it is enough of hell to have missed heaven. It will be grief enough to your heart, at the last, to find that “your sins have withholden good things from you.”

26. *For among my people are found wicked men:*

“Among my people,” saith the Lord,—in the very church itself, making as loud a profession as the most genuine Christian,—“among my people are found wicked men.” Here, in this place, tonight, mingling with the godly in this congregation, are found wicked men. The Lord have mercy upon them, and turn them from their evil ways!

26. *They lay wait, as he that setteth snares; they set a trap, they catch men.*

Beware of these man-catchers, who entrap souls, and ruin them for ever, ensnaring them by leading them into evil habits and transgressions.

27, 28. *As a cage is full of birds, so are their houses full of deceit: therefore they are become great, and waxen rich. They are waxen fat, they shine: yea, they overpass the deeds of the wicked:-*

The manifestly wicked,—

28, 29. *They judge not the cause, the cause of the fatherless, yet they prosper; and the right of the needy do they not judge. Shall I not visit for these things?*

Angels in heaven, God says to you, “Shall I not visit for these things?” And they answer, “Yea, Lord.” Even to the devils in hell, he may put the same question. They are already smarting under his wrath, and he may say to them, “Shall I not visit for these things?” And they also answer, “Yea.” He puts the question to all intelligent beings who know what is right and true, “Shall I not visit for these things?” And they, with one consent, reply, “Yea, Lord; it must be so.”

29-31. *Saith the LORD: shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this? A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so:*

It is a most horrible thing that God's own people should ever be willing that error should be preached, and that oppression and wrong-doing of any kind should be practiced. You know that, if God's own people did not tolerate false doctrine, it would soon cease to be heard in many places. But it is when those who profess to know God's Word endorse that which is contrary to the truth that error is kept in power in the land: "The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so."

31. *And what will ye do in the end thereof?*

That is a question which I would propose in God's name to all here. Is your religion of such a character that, when you come to die, it will bear you up? Or have you taken up with some form of falsehood which will not stand the test of your dying hour? Are you living in neglect of God? Is your life such that he must be angry with you, for he is angry with the wicked every day? Then, take home to yourself the question with which this chapter closes, "What will ye do in the end thereof?" I am going to speak to you presently about those who go forth with Christ, without the camp, bearing his reproach, so let us read a few verses about the glory which awaits them by-and-by.

This exposition consisted of readings from JEREMIAH 5:1-6 and 10-31; and REVELATION 22:1-7.

JEREMIAH 7:1-16

1-3. *The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, Stand in the gate of the LORD'S house, and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the LORD, all ye of Judah, that enter in at these gates to worship the LORD. Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings; and I will cause you to dwell in this place.*

Many of them thought that, if they went up to the temple, it was all right with them, if they did but go through the outward ritual, they would certainly be accepted. They must have been astonished when Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, met them at the temple door,

and told them that the best worship of God was holiness, not the mere outward ceremony but the renewal of the life, the cleansing of the heart before him.

4-7. *Trust ye not in lying words, saying The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD. The temple of the LORD, are these. For if ye thoroughly amend your ways and your doings; if ye thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbour; if ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt: then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers for ever and ever.*

The blessing is not to the temple and the temple worshippers, the blessing is to holy men, to such as love righteousness, to such as obey the living God, and do justice between man and man, and especially between themselves and the poor and needy of the earth. It is needful to say this even now, for there are some who talk of being regenerated by baptism, of being saved by sacraments, they trust in their priests, and rely upon their performances. "Trust ye not in lying words;" that is the Scriptural description of all that kind of thing, -just lying words, and nothing better.

8-10. *Behold, ye trust in lying words, that cannot profit. Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not; and come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations?*

Will you quote the very decree of God as an excuse for your sin? Will you make it out that even he is partaker in your criminality? That will never do; only a lying heart could conceive of such an abomination.

11-16. *Is this house, which is callest by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen it, saith the LORD. But go ye now unto my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness, of my people Israel. And now, because ye have done all these works, saith the LORD, and I spake unto you, rising up early and speaking, but ye heard not; and I called you, but ye answered not; therefore will I do unto this house, which is called by my name, wherein ye trust, and unto the place which I gave to you and to your father, as I have*

done to Shiloh. And I will cast you out of my sight, as I have cast out all your brethren, even the whole seed of Ephraim. Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make interception to me: for I will not hear thee.

You know how, through the sin of Eli's sons, God forsook Shiloh; and the tent of his house and the ark of his covenant were removed, and Shiloh became an utter desolation. This will God do to any church that becomes unfaithful to him. Go ye to Rome, and see what she is today,--mother of harlots, though once she seemed to be the chaste spouse of Christ. Her idolatries are as many as those of the heathen, for she forsook the truth of God, and turned aside from the Most High. Think not that God is tied to any place, or to any ministry. If we walk not before him aright, he may take the candlestick out of its place, he may take the talent away and give it to others, and then "Ichabod" shall be written on the walls whether it be of Shiloh or of Jerusalem. Jeremiah has thus shown us clearly that no confidence can be placed in holy places or outward ceremonies; the state of the heart and the life is the all-important matter.

This exposition consisted of readings from JEREMIAH 7:1-16; AND 17:1-14

JEREMIAH 7:21-26

21, 22. *Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Put your burnt offerings unto your sacrifices, and eat flesh. For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices:*

You have heard what God said to them when they came out of Egypt.

23-26. *But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you. But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels and in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward, and not forward.*

Since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt unto this day I have even sent unto you all my servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them: yet they hearkened not unto me, nor inclined their ear, but hardened their neck: they did

worse than their fathers. God grant that these words may never be a truthful description of us! Oh, may we keep the covenant of our God, and walk before him with a holy, reverent fear, and serve him all our days! Amen.

This exposition consisted of readings from EXODUS 15; AND JEREMIAH 7:21-26.

JEREMIAH 8

1, 2. *At that time, saith the LORD, they shall bring out the bones of the kings of Judah, and the bones of his princes, and the bones of the priests, and the bones of the prophets, and the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, out of their graves: and they shall spread them before the sun and the moon, and all the host of heaven, whom they have loved, and whom they served, and after whom they have walked, and whom they have sought, and whom they have worshipped: they shall not be gathered, nor be buried; they shall be for dung upon the face of the earth.*

This is an awful picture. Here is a nation that would worship the sun, and the moon, and the stars, instead of worshipping God. Here they are, and their bones lie exposed to the sun and moon and stars which they had worshipped, — dead people before lifeless gods. This is all that idolatry produces for the ruined people who have turned away from their true Friend and Helper; their bones lie exposed in the presence of the things that they made to be their gods. How dreadful is the result of sin! No matter what modern preachers say, a sinful course must be a disastrous one. It is in the very nature of things that we cannot go the wrong road, and yet be happy. Wrong must end in wrong, it cannot be otherwise; the universal conviction in the conscience of man teaches us this fact.

3. *And death shall be chosen rather than life by all the residue of them that remain of this evil family, which remain in all the places whither I have driven them, saith the LORD of hosts.*

These people would not have God, they cast him off; and now he so far casts them off that they feel that it would have been better for them if they had never been born, and they would rather die than live: “Death shall be chosen rather than life.”

4. *Moreover thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the LORD; Shall they fall, and not arise? shall he turn away, and not return?*

The old proverb says, "It is a long lane that has no turning." So the Lord seems to ask, "Will these men always go on in sin? Will they always turn away from me? They change from bad to worse; will they never change from worse to better?"

5. *Why then is this people of Jerusalem slidden back by a perpetual backsliding? they hold fast deceit, they refuse to return.*

Perseverance in evil is the very venom of evil. When men not only backslide, but continue perpetually to backslide, they are doubly dyeing their garments in the scarlet of iniquity. When men "refuse to return" to the Lord, and continue to refuse to return, surely they are digging their own graves exceeding deep.

6. *I hearkened and heard, —*

It is God who is speaking: "I hearkened and heard," —

6. *But they spake not aright:*

"I tried to discover whether there was any good in them. I listened to hear them offer a prayer, I watched to mark anything like repentance in them."

6. *No man repented him of wickedness, saying, What have I done? every one turned to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle.*

See how God described these people. When he might have expected that some of them would relent, and in their thoughtful moments turn to a better mind, they did not do so; but, as the horse, when he hears the war-trumpet, rushes into the midst of the fray, so did these people go headlong into sin with desperate resolve. Careless of wounds and death, they rushed to their destruction. I hope that this is not the case with any of my hearers at this time; I pray God that it may not be so.

7. *Yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming; but my people know not the judgment of the LORD.*

The birds take wing across the sea when the damps of autumn come; and, by-and-by, when spring returns, they twitter about our roofs again, punctual to the appointed time. But men come not to God in their season; they fly not from their sins, they return not to the Lord. The crane and the swallow rebuke the foolishness of men who know not the time to return to God, and know not their way back to him.

8, 9. *How do ye say, We are wise, and the law of the LORD is with us? Lo, certainly in vain made he it; the pen of the scribes is in vain. The wise men are ashamed, they are dismayed and taken: lo, they have rejected the word of the LORD; and what wisdom is in them?*

This test may serve as a motto for some, in these days, who believe themselves to be wiser than Scripture, and who fancy that, in their great wisdom, they are able to correct this inspired Book! Many set up in the trade of “Bible-makers” nowadays; they profess to be the revealers of revelation, the improvers of this blessed Book of God. Ah! but this passage still standeth true, “They have rejected the word of the Lord; and what wisdom is in them?”

10, 11. *Therefore will I give their wives unto others, and their fields to them that shall inherit them: for every one from the least even unto the greatest is given to covetousness, from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealeth falsely. For they have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace.*

This is a very mischievous thing. For the preacher of Christ to be honest and fearless, and to speak unpalatable truth, is right in God’s sight; but to gloss over the great facts about sin and judgment, and to say to the ungodly, “Oh, do not trouble yourselves! ‘Peace, peace; when there is no peace;’” this is to murder the souls of men; and I doubt not that the blood of multitudes will be upon the skirts of those teachers who have tried to make everything pleasant to the wicked, and to suit the age in which they lived. The Lord himself says of the prophet and priest who have dealt falsely, “They have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace.”

12. *Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush:*

What a striking expression is this! To what a condition of shameless obstinacy have men’s minds been brought when it can be said of them, “They were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush.” The very power to be ashamed was taken from them. Surely, almost the last ray of any hope of salvation must be gone from the man who cannot blush at the thought of his own iniquity.

12-18. *Therefore shall they fall among them that fall: in the time of their visitation they shall be cast down, saith the LORD. I will*

surely consume them, saith the LORD: there shall be no grapes on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree, and the leaf shall fade; and the things that I have given them shall pass away from them. Why do we sit still? assemble yourselves, and let us enter into the defensed cities, and let us be silent there: for the LORD our God hath put us to silence, and give us water to drink, because we have sinned against the LORD. We looked for peace, but no good came; and for a time of health, and behold trouble! The snorting of his horses was heard from Dan: the whole land trembled at the sound of the neighing of his strong ones; for they are come, and have devoured the land, and all that is in it; the city, and those that dwell therein. For, behold, I will send serpents, cockatrices, among you, which will not be charmed, and they shall bite you, saith the LORD. When I would comfort myself against sorrow, my heart is faint in me.

Because the people refused this testimony, because they seemed set on mischief, and resolved to die, therefore the prophet's heart was faint within him.

19, 20. *Behold the voice of the cry of the daughter of my people because of them that dwell in a far country: Is not the LORD in Zion? Is not her king in her? Why have they provoked me to anger with their graven images, and with strange vanities? The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.*

I will read that twentieth verse again: "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." This may be the lament of some of my present hearers; and if it be, may they bow now before the Lord in true penitence of heart, and may he in pity save them this very hour! The harvest is past, the summer is ended; but, oh! may they: soon be saved!

21. *For the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt; I am black; astonishment hath taken hold on me.*

That is the man to be God's prophet, the man who makes the sorrows of his people-to be his own sorrows, who does not perform the duties of his office as a mere matter of profession, but enters into his service with a weeping heart, longing to be made a blessing to men.

22. *Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there?*

No; there is none. There is balm in Christ, there is a Physician who once hung on Calvary's cross; but there is no balm and no physician in Gilead. If there were, —

22. *Why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?*

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 12.; AND JEREMIAH 8., AND 9:1.

JEREMIAH 8

1. *At that time, saith the LORD, they shall bring out the bones of the kings of Judah, and the bones of his princes, and the bones of the priests, and the bones of the prophets, and the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, out of their graves:*

The prophet Jeremiah had to foretell terrible judgments upon the guilty people, who had been often warned, but who had at last gone beyond all bearing, and were about to be destroyed by the Chaldeans, for here we have the picture of Judah and Jerusalem invaded by the Chaldeans and Babylonians, just before the city was utterly destroyed. It was a very common practice to bury treasure with the bodies of kings, hence when any land was invaded by foreign foes, they broke open the tombs, and searched for hidden valuables and it was a sign of the special detestation of the enemy, and of their fury against the people, when they dragged the carcasses out of the graves, and scattered the bones to the four winds of heaven. In this case, it was foretold that this desecration would not only take place with regard to the bones of the kings, in whose tombs the greatest treasure might be expected to be found, but the bones of princes, priests, prophets, and people were all to be alike brought forth.

2. *And they shall spread them before the sun, and the moon, and all the host of heaven, whom they have loved, and whom they have served, and after whom they have walked, and whom they have sought, and whom they have worshipped: they shall not be gathered, nor be buried; they shall be for dung upon the face of the earth.*

What a striking and appropriate judgment that was! As they had worshipped the sun, that very sun was to dry their bones. As they had worshipped the moon, that moon's rays should fall upon their

relics, and the stars, which they had adored, would also be quite unable to help them.

3. *And death shall be chosen rather than life by all the residue of them that remain of this evil family, which remain in all the places whither I have driven them, saith the LORD of hosts.*

There was to be stern treatment for the dead; but it would be worse with the living, for the Chaldeans were strong, fierce, cruel, and most ingenious in the torments which they inflicted upon their captives. It was an awful thing to be living in such times as those, and it always is a terrible thing to be living when God's judgments are abroad in the earth, and sinners are hardened in their sin.

4, 5. *Moreover thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the LORD, Shall they fall, and not arise? shall he turn away, and not return? Why then is this people of Jerusalem slidden back by a perpetual backsliding? they hold fast deceit, they refuse to return.*

Perseverance in sin is a great aggravation of it. There are some who fall into sin, but, by God's grace, they are raised out of it, and they turn away from iniquity, and are restored to God's favor. Where there is true grace in the heart, where there is spiritual life there will be restoration sooner or later; but there are others, like the people of Jerusalem, who have "slidden back by a perpetual backsliding." Day after day, they grow more outrageous in their wickedness.

6. *I hearkened and heard, but they spake not aright: no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? every one turned to his course as the horse rusheth into the battle.*

God listened; he waited to be gracious; he was eager to hear one penitent cry, and to observe one tear of genuine repentance, but, as the war-horse is eager for the fray, and, at the first blast of the trumpet, seeks to dash into the very center of the fight, so did these ungodly people. Instead of turning to God, they turned more desperately to sin.

7. *Yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming; but my people know not the judgment of the LORD.*

When God's judgments are being experienced, it is high time to repent. But these people did not think of such a thing, they were not

half so sensible as migratory birds, which come and go as the seasons guide them.

8. *How do ye say, We are wise, and the law of the Lord is with us, certainly in vain made he it; the pen of the scribes is in vain.*

What! do they talk like that, the people who do not know and do not regard God's judgments, do they talk in such a style as that? Ah, yes! Some of the most wicked of them have a so-called "religion" upon which they still pride themselves. Their hands are red with blood, yet they keep a Bible handy. They say, "We are wise, and the law of the Lord is with us;" all the while that they are sinning against the Lord and his law. Scribes multiplied copies of the law, and some of these very people, who were most hardened in guilt, possessed a copy. But, says God, "certainly in vain made he it; the pen of the scribes is in vain;" and our own Bible Societies may go on printing Bibles by the million; but, as long as men do not obey what is taught in the Bible, the work of the printing press, like that of the copyist, will be in vain. We need more than the letter of the Word, valuable as that is; we need to know, in spirit and in truth, what the Spirit teaches through the letter, and also to practice it. God grant that even our Bibles may not rise up in judgment against us.

9. *The wise men are ashamed, they are dismayed and taken: lo, they have rejected the word of the LORD, and what wisdom is in them?*

See God's judgment upon a man wise in his own conceit. You hear every now and then, of some wonderfully learned, philosophic, scientific man, and many folk are frightened because he is an infidel. He does not possess true wisdom; God's description of such a man is this, "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God."

10-11. *Therefore will I give their wives unto others, and their fields to them that shall inherit them; for every one from the least even unto the greatest is given to covetousness, from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealeth falsely. For they have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace.*

It is a dreadful thing when those, who ought to warn the people simply flatter them; when, instead of speaking sharp, stern, honest, faithful words, they cry, "Peace, peace, when there is no peace." Such false teachers say, "Do not trouble yourself; all will come right at last. You may live as you like, but there is no hereafter that need

alarm you; in another state, you may get set right, whatever God's Word declares as to the punishment of the impenitent. There are far too many of these smooth-tongued deceivers living now. God deliver this land from them, lest they become an occasion of judgment against the people!

12. *Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore shall they fall among them that fall: in the time of their visitation they shall be cast down, saith the LORD.*

They had gone so far that they could not blush. It is a dreadful thing when a man has lost the very sense of shame; there will be no repentance where that is the case.

13. *I will surely consume them, saith the LORD: there shall be no grapes on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree, and the leaf shall fade; and the things that I have given them shall pass away from them.*

They would not recognize the Giver, so the gift should be taken away from them. Now the people dwelling in the country villages begin to be alarmed because of the Chaldeans, and they say:

14-16. *Why do we sit still? assemble yourselves, and let us enter into the defended cities, and let us be silent there: for the LORD our God hath put us to silence, and given us water of gall to drink, because we have sinned against the LORD, We looked for peace, but no good came; and for a time of health, and behold trouble! The snorting of his horses was heard from Dan: the whole land trembled at the sound of the neighing of his strong ones, for they are come, and have devoured the land, and all that is in it; the city, and those that dwell therein.*

Dan was the northernmost tribe, bordering on Phoenicia, and after Nebuchadnezzar conquered the Phoenicians, he began to march through the territory of Daniel. The mighty horses of the Chaldeans can be seen represented upon the slabs brought home by Mr. Layard, they are a very prominent part of the Chaldean force; so the poet-prophet pictures them as being heard as far as from Dan as all the way to Jerusalem, so terrible was their snorting. This, of course, is the imagery of poetry, but there was terrible reality behind it.

17. *For, behold, I will send serpents, cockatrices, among you, which will not be charmed, and they shall bite you, saith the LORD.*

Such were the Chaldeans, crafty as serpents, full of the venom of cruelty wherever they came, there was no way of charming them as a serpent may be charmed. They came on a deadly errand, and thoroughly did they perform it.

18-21. *When I would comfort myself against sorrow, my heart is faint in me. Behold the voice of the cry of the daughter of my people because of them that dwell in a far country: Is not the LORD in Zion? is not her king in her? Why have they provoked me to anger with their graven images, and with strange vanities? The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved. For the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt; I am black; astonishment hath taken hold on me.*

The weeping prophet sorrows over the desolation of his land, in words that have seldom been surpassed for sublime sympathy and pathos:

22. *Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?*

This exposition consisted of readings from JEREMIAH 8., 9:1.

JEREMIAH 9

1. *Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!*

Jeremiah foresaw that the Chaldeans would come up, and so many would be slain that the nation would be almost destroyed.

2. *Oh that I had in the wilderness a lodging place of wayfaring men; that I might leave my people, and go from them! for they be all adulterers, an assembly of treacherous men.*

He mourned because of the doom that awaited them; but he equally mourned because of the sin that would bring that doom upon them. He wished that he could get away into one of those refuges, which were provided in lonely places, where travelers might lodge for a night.

3. *And they bend their tongues like their bow for lies:*

They made use of the tongue, as if it were a bow, to shoot out falsehood. It is a very graphic description of the men of Jeremiah's day. He dips his pen in his heart's blood as he writes about them.

3. *But they are not valiant for the truth upon the earth;*

Oh, no! No one stood up for the truth in those days; no man was willing to suffer for it, to argue for it, or even to own it.

3. *For they proceed from evil to evil, and they know not me, saith the LORD.*

They grew worse and worse. It is the way of wicked men to ripen into greater sin. They proceeded from evil to evil; and Jeremiah had Jehovah's testimony for it that, though they knew a great many things, they did not know the LORD: "They know not me, saith the LORD."

4. *Take ye heed every one of his neighbour, and trust ye not in any brother: for every brother will utterly supplant, and every neighbour will walk with slanders.*

It was an evil time indeed when, even in the domestic circle, there could be no brotherly confidence. "Every brother will utterly supplant." Jacob's name, you remember, was supplanter; and all these men were Jacobs, each one ready to supplant his brother, to throw him on one side that he might occupy his place. As to neighbourly conduct, there was none; the neighbours were all gossips and slanderers of one another.

5. *And they will deceive every one his neighbour, and will not speak the truth: they have taught their tongue to speak lies, and weary themselves to commit iniquity.*

What a sad state they were in! Their tongues spoke lies without any teaching; but they schooled them till they were masters of the art of lying. They were D.D.s, doctors of dissembling; they understood the art thoroughly. They had taught their tongue to speak lies, and they had committed so much evil that they even tired themselves in the doing of it.

6. *Thine habitation is in the midst of deceit; through deceit they refuse to know me, saith the LORD.*

Putting forth all their critical ingenuity to get rid of God, his Word, inspiration, and the divine sacrifice, doing all they could that they might not know God.

7, 8. *Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts, Behold, I will melt them, and try them; for how shall I do for the daughter of my people? Their tongue is as an arrow shot out; it speaketh deceit: one speaketh peaceably to his neighbour with his mouth, but in heart he layeth his wait.*

Do you wonder that Jeremiah wept? With so true a spirit, so tender and sympathetic, he could not bear it when man had become man's worst enemy, and no man could be relied upon, for all practiced and spoke deceit.

9. *Shall I not visit them for these things? saith the LORD: shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?*

Divine justice sets the fire of indignation burning. Nothing excites God's wrath more than continued falsehood and deceit, unkindness, unbrotherly conduct, and unholiness of life. Put all these evils together, and you have more than enough God-provoking sins calling for an avenging visitation.

10. *For the mountains will I take up a weeping and wailing, and for the habitations of the wilderness a lamentation, because they are burned up, so that none can pass through them; neither can men hear the voice of the cattle; both the fowl of the heavens and the beast are fled; they are gone.*

The prophet pictures what the Chaldeans would do. They would not only destroy the cities, but they would even rob the hills of their cattle, and sweep the fields till there would be nothing left that men could gather.

11. *And I will make Jerusalem heaps, and a den of dragons; and I will make the cities of Judah desolate, without an inhabitant.*

Jeremiah had to live to see all this. The thought of it pulled up the sluices of his tears, and made him wish that all the clouds and seas and rains would come, and dwell in his eyes, for his grief had need of all the watery things that nature could produce. George Herbert sings, and I quote his lines to illustrate the depth of Jeremiah's griefs

“Let every vein Suck up a river to supply mine eyes,
My weary, weeping eyes, too dry for me,
Unless they get new conduits, new supplies,
To bear them out, and with my state agree.”

12. *Who is the wise man, that may understand this? and who is he to whom the mouth of the LORD hath spoken, that he may declare it, for what the land perisheth and is burned up like a wilderness, that none passeth through?*

The land would never have been desolate if it had not been for the wickedness of the people. Sin-sin it is that does the mischief.

There are some who cavil at the punishment that God puts upon sin; they would do better if they found fault with the sin which brings its own punishment with it. There is nothing arbitrary in God's justice; he allows sin itself to ripen, and when it is finished, it bringeth forth death eternal.

13, 14. *And the LORD saith, Because they have forsaken my law which I set before them, and have not obeyed my voice, neither walked therein; but have walked after the imagination of their own heart, and after Baalim,*

After many Baals, is the meaning; many are the gods that men make for themselves when they turn away from Jehovah.

14, 15. *Which their fathers taught them: therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will feed them, even this people, with wormwood, and give them water of gall to drink.*

You cannot sin without suffering. If you will not drink of the waters of obedience, but will drink of the waters of rebellion, they shall be bitter.

16. *I will scatter them also among the heathen, whom neither they nor their fathers have known: and I will send a sword after them, till I have consumed them.*

A patriot for man, a prophet for God, do you marvel that he wept?

17. *Thus saith the LORD of hosts, Consider ye, and call for the mourning women, that they may come; and send for cunning women, that they may come:*

These were the hired mourners, the women who were paid to go to funerals, and simulate grief. "Send for your weepers now;" said the LORD of hosts, "for if you ever needed mourners, you need them now."

18, 19. *And let them make haste, and take up a wailing for us, that our eyes may run down with tears, and our eyelids gush out with waters. For a voice of wailing is heard out of Zion,*

These were no mock mourners; but real weepers, who had cause to mourn.

19. *How are we spoiled! we are greatly confounded,*

Why did they not say, "How have we sinned"? No; men will think of the punishment they suffer; but they will overlook the sin they commit.

19. *Because we have forsaken the land, because our dwellings have cast us out.*

Why did not they say, “Because we have forsaken the LORD, because we have cast off the worship of Jehovah”? You cannot bring men to that point. They quarrel with the rod rather than with the hand that holds it. They mourn over the result of sin; but to the sin itself they still cling.

20, 21. *Yet hear the word of the LORD, O ye women, and let your ear receive the word of his mouth, and teach your daughters wailing, and every one her neighbour lamentation. For death is come up into our windows,*

It did not wait to come in by the door. In time of war or pestilence, death comes how it will through every casement, closed or open.

21. *And is entered into our palaces, to cut off the children from without, and the young men from the streets.*

Generally, in war, they spare the children; and they carry the young men away as captives. The Chaldeans were cruel; they killed the little ones, and they slew the young men.

22. *Speak, Thus saith the LORD, Even the carcasses of men shall fall as dung upon the open field, and as the handful after the harvestman, and none shall gather them.*

So dreadful was the devastation that was wrought by these Chaldeans on account of the people’s sin, that dead bodies lay like heaps of dung that the husbandman strews upon the field.

23, 24. *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.*

This was the God who turned again to his rebellious people, and who would have been glad if they had but known him. He would have made them richer than the rich, and wiser than the wise, and mightier than the mighty; but they would not have the things in which Jehovah delighted.

25. *Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will punish all them which are circumcised with the uncircumcised;*

If they sin like others, they shall die like others, circumcised or uncircumcised, baptized or unbaptized.

26. *Egypt, and Judah, and Edom,*

You see that Judah is sandwiched in between Egypt and Edom. Those who were the people of God are put in the same category with the accursed nation, because they had forsaken him, and mixed up with them.

26. *And the children of Ammon, and Moab, and all that are in the utmost corners, that dwell in the wilderness: for all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in the heart.*

If the heart be not right with God, vain are all external rites.

JEREMIAH 9:1

1. *Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!*

This is how God's servants feel about the dying and perishing souls all around them. They cannot bear the thought of the sinner's awful doom; it brings continuous heartbreak and heaviness of spirit upon them. That men should eternally perish, that they should bring on their own heads the doom of their own sin, is no small thing, and therefore the Lord's servant mourns over those who mourn not for themselves. God save every one of us, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 12.; AND JEREMIAH 8., AND 9:1.

JEREMIAH 9:1

1. *Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, then, I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!*

Matthew Henry well observes that, in the Hebrew, the same word signifies "eye" and "fountain", as if God had as much given us eyes to weep with as to see with, as if there were as much cause to sorrow over sin as to look out upon the beauties of the world. Magnificent in its poetry, and most touching in its pathos, is this verse, which ought never to have been cut off from the previous

chapter: “Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!”

This exposition consisted of readings from JEREMIAH 8., 9:1.

JEREMIAH 10

1, 2. *Hear ye the word which the Lord speaketh unto you, O house of Israel: Thus saith the LORD, Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them.*

Among the heathen, if certain stars were in conjunction, it was considered unlucky; and certain days of the week were also regarded as unlucky, just as to this day, there are people who think that it is very unfortunate to commence anything on a Friday. There are a great many foolish superstitions floating about this silly world, but you Christian people should never allow such follies to have any influence upon you. Neither the fiends of hell, nor the stars of heaven, can ever injure those who put their trust in God.

3, 4. *For the customs of the people are vain: for one cutteth a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the axe. They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not.*

Those ancient prophets seemed to take delight in heaping scorn upon the god-making of the heathen. Even the heathen poets made sport of the god-making; one of them very wisely said that it would be more reasonable to worship the workmen who made the god, than to worship the god which the workmen had made.

5. *They are upright as the palm tree, but speak not: they must need be borne, because they cannot go.*

Pretty gods they must be, cannot move, and cannot even stand till they are nailed up, and cannot stir unless they are carried from place to place.

5-8. *Be not afraid of them; for they cannot do evil, neither also is it in them to do good. Forasmuch as there is none like unto thee, O LORD; thou art great, and thy name is great in might. Who would not fear thee, O King of nations? for to thee doth it appertain: forasmuch as among all the wise men of the nations, and in all their*

kingdoms, there is none like unto thee. But they are altogether brutish and foolish: the stock is a doctrine of vanities.

To teach people to worship mere stocks and stones, may well be called “a doctrine of vanities.”

9. *Silver spread into plates is brought from Tarshish, and gold from Uphaz, the work of the workman, and of the hands of the founder: blue and purple is their clothing: they are all the work of cunning men.*

Step into any Roman Catholic Joss-house in England, or on the Continent or, for the matter of that, into any Anglican Joss-house, for they are all very much alike and you will see that the modern “gods” are no better than those upon which the prophets of old poured scorn, and I think it is our duty to pour scorn upon these saints, and saintesses, and Madonnas, and Bambinos, and I know not what besides.

10-13. *But the LORD is the true God, he is the living God, and an everlasting king: at his wrath the earth shall tremble, and the nations shall not be able to abide his indignation. Thus shall ye say unto them, The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, even they shall perish from the earth, and from under these heavens. He hath made the earth by his power, he hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heavens by his discretion. When he uttereth his voice, there is a multitude of waters in the heavens, and he causeth the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; he maketh lightnings with rain, and bringeth forth the wind out of his treasures.*

To what a height of sacred imagery does Jeremiah mount! He seems to shake off his usual melancholy spirit when he comes to sing the praises of the Lord. He uses very similar language to that of Job, his fellow-sufferer.

14. *Every man is brutish in his knowledge:*

Every idolater proves that he knows no more than a brute beast when he worships a stock or a stone.

14, 15. *Every founder is confounded by the graven image: for his molten image is falsehood, and there is no breath in them. They are vanity, and the work of errors: in the time of their visitation they shall perish.*

The next verse brings out very vividly the contrast between these false gods and the one living and true God: —

16. *The portion of Jacob is not like them: for he is the former of all things; and Israel is the rod of his inheritance: The LORD of hosts is his name.*

What a blessed name that is for God: “The portion of Jacob”! And the other side of the truth is equally blessed: “Israel is the rod of his inheritance.” God belongs to his people, and they belong to him, if we can but realize that these blessings are ours, we are building on the solid foundation of the richest possible happiness. The form of the prophecy now changes, for God was about to send his people, because of their sin, into a long and sad captivity; so the prophet says, in the name of the Lord: —

17, 18. *Gather up thy wares out of the land, O inhabitant of the fortress. For thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will sling out the inhabitants of the land at this once, and will distress them, that they may find it so.*

They had fled to their fortresses for shelter, for the Babylonians were coming up against them; but no hope of deliverance was held out to them, and they were told to pack up their little bundles, to put their small stores as closely together as they could, for they had to go away into a far distant country as captives of the mighty king Nebuchadnezzar. God compares their captivity to the forcible ejection of stones from a sling; “I will slide out the inhabitants of the land at this once.” How severely God chastened his people in Jeremiah’s day! Yet, when we think of their innumerable provocations, and of how they revolted again and again against the Lord, we are not surprised that at last, the Lord sent them into captivity. Now listen to Jeremiah’s lamentation over the people whom he looks upon as already in captivity; he speaks in the name of the nation, and says: —

19. *Woe is me for my hurt! My wound is grievous: but I said, Truly this is a grief, and I must bear it.*

Ah, child of God, you also must learn to say that! There are some trials and troubles, which come upon you, against which you may not contend, but you must say, “Truly this is a grief, and I must bear it.”

20. *My tabernacle is spoiled, and all my cords are broken: my children are gone forth of me, and they are not: there is none to stretch forth my tent any more, and to set up my curtains.*

Alas, poor Israel! she was like a tent removed, with none to set her up again. There are some churches, in the present day, that are in this sad condition; the faithful fail from among them, there are no new converts, and no earnest spirits, so that the church has to say, "My tent is spoiled and all my cords are broken: my children are gone forth of me, and they are not: there is none to stretch forth my tent any more, and to set up my curtains" "Yes, poor afflicted church, that may be all true, yet thy God can visit thee, and make the barren woman to keep house, and to be a joyful mother of children, and thou who hast lost thy dearest ones, and seemest now to have no stay left, — thy children are all taken from thee, but thy God can build thee up; is he not better to thee than ten sons; and has he not said to thee, "Thy Maker is thy Husband; the Lord of hosts is his name" ?

21, 22. *For the pastors are become brutish, and have not sought the Lord: therefore they shall not prosper, and all their flocks shall be scattered. Behold, the noise of the bruit is come, —*

"Bruit" is an old Norman word; one wonders how it got in here. It might be rendered, "The noise of the tumult is come," —

22-24. *And a great commotion out of the north country, to make the cities of Judah desolate, and a den of dragons. O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps. O LORD, correct me, but with judgment; not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing.*

What a suitable prayer this is for a sick man, for a tried believer, for the child of God in deep despondency of soul; I scarcely know any better words that any of us could use. The suppliant does not ask to go unchastised, but he says, "O Lord, correct me, but with judgment: not in thine anger; lest thou bring me to nothing."

25. *Pour out thy fury upon the heathen that know thee not, and upon the families that call not on thy name: for they have eaten up Jacob, and devoured him, and consumed him, and have made his habitation desolate.*

So he asks God, instead of smiting his own children, to smite his enemies, and knowing what we do about the Babylonians, we do not wonder that Jeremiah put up such a prayer as that.

JEREMIAH 14

In some respects, Jeremiah is one of the greatest of the ancient prophets, for he had most sorrowful task to perform. He had not to deliver a message full of Evangelical comfort, like that of Isaiah; nor had he gorgeous visions of coming kingdoms, as Ezekiel had; but he was the Cassandra of his age. Jeremiah spoke the truth, yet few believed him; his life was spent in sighing over a wicked people who rejected and despised him. He bore a heavy burden upon his heart, and tears continually bedewed his Cheeks, so that he was rightly called “the weeping prophet.” This chapter gives us an illustration of the style in which he used to pray.

1. The word of the LORD that came to Jeremiah concerning the dearth.

There had been no rain, so the crops had failed, and there was a famine in the land. Jeremiah describes that famine in striking poetic imagery.

2-6. Judah mourneth, and the gates thereof languish; they are black unto the ground; and the cry of Jerusalem is gone up. And their nobles have sent their little ones to the waters: they came to the pits, and found no water; they returned with their vessels empty; they were ashamed and confounded, and covered their heads. Because the ground is chapt, for there was no rain in the earth, the plowmen were ashamed, they covered their heads. Yea, the hind also calved in the field, and forsook it, because there was no grass. And the wild asses did stand in the high places, they snuffed up the wind like dragons; their eyes did fail, because there was no grass.

The distress in the land was so great that the city gates, where, in more prosperous times, business transactions took place, and meetings of the people were held, were deserted. There was nothing that could be done while the nation was in such sorrow, and a great cry of agony went up from the capital of the country: “The cry of Jerusalem is gone up.” The highest in the land sent their children to hunt even for a little water to drink; they went to the cisterns where some might have been expected to remain, but they found none:

they returned with their vessels empty; they were as ashamed and confounded, and covered their heads.” The covering of the head was the sign of sorrow. You remember how, in the day of his distress, “David went up by the ascent of Mount Olivet, and wept as he went up, and had his head covered;” “and all the people that was with him covered every man his head, and they went up, weeping as they went up.” The ground had been reduced, by the drought, to such a state of hardness that it was useless to plough it, for there was no hope of any harvest coming. Even the wild creatures of the field shared the general suffering. The hind, which is reckoned by the Orientals to be the fondest of its young, forsook its fawn, and left it to perish, because there was no food. And the wild asses, which are able to endure thirst better than other creatures can and are always quick to perceive water if there is any to be found, tried in vain to scent it anywhere. “They snuffed up the wind like dragons,”—like cobras, or serpents, or jackals, as the word may be variously rendered,— but they snuffed in vain; and their eyes became like coals in their head: they “did fail, because there was no grass.” What then? Why, the prophet turns to prayer as the only means of obtaining relief

7. O Lord, though our iniquities testify against us, do thou it for thy name’s sake:

“Thou canst not do it because of any merit of ours.”

7-9. For our backslidings are many; we have sinned against thee. O the hope of Israel, the saviour thereof in time of trouble, why shouldest thou be as a stranger in the land and as a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night? Why shouldest thou be as a man astonished, as a mighty man that cannot save? yet thou O LORD, art in the midst of us and we are called by thy name; leave us not.

Can you not almost hear the good man praying? Notice how he begs the Lord not to be to the land like a mere stranger who passes through it, and cares nothing for it. “Why shouldest thou be as a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night?” Then he pleads with the Lord, “Why shouldest thou be as a man strong, but stunned?”—for that is the meaning of the expression he uses—“Be not thou as a mighty man astounded or stunned, who cannot save us; let it not be thought or said that we have come to such a pass that even thou canst not help us.” This was

grand pleading on the prophet's part, and he followed it up by mentioning the close connection that existed between Israel and God. Yet thou, O Jehovah, art in the midst of us, and we are called by thy name;" and then pleaded, "leave us not." It was a grand prayer; yet, at first, this was the only answer that Jeremiah received to it:—

10, 11. *Thus saith the Lord unto this people, Thus have they loved to wander, they have not refrained their feet, therefore the LORD doth not accept them; he will now remember their iniquity, and visit their sins. Then said the LORD unto me, Pray not for this people for their good.*

"You may pray, if you like to do so, for a plague to come upon them as a chastisement for their sins, but do not pray for any blessing for them."

12. *When they fast, I will not hear their cry; and when they offer burnt offering and an oblation, I will not accept them: but I will consume them by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence.*

After being long provoked, God at last determines that he will punish the rebellious nation, and he seems, as it were, to put Jeremiah on one side, now the day of my vengeance has come, and I will show no more mercy to them." Now note what Jeremiah does even after the Lord has said to him, "Pray not for this people for their good."

13. *Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! behold, the prophets say unto them, Ye shalt not see the sword, neither shall ye have famine; but I will give you assured peace in this place.*

He says, "Lord, have pity on the people, for they are misled by their prophets. Peradventure, if these false prophets had not thus deceived them, and puffed them up, they would not have been so hardened in their sin." He tried to make some excuse for them, but the Lord would not yield to his pleading.

14, 15. *Then the LORD said unto me, The prophets prophesy lies in my name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them: they prophesy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their heart. Therefore thus saith the Lord concerned the prophets that prophesy in my name, and I sent them not, yet they say, Sword and famine*

shall not be in this land; By sword and famine shall those prophets be consumed.

God says, "Yes, I will deal with the false prophets; it is true that they have misled the people, and I will punish them for their deception; but I will not excuse the people even on that ground."

16. *And the people to whom they prophesy shall be cast out in the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and the sword; and they shall have none to bury them, them, their wives, nor their sons, nor their daughters: for I will pour their wickedness upon them.*

That seems to be a hard answer to Jeremiah's pleading; what is the prophet to do now? God gives him another message to deliver to the people:—

17, 18. *Therefore thou shalt say this word unto them; Let mine eyes run down with tears night and day, and let them not cease: for the virgin daughter of my people is broken with a great breach, with a very grievous blow. If I go forth into the field, then behold! the slain with the sword! and if I enter into the city, then behold them that are sick with famine! yea, both the prophet and the priest go about into a land that they know not.*

So God told Jeremiah that he might go and tell the people that he would weep continually for them. The faithful and sympathetic prophet was to be allowed constantly to shed tears on their behalf, and to feel great distress of soul because everywhere he saw signs of the heavy hand of God resting upon the guilty people. If they went outside the city, the Chaldeans slew them with the sword; and if they stopped inside, they perished by famine; or those that died not were carried away captive into a land that they knew not. What is Jeremiah to do in such a case as this? He is told that he must not pray for the people, and God seems determined to smite them. What can love do when even the gates of prayer are ordered to be closed? Notice how, after he is told that he must not pray, he edges his way up towards the throne of grace and, at last, he does what he is told not to do. He begins thus:—

19. *Hast thou utterly rejected Judah? hath thy soul loathed Zion? Why hast thou smitten us, and there is no healing for us? we looked for peace, and there is no good; and for the time of healing, and behold trouble!*

That is not exactly praying, but it is very like it. Jeremiah is asking the Lord whether he can really have cast off his people.

20. *We acknowledge, O Lord, our wickedness, and the iniquity of our fathers: for we have sinned against thee.*

He has advanced a step farther now, to the confession of sin. If that is not really prayer, it always goes with it. It is the background of prayer, so we shall soon have some other touches in the picture.

21. *Do not abhor us for thy name's sake, do not disgrace the throne of thy glory: remember, break not thy covenant with us.*

Now he is getting actually to praying; he cannot help himself. He is told that he must not pray, but he feels that he must; he loves the people so much that he must plead for them.

22. *Are there any among the vanities of the Gentiles that can cause rain! Or can the heavens give showers? art not thou he, O LORD our God? Therefore we will wait upon thee: for thou hast made all these things.*

O splendid perseverance of importunity,—strong resolve of a forbidden intercession! “Thou, O Lord our God, tellest us not to pray, but we cannot restrain our supplication: “Therefore we will wait upon thee.” God help us all to wait upon him! We are not so discouraged from praying as he was who spoke these words, so there is still more reason why we should say to the Lord, “Therefore we will wait upon thee.”

JEREMIAH 17:1-14

1. *The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond:*

It is so ingrained in their very nature that you might as well try to erase an inscription that is written upon steel with the point of a diamond as hope to get this perversity out of the nation; it is graven upon the tablets of their heart. What is mere habit can be altered, but what is ingrained in the heart cannot be taken away except by a, miracle of grace. It was the heart that was wrong; the fountain-head was polluted, so what could the streams be but foul.

1. *It is graven upon the table of their heart, and upon the horns of your altars;*

Their holiest things were defiled. They wrote up the names of their idol gods even upon God's altar, and so they bore a written testimony against themselves.

2. Whilst their children remember their altars and their groves by the green trees upon the high hills.

God forbade the setting up of altars. There was one altar at Jerusalem, and there were to be no more; but they selected spots where great trees had long grown, they chose the tops of the hills, and they built shrines for their idols there; and there God was angry with them. Oh, how readily we may turn anything into sin! How easily our choicest mercies may be made into occasions of iniquity!

3-8. O my mountain in the field, I will give thy substance and all thy treasures to the spoil, and thy high places for sin, throughout all thy borders. And thou, even thyself, shalt discontinue from thine heritage that I gave thee; and I will cause thee to serve thine enemies in the land which thou knowest not: for ye have kindled a fire in mine anger, which shall burn for ever. Thus saith the LORD; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD. For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited. Blessed is the man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.

Oh, the blessedness of confidence in God! You see it here set out in contrast with the misery of trusting in men. Drought comes even to this tree, and times of trouble come to the believer; but the drought does not affect the tree, for it has secret, underground sources from which it sucks up its life; it spreads out its roots by the river; and blessed is that man who has a secret life, a secret strength, a secret comfort which sustains him in the trying hour. The world cannot perceive it, but he drinks it in, and lives upon it.

9. The heart-

That is the principal matter, it was the heart of the nation which had gone astray from God: "The heart"-

9-11. *Is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings. As the partridge sitteth on eggs, and hatcheth them not; so he that getteth riches, and not be right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a fool.*

The prophet likens the man who gets riches by falsehood and oppression to a bird which has many eggs, too many for her to cover, and consequently, though she sits on them, there is such a heap of eggs that they are none of them hatched; they come to nothing. I think I know some men who are very like that partridge. It would be a great mercy for them if they had only half of the eggs that they have, for all they get is the care and trouble of covering them, but no living joy comes out of them; the eggs are addled. He that has not the grace of God in his heart is just like a bird sitting upon addled eggs. Poor soul! "At his end he shall be a fool." He must therefore be something of a fool now, for he that pursues an end which shall end in folly is a fool to have such an end before him.

12-14. *A glorious high throne from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary. O LORD, the hope of Israel, all that forsake thee shall be ashamed and they that depart from me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the Lord, the fountain of living waters. Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved: for thou art my praise.*

This exposition consisted of readings from JEREMIAH 7:1-15; AND 17:1-14

JEREMIAH 23:1-32

1. *Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! saith the LORD.*

What a dreadful woe this is upon all false shepherds, — those who profess to be sent of God to instruct the people, but who are not sent of God at all, whose labours only result in the scattering of the sheep, and destroying them, instead of gathering them to Christ for their salvation!

2-4. *Therefore thus saith the LORD God of Israel against the pastors that feed my people; Ye have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them; behold, I will visit upon you,*

the evil of your doings, saith the LORD. And I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all countries whither I have driven them, and will bring them again to their folds, and they shall be fruitful and increase. And I will set up shepherds over them which shall feed them: and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall they be lacking, saith the LORD.

If the under-shepherds do not feed the flock, God himself will do it, for his own redeemed flock shall not be torn of wolves, nor left to perish in the lands whither they are driven. That great Shepherd of the sheep will do what others fail to do; but this does not take away from them their responsibility, and it must be the most solemn responsibility that rests on mortal man to profess to be a shepherd of souls, yet not to be sent of God.

5. *Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth.*

We are looking for that glorious King. Oh, that he would soon come! He is the great Monarch who shall absorb all other monarchies, for “he shall reign for ever and ever.”

6. *In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.*

What a glorious name for our King, who is made of God unto us “righteousness.” We may well rejoice to think that all the perfect righteousness of our great King and Lord shall belong to us, for this shall be his very name, “THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.”

7, 8. *Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that they shall no more say, The LORD liveth, which brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; but, the LORD liveth, which brought up and which led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country, and from all countries whither I had driven them; and they shall dwell in their own land.*

There are better times for Israel than Israel has ever known as yet. The glories of Egypt and of the Red Sea are yet to be eclipsed. And there are better times in store for the Church of God than she has seen as yet.

9. *Mine heart within me is broken because of the prophets;*

In Jeremiah's day there was a set of men who pretended to be prophets, yet who contradicted the Lord's servant at every point.

9. All my bones shake; I am like a drunken man, and like a man whom wine hath overcome, because of the LORD, and because of the words of his holiness.

Jeremiah had really received the Word of the Lord, and it seemed to overpower him; as that Word was full of terror, he felt like one who was overcome with wine.

10, 11. *For the land is full of adulterers, for because of swearing the land mourneth; the pleasant places of the wilderness are dried up, and their course is evil, and their force is not right. For both prophet and priest are profane; yea, in my house have I found their wickedness, saith the LORD.*

It is an awful thing when wickedness abounds even in the house of God; and it is to be feared that, in many places, the church of the present day is not clear in this matter.

12. *Wherefore their way shall be unto them as slippery ways in the darkness:*

What an awful description of the doom of the profane prophets and priests! Slippery ways are bad enough in the light, but "their way shall be unto them as slippery ways in the darkness."

12-14. *They shall be driven on, and fall therein: for I will bring evil upon them, even the year of their visitation, saith the LORD. And I have seen folly in the prophets of Samaria; they prophesied in Baal, and caused my people Israel to err. I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem an horrible thing:*

It was bad enough for Samaria to go astray. There was a mixed race there, so it was no wonder that their prophets were foolish; but oh! that in Jerusalem, the city of the great King, there should be false prophets, that was worst of all. This was the style of these prophets: —

14, 15. *They commit adultery, and walk in lies: they strengthen also the hands of evildoers, that none doth return from his wickedness: they are all of them unto me as Sodom, and the inhabitants thereof as Gomorrah. Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts concerning the prophets, Behold, I will feed them with wormwood, and make them drink the water of gall: for from the prophets of Jerusalem is profaneness gone forth into all the land.*

When preachers are bad, who wonders that people are worse? If the prophets go astray, how shall those who follow them find the right road?

16. *Thus saith the LORD of hosts, Hearken not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you: they make you vain:*

That is one mark of a false prophet, he makes you feel that you are a fine fellow, that there is something good in you: "They make you vain."

16. *They speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the LORD.*

That is another of the marks of a false prophet. Such a man as that is a great thinker; he has thought out his theology himself, he has imagined and invented it himself: "They speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the Lord."

17. *They say still unto them that despise me, The LORD hath said, Ye shall have peace; and they say unto every one that walketh after the imagination of his own heart, No evil shall come upon you.*

This is yet another mark of the false prophet. He always tries to smooth down the consequences of sin. "In the future state," he says, "sin may occasion some temporary inconvenience, but all things will come right sooner or later." That is a man sent of the devil, he is no servant of the living God. By these three tests you may prove who are the false prophets, they make you vain, they speak out of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of God, and they try to make it easy for you to sin by denying the greatness of the penalty attached to it.

18, 19. *For who hath stood in the counsel of the LORD, and hath perceived and heard his word? who hath marked his word, and heard it? Behold, a whirlwind of the LORD is gone forth in fury, even a grievous whirlwind: it shall fall grievously upon the head of the wicked.*

This is God's Word; he does not prophesy smooth things to the wicked, he does not promise slight consequences of sin, but "a whirlwind" and "a grievous whirlwind."

20-22. *The anger of the LORD shall not return, until he have executed, and till he have performed the thoughts of his heart: in the latter days ye shall consider it perfectly. I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they*

prophesied. But if they had stood in my counsel, and had caused my people to hear my words, then they should have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings.

False prophets are futile and vain, no good result comes of all their teaching; but oh! if they had known the Word of the Lord, if they had really been sent of God, what a difference there would have been! God grant that none of us may pretend to teach others what we have never learned, or to speak for God if God has never spoken to us!

23-26. *Am I a God at hand, saith the LORD, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD. I have heard what the prophets said, that prophesy lies in my name, saying, I have dreamed, I have dreamed. How long shall this be in the heart of the prophets that prophecy lies? yea, they are prophets of the deceit of their own heart;*

They profess to be prophets of their own heart, but “they are prophets of the deceit of their own heart,” for that which comes out of man’s heart is like the heart itself, and man’s heart “is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.”

27, 28. *Which think to cause my people to forget my name by their dreams which they tell every man to his neighbour, as their fathers have forgotten my name for Baal. The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream;*

Let him tell it as a dream, for it is nothing more than that. If he has dreamt it, let him say, “This is a dream that I have dreamed, but it is only a dream.”

28. *And he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully.*

Let him speak it as the Word of the Lord.

28. *What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the LORD.*

Man’s thoughts, man’s conceptions, at their very best, are but as chaff; only the Word of the Lord is the true wheat.

29, 30. *Is not my word like as a fire? saith the LORD; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces? Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, saith the LORD, that steal my words every one from his neighbour.*

Borrowed sermons — pages of other people’s experience — fragments pulled from old or new divines — nothing of their own,

nothing that God ever said to them, nothing that ever thrilled their hearts or swayed their souls, — God will not own such teaching as this.

31. *Behold, I am against the prophets, saith the Lord, that use their tongues, and say, He saith.*

They have not any hearts; they only use their tongues. They say, “He saith,” as if God had said to them something which he has never said.

32. *Behold, I am against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the Lord, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness; yet I sent them not, nor commanded them: therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the LORD.*

See how heavily God deals with the false prophets of Jeremiah’s time; and he will deal with equal severity with any who preach or teach anything other than the gospel of his blessed Son, — the pure revelation which is written in this Book. God grant that none of us may be deceived by them, for his dear Son’s sake! Amen.

JEREMIAH 30

12. *For thus saith the LORD, Thy bruise is incurable, and thy wound is grievous.*

See here is the bass again. We have got down into the sorrowful notes all to make us sick of self and ready to receive the grace of God.

13, 14. *There is none to plead thy cause, that thou mayest be bound up: thou hast no healing medicines. All thy lovers have forgotten thee:*

Out of sight, out of mind. They have forgotten thee. Oh! when God wounds, it, is a wound, indeed. When he breaks the heart who can comfort? If he does but speak, the earth trembles. He touches the hills, and they smoke.

“When he shuts up in long despair,
Who can remove the iron bar?”

14, 15. *They seek thee not; for I have wounded thee with the wound of an enemy, with the chastisement of a cruel one for the multitude of thine iniquity; because thy sins were increased. Why criest thou for thine affliction? thy sorrow is incurable for the multitude of thine iniquity:*

“These are dark words,” says one. If they are incurable, what more need be said? Ah! the things incurable with men are curable with God. Sin is the malady that none can cure save God alone.

15, 16. *Because thy sins were increased, I have done these things unto thee. Therefore*

Now I read this morning, and I could not help dwelling upon this “therefore.” It looks like a non sequitur, but there is a real argument, in it. Therefore, because you have now come to the worst, because you cannot help yourself, because you are ruined and undone: —

16, 17. *All they that devour thee shall be devoured: and all thine adversaries, every one of them, shall go into captivity; and they that spoil thee shall be a spoil, and all that prey upon thee will I give for a prey. For I will restore health unto thee,*

Oh! the sovereignty of divine grace! how it comes in when every hope is gone! Man’s extremity is God’s opportunity. An incurable sinner and therefore, God comes to cure him. If you are brought so low that you cannot go any lower, God will put his everlasting arms underneath you. I speak to some tonight who are about to enter into peace, and joy, and rest. “I will restore health unto thee; I will heal thee of thy wounds saith the Lord.”

17. *And I will heal thee of thy wounds, saith the LORD; because they called thee an Outcast, saying This is Zion, whom no man seeketh after.*

They said, “There is no hope for that man, there is no relief for that woman. Therefore, God means to give up all relief. Nothing pleases him better than to undertake a desperate case God is great at a dead lift. When all the world is palsied, then is God omnipotent.

This exposition consisted of readings from ISAIAH 58:1-12, JEREMIAH 30.

JEREMIAH 30:1-11

1, 2. *The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD God of Israel, saying, Write thee all the words that I have spoken unto thee in a book.*

Too good to be lost. The prophets said much when they did not write, and this particular chapter and the next were to be carefully written down. God here begins to deal with his guilty people in a way of love and mercy. It is a very strange chapter, one of the

richest, one of the most cheering in the whole of God's Word. Therefore, write it in a book.

3. *For, lo, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel and Judah, saith the LORD: and I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it.*

Souls get into captivity. God has ways of restoring them. Tonight I expect, and believe, that many captives will be restored by the grace of God to rest and comfort. Will you be one of them? Poor mourner, pray now that you may be. Ask of God that tonight God may bring again your captivity.

4, 5. *And these are the words that the LORD spake concerning Israel and concerning Judah. For thus saith the LORD: We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace.*

"Why" say you, "I thought you began to read words of comfort. Now there is a drop." Yes, there always is. Whenever God is going to comfort a man, he first makes him see his need of comfort. There is always stripping before there is clothing; there is always emptying before there is filling on God's part.

6. *Ask ye now, and see whether a man doth travail with child? wherefore do I see every man with his hands on his loins, as a woman in travail, and all faces are turned into paleness?*

Everywhere, when the time of mercy came, it was a bad time, a dark time, a time of inward throbs, and throes, and travail.

7. *Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble: but he shall be saved out of it.*

But he shall be saved out of it. What a flash of lightning across the black face of the cloud. "He shall be saved out of it."

8, 9. *For it shall come to pass in that day, saith the LORD of hosts, that I will break his yoke from off thy neck, and will burst thy bonds, and strangers shall no more serve themselves of him. But they shall serve the LORD their God and David their king, whom I will raise up unto them.*

See how the chapter has got back to the comforting strain again. After the bass notes, we run up the scale. We have come to comfort again. I should not wonder if we have to go back, however, for so it is, God's mercy is chequer work, black and white, sorrow and salvation.

10, 11. *Therefore fear thou not, O my servant Jacob, saith the LORD; neither be dismayed, O Israel: for, lo, I will save thee from afar and thy seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return, and shall be in rest, and be quiet, and none shall make him afraid.*

What a beautiful collection of words for a troubled heart! And they are not beautiful words only, but there is a deep, true meaning in them: “Shall be in rest and be quiet, and none shall make him afraid.” I pray God that many here who are much afraid, and cannot be quiet, but are like the troubled sea, which cannot rest, may get into this blissful state tonight.

11. *For I am with thee, saith the LORD, to save thee:*

God may destroy the wicked, and he will, but not his people, his own beloved, His heart goes after them. “I will not make a full end of thee.”

11. *Though I make a full end of all nations whither I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee: but I will correct thee in measure, and will not leave thee altogether unpunished.*

You will have to smart for it. If you are God’s child, you will have to be brought home with many a tear and many a sigh. Your sorrow tonight is a part of a heavenly discipline, by which you shall be saved.

This exposition consisted of readings from ISAIAH 55.; JEREMIAH 30:1-11.

JEREMIAH 30:1-22

1, 2. *The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD God of Israel, saying, Write thee all the words that I have spoken unto thee in a book.*

We believe in verbal inspiration; and, though some people treat with contempt the very idea of words being inspired, be you sure of this, if you have not inspired words, you are not likely to get inspired men. Besides, words are to the thought what the shell is to the egg; and if you break the shell, you have destroyed the egg; somehow or other, the thought will ooze out unless it is conveyed in God’s own words. Observe that the Lord does not say to Jeremiah, “Write thee all the thought that I have given thee;” but, “Write thee all the words that I have spoken unto thee in a book.”

3. *For, lo, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel and Judah, saith the LORD: and I will come them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it.*

And so they did, and so they shall in a yet fuller sense, for this is a promise that has fulfillments and fulfillments. Man's promises, once kept, are ended; but God's promises are perpetual; they are springing wells, which never run dry. That which he fulfilled once, he often takes the opportunity to fulfill again on a yet larger scale, as he will doubtless do to his ancient people in the latter days. You who are in spiritual captivity tonight may derive comfort from these words, "I will bring again the captivity of my people." It is the way of God to deliver the captives. What he does once, is only an index of what he is in the habit of doing. It is God's delight to devise means by which he will bring back his banished ones. So, in due time, he will end your captivity, and you shall enjoy the blessed liberty which is the portion of his people.

4, 5. *And these are the words that the LORD spake concerning Israel and concerning Judah. For thus saith the LORD; We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace.*

God hears his people's voices when they cry; he knows the tone and accent which they use; and, sometimes, when he is listening to them, he hears "a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace." Possibly that may be the condition of some who are here tonight; if so, may the Lord, who heareth their cry, bring them out of their tremblings, and fears, and fill their mouth with laughter, and their tongue with singing!

6, 7. *ask ye now, and see whether a man doth travail with child? wherefore do I see every man with his hands on his loins, as a woman in travail, and all faces are turned into paleness? Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like if: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it.*

This passage evidently alludes to a time of very great distress, when men's hearts were swollen within them as if they would burst for very grief. Not simply here and there one, but the great mass of the people seemed to be in sore trouble; even the stout-hearted ones began to feel inward pangs of affliction; yet it was then that the Lord said, "It is even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it."

8. *For it shall come to pass in that day, saith the LORD of hosts, that I will break his yoke from off thy neck, and will burst thy bonds, and strangers shall no more serve themselves of him:*

Here is a word for you tried ones. God, who sometimes permits his child to wear the yoke of the oppressor, will take that yoke away, He will snap the bands that are around thy neck, and enable thee to rise into the glorious liberty wherewith Christ makes his people free. O bondaged ones, be of good comfort, and lour for speedy deliverance through the power of the great Emancipator!

9, 10. *But they shall serve the LORD their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up unto them. Therefore fear thou not, O my servant Jacob, saith the LORD; neither be dismayed, O Israel: for, lo, I will save thee from afar, and thy seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return, and shall be in rest, and be quiet, and none shall make him afraid.*

There are great things in reserve for God's ancient people Israel, and there are not less laid up for God's spiritual Israel, for by them shall the greatest fulfillment of the promise be realized. They shall indeed be quiet, and none shall make them afraid. Note that these are the very men who had their hands upon their loins, and whose faces were pale with fright, These are they who were ready to die of heartbreak; yet even they shall, by the rich grace of God, be in rest, and be quiet, and none shall make them afraid. I wish that we could all realize the fulfillment of that promise even now; and that our gracious God would dwell with us as he is wont to abide with those who bear his name, and thus give us that blessed quiet and rest which we so much need.

11. *For I am with thee, saith the LORD, to save thee: though I make a full end of all nations whither I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee: but I will correct thee in measure, and will not leave thee altogether unpunished.*

Look abroad, and see what God has done to Israel. This is peculiarly the time of Israel's trouble, and the Jewish people were, perhaps, never worse persecuted than they now are in certain parts; yet the Lord will not allow any nation to crush them, and he will himself avenge all wrongs that they suffer. He still says to them, "He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of mine eye;" and it is very noteworthy that, whenever God has used any nation as a rod to chasten the Jews,— and he has used many in that way,—he has

always broken that kingdom up when he has done with it. Think of Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome; look at Spain, and see how mean and despicable that nation has become because of its cruelty to the people of God. Now, if this be true of Israel after the flesh, depend upon it that it is also true concerning God's spiritual people. Though he will correct us when we deserve chastening, it will always be in measure, and he will not make a full end of us. God has measureless wrath against the ungodly for their measureless sin; but as for his own people, he has cast their sin behind his back, and only as a wise and faithful Father does he chasten them for their profit.

12-14. *For thus saith the LORD, Thy bruise is incurable, and thy wound is grievous. There is none to plead thy cause, that thou mayest be bound up: thou hast no healing medicines. All thy lovers have forgotten thee; they seek thee not; for I have wounded thee with the wound of an enemy, with the chastisement of a cruel one, for the multitude of thine iniquity; because thy sins were increased.*

God never gave his people leave to sin; and sin in them is worse than sin in any other people, for they sin against more light, and more love; and therefore it grieves the Lord the more, and he smites all the more heavily; and, mark you, when God smites, there is nobody who can comfort us. A quaint old writer, whose book I was reading the other day, commenting on that part of the parable where the friend, disturbed at midnight, said, "My children are on me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee," wrote something like this, "When God is in bed, there are none of his children up to help us; if he does not open the door, there are none of his saints to give us a crust; all must come from him." Therefore we must cry unto him, and say, "Awake for my help, O God; for all my lovers have forgotten me; they seek me not in the time of my distress." When God wounds us, men often desert us; and those that seemed to be most fond of us forsake us when God smites us.

15, 16. *Why criest thou for thine affliction? thy sorrow is incurable for the multitude of thine iniquity: because thy sins were increased, I have done these things unto thee. Therefore all they that devour thee shall be devoured; —*

How striking is this sentence, and what a surprise it gives us as we read it! We might have thought, after the Lord had spoken as he did, that he would have given his people up to their enemies; but,

instead of doing so, he says, “Therefore all they that devour thee shall be devoured;”

16, 17. *And all thine adversaries, every one of them, shall go into captivity; and they that spoil thee shall be a spoil, and all that prey upon thee will I give for a prey. For I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds, saith the LORD; because they called thee an Outcast, saying, This is Zion, whom no man seeketh after.*

Did you notice that word, “therefore,” in the 16th verse? Can you see “therefore” in it,— any logical conclusion that could be drawn from the prophet’s premises? The argument seems to be, “Because thy disease is incurable, therefore will I restore health unto thee. Because no one else can heal thy wounds, therefore I will heal them.” It is a blessed thing to feel that you are incurable, for then it is that God will cure you. When there is an end of you, then you shall begin with God; but as long as you are full of self or sin, that passage shall be fulfilled to you, “He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away.”

18, 19. *Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I will bring again the captivity of Jacob’s tents, and have mercy on his dwelling places; and the city shall be builded upon her own heap, and the palace shall remain after the manner thereof. And out of them shall proceed thanksgiving and the voice of them that make merry: and I will multiply them, and they shall not be few; I will also glorify them, and they shall not be small.*

Well might the Lord introduce such a promise as this with the word, “Behold.” Again I remind you that these are the people who had their hands on their loins; these are they who were in sore trouble of soul, yet now they are merry, and full of gladness; and we also have learned to sing,—

My mourning he to dancing turns,
For sackcloth, joy he gives,
A moment, Lord, thine anger burns,
But long thy favor lives.

20, 21. *Their children also shall be as aforetime, and their congregation shall be established before me, and I will punish all that oppress them. And their nobles shall be of themselves, and their governor shall proceed from the midst of them; and I will cause him*

to draw near, and he shall approach unto me: for who is thee that engaged his heart to approach unto me? saith the LORD.

There is One, whom we call Master and Lord, who approaches the throne of God on our behalf; One who fulfils that ancient word, "I have exalted One chosen out of the people." Our glorious Saviour, through his humanity, is one of ourselves; and he appears before God on our behalf, blessed be his holy name!

22. *And ye shall be my people, and I will be your God.*

Happy are we if we can rejoice in this precious truth.

JEREMIAH 31:1-22

1. *At the same time, saith the LORD, will I be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be my people.*

During the Israelites' banishment to Babylon, God's covenant with them had been as it were in abeyance, but in this promise of their restoration he brings it to the front again, and he gives a peculiarly gracious turn to it: "I will be the God of all the families of Israel." What a mercy it is to have a family God, and to have our whole family in Christ! Brethren, you have a family Bible, and you have, I hope, a family altar; may your whole family belong to God!

2. *Thus saith the LORD, the people which were left of the sword found grace in the wilderness; even Israel, when I went to cause him to rest.*

Pharaoh tried to kill Israel; when he drew his sword, it looked as if the whole nation would be slain. But God got them away from Pharaoh into the wilderness, and there he caused them to rest. God still teas a people whom he will certainly save, and the adversary shall not be able to destroy them. Now comes this glorious verse:-

3,4. *The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee. Again I will build thee, and thou shalt be built,*

Jerusalem was all broken down, her houses were vacant, and her palaces were in ruins, but God's promise to her was, "Again I will build thee, and thou shalt be built." If the preacher tries to rebuild those who are spiritually broken down, his work may be a failure; but when God does it, it is effectually done.

4. *O virgin of Israel: thou shalt again be adorned with thy tablets, and shalt go forth in the dances of them that make merry.*

God can take away his people's sorrow, and fill them with exultant joy. Their flying feet shall follow the flying music, and they shall be exceeding glad. May the Lord make his people joyful now in his house of prayer!

5. *Thou shalt yet plant vines upon the mountains of Samaria: the planters shall plant, and shall eat them as common things.*

God's people shall get to work again; and they shall have the fruit of their toil, and shall rejoice before God because they do not labour in vain nor spend their strength for nought.

6. *For there shall be a day, that the watchmen upon the mount Ephraim shall cry, Arise ye, and let us go up to Zion unto the LORD our God.*

The men of Ephraim did not go up to Zion to worship, they forsook the one altar at Jerusalem; but the day will come when they will turn again to the Lord. Watchmen have to be on the look-out for enemies, but the day will come when even they shall be able to leave their watch-towers and to say, "Let us go up to Zion unto Jehovah our God." Are any of you watching just now with anxious eyes? Have you been watching all through the night? Well, you have not seen much, and your eyes ache with looking out for evil; so drop your watching now, and say one to another, "Let us go up to Zion unto the Lord our God."

7, 8. *For thus saith the LORD Sing with gladness for Jacob, and shout among the chief of the nation, publish ye, praise ye, and say, O LORD, save thy people the remnant of Israel. Behold, I will bring them-*

Notice the prayer and the answer. The prayer is put into our mouths, and before we hardly have time to utter it, the answer comes: "O Lord, save thy people, the remnant of Israel. Behold, I will bring them"-

8. *From the north country, and gather them from the coasts of the earth, and with them the blind and the lame,*

How can they come? Will they help one another? God himself will be eyes to the blind and feet to the lame.

8. *The woman with child and her that travaileth with child together: a great company shall return thither.*

They were not fit for traveling, yet God in his great mercy can make the feeblest of his people strong, and when he means to bring

them to himself, they shall come even though it looks as if they could not come.

9. *They shall come with weeping,-*

Never mind the weeping so long as they do but come, and remember that there is no true faith without the tear of repentance in its eye: “They shall come with weeping,”-

9. *And with supplications will I lead them:*

The way of prayer is the way home to God.

9. *I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble:*

Happy are the people who have such precious promises as these. The way is to be straight, and their feet are to be so firmly planted in it that “they shall not stumble.”

9-11. *For I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn. Hear the word of the LORD, O ye nations, and declare it in the isles afar off and say, He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock. For the LORD hath redeemed Jacob.*

The secret of every other blessing is redemption. If God has redeemed he will save, depend upon it; the precious blood of Jesus shall ne'er be shed in vain.

11, 12. *And ransomed him from the hand of him that was stronger than he. Therefore they shall come”-*

If they are redeemed, “they shall come.” Christ did not die in vain; the redemption that he wrought must be effectual; “therefore they shall come”-

12. *And sing in the height of Zion, and shall flow together to the goodness of the LORD, for wheat, and for wine, and for oil, and for the young of the flock and of the herd:*

These are all temporal mercies, and it is a great blessing to see God's goodness in them. If God blesses common mercies, they are blessings indeed; but without his blessing they may become idols, and so may become curses.

12. *And their soul shall be as a watered garden;*

What a delightful simile! It is of little use for the body to be fed unless the soul also is well nourished: “Their soul shall be as a watered garden;”

12-14. *And they shall not sorrow any more at all. Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, both young men and old together: for I will turn their mourning into joy, and will comfort them, and make them rejoice from their sorrow. And I will satiate the soul of the priests with fatness,*

God will give the spiritual leaders of his people enough and more than enough, more than they can take in, he will satiate them with fatness.

14. *And my people shall be satisfied with my goodness, saith the LORD.*

What a delightful promise this is! Listen to it and carry it home, all of you who are truly the Lord's people.

15. *Thus saith the LORD; A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rahel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not.*

There is here a prophetic allusion to the massacre of the infants by Herod at the time of the birth of our Lord. It was a time of sorrow indeed.

16, 17. *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. And there is hope in thine end, saith the LORD that thy children shall come again to their own border.*

As Rachel is represented as weeping for her children, so is she represented as mourning for the tribes that were carried away into captivity, yet is she comforted with the Lord's gracious assurance, ". . . they shall come again from the land of the enemy." So they did, and there is to be a glorious future yet for the people of God of the ancient race of Abraham.

18. *I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus;*

There is never a penitent in this world bemoaning himself without God hearing him. Do not think that a single penitential cry ever rises unheeded from a contrite heart. That cannot be; God has a quick ear for the cries of penitents.

18. *Thou hast chastened me, and I was chastened, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke:*

"I bore the chastisement, but derived no benefit from it. I have not repented of my sin, I have not turned unto thee."

18. *Turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the LORD my God.*

If the Lord undertakes to turn us, we shall be truly turned, that is, converted.

19. *Surety after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth.*

Are there any here recollecting the past with terror, and lamenting before God because of their sins? Then hear what God says. He seems to echo the voice of Ephraim. As Ephraim bemoans himself, God bemoans him:-

20. *Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child?*

You might expect the answer to be, “No, he has lost the rights of childhood; he has been unpleasant and provoking to God, “ yet God does not give such an answer as that to his own questions, but he says:-

20. *For since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still;*

Notwithstanding that the Lord threatened him, and sent prophets to foretell evil to him because of his sin, yet he says, “I do earnestly remember him still;”-

20. *Therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him saith the LORD.*

What a wonderful speech for God to make! Even the infinitely-blessed God represents himself as in trouble concerning penitent sinners, remembering them in pity, and longing to have mercy upon them.

21. *Set thee up waymarks, make thee high heaps: set thine heart toward the highway, even the way which thou wentest: turn again, O virgin of Israel, turn again to these thy cities.*

In crossing the desert, travelers raise little cairns of stone that they may be directed on a future occasion, across that pathless sea of sand; and so God bids them set up waymarks, and make high heaps, that they may know how to come back to him.

22. *How long wilt thou go about, O thou backsliding daughter?*

God still asks in pity, “how long will you seek here and there for comfort?”

You will never find it till you come back to your God. Emptiness is written upon everything till the heart comes to its Saviour and Lord.

JEREMIAH 31:1-26

1-3. At the same time, saith the LORD, will I be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be my people. Thus saith the LORD, The people which were left of the sword found grace in the wilderness; even Israel, when I went to cause him to rest. The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.

Was there ever a sweeter word from heaven than this, — everlasting love proved by the drawings of divine grace? I know that your hearts will be full of music if ever the Spirit of God has spoken home to your soul such a message as this. Let us read it again. “The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.

4, 5. Again I will build thee, and thou shalt be built, O virgin of Israel: thou shalt again be adorned with thy tabrets, and shalt go forth in the dances of them that make merry. Thou shalt yet plant vines upon the mountains of Samaria: the planters shall plant, and shall eat them as common things.

God has kind purposes of love towards his ancient people, and he will yet bring Israel again to her own land. And, spiritually, he has like purposes of love to all his elect; and they shall joy and rejoice with unspeakable delight. What though you are barren for awhile? God shall yet come to you, and you shall be fruitful.

6-9. For there shall be a day, that the watchmen upon the mount Ephraim shall cry, Arise ye, and let us go up to Zion unto the LORD our God. For thus saith the LORD; Sing with gladness for Jacob, and shout among the chief of the nations: publish ye, praise ye, and say, O LORD, save thy people, the remnant of Israel. Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the coasts of the earth, and with them the blind and the lame, the woman with child and her that travaileth with child together: a great company shall return thither. They shall come with weeping, and with

supplications will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble: for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn.

Do not forget the first meaning of this passage in its reference to Israel, but suck in also the consolation which comes from it to all who are believers in Christ. The Lord will certainly bring all his chosen ones to himself. Blind as they are, — wandering as they have been, — they shall come back to him; they shall come back with tears of repentance, and with refreshments of mercy: “by the rivers of water.” They shall come back to their God, who says, “I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn.”

10, 11. *Hear the word of the LORD, O ye nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock. For the LORD hath redeemed Jacob, and ransomed him from the hand of him that was stronger than he.*

Redemption lies at the bottom of every favor that we receive from God. He blesses us because he has redeemed us. He has bought us with so great a price that we are too dear for him ever to lose us. Because he has bought his flock, therefore will he fetch it away from the enemy.

12-14. *Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, and shall flow together to the goodness of the LORD, for wheat, and for wine, and for oil, and for the young of the flock and of the herd: and their soul shall be as a watered garden; and they shall not sorrow any more at all. Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, both young men and old together: for I will turn their mourning into joy, and will comfort them, and make them rejoice from their sorrow. And I will satiate the soul of the priests with fatness, and my people shall be satisfied with my goodness, saith the LORD.*

Why, these very words are full of marrow and fatness! The promise is inexpressibly sweet; what must the fulfillment of it be? Oh, for faith to lay hold upon it! Yet there is a note of sorrow mingled with the pealing of the joy-bells: —

15, 16. *Thus saith the LORD; A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rahel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not. 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.

“Your lost babes shall live; their very bodies, mouldering in the earth, shall rise again. Be not grieved or vexed overmuch; for ‘they shall come again from the land of the enemy.’ “

17. *And there is hope in thine end, saith the LORD, that thy children shall come again to their own border.*

There is another sorrow, — a deeper sorrow than grief over children, that is, sorrow for sin: —

18. *I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus; Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, —*

And there was an end of it, —

18. *As a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke:*

Since thy chastisements have been of little service to me, lay thine hand upon me: —

18, 19. *Turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the LORD my God. Surely after that I was turned, I repented;*

Repentance is a turning from sin unto the Lord.

19. *And after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh:*

In very grief of heart, as if I could not smite myself enough for having sinned.

19. *I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth.*

Now when a man talks like that, how does God speak?

20. *Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still:*

“Not only do I remember him, but ‘I do earnestly remember him still.’ “

20. *Therefore my bowels are troubled for him;*

“I cannot bear to see his misery.”

20. *I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the LORD.*

Oh, what blessedness there is in this gracious promise!

21-26. *Set thee up waymarks, make thee high heaps: set thine heart toward the highway, even the way which thou wentest: turn again, O virgin of Israel, turn again to these thy cities. How long wilt thou go about, O thou backsliding daughter? for the LORD hath created a new thing in the earth, A woman shall compass a man. Thus saith*

the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; As yet they shall use this speech in the land of Judah and in the cities thereof, when I shall bring again their captivity; The LORD bless thee, O habitation of justice, and mountain of holiness. And there shall dwell in Judah itself, and in all the cities thereof together, husbandmen, and they that go forth with flocks. For I have satiated the weary soul, and I have replenished every sorrowful soul. Upon this I awaked, and beheld; and my sleep was sweet unto me.

I should think it was. If a man could dream like that, he might well wish to go to sleep again. To dream of everlasting love, of gracious drawings, of heavenly restorations, of sin forgiven, sorrow removed, and desire satisfied, well may the prophet, say, “My sleep was sweet unto me.” May we, when we are awake, learn what the prophet heard in his sleep!

JEREMIAH 31:1-28

1. *At the same time, faith the LORD, will I be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be my people.*

How divinely he talks, — as only God can talk These people had rejected him, yet he says, “They shall be my people,” not only some of them, but all of them: “I will be the God of all the families of Israel.” Behold the wonderful power of divine grace upon the hearts of rebellious sinners. There are no “ifs” and no “buts” here; it is “I will” and “they shall.” God knows how to work out his own purposes of love and mercy.

2. *Thus saith the Lord, The people which were left of the sword found grace in the wilderness; even Israel, when I went to cause him to rest.*

If we ever do get true rest of soul, God must cause us to rest, as David said, “He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.” The rest of the heart is a miracle of divine power.

3. *The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.*

There is the source of everything that is good and gracious: “everlasting love.” When God has once set that love upon his people, anything and everything that is for their good may come out of it; all temporal good and all eternal blessings will come out of

everlasting love. Oh, that we might each one of us have grace to appropriate these blessed words to himself: "I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." They were given to Israel of old, but the spiritual Israel possesses all the privileges of the natural Israel, and much more.

4. *Again I will build thee, and thou shalt be built,*

Whatever God does is done effectually; there is never any failure in his work.

4. *O virgin of Israel: thou shalt again be adorned with thy tablets, and shalt go forth in the dances of them that make merry.*

They had wept and mourned, but they were to dance; they had been very sad and disconsolate, but they were to take down their harps from the willows, and even to have their tablets or timbrels again.

5. *Thou shalt yet plant vines upon the mountain of Samaria: the planters shall plant, and shall eat them as common things.*

God makes the luxuries of grace to be common things to his people. Fare that once seemed so rare as to be enjoyed only on high days and holidays shall become everyday meat to his people when their Lord reveals himself to them.

6. *For there shall be a day, that the watchmen upon the mount Ephraim shall cry, Arise ye, and let us go up to Zion unto the LORD our God.*

For many a year Israel had gone to Bethel to worship the calves, or stayed at home to adore the shrine of Ashtaroth; now they were to go to Zion to serve Jehovah. See what the grace of God can do even for idolaters. If any of us have been bowing down to our idols, may we this day turn to the living God; may the power of his grace lead us to go heartily and unanimously to worship the Lord our God.

7, 8. *For thus saith the LORD; Sing with gladness, for Jacob, and shout among the chief of the nations: publish ye, praise ye, and say, O LORD, save thy people, the remnant of Israel. Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the coasts of the earth, and with them the blind and the lame, the woman with child and her that travaileth with child together: a great company shall return thither.*

Whatever God does, he does thoroughly. When he shall restore his ancient people, he will not leave the weak ones behind, and if,

today, we are enjoying his presence, the most afflicted and the most infirm among us shall know what the joy of the Lord means. The Lord grant it, and we will praise his holy name.

9. They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them:

Weeping and prayer go well together. There is no prayer like a wet prayer saturated with the tears of repentance.

9. I will cause them to walk by the rivers of water in a straight way,

Hear this, ye mourners. God will supply your need with rivers of waters, and he will make you to walk in a straight way. Sometimes we are perplexed because the road seems to wind in and out like a labyrinth, but God can lead us in a straight way: “I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way,” —

9. Wherein they shall not stumble: for I am a father to Israel and Ephraim is my firstborn.

They had forgotten their relationship to Jehovah, but he still remembered that they were his children.

10, 11. *Hear the word of the LORD, O ye nations, and declare it in the isles afar off and say He that scattered Israel will gather him and keep him as a shepherd doth his flock. For the LORD hath redeemed Jacob and ransomed him from the hand of him that was stronger than he.*

They were the Lord’s chosen people even when they were in captivity in Babylon. He had scattered them because of their sin, but he would gather them in his mercy.

12-14. *Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion and shall flow together to the goodness of the LORD, for wheat and for wine and for oil, and for the young of the flock and of the herd: and their soul shall be as a watered garden; and they shall not sorrow any more at all. Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance both young men and old together: for I will turn their mourning into joy, and will comfort them and make them rejoice from their sorrow. And I will satiate the soul of the priests with fatness, and my people shall be satisfied with my goodness saith the LORD.*

What a blessed change this was for those who had sorrowfully cried, “How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?” And

we rejoice in a still greater change when the Lord brings us into spiritual liberty.

15-17. *Thou saith the LORD; A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping; Rahel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not. Thus saith the LORD; Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tear: for thy work shall be rewarded saith the LORD; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy. And there is hope in thine end, saith the LORD, that thy children shall come again to their own border.*

A mother's sorrow over her lost babes is very great and long-enduring, but if she is a Christian, she shall meet them again in the land of the blessed, and shall be parted from them no more for ever.

18. *I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus;*

What a wonderfully expressive word that word "bemoaning" is!

18, 19. *Thou hast chastised me and I was chastised as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the LORD my God. Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth.*

Hear what the Lord says about these bemoaning ones, these sin-loathing ones: —

20. *Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child?*

Or we may render it, "Is this Ephraim my dear son? Is this my pleasant child?" He is all that now that he begins to hate his sin.

20. *For since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still:*

Think of this, you who forget your God, ye backsliders, wanderers from your Father's house.

20, 21. *Therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the LORD. Set thee up waymarks, make thee high heaps:*

Raise cairns along the road at various point to let other travelers know the way in which they should go.

21, 22. *Set thine heart toward the highway, even the way which thou wentest: turn again, O virgin of Israel, turn again to these thy cities. How long wilt thou go about, O thou backsliding daughter? for the*

LORD hath created a new thing in the earth, A woman shall compass a man.

Whereas the enemy had compassed Jerusalem round about, now Jerusalem was to be the besieger, and to compass her enemies, and defeat them. Some interpreters think this is an allusion to the birth of the Saviour, that “new thing in the earth” — the incarnation of the Son of God.

23-25. *Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; As yet they shall use this speech in the land of Judah and in the cities thereof, when I shall bring again their captivity; The LORD bless thee, O habitation of justice, and mountain of holiness. And there shall dwell is Judah itself, and in all the cities thereof together, husbandmen, and they that go forth with flocks. For I have satiated the weary soul, and I have replenished every sorrowful soul.*

This prophecy is to be fulfilled in the restoration of Israel to Palestine; until that happens, the promise bears a spiritual meaning to all the children of God. O weary soul, thou shalt be satiated, that is more than being satisfied; thou shalt have as much of holiness and joy as thou canst hold! Plead his promise now, O sorrowful soul, and may God fulfill it to thee!

26. *Upon this I awaked, and beheld; and my sleep was sweet unto me.*

Well might it be. Poor Jeremiah, who so often wept over the woes of Israel, was the very man to be refreshed when he heard from God that he would visit his people in mercy, and bring them back to their own land. Happy dreamer, who dreams such a blessed dream as this, a dream that came true in due time.

27-28. *Behold, the days come saith the LORD, that I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man, and with the seed of beast. And it shall come to pass, that like as I have watched over them, to pluck up, and to break down, and to throw down, and to destroy, and to afflict; so will I watch over them, to build, and to plant, saith the LORD.*

What a black list of words we first have here! God’s way of dealing with his people when they wander away from him is very stern. They must be brought back, but it will be over a very rough road. The Lord says that he “watched over them, to pluck up, and to break down, and to throw down, and to destroy, and to afflict;” and

in the same measure he now declares that he will watch over them to do them good. As our tribulations abound, so also shall our consolations abound by Christ Jesus. If you have been bitterly convinced of sin, you shall be sweetly convinced of pardon. The deeper God digs the foundation, the higher he means to build the house. Those who are brought to him in great affliction very often afterwards know more of Christ and more of the love of God than any others.

JEREMIAH 31:18-26

18. *I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus; —*

It is God who is here speaking. There is never a moan, or a sob, or a cry, or a sigh, but God hears it. The Lord is very quick of hearing for the sorrows of penitent sinners; there is no mistake about this matter, for he says, “I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus; “ —

18. *Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, —*

“No good came of it. I smarted, but I was not benefited: ‘Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised,’” —

18. *As a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou; art the LORD my God.*

There was never a heart that spake thus, unless grace had been secretly at work with it; and depend upon it, if God has brought us to this point, that we are ready to declare him to be our God, and are anxious to be the subjects of his converting grace, it is because God has looked upon us in his wondrous love. If thou desirest to be turned towards God, thou art already in a measure turned towards him. The desire to feel is a kind of feeling, the longing to believe has some measure of faith in it. Be comforted by this thought, yet be not content to rest where thou art, but go on till thou hast all the blessing that the Lord is waiting and willing to bestow upon thee. Happy is the man who is saying to God at this moment, “Turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God.”

19. *Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed yea, even confounded because I did bear the reproach of my youth.*

“When a man has “sown his wild oats,” and God in mercy helps him to come back from such a dreadful field as that, he recollects what he has been, and he is ashamed of himself; sometimes, he is

more than half ashamed to mingle with God's people, for he is afraid that they will have nothing to do with such a wretch as he has been; but he is, most of all, ashamed to come near to his God, because of the reproach of his youth. Yet listen to the Lord's gracious words concerning him: —

20. *Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord.*

Here we seem to look into the very heart of God; and he is represented to us as though he had contending passions within him. He speaketh angrily one day, but he doth earnestly remember mercy the next day. God changes not, yet his dealings with men must change, because their state varies so much. He sometimes speaks in great wrath while they hold to their sin, but love lies even at the bottom of that wrath; and anon he changeth his tone, and speaketh comfortably, and putteth away the sinner's sin when he sees that his anger has wrought the due result, and the sinner quits his sin to come to his God. Some of you understand this treatment, for you have experienced it; but you cannot comprehend the fullness of mercy and love that is in the heart of God towards the repenting sinner.

21, 22. *Set thee up waymarks, make thee high heaps: set thine heart toward the highway, even the way which thou wentest: turn again, O virgin of Israel, turn again to these thy cities. How long wilt thou go about, O thou backsliding daughter?*

How long will you be seeking comfort where you cannot find it, and pleasure where nothing but misery can come?

22, 23. *For the Lord hath created a new thing in the earth, A woman shall compass a man. Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; As yet they shall use this speech in the land of Judah and in the cities thereof, when I shall bring again their captivity; The LORD bless thee, O habitation of justice, and mountain of holiness.*

Jerusalem was cursed because of sin; but God declared that, in his great mercy, he would make it to be a place of blessing, and men should speak of it as the "habitation of justice, and mountain of holiness."

24-26. *And there shall dwell in Judah itself, and in all the cities thereof together, husbandmen, and they that go forth with flocks. For I have satiated the weary soul, and I have replenished every sorrowful soul. Upon this I awaked, and beheld; and my sleep was sweet unto me.*

He that can sleep and dream as Jeremiah did, may well say that his sleep was sweet to him. May God grant to us, whether we sleep or wake, to be always with him! Then our time shall be indeed sweet unto us.

JEREMIAH 31:22-37

22. *For the LORD hath created a new thing in the earth, A woman shall compass a man.*

Here is a prophecy of the birth of Immanuel, God with us, born of a woman by the supernatural power of the Holy Ghost. Mary was indeed blessed among women, and we rejoice in that Man who was thus miraculously born to be the Saviour, Christ the Lord.

23-30. *Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; As yet they shall use this speech in the land of Judah and in the cities thereof, when I shall bring again their captivity; The LORD bless thee, O habitation of justice, and mountain of holiness. And there shall dwell in Judah itself, and in all the cities thereof together, husbandmen, and they that go forth with flocks. For I have satiated the weary soul, and I have replenished every sorrowful soul.*

There are good times in store for Israel; Jerusalem shall then be the “habitation of justice, and mountain of holiness.”

26. *Upon this I awaked, and beheld; and my sleep was sweet unto me.*

Jeremiah woke up with a pleasant impression of his vision upon him, and well he might, for was there ever a more blessed one than that of which we have just read?

27, 28. *Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man, and with the seed of beast. And it shall come to pass, that like as I have watched over them, to pluck up, and to break down, and to throw down, and to destroy, and to afflict; so will I watch over them, to build, and to plant, saith the LORD.*

All the ingenuity of heaven seems to be taxed to bless believers; and just as man sought out many inventions for evil, God in his

infinite love and mercy seeks out many inventions for the good of his people.

29, 30. *In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge. But every one shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge.*

We live under a personal dispensation, there is no such thing as hereditary godliness or salvation by proxy. Every man must for himself repent, and for himself believe. Vain and foolish is the idea that, because we have had Christian parents, therefore we also are Christians.

31, 32. *Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD.*

What bliss it is to know about this new covenant! Let us notice its tenor.

33. *But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; after those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts;”-*

Not on the tables of stone, not on the walls of the church, but “ I will write it in their hearts; “-

33. *And will be their God, and they shall be my people.*

You may have heard it said that Christ will not leave his people, but that his people may leave him; but in this promise the second contingency is provided for as well as the first.

34-37. *And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. Thus saith the LORD, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; The LORD of hosts is his name: If those ordinances depart from before me saith the LORD, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever. Thus saith the LORD, If heaven*

above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the LORD.

What a God of infinite mercy he is!

This exposition consisted of readings from LAMENTATIONS 3:1-33; AND JEREMIAH 31:22-37

JEREMIAH 31:27-37

27-33. *Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man, and with the seed of beast. And it shall come to pass, that like as I have watched over them, to pluck up, and to break down, and to throw down, and to destroy, and to afflict; so will I watch over them, to build, and replant, saith the Lord. In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge. But every one shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eateth the sour grape. his teeth shall be set on edge. Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord: but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.*

This is the central truth of all Scripture, it is the basis of all Scripture. When Paul desires to set forth the covenant of grace, he appeals to this passage. Twice, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, he bases an argument upon it, and after quoting it, adds, "Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us." Brethren and sisters in Christ, under the first covenant we are ruined; there is no salvation for us but under this new covenant, wherefore let us read to our joy and comfort what the promises and provisions of that new covenant are.

34. *And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.*

Pardoned sin, as well as the change of nature, is implied in the writing of the law upon the heart. Oh, what a privilege it is to be among these covenanted people! How shall we know whether we belong to them? The seal of the covenant is faith in Christ; I mean the personal seal upon the heart and conscience. Thou believest in Jesus Christ as thy Saviour, thou art trusting alone to his atoning sacrifice, then God is in covenant with thee, for Jesus is the Mediator of the new covenant, and he who hath Christ hath the Surety of the covenant, and he shall have in due time every blessing which that covenant guarantees.

35-37. *Thus saith the LORD, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; The LORD of hosts is his name: if those ordinances depart from before me, saith the LORD, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever. Thus saith the LORD; If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the LORD.*

Now Israel still standeth as a people separate from all others, and there is still before the literal seed of Israel a great and glorious future; but as for the spiritual Israel, who worship God in the Spirit, and have no confidence in the flesh, God will sooner blot out the sun and moon than cast away his people, or any one of them. They shall all be his people, and he shall be their God; he will preserve them, and he will keep his covenant with them for ever and for ever, blessed be his holy name, the name of Jehovah, the God of the covenant which cannot be broken!

JEREMIAH 31:29-37

29, 30. *In these days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge. But every one shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge.*

God was going to deal with the Israelites individually, personally; and that is how he will deal with us.

31. *Behold,*

Here is something worth beholding; read this great promise with tears in your eyes: —

31-33. *The days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the Land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel, After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.*

It is all wills and shalls; it is all covenant life; — no longer the law graven upon the tables of stone, but the law written on the heart; — no more the Lord's command without man's power and will to obey it; but God will renew our nature, and change our disposition, so that we shall love to do what once we loathed, and shall loathe the sins that we once loved. What a wonderful mass of mercies is included in the covenant of grace!

34. *And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, know the Lord: for they shall all know me, —*

“All thy children shall be taught of the Lord.” All believers, whatever else they may not know, do know their Lord: “they shall all know me,” —

34. *From the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD:*

How will they learn to know the Lord? Well, it will be in a very wonderful way; —

34. *For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.*

Let me read that again, and may come poor wandering children of God hear the promise, and be glad that it applies to them: “I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

35-37. *Thus saith the LORD, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; The LORD of hosts is his name: if these ordinances depart from before me, saith*

the LORD, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever.

Thus saith the LORD; If heaven above can be measured, and the foundation of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the LORD.

JEREMIAH 31:31-34

31-33. *Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.*

The old covenant was written on tables of stone; but the Lord said, concerning the new covenant, "I will put my law in their inward parts." The old law was hidden from sight when it was written a second time, and placed in the ark of the covenant; and God says of his new law, "I will write it in their hearts." They were always rebelling against God, and wandering away from him; but in this new, gracious covenant, he says, "I will be their God, and they shall be my people."

34. *And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD:*

God gives to all his people a knowledge of himself. "Whatever else they know or do not know," saith the Lord, "they shall all know me." Though they differ as to their growth in grace, yet "they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord."

34. *For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.*

If God has pardoned your sins, you will be sure to know him; there will be no mistake about that point. Men shrink back, and hide away from an angry God punishing sin, for they do not care to know

him; but when he comes forth, dressed in the silken robes of love, to bestow free pardons upon the chief of sinners, then they know him. God grant that all of us may have this blessed knowledge! Now kindly turn over the leaves of your Bibles until you come to then 36th chapter of the Book of Ezekiel, and the 25th verse, where you can read still further about this same gracious new covenant of Jehovah.

JEREMIAH 32:1-27

1-5. *The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord in the tenth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, which was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar. For then the king of Babylon's army besieged Jerusalem : and Jeremiah the prophet was shut up in the court of the prison, which was in the king of Judah's house. For Zedekiah king of Judah had shut him up, saying. Wherefore dost thou prophesy, and say, Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall take it; and Zedekiah king of Judah shall not escape out of the hand of the Chaldeans, but shalt surely be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon, and shall speak with him mouth to mouth, and his eyes shall behold his eyes; and he shall lead Zedekiah to Babylon, and there shall he be until I visit him, saith the Lord: though ye fight with the Chaldeans, ye shall not prosper.*

So you see that Jeremiah was shut up in prison at the time here mentioned. Zedekiah, the king of Judah, had treated him very harshly, because of his faithful utterance of the Word of the Lord. He was a true servant of Jehovah, yet he suffered much at the king's hand. One very remarkable event, which happened at that time, is here recorded.

6-8. *And Jeremiah said, The word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Behold, Hanameel the son of Shallum thine uncle shall come unto thee, saying, Buy thee my field that is in Anathoth: for the right of redemption is thine to buy it. So Hanameel mine uncle's son came to me in the court of the prison according to the word of the LORD, and said unto me, Buy my field, I pray thee, that is in Anathoth, which is in the country of Benjamin: for the right of inheritance is thine, and the redemption is thine; buy it for thyself. Then I knew that this was the word of the LORD.*

The Lord had told him beforehand that it would be so; and, therefore, in due time, his cousin came to him with the offer of this plot of land in the country of Benjamin.

9, 10. *And I bought the field of Hanameel my uncle's son, that was in Anathoth, and weighed him the money, even seventeen shekels of silver. And I subscribed the evidence, and sealed it, and took witnesses, and weighed him the money in the balances.*

This was, in every respect, a very extraordinary transaction. Remember that the Chaldeans were already besieging Jerusalem, and they were all over the land, carrying fire and sword into every part of it. Jerusalem was straitly shut up, so that none of the inhabitants could get out of the city; yet here is Jeremiah, himself a prisoner, buying land which was virtually worth nothing whatever; but he believed so firmly that the Chaldeans would yet permit the Jews to live unmolested in that land that he paid down the purchase money for the field, and saw to the legal execution of the deed of transfer, just as you or I might have done if we were purchasing a plot of land in our own country. This is a notable instance of the triumph of faith over unfavourable surroundings, and also of the prophet's obedience to the Word of the Lord.

11, 12. *So I took the evidence of the purchase, both that which was sealed according to the law and custom, and that which was open: and I gave the evidence of the purchase unto Baruch the son of Neriah, the son of Maaseiah, in the sight of Hanameel mine uncle's son, and in the presence of the witnesses that subscribed the book of the purchase, before all the Jews that sat in the court of the prison.*

Jeremiah did all this openly. What they may have thought to be an absurd action, he did not do in private; but in the presence of them all. True faith in God does not go in for hole-and-corner transactions. Faith can do its business in the light of the sun. Faith believes God under all circumstances, and believes that the truest common sense is to obey his Word. Therefore she is not ashamed of what she does; neither shall she ever have cause to be ashamed or confounded, world without end. There is a living God; and if we do what he bids us, good must come of it. No harm shall happen to the man who confidently rests in the Most High.

13-17. *And I charged Baruch before them, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Take these evidences, this*

evidence of the purchase, both which is sealed, and this evidence which is open; and put them in an, earthen vessel, that they may continue many days. For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Houses and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land. Now when I had delivered the evidence of the purchase unto Baruch the son of Neriah, I prayed unto the LORD, saying, Ah LORD GOD!

Faith cannot live without prayer. When she has performed her most heroic deeds, she turns to God and humbly asks for renewed strength; for oh! my brethren, the best of men are but men at the best; and those who have the most faith never have any to spare. Jeremiah says, “I prayed unto the Lord, saying, Ah Lord God!” It looked, at first sight, as if the prophet was going to utter some mournful complaint, or to express some doubt or misgiving concerning the purchase of the land; but it was not so. Having allowed that exclamation to escape from him, his faith came to the rescue, and he continued: —

17. *Behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee:*

Is not that a grand sentence? “There is nothing too hard for thee.” He that could make the heaven and the earth can do anything. Read, in the Book of Genesis, the story of the creation, and see how “He spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast;” and then judge as to what can ever be a difficulty to the Almighty. Surely you must say to him, as Jeremiah did, “There is nothing too hard for thee.”

18. *Thou shewest lovingkindness unto thousands, and recompensest the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their children after them; the Great, the Mighty God, the LORD of hosts, is his name, —*

See how these godly men, in their times of trouble, delighted in the great names and glorious attributes of God. There are, nowadays, many namby-pamby, fashionable religionists, wrapped in luxury, who have only a little god; they never seem to know “the Great, the Mighty God;” but Jeremiah, with the smell of the prison still clinging to him, talks grandly: “the Great, the Mighty God, the Lord of hosts, is his name,” —

19-21. *Great in counsel, and mighty in work: for thine eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men: to give every one*

according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings: which hast set signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, even unto this day, and in Israel, and among other men; and hast made thee a name, as at this day; and hast brought forth thy people Israel out of the land of Egypt with signs, and with wonders, and with a strong hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with great terror;

Those ancient Jews, in the time of their trouble, always looked gratefully back to the wonders wrought by Jehovah in Egypt. That great deed of God, when he smote the might of Pharaoh, was always present to the Hebrew mind; and the people, in every season of tribulation, refreshed themselves with the remembrance of it. Well, then, dear friends, as they sang the song of Moses, shall not we sing the song of the Lamb? Will not we go back in thought to the glorious triumphs of our Redeemer, and recount again and again, for the encouragement of our faith, what Christ did for us upon the tree, even as the Jews thought often, for the strengthening of their confidence, of their wondrous deliverance from Egypt by the high hand and the stretched out arm of Jehovah?

22-24. *And hast given them this land, which thou didst swear to their fathers to give them, a land flowing with milk and honey, and they came in, and possessed it; but they obeyed not thy voice, neither walked in thy law; they have done nothing of all that thou commandedst them to do: therefore thou hast caused all this evil to come upon them: behold the mounts, —*

The margin renders it, “the engines of shot,” which we see, by the next chapter, were powerful enough to throw down the houses in Jerusalem.

24, 25. *They are come unto the city to take it; and the city is given into the hand of the Chaldeans, that fight against it, because of the sword, and of the famine, and of the pestilence; and what thou hast spoken is come to pass; and, behold, thou seest it. And thou hast said unto me, O LORD GOD, Buy thee the field for money, and take witnesses; for the city is given into the hand of the Chaldeans.*

I suppose that, although Jeremiah, with unquestioning faith, had done as God had commanded him, yet afterwards, when he was alone in his prison cell, he began to think the whole matter over; and though he may not have had any actual doubts, yet he probably had some anxieties as to the issue of the whole affair. He could not quite understand it, so he wisely put it before the Lord. Some of you, who

have truly trusted God, may yet be just now perplexed with anxiety of one kind or another. Well, then, tell it all out before the Lord; go at once into his presence, and spread the case before him, as Jeremiah did.

26, 27. *Then came the word of the Lord unto Jeremiah, saying, Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for me?*

That question we will try to answer presently.

JEREMIAH 32:6-41

6, 7. *And Jeremiah, said, The word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Behold, Hanameel the son of Shallum thine uncle shall come unto thee, saying, Buy thee my field that is in Anathoth: for the right of redemption is thine to buy it.*

God gave his servant an intimation of what was about to happen, so that he might know how to act. It did seem a very strange thing to come to a poor prophet in prison, and to ask him to buy a piece of land when the Chaldeans were in possession of it, and when there seemed to be no hope that he would ever see it. One said, "I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it;" but Jeremiah could not do this, for he was shut up in prison, and the enemy had possession of the field he was to buy. Still, the thing was of the Lord, and therefore it was right; and there is many an action which in itself might seem absurd, but which, nevertheless, is to be performed because it is according to the will of God.

8. *So Hanameel mine uncle's son came to me in the court of the prison according to the word of the LORD, and said unto me, Buy my field, I pray thee, that is in Anathoth, which is in the country of Benjamin: for the right of inheritance is thine, and the redemption is thine; buy it for thyself. Then I knew that this was the word of the LORD.*

Should a minister be concerned about the buying of land? Yes, if God bids him buy it. He is not to be entangled with the affairs of this life; but Jeremiah certainly could not be entangled with this field.

9. *And I bought the field of Hanameel my uncle's son, that was in Anathoth, and weighed him the money, even seventeen shekels of silver.*

They always paid by weight to make sure that the amount was correct.

10, 11. *And I subscribed the evidence, and sealed it, and took witnesses, and weighed him the money in the balances. So I took the evidence of the purchase, both that which was sealed according to the law and custom, and that which was open:*

The transaction was all in proper legal form. We are not to be neglectful in business because we are the servants of the Lord; but in all things we should act as men of prudence and common sense.

12-14. *And I gave the evidence of the purchase unto Baruch the son of Neriah, the son of Maaseiah, in the sight of Hanameel mine uncle's son, and in the presence of the witnesses that subscribed the book of the purchase, before all the Jews that sat in the court of the prison. And I charged Baruch before them, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; take these evidences, this evidence of the purchase, both which is sealed, and this evidence which is open; and put them in an earthen vessel, that they may continue many days.*

They had no iron safes in those days; so their practice was to put their documents into earthen vessels, and bury them deep in the earth, where they reckoned they would be secure.

15. *For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Houses and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land.*

Therefore, as an act of faith in God, the prophet bought this meadow.

16. *Now when I had delivered the evidence of the purchase unto Baruch the son of Neriah, I prayed unto the LORD, saying,*

Jeremiah completes the business, puts the securities into safe keeping, and now he prays. It is always well to be free from care before you pray. Let nothing remain to be done, if it be possible, and then get alone, and let your heart be free to speak with God. I do not suppose that Jeremiah prayed any the less or any the worse because he had attended to this business transaction. A man who lives near to God ought to be able to go from his counting-house to his closet with a happy heart.

17-19. *Ah Lord GOD! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee: thou shewest lovingkindness unto*

thousands, and recompensest the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their children after them: the Great, the Mighty God, the LORD of hosts, is his name, great in counsel, and mighty in work: for thine eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men: to give every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings:

Whenever you are troubled, think much of God; speak much of him. This is true adoration. It will be a great help to your own spirit. Your own littleness will be forgotten in the greatness of your God.

20-24. *Which hast set signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, even unto this day, and in Israel, and among other men; and hast made thee a name, as at this day; and hast brought forth thy people Israel out of the land of Egypt with signs, and with wonders, and with a strong hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with great terror; and hast given them this land, which thou didst swear to their fathers to give them, a land flowing with milk and honey; and they came in, and possessed it; but they obeyed not thy voice, neither walked in thy law; they have done nothing of all that thou commandedst them to do: therefore thou hast caused all this evil to come upon them: behold the mounts,*

The earthworks thrown up about Jerusalem completely surrounded it and the Chaldeans were hard at work breaking down the walls to capture the city while the people were dying of famine and disease.

24,25. *They are come unto the city to take it; and the city is given into the hand of the Chaldeans, that fight against it, because of the sword, and of the famine, and of the pestilence: and what thou hast spoken is come to pass; and, behold, thou seest it. And thou hast said unto me, O Lord GOD, Buy thee the field for money, and take witnesses; for the city is given into the hand of the Chaldeans.*

Observe, it is hardly a prayer that Jeremiah utters; it is just a statement of his condition, and yet that is real prayer. When you do not know what to ask of God, state your difficulty; for that is the very best thing you can do. When you cannot see any way out of the maze, never mind; it is for God to show you the clue. There is often much sanctified common sense in laying the difficulty before the Lord, spreading the letter before him, and leaving it there. When you cannot ask for deliverance in this way or that, it will be sufficient just to state the case as Jeremiah did.

26, 27. *Then came the word of the LORD unto Jeremiah, saying, Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh: is there anything too hard for me?*

This is a grand question, an unanswerable question.

28-31. *Therefore thus saith the LORD; Behold, I will give this city into the hand of the Chaldeans, and into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and he shall take it: and the Chaldeans, that fight against this city, shall come and set fire on this city, and burn it with the houses, upon whose roofs they have offered incense unto Baal, and poured out drink offerings unto other gods, to provoke me to anger. For the children of Israel and the children of Judah have only done evil before me from their youth: for the children of Israel have only provoked me to anger with the work of their hands, saith the LORD. For this city hath been to me as a provocation of mine anger and of my fury from the day that they built it even unto this day; that I should remove it from before my face,*

Jerusalem was such a sinful city that it must be destroyed. The very roofs of the houses had been defiled by the sacrifices offered to idols. If these words were true of Jerusalem, surely they are also true in great measure of London. It has been a provocation of God's anger, "from the day that they built it even unto this day."

32. *Because of all the evil of the children of Israel and of the children of Judah, which they have done to provoke me to anger, they, their kings, their princes, their priests, and their prophets, and the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem.*

They seemed, from the very highest to the lowest, determined to provoke the Lord, to show how little they cared for the Most High.

33. *And they have turned unto me the back, and not the face:*

Like men who wished to insult a king in his very court.

33. *Though I taught them, rising up early and teaching them, yet they have not hearkened to receive instruction.*

It is a great aggravation of an offense against God when he has taught us, and yet we "have not hearkened to receive instruction."

34, 35. *But they set their abominations in the house, which is called by my name, to defile it. And they built the high places of Baal, which are in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire unto Molech; which I*

commanded them not, neither came it into my mind, that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin.

If God had commanded them to offer up their children, they would have stood aghast at such cruelty; but they willingly sacrificed them to Molech in opposition to his will.

36, 37. *And now therefore thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning this city, whereof ye say, It shall be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence; Behold, I will gather them out of all countries, whither I have driven them in mine anger, and in my fury, and in great wrath; and I will bring them again unto this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely:*

God is angry, and yet gracious. The rest of the chapter is full of tenderness and love. It is enough to make our eyes fill with tears as we note how God speaks concerning those who had rebelled against him.

38. *And they shall be my people, and I will be their God:*

This is indeed a covenant of grace; it is not dealing with men after their sins, but according to the inexhaustible bounty of eternal love.

39, 40. *And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them: And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me.*

There is here a promise of double bliss. The Lord will not turn from his people, and they shall not turn from him. What more could God do than he here promises? It looks like a trial of strength between sin and grace. Sin was like a mountain; but the Lord's love was like the flood, which prevailed till even the mountains were covered.

41. *Yea, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will plant them in this land assuredly with my whole heart and with my whole soul.*

See how God puts his whole heart to the work when he is blessing his people. When he forgives sin, it is with his whole heart and soul. May we, with our whole heart and soul, repent of our sin; and then, with all our heart and soul, serve the Lord! Amen.

JEREMIAH 32:30-42

30. *For the children of Israel and the children of Judah have only done evil before me from their youth: for the children of Israel have only provoked me to anger with the work of their hands, saith the LORD.*

Here were people who had done nothing else but evil. God had been very good to them, but they had been very bad to him. From their youth, and without a break, they had continued to rebel.

31. *For this city hath been to me as a provocation of mine anger and of my fury from the day that they built it even unto this day; that I should remove it from before my face,*

Jerusalem, which ought to have been a holy city, had been so impure that it had been a standing provocation to God from the day it was built.

32. *Because of all the evil of the children of Israel and of the children of Judah, which they have done to provoke me to anger, they, their kings, their princes, their priests, and their prophets, and the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem.*

They seem to have been all alike. With scarcely an exception, from the highest class to the lowest, they were always disobeying God.

33. *And they have turned unto me the back, and not the face: though I taught them, rising up early and teaching them, yet they have not hearkened to receive instruction.*

This is a fearful indictment. When men refuse to learn better, turn their back upon the King of kings, and will have nothing to do with him, surely the time for vengeance has come.

34, 35. *But they set their abominations in the house, which is called by my name, to defile it. And they built the high places of Baal, which are in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire unto Molech;*

There was nothing so terribly bad but they would do it; there was nothing so unnatural, so detestable, but they must needs practice it.

35-38. *Which I commanded them not, neither came it into my mind, that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin. And*

now therefore thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning this city, whereof ye say, It shall be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence; Behold, I will gather them out of all countries, whither I have driven them in mine anger, and in my fury, and in great wrath; and I will bring them again unto this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely: And they shall be my people, and I will be their God:

Is not this a wonderful passage? After all this sin, and all this provocation, when we expect the thunder and lightning of divine judgment, behold, there is nothing but the sweet voice of pitying love: “They shall be my people, and I will be their God.” Oh, the wonders of divine grace! See what the covenant of grace does for guilty men.

39, 40. *And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them: And I will make an everlasting covenant with them,*

“With them” — with these very people who had provoked him, and served Molech, and bowed before idol gods, and put the Lord to shame, and angered him.

40, 41. *That I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me. Yea, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will plant them in this land assuredly with my whole heart and with my whole soul.*

A whole-hearted God, blessing those upon whom he looks with an eye of grace. It is a wonderful thing. If he had set his whole heart to destroy them, it would have seemed natural; but God is far above any conception of ours; and so, in the midst of guilt extraordinary and almost immeasurable, behold love equally extraordinary and grace altogether measureless.

42. *For thus saith the LORD; Like as I have brought all this great evil upon this people, so will I bring upon them all the good that I have promised them.*

Oh, for grace to lay hold upon this everlasting covenant, even the sure mercies of David; and to be saved thereby!

JEREMIAH 33:15-26

15. *In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land.*

In the latter days, at the glorious appointed time, Jesus Christ will grow up like a Branch out of the stem of Jesse. The dynasty of David now seems like a tree cut down, whose stock is buried under the ground, but “the Branch of righteousness” shall appear in due time, and Jesus, the Son of David, “shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land.”

16. *In those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely: and this is the name wherewith they shall be called, The LORD our righteousness.*

What a wonderful unity there is between Christ and his Church! She actually takes his name: “The Lord our righteousness.”

17, 18. *For thus saith the LORD; David shall never want a man to sit upon the throne of the house of Israel; Neither shall the priests the Levites want a man before me to offer burnt offerings, and to kindle meat offerings, and to do sacrifice continually.*

This shows that the covenant was not a literal and fleshly one, made with David and his seed according to the flesh, or with the priests and their seed according to the flesh. There is a Kingdom that can never be moved, and our Lord sits on that throne; there is a Priesthood which is everlasting, it is held by that great High Priest who hath offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, and who abides a Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.

19, 22. *And the word of the LORD came unto Jeremiah, saying, Thus saith the LORD; If ye can break my covenant of the day, and my covenant of the night, and that there should not be day and night in their season; Then may also my covenant be broken with David my servant, that he should not have a son to reign upon his throne; and with the Levites the priests, my ministers. As the host of heaven cannot be numbered, neither the sand of the sea measured: so will I multiply the seed of David my servant, and the Levites that minister unto me.*

So that they are at this day the seed of Jesus, the Son of David, who shall count them? And the company of those whom he hath

made to be kings and priests unto God, who but he can number them?

23-26. *Moreover the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah, saying, Considerest thou not what this people have spoken, saying, The two families which the LORD hath chosen, he hath even cast them off? thus they have despised my people, that they should be no more a nation before them. Thus saith the LORD; If my covenant be not with day and night, and if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth; Then will I cast away the seed of Jacob, and David my servant, so that I will not take any of his seed to be rulers over the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: for I will cause their captivity to return, and have mercy on them.*

This shall be literally fulfilled in the latter days, I doubt not, but it is even now being fulfilled to the spiritual seed of Jacob and David. The covenant of grace is made sure to all the seed, even to as many as have believed on Christ's name.

This exposition consisted of readings from GENESIS 8:15-22; AND JEREMIAH 33:15-26.

LAMENTATIONS

LAMENTATIONS 3:1-33, AND 55-58

We are about to read a chapter which is very full of sorrow; while you are listening to it, some of you may be saying, "We are not in that condition." Well then, be thankful that you are not, and while you hear of the sorrows of others, bless God for the joys you yourself experience. At the same time, remember that there is a way of sorrow which leads at last to rest and peace. There is truth in the words of the poet Cowper, —

"The path of sorrow, and that path alone,
Leads to the land where sorrow is unknown."

If you have never known the sorrows of the weeping prophet, or anything like them, I am not sure that you should congratulate yourselves, for there is a brokenness of heart that is worth more than the whole world, there is a crushed and bruised spirit in which the Lord delights, and which is a token for good to the one who possesses it.

1, 2. *I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath. He hath led me, and brought me into darkness, but not into light.*

Some of us recollect when we used to go into our own room, and shut the door, and read such a chapter as this, and say, "Here is a description of my true condition." We were once broken in pieces, torn asunder, through a terrible sense of sin. Our thoughts were like a case of knives perpetually pricking us, and, at such a time, these were our words as well as the words of Jeremiah, "He hath led me, and brought me into darkness, but not into light."

3, 4. *Surely against me is he turned; he turneth his hand against me all the day. My flesh and my skin hath he made old: he hath broken my bones.*

Conviction of sin seems to dry up the very sap of our life till we become withered with age. Worse than the agony of a broken bone is the pain of a broken heart. When the Holy Spirit convinces of sin, believe me, it is no child's play; in the case of some of us, it was sore wounding.

5. *He hath builded against me, —*

“As if he deliberately built walls to stop up my way, and erected castles from which to attack my soul, ‘He hath builded against me,’”

5. *And compassed me with gall and travail.*

“He has shut me up in a circle of bitterness.”

6, 7. *He hath set me in dark places, as they that be dead of old. He hath hedged me about, that I cannot get out: he hath made my chain heavy.*

Like a prisoner in his dungeon, who has to wear manacles and fetters.

8. *Also when I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer.*

That is the worst trial of all, for there is comfort in prayer; but when even that seems denied you, into what a terrible state of sorrow is your heart brought!

9-11. *He hath enclosed my ways with hewn stone, he hath made my paths crooked. He was unto me as a bear lying in wait, and as a lion in secret places. He hath turned aside my ways, and pulled me in pieces: he hath made me desolate.*

You who remember that experience, bless God that you have passed through it, that you have gone over that rough road into the place of peace and rest in Christ. You who have never known this path, it will be well for you when you do, trying as you may find it.

12. *He hath bent his bow, and set me as a mark for the arrow.*

“Every sermon I hear seems a shot at me, every text of Scripture seems an arrow aimed at me.”

13. *He hath caused the arrows of his quiver to enter into my reins.*

“They are not merely shot at me, but they have actually hit me; they have wounded me; they have pierced me in vital parts.”

14-17. *I was a derision to all my people; and their song all the day. He hath filled me with bitterness, he hath made me drunken with wormwood. He hath also broken my teeth with gravel stones, he hath covered me with ashes. And thou hast removed my soul far off from peace: I forgot prosperity.*

“It seems so long ago since I was prosperous that I forget what it was like. I have been so troubled that I do not remember what it was to be at ease.”

18-21. *And I said, My strength and my hope is perished from the LORD: Remembering mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall. My soul hath them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me. This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope.*

Notice that, in all his sorrow, this man still had hope. His soul was humbled, and therefore he had hope. I think that, in the New Zealand language, the word for hope is “swimming thought” — the thought that swims when everything else is drowned. Oh, what a mercy it is that hope can live on when all things else appear to die!

22. *It is of the LORD’S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.*

Hear that, troubled heart; you are not yet destroyed, you are still in the land of the living, — as we say “on praying ground and pleading terms with God.” “It is of Jehovah’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.”

23, 24. *They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness. The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him.*

“With all my troubles, and losses, and griefs, I still have a God; therefore will I hope in him.”

25. *The LORD is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him.*

Even though it be out of the depths of the utmost distress that you seek God, you shall find him to be good to you. He is hard to none, unkind to none. Only go thou, and test him and try him, and thou shalt find that it is even as I say.

26, 27. *It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD. It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth.*

And it is not bad for him if he keeps on bearing it in his old age. Our shoulders ever need the yoke; we are such uncertain creatures that we cannot bear too much freedom, even from sorrow.

28-31. *He sitteth alone and keepeth silence, because he hath borne it upon him. He putteth his mouth in the dust; if so be there may be hope. He giveth his cheek to him that smiteth him: he is filled full with reproach. For the Lord will not cast off for ever:*

What music there is in that line! He may put thee away for a while, and seem to leave thee; but “the Lord will not cast off for ever.” God may seem to put us away from him, but it is written, “He

hateth putting away.” There is no divorcement between Christ and the soul that is once espoused to him. Their separation shall not be perpetual, for nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

32, 33. *But though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies. For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men.*

Now notice in the 55th verse, what came to the prophet after all this sorrow.

55, 56. *I called upon thy name, O LORD, out of the low dungeon. Thou hast heard my voice: hide not thine ear at my breathing, at my cry.*

Sometimes our prayers get to be so very weak that they are only a breathing; yet we must never forget that, “Prayer is the breath of God in men, returning whence it came,” and “Praying breath is never spent in vain.”

57, 58. *Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee: thou saidst, Fear not. O Lord, thou hast pleaded the causes of my soul;*

What a comfort it is that Christ in heaven is our great Advocate, and that he has pleaded the causes of our soul before the throne of God!

58. *Thou hast redeemed my life.*

He who is our Advocate is also our Redeemer, and therefore we are doubly safe. Glory be to his name!

LAMENTATIONS 3:1-33

I am about to read a portion of Holy Scripture which may seem very strange to some of you, but it belongs to a part of the congregation, and I hope it may be the means of giving them comfort. I read it as a picture of the suffering of a soul under a sense of sin. I think it is a most graphic portrait of a heart that is aroused and made to feel its lost estate. If there are any such here, they will be sure to see themselves in the picture.

1. *I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath.*

It is a mistake that most souls make when in trouble, to suppose that no others ever felt as they do. John Bunyan describes Christian as being very much comforted by hearing someone quoting Scripture as he went through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, for

then he perceived that there were others in like case with his own. Do not think, poor troubled soul, that no one ever was so broken in pieces as you are; your path of sorrow is a well-trodden one.

2. He hath led me, and brought me into darkness, but not into light.

A Hebrew method of saying that it was a thick darkness without any light, either star-light or moon-light. You who have passed through this state of conviction know what it means;--no comfort from ordinances, no comfort from God's Word, no comfort from your daily mercies. Every stream of comfort seems dried up to you, and sin lies heavily upon you.

3. Surely against me is he turned; he turneth his hand against me all the day.

As if, when a man is about to strike, he smites not with his open hand but turns his hand, so the prophet says God did with him. He felt that he was being smitten with the heaviest blows that God seemed able to give.

4. My flesh and my skin hath he made old; he hath broken my bones.

As men through excessive grief sometimes appear to grow prematurely aged, so the prophet says he had done through grief. He felt as if his bones were broken. The sore vexations of his spirit had dashed the solid pillars of the house of Manhood from their place.

5. He hath builded against me, and compassed me with gall and travail.

That is to say, as the besiegers erected a mound against a city, and threw up earthworks, so, the prophet says, God seemed to have thrown up earthworks from which he might fire off the great guns of the law against him.

6. He hath set me in dark places, as they that be dead of old.

As though he had to live in a tomb, where neither life nor light could come to him.

7. He hath hedged me about, that I cannot get out: he hath made my chain heavy.

"My way seems blocked up, nothing prospers with me." As the convict sometimes drags about his chain, and has a ball at his foot, so the prophet felt as if God had clogged him with a heavy chain, so that he could not move because of its terrible weight.

8. Also when I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer,

Which was the worst trial of all.

9. *He hath enclosed my ways with hewn stone; he hath made my paths crooked.*

It was believed that hewn stones made the strongest wall as the joints would the more closely fit into one another. Jeremiah seems to speak as if God had taken care and trouble to build, not as men do, roughly with common stones, but with polished and well-shapen troubles built like strong barriers in his way.

10. *He was unto me as a bear lying in wait, and as a lion in secret places.*

He felt as if the justice of God was about to spring upon him. He was afraid to move, lest the couchant lion should leap upon him, and tear him in pieces. John Bunyan, in his *Grace abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, describes in his own experience precisely what the prophet here speaks of.

11-13. *He hath turned aside my ways, and pulled me in pieces: he hath made me desolate. He hath bent his bow, and set me as a mark for the arrow. He hath caused the arrows of his quiver to enter into my reins.*

And all this while, to aggravate his grief, he found no comfort anywhere.

14. *I was a derision to all my people; and their song all the day.*

It is just so with a man who is under a sense of sin. His companions ask him why he is so melancholy; he has an attack of the mopes, they say. They do not want his society, they will chase him from their midst. I marvel not that they want not his company, for well do I know that he wants not theirs, but this adds much to his grief, to find that they make derision and laughter of his woe.

15. *He hath filled me with bitterness, he hath made me drunken with wormwood.*

What a strong expression the prophet uses! As a drunken man hath lost his wits, and staggereth he knoweth not where, even as is a sinner when he really begins to taste the bitterness of sin. He does not act as if he were endowed with reason; despair and sorrow have driven his senses away.

16. *He hath also broken my teeth with gravel stones, he hath covered me with ashes.*

The Easterns usually baked their cakes on the hearth, and very frequently there would be in the cakes pieces of grit, perhaps large

lumps of cinder, and sometimes small gravel stones, which would break the teeth. "So," the prophet seems to say, "when I went to try to get some nourishment by the eating of bread, I was disappointed; my teeth were broken with gravel stones." I remember when I used to go up to the house of God to try to get comfort; but, instead thereof, I came away more wretched than I went, for sin, that great devouring dragon, still followed me everywhere.

17-21. *And thou hast removed my soul far off from peace: I forgot prosperity. And I said, My strength and my hope is perished from the LORD: remembering mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall. My soul hath them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me. This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope.*

Notice the gracious change that has taken place, as if the sun had risen after the blackness and gloom of the night. Now the birds of joy begin to sing, and the flowers of hope begin to open their golden cups.

22. *It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassion fail not.*

Bad as our state is, we are not yet in hell; we are not yet beyond the reach of hope.

23. *They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.*

We had new mercies this morning, and we have had fresh mercies this evening. God has not forgotten us. The very breath in our nostrils is a proof of his goodness to us; let us, therefore, dear friends, still hope for yet further favors from him.

24, 25. *The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him. The LORD is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him.*

Can you get a hold of this blessed truth, any of you troubled ones who are here? Broken-hearted sinner, can you get a grip of this comforting assurance? If so, there will soon be peace for you.

26, 27. *It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD. It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth.*

For this yoke, though it may seem to be very heavy for a time, when it has humbled us, and brought us to Christ, will bring us innumerable blessings.

28-33. *He sitteth alone and keepeth silence, because he hath borne it upon him. He putteth his mouth in the dust if so be there may be hope. He giveth his cheek to him that smiteth him: he is filled full with reproach. For the LORD will not cast of for ever: but though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies. For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men.*

Unless he has some gracious motive for it, he never afflicts or grieves them, and when he doth act thus, it is as when a father smites his child. It is because it must be done and not because he loves to do it. See, then, the great mercy of God. May it lead the sinner to repentance, yea, and lead us all to put our trust in the Lord!

This exposition consisted of readings from LAMENTATIONS 3:1-33; AND JEREMIAH 31:22-37.

LAMENTATIONS 3:1-36

The first part of this chapter is one of the saddest in the whole Book of God; yet I expect it has ministered as much consolation as some of the brightest pages of Holy Writ, because there are children of God who are the subjects of great suffering and sorrow, and when they turn to such a passage as this, they see that one of the Lord's own prophet has gone that way before them; and when they see the footprints of another of God's people in the dark and gloomy valley that they are themselves traversing they are encouraged. Besides, the chapter does not end as it begins. There is daylight for the poor sufferer after all, so we shall read the sad utterances of the prophet in the hope that, if we have ever known experiences similar to his, we may learn where to find comfort even as he did.

1, 2. *I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath. He hath led me, and brought me into darkness, but not into light.*

This seems to be the hardest part of our lot,-that God should lead us into darkness: "He hath led me, and brought me into darkness." Yet dear brethren, that is, on the other hand, the sweetest thing about our trial; because, if the darkness be in the place where God has led us, it is best for us to be in the dark. A child in the dark should derive much comfort from the thought, "My father brought me here, and he loves me so much that he would not bring me where I should be in danger, he must have had some good end and object in view in

what he has done.” Surely, there is something comforting to the tried child of God in that thought.

3-5. *Surely against me is he turned; he turneth his hand against me all the day. My flesh and my skin, hath he made old; he hath broken my bones. He hath builded against me, and compassed me with gall and travail.*

“I am like a besieged city that has strong forts built all round it to shut it in on all sides.”

6, 7. *He hath set me in dark places, as they that be dead of old. He hath hedged me about, that I can not get out: he hath made my chain heavy.*

Ah, dear friends, it is easy for some people to read such a passage as this, but there are others who have read it with aching brows and eyes red with weeping; and often, I doubt not, as they have read the prophet’s descriptions of just such sorrows as they are themselves feeling, they have said, “Then after all, we are not alone in our griefs, and we may yet be delivered even as Jeremiah was”

8. *Also when I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer.*

What a sorrow is this,—to feel that even prayer itself is unavailing! Yet this suppliant was no graceless sinner, he was a dear child of God, one of the noblest of the Lord’s ancient prophets, one of the most faithful of his ministers. You must not think, because sometimes your prayers seem to be unheard or unheeded, and you are allowed to continue in sorrow, that therefore the Lord does not love you. “Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth;” and that word “scourgeth” is a very strong one, meaning much more than just an ordinary whipping.

9. *He hath inclosed my ways with hewn stone,*

“The Lord has shut me right up, as if he had built a wall around me on every side.”

9-13. *He hath made my paths crooked. He was unto me as a bear lying in wait, and as a lion in secret places. He hath turned aside my ways, and pulled me in pieces: he hath made me desolate. He hath bent his bow, and set me as a mark for the arrow. He hath caused the arrows of his quiver to enter into my reins.*

The King’s arrows had wounded him to the very quick. Perhaps some of you may know what it is to go to the Bible, and yet to find no comfort in it for the precious promises have seemed to be too

good to be true to you, and you seem to have hunted out every dark and threatening passage at once, and you have said, “Ah, that belongs to me!” You have written bitter things against yourself, and have thought that surely you were the target at which God was shooting his sharpest arrows.

14-17. *I was a derision to all my people; and their song all the day. He hath filled me with bitterness, he hath made me drunken with wormwood. He hath also broken my teeth with gravel stone, he hath covered me with ashes. And thou hast removed my soul far off from peace: I forgot prosperity.*

“It seems so long since I have had any prosperity that I have forgotten it. I have become so accustomed to trouble and sorrow that it seems as if I had never known what joy was.” The original is even more sad, “I forget good.”

18-21. *And I said, My strength and my hope is perished from the LORD: Remembering mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall. My soul hath them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me. This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope.*

And as long as your afflictions, poor troubled souls, have really humbled you, you may have hope. Recall to your mind the fact that God’s chastising blows have brought you down to his feet in humble submission, and ended all your boastings, and therein you may have hope.

22. *It is of the LORD’S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.*

See where Jeremiah gets his comfort; he seems to say, “Bad as my case is, it might have been worse, for I might have been consumed, and I should have been consumed if the Lord’s compassions had failed.” Ah, brethren and sisters, and we too might have been in hell at this very moment! Amidst the hottest flames of that hopeless place we might have been enduring the wrath of God, but we are not there, and blessed be his name for that! “It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.” He still has compassion upon us; if he had not, he would have given us up altogether; but there is love in his heart, even while there is a frown upon his brow, and while his hand is smiting us, his heart is loving us still.

23. *They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.*

If every day brings its trouble, every day also brings its mercy. Up to this day, at all events, we have not perished. The Lord has chastened us, but he has not crushed us. We have been cast down, but we have not been destroyed. "Great is thy faithfulness." No man can say that so truly as the one who has known what it is to prove that great faithfulness in great affliction. But when there has been a great trial, the believing soul has cast itself upon the ever-faithful God, and so has been able to set its seal to this truth, "Great is thy faithfulness."

24. *The LORD is my portion, saith my soul;*

What! With his mouth full of gravel stones, and made drunken with wormwood, overwhelmed with sorrow, yet he says, "the Lord is my portion." Oh, yes, beloved, whatever else we have lost, we have not lost our God. The thieves have robbed us of our little spare cash, but they could not get at the gold that we have in the bank; They could not break into the great treasure-house of everlasting love. John Bunyan says, "Little-Faith lost his spending-money, but the thieves could not find his jewels." Nor can they find ours; they are all safe. "The Lord is my portion, saith my soul;" —

24. *Therefore will I hope in him.*

If I cannot cast the anchor of hope anywhere else, I may "hope in him;" and what better hope do I want than that?

25. *The LORD is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him.*

Do not be in a hurry; do not expect to be delivered out of your trouble the first time you begin to cry unto God. Oh, no: "the Lord is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him."

26. *It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation, of the LORD.*

God's time is always the best time. To deliver you just now might be to deprive you of the benefit of the trouble. You must bear it till it produces "the peaceable fruit of righteousness." When the doctor puts on a blister, we are not to take it off the next minute. No; patience must have her perfect work, that we "may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."

27, 28. *It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth. He sitteth alone and keepeth silence, because he hath borne it upon him.*

When it makes a man get alone, to contemplate and meditate, affliction is already doing him good.

29. *He putteth his mouth in the dust; if so be there may be hope.*

That is the way to find it;-not lifting your mouth up to defy the Lord, or to murmur at him, nor yet opening your mouth in boastfulness; but putting your mouth in the dust, that is the way to find hope. A humble, penitent, resigned, silent, submissive spirit will soon find hope.

30, 31. *He giveth his cheek to him that smiteth him: he is filled full with reproach. For the Lord will not cast off for ever:*

Oh, get a grip of that blessed truth! I pray you, O ye sons of trouble, lay hold of it, and never let it go! The Lord may, to all appearance, cast off for a little while, but he will not cast off for ever.

32-34. *But though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies. For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men. To crush under his feet all the prisoners of the earth,*

That is not God's way of acting. Tyrants may do so, but the tender, compassionate God, our gracious, loving Father, will never do that. If you lie in the dust before him, he will not tread on you.

35, 36. *To turn aside the right of a man before the face of the most High, To subvert a man in his cause, the Lord approveth not.*

Again I say, that is not God's way of acting.

LAMENTATIONS 3:52-58

52-55. *Mine enemies chased me sore, like a bird, without cause. They have cut off my life in the dungeon, and cast a stone upon me. Waters flowed over mine head; then I said, I am cut off. I called upon thy name, O LORD, out of the low dungeon.*

He said, "I am cut off," yet he called upon the name of the Lord out of the low dungeon into which his enemies had cast him. What a mercy it is that God's servants are often as graciously inconsistent as Jeremiah was just then! They are afraid that the Lord will not hear them, yet they continue to pray unto him. They are afraid that they are cast off for ever, yet they will still use the privilege of a child of God, and cry unto him, though they doubt whether they

have a child's right to do so. Go on, beloved, with that blessed inconsistency, and the Lord will bless you in it.

56. *Thou hast heard my voice: hide not thine ear at my breathing, at my cry.*

Is not that a beautiful description of prayer, when the soul cannot find words, nothing but a "breathing"? Did I say nothing but a breathing? Why, that is the very essence of prayer.

"Prayer is the breath of God in man,
Returning whence it came."

Vocal sounds in prayer can be given forth by hypocrites. Our children have their dolls or their little animals that they press to make them squeak, but there is no life in them; so there may be a sound, yet no life, but I never heard of anything that really breathed, and yet had not life. And when your soul breathes itself out before God in prayer, although it cannot utter any articulate sound by reason of the sorrow of your heart, there is spiritual life in you.

57. *Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee:*

Oh, sweet experience! Cannot you, beloved, say that these words suit you as much as they did Jeremiah? I am inclined to say to him, "They are mine, Jeremiah, they certainly were yours, but I am sure that they are equally mine."

57, 58. *Thou saidst, Fear not. O Lord, thou hast pleaded the causes of my soul; thou hast redeemed my life.*

Blessed be his holy name for ever and ever!

EZEKIEL

EZEKIEL 16:1-3, 5-16, 60-63

In this very remarkable chapter, God describes his ancient people Israel under the figure of an infant which had been cast away, but which he had cared for and tended, and upon which he had lavished much love, making it the object of his choice, on which his very heart was set. Yet this specially-favored one had gone astray, and committed all manner of wickedness; but for all that, the love of God had not been withdrawn. The whole chapter is a graphic picture of the way in which Israel and Judah went after false gods, and forsook the only living and true God.

1, 2. *Again the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, cause Jerusalem to know her abominations,*

This is a very necessary command, for unless men know their disease they will not apply to the great Physician. Only he who knows that he is poor will be willing to accept of alms. It is, therefore, a needful part of the duty of God's servants to make sinners know their evil ways: "Son of man, cause Jerusalem to know her abominations."

3. *And say, Thus saith the Lord GOD unto Jerusalem; Thy birth and thy nativity is of the land of Canaan; thy father was an Amorite, and thy mother an Hittite.*

Abraham, the father of the nation, came from beyond the flood; but here, because of the sin of the people, God attributes their birth to the place of their settlement rather than to that chosen and noble man. They had lived so long in Canaan that they had grown to be Canaanites. Their habits were so evil that there was little choice between the Israelites and the Amorites and Hittites whom God had smitten in his wrath. So the Lord says: "Thy birth and thy nativity is of the land of Canaan; thy father was an Amorite, and thy mother an Hittite." Then, in the fifth verse, he describes the condition of the nation when it was in Egypt, when nobody cared for it:-

Verses 5-16.

5. *None eye pitied thee, to do any of these unto thee, to have compassion upon thee; but thou wast cast out in the open field, to the loathing of thy person, in the day that thou wast born.*

You remember that Pharaoh tried to destroy all the male children of the captive Israelites. No mortal eye had any pity upon the downtrodden race in the house of bondage; but God looked down from heaven in love, and pity, and grace.

6, 7. *And when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live; yea, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live. I have caused thee to multiply as the bud of the field, and thou art come to excellent ornaments: thy breasts are fashioned, and thine hair is grown, whereas thou wast naked and bare.*

Israel came out of Egypt exceedingly multiplied, a great people; and when they settled down in Canaan they still increased till they became a numerous and powerful nation. Remember that all this description applies to us spiritually. There was a day when we seemed polluted, and cast away, and left to perish; but God in great mercy passed by, and said unto us, "Live."

8, 9. *Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I swore unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord GOD, and thou becamest mine. Then washed I thee with water; yea, I thoroughly washed away thy blood from thee, and I anointed thee with oil.*

How wondrously the Lord did all this for us! Our washing, and our anointing, we never can forget.

10. *I clothed thee also with broidered work, and shod thee with badgers' skin, and I girded thee about with fine linen, and I covered thee with silk.*

All that God could do for Israel, he did. That poor poverty-stricken nation increased and multiplied till, in the days of David and Solomon, it was of high repute among the nations, and exceedingly rich and wealthy. Even so has God dealt with us; he "hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." We who, a little while ago, were cast out as helpless and worthless, he hath greatly enriched with heavenly treasure.

11-13. *I decked thee also with ornaments, and I put bracelets upon thy hands, and a chain on thy neck. And I put a jewel on thy forehead, and earrings in thine ears, and a beautiful crown upon thine head. Thus wast thou decked with gold and silver; and thy raiment was of fine linen, and silk, and broidered work;*

The work of the Lord Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit have made marvelously glorious “broidered work” for our spiritual adornment. Well does good Dr. Watts sing,-“

How far the heavenly robe exceeds,

What earthly princes wear!

These ornaments, how bright they shine!

How white the garments are!

Strangely, my soul, art thou array'd By the great Sacred Three!

In sweetest harmony of praise Let all thy powers agree.”

13 14. *Thou didst eat fine flour, and honey, and oil: and thou wast exceeding beautiful, and thou didst prosper into a kingdom. And thy renown went forth among the heathen for thy beauty: for it was perfect through my comeliness, which I had put upon thee, saith the Lord GOD.*

Doubtless, these words apply to Israel; but they are still more appropriate to us when we are covered with the righteousness of Christ, and made beautiful in his beauty.

15, 16. *But thou didst trust in thine own beauty, and playedst the harlot because of thy renown, and pouredst out thy fornications on every one that passed by; his it was. And of thy garments thou didst take, and deckedst thy high places with divers colours, and playedst the harlot thereupon: the like things shall not come, neither shall it be so.*

As soon as ever the Israelites grew rich and powerful, they began to build altars to the false gods. The very treasures that God had given them, they desecrated to the making of idols; and God calls' this a spiritual harlotry, turning aside from the one true God, who was the Husband of the nation, to follow after false gods. It is an ill sign in any of us when God's blessings are themselves made into idols. If thou beginnest to worship thy wealth, thy health, thy children, thy learning, or anything that God has given thee, this is exceedingly provoking to the Most High; it is a breach of the marriage covenant between thy soul and God. The rest of the chapter is rather for private reading than for the public assembly. It

gives a truly awful picture of the sin of Israel, and heaps up most dreadful descriptions of the way in which the people turned aside from God. I confess that, after reading to the end of this chapter, I am astonished to think that it should close as it does. It is an amazing instance of the immutable love of God, Turn to the 60th verse.

Verses 60-63.

60. *Nevertheless-*

Blessed “nevertheless”!

60, 61. *Nevertheless I will remember my covenant with thee in the days of thy youth, and I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant. Then thou shalt remember thy ways, and be ashamed,*

Infinite mercy makes men ashamed of their sinfulness. Great pardon produces both humility and holiness. The ungodly think that, for God to forgive great sin will be to give a license to it, but the Lord knows that it is not so. He understands that the greatness of his forgiving love will be the cause of the pardoned sinner’s hatred of sin: “Then thou shalt remember thy ways, and be ashamed,”-

61-63. *When thou shalt receive thy sisters, thine elder and thy younger: and I will give them unto thee for daughters, but not by thy covenant. And I will establish my covenant with thee; and thou shalt know that I am the LORD: That thou mayest remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord GOD.*

Pardon from God for great sin is a silencer to all our pride. We never dare open our mouths again because of our shame; yet the blessed silence of a grateful heart makes true music before the throne of God, and when the Lord opens our lips, then our mouth shall show forth his praise.

EZEKIEL 33:1-20

1-4. *Again the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, speak to the children of thy people, and say unto them, When I bring the sword upon a land, if the people of the land take a man of their coasts, and set him for their watchman: If when he seeth the sword come upon the land, he blow the trumpet, and warn the*

people; Then whosoever heareth the sound of the trumpet, and taketh not warning; if the sword come, and take him away, his blood shall be upon his own head.

In that case the watchman is quite clear; he has done his duty, he has sounded an alarm, and a fitting alarm, upon the trumpet; he has sounded it immediately, without loitering or delaying. He has not been afraid of giving uneasiness to men; he has done his duty, fearless of remark, and he is clear. Happy also is he in knowing that, by heeding the trumpet's warning blast, many have escaped the threatened danger. Still, even then it seems that there are some who hear the trumpet, and will not take the warning. That is the sad part of our service; it makes the most successful ministry to be fringed with black. It cannot be all joy for him who wins the most souls for God; for at times he can sympathize with his brethren, the prophets, in their sorrowful enquiry, "Who hath believed our report? And to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" Listen to this, you who hear the gospel, and yet do not repent; if you heed not the warning, your blood will be upon your own head.

5, 6. *He heard the sound of the trumpet, and took not warning; his blood shall be upon him. But he that taketh warning shall deliver his soul. But if the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword come, and take any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand.*

This is a very solemn truth. It not only concerns me, and the many ministers of Christ who are here, but it is for all of you who know the Lord, for you also are set as watchmen to your families, to your neighbours, to the class which you teach, or which you should teach, in the Sunday-school. May God grant that we may, each one of us, be delivered from other men's sins, for we may become partakers with them in their iniquity unless we bear our testimony against them, and give them warning of the consequences of their evil-doing!

7. *So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel;*

It is not merely the people who took a man of their coasts, and set him for their watchman; but, "I have set thee." Oh, the solemn ordination of a true servant of Christ! It is not by laying on of hands

of man, nor by a pretended descent from the apostles; it is a call from God.

7. Therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me.

That is the way to preach, to get the sermon from the mouth of God, and then to speak it as the mouth of God. Dear teachers, wait upon God for that which you are to teach; take it warm with love out of the very mouth of God, and then speak it for God out of your own mouth. Good will surely come of such teaching as that.

8. When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand.

Even as God required Abel's blood at the hand of Cain, and pronounced him cursed because he was guilty of that blood, so will he require the blood of perishing men at the hands of those set over them, and a curse shall come upon them if they be found negligent.

9, 10. Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it; if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul. Therefore, O thou son of man, speak unto the house of Israel; Thus ye speak, saying, If our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live?

This is as much as to say, "We cannot get away from our sins; there is no hope of our living." When men get into the iron cage called "Despair", there really seems to be no hope that they will turn from their sin. There is no hope in themselves; their only hope is in the Lord.

11, 12. Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel? Therefore, thou son of man,

Notice how often God calls Ezekiel "the son of man." He had many wonderful visions; but he was to be kept humble by being constantly reminded that he was nothing more than a "son of man." He was to be kept sympathetic with the people; they were men, and he was one of them: a "son of man. It seems hard that any mother's son of ours should die and perish; the thought that he will perish for

ever, is terrible indeed to one who recognizes his union with the race as a “son of man.”

12. *Say unto the children of thy people, The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him in the day of his transgression: as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall thereby in the day that he turneth from his wickedness; neither shall the righteous be able to live for his righteousness in the day that he sinneth.*

It is not merely what we have been, but what we are, and what we shall be, that will have to be taken into account. If we have been righteous in our own esteem, what if we turn from it? If we have been sinful, yet if, by God’s grace, we turn from it, the past shall be blotted out.

13. *When I shall say to the righteous, that he shall surely live; if he trust to his own righteousness, and commit iniquity, all his righteousnesses shall not be remembered; but for his iniquity that he hath committed, he shall die for it.*

There is no salvation for any man without final perseverance, and if that final perseverance were not secured to us in the covenant of grace, there would be no salvation even for the brightest believer, or the most sparkling professor. What are our lights in themselves? Will they not soon burn dim unless the secret oil of God’s grace shall keep them bright? Whatever point any of you have reached, do not begin to put your confidence in that. If you had seemed to be righteous through a lifetime of seventy years, yet, unless the grace of God kept you even to the end, you must perish. The mercy is that we have many precious promises concerning the eternal safety of all who are in Christ, and God will not fail to fulfill every one of them.

14-17. *Again, when I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; if he turn from his sin, and do that which is lawful and right; If the wicked restore the pledge, give again that he had robbed, walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die. None of his sins that he hath committed shall be mentioned unto him: he hath done that which is lawful and right; he shall surely live. Yet the children of thy people say, The way of the Lord is not equal: but as for them, their way is not equal.*

Sinners are very fast in judging God. Oh, that they would judge themselves! It is not the Lord who is unjust; it is the balances and weights of men that are unjust. Oh, that they did but know it!

18-20. *When the righteous turneth from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, he shall even die thereby. But if the wicked turn from his wickedness, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall live thereby.*

Now let us read at the thirtieth verse.

Verses **30-33.**

30, 31. *Also, thou son of man, the children of thy people still are talking against thee by the walls and in the doors of the houses, and speak one to another, every one to his brother, saying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh forth from the LORD. And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness.*

This is another of the great sorrows of the prophetic calling, that however accurately we report the Lord's message, however earnestly we try to drive it home to the consciences of our hearers, it must often be said, "They sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness."

32. *And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not.*

Preaching seems to such people to be only a song, or a piece of acting for their amusement; but it is not so. They that can find sport in the things of God, will find it dull sport in hell when they shall be for ever driven away from the presence of God, and from the glory of his power.

33. *And when this cometh to pass, (lo, it will come,) then shall they know that a prophet hath been among them.*

But then it will be too late for them to know it; for they will have missed their opportunity of profiting by the message that the prophet delivered to them. God grant that it may not be so with any one of us, for his abounding mercy's sake! Amen.

EZEKIEL 34:11-25

11, 12. *For thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day.*

What a glorious promise! Christ's elect run hither and thither, in the darkness of their ignorance, into sin of every kind, but he will find every one of them out. There is no jungle so thick but Christ will track his own through it; There are no bogs of sin so dangerous but Christ will traverse them and find every lamb of his flock. And if through your backslidings, O people of God, you have wandered far from him, yet he perceives you with that eye which sees in the dark as well as in the light; and he will follow after you and bring you back. Blessed be his name!

13, 15. *And I will bring them out from the people, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel by the rivers, and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be: there shall they lie in a good fold, and in a fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel. I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord God.*

A beautiful image of that peace of mind, that complete repose, that perfect content, that sweet satisfaction, that divine fullness, which is the work of the Spirit of God in the hearts of believers when they are gathered to Christ.

16. *I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick: but I will destroy the fat and the strong; I will feed them with judgment.*

It is a sweet thing, then, to be one of the needy ones of the flock because you see all the promises run that way, but, if we feel ourselves to be very strong and great, we are in a dangerous state, for then there is no promise for us. The only word concerning us is — “I will destroy the fat and the strong.”

17, 18. *And as for you, O my flock, thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I judge between cattle and cattle, between the rams and the he*

goats. Seemeth it a small thing unto you to have eaten up the good pasture, but ye must tread down with your feet the residue of your pastures? and to have drunk of the deep waters, but ye must foul the residue with your feet?

Truly there are some vainglorious Christians who not only will not receive the gospel themselves, but actually find fault with it, insinuate doubts into the minds of others, and prevent the simple-minded people of God feeding on the pasture-which the Lord provides for them. See one of the evils of being great and strong in your own esteem; you are pretty sure then to despise the very pasture which was quite good enough for you when you were weaker and feebler. That very truth of Jesus Christ which was marrow and fatness to you, when you were hungry, comes to be despised as the manna was by the children of Israel when they called it "light bread." There is no savour in it that you should desire it. Blessed blessed hunger that makes the word of God to be always sweet.

19-25. *And as for my flock, they eat that which ye have trodden with your feet; and they drink that which ye have fouled with your feet. Therefore thus saith the Lord God unto them; Behold, I, even I, will judge between the fat cattle and between the lean cattle. Because ye have thrust with side and with shoulder, and pushed all the diseased with your horns, till ye have scattered them abroad; Therefore will I save my flock, and they shall no more be a prey; and I will judge between cattle and cattle. And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. And I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them; I the LORD have spoken it. And I will make with them a covenant of peace, and will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land: and they shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods.*

What perfect assurance for Christ's flock when, in the very place where the wolf once ranged, they shall be able to lie down and sleep in perfect safety. Happy people, with all their weakness, who have divine strength to be their protection. O my soul, seek no other strength than this, but learn thou the apostle's logic and his true Christian philosophy so that, like him, trusting in the Mighty Shepherd, you will be able to say "When I am weak, then am I strong."

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 23., ISAIAH 40:9-11, EZEKIEL 34:11-25.

EZEKIEL 34:11-27

11. *For thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out.*

Here is a divine One come to seek and to save. The shepherds had neglected and scattered the flock. Now God takes it out of their hands, and he says, "I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out."

12. *As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day.*

He has a chosen people redeemed unto himself by blood, and though they have wandered in the cloudy and dark day of their depravity and ruin, yet will he seek for them with ceaseless care, and bring them back with mighty power, until he has put them into his fold again.

13. *And I will bring them out from the people, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel by the rivers, and in all the inhabited places of the country.*

This shall yet be done to Israel after the flesh; it is being done to Israel after the spirit, to whom these promises in their fullness belong. By the mountains of his immutable promise, by the rivers of his Spirit's influences, shall his people be fed.

14. *I will feed them in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be: there shall they lie in a good fold, and in a fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel.*

When God works, he does nothing by halves, nothing scantily. There shall be a pasture, and it shall be fat; his people shall feed; they shall feed until they lie down in the pasture through very satiety; through the plenitude of his feeding they shall rest.

15. *I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord God.*

Happy sheep that have such a guardian! Happy believer if you are realizing today the full meaning of this, "I will feed my flock."

Only God can do it, but he can do it very effectually until the heart is satisfied with favor, and full of the blessing of the Lord.

16. *I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick: but I will destroy the fat and the strong; I will feed them with judgment.*

Men that are proud and lifted up shall meet with no blessing, but such as feel their poverty, their weakness, their nothingness, shall be the favored ones of God. Cannot some of you poor lost ones, driven-away ones, broken ones, and sick ones, lay hold upon this promise? You may see daylight through it, however dark your condition may be. God saith, "I will," and you may depend upon it. He will make it good. There is never an "I will" of Jehovah that shall fall to the ground.

17, 18. *And as for you, O my flock, thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I judge between cattle and cattle, between the rams and the he goats. Seemeth it a small thing unto you to have eaten up the good pasture, but ye must tread down with your feet the residue of your pastures? and to have drunk of the deep waters, but ye must foul the residue with your feet?*

Sometimes when God's people get very strong in themselves, they grow proud, and they find great fault; precious truth is not good enough for them unless it is very daintily spoken; they have eaten, and now they tread down the pasture and spoil it for others. This may seem a very small offense, but the great Shepherd does not think so; he looks with indignation upon these fat and strong, who foul the waters with their feet.

19-21. *And as for my flock, they eat that which ye have trodden with your feet; and they drink that which ye have fouled with your feet. Therefore thus saith the Lord God unto them: Behold, I, even I, will judge between the fat cattle and between the lean cattle. Because ye have thrust with side and with shoulder, and pushed all the diseased with your horns, till ye have scattered them abroad.*

There is a way of doing that. Some are so big, so harsh, so wrapt up in themselves, that if they meet with a fellow-Christian in trouble, who has less confidence than themselves, who seems to be less useful than themselves, they are all for pushing, and poking, and driving, and doing I do not know what. Mind what you are at,

when you meddle with the poor people of God. There are some doctrinal views, some pretensions to perfection, which just amount to this.

22, 23. *Therefore will I save my flock, and they shall no more be a prey; and I will judge between cattle and cattle. And I will set up one shepherd over them.*

You know his name. “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me, and I give unto my sheep eternal life.” You know that voice; it makes you glad to think he is so near you. “I will set up one shepherd.” That is glorious. He is of God’s setting up; Who can put him down again?

23. *And he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd.*

The house of David shall still shepherd the people of God in the person of great David’s greater Son, whom we adore.

24, 25. *And I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them; I the Lord have spoken it. And I will make with them a covenant of peace,*

With you that were lost, that were driven away, that were sick, that were broken.

25. *And will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land:*

So he will. There were once more wolves than sheep; now there are more sheep than wolves; and the day shall come when the saints shall possess the land. “The meek shall inherit the earth.” Meanwhile, in the ways of God, “no lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon.” “And they shall dwell safely in the wilderness,” where they seemed to be quite defenseless; there they shall be safe, and they shall “sleep in the woods,” in the very lairs of the wild beasts. There shall they be so safe that they shall feel safe, and shall even go to sleep. So “he giveth his beloved sleep.” “And I will make them and the places round about my hill a blessing,” for God does not bless men that they may keep the blessing to themselves. If he blesses them he makes them a blessing, and their surroundings become a blessing.

25-27. *And they shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods. And I will make them and the places round about my hill a blessing; and I will cause the shower to come down in his season; there shall be showers of blessing. And the tree of the field shall*

yield her fruit, and the earth shall yield her increase, and they shall be safe in their land, and shall know that I am the Lord, when I have broken the bands of their yoke, and delivered them out of the hand of those that served themselves of them.

Oh! what a blessed day when all our yokes are broken by God's own hand. We have worn them long enough — the sinful yoke, the legal yoke, the yoke of fear of man, a yoke heavy to bear — when they are all gone, and we can sing, "Thou hast loosed my bonds."

EZEKIEL 34:11-31

The former part of the chapter contains a prophetic denunciation against the evil shepherds, — the men who fed not the flocks, but fed themselves, — who fouled, with their filthy feet, the waters where the flocks did drink, and trod upon the soft grass that otherwise might have afforded pasture for the sheep. After pronouncing judgment upon them, the Lord turns his thoughts to his sheep, and gives this precious promise, —

11. *For thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out.*

The shepherds did not do this; they left the sheep to wander, and they were lost upon the mountains; but where men fail, God proves himself all-sufficient. My hearer, are you sitting under an unprofitable ministry? Then look to the Chief Shepherd, and not to the man who is unfaithful as an under-shepherd.

12. *As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day.*

It does not matter where the place is, the Lord will find out his sheep. If it be the castle of Giant Despair, he will find them there; if it be the worst dungeon in Doubting Castle, he will discover them there; they may have wandered upon the mountains of Despondency and Dejection; they may have been lost in the gorges of some dark valley of Desperation; but the Lord says, "I will both search my sheep, and seek them out." And, mind you, he does not seek without finding. He discovers them, for he knows where they are. Oh, is not that a "cloudy and dark day" wherein we wander from God, and

know not how to return unto him? But clouds and darkness are banished when we see the light of his face.

13-15. *And I will bring them out from the people, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel by the rivers, and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be: there shall they lie in a good fold, and in a fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel. I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord GOD.*

There is a blessed state of rest. God's flock are not only to be fed, but they are to lie down while they feed. You have sometimes noticed a flock, at noontide, when the sun is hot, lie down upon the grass, and feed while they rest; that is what God's people are to do. They are to lie down in tranquility of spirit; they are to lie down in a state of placid submission to his will, in a state of perfect security, — a state, not of idleness from the Master's service, but still a state in which they know there is nothing for them to do for their own security, since Christ has accomplished the whole of their salvation. "I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord God." It is not every one of God's people that has attained to this blessed experience, to be able to lie down in quiet confidence and rest.

"Thousands in the fold of Jesus,
This attainment ne'er can boast;
To his name eternal praises;
None of these shall e'er be lost."

Deeply graven on his heart their names remain. If ye are his sheep, yet even if ye have never come to lie down in peace, if ye cannot say, "I know and am confident," and cannot rest while you feed; it is still comforting for you to feel that all Christ's sheep are his sheep, whether they are lying down or standing up, or even wandering from him.

16. *I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, —*

Ah, one little thinks, perhaps, that there should be such a thing as a poor sheep driven away; but it is sometimes true! A legal preacher drives Christ's sheep away from Christ. A seeking soul would fain come to Jesus; but he is told that he must be something,

and do something, before he can come. The poor sinner would trust in Jesus, but he is told first to get such-and- such a state of heart, he is told, "You are not the man who should be encouraged to come to Christ; you must have some deeper experience before you come." But, blessed be God, the Good Shepherd says, if Satan has driven you away, or a legal preacher has driven you away, "I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away," —

16. *And will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick: but I will destroy the fat and the strong; I will feed them with judgment.*

Those who boast of being fat and strong, who glory in themselves, these God will destroy; but the poor, weak, sick souls shall be fed with kindness tempered with judgment.

17, 18. *And as for you, O my flock, thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I judge between cattle and cattle, between the rams and the he goats. Seemeth it a small thing unto you to have eaten up the good pasture, but ye must tread down with your feet the residue of your pastures? and to have drunk of the deep waters, but ye must foul the residue with your feet?*

Oh, how many there are, even of God's sheep, that foul the waters very much! They come up to God's house, where, perhaps, they get some sweet morsel in the sermon; but there are some things in it with which they do not quite agree. They are walking home with some young Christian, and he is thinking how blessedly he felt under the sermon; while, perhaps, that old professor is grumbling all the time, and stirring up the waters with his feet. If the pasture is not good enough for you, you should let the lambs eat of it, without treading it down; others like it, though you may not; and if you do not like it, you can always leave it! But what is the use of finding fault with it, and treading it under your feet, and not letting others eat of it? It is a great crime, saith God: "Seemeth it a small thing" to tread it down under your feet, to spoil the spiritual enjoyment of your brethren? It seems, to some, of very little consequence what harm they do to God's weak ones; but it is not so, it is a great sin to tread down with your feet the residue of your pastures, so you cavillers and critics had better beware.

19-21. *And as for my flock, they eat that which ye have trodden with your feet; and they drink that which ye have fouled with your feet.*

Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD unto them; Behold, I, even I, will judge between the fat cattle and between the lean cattle. Because ye have thrust with side and with shoulder, and pushed all the diseased with your horns, till ye have scattered them abroad; —

I wish some people would not thrust so much with side and shoulder in their controversies with their brethren. It may be all very well for a man to be honest and faithful, and push with his horns; but there are some diseased ones who cannot stand rough usage when they are only coming in all simplicity to drink at the fountain of life.

22, 23. *Therefore will I save my flock, and they shall no more be a prey; and I will judge between cattle and cattle. And I will set up one shepherd over them, —*

There is only one Shepherd now. As for the rest of us, we are only under-shepherds; there is only one Shepherd, our Lord Jesus Christ; we are simply the men he employs to see after his sheep a little; but he is the Great Shepherd, and when he shall appear, we also shall appear with him in glory. “I will set up one shepherd over them,” —

23-25. *And he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. And I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them; I the Lord have spoken it. And I will make with them a covenant of peace, and will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land: and they shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods.*

Those who have seen the watching of flocks by night in the East, could give you quite a picture of the meaning of this verse. Sometimes the shepherds will sit down in the midst of bushes and briars that may grow at the side of the wood, and taking some of them for firewood, they will light a fire in the night; and when the wolves come around them, the sheep are quite safe. I have read of this in books of travel; and what a beautiful thing. It seems to sit, with the full moon shining down on the forest, and the fires alight, feeling that, notwithstanding all the wolves, the sheep are quite safe with the shepherds there to protect them! So is it with God's people; they must always expect, while they are in the wood of this world, to have a scratch now and then from the briars and thorns; but “they shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods.” God

will always take care of his own, for “the Lord knoweth them that are his.”

26. And I will make them and the places round about my hill a blessing; and I will cause the shower to come down in his season; there shall be showers of blessing.

My earnest prayer is that this church may be a great blessing to all who are around us, and I firmly believe it will be so, by God’s grace.

27. And the tree of the field shall yield her fruit, and the earth shall yield her increase, and they shall be safe in their land, and shall know that I am the LORD, when I have broken the bands of their yoke, and delivered them out of the hand of those that served themselves of them.

The Jews will know that God is the Lord when they shall return to their own land. The poor tired sinner, best of all knows that God is God when he gets the bands of his neck broken off him. By nature, we all have bands about our necks; it is only God who takes them off. Pilgrim, you know, lost his burden when he looked at the cross; it rolled away down into the sepulcher; and if you had asked him then, “Is God, God?” “Yes,” he would have said, “otherwise, I should not have had the bands of my neck loosed.” No man who has had the bands taken off him, will ever doubt that there is a God. Let him experience that holy calm which springs from the fact of his having been set at gospel liberty, and he will say, “This is the work of God; no man, no human power could have done it.” I can never be an Arminian as long as I feel myself a sinner. I am obliged to come back to this: Lord, I must be saved by sovereign grace, or not at all. A single day’s experience is enough to take all the self-conceit out of a Christian, if the Lord should leave him to his own unaided strength. We best know that God is God when we have had the bands broken off our necks. How many are there sitting here with bands on their necks; — slaves, wearing the yoke upon their shoulders? They cannot see it, but it is there, nevertheless. Who is there who can say, “My bands are broken from my neck”?

“My sins are drown’d, as in a flood,
Of Jesus’ pure and matchless blood.”

“I am finally discharged; the bands are broken off my neck, verily, God is God.”

28, 29. *And they shall no more be a prey to the heathen, neither shall the beast of the land devour them; but they shall dwell safely, and none shall make them afraid. And I will raise up for them a plant of renown, —*

Jesus is “a plant of renown,” because you may go to him at all times, and you will always find fruit on him. That is more than you can say of any other plant. You may go to him, and you will always find the sort of fruit you want; is he not “a plant of renown”? You will find healing virtue in his leaves, and satisfying fruits hanging in clusters upon him. He is “a plant of renown,” because his father planted him; because he has food enough for all his saints, and a gracious variety for all their tastes; because he will blossom through eternity; because of the multitude who sit under his shadow, and rejoice therein, He is “a plant of renown” to his people, for under his shadow they are begotten and brought forth; the greatest transactions of their lives have taken place beneath the shadow of that old tree, “the plant of renown.”

29, 30. *And they shall be no more consumed with hunger in the land, neither bear the shame of the heathen any more. Thus shall they know that I the LORD their God am with them, and that they, even the house of Israel, are my people, saith the Lord God.*

Thus shall they know it. Do you know it? Has God told it to you? Have you the witness of the Spirit within your spirit that you are born of God? My hearers, never be satisfied till you get this; for you will never be truly at rest until you know that you are God’s people, and until you can each one say, “My God, my God, thou art my God.”

31. *And ye my flock, the flock of my pasture, are men, and I am your God, saith the Lord GOD.*

“However much I may have uplifted you, you are only men, after all; but I am not a man, I am your God,” saith the Lord.. And we rest more upon what God is, than upon what man is, for he “is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask, or think.”

EZEKIEL 36:16-38

16-20. *Moreover the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, when the house of Israel dwelt in their own land, they defiled it by their own way and by their doings: their way was before me as*

the uncleanness of a removed woman. Wherefore I poured my fury upon them for the blood that they had shed upon the land, and for their idols wherewith they had polluted it: And I scattered them among the heathen, and they were dispersed through the countries: according to their way and according to their doings I judged them. And when they entered unto the heathen, whither they went, they profaned my holy name, when they said to them, These are the people of the LORD, and are gone forth out of his land.

All through Scripture we are told that God has great regard to the honour of his holy name. "The Lord thy God is a jealous God." And this is no small blessing to us, for it has so happened that, when there has been no other reason for mercy, God's regard to his own name has found him a reason for dealing mercifully with his unbelieving, undeserving people. See how he had scattered his chosen people; he had sent them away into captivity, justly, on account of their sins. But it came to pass that wherever they went, whether it was into Persia or Babylonia, the people said, "These are Jehovah's people; these are Jehovah's people; and they are gone forth out of his land." What was the consequence of this?

21. *But I had pity for mine holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the heathen, whither they went.*

He had pity for his own name. He had a reverence and esteem for his own renown and standing, even among these heathen nations.

22, 23. *Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the LORD GOD; I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name's sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen whither ye went. And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I am the LORD, saith the LORD GOD, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes.*

Brethren, what must God think of a nation like to ours which has come to be called by his name, albeit it so little deserves that great honour? What, I say, must he think of the fact that if there are any vices yet unknown, white men will teach them to the heathen, and when the heathen have heard the Gospel, the great sources of doubt are the white men — Englishmen. Full often the greatest oppressors will spring of our own nation. Certainly we hold the belt for drunkenness, and where our fellow countrymen go the name of

Christianity is rendered base among the heathen. The Mohammedan says of such a man, "He has been drunk and turned a Christian." I will grant that much that is said is said unwisely, and untruthfully, and slanderously in exaggeration, for these men are no Christians. They know not the Lord. It is not a Christian country: it is a heathen country, as some of us know, not only by what we read, but by what we see and hear. Can you walk the streets without hearing blasphemies more black than might be heard in any streets under heaven? This is a heathen country, but yet it has somehow come to be thought to be a Christian country; and therefore its conduct is bringing dishonour upon the name of the Most High. Oh! that he would have pity upon that name, and interpose, and once more establish the truth and set up a throne of righteousness, and turn the hearts of the people to himself in this country! Oh! that it were so, for his great name's sake! He cannot bless us for our own sakes, for we deserve nothing but his wrath; but, oh! that he would once again have pity upon his holy name that is profaned, and bless this our land. The Lord goes on to say concerning his people: —

24. *For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land.*

Now, this stands true of Israel after the flesh. It will assuredly be fulfilled in the latter days. But it stands even more certain concerning Israel, the true Israel, of whom the natural Israel is but the type. Now, we read one form of that new covenant made with God concerning his elect, comprehending all that have believed in Christ, or ever shall believe in him. This is the covenant that he makes with us in these days: —

25, 26. *Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.*

Here is, first of all, full justification. "From all your filthiness will I cleanse you." And here is next regeneration: "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you." These are unconditional promises of that covenant which he hath made with his redeemed in the person of Christ Jesus, their covenant-head. See how majestically it is worded: "I will" and "You shall." There is not an "if" or a "but" all through it.

27. *And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.*

Here is sanctification: here is final perseverance. Blessed promises of the covenant of grace.

28. *And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God.*

That is the greatest promise of all. If a man were to preach a series of sermons upon this text during everyday in the year, he would never exhaust the fullness of its meaning. “Ye shall be my people, and will be your God.”

29. *I will also save you from all your uncleannesses: and I will call for the corn, and will increase it, and lay no famine upon you.*

And, spiritually, how true this is — that whenever God saves us from sin he also saves us from every form of famine. No heart was ever left to hunger and thirst in vain when it was cleansed from its sin. Our wants come out of our sins; but when we walk with God, he lays no famine upon us in spiritual things.

30. *And I will multiply the fruit of the tree, and the increase of the field, that ye shall receive no more reproach of famine among the heathen.*

“Then,” when I have blessed you thus — when I have fully saved you, when I have brought you up from all the places where I have scattered you, when I have enriched you and indulged you with my love: —

31. *Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations.*

Repentance is not the root of grace, but the lily-like flower of it. It is not a thing for the early morning of Christian life alone. Repentance will go side by side with faith all through the ways of righteousness, till we get to Heaven Gate. It is when we have most of mercy that we have most loathing for sin.

“Law and terrors do but harden All the while they work alone;
But a sense of blood-bought pardon Soon dissolves a heart of
stone.”

32. *Not for your sakes do I this, saith the LORD GOD, be it known unto you: be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel.*

There is no man saved for his own sake: there is no man redeemed for his own sake. It is for God's own glory's sake. There is no motive so high, there is none so worthy of God, as the making known to all generations and all realms the majesty of his love, and the faithfulness of his covenant.

33-36. *Thus saith the LORD GOD; In the day that I shall have cleansed you from all your iniquities I will also cause you to dwell in the cities, and the wastes shall be builded. And the desolate land shall be tilled, whereas it lay desolate in the sight of all that passed by. And they shall say, This land that was desolate is become like the garden of Eden; and the waste and desolate and ruined cities are become fenced, and are inhabited. Then the heathen that are left round about you shall know that I the LORD build the ruined places, and plant that that was desolate; I the LORD have spoken it, and I will do it.*

Now, as he will do this, I doubt not, in Palestine, in due season, so does he always make the most desolate places to be built when his people live near to him. Let us have courage, brethren, about London, about England, about the world. It is very wicked; but if we will keep close to God, we are able to overcome this wickedness in Christ's name. Let us have comfort about these evil days in which the most of men seem to be departing from the Gospel. We can "hold the fort" till Christ shall come; let us but have courage. God will give us yet to see better and brighter days. He was thought to be a good citizen who never despaired of his country, and he is a good Christian who never indulges a dreary thought about the ultimate triumph of Christ and the coming of his kingdom: "for thine is the kingdom," even now, "and the power and the glory," and so shall it be, for ever and ever.

37. *Thus saith the LORD GOD; I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them; I will increase them with men like a flock.*

There must be the spirit of prayer and supplication poured out first. We shall see Israel restored to her land when Israel is restored to the mercy-seat; and we shall see great prosperity as a church, and the blessing of God will rest upon our nation, when once God's people go up to the top of Carmel with their faces between their knees, and cry, and cry, and cry again, expecting that yet the heavenly shower shall end this long drought of the curse, and the

blessing shall come. “I will yet be enquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them.”

38. *As the holy flock, as the flock of Jerusalem in her solemn feasts; so shall the waste cities be filled with flocks of men: and they shall know that I am the LORD.*

And that is the great end of it all — to make men know that the I AM is — that the true and real God is still potent among the sons of men and doeth his will both here and among the armies of heaven. Unto his name be glory for ever and ever.

EZEKIEL 36:16-38

16-19. *Moreover the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, when the house of Israel dwelt in their own land, they defiled it by their own way and by their doings: their way was before me as the uncleanness of a removed woman, Wherefore I poured my fury upon them for the blood that they had shed upon the land, and for their idols wherewith they had polluted it: And I scattered them among the heathen, and they were dispersed through the countries: according to their way and according to their doings I judged them.*

When God comes forth to deal with men according to their deserts, there will always be times of dire distress. The land of Israel was made into a wilderness; the habitations of men were burnt by fire, the inhabitants fell by the sword, or they were carried away captive, and untold miseries became the lot of God’s revolting people.

20. *And when they entered unto the heathen, whither they went, they profaned my holy name, when they said to them, These are the people of the LORD, and are gone forth out of his land.*

For the heathen did not remember the sin of Israel; they only saw that they had been cast out of their land by their God, so they blamed Jehovah, and not his guilty people. Thus, God’s holy name was doubly profaned.

21. *But I had pity for mine holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the heathen, whither they went.*

If the Lord could see no ground of mercy in them, yet, so full of mercy is he, that he would find a reason for exercising pity for his own name’s sake. If lovingkindness cannot come to them by any other means, then it shall come for God’s name’s sake.

22-24. *Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God; I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name's sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen, whither ye went. And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I am the LORD, saith the Lord God, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes. For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land.*

He says that he will do this for his holy name's sake. If the heathen profaned that name because they saw Israel scattered, they should be made to eat their own words when God gathered Israel again to their own land.

25, 26. *Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.*

What grand language this is! How different it is from the stern commands of the law! The law says, "Make your hearts clean; put away the evil of your doings;" but the gospel covenant of grace says, "A new heart also will I give you, and I will cleanse you from all your iniquities."

27-30. *And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God. I will also save you from all your uncleannesses: and I will call for the corn, and will increase it, and lay no famine upon you. And I will multiply the fruit of the tree, and the increase of the field, that ye shall receive no more reproach of famine among the heathen.*

What splendor of love is this to a people who, mind you, had done nothing whatever to deserve it,—who were just as undeserving as in the day when the Lord smote them, and scattered them among the heathen! For no reason whatever but his own free grace, and for the glory of his holy name would God do these extraordinary deeds of love. What a wondrous God he is! Rightly do we sing,—

"Who is a pardoning God like thee?
Or who has grace so rich and free?"

31, 32. *Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall loathe ourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations, Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord God, be it known unto you: be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel.*

There was nothing for them to boast of in all the mercies they received. No merit of their own had brought them back the corn and oil; it was all of God's infinite sovereign grace because he will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and he will have compassion on whom he will have compassion. How royally he talks—like such a King as he is—the Sovereign Lord of all!

33-35. *Thus saith the Lord GOD; In the day that I shall have cleansed you from all your iniquities it will also cause you to dwell in the cities, and the wastes shall be builded. And the desolate land shall be tilled, whereas it lay desolate in the sight of all that passed by. And they shall say, This land that was desolate is become like the garden of Eden; and the waste and desolate and ruined cities are become fenced, and are inhabited.*

As much as they noticed before the chastising hand of God, so much shall even the heathen be compelled to perceive the great goodness of God in restoring the land to all its former glory.

36, 37. *Then the heathen that are left round about you shall know that I the LORD build the ruined places, and plant that that was desolate: I the Lord have spoken it, and I will do it. Thus saith the Lord God; I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them;—*

The blessing shall come, but not without prayer for it,—not without a hopeful expectancy of it,—not without a faithful belief in it: “I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them;”—

37, 38. *I will increase them with men like a flock. As the holy flock, as the flock of Jerusalem in her solemn feasts;*

Like the multitudes of lambs that were brought up to Jerusalem at the time of the passover, such should be the number of the chosen people once again.

38. *So shall the waste cities be filled with flocks of men: and they shall know that I am the LORD.*

The result of all this wondrous mercy was to be, that they were to be ashamed of their former sins, and loathe their past iniquities, and so know the Lord as to turn from their evil ways, and live unto him.

EZEKIEL 36:21-38

The prophet had been bringing many heavy charges against God's people, had been thundering out the most tremendous threatenings against them. God was angry with them on account of sin. The chapter is full of dreadful utterances, enough to make one tremble as he reads them. And on a sudden the note altogether changes, and the prophet of thunder becomes the prophet of consolation. Free grace follows like a clear shining after the rain.

21-28. But I had pity for mine holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the heathen, whither they went. Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the LORD GOD; I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name's sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen, whither ye went. And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I am the Lord, saith the Lord GOD, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes. For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land.

Here, indeed, is matchless grace that these very people who for their sins were banished from their land, and who in their exile added to their sin by the way in which they blasphemed God — those very people are to be brought back, and the mercy of God is so to be displayed in them that, in the very people who blasphemed God's name, God shall be held in honour.

25, 26. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.

Now notice that all this was spoken to persons who had no desire for these blessings. If they had had a desire for them, their hearts could not be considered to be stony, but they were set against

God; they were his enemies; and yet he makes this solemn declaration in the sovereignty of his grace that he will give them a new heart and a right spirit. There may be some in this house tonight, and I pray there may, who are strangers to the God of Israel, who, if they know aught concerning his Son only know enough to oppose him. May God's eternal omnipotence work in them mightily that a new heart and a right spirit may be given them tonight according to that ancient word, "I am found of them that sought me not." He can come and make them a people that were not a people. Oh! that his grace would do so now.

27. *And I will put my spirit within you,*

Not only a new spirit, but my Spirit. God himself shall come and dwell in those hearts which once were a receptacle for the devil.

27, 28. *And cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God.*

He who talks in this sovereign way is God himself. He first made the world as he pleased, and in the second new creation he doeth as he will, having power over us as the potter has over his clay. This is promised to the Jewish people, but it is also fulfilled in multitudes of others where God in the same sovereign way works out the purposes of his love.

29. *I will also save you from all your uncleannesses: and I will call for the corn, and will increase it, and lay no famine upon you.*

Temporal mercies shall follow where spiritual mercies are given.

30-36. *And I will multiply the fruit of the tree, and the increase of the field, that ye shall receive no more reproach of famine among the heathen. Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations. Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord GOD, be it known unto you: be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel. Thus saith the Lord GOD; In the day that I shall have cleansed you from all your iniquities I will also cause you to dwell in the cities, and the wastes shall be builded. And the desolate land shall be tilled, whereas it lay desolate in the sight of all that passed by. And they shall say, This land that was desolate is become like the garden of Eden; and the waste and desolate and ruined cities are become*

fenced, and are inhabited. Then the heathen that are left round about you shall know that I the LORD build the ruined places, and plant that that was desolate: I the LORD have spoken it, and I will do it.

Prayer will always go with the divine working. Where God means to save, he sets men praying. Those who are saved intercede for others, and others who as yet are unsaved feel the need of the blessing and begin to cry for it, and the blessing comes. As the black cloud forebodes the shower, so doth the gathering spirit of prayer always foretold the coming blessing. Heaven and earth may pass away, but the memorial of Jehovah always is "The God that heareth prayer." He is the God whose arm is always moved by the prayer of man. Did not Moses stand between them and vengeance, so that God said, "Let me alone," as if he had said, "I cannot destroy them while you pray"? Did not Elijah open and shut the windows of heaven by his prayer? Nothing is impossible to those who know how believingly to inquire of God.

37. Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them; I will increase them with men like a flock.

Take up this promise, members of this Church, and urge it before God that he would give us not few additions, but many, very many. "I will increase them with men like a flock."

38. As the holy flock, as the flock of Jerusalem in her solemn feasts;

When a great number of lambs would be brought up to Jerusalem for them to keep the Passover with, a great and countless company. Oh! that such additions may be given to the Church!

38. So shall the waste cities be filled with flocks of men: and they shall know that I am the LORD.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 50:14-23; Ezekiel 36:21-38.

EZEKIEL 36:25-32

25. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you.

"You would not cleanse yourselves; you even went back to your idols again, and so defiled yourselves still more; but I will cleanse you. I have a wondrous stream, such as no river or spring on earth

can ever produce. It wells up from the heart of Jesus; and this shall cleanse you from all your filthiness, and from all your idols.”

26, 27. *A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.*

The old covenant told us what to do, and commanded us to do it; but the new covenant enables us to do it; yea, it works in us that obedience which we never could have rendered to the old law, but which the new covenant gives to us.

28-31. *And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God. I will also save you from all your uncleannesses: and I will call for the corn, and will increase it, and lay no famine upon you. And I will multiply the fruit of the tree, and the increase of the field, that ye shall receive no more reproach of famine among the heathen. Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall loath yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations.*

How sweetly the mercy of God melts the human heart! How graciously the goodness of God produces repentance! That blessed result was never produced by the terrors of the law; but it is continually being brought forth by the lovingkindness of the Lord as manifested in the covenant of his grace.

32. *Not for your sakes do I this, saith the LORD GOD, be it known unto you: be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel.*

The covenant is all of grace, you see; mercy is shown to the unworthy, - not for their own sakes, but for God's own glory's sake. Oh, how sweet it is to have a share in this blessed covenant! Now turn to the Epistle to the Hebrews, the 8th chapter, and 7th verse, where you have still more concerning the new covenant.

This exposition consisted of readings from JEREMIAH 31:31-34; EZEKIEL 36:25-32; AND EBREWS 8:7-13

EZEKIEL 37

1. *The hand of the LORD was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the LORD,*

God's servants learn nothing until they have an experience similar to that of Ezekiel. They must be led by the Spirit of the Lord, and they must have their eyes and mouths opened by him, and then they can both see the vision, and tell the vision to others.

1. *And set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones,*

Like a huge grave, or charnel-house, or battle-field where the slain had not been buried. No servant of God would go without being sent to such a place, yet it was needful that Ezekiel should be there in order that he might understand and speak the message of God.

2. *And caused me to pass by them round about:*

He had to make a thorough survey of this grim and ghastly charnel-house.

2. *And, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry.*

They had lain there so long that the wind had dried up the juices of the marrow-bones, and they were turned to dust.

3. *And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live?*

God did not ask this question for his own information, but for the prophet's. The Lord wanted him to realize the difficulties of the work to which he was called that he might be driven the more completely to rely upon God, and not upon himself.

3, 4. *And I answered, O Lord GOD, thou knowest. Again he said unto me, Prophecy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LORD.*

We have heard of a Romanist who had, as a penance from his priest, to go and water a dry stick. Ezekiel's task of preaching to dry bones seemed to be as useless as that; yet, if God bids us do the same, we need no other justification for doing it. What is foolish in the sight of reason is wisdom in the judgment of faith.

5, 6. *Thus saith the Lord GOD unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live: And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you*

with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the LORD.

He had to tell these bones the unconditional purposes and promises of God: “I will,” and “ye shall;” and this is the way in which God works out his eternal purposes concerning the sons of men. He bids his servants proclaim his message, and then he fulfills his own purposes and promises.

7. So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise,

A rustle, —

7. And behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone.

Here was divine power bringing the bones to their proper position in the various bodies, and forging the separated anatomy to re-form itself.

8. And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them.

So there was no very great improvement so far; there were only dead bodies instead of dry bones; there was something more to look at, but nothing more agreeable, and really no more of life than there was before.

9. Then said he unto me, Prophecy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man,

“Prophecy unto the wind.” That seems a very absurd thing to do, but there are no absurdities where God gives his commands.

9, 10. And say to the wind, Thus saith the lord GOD; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me,-

Ezekiel was very obedient; he only wanted to know his Lord’s will, and then he raised no question, but did at once just as he was told to do: “So I prophesied as he commanded me.” It is a prime qualification in a servant of God that he should do exactly as he is bidden-not to think how he would like to do it, nor to follow the plan that his own wisdom suggests, but just to do as he is told, as Ezekiel did: “So I prophesied as he commanded me,” —

10, 11. And the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army. Then he said unto me, Son

of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts.

“There is no hope for us; we are dead, and worse than dead. Our case is hopeless; there is no possibility of restoration for us.”

12. *Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the lord GOD; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel.*

There was to be a house of Israel after all. The nation seemed to be dead and buried, but God would revive and restore it. This is a promise which may apply to a church when she gets into a very low spiritual state, and it looks as if she could never do any more good: “Behold, O my people, I will open your graves.” And to you, dear friends, who are very heavy of heart, full of despair, and who seem as if you were as good as dead and buried, God speaks in this promise. Therefore believe his Word as though it had been directed to you personally, “Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel.”

13. *And ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves,*

Great deliverances and almighty quickenings reveal God to us, and make us know how gloriously great Jehovah is.

14. *And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the LORD have spoken it, and performed it, saith the LORD.*

When the Jews get back to Canaan again,-as they will do,-they will then not only know that Jehovah is God, but also that Jesus Christ is the true Messiah. May the Lord hasten that blessed consummation in his own time!

15, 16. *The Word of the LORD came again unto me, saying, Moreover, thou son of man,*

Notice how the Lord constantly calls the prophet “son of man.” When God uses his servants much, and greatly honours them, he always takes care to keep them humble by reminding them of what they are in themselves. So, Ezekiel, you have prophesied to the dry bones, and they have lived through your prophecy but it was not by

your own power that you did this. You are nothing but a son of man, God must have all the glory of this wondrous work.

16. *Take thee one stick, and write upon it, For Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions: then take another stick,-*

Or, rod, —

16. *And write upon it, For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel his companions:*

They were divided into separate companies, they first wandered away from God, and then they wandered away from one another.

17. *And join there one to another into one stick; and they shall become one in thine hand.*

As he held them in his hand, they were to grow into one; and, when all the churches get into the hand of Christ, there will be perfect unity between them. Things that are near to the same thing are near to one another; but, until the Lord shall come, and take his divided Judah and Ephraim into his own hand, there will be no true unity between them; but there will be then.

18, 19. *And when the children of thy people shall speak unto thee, saying, Wilt thou not shew us what thou meanest by these? Say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel his fellows, and will put them with him, even with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they shall be one in mine hand.*

No church will long continue in the enjoyment of the blessing of unity unless it continues in nearness to Christ. Communion with Christ means the communion of Christians with one another; we can only get true union and true communion in that way.

20-22. *And the sticks whereon thou writest shall be in thine hand before their eyes. And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land: And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all:*

When Christ cometh, there shall be this true unity in Israel. Where Christ has already come, there is this true unity in his Church; and as Christ cometh to all of us, he will take away the evil

that divides us from himself, and divides us from the rest of the people, and so we shall be one in his hand.

23. *Neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions: but I will save them out of all their dwellingplaces, wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them: so shall they be my people, and I will be their GOD.*

This applies first to Israel literally, and then spiritually to all the chosen. What a weighty and comprehensive promise it is! We are to be saved from our idols, to be saved from the most loathsome sins: "detestable things"; to be saved from our household sins: "I will save them out of all their dwellingplaces wherein they have sinned." Where do we go, my brethren, without finding sin? Sin in our bed, and sin at the board, sin in the shop, and sin in the street, sins when we are in company, and sins when we are alone in the field, sins everywhere; yet the Lord Jesus Christ is able to meet us in every place, and to cleanse us.

"So shall they be my people, and I will be their God." What a wonderful declaration this is,-we are the Lord's people, he is our God! We are his portion, and he is one portion. Oh, that every one of us might have a share in this double blessing!

24. *And David my Servant shall be king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them.*

Oh, for the one king to reign over the one people, who shall keep the one law, and walk in holiness and humility before the one Lord!

25. *And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children's children for ever: and my servant David shall be their prince for ever.*

Surely God does not treat the saints now worse than he treated Israel in the days of old; so we may go to him in prayer for our children and for our children's children.

26. *Moreover, I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them:*

Oh, that blessed word everlasting! A salvation which is not everlasting is not worth having; any promise that is not fulfilled, any grace that can fail, is not God's promise or God's grace.

26, 27. *And I will place them, and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore. My tabernacle also shall be with them: yea, I will be their God, and they shall be my people.*

In the 23rd verse, the Lord's promise was, "They shall be my people, and I will be their God," and here, grace seems to ring the changes by reversing the order: "I will be their God, and they shall be my people." God is evidently so pleased with this declaration that he repeats it, only turning the sentences round the other way.

28. *And the heathen shall know that I the LORD do sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary shall be in the midst of them for evermore.*

DANIEL

DANIEL 1

1. *In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah came Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon unto Jerusalem, and besieged it.*

Sin always brings its punishment. King Jehoiakim did evil in the sight of the Lord, so God used Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, to be the rod in his hand to scourge his sinful people and their wicked king.

2. *And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand,*

It was not merely that Nebuchadnezzar was strong enough to overcome the Jews; but God handed over his people into Nebuchadnezzar's hand. The enemy cannot touch the Church of God without the divine permission.

2. *With part of the vessels of the house of God: which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the vessels into the treasure house of his god.*

See how holy things, once used for the noblest purposes, become of no further service when the Spirit of God is gone from the Church. You know that when the Philistines captured the ark of God, and put it in the temple of Dagon, the fish — god fell down broken before the ark. Nothing of this kind happened in Babylon. The holy vessels were put into the heathen temple, and no miraculous result followed, for God cares nothing for golden vessels in and of themselves. When sin has polluted his people, their precious things are nothing to him. They may go where men please to carry them. All their value lies in God accepting the service rendered through them. So, brother, you may keep up your attendance at the Lord's supper, and your preachings, and your gatherings for worship; but they will all be nothing without the Spirit of God. See how the Lord's supper is turned into the sacrifice of the mass, and how baptism is represented as the channel or medium of regeneration, when once the Spirit of God has gone from the divinely-appointed ordinances. Besides these holy vessels, Nebuchadnezzar took the best of the people of the land, and carried

them away captive. He singled out the rich and the noble, those who had education and other attainments, while he left the poorest of the land behind. Sometimes those who are the most exalted will have the most suffering.

3, 4. *And the king spake unto Ashpenaz the master of his eunuchs, that he should bring certain of the children of Israel, and of the king's seed, and of the princes; Children —*

Or, youths, —

4. *In whom was no blemish, but well favoured, and skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans.*

Nebuchadnezzar was, in many respects, an enlightened ruler. He looked upon this as one of the best things that he could do for his court and vast empire, that he should pick out the best of the young men of every nation, who should bring their national knowledge with them; and then, being sprightly in body and nimble in mind, should be trained to become counselors, or advisers of the court, or be prepared to fill important offices as they became vacant.

5. *And the king appointed them a daily provision of the king's meat, and of the wine which he drank:*

Treating them exceedingly well, thinking, perhaps, that the very food they ate might help to tone their minds for the work to which he had called them. He wished to make them into true Chaldeans, so be ordained that they must eat of the meat he ate, and drink of the wine he drank.

5. *So nourishing them three years,*

Putting them to college, as it were, for three years, —

5, 6. *That at the end thereof they might stand before the king. Now among these were of the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah:*

You know these men's names. You will recognize them when you hear them in their altered form.

7. *Unto whom the prince of the eunuchs gave names:*

This was to Chaldeanize them, to take away from them everything Jewish.

7. For he gave unto Daniel the name of Belteshazzar; and to Hananiah, of Shadrach; and to Mishael, of Meshach; and to Azariah, of Abednego.

Now these young men's Jewish names had, each one of them, the name of God wrought into their texture. I need not stay to bring it out; but there is a signification about each name connecting it with God. You hear in two of them the sound of El, which is a name of God; and in the other two, the termination Iah, which brings out the name Jehovah. The new names that were given to them appear to have been connected with idols; at all events, it was so with Belteshazzar and Abed-nego, or Abednego. The intent was to make Babylonians of them.

8. *But Daniel purposed in his heart —*

I always like to come across a "but" when there is any scheme of this kind on. When the plan is to seduce men from right, then it is a happy thing to have a but, but, but, "But Daniel purposed in his heart," determined, settled, fixed it,

8. *That he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank:*

Daniel here mentions only himself; but the three others were one with him in the resolve and the request. He was the leader. Sometimes there would be no Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, if there was not a Daniel. The other three might never have had the strength of mind, if it had not been for the Daniel, who dared to stand alone; but having such a brave leader, they dared to stand with him. We often owe much to spiritually-minded men, who are able to help others to take a right course.

8, 9. *Therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself. Now God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs.*

It was like the case of Joseph and Potiphar. Daniel's gentle disposition, his loving ways, his open and frank spirit, had won upon the prince of the eunuchs, so that he not only regarded him with favor, but even had a tender love for him. God has the hearts of all men under his control, and he may give his people favor where they least expect it.

10. *And the prince of the eunuchs said unto Daniel, I fear my lord the king, who hath appointed your meat and your drink: for why*

should he see your faces worse liking than the children which are of your sort? then shall ye make me endanger my head to the king.

What a reign of terror there is in a despotic country, where kings can do as they will! For the smallest offense, a man's head may be in danger.

11, 12. *Then said Daniel to Melzar whom the prince of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink.*

I like it that the Holy Ghost uses their old names whenever it is proper that they should be used. May we never lose our old names! I mean, our new names, for they have grown old with some of us now. May we ever be known as the servants of God, and not as Chaldeans! The prince of the eunuchs gave Daniel a kind of hint, that, if the officer under him chose to take the responsibility of altering the food and drink, he might do so, and the prince would not interfere with the experiment. So Daniel turns to Melzar, and says to him, "Prove thy servants for a suitable time. Let us have pulse to eat, and water to drink." He put his request in an extreme light, in order to be quite sure that nothing brought to him would come from the king's table.

13. *Then let our countenances be looked upon before thee, and the countenance of the children that eat of the portion of the king's meat: and as thou seest, deal with thy servants.*

"If we do fall off, and grow thin, and look pale and ill through this coarse food, as you think it, well then, alter it; and if, on the other hand, we should be as well as those who have eaten the king's meat, and drunk the king's wine, then let us keep to our pulse and water."

14. *So he consented to them in this matter, and proved them ten days.*

A round number, standing for a sufficient period to afford a fair test.

15. *And at the end of days their countenances appeared fairer — and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat.*

I doubt not that the satisfaction of heart which they had in keeping themselves undefiled tended to give them a good digestion, and thus they were more likely to be well than were the others.

16, 17. *Thus Melzar took away the portion of their meat, and the wine that they should drink; and gave them pulse. As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom:*

God can help us in our study. We may pray as much over what we have to learn as over what we have to do. I believe that, often, a difficult problem can be best solved by prayer. All true knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom are the gifts of God.

17-19. *And Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. Now at the end of the days that the king had said he should bring them in, then the prince of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. And the king communed with them; and among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: therefore stood they before the king.*

They were made to be his attendants, his advisers, these very men who had been so absurd as not to eat the food from the royal table, so obstinate as to consider that they would defile themselves if they did. It is these absurd and obstinate people who cannot be bent, but must be straight; the upright men, who shall stand before kings, for God is with them.

20. *And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm.*

They communed with God, and that was better than being magicians or stargazers. Men of God are ten times better than all that lot put together.

21. *And Daniel continued even unto the first year of king Cyrus.*

Those two words summarize the whole of Daniel's history: Daniel continued." May God give to each of us here grace to continue as Daniel did!

DANIEL 6

1-3. *It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom an hundred and twenty princes, which should be over the whole kingdom; And over these three presidents; of whom Daniel was first: that the princes*

might give accounts unto them, and the king should have no damage. Then this Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king thought to set him over the whole realm.

Kings are never satisfied. The empire of Darius was always growing, and a chapter or two farther on we find that he had a hundred and twenty-seven provinces. There is no end to the greediness of man, and what does he get by it after all? One pair of hands can only do one man's work; he only gains more toils, and he has now to distribute the cares of his State among others. Then how good it is for any man when he is guided to a right, honest, and hearty helper! Such was the lot of Darius. How advantageous, too, it may be for the people of God when a man like Daniel is put in the high places of the land! Doubtless he was exalted, not only for his own sake, but that he might be as a brazen shield and bulwark for the people of God in that foreign land. No extortions would now be committed on the Jewish race, for they had a friend at court. Blessed be God, we have a friend at court too, one who will take up our cause, and speak for us to the King of Kings

4. Then the presidents and princes sought to find occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find none occasion nor fault;

Who can stand before envy? High places furnish very uncomfortable seats, for even if God exalt a man, men will try to pull him down; but he is an honourable man indeed who puts his enemies to their shifts before they can find anything against him.

4-7. Forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him. Then said these men, We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God.

Then these presidents and princes assembled together to the king, and said thus unto him, King Darius live for ever. All the presidents of the kingdom, the governors, and the princes, the counselors, and the captains, have consulted together to establish a royal statute, and to make a firm decree, that whosoever shall ask a petition of any God or man for thirty days, save of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions. We do not know with what ingenious arguments they moved the king's mind to pass this, but we think we can conceive them. He had just conquered Chaldea;

they would, therefore, say, "It will be an excellent test of the obedience of your new subjects if you touch them upon the point of their religion; try whether they will for thirty days abstain from addressing their deities." Perhaps, too, since Darius had a colleague on the throne, the younger Cyrus, who was much more popular than he. They may have egged him on by hinting that Cyrus was much too vain, and that, therefore, if he would not allow anyone to address a petition, even to Cyrus, for thirty days, it would tend to show who was really loyal to Darius, and it would also test the temper of Cyrus. I cannot tell how they did it, but somehow or other they managed to lead the foolish old man to carry out their designs.

8. *Now, O king, establish the decree, and sign the writing, that it be not changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not*

The Babylonians entrusted their king with absolute power; hence he could will this or that as he chose. The Persians believed their kings to be possessed of perfect wisdom; and hence they never allowed a law to be changed, for that would be to suppose that the king who made it had made a mistake, a thing which could by no possibility ever occur. There is an amusing instance given by a modern traveler, who tells us that a few years ago one of the later Persian kings said he would never remove from the tent in the plain until the snow had gone from some mountains to which he pointed. It happened to be a very late summer, and the snow was long in melting, and his gracious majesty had to keep his place in his tent, while his troops were perishing with fever in a low marsh-district, until they procured men to sweep the snow from the tops of the mountains in order that he might be able to move. It is inconvenient for men to play the God; they cannot do it without bringing serious difficulty and danger upon themselves. So did Darius on this occasion. I never like men who, when they speak a hasty word, say they cannot alter it. Rash vows are better broken than kept; you had no right to say you would do the thing; much less have you any right to do it when you have said you would do it. However, the law of the Medes and Persians could not be altered.

9, 10. *Wherefore king Darius signed the writing and the decree. Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into the house;*

That is right; the less we have to do with man, and the more we have to do with God the better. He did not go to the king to complain, but he went into his house to tell his God about it.

10. *And his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, That much-loved city, though now in ruins.*

10. *He kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.*

‘Twas bravely done. A man in a meaner position might have carried out his devotions in private without sin, but not so Daniel. He is a representative man: he must not play the coward; it is incumbent upon him to be more especially and deliberately public in all that he does, for if he be seen to slink in never so small a degree, then all the saints will lose heart.

11-13. *Then these men assembled, and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God Then they came near, and spake before the king concerning the king’s decree; Hast thou not signed a decree, that every man that shall ask a petition of any God or man within thirty days, save of thee, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions? The king answered and said, The thing is true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not. Then answered they and said before the king, That Daniel,*

Here is impudence! But they called Jesus Christ “this fellow.” Why? Daniel was the chief of the presidents, the prime minister of the king, and yet they say, “That Daniel.” Ill-hearts generally have ill-mouths, and what can you expect but ill-words out of ill-mouths?

13. *That Daniel, which is of the children of the captivity of Judah,*

That captive, that slave, that serf — so they seemed to put it, forgetting that he was their master by virtue of his high office.

13-14. *Regardeth not thee, O king, nor the decree that thou hast signed, but maketh his petition three times a day. Then the king, when he heard these words, was sore displeased with himself,*

There was a little conscience left. Calvin does not like the man at all. He says, What right had he to sign a decree hastily, which might take away the lives of the best men in his dominion? And his repentance does not seem to be a repentance of the act, but only of the consequences.

14. *And set his heart on Daniel to deliver him: and he laboured till the going down of the sun to deliver him.*

Here was a great king, made himself out to be a god, and yet he cannot have his own way. When that famous potter, who was a true Christian, was brought before the king, the king said to him, "Unless you change your views, I shall be compelled to have you burned." "Ah!" said Bernard de Palissy, "you are a king, and yet say, 'I shall be compelled,' and I am a poor potter, but no man can make me use those words; I will be compelled to do nothing against my conscience." Oh! the holy bravery of men who are saved! When Bonner had one of the martyrs before him, he said, "I will convince you; a blazing faggot will convince you." "A fig for your faggot," said the man, "or a wagon-load of them; I can stand and burn better than you can wear your miter." So the saints of God are strong, and can bid defiance to the adversary through divine grace.

15. *Then these men assembled unto the king, and said unto the king, Know, O king, that the law of the Medes and Persians is, That no decree nor statute which the king establisheth may be changed.*

This is the reason of his deliverance, not his innocency, but his faith; we are told by Paul that it was faith that shut the mouths of lions.

16-24. *Then the king commanded, and they brought Daniel, and cast him into the den of lions. Now the king spake and said unto Daniel, Thy God, whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee. And a stone was brought, and laid upon the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it with his own signet, and with the signet of his lords; that the purpose might not be changed concerning Daniel. Then the king went to his palace, and passed the night fasting: neither were instruments of music brought before him: and his sleep went from him. Then the king arose very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of lions. And when he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel: and the king spake and said to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions? Then said Daniel unto the king, O king, live for ever. My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt. Then was the king exceeding glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his*

God. And the king commanded, and they brought those men which had accused Daniel, and they cast them into the den of lions, them, their children, and their wives;

Which was a piece of injustice, the throwing in of their wives and children, though we cannot say as much of the throwing of them in.

24. And the lions had the mastery of them, and brake all their bones in pieces or ever they came at the bottom of the den.

DANIEL 9:1-11

1, 2. In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes, which was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans; In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem.

Daniel was himself a prophet, but he studied the inspired prophecies of Jeremiah. If such a man need read Scripture, how much more ought we! Whatever light we may suppose to dwell within us, we shall do well to walk by the mere sure word of prophecy.

3-5. And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes: And I prayed unto the LORD my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments; We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments:

Daniel certainly had rebelled less than any of his countrymen, and yet he is the first to make confession on their behalf. So, my brethren, when we have confessed our own sins, and have found mercy, then we should begin to be intercessors for others. We should make confession for the sins of our families, for the sins of our city, for the sins of our country. If no longer need we plead for salvation for ourselves because we have obtained it, let us give the full force of our prayers for the benefit of others.

6. *Neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets, which spake in thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land.*

It greatly increases sin when we sin against warnings sent from God. Daniel confesses this.

7-9. *O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day; to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and unto all Israel, that are near, and that are far off, through all the countries whither thou hast driven them, because of their trespass that they have trespassed against thee. O Lord, to us belongeth confusion of face, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against thee. To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him;*

What a gracious verse that is! Surely it might be printed in letters of gold, and every trembling, penitent sinner might look at it till at last beams of light should dart into the darkness of his despair.

10, 11. *Neither have we obeyed the voice of the LORD our God, to walk in his ways, which he set before us by his servants the prophets. Yea, all Israel have transgressed thy law, even by departing, that they might not obey thy voice; therefore the curse is poured upon us, and the oath that is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, because we have sinned against him.*

DANIEL 9:1-13

1, 2. *In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes, which was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans; In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem.*

And, therefore, discovering that the end of the captivity had nearly come, he set himself to plead mightily with God that now he would turn the hand of his love upon the destroyed and desolate city of Jerusalem. Notice that Daniel recollected the exact date when the captivity was to end; and when you and I have had a term put to any trial or chastisement from God, we ought to remember it, and record it among our special memoranda. I am afraid it is not always so. We

do not forget when a great sorrow overtook us; we can, probably, recollect when some dear one died; we remember the very day of the week and month when that happened; but are we equally tenacious of the memory of God's lovingkindness? I am afraid not; yet it should be so. We should be able to write about it as definitely as Daniel did when he said, "In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes;" and then mention the time when we had some peculiarly choice communion with God, or when we were led to cry out in more than usually earnest prayer, or when we had a specially gracious answer from our God.

3. *And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes;*

"I set my face unto the Lord God." This expression is full of meaning. When men resolutely set their faces to prayer, bending their whole mind that way, seeking God, with their faces towards him, not in pretense, but in deep and solemn earnestness, then it is that they succeed with their supplication. Daniel speaks of "prayer and supplications," by which we may understand that he prayed much amid prayed often, setting apart a regular and considerable portion of his time for the holy exercise. He was a very busy man, for he was the first of the presidents over the hundred and twenty princes; yet, for all that, or because of that, he would have his time for communion with God; and he was wise in so acting, for any portion of our time that is stolen from prayer is also stolen from ourselves. The old saying is true, "Prayer and provender hinder no man's journey."

4. *And I prayed unto the LORD my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments;*

You must have noticed how, in prayer, holy men of old were wont to vary the names of God. Here, we find Daniel addressing him as "the great and dreadful God;" but that title was not chosen at haphazard, for the prophet felt that, as Jerusalem had remained so long a desolation, the terrible aspect of God's character was more conspicuous even than the tender one; yet he coupled with it that gracious truth, "keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments."

5, 6. *We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments: Neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets, which spake in thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land.*

Daniel confesses the sins of the nation, and he spares no proper epithets in describing them: "We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled." He saw at least a shade of different meaning in each word that he employed. These are not vain repetitions; Daniel multiplied his expressions because he had an intense sense of the sinfulness of sin and the guilt of his people. Observe, too, how he notes the aggravation of their sin in their refusal to listen to the messages which God had sent to them by his servants. If there is anything in the world that can make sin to be more than ordinarily sinful, it is when sin is persisted in notwithstanding the manifest warnings of God.

7. *O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day; to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and unto all Israel, that are near, and that are far off, through all the countries whither thou hast driven them, because of their trespass that they have trespassed against thee.*

This verse might be just as truly spoken now as in the first year of Darius, the Mede, for we also can say, "O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee;"-we cannot find it anywhere else; and the other part of the verse is equally true, for unto us belongs confusion of faces, as it did to the men of Daniel's day.

8, 9. *O Lord, to us belongeth confusion of face, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against thee. To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him;*

What a precious assurance this is! Just in proportion to your sense of sin, will you value it. If you feel that confusion of face belongs to you, you will also rejoice to know that mercies and forgivenesses belong to the Lord, and that he is waiting to bestow them upon all who seek his face in penitence and faith.

10, 11. *Neither have we obeyed the voice of the LORD our God, to walk in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets. Yea, all Israel have transgressed thy law, even by*

departing, that they might not obey thy voice; therefore the curse is poured upon us, and the oath that is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, because we have sinned against him.

It was a part of that old covenant that, if they sinned against the Lord, they should be scattered among all the peoples of the earth, and their sufferings exactly tallied with what God had threatened. This fact is used by the prophet in some measure as a source of consolation, for he argues that, if God is true to the black side of the covenant, he will also be faithful to the bright side of it; and it is so, he who faithfully fulfils his threatenings will just as faithfully keep his promises.

12, 13. *And he hath confirmed his words, which he spoke against us, and against our judges that judged us, by bringing upon us a great evil: for under the whole heaven hath not been done as hath been done upon Jerusalem. As it is written in the law of Moses, all this evil is come upon us: yet made we not our prayer before the LORD our God, that we might turn from our iniquities, and understand thy truth.*

Oh, sad hardness of heart and impenitence that, though Jerusalem had been so sorely smitten, yet the people turned not unto God in prayer!

DANIEL 9:14-23

14-21. *Therefore hath the LORD watched upon the evil, and brought it upon us: for the LORD our God is righteous in all his works which he doeth; for we obeyed not his voice. And now, O Lord our God, that hast brought thy people forth out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and hast gotten thee renown, as at this day; we have sinned, we have done wickedly. O Lord, according to all thy righteousness, I beseech thee, let thine anger and thy fury be turned away from thy city Jerusalem, thy holy mountain: because for our sins and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and thy people are become a reproach to all that are about us. Now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of thy servant, and his supplications, and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake. O my God, incline thine ear, and hear; open thine eyes, and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by thy name: for we do not present our supplications*

before thee for our righteousnesses, but for thy great mercies. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God: for thy city and thy people are called by thy name. And whiles I was speaking, and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the LORD my God for the holy mountain of my God; Yea, whiles I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation.

That is the time when prayer is always heard, when the lamb is offered, and his blood is sprinkled, and blessed be God, the sacrifice in which we trust has been offered once for all. The Christ, who has gone into heaven as a lamb that had been slain, has, by his one offering, made perpetual oblation unto the Most High on our behalf. So pray when we will, we may expect an answer. See how quick it was in Daniel's case: "Whiles I was speaking in prayer," the angel Gabriel, in the form of a man, appeared unto him, and brought him the answer to his petition.

22, 23. *And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding. At the beginning of thy supplications the commandant came forth, and I am come to shew thee; for thou are greatly beloved: therefore understand the matter, and consider the vision.*

And then he told him of the Messiah who was coming, of all that would happen to him, of the week of respite, and then of the final consummation when God would permit the foreign prince to come and destroy the city and the sanctuary, and to pour upon them the desolations which he had determined to inflict upon them.

HOSEA

HOSEA 2:5-23

In this chapter God compares Israel to a woman who had been unfaithful to her husband in the very worst and most wicked manner.

5. For their mother hath played the harlot: she that conceived them hath done shamefully: for she said, I will go after my lovers, that give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, mine oil and my drink.

She attributed to false gods the gifts which God had given to her. This was great ingratitude to God, and a high insult to his holy majesty.

6. Therefore, behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths.

That is what God does to sinners whom he means to save. He will not let them take their own course. He gives them thorny trials which hedge up their way. He puts an obstacle in their path, perhaps some sickness or poverty. When men are desperate in wickedness, God has a way of stopping them. Even in their mad career, his mighty grace comes in, and says, "So far shalt thou go, but no further."

7. And she shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them:

Thus sinners go after the pleasures of the world, and the pleasures run away from them. They make one thing their god, and then another; and they put out all their strength to attain the object of their ambition; and God thwarts them. In infinite love, he baffles all their endeavors because he means to bring them to himself.

7. Then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now.

That is what he brings us to; weary of the world, ay, weary of life itself, We get worn out in the ways of evil, and then we say, "I will go to God." What a blessed conclusion to come to! However terrible the whip with which he scourges us, it does us good. The

fierce billow that washes the mariner upon the rock of safety, is a blessing to him.

8, 9. *For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal. Therefore will I return, and take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof, and will recover my wool and my flax given to cover her nakedness.*

God claims the blessings of providence as his own; and when he sees his people misuse them, he says, "I will recover them. She is giving them to Baal. She is using them for an evil purpose; I will take them away."

10, 11. *And now will I discover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers, and none shall deliver her out of mine hand. I will also cause all her mirth to cease, her feast days, her new moons, and her sabbaths, and all her solemn feasts.*

When God deals with men, he uses no half measures. If they have been very happy in the ways of sin, and he intends to save them from their evil courses; he will take away all their joy. They shall henceforth have none of the merriment in which they indulged. He will give them better happiness by-and-by; but for the time being it shall be true, "I will cause all her mirth to cease."

12. *And I will destroy her vines and her fig trees, whereof she hath said, These are my rewards that my lovers have given me: and I will make them a forest, and the beasts of the field shall eat them.*

Her most precious things shall be destroyed; or, if they are allowed to exist, they shall become a cause of fear and trouble. Oh, how often have I seen this verified in the experience of men and women whom God has saved by his almighty grace!

13. *And I will visit upon her the days of Baalim, wherein she burned incense to them, and she decked herself with her earrings and her jewels, and she went after her lovers, and forgot me, saith the LORD.*

They burnt no incense at Jerusalem; they refused to offer sacrifice there; but they went to this hill and to that, to worship the different images of Baal, and said, "These are our gods." Therefore, God says that he will make them sick of their idolatry. They shall grow tired of thus polluting his holy name, and degrading themselves by worshipping things made of wood and stone.

14. *Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her.*

Oh, glorious verse! She that went so far astray, God will come, and draw her back from the path of sin. He will get her alone; he will bring her into a place of grief and sorrow, a wilderness; and then he will come near, and speak sweet words of comfort into her ear. "I will allure her," as the bird-catchers whistle to the birds, and draw them to the net, so will I allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, the place of loneliness, the place of want; and "I will speak to her heart," so the Hebrew has it, for God knows how to speak, not only into the ear, but into the heart.

15. *And I will give her her vineyards from thence,*

He will give back what he took away. He will seal with lovingkindness the real kindness which made him deal roughly with her at first.

15. *And the valley of Achor for a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt.*

Oh, backslider, God can give you back your early joy, your early love, ay, and your early purity; and he can make you sing as at the beginning! Wherefore, be of good comfort, and come to your Lord; come even now, with all your sins about you, and he will receive you.

16. *And it shall be at that day, saith the LORD, that thou shalt call me Ishi; and shalt call me no more Baali.*

"Baali" means "my lord" in the sense of domination; but God will not seem to us any more like a domineering governor, as we once thought him; but we shall call him "Ishi", "my husband." There shall be such nearness of love, such confidence of hope, between the restored soul and her God, that she shall call him no more Baali, but Ishi.

17. *For I will take away the names of Baalim out of her mouth, and they shall no more be remembered by their name.*

Oh, the love of God! He does not want us to recollect our old ways. I do not like to hear people talk about their old habits, except they do it very tenderly, with many a tear and many a sigh, and tell the story to the praise and glory of divine grace. God takes the old

names out of our lips; we forget them, we have done with them, we bury the dead past, and we live in newness of life.

18. *And in that day will I make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven, and with the creeping things of the ground:*

So that the insects should not devour the crops, and the foxes should not spoil the vines, and the birds should not steal the seeds, so will God take care of his people still. It does seem that, when we once get right with God, we get right with everything; when we are at peace with him, then neither beast, nor fowl, nor creeping thing can do us harm.

18. *And I will break the bow and the sword and the battle out of the earth, and will make them to lie down safely.*

They had been much troubled by war. It had killed their children, destroyed their homes, and made them poor and wretched. Now God says, "I will break the bow and the sword and the battle." How often God gives a heavenly calm to us when we are once washed in the blood of Christ, and covered with his righteousness! I remember how the storm within my heart was hushed into a deep calm as soon as I had seen my Lord, and had yielded my heart to him. Oh, you that are in storms tonight, I pray that God may bring you to himself, and give you "peace, perfect peace!" And then what more will the Lord do?

19. *And I will betroth thee unto me for ever;*

What, this woman that had gone so far into evil? Can a man receive such an one back? No; but God can. He says there shall be a new betrothal, a new marriage: "I will betroth thee unto me for ever." Blessed word!

19, 20. *Yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the LORD.*

Thou shalt know Jehovah; thou shalt know that there is none like him, passing by iniquity, transgression, and sin; and faithful to his people even when they are unfaithful to him. Is there any god like our God? Have you ever tasted his grace? Do you know his pardoning love? Have you ever been brought back to him? Have you been restored to his favor? Then I am sure you can say, "There is none like unto Jehovah."

21, 22. *And it shall come to pass in that day, I will hear, saith the LORD, I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth; and the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil; and they shall hear Jezreel.*

God would send rain when it was wanted. He would be all ear to hear on behalf of his people. He would not only hear them, but hear the very earth they tilled, and the heavens above their heads, as if nature itself began to pray when the child of God learned that holy art.

23. *And I will sow her unto me in the earth;*

He would make the people to be like the seed which he himself would sow, and cause to spring up, and abide.

23. *And I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy;*

I would like to read that again. Somebody has, perhaps, come in here tonight, who has never obtained mercy. Perhaps you have been seeking it, and you have not found it. Hear God's promise, and lay hold upon it: "I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy."

23. *And I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God.*

See, it is all in "shalls" and "wills." God is speaking, God omnipotent, omnipotent over men's hearts. He is not saying, "I will if they will," but "I will, and they shall," for he hath the key of free agency; and when he turns it in the lock, without violating the free will of man, he makes him willing in the day of his power to the praise of his divine supremacy, for God is God when he saves as much as when he reigns; yes, his reigning grace is the very glory of his nature, and this we love and adore. Grant us a taste of it! Amen.

HOSEA 2:6-23

6. *Therefore, behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths.*

God will cause sin to be painful; he will make the way of it difficult; he will do everything to prevent the sinner running in it: "She shall not find her paths."

7. *And she shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them;*

They cannot find satisfaction in sinful pleasure; that which once they easily obtained, they shall no longer be able to procure.

7. And she shall seek them, but shall not find them: then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now.

Am I addressing a backslider? Has God hedged up your way? Is there a whisper in your heart which reminds you of better days and happier times? Oh, stifle not that whisper! Let it be heard within your spirit; if it be but a gentle voice, listen to it till it increases in force, and sounds like the very voice of God in your soul; it will be for your present and eternal good if you do so.

8. For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal.

It is a sad sin when we take God's mercies, and use them in rebellion against him. Just think of it, — the very gifts which Jehovah gave to these people, they presented in sacrifice to Baal; and there are men, who are in comfortable circumstances, who spend their wealth for sin. They have health and strength, and they use them in the service of their own evil passions. The very gifts with which God has enriched them become weights to sink them deeper and deeper in the gulf of transgression. Ah, this is terrible! God has often brought men down to poverty, to sickness, to death's door, in order that they might be weaned from their sin. He saw that they were going to hell full-handed, and he judged it better that they should go to heaven empty-handed. He knew that, if they had health, they would misuse it, so he stretched them on the bed of sickness, that they might turn to him. God has severe remedies for desperate cases; he will do all that mercy and wisdom can suggest to prevent men from being their own destroyers.

9-11. Therefore will I return, and take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof, and will recover my wool and my flax given to cover her nakedness. And now will I discover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers, and none shall deliver her out of mine hand. I will also cause all her mirth to cease, her feast days, her new moons, and her sabbaths, and all her solemn feasts.

There is no more merriment now; the old songs have lost their sweetness, and the old games have lost their charm.

12. *And I will destroy her vines and her fig trees, whereof she hath said, These are my rewards that my lovers have given me: and I will make them a forest, and the beasts of the field shall eat them.*

So that the joys of sin shall become miseries, as if vineyards were suddenly trained into dense forests wherein lions and wolves might make their lairs. There are some people who can understand this in a spiritual sense; some, perhaps, who have been made to realize it in their own experience.

13. *And I will visit upon her the days of Baalim, wherein she burned incense to them, and she decked herself with her earrings and her jewels, and she went after her lovers, and forgat me, saith the LORD.*

It is terrible when God comes to visit upon men the days of their sin,—when for every night of sin they shall have a night of anguish. — when for every pleasure that they took in sin they shall feel the scourge of conscience till they have measured out the weary round. “She went after her lovers, and forgat me, saith the Lord.” This was said by him who never forgot her, by him whose love was true and faithful to her when she thus went away from him, and defiled herself and dishonoured his holy name. Now read the next verse; and be astonished, —

14. *Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her.*

You might have thought the Lord was going to say, “Therefore, behold, I will destroy her.” Nothing of the kind: “I will fascinate her to myself; I will draw her away from all her idol lovers, and I will speak comfortably unto her.”

15. *And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt.*

“I will pluck this Israel of mine out of all her sin; I will give her back the purity and the happiness of her early days: ‘She shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt.’” You must have noticed how often God speaks of that coming out of Egypt. He says, in another place, “I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness.” Here the

Lord promises to give back to Israel the joy she had when she was young, and espoused herself to her God.

16. *And it shall be at that day, saith the LORD, that thou shalt call me Ishi; and shalt call me no more Baali.*

“Thou shalt call me, My man, my husband,” — a name of sweet endearment, “and shalt call me no more Baali,” that is, “my lord, my lordly husband,” for the Lord’s love shall not be galling to thee, but it shall sweetly and gently rule thee. Oh, what a sweet change this is, when we no longer tremble before God with slavish fear, but love him with intense affection, and see in him our soul’s Husband in whom is all our delight!

17. *For I will take away the names of Baalim out of her mouth, and they shall no more be remembered by their name.*

The word Baalim had been profaned, they had applied it to other lords; and when they used it concerning Jehovah, it sounded harsh, as if he, too, was a tyrant master.

18. *And in that day will I make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven, and with the creeping things of the ground:*

Everything is in covenant with me if I am in covenant with God; there is nothing so high that it can hurt me, there is nothing so low that it can injure me, there is nothing so great that it need distress me, there is nothing so little that it shall torment me.

18. *And I will break the bow and the sword and the battle out of the earth, and will make them to lie down safely.*

Oh, the security of God’s people when they get into their right position towards God!

19. *And I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies.*

What a glorious promise is this! It is marvellous that our wayward, wanton, wicked souls should be brought back by infinite mercy, and then that God should be so enamoured of us as to declare, “I will betroth thee unto me for ever.”

20. *I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the LORD.*

It is said three times that he will betroth us unto himself, as if the Lord knew that we should hardly be able to believe it.

21. 22. *And it shall come to pass in that day, I will hear, saith the LORD, I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth; And the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil and they shall hear Jezreel.*

So that there shall be no famine to try God's people; their prayers shall be abundantly answered, and all their needs shall be supplied.

23. *And I will sow her unto me in the earth; and I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God.*

Oh, blessed Scripture! May the Lord write it on all our hearts! Amen.

HOSEA 2:14-15

You remember that, a fortnight ago, we read the second chapter of the prophecy of Hosea, and I preached from the fourteenth verse. I am going to continue that subject tonight, so we will read two verses of the same chapter over again. I am sure we shall never exhaust it, and you will not be weary of hearing it. We will begin with the text from which I then spoke to you.

14, 15. *Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt.*

Now I want you to hear how she did sing in the days of her youth, in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt. Turn to the fifteenth chapter of the Book of Exodus, where we have the joyful song of the emancipated chosen nation.

This exposition consisted of readings from HOSEA 2:14-15; AND EXODUS 15:1-21.

HOSEA 10:1-6

1. *Israel is an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit unto himself:*

Not to his God. It matters not how much fruit we bear — if it is for self, we are really fruitless. A thing which is good in itself may lose all its goodness because stained with a selfish motive. We are to live unto God; and we must always be watchful about this;

otherwise we may be doing much, and doing nothing. "Israel is an empty vine. He bringeth forth fruit unto himself."

1. According to the multitude of his fruit he hath increased the altars; according to the goodness of his land they have made goodly images.

It is a very sad thing when, the more men received from God, the more they sin. But just in proportion as the land of Israel was fat and fertile, in that proportion did they set up altars unto false gods, and provoke the true God, who had given them these mercies. It is an ill thing when men grow rich, and offer sacrifice to their own vanity — when men gather learning, and only use it to debate with against the simple teachings of God — when just as God blesses, men cease to bless him!

2. Their heart is divided; now shall they be found faulty:

A half-heart is no heart at all; and when men seem to go after God, and at the same time to go after their idols, they are not going after God. Their religion is vain. The good side is but a pretense; the evil side is the real thing.

2. He shall break down their altars, he shall spoil their images.

Let us take heed then, dear friends, that we make nothing into an idol. The shortest way to lose the dearest object of your affections is to make an idol of him. "He shall break down their altars. He shall spoil their images." Sometimes this is done in great mercy to God's people, for there is no greater evil than for a heart to be happy in idolatry. Sometimes it is done in judgment upon the ungodly. They will not have the true God, and the false god shall be false to them. "He shall break down their altars, he shall spoil their images."

3. For now they shall say, We have no king, because we feared not the LORD; what then should a king do to us?

Their king was slain, but if he had lived, what would be the good of him without God? What is the good of any temporal blessing if God be not in it? It is the husk with the kernel gone; and if we are able to enjoy the husk, it looks as if we were swine, and swine are being fattened for the slaughter.

What is the use of anything that we possess to us if God be divorced from it? I put the question again. If you are a true child of God, all the corn and wine in the world cannot feed you. Your bread must come from heaven.

4. *They have spoken words,*

That which they spoke was not truth. We cannot speak without words, but it is an evil thing when our speech is nothing but words. Words, words, words! — no heart, no truth. “They have spoken words.”

4. *Swearing falsely in making a covenant: thus judgment springeth up as hemlock in the furrows of the field.*

God keep us from untruthfulness, and especially from a want of truth towards himself. Do not you think that oftentimes, both in prayer and praise, it might be said, “They have spoken words — nothing more”? There has been a falsehood in the most solemn transaction towards God.

Woe unto you, dear friends, if that should turn out to be the case. Ye may cheat your fellow men if ye have a heart for it, but you never will be able to cheat your God. He is not mocked. “They have spoken words,” says he.

5. *The inhabitants of Samaria shall fear because of the calves of Bethaven:*

Why, those calves are their trust. They rely upon those images of false gods — those images which they set up in the place of the true God. Pretending thereby to worship him, they trusted in these; and now they shall become their fear. He who will have a confidence apart from God will find his confidence soured into a fear before long. Your greatest ground of distress will be that which was once the ground of your reliance apart from God.

5, 6. *For the people thereof shall mourn over it. and the priests thereof that rejoiced on it, for the glory thereof, because it is departed from it. It shall be also carried unto Assyria for a present to king Jareb:*

The spiteful king.

6. *Ephraim shall receive shame, and Israel shall be ashamed of his own counsel.*

These golden calves excited the desires of the king of Assyria, and he took them away. These gods were baits, to their enemies, instead of basis for their confidence. They were carried away captive of the people with them — their god captive — their god melted down to make images, or to make money for the king of Assyria! Ah! what shame did God pour upon idolaters! And what

shame he will pour upon us if we have any confidence except the unseen God, and if we rely anywhere but upon the eternal covenant of his immutable grace. Oh! brothers and sisters, let us try to flee away from that which is so tempting to sense — confidence in an arm of flesh, and let our sole and alone trust be in him that made the heavens and the earth, and in his Son, Jesus Christ.

HOSEA 11

1. *When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt.*

God's love was very early love. He began with the nation of Israel when it was a mere handful of men in Egypt. There he multiplied them; and, in due time, he called them out from among the heathen. God's love to some of us manifested itself at a very early period of our lives, when we were yet children. It is among our most joyous memories that we have known the Lord from our youth up. Happy man, happy woman, of whom God can say, as he said concerning his ancient people, "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt."

2. *As they called them, so they went from them: they sacrificed unto Baalim, and burned incense to graven images.*

The nation of Israel did not fulfill the promise of its youth; it was not faithful to God. The people heard from the lips of Moses the command "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord;" yet they turned aside continually to the idols of the nations. Have not some of us also, although we have been loved by God, been faithless to him? Can we not look back, with great regret and sorrow, upon our many stumblings and backslidings? If it be so, let us repent of our sin, and never repeat it.

3. *I taught Ephraim also to go, —*

Just as nurses teach children to walk: "I taught Ephraim also to go," —

3. *Taking them by their arms; but they knew not that I healed them.*

God has done great things for many of us who, possibly, have never noticed his hand at work on our behalf. Lives which were in great peril have been saved, yet the goodness of God has never been acknowledged by those whom he has delivered. Men have been raised up from beds of sickness, yet the great and good Healer has

never been thanked for what he has done for them. Oh, how sad it is that God should do too much for us, and yet that we should not even thank him for doing it.

4. I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love: and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat unto them.

As men do with the bullocks that have been ploughing, lifting the yoke from them, and giving them rest and food before they have to begin ploughing again. So did God to Israel, and so has he done to us. He lifted from us the heavy burden of our sin, and he gave us rest and heavenly food. But oh, what a poor return we have made for all the thoughtful kindness of our God! If any man here imagines that he can boast of his conduct towards his God, he does not feel as I do. Rather dear friends, I think that we all ought to humble ourselves in the Lord's presence when we remember what ill returns we have made for all that he has done for us.

5, 6. He shall not return into the land of Egypt, but the Assyrian shall be his king, because they refused to return. And the sword shall abide on his cities, and shall consume his branches, and devour them, because of their own counsels.

If men will sin, they shall suffer; and God's people will be the first to suffer for their sins against the Lord, as he said by the mouth of the prophet Amos, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." If a man lets other men's children go unchastened, he will chastise his own children, if he is worthy of the name of a father; and God will do the same. He will not destroy us, but he will chasten us if we backslide from him.

7, 8. And my people are bent to backsliding from me: though they called them to the Most High, none at all would exalt him. How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel?

There seems to be a contest in the heart of God; at least, that is how he describes it himself, as though mercy pleaded with justice, and love contended with wrath: "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel?"

8. How shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim?

“I cannot destroy thee, as I destroyed the guilty cities of the plain in the days of old.”

8. *Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together.*

O backsliders, if God’s repentings are kindled, will not yours also be kindled? If you have left him, and yet he will not give you up, Will you give him up? Will you not return to him? Listen to his own words: —

9. *I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man; —*

What a mercy this is for us! If the Lord had been man, he would have cast us off long ago; but, as he is God he is infinitely patient, and he loves to forgive: “I am God, and not man;” —

9, 10. *The Holy One in the midst of thee: and I will not enter into the city. They shall walk after the LORD:*

See what his almighty grace will do to make these wanderers come back to him.

10. *He shall roar like a lion: when he shall roar, then the children shall tremble from the west.*

Even his roaring like a lion will only make them tremblingly come back to him.

11, 12. *They shall tremble as a bird out of Egypt, and as a dove out of the land of Assyria: and I will place them in their houses, saith the LORD. Ephraim compasseth me about with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit: but Judah yet ruleth with God, and is faithful with the saints.*

This exposition consisted of readings from HOSEA 11, AND 14.

HOSEA 11

1. *When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt.*

God remembers what he did for us when we were young; and sin against him is much aggravated by his long kindness to us. He brings this up against his rebellious people, “When Israel was a child, then I loved him.” Some of you may remember your childhood with deep regret — when you used to sing your hymn, and bow your knees on your mother’s lap. Times have greatly changed since then, but God remembers them.

2. As they called them, so they went from them: they sacrificed unto Baalim, and burned incense to graven images.

These people only had to be called away, and away they went. There are some of that sort. You have only to beckon them anywhere. Like a dog that is whistled to, they will follow anybody's call. They leave God for anything, for nothing. These people went and forgot the true God, and burnt incense to graven images.

3. I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms; but they knew not that I healed them.

God describes himself as acting like a nurse that holds a child up by its arms and teaches it its first steps. Yet they did not know what God was doing for them. God has done great things for many of us, and perhaps we have never recognized his command. Years of mercy, and yet never a day of gratitude. It is sad that it should be so.

4. I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love: and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat unto them.

As the good husbandman, when the oxen come to the end of the field, takes off the yoke and puts on the noseband, so has God often done with us in the day of our trouble. He has unyoked us, and he has relieved our wants, and fed us. Yet we have forgotten him.

5, 6. He shall not return into the land of Egypt, but the Assyrian shall be his king, because they refused to return. And the sword shall abide on his cities, and shall consume his branches, and devour them, because of their own counsels.

When men will have their own way, God sometimes lets them have their way, and that turns out to be the most unhappy thing that can be. They make a rod for their own backs. They pile the faggots for their own burning. It is a great pity that it should be so, but often and often have we seen it.

7. And my people are bent to backsliding from me: though they called them to the most High, none at all would exalt him.

There is a propensity in the human heart to go away from God — even in the hearts of God's own people. Oh! how sad it is that, though often called to God by the voice of Providence, and by the call of his Word, yet none at all would exalt him!

8. How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as

Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together.

God represents himself as holding a controversy within himself, “These people I must punish. These people I love. I shall have to give them up. I cannot give them up.” Justice debating with mercy, and mercy triumphant over justice.

9. *I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst of thee. and I will not enter into the city.*

Remember that when God entered into Sodom and saw its sin, then he destroyed it; but he determines to have pity upon Samaria, and not to enter into it lest, seeing it, he should feel compelled to destroy it.

10. *They shall walk after the LORD: he shall roar like a lion:*

If God can make his people follow him when he roars like a lion, how we ought to follow him. who is the Lamb of God, that takes our sins upon him!

10. *When he shall roar, then the children shall tremble from the west.*

When God puts on the lion’s form, and his grave, majestic voice is heard,

full of thundering threatenings, then men are constrained and tremble.

11. *They shall tremble as a bird out of Egypt, and as a dove out of the land of Assyria:*

They shall come on hasty wings, trembling along, to find a shelter.

11, 12. *And I will place them in their houses, saith the LORD. Ephraim compasseth me about with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit:*

It is a dreadful thing when men go to God and, as it were, make a ring round about him, and compass him about with falsehood and with lies. Many profess to worship God when they are not worshipping at all. Their bodies are in the assembly of the saints, but their minds are far away.

12. *But Judah yet ruleth with God, and is faithful with the saints.*

And it was to the honour of Judah that it was so. When others are false, then is the time for God’s servants to be true. If you held

your tongue before, speak out for truth and God in the day when God is compassed about with deceit.

HOSEA 11

1. *When Israel was a child,*

When the nation was yet young, and had scarcely started on its march among the peoples of the earth: “When Israel was a child,”

1. *Then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt.*

God’s love does not depend upon the standard of our spiritual attainments. While we are yet children in grace, the Father’s love is set upon us, as it was upon Israel in its beginnings as a nation.

2. *As they called them, so they went from them;*

Such was the perversity of this child-nation, whom nevertheless God loved that though galled by Jehovah, he went away, and refused to obey the divine call. The Israelites in Egypt “hearkened not unto Moses for anguish of spirit, and for cruel bondage;” and, even after their great deliverance, they were constantly turning aside from the path pointed out by Moses, who bade them be faithful to their God.

2. *They sacrificed unto Baalim, —*

They offered sacrifice to many Baals, first to one and then to another, for men will readily change their idols when they know not the true God.

2, 3. *And burned incense to graven images. I taught Ephraim also to go, —*

This child-nation was taught by God how to walk; —

3. *Taking them by their arms;*

As nurses hold up their little children when for the first time they try to stand or toddle along.

3. *But they knew not that I healed them.*

This was a singular thing, and it shows the great blindness of man, that he does not know his own Physician. It was so with Israel: “They knew not that I healed them.” Surely, brethren, it seems impossible that we should not know our Divine Healer; yet our blindness is extreme by nature, and leads to many a folly.

4. I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love: and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat unto them.

As men do to their cattle when they have been ploughing, and they come to the end of the day's work, then the bit is removed, or the yoke is lifted off the shoulder, and fit fodder is provided for the cattle that they may be refreshed. This is what God did to his people Israel; he brought them out of Egypt, where they had to perform hard tasks, caused them to rest from their labours, and gave them both material and spiritual meat to eat; yet nevertheless they were ungrateful to him. We say that ingratitude is the worst of sins; but, alas, it is one of the commonest of evils, and we ourselves are ingrates to our God.

5. He shall not return into the land of Egypt, but the Assyrian shall be his king, because they refused to return.

If we try to escape from our trouble without hearing the voice of God in it we shall run into another; if, by our own plotting and scheming, we escape from Egypt, then the Assyrian shall be our king, and there is small choice between Assyria and Egypt. It is always best to take with submission the sorrow that God appoints, lest, by fleeing from the bear the serpent bite us, and so we go from bad to worse.

6. And the word shall abide on his cities, and shall consume his branches, and devour them, because of their own counsels.

That is a very striking expression, "Because of their own counsels." It should be a solemn warning to us not to follow the devices of our own heart when we see the consequences of Israel's walking after his own way.

7. And my people are bent to backsliding from me:

They seemed as if they must do it, as if their hearts were set upon it; they were "bent" upon it. Oh, that our bent and bias were towards holiness, and not towards backsliding!

7. Though they called them to the most High, none at all would exalt him.

See how Israel puts God away, and will not hear Jehovah's voice. Now observe the change in the chapter, for God speaks of his faithfulness even to backsliding Israel. He does not give his people up, and he still yearns over them in tenderest pity and forbearance.

8. *How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together.*

And this divine turning and repenting, remember, were toward a people who did not turn to the Lord. God turned towards a people that would not turn towards him, and his repentings were “kindled together” towards the nation that would not repent. Oh, the unspeakable, the unthinkable grace of God! He doeth for us “exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think.”

9. *I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man;*

Our hope lies in the fact that God is God. Sometimes, that truth is a terror to men; they are distressed at the thought of the great and holy God, yet in this truth is their only hope of salvation. The Lord says, “I will not return to destroy Ephraim, for I am God, and not man.”

9. *The Holy One in the midst of thee: and I will not enter into the city.*

That is, the Lord says, “I will not come into it to see all its iniquities, lest in my wrath I smite and destroy it.” How tenderly doth God bear with wicked men! How great is his long-suffering! How graciously he seems to close his eyes, as if he would not see that which must bring upon us swift destruction if he looked upon it in his righteous anger!

10. *They shall walk after the LORD:*

It is a great blessing when men begin to seek the Lord whom they formerly shunned. This proves that there has been wrought in them a complete change of heart.

10. *He shall roar like a lion: when he shall roar, then the children shall tremble from the west.*

God’s terrible voice often makes men tremble, and that is one proof of the working of his grace in their hearts, for they tremble before him, and flee unto him.

11, 12. *They shall tremble as a bird out of Egypt, and as a dove out of the land of Assyria: and I will place them in their houses, saith the LORD. Ephraim compasseth me about with lies, and the house*

of Israel with deceit: but Judah yet ruleth with God, and is faithful with the saints.

There are still some left to serve Jehovah; there is a remnant according to the election of grace even in the very worst of times. “Judah yet ruleth with God, and is faithful with the saints.” May we be found among the faithful few! Amen.

HOSEA 13:1-9

Hosea was full of complaints against the people of God; for, in his day, they had very sadly wandered from the Lord. They had even forgotten him. In Hosea’s prophecy, we have the plaintive voice of a loving God chiding his backsliding children.

1. When Ephraim spake trembling, he exalted himself in Israel; but when he offended in Baal, he died.

A modest, humble, trembling heart is often by far the sounder heart, but when we begin to sin, and to sin boastfully, and to wrap ourselves about with the robe of self-complacency, then is death very near to us: “When Ephraim spake trembling, he exalted himself in Israel; but when he offended in Baal, he died.”

2. And now they sin more and more, and have made them molten images of their silver, and idols according to their own understanding, all of it the word of the craftsmen: they say of them, Let the men that sacrifice kiss the calves.

When Jeroboam became king of the new kingdom of Israel, — in order to prevent his subjects from going to Jerusalem to worship God in Solomon’s temple, — he started two shrines at Dan and Bethel, and there he set up what Holy Scripture calls in derision “calves.” I suppose that his idea was to make images of a bull, the emblem of power, intending them to be the symbol of the Divine Being, and that the people intended still to worship God, but to worship him under the image of a bull. It is the same in Roman Catholicism to this day, — the worship of God, the worship of Christ, by means of crucifixes, and emblems and symbols of various kinds. But when men once begin that kind of idolatry, there is no knowing where they will stop; for the worship of God, through the medium of symbol, soon grows into the worship of other gods saints and saintesses, “blessed virgins” and I know not what besides, are pretty sure to be set up when once people begin to make use of

outward and visible emblems of the Deity. So it was with these ancient Israelites. From worshipping the bull, which was meant to be a type of the omnipotent God, they went on to the worshipping of “molten images of their silver, and idols according to their own understanding.” Brethren, let us take warning from these idolaters, and always keep to the simplicity of worship ordained by God in his Word. However comely and beautiful, or grand and imposing, and, consequently, fascinating, any form of idolatry may be to some minds, let us utterly despise it if it is not according to the mind of God, and the teaching of his spirit, as revealed in his Word.

3. *Therefore they shall be as the morning cloud, and as the early dew that passeth away, as the chaff that is driven with the whirlwind out of the floor, and as the smoke out of the chimney.*

Those who will have gods of their own making shall have but a brief enjoyment of them. He who truly worships the everlasting God shall have an everlasting blessing; but he who worships gods that he has himself made, — mere objects of this mortal day, shall have but a short day of it. He shall be as the early dew, which glistens brightly, but is soon gone; or as the morning cloud, which is banished by the rising of the sun.

4, 5. *Yet I am the LORD thy God from the land of Egypt, and thou shalt know no god but me: for there is no Saviour beside me. I did know thee in the wilderness, in the land of great drought.*

The Israelites drew near to God when they wanted bread and water in the wilderness. God says, “I did know thee in the wilderness, in the land of great drought;” and the Lord might say to his people nowadays, “I did know you when you were very sick, when you were very poor, when you were in great trouble. You sought me then; how is it that you are trying to do without me now?”

6-8. *According to their pasture, so were they filled; they were filled, and their heart was exalted; therefore have they forgotten me. Therefore I will be unto them as a lion: as a leopard by the way will I observe them: I will meet them as a bear that is bereaved of her whelps, and will rend the caul of their heart, and there will I devour them like a lion: the wild beast shall tear them.*

When men forget God, they may expect that they will meet with some terrible judgments; and God’s own people especially will find

this to be the case with them if they forget the Lord. Our God is a very jealous God; and when his children will set their hearts on other objects instead of upon himself, he will take care to embitter those objects of their affection to them. He will make their idols to be loathed by them. If God did not love us very much, he would think little of our faults, but just because he loves us so much, he cannot bear that any part of our heart's affection should go away from himself. So, if he sees that we deal unfaithfully with him, he will make us realize that sin is an exceedingly evil and bitter thing. His anger against us will be like that of a bear that is robbed of her whelps, or of a lion or leopard leaping upon his prey.

9. Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help.

“You have gone away from me, but I will bring you back again. You have destroyed yourself by your sin, but I will restore you to my favor by my grace. You may look within yourself for causes of repentance, but you must not look to yourself for the means of restoration; you must look to me, your Saviour and your God.” So this verse teaches us “O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help.”

HOSEA 13:1-14

1. When Ephraim spake trembling, he exalted himself in Israel;

When we are little in our own esteem, when we are full of fears concerning ourselves, when we dare not think of boasting, then it is that we grow:

“When Ephraim spake trembling, he exalted himself in Israel.”

1. But when he offended in Baal, he died.

It is when, like Ephraim, we turn aside to other gods, when our heart goes astray from the Lord, that there is death-death to our joys, death to our confidence, death to our usefulness. No one knows what destruction there is, even in the least sin, to the most joyful believer. It is like the hot breath of the Sirocco, which scorches up every green thing. If, before this terrible blast, everything is like Eden, behind it all is as a desert. Let us read the whole verse again that we may lay to heart the lesson it teaches us; “When Ephraim spake trembling, he exalted himself in Israel; but when he offended in Baal, he died.”

2. And now they sin more and more,

That is the usual way of sin; it is a growing evil; its course is downhill.

2. And have made there molten images of their silver, and idols according to their own understanding, all of it the work of the craftsmen: they say of them, Let the men that sacrifice kiss the calves.

Their idolatry was such that they were not satisfied with the bulls that were set on high as images, but they had little imitations of these, which they wore upon their persons, just as Romanists wear small crucifixes or crosses. These they carried about with them for their own private worship. Oh, what a tendency there is in sin to multiply itself. The idolaters were not satisfied with bowing the knee to false gods, but they said, "Let the men that sacrifice kiss the calves." Superstition goes from one evil to another, there is no end to it. You may begin with what you call moderate Ritualism, but where you will end I cannot tell. Some go beyond the superstitions of popery itself. The only safe way is to worship the Lord our God, and serve him alone, and purge out the idols from among us.

3. Therefore they shall be as the morning cloud, and as the early dew that passeth away, as the chaff that is driven with the whirlwind out of the floor, and as the smoke out of the chimney.

If they make idols their gods, they shall be like their idols. Idols are but for a day; what is there in them of endurance? What is there in them of power? "They that make them are like unto them, so is every one that trusteth in them." If we trust in anything that we can see, if we trust in anything but God, then our hope shall be "as the morning cloud, and as the early dew that passeth away," and we ourselves shall be like the chaff that is driven from the threshing-floor by a whirlwind, or like the smoke driven out of the chimney by the blast.

4. Yet I am the LORD thy God from the land of Egypt, and thou shalt know no god but me: for there is no saviour beside me.

Now here is the wickedness of idolatry, that we have so good a God, and yet must needs look after another. Here is the sin of trusting to an arm of flesh, that we have an almighty arm to lean upon, and instead of doing so we begin to look to a poor arm that has not strength enough to support itself, much less to support us. Are any of you children of God forgetting your God? Is your faith

turning away from the great invisible, and the sure promises of his Word? Are you looking to the creature? Beware of it, I pray you; whenever you do that, you are making a rod for your own back.

If you forsake the Lord, to whom will you go?

5. *I did know thee in the wilderness, in the land of great drought.*

Look back upon days of your trouble, when God was very near to you; do you not remember when he was everything to you? When you were poor, when you were sick, when you were despised, God did know you then; yet now you sing,-

“What peaceful hours I once enjoyed,
How sweet their memory still!”

6. *According to their pasture, so were they filled; they were filled, and their heart was exalted; therefore have they forgotten me.*

What a terrible verse this is! After they had been filled, they turned away from the God that filled them. When they were poor and despised, then he was all to them; but afterwards, when by his providence they grew rich and increased in goods, then they forgot their God. I have often seen it thus; it is a grievous evil under the sun. I have seen the man rejoicing in God, earnest and devout while he has been afflicted and poor. God has prospered him, and then he has turned his back upon sacred things, and made the world his joy. Is not this a horrible sin, a gross evil? I well remember one, who used to steal into this house on Thursday nights, glad to escape a while from the persecution in his own home. He had a hard time of it to be a Christian at all; but he came to be the possessor of his father's estates, and he has now no care for these things. He is a fashionable gentleman now, he who once was glad enough to mix with even the poorest of God's people, and to find comfort among them. It is a sad thing when it is so, and when the Lord has to say to any, “I did know thee in the wilderness, in the land of great drought. They were filled, and their heart was exalted; therefore have they forgotten me.”

7, 8. *Therefore I will be unto them as a lion: as a leopard by the way will I observe them: I will meet them as a bear that is bereaved of her whelps, and will rend the caul of their heart, and there will I devour them like a lion: the wild beast shall tear them.*

For God is jealous, and most jealous of those whom he loves best. He cannot endure that we should treat him thus; he means to

have our love by some means, and if he cannot have it by gentleness, he will have it by sterner methods. If the Lord has chosen you, he will sooner be to you as a leopard and a lion than he will suffer you to live without him. You must, you shall find your all in him.

9, 10. *O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me thine help. I will be thy king:*

If thou hast shifted me from the throne, and set up a usurper, I will come and be thy King even now.

10. *Where is any other that may save thee in all thy cities?*

To whom else canst thou look? Where else canst thou find peace?

10. *And thy judges of whom thou saidst, Give me a king and princes?*

What is the good of them? Have they not all turned out to be a delusion?

11, 12. *I gave thee a king in mine anger, and took him away in my wrath. The iniquity of Ephraim is bound up; his sin is hid.*

How sadly true this is! Sin seems to be bound up in our very nature. It is hard to find it; it is hidden away; and when we discover some of it, and it is purged away, there is still more to be found. As hidden treasure may lie in a house for many a day, and not be seen, so are there stores of corruption that seem hidden away in our nature, and are not easily discovered. What a gracious God we have to deal with, or else he would have swept us away long ago!

13, 14. *The sorrows of a travailing woman shall come upon him: he is an unwise son; for he should not stay long in the place of the breaking forth of children. I will ransom them from the power of the grave;*

Oh, what great promises we get driven, like piles, into the marshes of our sin, to make a foundation for God's grace! Here, when the Lord says that we have destroyed ourselves, and he notes all the blackness of our depravity, then he comes in with this gracious word, "I will ransom them from the power of the grave." You who believe in Jesus shall not die; nay, not even the deadly force of sin shall hold you in your grave. There is a resurrection for the dead. There is a spiritual resurrection for you, believers. When you mourn your death, and cry, "O wretched man that I am! who

shall deliver me from the body of this death?" the Lord will answer you, "I will ransom you from the power of the grave."

14. *I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes.*

Lord, work this quickening in thy people tonight, and let us live in the fullness of thy divine love, and so anticipate the day when our bodies also shall be raised by thy glorious power!

HOSEA 14

According to the heading of this chapter, we have here "an exhortation to repentance," and "a promise of God's blessing."

1. *O Israel, return unto the LORD thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity.*

Fallen into sorrow, fallen into shame, fallen into spiritual poverty, fallen into weakness of faith, fallen almost to destruction, though thou art Israel, and God loves thee, yet "thou hast fallen by thine iniquity;" and the only possible way in which thou canst obtain restoration, is to "return unto the Lord thy God." Seek once again thy Father's face; cry, with the prodigal "I will arise, and go to my Father." "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God." Thou mayest do so, for he bids thee come back to him. Thou should do so, for it was ill of thee to wander from him; so end thy wandering, and return unto him. "Return unto the Lord thy God." He is "thy God" still. He denies not the sacred band which binds thee to himself. Though thou hast forsaken him, yet still he bids thee think of him, not as a stranger, but as thy God. O child of God, are you just now very heavy in heart because of your backsliding? Is the lamp of spirituality burning very low? Do you feel as if you had got into a state of spiritual barrenness? Then return—return at once—unto the Lord your God, for your sad condition is due to your iniquity.

2. *Take with you words, and turn to the LORD: say unto him,—*

He puts the words into our mouths; for he knows that, sometimes, we feel as if we cannot give proper expression to our repentance. We feel it, but we cannot utter it; so he puts the very form of the confession into his children's mouths: "Take with you words, and turn to the Lord: say unto him,"—

2. *Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips.*

Sin has had the mastery over you; therefore, ask to have it taken away by pardon, and by the cleansing which shall deliver you from the influence and power of it! Do not ask the Lord merely to take away some of your sin, but say to him, "Take away all iniquity. Especially, if I have indulged some darling sin that has been my ruin, take that away." "Take away all iniquity, and receive us." "Thou canst not receive us with our sins 'upon us. Wilt thou press us to thy bosom while we are black and foul with iniquity? No, that cannot be; so, first take away all our sin, and then receive us. Receive us again into favour with thee, into a conscious sense of thy love. Receive us when we come to thee in prayer. Receive us when we come to the communion table. Receive us as thou didst at the first, as thy sons and daughters." "Receive us graciously." "We cannot hope to be received on any other footing but that of thy free and abounding grace; for even if thou dost forgive and cleanse us, we shall be sinners still, and shall still need thy grace and mercy." "Receive us graciously; so will we render." "When thou hast put away our sin, and received us, then we will begin to serve thee; and we will bring to thee, not the calves of the legal sacrifice; for a sense of thy love will make us feel that thou delightest not in burnt offering; but we will render unto thee the calves of our lips,—our testimony to thy faithfulness,—our declaration of thy truth,—our prayer,—our praise."

3. *Asshur shall not save us;-*

When a man trusts to his God, he gets away from all other trust. Confidence in God is the death of all other confidences: "Asshur shall not save

3. *We will not ride upon horses:*

Which, somehow or other, were always the Israelites' fear and trust. They always looked upon horsemen as the most powerful friends or foes in the day of battle; but now they feel that all creatures shall be given up, and they will cling to God alone: "Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses."

3. *Neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods: for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy.*

What a sweet reason this is for confidence in God, namely, that he cares for those who have nobody else to care for them,—that he becomes the Helper of those who have no other helper, and the Guardian of those who are left friendless in the world! O my soul, art thou not just such an one,—friendless, helpless, hopeless, orphaned? Fly, then, to that God in whom the fatherless findeth mercy, and thou, too, shalt find mercy. Now let us listen to the voice of God:—

4. *I will heal their backsliding,*—

He can do it; he will do it, he evidently rejoices to do it. He soliloquizes with himself, as though it were a very pleasant thought to him: “I will heal their backsliding,”—

4. *I will love them freely:*

“Though there is nothing lovely in them, though they deserve my wrath,—though, according to their own confession, they have gone after false gods, I will love them freely.”

4. *For mine anger is turned away from him.*

“I have fully forgiven them, and I have caused my great wrath to pass away from them.” Now, dear child of God, you to whom I spoke just now, who have fallen into a dull, dead, dreary sort of state, are you not encouraged to return unto the Lord when he thus declares that he will heal your backsliding, and love you freely? You shall have your joy-days back again; you shall have your old love restored; you shall have your old delight renewed; you shall again dance before the Lord for very joy of spirit.

5. *I will be as the dew unto Israel:*

“When they come back to me, I will refresh them,—softly, sweetly, efficaciously, abundantly, mysteriously, even as the dew refreshes the thirsty earth.”

5. *He shall grow as the lily,-*

Your souls shall suddenly spring up. As the daffodil-lily springs up almost in a night, and its golden bells speedily appear, so you, who seem so dead, shall grow up adorned with the golden flowers of God’s delight in you.

5. *And cast forth his roots as Lebanon.*

Fickle as you have been, God’s grace will make you stable. You shall have as firm a roothold as a cedar has, and be as fixed as Libanus himself.

6. *His branches shall spread,*

You shall begin to have influence upon others, and cast a shadow over them for their good.

6. *And his beauty shall be as the olive tree,*

His soul, bedewed by grace divine, shall be beautiful as the olive tree, which has an almost indescribable loveliness all its own.

6. *And his smell as Lebanon.*

There shall be a gracious flavour about you, who are now so sapless and dry, when once the Lord returneth to you because you have returned to him.

7. *They that dwell under his shadow shall return;-*

Your children, your friends, all those who live in your house, shall be the better for your repentance and return to God. They try you now, but when you have left off trying God, they will leave off trying you. Among a man's own children, there are often those who remind him of his own sin against God. Do you wonder that Jacob had so much trial with his sons when you remember what kind of man he was? Are you surprised that David's latter days were so full of trouble when you recollect his great sin? Ah! But if the Lord restores, and revives, and refreshes you, your household also shall be blessed: "They that dwell under his shadow shall return;"—

7. *They shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine: the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon.*

Your household shall have such a blessedness about them that observers shall say of you and yours, "They are a seed that the Lord hath blest." The Lord has a most gracious way of making families to be very choice and select, and full of comfort and peace, when those families walk in his fear; but when there is sin in the head of the household, there comes disorder in the family, the departure of the divine blessing, and all goes awry.

8. *Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols?*

"I have had enough of them. They have cost me sorrow enough; they have plagued me enough. I will put them away, for I must have my God, and I cannot have him and idols too."

8. *I have heard him and observed him:*

God hears the cry of the penitent, and observes what is going on in his heart.

8, 9. *I am like a green fir tree. From me is thy fruit found. Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein.*

The Lord give us wisdom, by his Holy Spirit, to understand and know these things, and to put our understanding to practical account by returning unto him, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

HOSEA 14

1. *O Israel, return unto the LORD thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity.*

Come back, poor wanderer! My brother or my sister, if your heart has grown cold toward your Lord and Master, return to him this very hour. This message comes from God himself, through his servant the prophet, "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity.

2. *Take with you words, and turn to the LORD: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips.*

As if he feared that we could not find suitable words to speak to him, he puts the right words into our mouths. Our Heavenly Father is so anxious to bring back his children when they wander from him that he actually makes the prayer with which they may come back to him: "Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render to thee the praise which is thy due, which shall come from our hearts, and which our lips shall express, "If there are any of you here who have grieved your Heavenly Father by growing cold at heart, I do trust that the spirit of God will sweetly draw you back again to your old standing, and to something higher and nearer to God than even that was.

3. *Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses: neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods: for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy.*

If you expect the Lord to smile upon you, you must have done away with all your idols. You must put away all your false confidences, and those other sinful things in which you have found even a little joy, and you must come back to your Father, throwing

away those rivals which have been set up in your heart, and asking him to give you grace to live henceforth for him alone.

4. *I will heal their backsliding,* —

“Nobody else can do it, but I can, and I will. I will not chide them any more, I will not keep them at a distance from me as unworthy to draw near to me; but ‘I will heal their backslidings,’”
—

4. *I will love them freely;* —

That is a grand sentence. God could not love us anyhow else, for what price could you and I bring with which to purchase his love? And if his love were not most free, it could never come to such unworthy ones as we are: “I will love them freely;” —

4, 5. *For mine anger is turned away from him. I will be as the dew unto Israel:* —

You know that, in the East the dew is a great fertilizer, even more so than it is here; When a plot of ground is all browned by the hot sun, the dew makes it green and fruitful again. So God says, “I will be as the dew unto Israel:” —

5. *He shall grow as the lily,* —

That is, upwards, bearing his flowers as near heaven as he can; not groveling as he once did. He shall grow rapidly, as the daffodil lily does, which seems to start up, in the East, after a shower of rain, and come to maturity at once. Lord, grant that we may bring forth lilies of grace all of a sudden! May there be in us the beauty of holy Christian love which shall come all at once! “He shall grow as the lily, —

5. *And cast forth his roots as Lebanon.*

There will be rapid growth, but sure growth. The lily has frail beauty, but Lebanon has the permanent lasting cedar; and God can make the graces of his people to be as enduring as they are beautiful.

6, 7. *His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon. They that dwell under his shadow shall return;*

His children, who were led into mischief by his bad example, shall be drawn back again.

7-9. *They shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine: the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon. Ephraim shall say, What*

have I to do any more with idols? I have heard him, and observed him: I am like a green fir tree. From me is thy fruit found. Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the LORD are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein.

HOSEA 14

1. *O Israel, return unto the LORD thy God;*

Bless his name that he is still thy God, however much thou mayest have backslidden, thou hast not lost thy right to claim him as thy God, for he is thine eternally by a fixed entail; and because he is still thy God, let his everlasting kindness entice thee to come back to him.”

1. *For thou hast fallen by thine iniquity.*

“Thou hast lost thy comforts, thou hast become a poor despicable creature; thou hast fallen by thine iniquity, this is the eve of all the mischief; thy sin is the seed of all thy ruin; get rid of that, and thou shalt soon have thy comforts back again.”

2. *Take with you words, and turn to the LORD: say unto him,-*

See, he puts the words into your mouth; as if he felt persuaded that you would say, “Lord, I cannot pray an acceptable prayer,” he makes one for you, so that you, who have backslidden the most, and have gone the farthest astray, may have no excuse: “Turn to the Lord: say unto him,” —

2. *Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips.*

“Our thankfulness shall give thee such hearty praise that it shall not be like the Jew’s slender sacrifice, when he offered the turtle-doves or the young pigeons, but we will give thee of our praise as hearty a sacrifice as when the devout Israelite brought the young bullock, the very best of his beasts, to be offered upon the altar of his God; so we will offer to thee the calves of our lips.”

3. *Asshur shall not save us;*

-Backslider, hast thou been putting thy trust anywhere but in God, hoping to find comfort in the world and in sin? Then make this confession: “Asshur shall not save us;” —

3. *We will not ride upon horses:*

These were the confidence of the Egyptians, and the Israelites vainly tried to imitate their powerful and rich neighbours, so we will not put our confidence in the strength of cavalry.

3. *Neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods:-*

Happy is that man who turns aside from every idol, and trusts in God alone. It is a mark of very black backsliding when we begin to make our business, our families, our pleasures, and our bodily health the objects of such tender consideration that we virtually say to them, "Ye are our gods."

3, 4. *For in thee the fatherless findeth mercy. I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him.*

Everlastingly turned away through the complete and satisfactory atonement of Jesus Christ.

5. *I will be as the dew unto Israel:-*

The dew is God's gift, and so is grace; the dew falls silently, yet copiously, and bedews both the leaf and the root sufficiently. "I will be as the dew unto Israel," is a promise to the man of faith, the man of prayer, the man who can endure trial: "I will be as the dew unto Israel;" —

5. *He shall grow as the lily,*

It is "the daffodil" in the original, the yellow daffodil, in the East, springs up after a shower where you could not have perceived anything before; yet there is the idea of frailness in that simile, so it is balanced by the next one:-

5. *And cast forth his roots as Lebanon.*

After you have grown upward, you must grow downward; and growing downward, though it may not be so pleasant, is quite as excellent as growing upward, so the promise to you is, "He shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon."

6. *His branches shall spread,*

This is growing sideways; so the believer spreads his branches by public profession and testimony after having become deeply rooted in the faith and having grown up in love to God, then he begins to spread his shadow over the sons of men by telling-

"To sinners round,
What a dear Saviour he has found."

6. *And his beauty shall be as the olive tree,*

Which largely consists in its fruitfulness. That is always the most beautiful olive which bears the most fruit; so the fruitful Christian shall have the beauty of the olive tree. Besides, the olive is an evergreen, and the Christian's beauty is of a kind that shall never fade. There is an old saying, "Beauty soon fades" but that does not mean the Christian's beauty, for that shall never fade, neither in life, nor in death, nor in eternity.

6. *And his smell as Lebanon.*

That is, the holy influence of his life and conversation shall be as fragrant to God and men as are the perfumes exhaled by the sweet flowers upon the side of Mount Lebanon.

7. *They that dwell under his shadow shall return:*

His children, his servants, his congregation shall be blessed by his gracious influence. As the Upas tree droppeth with deadly poison, so the tree of grace in a Christian droppeth living drops to fall on dead souls.

7. *They shall revive as the corn,*

Which suddenly springs up in the East after rain falls,-

7. *And grow as the vine:*

The branches shall in their turn become fruitful.

7. *The scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon.*

Our families and households should be so well-ordered that, not only we ourselves personally, but all in our household, should have a heavenly influence, a blessed savour upon all around us.

8. *Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols?*

Let that question also go round our ranks, "What have I to do any more with idols; I, who am bought with the precious blood of Jesus; I, who am named by the name of Jesus; I, who have been baptized into the Sacred Trinity, what have I to do any more with idols?" You may make an idol of that boy or girl of yours; you may make an idol of that house or garden of yours; you may make an idol of that business or profession of yours. Do not so, I entreat you, but rather say, "What have I to do any more with idols?"

8. *I have heard him, and observed him: I am like a green fir tree;*

That is what Ephraim says, and this is what God says:-

8. *From me is thy fruit found.*

We are never so fruitful as when we get all our fruit from God. We always shine in borrowed light, and we are always fruitful in borrowed fruitfulness.

9. Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the LORD are right,-

Did your murmuring spirit say that they were not right? Because you have had some sore trial, did your repining spirit say that they were not right? They are certainly right, and you shall see that it is so one day: "The ways of the Lord are right," —

9. And the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein.

Even in God's good ways, transgressors cannot stand; they fall even when they try to praise God, or to pray to him; and this is a sad proof of man's deep depravity, that even when he is engaged in the worship of God the thing which is in itself good becomes obnoxious to God by reason of the sin which is certain to be mingled with it.

HOSEA 14

1. O Israel, return unto the LORD thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity.

Let anyone here, who has turned aside from the Lord, hear these tender pleading words, and then yield to him who utters them. God speaks, not to condemn, but to comfort. He would fain allure you back to him with his gracious words of love: "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity."

2. Take with you words, and turn to the Lord:

But the poor penitent cries, "Alas, Lord, I do not know what to say. So God puts in the sinner's mouth the very words he is to utter.

2. Say unto him. Take away all iniquity, —

That is where the mischief lies, in your iniquity, your turning aside from the path of truth and iniquity. Say to the Lord, "I do not want to keep any of my iniquity, I desire to be delivered from it altogether." "Take away all iniquity," —

2. And receive us graciously: —

"Lord, take us back again. According to the greatness of thy grace, restore us to thy heart of love, and let us dwell where thy children dwell: Receive us graciously:" —

2. *So will we render the calves of our lips.*

That is to say, “We will give thee the sacrifice of our praises. We will speak well of thy name. If we have the calves of the stall, we will give them to thee; but, in any case, we will give thee the calves of our lips.”

3. *Asshur shall not save us; —*

They had been accustomed to rely either upon Assyria or upon Egypt; and one of the first signs of their real repentance was that they had given up their false dependences. So, sinner, you must give up your self-righteousness, your ceremonialism, anything and everything in which you have trusted in place of trusting in the Lord: “Ashur shall not save us;” —

3. *We will not ride upon horses: —*

In the day of battle, they had trusted in their cavalry; but now, in the time of their repentance, they cry, “We will not ride upon horses;” —

3. *Neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods: for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy.*

What a beautiful ending there is to this verse! If any of you are full of sin and full of wants, and have become like orphans who have lost everything, and are utterly destitute, — if you have none to provide for you, and none to care for you, come to the God of the fatherless, and put your trust in him: “For in thee the fatherless findeth mercy.” Then follows this gracious promise: —

4. *I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: —*

Listen to the heavenly music: “I will.” “I will.” When God says, “I will,” you may depend upon it that he will do what he says he will. If you or I say, “I will,” it must be with the proviso, “If it is God’s will, I will do so-and- so,” but God is the almighty king whose least word is a sovereign mandate: “I will heal their backsliding: I will love them freely:” —

4. *For mine anger is turned away from him.*

If you have come back to the Lord with true penance of heart, he is no longer angry with you, but he is ready to welcome you again.

5. *I will be as the dew unto Israel: —*

“Not as first, not as tempest; but in gentle yet effectual grace, I will visit them. I will be as the dew unto Israel:” —

5. *He shall grow as the lily,*

“He shall be as beautiful and fair as the lily, though just now he was black as night.”

5. *And cast forth his roots as Lebanon.*

“He shall be as stable as he is beautiful. Like old Lebanon, the mighty mountain, which none can shake, so shall this poor sinner be when I have visited him with my love.”

6. *His branches shall spread,*

“I will endue him with usefulness and influence.

6. *And his beauty shall be as the olive tree,*

“I will load him with fruit. He shall have the beauty that belongs to that fat and oily tree, the olive.”

6. *And his smell as Lebanon.*

God can make the foul, polluted sinner to become fragrant to him: “His smell shall be as Lebanon”

7. *They that dwell under his shadow shall return; —*

His family, his work-people, his neighbours, who wandered from the Lord because he wandered, shall get good from his holy influence. His restoration shall be a benediction to them: “They that dwell under his shadow shall return;” —

7. *They shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine: the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon.*

All good things come to a man when God comes to him, and he comes to God. Get right with God, and you shall get right with all things around you, and you shall be the means of helping to put other people right.

8. *Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols?”*

He will spontaneously purge himself from the evil things which he once loved. I shall not need to send the hammer to break his idols, but he shall say, out of the fullness of his own heart, “What have I to do any more with idols?””

8, 9. *I have heard him, and observed him: I am like a green fir tree. From me is thy fruit found. Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the LORD are right and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressor shall fall therein.*

Yes, they shall fall even when they are in the right ways; and I know of no falling that is worse than for men to be in the ways of

religion, and yet to stumble and fall even there; for, if they fall there, where will they not fall?

This exposition consisted of readings from HOSEA 11, AND 14.

HOSEA 14

1. *O Israel, return unto the LORD thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity.*

When we fall by sin, we must regain our comfort by going back to the place where we lost it: "Return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity." Then, to help us return, God, through his servant, actually makes a prayer for us.

2. *Take with you words, and turn to the Lord:*

"What words am I to take?" asks the poor convinced sinner. "I cannot put words together." Here are the words put into your mouth:

—
2. *Say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips.*

Come with humble confession, come with sincere repentance, come with earnest supplication, come trusting to the grace of God, come bringing your heart with you, and rendering it to God as a living sacrifice.

3. *Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses: neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods: for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy.*

If you come to God to be saved, you must bring no other saviour with you. What an encouragement is given to us to come to God! He calls himself the Father of the fatherless. O thou, whose soul is orphaned, thou who art left disconsolate in a world of grief, come thou to him in whom the fatherless find mercy, for so shalt thou find mercy!

4, 5. *I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him. I will be as the dew unto Israel:*

"Swiftly and mysteriously will I come and refresh him."

5. *He shall grow as the lily,*
Quickly, beautifully, —

5. *And cast forth his roots as Lebanon.*

He shall be as permanent as he is fair, like a cedar as well as like a lily.

6. *His branches shall spread,*

The dew of the Lord imparts influence to men; it gives them, as it were branches, with which they cast a wide shadow.

6. *And his beauty shall be as the olive tree,*

The beauty of fruitfulness. God grant all of us this beauty!

6. *And his smell as Lebanon.*

Oh, to stand in holy repute among men, so that there is a fragrance going forth from us, like the sweet odours from the wild thyme and other products of Mount Lebanon!

7. *They that dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine: the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon.*

When God blesses men, he also blesses those round about them. Your children, your servants, your neighbours, shall all be the better if the grace of God comes to you. So may it be!

8, 9. *Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols? I have heard him, and observed him: I am like a green fir tree. From me is thy fruit found. Who is wise? and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the LORD are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein.*

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 34; AND HOSEA 14.

AMOS

AMOS 5:4-27

4. For thus saith the LORD unto the house of Israel, Seek ye me, and ye shall live:

And that it just the message of God to professing Christians now: “Seek ye me.” Get away from your mere ceremonies, from trusting in your outward performances, and get to God himself. Get beyond your fellow-worshippers and your ministers, beyond your sanctuaries and your supposed holy places, and get in spirit and in truth to God himself: “Seek ye me, and ye shall live.”

5. But seek not Beth-el, nor enter into Gilgal and pass not to Beersheba; for Gilgal shall surely go into captivity, and Beth-el shall come to nought.

These were the places where the calves and other idols were set up for the worship of God by means of visible symbols. That was the Romanism of that day. Pure spiritual worship was ordained by God, but that was not enough for the idolatrous Israelites. They must needs set up the image of an ox, the emblem of power, — not that they would worship the ox, they said, but that they might worship the God of power through that symbol. And that is the plea of Papists today: — “We do not worship that cross; we do not worship that image; but these things help us. They are emblems.” But they are absolutely forbidden by God: “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them.” The first commandment forbids us to have any other God than Jehovah; the second forbids us to worship him through any emblem or symbol whatsoever.

6, 7. Seek the LORD, and ye shall live; lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and devour it, and there be none to quench it in Beth-el. Ye who turn judgment to wormwood, and leave off righteousness in the earth,

Here you have another great truth, — that, in order to seek God aright, we must turn away from sin. All the ritualism in the world will not save us, or be acceptable to God; there must be purity of life, and holiness of character; justice must be done between man and man, and we must seek to be right before the righteous and holy God.

8. *Seek him that maketh the seven stars and Orion, —*

The Creator of the spring-bringing Pleiades, and of the winter-bringing Orion, —

8, 9. *And turneth the shadow of death into the morning, and maketh the day dark with night: that calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the face of the earth: The LORD is his name: that strengtheneth the spoiled against the strong, so that the spoiled shall come against the fortress.*

The God of the weak, the Defender of the oppressed. Ye that oppress the poor, and tread down the people, seek ye him, and wash your hands from the stains of your past injustice.

10. *They hate him that rebuketh in the gate, and they abhor him that speaketh uprightly.*

There is still a generation that cannot bear to be told of its faults, and that shows its venom against everything that is right.

11. *Forasmuch therefore as your treading is upon the poor, and ye take from him burdens of wheat: ye have built houses of hewn stone but ye shall not dwell in them; ye have planted pleasant vineyards, but ye shall not drink wine of them.*

God has often shown how he can overthrow those who oppress the poor.

12-17. *For I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins: they afflict the just, they take a bribe, and they turn aside the poor in the gate from their right. Therefore the prudent shall keep silence in that time; for it is an evil time. Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live: and so the LORD, the God of hosts, shall be with you, as ye have spoken. Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate: it may be that the LORD God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph. Therefore the LORD, the God of hosts, the Lord saith thus, Wailing shall be in all streets, and they shall say in all the highways, Alas! alas! and they shall call the husbandman to mourning, and such as are skilful of*

lamentation to wailing. And in all vineyards shall be wailing: for I will pass through thee, saith the LORD.

National sins bring down national judgments; and when God grows angry against the people, he makes the places of their feasting, the vineyards where grow their choicest vines, to become the places of their sorrow, so that wailing and distress are heard on all sides. Oh, that nations knew the day of their visitation, and would do justly! Then would such judgments be averted.

18. *Woe unto you that desire the day of the LORD! to what end is it for you? the day of the LORD is darkness, and not light.*

“The day of the Lord is darkness, and not light,” for such as you, impenitent, unjust, graceless sinners. “The day of the Lord” will not bring blessings to you; but it will be —

19. *As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him.*

From bad to worse do they go who think to escape from present misery by plunging into the presence of God. The suicide is, of all fools, the greatest, for he goes before God with his own indictments, nay, with his own sentence in his hand. He needs no trial; he has condemned himself.

20-22. *Shall not the day of the LORD be darkness, and not light? even very dark, and no brightness in it? I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts.*

See how God speaks about public worship and formal sacrifices when the heart is not right with him. When the moral conduct of the offerer is wrong, the Lord will not accept his offering.

23, 24. *Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.*

This is what God asks for, — righteousness, not sweet music. Have they not, at this very day, turned what were once houses of prayer into music-halls, set up their idols in our parish churches, and adorned their priests with every kind of Babylonian garment which they could find at Rome, the mystical Babylon? Are they not turning this nation back again to that accursed Popery, the yoke of which

our fathers could not bear? Therefore, the Lord is wroth with this land; there are storm-clouds gathering over it, because it is not sufficiently stirred with indignation against those idolatrous men who are again seeking to come to the front among us.

25. *Have ye offered unto me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel?*

“Did you worship me? Did you offer sacrifices to me?” “No,” said God, “ye did not.”

26, 27. *But ye have borne the tabernacle of your Moloch and Chiun your images, the star of your god, which ye made to yourselves. Therefore will I cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus, saith the LORD, whose name is The God of hosts.*

Oh, for pure worship! Oh, for pure living! Oh, for hearts that spiritually worship the Lord, for Jesus said, “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.” “But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth?”

AMOS 6:1-8

Amos was a herdsman, and a gatherer of sycamore fruit. His words are rugged, but sometimes he rises to sublimity. His expressions are somewhat dark, and not readily to be understood; but when we learn the meaning of them, we perceive that they are full of deep, earnest, solemn warning and instruction.

1. *Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria, which are named chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel came!*

It was a time of great sin, and also of great judgment, yet there were some in Zion who were quite at ease under all that was happening. No sense of sin grieved them, no thought of coming judgment alarmed them. What did they care if the nation went to rack and ruin? What did it signify to them that God was angry with his people? They were atheists; or, at least, they acted as if they were. Whatever might happen, they would run the risk of it. “Woe,” says God, to all such people as these; and when the Lord says “Woe” to anyone, it is indeed woe, for he never speaks thus without cause.

2. Pass ye unto Calneh, and see; and from thence go ye to Hamath the great; then go down to Gath of the Philistines: be they better than these kingdoms? or their border greater than your border?

The Lord points to other cities which had been destroyed, — to Calneh, and Hamath, and Gath, which he had smitten because of the sin of the people who had lived there; and he says, “Ye that dwell at Jerusalem, and ye that live at Samaria, do not imagine that ye will escape the consequences of your sin. I was able to reach the inhabitants of these proud cities, despite their strong fortifications and their powerful armies; and I can reach you also.” So, when we look back upon the judgments of God upon guilty men, we may conclude that no sinner has any right to think that he shall escape. The proudest and mightiest have been brought down by God and so will men, who dare to resist the Most High. Continue to be humble, even to the world’s end.

3. Ye that put far away the evil day, —

Ye who say, “There is time enough yet. Let us see a little more of life; why need we be in a hurry to seek salvation?” “Ye that put far away the evil day,” —

3. And cause the seat of violence to come near;

For, when men try to postpone thoughts about “the judgment” which is to follow “after death,” they are generally the more eager to indulge in sin. They say, “There is time enough yet,” because they want a longer period to get greater indulgence in sinful ways. The Lord says “Woe” to all such people as these.

4. That lie upon beds of ivory,

They were men of wealth, who spent their money upon all manner of luxuries while the poor of the land were perishing through want.

4. And stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall;

It was, as I have said, a time of danger, when war was at the gates; but the people were so careless that they lived as if peace were established for ever, and the enemy could never touch them. Their expenditure was at a high rate for self-indulgence, and for that only.

5. That chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instrument of music, like David;

But not for the same purpose as David played and sang; his instruments of music were used for spiritual solace and the worship of God; but these people set their wits to work to find out how their music might inflame their lusts, and be a vehicle for the expression of their lascivious desires.

6. *That drink wine in bowls,*

For seldom can a careless man crown the edifice of his sin without indulging in drunkenness; he must have the sensual delight that he finds in “the flowing bowl.”

6. *And anoint themselves with the chief ointments: but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.*

It is not wrong for a person, to whom God has given much of the good things of this life, to enjoy them fitly and reasonably. The sin of these people consisted in the fact that, when others were afflicted, they took that opportunity to indulge themselves in all the delights of the flesh; and when God’s rod was being used for chastisement, they went on with their sinful mirth to show how little they cared about it. Probably I am addressing some who have, at this very moment, a sore sickness in the house; or it may be that a beloved wife is scarcely cold in her grave, or a dear child has only just sobbed itself into its death-sleep; yet the survivors are running after amusements, and pleasures, and follies, more wildly than ever, as if to hush the voice of conscience, and to forget the strokes of God’s rod. Oh, that this very solemn chapter might convey a warning message to them!

7. *Therefore now shall they go captive with the first that go captive, and the banquet of them that stretched themselves shall be removed.*

Whenever God does come forth to execute judgment upon the ungodly, he will first pick out those who have defied him the most. Those who have the proudest spirit and the hardest heart shall be the first to feel the strokes of his rod.

8. *The Lord GOD hath sworn by himself, saith the LORD the God of hosts, I abhor the excellency of Jacob, and hate his palaces: therefore will I deliver up the city with all that is therein.*

The next chapter shows that, even when God was very angry with the wicked, there was still wonderful power in prayer.

This exposition consisted of readings from AMOS 6:1-8; 7:1-6.

AMOS 7:1-6

1-3. *Thus hath the Lord God showed unto me; and, behold, he formed grasshoppers in the beginning of the shooting up of the latter growth; and, lo, it was the latter growth after the king's mowings. And it came to pass, that when they had made an end of eating the grass of the land, then I said, O Lord God, forgive, I beseech thee: by whom shall Jacob arise? For he is small. The Lord repented for this: it shall not be, saith the LORD.*

In a vision, the prophet saw the locusts or grasshoppers come to devour all the green things of the land, — a very terrible visitation. If you have never seen it, you cannot realize how utterly bare everything is made after the visit of the locusts. The prophet put up a vehement and earnest prayer; he cried, “O Lord God, forgive” and, no sooner was the intercession offered than the Lord said, “It shall not be.” Thus the impending judgment was turned away.

4-6. *Thus hath the Lord God showed unto me: and, behold, the Lord God called to contend by fire, and it devoured the great deep, and did eat up a part. Then said I, O Lord God, cease, I beseech thee: by whom shall Jacob arise? for he is small. The Lord repented for this: This also shall not be, saith the Lord God.*

This time, the prophet saw the fire devouring the land, — perhaps the fire of war, which casts its blazing brand upon peaceful dwellings. This fire, however, was something worse than that, for the very deep itself seemed to be licked up by tongues of flame; and the prophet, in hearty sympathy with the afflicted people, cried again as he had done before, and the answer came “This also shall not be, saith the Lord God.” This ought to encourage you who are the King’s remembrances to make use of the position in which his grace has placed you, and to cry earnestly to him to turn away his wrathful hand, and have pity upon sinners. God grant that many of us may have such an intercessory spirit as that of Amos the herdsman-prophet!

This exposition consisted of readings from AMOS 6:1-8; 7:1-6.

JONAH

JONAH 1

1-3. *Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me. But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.*

Observe the misconduct of the prophet Jonah. He had a plain command from the Lord, and he knew it to be a command; but he felt that the commission given to him would not be pleasant and honouring to himself, and therefore he declined to comply with it. We see, from his action, how some, who really know God, may act as if they knew him not. Jonah knew that God was everywhere, yet he “rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.” What strange inconsistencies there often are even in good men! Here is one, who is favored with a divine commission, — one who knows God, and fears him; yet, for all that, he ventures on the fool’s errand of endeavoring to escape from the Omnipresent. He “went down to Joppa,” which was the port of his country, “and he found a ship going to Tarshish.” Learn from this that providence alone is not a sufficient guide for our actions. He may have said, “It was very singular that there was a ship there going to Tarshish, just when I reached the port. I gather from this that God was not so very disinclined for me to go to Tarshish.” Precepts, not providences, are to guide believers; and when Christian men quote a providence against a precept, — which is to set God against God, — they act most strangely. There are devil’s providences as well as divine providences, and there are tempting providences as well as assisting providences, so learn to judge between the one and the other.

4. *But the LORD sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken.*

Learn, hence, that “Omnipotence has servants everywhere.” The Lord is never short of sheriff’s officers to arrest his fugitives, and on that occasion he “sent out a great wind into the sea.” “The wind bloweth where it listeth.” That is true, but it is also true that the wind bloweth where God listeth, and he knew how to send that great wind to the particular ship. No doubt many ships were on the Mediterranean at that time; but, possibly, unto none of them was the storm sent save unto the one which carried Jonah son of Amittai. We say, “Every bullet has its billet,” and this great wind was sent to pursue the fugitive prophet.

5. *Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god,*

—
If there is ever a special time for prayer, it is a time of need. Nature seems then to compel men to utter prayer of such a sort as it is, for it is but nature’s prayer at the best: “The mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god,” —

5. *And cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it of them.*

Life is precious, and a man will give up everything else in order to save it.

Satan spoke the truth when he said, “Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath, will he give for his life.” From the action of these mariners, we may learn that sometimes we may lighten our ship for the safety of our souls. When we have less to carry, probably we shall sail more safely. Losses and crosses may turn out to be our greatest gains. Let the ill-gotten ingots go to the bottom of the sea; and lo, the ship rights herself at once!

5. *But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep.*

The greatest sinner on that ship appeared to be the least concerned about the storm which had come because of him, he did not even seem to know that there was a storm, for he had “gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep.”

6. *So the shipmaster came to him, and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not.*

It is hard when sinners have to rebuke saints, and when an uncircumcised Gentile can address a prophet of God in language like this.

7. And they said every one to his fellow, Come and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us. So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah.

We commend not the action of these men in casting lots, but we admire the providence by which is the lot fell upon Jonah. Solomon says, “The lot is cast into the lap,” but he did not say that it was right that lots should be cast into the lap; and he very properly added, “but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.”

8. Then they said unto him, Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil is upon us, What is thine occupation? and whence comest thou? what is thy country? and of what people art thou?

I do not know whether these men had traded with those who then lived in these islands, but they had a very English custom of not judging a man before they had heard him speak. It would be well if we all practiced it more, — so that, before we condemn men, we were willing to hear their side of the question. Considering that there was such a storm raging, the questions put to Jonah were remarkably calm. They were very comprehensive, and went to the very root of the matter.

9. And he said unto them, I am an Hebrew:

That let them know whence he came, and what his country was.

9. And I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land.

That, I suppose, must be regarded as his occupation; and what a blessed occupation it is, — to be occupied with the fear of the Lord! So, you see that, though Jonah was not properly following his occupation while he was on board that ship, yet he did not hesitate to avow, “I am a Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land.” The child of God, even when he gets where he ought not to be, if you test him and try him, will stand to his colors. He will confess that he is, after all, a servant of the living God.

10. Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him, Why hast thou done this?

Jonah had to go through this catechism, question after question, and this was the hardest of them all: “Why hast thou done this?” Could you, dear friend, submit every action of your life to this test? “Why hast thou done this?” I am afraid that there are some actions, which we have performed, for which we could not give a reason, or the reasons for which we should not like to give to our fellow men, much less to our God.

10, 11. *For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them. Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us?*

Here is another question; the catechism is not yet finished, and this is one of the most difficult of all.

11, 12. *For the sea wrought, and was tempestuous. And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you:*

Notwithstanding all his faults, Jonah was an eminent type of Christ. We know that from our Lord’s own words, for he was as long in the belly of the whale as Christ was in the heart of the earth. Here he seems to be a type of our Saviour: “Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea: so shall the sea be calm unto you.”

12, 13. *For I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you. Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring it to the land;*

They showed a deal of good feeling in all their treatment of Jonah. They could not bear to take away a fellow-creature’s life, so they pulled and tugged in order to get the ship to land.

13. *But they could not: for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous against them.*

Their safety lay in the sacrifice, — not in the labour. They rowed hard to bring the ship to land, but their efforts were of no avail. If they would cast Jonah overboard, then they would be safe.

14, 15. *Wherefore they cried unto the LORD, and said, We beseech thee, O LORD, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man’s life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for thou, O LORD, hast done as it pleased thee. So they took up Jonah, —*

Put the emphasis on the first word, “So they took up Jonah”; that is, with great reluctance, with much pity and sorrow, not daring to do such a deed as that wantonly and with a light heart. When men do deeds like this, on a far greater scale, and go to war with a light

heart, they will have a heavy heart before long. If ever you have to cast a brother out of the Church, —if ever you have to relinquish the friendship of any man, — do it as these men did with Jonah, patiently, and carefully. Investigate the matter, and do not act until you are driven to it after consulting the Lord.

15, 16. *And cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging. Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the LORD, and made vows.*

Jonah had been the means of causing a greater change than he expected. His conduct and punishment had been a warning to those thoughtless sailors. They could not but believe in the God who had thus followed up his fugitive servant.

17. *Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah.*

He prepared a storm, he prepared a fish and we afterwards read that he prepared a gourd, and he prepared a worm. In the great things of life, and in the little things, God is ever present. The swimming of a great fish in the sea is, surely, not a thing that is subject to law. If ever there is free agency in this world, it must certainly be in the wanderings of such a huge creature that follows its own instincts, and ploughs its way through the great wastes of the wide and open sea. Yes, that is true; yet there is a divine predestination concerning all its movements. Over every motion of the fin of every minnow predestination presides. There is no distinction of little or great in God's sight, he that wings an angel guides a sparrow. "The Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah."

17. *And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.*

So round about the truant prophet was the preventing grace of Jehovah.

JONAH 2

1. *Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly.*

What a strange place for prayer! Surely then is the only prayer that ever went up to God out of a fish's belly. Jonah found himself alive;-that was the surprising thing, that he was alive in the belly of a fish;-and because he was alive, he began to pray. It is such a wonder that some people here should continue to live that they

ought to begin to pray. If you live with death so near, and in so great peril, and yet you do not pray, what is to become of you? This prayer of Jonah is very remarkable because it is not a prayer at all in the sense in which we usually apply the word to petition and supplication. If you read the prayer through, you will see that it is almost all thanksgiving; and the best prayer in all the world is a prayer that is full of thankfulness. We praise the Lord for what he has done for us, and thus we do, in effect, ask him to perfect the work which he has begun. He has delivered us, so we bless his holy name, and by implication we beseech him still to deliver us. Notice that it says here, "Then Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God." He was a runaway; he had tried to escape from the presence of God; yet the Lord was still his God. God will not lose any of his people, even if, like Jonah, they are in the belly of a fish, Jehovah is still their God: "Then Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God out of the fish's belly," —

2. *And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me;-*

You see that this is not praying, it is telling the Lord what he had done for his disobedient servant. Jonah had prayed, and the Lord had heard him, yet he was still in the fish's belly. Unbelief would have said, "You have lived so long; Jonah; but you cannot expect to live to get out of this dreary, damp, fetid prison." Ah, but faith is out of prison even while she is in it. Faith begins to tell what God has done before the great work is actually accomplished; so Jonah said, "I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the Lord, and he heard me;" —

2. *Out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice.*

He was like a man in the unseen world among the dead. He felt that he was condemned and cast away; yet God had heard him, and now he sings about it in the belly of the fish. No other fish that ever lived had a live man inside him singing praises unto God.

3. *For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas;*

The word Jonah used implies that God had violently cast him away into the deep. "Cast me not off," prayed David, but here is a man who says that God did cast him out like a thing flung overboard into the vast deep: "Thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas;" —

3. *And the floods compassed me about:*

“They rolled all over me, beneath me, above me, around me; ‘The floods compassed me about.’” —

3. *All thy billows and thy waves passed over me.*

Jonah had evidently read his Bible; at least, he had read the 42nd Psalm, for he quotes it here. It is a blessed thing to have the Bible in your mind and heart so that, wherever you may be, you do not need to turn to the Book because you have the Book inside you. Here is a man inside a fish with a Book inside of him; and it was the Book inside of him that brought him out from the fish again.

4. *Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple.*

What grand faith Job displayed when he said, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him;” and here is another splendid manifestation of faith, “‘I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple.’ If God does not look at me, I will still look towards the place where he dwells. As I am being flung away from him, I will give one more look towards his holy temple.”

5. *The waters compassed me about, even to the soul:-*

They seemed to get right into his spirit; his heart became waterlogged: “The waters compassed me about, even to the soul:” —

5. *The depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head.*

Like his winding-sheet,-as if the cerements of the grave were wrapped about his mouth, and ears, and eyes, and he was consigned to a living tomb. This narrative is a graphic description of the natural motion of the great fish which had swallowed Jonah. When the fish found this strange being inside him, the first thing that he did was to plunge as deep as ever he could into the waters. You will see that Jonah did go down very deep indeed. The next thing was for the fish to make for the weeds; as certain creatures eat weeds to cure them when they feel very ill, this fish went of to the weedy places to see if he could get a cure for this new complaint of a man inside him.

6. *I went down to the bottoms of the mountains;-*

To the very roots and foundations of the mountains, where the big jagged rocks made huge buttresses for the hills above: “I went down to the bottom of the mountains;” —

6. *The earth with her bars was about me for ever:*

Down went the fish, as deep as he could go: and, of course, down went Jonah too, and he might well imagine that he was in a vast prison from which there was no way of escape,

6. *Yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my God.*

And, dear friend, God can bring you up, however low you may have gone. Though, in your own feelings, you feel as if you had gone so low that you could not go any lower, God can, in answer to prayer, bring you up again. O despairing one, take heart, and be comforted by this story of Jonah! God is dealing with you as he was with him. There may be a great fish, but there is a great God as well. There may be a deep seas, but there is an almighty God to bring you up out of it.

7. *When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD:*

It is a blessed memory that serves us faithfully in a fainting fit. Mostly, when the heart faints, the memory fails; but Jonah remembered the Lord when his soul fainted within him.

7. *And my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple.*

Think of Jonah’s prayer going right within the veil, and reaching the ear and heart of God in his holy temple. He said that he was cast out of God’s sight, yet his prayer went into God’s temple. Oh, the prevalence of a bold believing prayer! “My prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple.”

8. *They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy.*

If you trust anywhere but in God, you will run away from your own mercy. God is the only really merciful One who can always help you; but if you trust in your own righteousness, if you trust in priest craft, if you trust in any superstition, you are observing lying vanities, and forsaking your own mercy. God is the source of your mercy; do not run away from him to anyone or anything else.

9. *But I will sacrifice unto thee—*

I long to do so. I cannot do it just now, but I would if I could; and I will do it when thou shalt grant me deliverance from my present peril.”

9. With the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD.

That is one of the grandest utterances that any man ever made: "SALVATION!" Write it in capital letters. It is a very emphatic word in the Hebrew, and I might read it, "Mighty salvation is of Jehovah." This is real, old-fashioned Calvinistic doctrine spoken centuries before John Calvin was born. The whale could not endure it, and he turned Jonah out directly he said, "Salvation is of the Lord." The world does not like that doctrine, and there are many professing Christians who do not like it. They say, "Salvation is of man's free will; salvation is of the works of the law; salvation is of rites and ceremonies;" and so on. But we say, with Jonah, "Salvation is of the Lord." He works it from beginning to end, and therefore he must have all the praise for it for ever and ever.

10. And the LORD spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.

God has only to speak, and even sea-monsters obey him. I know not how he spoke to the fish; I do not know how to talk to a fish, but God does; and as the Lord could speak to that fish, he can speak to any sinner here. However far you may have gone from all that is good, he who spoke to that great fish, and made it disgorge the prophet Jonah, can speak to you, and then you will give up your sins as the whale gave up Jonah. God grant that it may be so this very hour! That is the prayer of an ancient mariner, may it be ours, as far as it is suited to our circumstances, and may we be brought by God's grace to cry, with Jonah, "Salvation is of the Lord"!

JONAH 3

1, 2. And the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time, saying, Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.

There is no preaching like that which Gods bids us. The preaching that comes out of our own heads will never go into other men's hearts. If we will keep to the preaching that the Lord bids us, we shall not fail in our ministry.

3. So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey.

For those times, Nineveh was “an exceeding great city,” but it is far exceeded in size by this modern Nineveh of London.

4. *And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.*

His message was short and sharp, there was not a word of mercy in it. There was nothing to distract the attention of the hearers from the one point and the one subject; and there is a great deal in that. We may sometimes say too much in a single sermon, and give our hearers a field of wheat instead of a loaf of bread. · But Jonah said what he was bidden to say, no more and no less: “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.”

5-9. *So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything: let them not feed, nor drink water: but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?*

Note that the only message they had heard was a prophecy of impending judgment. God had sent his servant to warn them of the coming destruction; and, since he had warned them that he meant to destroy them, they could infer that he might possibly intend pity towards them should they repent, but there was as yet no verbal declaration of mercy or hope. these people went to God with nothing better to sustain them than this, “Who can tell?” How much more guilty than these Ninevites are they who refuse to humble themselves before God, even when they have distinct injunctions from God, and explicit promises that whosoever shall confess and forsake his sins shall find mercy! these men of Nineveh will rise up in judgment against the men of London, and the men of this generation, and condemn them, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now men do not repent even at the testimony of Jesus Christ the Son of God. To despise the prophet Jonah, would have involved these people in certain destruction; of how much sorer

punishment shall they be thought worthy who despise the Christ of God, and do despite unto the Spirit of grace.

10. *And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not.*

There is no change in God, absolutely considered, but there is often an apparent change, that which he threatens, while men remain in sin, is not executed upon them when they repent and turn to him. He is always the same God. from the beginning, he has been “the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.” If he did not pardon sin, when men turn from it with sincere repentance, he would have changed his method of dealing with the penitent; but when he does forgive, it is according to his way from the beginning, for he has ever been a tender, and compassionate, and gracious God.

This exposition consisted of readings from Jonah 3, 4:1, 2; and Romans 5.

JONAH 4

You know all about Jonah’s refusal to go upon the Lord’s errand, and how he was held to it, and carried to his work in a great fish as he would not go by himself. Somehow or other, God will make his servants do his will; and the more speedily they do it, the better it is for them. You know also how the Ninevites repented at the preaching of Jonah, and how the Lord had mercy upon them.

1-3. *But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry. And he prayed unto the Lord, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil. Therefore now, O Lord, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live.*

“For, if I live, the Ninevites will say, ‘This man scared us needlessly. He is a prophet of evil, and he is a liar, too, for our great city is not destroyed. He frightened us into a kind of repentance for which there was no necessity, for his God does not carry out his threatenings,’” and so forth. And poor Jonah could not face such talk as that. But, brother, if you preach God’s Word as he gives it to you, you have nothing to do with the consequences that come of it.

God will justify his own truth; and even if it should seem that the worst rather than the best consequences ensue, it is for you still to go on in the name of him who sent you. Whenever you and I begin to try to manage God's kingdom for him, we find the divine scepter too heavy for our little hands to hold; our case would be like that of Phaeton trying to drive the horses in the chariot of the sun. We cannot hold the reins of the universe. And poor Jonah, wanting to manage everything for God, makes a dreadful mess of it, and in his anger makes a very foolish request: "O Lord, take, I beseech thee, my life from me."

4. *Then said the LORD, Doest thou well to be angry?*

How kind of God to speak thus gently to his rebellious servant. Are any of you given to anger? Might not the Lord say to you, "Doest thou well to be angry, so soon, — so often, — so long, — about such little things?"

5. *So Jonah went out of the city, —*

When, no doubt, everybody would have been willing to entertain him, for all, even to the king, must have felt a deep respect for the messenger who had brought them to their knees before the Lord: "Jonah went out of the city," —

5. *And sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city.*

To see those forty days out; half hoping, perhaps, that there would come an earthquake, to shake the city down; and then, under his little booth of boughs, he would not be hurt by the failing edifices. In as sulky and surly a spirit as he could be, he put himself to great inconveniences. The damp of the night fell on him, and the heat of the sun would soon wither up the branches. If, dear friends, like Jonah, you want to complain, you will soon have something to complain of. People who are resolved to fret, generally make for themselves causes for fretfulness.

6. *And the LORD God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd.*

Those who are angry with God show the littleness of their minds. "Little things please little minds;" so a gourd made Jonah glad.

7, 8. *But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered. And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, —*

Jonah was soon up, and soon down. Yesterday, he “was exceeding glad of the gourd;” today, he is fainting because of the heat of the sun. If we allow our mercies to become too sweet to us, they will soon become, by their withdrawal, too bitter for us. When we feel too much affection for the creature, we shall soon find a great deal of affliction from the creature. “The sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die,” —

8, 9. *And said, It is better for me to die than to live. And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death.*

He had gotten into such a bad spirit that he could even brave it out with his God. Oh, that we might be preserved from such an evil temper! It is well for us that, “Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.” When a child is in a fever, and says a great many naughty things, his father puts it down to the sickness rather than to the child. So it was with God’s poor fainting servant Jonah.

10, 11. *Then said the LORD, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: and should not I spare Nineveh, —*

“Nineveh, for which I have laboured; Nineveh, which I made to grow; Nineveh, which has been many years in the building; Nineveh, which contains multitudes of immortal souls which will not perish in a night: ‘Should not I spare Nineveh,’” —

11. *That great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; —*

This is always supposed to mean infants, and I judge that the supposition is a correct one. So Nineveh had a population of over one hundred and twenty thousand who were under two years old, so it must have been an immense city. Who can tell the blessing that even infants bring to us? It may be that God spares London for the

sake of the children in it. What a deal the Lord Jesus Christ made of children! He suffered the little children to come unto him, and forbade them not. Does God care for children? Ay, that he does; and so should his servants! They are the better part of the human race; there is more in them that is admirable than there is in us who are grown up. They are, in many respects, a blessing to the city, as these six-score thousand little ones were to Nineveh. But how singularly does God add —

11. *And also much cattle?*

Does God care for cattle? He does; and how that fact should teach his servants to be kind to all brute creatures! There is some truth in those lines of Coleridge, —

“He prayeth best, who loveth best All things, both great and
small,”

for everything that lives should be the object of our care for the sake of him who gave them life; and if he has given us to have dominion over all sheep and oxen, and the birds of the air, and so forth, let not our dominion be that of a tyrant, but that of a kind and gentle prince who seeks the good of that which is under his power. Here ends the story of Jonah which he tells himself; and he did not add anything to it because nothing needs to be added. The Lord’s question to him was altogether unanswerable, and Jonah felt it to be so. Let us hope that, during the rest of his life, he so lived as to rejoice in the sparing mercy of God. He had stood outside the door, like the elder brother who was angry, and would not go in, and who 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.” But after his father had said to him, “Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine,” I hope that he went in, and I trust that Jonah also went in and lived with the penitent Ninevites, and that all were happy together in the love of the God who had been so gracious to them.

JONAH 4:1, 2

1. *But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry.*

A nice prophet this! Jonah was a man of a somewhat ugly disposition, yet I think he has been misunderstood. He was the true child of Elijah, the prophet of fire. Elijah was a rough, stern servant of the Lord, who felt that the indignities which had been done to Jehovah deserved instant and terrible punishment; and he seemed almost to wish to see that punishment inflicted, as he accused the people unto God, saying, “the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.” He was bravely stern for God, and Jonah was cast in a similar mold. He seemed to feel, “I have been sent of God to tell these people that they will be destroyed for their sin. Now, if they are not destroyed, it will be thought that I have not preached the truth, and, what is far more serious, it will be thought that God does not keep his word.” His whole thought was taken up with the honour of God, and his own honour as involved in that of the Lord. There are many people, nowadays, who seem to think everything of man, and very little of God; and, consequently, they fall into grievous errors. Jonah, on the contrary, thought everything of God, and very little of men. He fell into an error by so doing, and there was a want of balance of judgment, yet is Jonah’s error so very seldom committed that I am half inclined to admire it in contrast with the error on the other side. He felt that it would be better for Nineveh to be destroyed than for God’s truthfulness to be jeopardized even for a single moment. God would not have us push even concern for his honour too far; but we are such poor creatures that, very often, when we are within an inch of the right course, we fall into a snare of the enemy. It was so with Jonah, when he was exceedingly displeased and very angry at what God had done in sparing the repentant people of Nineveh.

2. And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish : for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.

This was as much as if he had said to the Lord, “I went and did thy bidding, and told the Ninevites that they would be destroyed; but I knew in my heart that, if they repented, thou wouldst not carry out thy threat, and now thou art too gracious, too kind, to these wicked

people.” It is a strange thing, is it not, that Jonah was angry because his message was blessed to his hearers? As a good commentator says, “When Christ sees of the travail of his soul, he is satisfied; but when Jonah saw of the travail of his soul, he was dissatisfied.” There are some men who leave off preaching because they do not succeed; but here was one who was ready to give up because he did succeed. It is strange that such a good man as Jonah was should fall into such a foolish state of mind; but God still has a great many unwise children. You can find one if you look in the right place; I mean, in a looking-glass. We are all foolish at times; and it should be remembered that, although Jonah was foolish, and wrong in certain respects, there is this redeeming trait in his character, — we might never have known the story of his folly if he had not written it himself. It shows what a true-hearted man the prophet was, that he just unveiled his real character in this Book. Biographies of men are seldom truthful, because the writers cannot read the hearts of those whom they describe; and if they could read them, they would not like to print what they would see there. But here is a man, inspired of God to write his own biography, and he tells us of this sad piece of folly, and does not attempt in the least degree to mitigate the evil of it. Now turn to a very different portion of Scripture, Romans **5**

This exposition consisted of readings from Jonah 3, 4:1, 2; and Romans 5.

MICAH

MICAH 4

1. But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it.

God's cause and kingdom shall not be hidden away in a corner: "the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains," an Alp upon other Alps, higher than all the other hills. The day is coming when the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ shall be the most conspicuous thing in the whole world, "and people shall flow unto it." The heathen, the people who knew nothing about it, shall flow to it like a great river.

2. And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths:

That is the way the grace of God works in us; he teaches, and then we not only learn, but we obey.

2, 3. For the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off;

The kingdom of Christ, the Son of David, shall attract people and nations that were far off from the holy city where he lived and died.

3. And they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

They shall give up the study of the art of war. Their spirit shall be softened, in many cases renewed by grace and then they shall take to the useful arts; they shall not throw away their swords, but shall beat them into ploughshares, they shall not hurl their spears into the earth, but shall bend them into scythes or pruning-hooks. Oh, that the day were come when the wealth and ingenuity and power of nations were used in the pursuits of peace instead of in the arts of war! This is the tendency of the kingdom of Christ, for

wherever he comes, he makes peace. Nothing is more opposed to the spirit of Christianity than war; and when men are Christians, not in name only, but in deed and in truth, wars must cease.

4. But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree: and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken it.

The best evidence that this will be the case is that the Lord of hosts, who has all power at his disposal, has said that it shall be so.

5. For all people will walk every one in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of the LORD our God for ever and ever.

When we learn to know God in truth, we do not give him up, but we walk in his name for ever and ever. God's covenant with us is an everlasting covenant, reaching beyond time, and enduring throughout eternity. Some nations have discarded their idol gods; but those who really know and love the Lord will walk in his name for ever and ever.

6. In that day, saith the LORD will I assemble her that halteth, —

God will bring to himself you that limp, that hesitate, that tremble, that fear: "I will assemble her that halteth," —

6. And I will gather her that is driven out —

Hunted by Satan, and harassed by care, frightened by depression of spirit, "I will gather her that is driven out," —

6. And her that I have afflicted;

If God has laid his hand upon one of you so that you have a special affliction from himself, you have this gracious promise that he will gather you to himself.

7. And I will make her that halted a remnant, and her that was cast far off a strong nation: and the LORD shall reign over them in mount Zion from henceforth, even for ever.

Little scattered communities, churches which have been weak and feeble shall have the strengthening of God, and they shall be, through his sovereign grace, a remnant saved by grace to his praise and glory. Note how everything here is done by God; you keep on reading, "I will," "I will," "I will." Oh, those blessed "I wills" of God! Our wills are often defeated and disappointed, but God's "I wills" stand fast for ever.

8. *And thou, O tower of the flock, the stronghold of the daughter of Zion, unto thee shall it come, even the first dominion; the kingdom shall come to the daughter of Jerusalem.*

So it did. “Beginning at Jerusalem,” was Christ’s order concerning the preaching of the gospel after his resurrection. The first servants of Christ were of that ancient people who might be called the “tower of the flock, the strong hold of the daughter of Zion.” Oh, that Christ would soon return in mercy to the —

“Chosen seed of Israel’s race,
A remnant weak and small,” —

and gather them to himself, for that would be the fullness of the Gentiles also!

9. *Now why dost thou cry out aloud? is there no king in thee? is thy Counselor perished?*

Sometimes, our prayers may be the utterance of our fears rather than of our faith, and then the question comes, “Is there no king in thee? Is thy Counselor perished?” Can we not trust to him whose name is “Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace”?

10. *For pangs have taken thee as a woman in travail.*

They are sharp pangs, but they lead to life, and therefore they are blessed pangs after all.

10. *Be in pain, and labour to bring forth, O daughter of Zion, like a woman in travail: for now shalt thou go forth out of the city, and thou shalt dwell in the field, and thou shalt go even to Babylon: there shalt thou be delivered; there the LORD shall redeem thee from the hand of thine enemies.*

It looks more like a threat than a promise that God would send his people to Babylon, but there they were to be delivered; and it oftentimes happens with us that we must be brought into captivity before we are set free, we must feel the weight of the iron bondage of sin and Satan before we are brought out into the glorious liberty wherewith Christ makes his people free.

11. *Now also many nations are gathered against thee, that say, Let her be defiled, and let our eye look upon Zion.*

All the enemies of Israel came together, hoping to destroy her, they saw that God had left her for a while in their hands, so they maliciously sought her destruction.

12. *But they know not the thoughts of the LORD, —*

They had their own thoughts, and they thought that the Lord meant what they meant, — the entire destruction of the chosen race. So the prophet says, “But they know not the thoughts of the Lord,”

12. *Neither understand they his counsel: for he shall gather them as the sheaves into the floor.*

God let them come together, great hosts of them, like the sheaves of wheat upon the threshing-floor. Then see what the Lord says: —

13. *Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion: for I will make thine horn iron, and I will make thy hoofs brass; and thou shalt beat in pieces many people:*

She was to be like the ox that treadeth out the corn, and she was to have horns of iron and hoofs of brass with which to break in pieces those that had oppressed her.

13. *And I will consecrate their gain unto the LORD, and their substance unto the Lord of the whole earth.*

So that, when they expected to destroy her, she destroyed them, and there may come a day when all the great men and the wise men and the proud men of the world will come together to destroy the Church of Christ, but, oh, how mistaken they will be! For when their pride is at its height, then will the poor weak Church of Christ be suddenly strengthened by the Most High, and she shall tread them under her foot, and they shall be utterly defeated, to the praise of the glory of the God of Zion who liveth for ever and ever.

MICAH 6

1. *Hear ye now what the LORD saith;*

And yet some doubt the infallible inspiration of Scripture. I would commence every reading of the Scripture with such a word of admonition as this: “Hear ye now what the Lord saith.” That is what the prophet said; but God spake by the prophet: “Hear ye now what the Lord saith.”

1. *Arise, contend thou before the mountains, and let the hills hear thy voice.*

As men were hardened, and turned away their ears, the prophet was bidden to speak to the mountains, those mountains which had

been disfigured with the shrines of idols, with altars on every high hill, or, perhaps, those higher hills that were never cultivated, and that remained untouched by the defiling hand of men. God makes an appeal to these ancient things.

2. Hear ye, O mountains, the LORD'S controversy, and ye strong foundations of the earth: for the LORD hath, a controversy with his people, and he will plead with Israel.

It was wonderful condescension on God's part that he should deign to come as a defendant before the august court of the mountains, and in the presence of the deep foundations of the earth. It is a noble conception, in poetry most excellent; in grandeur, worthy of God. He made his appeal to the ancient hills to hear his pleading while he condescended to argue and ask his people why they had rejected their God, and turned aside to idols. Then he pleaded with Israel.

3. O my people, what have I done unto thee?

“What but good, what but mercy, have I done unto thee?”

3. And wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me.

He asks them to give any reason whatever why they had turned away from him. Beloved friends, have any of you, who are the people of God, grown cold in your love to him? Are you neglecting the service of the Most High? Are you beginning to trust in an arm of flesh? Are you seeking your pleasures in the world? Have you lost the love of your espousal, your first love to your blessed Lord? Then hear him plead with you. Be not as Israel was, but let the Lord speak to you rather than to the hills: “What have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me.” O Lord, we have nothing to testify against thee! We have very much to testify for thee; and we blush to think that we have not done so oftener. Oh, that we had felt more love to thee, and had borne a bolder and more consistent testimony to thy love, thy grace, thy faithfulness!

4. For I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of servants; and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.

God constantly refers to Israel's coming out of Egypt; on every great occasion he begins, “I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.” And to his people the Lord still says, “I brought thee up out of the

land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of slavery.” Is it not so? Do we not still delight in his redeeming work, in the sprinkling of the blood of the Paschal Lamb, and in the high hand and outstretched arm with which the Lord delivered us from the bondage of our sin? Remember that thou also wast a bondman; forget not who bought thee, and with what price; remember who delivered thee, and led thee out, and with what mighty power. Remember this, and let thy cold love burn up again, and let thine indifference turn to enthusiasm. O Lord, revive thy people! The Lord further says to his people, “I sent before thee Moses (the lawgiver), Aaron (the priest), and Miriam (the prophetess);” one to teach thee, another to plead for thee, and to sacrifice for thee, and the third to sing for thee, to sing thy song of gladness at the Red Sea. God has given to his people many ministries in divers forms; and they are all concentrated in his Son, who is everything to us. Oh, by the greatness of his gifts to us, let us come back to our former love to him, and to something more than that!

5. O my people, remember now what Balak king of Moab consulted, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him from Shittim unto Gilgal; that ye may know the righteousness of the LORD.

Balak endeavored to get Balaam to curse the people of God; but they could not be overcome by human power. He sought to destroy them by superhuman agency; but Balaam’s curses turned to blessings. God would not permit the false prophet to curse Israel; and he has in our case turned the curse of the great adversary into a blessing. He has delivered us, and our trials have strengthened us, and taught us more of God. Will we not remember this? Shittim was the last encampment on the further side of Jordan, Gilgal the first in the promised land; therefore they are united here with God’s righteousnesses to his people, for the word is in the plural. It is a remarkable idiom: “That ye may know the righteousnesses of the Lord.” He is righteous always, in every way, towards everything, and under every aspect. I wish we knew this, for sometimes we begin to think that he deals harshly with us. When we are severely tried, we begin to doubt the righteousness of the Lord. Remember all that he has done to you from the first day to the last, “that ye may know the righteousness of the Lord.” Now the plaintiff takes up the case, but he, too, turns defendant, and asks what he can do to bring about a reconciliation.

6, 7. *Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?*

The people will give God everything but what he wants. They begin, you see, by saying that they will bring burnt offerings; they are ready to do that. The axe shall fall upon the head of numberless young bullocks, such as God demanded under the law. The people are ready enough for that sacrifice; and as for rams, they will shed their blood by thousands. If oil is wanted for the meat offering, rivers of it shall flow. When they have offered what God would have, they offer what he would not have, what God abhorred and loathed, for they offered to give their firstborn for their transgressions. They insulted Jehovah with the sacrifices of Moloch, with human slaughter, offering their children to obtain atonement for their sins. They were willing to go even that length, and to do anything but what God wants; and men will still give to God anything but what he asks for; majestic edifices, gorgeous services, ecstatic music, gold and silver; anything but what the Lord demands. Here is God's answer:

8. *He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?*

It was a spiritual worship that the Lord required; not externals, not outward gifts, but the heart. If thou wilt bring an offering, bring thyself; there is no other gift that the Lord so much desires. The prophet mentions three things that the Lord required of his people: "To do justly:" here are the equities of life. "To love mercy here are the kindnesses of life, which are to be rendered cheerfully. The prophet does not say, "to do mercy," but to "love" it, to take a delight in it, to find great pleasure in the forgiveness of injuries, in the helping of the poor, in the cheering of the sick, in the teaching of the ignorant, in the winning back of sinners to the ways of God. "And to walk humbly with thy God." These are the things which please him; and when we are in Christ, and he becomes our righteousness, these are the sacrifices with which God is well pleased; they make an offering of a sweet smell, a holy incense

which we may present before him. Talk no more of your outward ordinances, your will-worship, with abundance of music, or human eloquence and learning, and what not. These things delight not the Lord; no offering is acceptable unless the outward conduct shows that the heart is right with him.

9. *The LORD'S voice crieth unto the city, and the man of wisdom shall see thy name: hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it.*

God's voice to his people is often uttered by means of their affliction Hear ye the rod." He wishes us to understand that judgments and calamities are his voice crying to the city. Oh, that we were men of wisdom, that we would hear what God has to say! Alas! Israel did not hear, and Judah would not listen, even to God's own voice!

10. *Are there yet the treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked, and the scant measure that is abominable?*

Here he comes to practical details. In Micah's day, men had grown rich by oppression, by a want of justice; they had wronged their fellow men, and God asked them whether they expected to be pleasing to him when their houses were full of treasure which they had virtually stolen by giving scant measure and short weight. God condescends even to point out these minute particulars of moral conduct, and so should his servants do. It is not for us, his ministers, to be soaring into the clouds, to astonish you with the grandeur of our thoughts and words; but to come to your shops, to look at your bushel-measures and your pecks, your yard-sticks and your weights.

11, 12. *Shall I count them pure with the wicked balances, and with the bag of deceitful weights? For the rich men thereof are full of violence, and the inhabitants thereof have spoken lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth.*

They were, I suppose, very much what Orientals are still; you cannot trade with them without having need of more than two eyes. Their price has to be beaten down; their quantities must be counted. God would not have his people like this. He says nothing about the Moabites or the Babylonians doing this, but for his people to do it was very grievous to him.

13. *Therefore also will I make thee sick in smiting thee, in making thee desolate because of thy sins.*

They lied, and they cheated; so God would give them a sorry tongue, betokening their ill-health. He would make their present distress to get worse and worse, till they should be sick through their wounds.

14. *Thou shalt eat, but not be satisfied;*

The satisfaction that comes to us through eating is of his mercy, and when he wills, he can say, "Thou shalt eat, but not be satisfied."

14. *And thy casting down shall he in the midst of thee;*

"Thou shalt feel an inward sinking; even when thou hast eaten, thou shalt be faint, as a man who has eaten nothing."

14. *And thou shalt take hold, but shalt not deliver; and that which thou deliverest will I give up to the sword.*

So that in every project they would be disappointed; in every design they would be frustrated, because God would be against them.

15. *Thou shalt sow, but thou shalt not reap; thou shalt tread the olives, but thou shalt not anoint thee with oil; and sweet wine, but shalt not drink wine.*

God can let men have every form of outward prosperity, and yet make nothing of it. I fear that some, perhaps some present, have every outward religious blessing; yet nothing comes of it. You hear sermons, you come to meetings, you tread the olives, but you are not anointed with the oil. The grapes are in the wine-vat; but you drink not the wine. God save us from that sad condition!

16. *For the statutes of Omri are kept,*

They would not keep the statutes of God; but they could keep the foul statutes of Omri, which appear to have been specially objectionable to God.

16. *And all the works of the house of Ahab, and ye walk in their counsels;*

He was an arch rebel against God. Remember his murder of Naboth to get his vineyard; and these people followed his evil example.

16. *That I should make thee a desolation, and the inhabitants thereof an hissing: therefore ye shall bear the reproach of my people.*

Very hard was it to bear that reproach, when there would be none of the comforts of the Spirit to go with it. There are some

professors who bear the reproach of Christ, but will never share his crown; that is a fearful state of things. Gladly enough would we take up that reproach that we may be truly his; but if we profess to be God's people, and act inconsistently, we shall bear all the reproach, but have nothing to sustain us under it. O Lord, of thy mercy, save us from this!

MICAH 7

The prophet begins in a sorrowful strain, and there is much that is said in the chapter, yet there is also much of holy confidence in God.

1. *Woe is me! for I am as when they have gathered the summer fruits, as the grape gleanings of the vintage: there is no cluster to eat: my soul desired the first ripe fruit.*

It is a terrible thing for a good man to find good men growing very scarce, and to see wicked men becoming more wicked than ever. It makes him feel his loneliness very keenly, and joy seems to be banished from his heart.

2. *The good man is perished out of the earth: and there is none upright among men: they all lie in wait for blood; they hunt every man his brother with a net.*

Those were sad times in which Micah lived; and yet, under some aspects, one might be willing and even glad to live in such times, for, if ever one could be useful to one's fellows, surely it would be then. God had need of a voice like that of the prophet Micah in the days when his worship was forsaken, and the true faith had almost died out among men. Unless God had left a Micah here and there, the land would have been as Sodom, and have been made like unto Gomorrah. So the more unpleasant the age was to the good man, the more necessary and profitable was he to that age.

3. *That they may do evil with both hands earnestly,*

I wish the professed followers of Christ did good with both hands, that is, with every faculty, with every capacity, in every way, and at every opportunity, just as wicked men "do evil with both hands earnestly."

3. *The prince asketh, and the judge asketh for a reward; and the great man, he uttereth his mischievous desire: so they wrap it up.*

Honesty seemed to have died out of the nation; the highest people in the land, who ought to have been beyond the power of bribery, sold the administration of justice to the highest bidder. Ah, those were ill times indeed.

4. The best of them is as a brier: the most upright is sharper than a thorn hedge: the day of thy watchmen and thy visitation cometh; now shall be their perplexity.

Sin brings sorrow in its train; and, as nations will have no future as nations, God deals with national sin here upon earth, and visits it with national punishments. Now that sin had become so rampant in Israel, it would be the time of their perplexity, and when sins, like chickens, come home to roost, then will be the time of the sinner's perplexity. He lets his sins fly abroad, and thinks that, like the wandering birds of the air, they will soon be gone, and he shall never see them again, but they will all come home to him, and he shall be made bitterly to rue the day in which he thought that he could make a profit by transgressing the righteous law of the Lord.

5. Trust ye not in a friend, put ye not confidence in a guide: keep the doors of thy mouth from her that lieth in thy bosom.

So saturated with dishonesty had the nation become that the evil had penetrated even into domestic life, so that, where all should have been in a state of mutual happy confidence, the prophet felt bound to tell them that each confidence could not exist between those who appeared to be friends, or even between husbands and wives.

6. For the son dishonoureth the father, the daughter riseth up against her mother, the daughter in law against her mother in law; a man's enemies are the men of his own house.

And this is true in a measure still, for, without the fear of God, you will find that even the nearest and dearest relationships will not keep the unconverted from being the enemies of the godly. In that respect, a gracious man cannot trust her that lieth in his bosom, if she be not a true child of God.

Now mark the grandeur of faith. Set this white spot right in the middle of the black darkness of which we have been reading:-

7. Therefore I will look unto the LORD;-

There was nowhere else for the prophet to look. According to what he tells us, all men had become false; “therefore,” says he, “I will look unto Jehovah;”-

7, 8. *I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me. Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the LORD shall be a light unto me.*

And this is all the light that God’s people need. Even if it be the darkness of a black Egyptian night into which our spirit has fallen, yet, if God shall but appear to us, there shall soon be light for us. Dr. Watts truly sang,-

“In darkest shades, if he appear,
My dawning is begun;
He is my soul’s sweet morning star,
And he my rising sun.”

9. *I will bear the indignation of the LORD, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me: he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness.*

Listen to this testimony of the prophet, tried child of God; even when in your own household you find enemies, put your trust in God, for he will yet appear to deliver you. Let this be your joy. Sit still in humble patience, and “bear the indignation of the Lord,” for, even though trouble is laid upon you, it is not so heavy as it might have been, and it is not so severe as it would have been if the Lord had dealt with you in strict justice. Therefore in patience possess your soul, and wait quietly before your God. Be not without hope, expect that he will plead your cause and that he will execute judgment for you; watch for his light, which will most surely come, and in which you shall behold, not your own righteousness, but his.

10. *Then she that is mine enemy shall see it, and shame shall cover her which said unto me, Where is the LORD thy God? mine eyes shall behold her: now shall she be trodden down as the mire of the streets.*

This verse relates to the nation which, at that time, was oppressing Israel. She should have her turn of suffering for she should be crushed beneath Jehovah’s foot as the mire is trodden in the streets.

11, 12. *In the day that thy walls are to be built, in that day shall the decree be far removed. In that day also he shall come even to thee from Assyria, and from the fortified cities, and from the fortress even to the river, and from sea to sea, and from mountain to mountain.*

This is what was to befall those who had sinned against God, and oppressed his people; he would let loose the oppressors upon them, and they should find foes in every quarter.

13. *Notwithstanding the land shall be desolate because of them that dwell therein, for the fruit of their doings.*

That is a wonderful expression, “the fruit of their doings.” All doings bear fruit of one kind or another, and sinful doings bear bitter and deadly fruit. Woe to the man who is made to eat the fruit of his own doings! That which men eat on earth they may have to digest in hell, and there shall they lie for ever digesting the terrible morsels which they ate with so much gusto here below.

14. *Feed thy people with thy rod, the flock of thine heritage, which dwell solitarily in the wood, in the midst of Carmel: let them feed in Bashan and Gilead, as in the days of old.*

Sometimes, there are pastures in the very center of woods, and God’s people in Micah’s day were like a little flock of sheep hidden away from their enemies in the midst of a wood, but God will bring them out by-and-by to far larger liberty. They shall yet have Bashan and Gilead to be their pasture, “as in the days of old;” and so the little one shall become a thousand, and the small one a great nation, and they that were hidden away because of their many enemies shall have such liberty that everywhere they shall worship and praise the Lord their God.

15-17. *According to the days of thy coming out of the land of Egypt will I show unto him marvelous things. The nations shall see and be confounded at all their might: they shall lay their hand upon their mouth, their ears shall be deaf: They shall lick the dust like a serpent, they shall move out of their holes like worms of the earth: they shall be afraid of the LORD our God, and shall fear because of thee.*

The day will come when there shall be such a fear of the people of God upon those who formerly persecuted them that they shall

tremble before the Lord, and be afraid of the very people whom once they derided and oppressed.

18. *Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy.*

He never delights in anger, especially in anger against his own people. That is but temporary anger, and is, after all, only another form of love, for the parental anger which hates sin in a dear child is but love on fire. May God never permit us to sin without being thus angry with us! We might almost beseech him never to tolerate sin in us, but to smite us with the rod rather than suffer us to be happy in the midst of evil. Perhaps the worst of horrors is peace in the midst of iniquity, happiness while yet sin is all round about us.

19. *He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us, he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.*

We read about their sins in the earlier part of the chapter; and what a horrible catalogue of evils it was, yet here we read, “Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity?” Even those mountainous sins of which the prophet writes, the Lord will tear up by their roots, and cast them into the depths of the sea.

20. *Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old.*

There is our comfort, our God is the covenant-keeping God who will perform every promise that he has made. Even “if we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.” Blessed be his holy name.

NAHUM

NAHUM 2:11-13

This is a prophecy of the destruction of Nineveh. Remember that Assyria had been one of the great powers that swayed the world, a cruel, tyrannical empire; and God at last determined to destroy Nineveh, which was its seat of government. In a high poetical strain, the prophet cries out,

11. *Where is the dwelling of the lions, and the feedingplace of the young lions, where the lion, even the old lion, walked, and the lion's whelp, and none made them afraid?*

You will remember how Mr. Layard took out of the ruins at Nineveh those immense lions that now stand in the British Museum. They were the very type of this great empire, that boasted itself in its lion-like strength and ferocity. So the prophet cries, "Where is the lair of the lion?"

12. *The lion did tear in pieces enough for his whelps, and strangled for his lionesses, and filled his holes with prey, and his dens with ravin.*

They were always destroying, and plundering, and carrying home the spoil, so that everybody was fattened with the rapine of the nations.

13. *Behold, I am against thee, saith the LORD of hosts,*

And whenever that is the case, a man does not need any other adversary. If God be against you, O my dear hearer, what will become of you? Though you should have all the power of the world, and possess robust health, abundant riches, and keen wit, what can you do against God? "I am against thee, saith Jehovah of hosts." He throws down the gauntlet to Nineveh.

13. *And I will burn her chariots in the smoke, and the sword shall devour thy young lions: and I will cut off thy prey from the earth, and the voice of thy messengers shall no more be heard.*

It is time that they were stopped. You remember in what foul-mouthed language Rabshakeh addressed king Hezekiah; and God now declares that there shall be no more such letters as his. God

may allow evil to lord it over his people for a while; but he puts a hook in the mouth of the leviathan by-and-by. He that restraineth the sea and the waves thereof, Jehovah is his name, and he restraineth the wickedness of men.

This exposition consisted of readings from NAHUM 2:11-13, AND 3.

NAHUM 3

1. *Woe to the bloody city! it is all full of lies and robbery; the prey departeth not;*

Assyria became a great empire through violence, falsehood, and robbery. The soldiery had no respect for justice; they trod out the last spark of liberty, and crushed all nations under their feet.

2, 3. *The noise of a whip, and the noise of the rattling of the wheels, and of the prancing horses, and of the jumping chariots. The horseman lifteth up both the bright sword and the glittering spear: and there is a multitude of slain, and a great number of carcasses; and there is none end of their corpses; they stumble upon their corpses:*

When the Medo-Babylonian army came against the great city, it inflicted a terrible slaughter, killing the inhabitants without mercy, making a very holocaust of human bodies; but, inasmuch as it was a den of criminals, this horrible execution was well deserved. Yet is the story dreadful.

4, 5. *Because of the multitude of the whoredoms of the well favoured harlot, the mistress of witchcrafts, that selleth nations through her whoredoms, and families through her witchcrafts. Behold, I am against thee, saith the LORD of hosts;*

These people had been steeped in sin of the worst kind, they had led other nations into it; and had practiced the witchcrafts which God abhors. Therefore again Jehovah says, "I am against thee." When God is in arms against a triumphant nation, he soon makes an end of it.

5, 6. *And I will discover thy skirts upon thy face, and I will shew the nations thy nakedness, and the kingdoms thy shame. And I will cast abominable filth upon thee, and make thee vile, and will set thee as a gazingstock.*

See what God can do. They were the proudest of the proud, and now he makes them the scorn of the scorner, and sets them as a

gazingstock. May God never deal in that way with any proud man here! He can easily do it; when we set ourselves up to be little gods, he can soon make us utterly mean and contemptible, and bring us down to nothing at all. It is his way to deal thus with the proud.

7. And it shall come to pass, that all they that look upon thee shall flee from thee, and say, Nineveh is laid waste: who will bemoan her? whence shall I seek: comforters for thee?

If you could go today, and see the vast heaps of Kouyunjik, and of the great monuments of that mighty city all destroyed and crumbling into powder, you would know something of what God can do. It does not look likely to you that London can ever become a heap of ruins; and yet it may be, for its sins reek up to heaven as the sins of Nineveh did. The Lord can smite this city as he smote that.

8. Art thou better than populous No, that was situate among the rivers, that had the waters round about it, whose rampart was the sea, and her wall was from the sea?

The prophet quotes the destruction of the city called No-Amon, probably Thebes, as an instance of what God can do.

9. Ethiopia and Egypt were her strength, and it was infinite;

There seemed to be no measure to her strength. If she wanted assistance from other nations, she had only to call them in, and the mercenary tribes were ready to defend her.

9, 10. Put and Lubim were thy helpers. Yet was she carried away, she went into captivity: her young children also were dashed in pieces at the top of all the streets: and they cast lots for her honourable men, and all her great men were bound in chains.

So one city is a warning to another. No in Egypt is a warning to Nineveh in Assyria, and both of these a warning to our city, and a warning to every man who is proud, and haughty, and domineering, and oppressive to the poor, great in his own wisdom, and careless for the comfort of others.

11. Thou also shalt be drunken: thou shalt be hid, thou also shalt seek strength because of the enemy.

Nineveh never dreamed of doing that; she said, "I am a queen, I shall see no sorrow; I am the greatest of all cities."

12. All thy strongholds shall be like fig trees with the first ripe figs: if they be shaken, they shall even fall into the mouth of the eater.

As figs do when they are ripe. These castles, towers, fortresses, built to stand the siege, would be no sooner attacked than they would fall into the hand of the enemy.

13. *Behold, thy people in the midst of thee are women:*

You see, on those great Assyrian stones, the strong men that are sculptured there, with their enormous muscles, telling of gigantic force. When God came to deal with them, they became weak and cowardly.

13, 14. *The gates of thy land shall be set wide open unto thine enemies: the fire shall devour thy bars. Draw thee waters for the siege,*

The prophet challenges them to defend themselves.

14. *Fortify thy strong holds: go into clay, and tread the mortar, make strong the brickkiln.*

That was, to mend the walls whenever they were broken. They did this with great industry. "Do it," says God, "yet you shall not be able to stand."

15-17. *There shall the fire devour thee; the sword shall cut thee off, it shall eat thee up like the cankerworm: make thyself many as the cankerworm, make thyself many as the locusts. Thou hast multiplied thy merchants above the stars of heaven: the cankerworm spoileth, and fleeth away. Thy crowned are as the locusts, and thy captains as the great grasshoppers, which camp in the hedges in the cold day, but when the sun ariseth they flee away, and their place is not known where they are.*

What marvellous poetry is this! How terrible! Their soldiers, their rulers, their captains, were as many as the locusts and the grasshoppers; but when they were wanted, all these hosts would flee, away. What cannot God do when he comes out to fight with men? "The Lord is a man of war; the Lord is his name." He brings confusion to his enemies. Oh, fight not against him! Beloved, let us be at peace with him, the strong and mighty God. Let us confess our faults to him, acquaint ourselves with him, and be at peace.

18. *Thy shepherds slumber, O king of Assyria*

They who should have taken care of the people, the chief governors, neglected them; they who should have defended the people were out of the way when they were wanted: "Thy shepherds slumber, O king of Assyria."

18. *Thy nobles shall dwell in the dust: thy people is scattered upon the mountains, and no man gathereth them.*

Let not the same be said of London. Are there any who can say, “No man careth for my soul”? Let them not be without a helper.

“Oh, come, let us go and find them!

In the paths of death they roam;

At the close of the day ‘twill be sweet to say, ‘I have brought some lost one home.’”

Brothers and sisters, rouse yourselves; be shepherds to the people of this modern Nineveh, and seek to gather the scattered flock of Christ.

19. *There is no healing of thy bruise; thy wound is grievous:*

Thank God, we have not come to that point yet, there is healing for the bruised sinner! Though the wounds of our people are grievous, there is a balm for them; we know where it is, and what it is; let us not be slow to tell them about it.

19. *All that hear the bruit of thee shall clap the hands over thee:*

I think that is the old Norman-French word, “bruit,” signifying noise or tumult, that has been left in our Bible.

19. *For upon whom hath not thy wickedness passed continually?*

Nineveh had been so wicked, and had done so much evil, that when men heard that it was destroyed, they would even clap their hands for very joy that such an evil-doer was out of the way.

I know not to what purpose I was moved to read this passage; but it is specially meant for some one, to whom may God apply it by his Spirit!

This exposition consisted of readings from NAHUM 2:11-13, AND 3.

HABAKKUK

HABAKKUK 2:1-11

1. *I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved.*

“I shall look to God, and I shall also look to myself. There shall be an expectation as I gaze upward to my Lord, and there shall also be an examination as I look within at my empty, guilty, good-for-nothing self.”

2. *And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it.*

The prophets were accustomed to write their messages upon wax tablets, and the Lord bade Habakkuk thus write what he had seen. God would have both his law and his gospel plainly revealed to men, so that they might know and understand his will. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “We use great plainness of speech;” and the Lord would have all his servants do likewise. It is not for us to bury the gospel under a mass of fine words, but to set it forth in the simplest and clearest possible language; for it is not the power of human words that God blesses, but the truth itself as it is applied to the heart by his Spirit.

3. *For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.*

Is that a contradiction,—“Though it tarry,.... it will not tarry” ? No; to us, it appears to tarry; but, in God’s way of reckoning, it does not really tarry. To our impatient spirits, it seems long in coming; but God knows that it will not be a moment beyond the appointed time.

4. *Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.*

This grand text was quoted by Paul when he wrote his Epistles to the Romans, the Galatians, and the Hebrews. It proves that Old Testament saints understood New Testament life. David and

Abraham lived by faith, even as Paul and Peter and the other apostles did.

5. *Yea also, because he transgresseth by wine, he is a proud man, neither keepeth at home, who enlargeth his desire as hell, and is as death, and cannot be satisfied, but gathereth unto him all nations, and heapeth unto him all people:*

This was spoken of the Chaldeans, an ambitious nation so exceedingly greedy that it seemed as if the whole world would not be large enough to satisfy their voracious appetite. Their great kings enlarged their mouths like Gehenna, and they seemed as insatiable as the very maw of death itself.

They heaped up nation upon nation to make a huge empire for themselves.

6. *Shall not all these take up a parable against him, and a taunting proverb against him, and say, Woe to him that increaseth that which is not his! how long? and to him that ladeth himself with thick clay!*

That which is said of ambition may also be said of covetousness. What an idle task it is for a man to go on perpetually hoarding,—heaping together more than he can possibly enjoy himself, as if it were made for nobody but for one man, and he must needs grasp all the wealth of the world. There is scope enough for the loftiest ambition when you seek the nobler joys of grace; there is room for a sacred covetousness when you “covet earnestly the best gifts;” but, in every other respect, may these two things —ambition and covetousness — be ever thrust far from us!

7. *Shall they not rise up suddenly that shall bite thee, and awake that shall vex thee, and thou shalt be for booties unto them?*

So it happened to Chaldea that the nations, which they had spoiled, by-and-

by grew strong enough to take vengeance upon them, and to spoil them in their turn. Usually, when men do wrong, it comes home to them sooner or later. The chickens they hatch come home to roost; at night, at any rate, if not before. Towards the end of life, a man begins to gather the fruit of his doings; or if he does not reap it in this world, certainly he will in the world to come.

8, 9. *Because thou hast spoiled many nations, all the remnant of the people shall spoil thee; because of men's blood, and for the violence of the land, of the city, and of all that dwell therein. Woe to him that*

coveteth an evil covetousness to his house, that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the power of evil!

He fancies, when he gets rich by oppressing others, that he will himself rise out of harm's way. He says that he will make the main chance sure, He who has plenty of gold fancies that he will be able to preserve himself from sorrow; but this is what God has to say about that matter:

10, 11. *Thou hast consulted shame to thy house by cutting off many people and hast sinned against thy soul. For the stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it.*

These Chaldeans were great builders, as we know by the vast ruins that still remain; and most of their buildings were erected by labour exacted from the people whom they oppressed. They received no wages for their work; so even today, from the ruins, the stone cries out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber answers it. Let all men know that, sooner or later, God will execute justice even upon the greatest nations. If they will be destroyers, they shall be destroyed. Their evil policy shall, by-and-by, sweep them away. "There is a something in the world," says one, "that makes for righteousness." Indeed there is, only it is more than a something; it is God himself who is ever working in all things towards the vindication of his own righteous and holy law.

HAGGAI

HAGGAI 1

The subject is the building of the second temple. The people had been busily employed in building their own houses — some of them had gone to great expense and much labour upon these houses, but they had not built the temple of God. The prophet Haggai was sent to incite them to holy labour.

1, 2. In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month, came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet unto Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, Governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Thus people say, The time is not come, the time that the LORD'S house should be built.

A bad excuse is thought to be better than none. These people would not object to the building of the Lord's house, but they were willing to postpone so expensive a matter. There are always some persons who will not say that they decline self-sacrifice for Christ — that were more honesty than it were reasonable to expect from them, and honesty might cost their feelings too much, but they have some other reason or pretense of reason — “The time is not come that the Lord's house should be built.” Men are generally quick enough for anything that is for their own interest. “A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.” We must catch time by the forelock. Oh! if we had the same desire in the work and service of God — if we had the same desire — we should have the same promptitude to do our task. “The time is not come — the time that the Lord's house should be built.”

3, 4. Then came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet, saying, Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste?

They had wainscoted their houses with cedar and odoriferous wood, decorated them with carving, whereas the plainest edifices would have sufficed. God will allow them to build their own house

for necessary dwelling, but next to that should certainly come his house, before they took to decorating their own. "Is it time for you to do this?" and, indeed, it may well be said to many a wealthy man, "It does not appear to you to be time to aid foreign missions, but it does seem to you to be time to put another thousand pounds in Consols. It does not seem time for you to help the Bible Society, but it seems to be time to make another investment, and purchase another estate that adjoins your own." "Is it time for you, oh! ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses?"

5, 6. *Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages, earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes.*

Those people did not prosper: they were very prudent after a worldly sort, but somehow they did not get on. No! it is not what we do so much as God's prospering us that will make us really succeed. It is vain to rise up early and sit up late, and eat the bread of carefulness. God must give us prosperity, and he often withholds this where he sees it is not right. A man will not trust a bad steward, and though God hath trusted many and many a bad steward for wise reasons, yet among his own people he often gives chastisements, and deprives them of worldly comfort, when they use not what they have for his service. I think I have heard some people say that ministers never ought to talk about money in the pulpit. The prophet Haggai did, however; and it is because ministers say so little about the consecration of their substance to God's cause that this most important part of true piety is often treated with levity, and with some even by disgust. Nay, brethren, we must speak often. The great sin of the Christian Church is withholding from God. Now is it the sin as in the days of Haggai. "Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, consider your ways." If you considered your ways, you would see that you have been losers by your attempts to gain. Consider your ways practically by altering them.

7, 8. *Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD.*

That should be the great object that we should aim at in all we do, that God may be glorified — that God may take pleasure in it. It

does not matter who we please if God is not pleased, nor who gets honour from what we give, if God is not glorified thereby.

9. *Ye looked for much, and, lo it came to little;*

It vanished: the breeze was so strong that the unconsecrated substance went away like chaff.

9-11. *I did blow upon it. Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house. Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit. And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands.*

Men make an inventory: item so many cattle, item so much corn, item so much wine. God can make items, too, and he can curse all our blessings one by one. This catalogue looks like it. If they have saved in all these, robbing God, God will take care that they shall get nothing by their doing.

12. *Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Joshua, the son of Josedech, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the LORD their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the LORD their God had sent him, and the people did fear before the LORD.*

There is good bottom in those men who are led to duty when they are reminded of neglect, and it is blessed work preaching where there is a conscience quick to accede to the admonition. I do not suppose it was so with all the people of Jerusalem. but it was with some of them, and those the leading men. Where high priests and men of authority lead the way, others, if not so prompt, are often guided by the principle of imitation, and they follow the leader.

13. *Then spake Haggai the LORD'S messenger in the LORD'S message unto the people, saying. I am with you, saith the LORD.*

Here was the best cheer for them. They had engaged in God's business, and God would be with them

14, 15. *And the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the LORD of*

hosts their God, In the four and twentieth day of the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king.

Notice that date — the four and twentieth day of the sixth month.

This exposition consisted of readings from HAGGAI 1-2:1-9; HEBREWS 7:15-28.

HAGGAI 1

1, 2. In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month, came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet unto Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the LORD'S house should be built.

God keeps an almanac, and the date on which he speaks is always important. There is a set time for each of his messages to come to men, and God would have them give heed to every message as soon as it is delivered to them. If they do not, he keeps count of the days of their delay; and therefore he is particular in causing his servants to record the exact date when his message was delivered: “In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month, came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet unto Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest.” Oh that God would make this very day notable in our history by speaking to the hearts of many here! Notice, too, that God also takes care to direct his messages to those for whom they are intended. The word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet unto Zerubbabel and to Joshua. God knows to whom his message is specially addressed today, and he will not let it miss its mark. Oh, that someone here would cry unto him, and say, “Lord, speak to me, as thou didst to Zerubbabel; and not to me only, but to such-and-such another, as thou didst to Joshua.” “Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, This people say.” So that the Lord notes what people say, and in due time he reminds them of what they have said. Sometimes, he makes men eat their own words; but, if not, he at least recalls them to their remembrance: “This people say, The time is not come, the time that Jehovah’s house should be built.” Delay has always been one of the strongest of Satan’s temptations even with God’s own people, who far too often say, even concerning his work which they know ought

to be done, "The time is not come." How much more would be done for God if we would all do at once what ought to be done! We could then go on to something else, and make our lives still more useful and fruitful. But we delay so long the carrying out of one good purpose that there remains no opportunity for another. If any of you Christian people are tempted to put off some service for God which lies upon your heart, I pray you to remember your Lord's words, and to imitate his prompt action, "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work."

3, 4. *Then came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet, saying, Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste?*

"There seems to be time enough for you to enjoy the luxuries of life, but not time for you to rebuild the temple of the Lord; time enough for you to get rich, but not time for you to serve God; time enough for you to spend your labour upon anything for yourself, but not upon the house of your God!" What a rebuke was this to those who professed to be the Lord's people!

5. *Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; consider your ways.*

"Just look back a little, and see what have already been the consequences of looking to yourselves, and not to your God; have you gained anything by so acting?"

6. *Ye have sown much, and bring in little;*

"You have sown much to yourselves, but little to God; what has your sowing brought in to you?"

6. *Ye eat, but ye have not enough;*

"Those of you who do seem to prosper are not content with what you have. Peace of mind does not come with it; you are not happy."

6. *Ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink;*

"You are as thirsty as ever after all your drinking from the earthly cistern, yet you still crave for more of that drink which can never quench your soul's thirst."

6. *Ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put into a bag with holes.*

How often does this happen! Yet what folly it is for a man to work hard, and earn wages, and then put the money into a bag with holes, and so lose it all!

7-9. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD. Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house.

Again I beg you to note what a stern rebuke this was, yet how richly was it deserved! God had done great things for his people; he had brought them back from Babylon to Jerusalem, and their first concern should have been to rebuild the temple which had been destroyed. But every man was more concerned for his own house than for the house of the Lord, and, therefore, no good could come of whatever they did, or whatever they had. "I did blow upon it," said the Lord; and when God blows upon whatever a man has, or upon whatever a man does, he soon blows it away, as the marginal reading says.

10, 11. Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit. And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands.

We are dependent upon God for everything, and sometimes he makes use of the ordinary laws of nature to be a chastisement to those who forget him. If we will not be reminded of him by his mercies, we shall be reminded by his judgments; and if, as stewards, we do not make a proper use of that which he entrusts to us, he can easily take it all away.

12. Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the LORD their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the LORD their God had sent him, and the people did fear before the LORD.

What a blessing it is when faithful testimony is thus received! Sometimes it happens that people get angry, and hate the preacher who too plainly rebukes them for their sins; but when the Spirit of God works within them, they take heed to what is said, and receive the preacher's message as from God himself.

13. *Then spake Haggai the LORD'S messenger in the LORD'S message unto the people, saying, I am with you, saith the LORD.*

Haggai was the Lord's messenger, so he did not utter his own words; but he "spake in the Lord's message unto the people, saying, I am with you, saith Jehovah." He was with them, so they were with him; and it is the same with us if we are true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, for he says to us, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world;" and if we have the presence of God, we have all that we need.

14, 15. *And the LORD stirred up the Spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the LORD of hosts, their God, in the four and twentieth day of the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king.*

God takes note of the time when his people work for him; he records, in his almanac, the day, the month, the year, for he loves to see his people actively engaged in his service.

This exposition consisted of readings from HAGGAI 1 and 2

HAGGAI 2

1. *In the seventh month, in the one and twentieth day of the month, came the word of the LORD by the prophet Haggai, saying,*

God's people need to be spoken to very often; and every time God speaks to them, he takes account of it. Let us do the same: let us not think it is such an unimportant matter for us to hear a gospel sermon that we need not take note when we hear it. Oh, that the Word of the Lord were more precious to us in these days! Let us praise God for it, and not reckon it to be so common a thing that we take no more notice of it than we do of eating our breakfast or sitting down to our supper.

2, 3. *Speak now to Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and to the residue of the people, saying Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?*

There could not have been many persons left who had seen Solomon's temple. If any such were still living at that time, they

must have been extremely aged persons; yet there were many there whose fathers had seen it, and who had heard from their fathers, when they sat upon their knees as children, what a glorious place the house of God had been in Solomon's day.

4. *Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the LORD; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the LORD, and work: for I am with you, saith the LORD of hosts:*

This is the second time that Haggai was sent with this message. It was so rich, so full, so divinely encouraging, that the Lord might well repeat it: "I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts."

5-7. *According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not. For thus saith the LORD of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts.*

So it happened that, to the second temple, the Babe of Bethlehem was brought, that glorious "Desire of all nations" whom we worship; and thus it came to pass that the glory of the second house was, after all, far greater than the glory of the first.

8. *The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the LORD of hosts.*

The released captives had not much of it with which to build the second temple, but God had all that was needed, and he was willing to supply them with enough for all the needs of the great work which they had undertaken in his name.

9. *The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts.*

The Prince of peace gave peace to many in that second temple.

10. *In the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet, saying,*

Here is another message from the Lord, and the date of its delivery is as carefully noted as the dates of those that had preceded it.

11-14. *Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Ask now the priests concerning the law, saying, If one bear holy flesh in the skirt of his*

garment, and with his skirt do touch bread, or pottage, or wine, or oil, or any meat, shall it be holy? And the priests answered and said, No. Then said Haggai, If one that is unclean by a dead body touch any of these, shall it be unclean? And the priests answered and said, It shall be unclean. Then answered Haggai, and said, So is this people, and so is this nation before me, saith the LORD, and so is every work of their hands; and that which they offer there is unclean.

That which is ceremonially holy cannot communicate its holiness to that which is unclean; but that which is unclean, in the eyes of the law, can communicate its uncleanness to anything that touches it. These people, being themselves defiled with sin, could not bring to God either acceptable service or acceptable offerings.

15-17. *And now, I pray you, consider from this day and upward, from before a stone was laid upon a stone in the temple of the LORD: since those days were, when one came to an heap of twenty measures, there were but ten: when one came to the press vat for to draw out fifty vessels out of the press, there were but twenty. I smote you with blasting and with mildew and with hail in all the labours of your hands; yet ye turned not to me, saith the LORD.*

How often, in these two chapters, the word “Consider” occurs! And this subject of the Lord’s chastisement was well worthy of his people’s earnest and solemn consideration, yet they were not brought to repentance by all that they suffered.

18, 19. *Consider now from this day and upward, from the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, even from the day that the foundation of the LORD’s temple was laid, consider it. Is the seed yet in the barn? yea, as yet the vine, and the fig tree, and the pomegranate, and the olive tree, hath not brought forth: from this day will I bless you.*

That was indeed a memorable day in their history; I trust that many of us can also remember such a notable day in our life, when the Lord said to us, “From this day will I bless you.”

20-23. *And again the word of the LORD came unto Haggai in the four and twentieth day of the month, saying, Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, I will shake the heavens and the earth; and I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms, and I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the heathen; and I will overthrow the*

chariots, and those that ride in them, and the horses and their riders shall come down, every one by the sword of his brother.

In that day, saith the LORD of hosts, will I take thee, O Zerubbabel, my servant, the son of Shealtiel, saith the LORD, and I will make thee as a signet: for I have chosen thee, saith the LORD of hosts.

This exposition consisted of readings from HAGGAI 1 and 2

HAGGAI 2:1-9

1. *In the seventh month, in the one and twentieth day of the month.*

Not very long after.

2, 3. *Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest and to the residue of the people, saying, Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?*

It appears that the spirit of idleness had broken out again. As the walls began to rise the older men wept at the recollection of what an inferior structure it would be, compared with the former building of Solomon, and the idolaters, ready enough to get an excuse, are ready enough to cease work. Therefore, God's prophet is at it again. If the fire begins to die out, the bellows must be used again. The zeal of the Christian is very like the zeal of these men of Jerusalem — very apt to flag; and the zeal of God's messenger must come to stir them up again.

5, 6. *According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not. For thus saith the LORD of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while,*

Though as some read it, it is "but a little structure," but our reading is, perhaps, better — it is but a little while.

6-9. *And I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the LORD of hosts. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts.*

Clearly encouraging them to proceed with their work.

This exposition consisted of readings from HAGGAI 1-2:1-9; HEBREWS 7:15-28.

ZECHARIAH

ZECHARIAH 7

1. And it came to pass in the fourth year of king Darius, that the word of the LORD came unto Zechariah in the fourth day of the ninth month, even in Chisleu;

God's prophets were not always in the spirit, and when the Word of God came to them, it was a notable day, and they marked it in their diary. I think that we, too, who are not prophets can remember some special time when God's Word was peculiarly precious to us. We can put down "the fourth day of the ninth month."

2, 3. When they had sent unto the house of God Sherezer and Regemmelech, and their men, to pray before the LORD, And to speak unto the priests which were in the house of the LORD of hosts, and to the prophets, saying, Should I weep in the fifth month, separating myself, as I have done these so many years?

On that day the Jews had kept a fast to commemorate the terrible calamity which happened to the temple in the time of Nebuchadnezzar. Now these people were living away in Babylon, and it occurred to them that, as the temple was now building and Jerusalem was restored, it was a question whether they ought to keep that fast any longer, it was not kept by divine command. It was a fast of their own inventing, and the question was whether they ought not to abandon it when things had so changed; so they sent messengers to the temple to inquire of the priests and of the prophets, and to pray to God himself. When we have a difficult question lying on the conscience, it is well to settle it, and not allow it to rest on the heart unsatisfied.

4, 5. Then came the word of the LORD of hosts unto me, saying, Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying, When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, even to me?

There is the point. You can fast to self. You can fast to your own pride. If we have no thought of honouring God in our fasting, there

is nothing in it. The question is, “Did ye at all fast unto me, even to me?”

6. *And when ye did eat, and when ye did drink, did not ye eat for yourselves, and drink for yourselves?*

If a holy feast is not kept with a view to God, it is not kept at all. It is a feast to yourselves. You have missed the mark altogether.

7. *Should ye not hear the words which the LORD hath cried by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and in prosperity, and the cities thereof round about her, when men inhabited the south and the plain?*

Well, what was that word? Zechariah has it fresh from God, and he states it.

8-10. *And the word of the LORD came unto Zechariah, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Execute true judgment, and shew mercy and compassions every man to his brother: And oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart.*

This is what God said — most just, most fit for God to require of his people.

11, 12. *But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, they should not hear. Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone lest they should hear the law, and the words which the LORD of hosts hath sent in his spirit by the former prophets: therefore came a great wrath from the LORD of hosts.*

And well there might. When God requires what is so just and so commendable, and men will not yield to it, and will not even hear about it, they deserve that God should grow wrathful with them.

13. *Therefore it is come to pass, that as he cried, and they would not hear; so they cried, and I would not hear saith the LORD of hosts:*

The punishment of sin seems to be according to the sin itself. If men will not hear God, neither will God hear them.

14. *But I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations whom they knew not. Thus the land was desolate after them, that no man passed through nor returned: for they laid the pleasant land desolate.*

Now, in the next chapter, the prophet goes on to speak not so much of the people’s sin as of God’s resolve to have mercy upon them. He speaks with gentle warnings, and with loving promises.

ZECHARIAH 8

1, 2. *Again the word of the LORD of hosts came to me, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; I was jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I was jealous for her with great fury.*

Because they worshipped idols instead of the living God, Jehovah of hosts, who is a jealous God, was very angry with his ancient people, and allowed them to be carried away into captivity; and it is well for us, in these days, to recollect that we serve a jealous God, and that, if our hearts are not true to him, he will soon send us sharp afflictions, and make us feel the weight of his rod. It was Paul's anxious desire that he might be able to present the church at Corinth "as a chaste virgin to Christ;" and, certainly, our Lord Jesus Christ will not accept the professing church of these days on any other terms. Let thy heart be loyal and true to him, or else thou wilt stir up the holy jealousy of thy God. Yet the same jealousy which makes God punish his people for their unfaithfulness, prompts him to return to them in love so soon as he sees that he can justly do so. When their enemies have sorely vexed and oppressed them, then is the Lord jealous, not against them, but against their enemies, and he swiftly returneth to his own people in love.

3. *Thus saith the LORD; I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the LORD of hosts the holy mountain.*

The first coming or the return of God to a church, or to an individual heart, always promotes holiness; so, unless thy piety is daily growing, do not imagine that God is in the midst of thee; for, wherever the Lord comes, he comes "as a refiner and purifier." You will never find Jesus come except as John the Baptist pictured him to the Pharisees and Sadducees of his day: "whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor." The coming of Christ into any soul, or into any church, is the death of sin and the birth of holiness.

4, 5. *Thus saith the LORD of hosts; There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof.*

It is an indication that there is peace in the city when the children can play in the streets without fear. We may apply these verses spiritually thus, — when God greatly blesses a Christian church, there are sure to be many aged persons in it, those who, by their long experience and their matured wisdom, are able to teach others the lessons which they have themselves learned at the feet of Jesus. Happy is the church that hath in it many fathers and mothers in Israel. At the same time, a church that is largely blessed by God will also have in it many young converts, who will be as full of life and joy as children playing in the streets of a city in time of peace. There is a text which is true both in its literal and its spiritual sense: “Lo, children are a heritage of the Lord . . . Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them.” There is no glory so great to a Christian minister, and a Christian church, as that of having an abundance of spiritual children, and multitudes of converts brought to Christ. So shall it be with any church when God is in the midst of her.

6. *Thus saith the LORD of hosts; If it be marvelous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, should it also be marvelous in mine eyes? saith the LORD of hosts.*

This is a very remarkable passage, warning us not to judge of God by ourselves. Though a thing may be difficult to us, there are no difficulties with God. Nay, even if we imagine anything to be impossible to man, the word impossibility has no relation to the Deity, for “with God all things are possible.” Are you in trouble today? Do you say that it is impossible for you to be delivered? It is an easy thing for God to deliver you, though the task seems so hard to you. Do you feel the weight of your sin, and do you imagine that it is impossible for your sin to be pardoned? Would you look upon it as a miracle; and because it seems so marvelous to you, do you think it is marvelous in God’s eyes? Remember what he said by the mouth of Isaiah, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord.” Consider the infinite difference between God and man, and look no longer at God through the misleading glasses of your own feebleness.

7, 8. *Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Behold, I will save my people from the east country, and from the west country; and I will bring them, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness.*

Mark God's emphatic language, how full it is of "shalls" and "wills." "I will," and "they shall," saith he, again and again; and if God saith, "I will," who shall dare to say that it shall not be? What God declareth shall certainly come to pass. Surely this is golden language of comfort to those who are bowed down; then, how great must be the sinfulness of that unbelief which dares to despair when God says "shall" and "will"! That one sentence in the eighth verse contains the whole gospel in two short sentences: "They shall be my people, and I will be their God." This is the tenor of the covenant of grace. There is no "if," nor "but," nor "peradventure" in it, God does not say, "I will be their God if they will be my people;" nor, "I will love them if they will keep my laws." That is the old covenant of works, which has been broken for ever; but the covenant of grace runs thus, "They shall be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness."

9-11. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Let your hands be strong, ye that hear in these days these words by the mouth of the prophets, which were in the day that the foundation of the house of the LORD of hosts was laid, that the temple might be built. For before these days there was no hire for man, nor any hire for beast; neither was there any peace to him that went out or came in because of the affliction: for I set all men everyone against his neighbour. But now I will not be unto the residue of this people as in the former days, saith the LORD of hosts.

The Jewish people had been brought into abject poverty; they were all so poor that there was not one who could hire his fellow-man or even pay for the hire of a beast of burden. This was before the foundation of Solomon's temple was laid; but, as that wondrous structure grew, the State also grew; and, often, the prosperity of a church brings prosperity to the people around it, and to the residue of God's people there comes a blessing, and not a curse.

12. For the seed shall be prosperous;

It is a happy omen for a church when the Word preached is with power.

12. The vine shall give her fruit, and the ground shall give her increase,

Happy are the hearts that are like fruitful vines, and good and fertile ground yielding thirty, sixty, or a hundredfold increase.

12. *And the heavens shall give their dew;*

We cannot bring forth fruit unto God without the bedewing influences of the Holy Spirit. This is that “womb of the morning” of which David speaks in Psalm 110:3, and out of which the precious fruit of the Spirit must come.

12-15. *And I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things. And it shall come to pass, that as ye were a curse among the heathen, O house of Judah, and house of Israel; so will I save you, and ye shall be a blessing: fear not, but let your hands be strong. For thus saith the LORD of hosts; As I thought to punish you, when your fathers provoked me to wrath, saith the LORD of hosts, and I repented not: so again have I thought in these days to do well unto Jerusalem and to the house of Judah: fear ye not.*

Did you notice the repetition of the exhortation, “Fear not,” and then again, “Fear ye not”? The Lord knows how much mischief doubts and fears do to his people, and therefore many a time, in Scripture, he aims a blow at them. “Fear nots” abound in Scripture; it would be well if you made every one of them into a gallows-tree upon which to hang your unbelief until it died. What is your fear at this moment? What is the cause of your trembling? “Fear ye not,” saith God to you; will you dare to fear after this?

16, 17. *These are the things that ye shall do; Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates: and let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour;*

Some have wickedly said that “thought is free, and can’t be condemned;” but here we see that, if it goeth after evil, it is a wicked thing which God abhors.

17-19. *And love no false oath: for all these are things that I hate, saith the LORD. And the word of the LORD of hosts came unto me, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be to the house of Judah joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts; therefore love the truth and peace.*

God turns sad fasts to glad feasts when he visits his people in love. Is there one here who has been having a long fast? Has your soul been sorely afflicted? Have you been desponding and trembling, so that you have had no joy and gladness? Ah, when the

Lord Jesus Christ reveals himself to you, he will soon change your sad state into something brighter and better. He will give you “beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.” Look up, poor trembling soul, to yonder hill of Calvary where Jesus bled and died for you, and there let your joys begin, and never, never end.

20, 21. *Thus saith the LORD of hosts; It shall yet come to pass, that there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities: and the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the LORD, and to seek the LORD of hosts: I will go also.*

You see that, in the latter days, there is to be a great spirit of prayer and of seeking the Lord. This will include the hearing of the Word, and the love of the truth; and one good sign is that the people will say, “Let us go speedily.” They will not come in late, as so many do nowadays, just getting into their seats when the Scripture is being read, instead of being present at the opening prayer. I am sorry to say that some of you are getting later and later; and some morning, I shall most certainly carry out my threat, and preach the sermon first, unless you are more punctual. A little more thought, and a little sooner start, and you might all be at God’s house in time. David longed to be a doorkeeper in the Lord’s house, and you know that the doorkeeper is always the first in and the last out. May you all have more of David’s spirit, though you cannot all be doorkeepers! These people are to say, “Let us go speedily (the marginal reading is ‘continually’) to pray before the Lord, and to seek the Lord of hosts: I will go also.” That is the best way of bringing others to God’s house, — to say, “I will go also.” I have read that Julius Caesar never said to his soldiers, “Go,” but “Let us go.” So should we seek to get others to God’s house by saying to them, “Let us go; . . . I will go also.”

22, 23. *Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you.*

In the latter days, the Jews, who are still despised, and oppressed, and persecuted in many countries, shall be so highly

honoured by God that men of other nationalities will want to be in their company. But, no doubt, there is here a special reference to Jesus, the Jew, the Son of God who became the Son of Mary too. Oh that, this very day, many Jews and Gentiles may take hold of his skirt by a living faith, and so may receive blessing from him, and be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation!

ZECHARIAH 8:9-22

9, 10. *Thus saith the LORD of hosts: Let your hands be strong, ye that hear in these days these words by the mouth of the prophets, which were in the day that the foundation of the house of the LORD of hosts was laid, that the temple might be built. For before these days there was no hire for man, nor any hire for beast; neither was there any peace to him that went out or came in because of the affliction: for I set all men every one against his neighbour.*

See into what a state sin brought Israel. There was no bread, no work, no wage, no peace. Every man was the enemy of his neighbour.

11. *But now I will not be unto the residue of this people as in the former days, saith the LORD of hosts.*

He would change everything, and give them happiness and prosperity.

12. *For the seed shall be prosperous; the vine shall give her fruit, and the ground shall give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things.*

God can turn our estate as easily as a man turneth his hand. "The Lord can clear the darkest skies, can give us day for night." As the wheel revolves, so can the whole fortune of a man change speedily under the kind hand of God.

13. *And it shall come to pass, that as ye were a curse among the heathen, O house of Judah, and house of Israel; so will I save you, and ye shall be a blessing: fear not, but let your hands be strong.*

The Jew had become the very model of a curse. "You are as cursed as a Jew," said the enemies of Israel; but God would make them to be the very model of a blessing, so that men should say, "You are as blessed as the house of Israel."

14, 15. *For thus saith the LORD of hosts; As I thought to punish you, when your fathers provoked me to wrath, saith the LORD of hosts, and I repented not: So again have I thought in these days to do well unto Jerusalem and to the house of Judah: fear ye not.*

It is a very instructive and encouraging passage. When God threatened to punish his people, he did it. He did not play with words. He punished them, and repented not. And so when God promises to bless his people, he will not run back from his word, but he will carry out every jot and tittle of it in the blessing of his people.

16, 17. *These are the things that ye shall do: Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour: execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates: And let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour; and love no false oath: for all these are things that I hate, saith the LORD.*

He will have his people true, even if they swear to their own hurt. They must not change. They are to speak the truth, though a thousand calamities should be let loose thereby. May God make us a truth-loving, truth-speaking, truth-doing people.

18. *And the word of the LORD of hosts came unto me, saying,*

This is the point that I call your attention to. You had the question when I began to read, and here is the answer.

19. *Thus saith the LORD of hosts; The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be to the house of Judah joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts; therefore love the truth and peace.*

Here is an answer to more than they asked for. The messengers only enquired about one fast — what they should do with it — namely, the fast of the fifth month; but they get instruction upon three other fasts. If you come to God's Word upon any point, you will not only be resolved upon that point, but you will be guided in many other ways, for God's Word is full of instruction, and they that are willing to be taught of it shall become wise in all ways. So now they are told that these fasts were to be turned into feasts.

20, 21. *Thus saith the LORD of hosts; It shall yet come to pass, that there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities: And the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go*

speedily to pray before the LORD, and to seek the LORD of hosts: I will go also.

It is a fine thing when we invite other people and can always say, "I will go also." There are many people who say, "Do as I do, not as I say"; but if our example keeps pace with our precept, there will be power in our precept. "Let us go," said they; and he that said it added, "I will go also."

22. *Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD.*

And it is so, even now. We have received our religion from a Jew. We believe in One who was of the seed of Abraham. We rejoice in him as also the Son of God, and many nations come crowding about the Christ of God.

This exposition consisted of readings from ZECHARIAH 7; 8:9-22.

ZECHARIAH 9

As we read these ancient prophecies, we will not only notice how exactly they have been fulfilled, but we will also try to learn the lesson that they are intended to teach us.

1-4. *The burden of the word of the LORD in the land of Hadrach, and Damascus shall be the rest thereof: when the eyes of man, as of all the tribes of Israel, shall be toward the LORD. And Hamath also shall border thereby, Tyrus, and Zidon, though it be very wise. And Tyrus did build herself a stronghold, and heaped up silver as the dust, and fine gold as the mire of the streets. Behold, the Lord will cast her out, and he will smite her power in the sea; and she shall be devoured with fire.*

Alexander the Great besieged Tyre, and utterly overthrew it. The citizens thought that their "strong hold" was impregnable, but they had at last to surrender to the mighty monarch whose attacks they had so long resisted. All the mercenaries whom they could procure with their heaped-up silver and gold could not avert the doom which the Lord had foretold, and which, through the instrumentality of Alexander, he accomplished: "The Lord will cast her out, and he will smite her power in the sea."

5-8. *Ashkelon shall see it, and fear; Gaza also shall see it, and be very sorrowful, and Ekron; for her expectation shall be ashamed; and the king shall perish from Gaza, and Ashkelon shall not be*

inhabited. And a bastard shall dwell in Ashdad, and I will cut off the pride of the Philistines. And I will take away his blood out of his mouth, and his abominations from between his teeth: but he that remaineth, even he, shall be for our God, and he shall be as a governor in Judah, and Ekron as a Jebusite. And I will encamp about mine house because of the army, because of him that passeth by and because of him that returneth: and no oppressor shall pass through them any more: for now have I seen with mine eyes.

When Phoenicia had fallen into the hands of the conqueror, there was no power able to avert the overthrow of Philistia; and Jerusalem would also have come beneath his away had not the Lord miraculously interposed for its preservation. Alexander was restrained by a power which perhaps he did not understand, but which he could not resist, so he passed by the holy city of which the temple of the Lord was the glory in the midst. They who are divinely protected are in absolute safety even in the most perilous times. “The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.”

9. *Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion, shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.*

You know how exactly this prophecy was fulfilled in our Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, when the multitudes welcomed him with hosannas,-probably the same crowds that soon hoarsely shouted, “Crucify him!

Crucify him!”

10. *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.*

He shall yet be acclaimed as the universal Monarch, “King of kings, and Lord of lords,” for “of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end.”

11, 12. *As for thee also, by the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water. Turn you to the stronghold, ye prisoners of hope: even to day do I declare that I will render double unto thee;*

This “stronghold” is very different from that of Tyre, which failed her in her hour of need; it is indeed that of which the prophet Nahum wrote “The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him.”

13. *When I have bent Judah for me, filled the bow with Ephraim, and raised up thy sons, O Zion, against thy sons, O Greece, and made thee as the sword of a mighty man.*

Note well that it is the Lord who is doing all these notable deeds, bending Judah like a bow, fitting Ephraim to the bow as the archer presses his arrow to the string, and raising up the despised sons of Zion so that they may be able to overcome the proud sons of Greece. “The sword of a mighty man” owes its strength to the hand that wields it, and the sons of Zion are only mighty when the Lord holds them in his almighty hand, and uses them as seems good in his sight.

14. *And the LORD shall be seen over them, and his arrow shall go forth as the lightning: and the Lord God shall blow the trumpet, and shall go with whirlwinds of the south.*

Then, how safe must the Lord’s people be, and what terror must spread among their enemies!

15. *The LORD of hosts shall defend them; and they shall devour, and subdue with sling stones; and they shall drink, and make a noise as through wine; and they shall be filled like bowls, and as the corners of the altar.*

There seems to be a hint here of the strange scene that was witnessed in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, when the unbelieving mockers said of the Spirit-filled disciples, “These men are full of new wine;” but Peter repudiated the slander, and declared that the wonder which the people could not comprehend was really the fulfillment of the ancient prophecy, “It shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh.”

16. *And the LORD their God shall save them in that day as the flock of his people; for they shall be as the stones of a crown, lifted up as an ensign upon his land.*

See how many metaphors the prophet was inspired to use in a single verse in describing the Lord’s chosen ones: “ as the flock of his people; as, the stones of a crown, as an ensign upon his land.”

No human language can fully set forth all that their Lord thinks of them, and all that they are in his esteem.

17. For how great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty! corn shall make young men cheerful, and new wine the maids.

This exposition consisted of readings from ZECHARIAH 9., AND 10.

ZECHARIAH 9

*1. The burden of the word of the LORD in the land of Hadrach, —
Or, Syria, —*

1, 2. And Damascus shall be the rest thereof: when the eyes of man, as of all the tribes of Israel, shall be toward the LORD. And Hamath also shall border thereby; Tyrus, —

That is Tyre, —

2-4. And Zidon, though it be very wise. And Tyrus did build herself a strong hold, and heaped up silver as the dust, and fine gold as the mire of the streets. Behold, the Lord will cast her out, and he will smite her power in the sea; and she shall be devoured with fire.

This prophecy was literally fulfilled. Tyre was attacked by Alexander the Great, and after withstanding a long siege, was destroyed by him. The strength of the city lay in the fact that it was built right out into the sea and that it was protected by a vast, massive hole. Also as a great trading center it possessed enormous wealth, and so was able to hire mercenary soldiers. But all its power and its wealth could not preserve it from destruction; and although we read of Tyre in the New Testament, it is now only a place for the drying of the nets of a few poor fishermen, even as Ezekiel foretold that it would be (36:14). When God foretells destruction, it always comes; but, blessed be his holy name, when he promises blessing, that comes just as surely.

5. Ashkelon shall see it, and fear; Gaza also shall see it, and be very sorrowful, and Ekron; for her expectation shall be ashamed; and the king shall perish from Gaza, and Ashkelon shall not be inhabited.

When Alexander invaded the country, the Philistines expected that he would be hindered by the Tyrians; but, when Tyre fell, the Philistines were easily conquered. That shows you the meaning of the prophecy, and how literally it was fulfilled.

6. And a bastard —

Or, stranger —

6, 7. *Shall dwell in Ashdod, and I will cut off the pride of the Philistines. And I will take away his blood out of his mouth —*

That is, the prey that he had caught; “I will snatch it out of his mouth,” —

7. *And his abominations from between his teeth: but he that remaineth, even he, shall be for our God, and he shall be as a governor in Judah, and Ekron as a Jebusite.*

There is no doubt that, after the days of Alexander, many Philistines became proselytes to the faith of the Jews, and were absorbed into the Jewish nation, so that an Ekronite became like an Israelite; and this is a symbol of what God is doing all the world over. He takes men, who are strangers and foreigners to the citizenship of Zion, and puts them among his people, and treats the Ekronite as a Jerusalemite. Blessed be his name for this great act of sovereign grace.

8. *And I will encamp about mine house because of the army, because of him that passeth by, and because of him that returneth: and no oppressor shall pass through them any more: for now have I seen with mine eyes.*

And so it was. Alexander went to Jerusalem, after destroying Tyre, but he did not attack the city. There was a strange restraint resting upon him, which prevented him from touching the house of the living God. I need not repeat the well-known story of how he was met by the high priest, whom he recognized as the man whom he had seen in a dream, and so, though he smote Tyre and Philistia, he suffered the people of God to go free. But, after that time, something better happened. That great event is marked off by a new paragraph in our Bible, and well it may be: —

9. *Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: —*

Not Alexander the Great, but “thy King” “Thy King cometh unto thee:

9. *He is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.*

What a beautiful and faithful description of our Lord Jesus Christ! We wonder that Israel cannot see the Messiah here. Had this verse been written after the coming of Christ, it could not more

accurately have described the blessed person and character of our Lord Jesus. His very riding into Jerusalem upon an ass, with her colt trotting by her side, is most plainly foretold here.

10. *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.*

This is our glorious King, — the King, whose conquests are not achieved by horses, and chariots, and battle-bows, but by the more powerful panoply of truth and love. Blessed are all who dwell beneath the rule of such a King as he is.

11, 12. *As for thee also, by the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water. Turn ye to the stronghold, ye prisoners of hope: even to day do I declare that I will render double unto thee;*

Christ has come to set the prisoners free, and to be the stronghold of his people. Therefore turn ye to him, and all manner of precious blessings shall be yours.

13. *When I have bent Judah for me, filled the bow with Ephraim, and raised up thy sons, O Zion, against thy sons, O Greece, and made thee as the sword of a mighty man.*

This is a truly wonderful passage, setting forth how God is going to use his people as the weapons by which he will conquer the world. He will bend Judah, and make her into a bow, and take Ephraim, and make her into an arrow; and then he will shoot his strangely-fashioned shaft against his adversaries and ours! What does this mean but that he is going to use those of us, who are his own saved ones, that he may conquer the world by us? And what a blessed battle this is! “Thy sons O Zion against thy sons, O Greece,” — the simple believer against the cultured man of reason without faith, — the humble truster in the Lord Jesus Christ against the man who proudly boasts of his own learning and eloquence! How will this battle end? We know which side will win, for “the Lord of hosts is with us: the God of Jacob is our refuge.”

14. *And the Lord shall be seen over them,*
As he was in the midst of his people of old.

14. *And his arrows shall go forth as the lightning: and the Lord God shall blow the trumpet, and shall go with whirlwinds of the south.*

Here you have a foresight of Pentecost, and the grand era which succeeded the outpouring of the Spirit. Oh, that we might once again prove what God's almighty Spirit can do!

15. *The LORD of hosts shall defend them; and they shall devour, and subdue with sling stones and they shall drink, and make a noise as, through wine; and they shall be filled like bowls, and as the corners of the altar.*

You remember that the mockers said, on the day of Pentecost, "These men are full of new wine." They were not, as Peter plainly declared, "these are not drunken, as ye suppose;" neither does this prophecy mean that they would be so, but that the Spirit of God should fall so copiously upon them as to fill them, like bowls brimming over with precious liquid, or like the corners of the altar drenched for Elijah's sacrifice. It is a grand thing when believers in Christ are thus filled to overflowing with the Spirit of God, and energy divine; they are the men who will win the battle for the cause of God and truth.

16, 17. *And the LORD their God shall save them in that day as the flock of his people: for they shall be as the stones of a crown, lifted up as an ensign upon his land For how great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty! corn shall make the young men cheerful, and new wine the maids.*

ZECHARIAH 10

1. *Ask ye of the LORD rain in the time of the latter rain; so the LORD shall make bright clouds, and give them showers of rain, to every one grass in the field.*

The atheistic philosopher of the present day laughs at such a verse as this, and sneeringly asks, "What possible connection can there be between men and women praying to God and the showers of rain which fall upon the earth?" "Why!" saith he, "according to the laws of nature, showers fall at such-and-such seasons; and if the atmosphere should not happen to be in such-and-such a state, all the praying in the world cannot produce a single drop of rain." But faith can clearly see where reason is blind; and the prayer of faith moves

the arm of God, and the arm of God controls what the philosopher calls the laws of nature, and so the rain descends. Let us learn, from this precept and promise, the power of believing prayer. Prayer hath the key of nature as well as the key of heaven hanging at her girds. Observe also that, when we have received one mercy from the Lord, we are to go on to pray for another. These people must have had “the former rain”, yet they were to ask for “the latter rain” also; and if you, dear friends, have had “the former rain” of conversion, go on to ask the Lord for “the latter rain” of sanctification. If, in our church-fellowship, we have had “the former rain” of gracious additions to our numbers, we must ask for “the latter rain” by praying that God would continue thus to bless us. When we cease to pray for blessings, God has already ceased to bless us, but when our souls pour out floods of prayer, God is certain temporary floods of mercy.

2. For the idols have spoken vanity, and the diviners how seen a lie, and have told false dreams; they comfort in vain:

Observe the readiness of man to forsake the great fountain of living waters and to make unto himself broken cisterns which can hold no water. Notice too, that some sort of comfort may, for a time, be derived from a false trust, but it is “comfort in vain.” As a dream yields no comfort when a man wakes up, and finds himself to be not rich, as he had vainly dreamed that he was, but miserably poor, so all confidence in the flesh, all reliance upon anything except the almighty arm of God, even if it should yield us temporary hope and consolation, will only make our grief the greater when its utter failure is discovered.

2. Therefore they went their way as a flock, they were troubled, because there was no shepherd.

The sheep that belong to Christ’s flock will never find any true shepherd except him who is “the good Shepherd.” If, for a time, they should so lose their spiritual wits as to follow strangers, which, indeed is not a natural thing for them to do, for “a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers;”-they will meet with a thousand troubles because they have no shepherd.

3. Mine anger was kindled against the shepherds, and I punished the goats:

Whenever people are afflicted with unfaithful ministers, when God comes to visit these people, he will not only punish the ministers, but the religious leaders, the false professors in those churches, the he-goats who led the flock astray. Oh, what a plague and a curse will an unfaithful minister be found to have been at the last day! A well which only yields bitter water like that of Marah, merely mocks a temporary thirst; but a minister who does not preach the gospel, and who does not live the gospel, mocks the soul's eternal thirst. Whatever I may be, God grant that I may never be an unfaithful preacher of his Word! Surely, if there be an innermost hell, a place where the soul's feet shall be made more feet in the stocks of the pit than anywhere else, it shall be reserved for the man who, professing to be an instructor of the ignorant, and a leader of the flock, taught them falsehood, and led them out of the way. Pray the Lord save us from shepherd against whom his anger must be kindled!

3. *For the LORD of hosts hath visited his flock the house of Judah, and hath made them as his goodly horse in the battle.*

As an expert horseman skillfully controls his caparisoned steel, and turns it according to his pleasure in the day of battle, and makes it obey himself alone, so doth the Lord rein in and direct his Church, so that she becomes like a "goodly horse in the battle."

4. *Out of him came forth the corner, out of him the nail, out of him the battle bow, out of him every oppressor together.*

Let us learn from this verse that everything cometh from the Lord of hosts, the God of providence as well as of grace. Those statesmen, who are the corner-stones of the great building of state, must come from him. Those Christian men and women of experience, who seem to be as the corner-stones of our spiritual building, must come from him. Those who are as nails, upon whom weaker Christians seem to hang, come from him. And whoever is, in the day of battle, like God's bow, must also come from him; for, apart from the Lord, there is no strength, nor power, nor wit nor wisdom, amongst all his people. We must learn, then, to lift up our eye unto God, and look to his for ail that we need; whether it be political, social, or religious needs that are to be supplied, all must come from him.

5. And they shall be as mighty men, which tread down their enemies in the mire of the streets in the battle: and they shall fight, because the LORD is with them, and the riders on horses shall be confounded.

The Jewish infantry often turned to flight the Syrian cavalry, and I may fitly compare the apostles of old to humble fighters upon foot, while heathen and other philosophers were like mighty men on horseback, yet they were turned back by the apparently weaker warriors of the cross, and it is so still. We can well afford to give our adversaries every advantage that they can ask; let them have state patronage, let them have worldly dignity, let them have learning, let them have wealth; yet, in the name of God will we vanquish them, for the truth of God is mightier than all the wisdom of man and the weakness of God is stronger than the greatest strength of man.

6. And I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph, and I will bring them again to place them; for I have mercy upon them: and they shall be as though I had not cast them off; for I am the LORD their God, and will hear them

See, beloved, how the everlasting covenant is the great foundation of everything for the saints. “I and Jehovah their God,” says he. The Lord has taken his people to be his own for ever; and therefore, though he may seem temporarily to reject them, yet permanently and everlastingly he will hold them fast, and own them as his people.

7. And they of Ephraim shall be like a mighty man, and their heart shall rejoice as through wine: yea, their children shall see it and be glad; their heart shall rejoice in the LORD.

Get a firm hold of this promise, believers, and plead it. Are you dull and heavy, desponding and sad? Then plead this promise, “Their heart shall rejoice in the Lord.”

8. I will hiss for them, and gather them; for I have redeemed them: and they shall increase as they have increased.

The word “hiss” is supposed by some to be an allusion to the Eastern custom of men who managed bees making a sound like hissing in order to gather them into the hive. Others, however, translate the word “piping”, as the shepherd pipes to his flock, and they gather round him. In the words, “I will gather them, for I have redeemed them,” we see that particular redemption is the

groundwork of effectual calling; those whom Jesus Christ hath bought with his precious blood the Holy Spirit will call by power out from the rest of mankind.

9-11. *And I will sow them among the people and they shall remember me in far countries; and they shall live with their children, and turn again. I will bring them again also out of the land of Egypt, and gather them out of Assyria; and I will bring them into the land of Gilead and Lebanon; and place shall not be found for them. And he shall pass through the sea with affliction,-*

In the restoration of Israel, there is to be an even greater triumph than that which was achieved at the Red Sea.

11. *And shall smite the waves in the sea, and all the deeps of the river shall dry up: and the pride of Assyria shall be brought down, and the scepter of Egypt shall depart away.*

For the glory of God in the deliverance of his people is sure to be attended by another form of glory in the destruction of his enemies Christ is a sweet saviour unto God both in them that are saved and in them that perish.

12. *And I will strengthen them in the LORD; and they shall walk up and down in his name, saith the LORD.*

This exposition consisted of readings from ZECHARIAH 9., AND 10.

ZECHARIAH 11:4-17

4. *Thus saith the LORD my God; Feed the flock of the slaughter;*

This is a deep prophecy. It may be interpreted concerning many events, but I think it primarily refers to the departure of the people of Israel from God, and their rejection of Christ. It has to do with the first coming of Christ, and the way in which they cast off the great Shepherd, and he cast them off, so that Israel was simply spoiled and scattered throughout the whole earth. The teachers of those days were false to their service.

5. *Whose possessors slay them, and hold themselves not guilty: and they that sell them say, Blessed be the LORD; for I am rich; and their own shepherds pity them not.*

They bound heavy burdens upon them, grievous to be borne, but they touched them not with one of their fingers. The Scribes and Pharisees were false shepherds, and had clean departed from God in the day of our Lord.

6. *For I will no more pity the inhabitants of the land, saith the LORD: but, lo, I will deliver the men every one into his neighbour's hand, and into the hand of his king: and they shall smite the land, and out of their hand I will not deliver them.*

Christ gathered a few round him who were his true sheep, who knew his voice, and these he fed; they were the flock of the slaughter. They, most of them, died a martyr death, and they were the poor and despised among men.

7. *And I will feed the flock of slaughter, even you, O poor of the flock. And I took unto me two staves; the one I called Beauty, and the other I called Bands; and I fed the flock.*

The “Beauty” is the loving-kindness of the presence of God; “thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.” By “Bands” we understand binders, the unity of the flock; that which kept the people together. These are the two staves — the two staves with which the good shepherd blessed his flock when he is with them.

8. *Three shepherds also I cut off in one month; and my soul loathed them, and their soul also abhorred me.*

There is a mutual loathing between God and ungodly men. They, to whom Christ came, were of this character; they loathed him. and he could not endure them. See how he cried to them, “Woe unto you, Scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites; woe unto you teachers of the law.” There was a solemn division between them, and the people themselves called after their shepherds, and we are like them, so that they took up stones again to stone him, and he, with many tears, was forced to pronounce woe upon them.

9-11. *Then said I, I will not feed you: that that dieth, let it die; and that that is to be cut off, let it be cut off; and let the rest eat every one the flesh of another. And I took my staff, even Beauty, and cut it asunder, that I might break my covenant which I had made with all the people. And it was broken in that day: and so the poor of the flock that waited upon me knew that it was the word of the LORD.*

The national covenant, as far as Israel was concerned, was broken, and they were cast off and driven from their land. Oh! the sufferings of Israel in those days! The stories were enough to melt the heart of a stone. The great sins of the ages, and, worst of all, the great sin of rejecting Christ, brought upon that people such a doom that we know not where to find its parallel in all the annals of

mankind. Still, notice there was always a people that the great Shepherd looked after; “so the poor of the flock that waited upon me knew that it was the word of the Lord.”

12, 13. *And I said unto them, If ye think good, give me my price; and it not, forbear. So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver. And the LORD said unto me, Cast it unto the potter; a goodly price that I was priced at of them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the LORD.*

You know how this came to pass, and literally came to pass in that day, when the betrayer cast down the price of his blood, and they bought therewith the potter’s field to bury strangers in. This is what Israel did with her great Shepherd — with the Messiah.

14. *Then I cut asunder mine other staff, even Bands, that I might break the brotherhood between Judah and Israel.*

They became a scattered people henceforth.

15. *And the LORD said unto me, Take unto thee yet the instruments of a foolish shepherd.*

Hard clubs and swords, and such like things, unfit for sheep.

16, 17. *For, lo, I will raise up a shepherd in the land, which shall not visit those that be cut off, neither shall seek the young one, nor heal that that is broken, nor feed that that standeth still: but he shall eat the flesh of the fat, and tear their claws in pieces. Woe to the idol shepherd that leaveth the flock! the sword shall be upon his arm, and upon his right eye: his arm shall be clean dried up, and his right eye shall be utterly darkened.*

These were the shepherds to which Israel was left when they rejected Christ. They did nothing for the people; they were a curse to them, and they themselves were blinded; their own power failed. Well now, what took place actually with regard to Israel takes place with regard to any church that casts off Christ and his teaching; it becomes an anti-Christ; and all has surely been fulfilled in the great anti-Christian system, which is not dead even yet, which destroys and injures; and this day its arm is clean dried up, and its right eye is utterly dimmed. We have a terrible description of what God will do to these who turn away from him.

This exposition consisted of readings from ZECHARIAH 11:4-17; 12:1-4.

ZECHARIAH 12 AND 13:1

12:1. *The burden of the word of the LORD for Israel, saith the LORD, which stretcheth forth the heaven, and layeth the foundation of the earth, and formeth the spirit of man within him.*

Note how this chapter begins: “The burden of the word of the LORD for Israel,” — not against Israel. The gospel is always, to the true preacher of it, the burden of the Lord, but, to those who receive it, it is a burden of blessing, a load of mercy. To those who reject it, it will become a burdensome stone, crushing them to their eternal ruin. God grant, in his infinite mercy, that none of us may belong to the last class!

2. *Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of trembling unto all the people round about, when they shall be in the siege both against Judah and against Jerusalem.*

This is a promise of God’s abounding mercy to his chosen people Israel. When he comes to their aid, they shall be a cup of trembling to their enemies. Those enemies will try to swallow them, but they will find that they are drinking a cup of poison, which will cause their own death. Oh that the day might soon come when God would remember his ancient people, the Jews, and bring them back to their own land, as he certainly will do in the fullness of time, and when he has done it, then it shall come to pass that all who fight against them shall find his people to be as a cup of trembling to them. This promise, which is to be literally fulfilled to God’s chosen people, the seed of Abraham, is also spiritually true to all believers. Christian, your enemies cannot really hurt you. If they could drink you up, as men drink a cup of wine, you would be a cup of trembling to them, they would find that they had taken in more than they wanted. All the persecutors of the Church of God, in smiting this stone, have themselves been broken on it. They have found that they have undertaken a task which has ended in their own destruction. Woe unto the man who fights against the Church of the living God! Victory must always come to the Lord’s people, for greater is he who is with them than all that can be against them.

3. *And in that day will I make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people: all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it.*

This is true literally, but it is also true spiritually. As the Church of God is to be a cup of trembling to its enemies, so is it also to be a burdensome stone. They do not like it, they cannot bear it. They would, if they could, get rid of the spiritual Church of God; but they cannot get rid of it. There it is: — a stone, cut out of the mountain without hands, which will grow until it fills the whole earth, and breaks in pieces everything that opposes it. Those who set themselves against God, and against his Christ shall find themselves crushed to atoms by this mighty stone.

4. In that day, saith the LORD, I will smite every horse with astonishment, and his rider with madness:

The chief strength of Jerusalem's enemies lay in horses and chariots; but God bids his people not to fear them, for he knows how to overcome all power, whether it be the power of cavalry or the power of infantry. He knows how to smite every horse with astonishment, and every rider with madness, for, "as the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people, from henceforth even for ever," and he can protect them against the most powerful foes that may assail them.

4. And I will open mine eyes upon the house of Judah,

It looked as if the Lord had been asleep, but now he says, "I will open mine eyes upon the house of Judah," — I will look at them, and note their sufferings, pity their griefs, plan for their good, and come forth for their defense."

4. And will smite every horse of the people with blindness.

Their enemies shall not be able to see them, but God will see them, and he will deliver his people and overthrow all their adversaries.

5, 6. And the governors of Judah shall say in their heart, The inhabitants of Jerusalem shall be my strength in the LORD of hosts their God. In that day will I make the governors of Judah like an hearth of fire among the wood, and like a torch of fire in a sheaf; and they shall devour all the people round about, on the right hand and on the left: and Jerusalem shall be inhabited again in her own place, even in Jerusalem.

The literal prophecy is that the seed of Israel shall go back to their own land and shall prevail over their adversaries; but the spiritual meaning is that the Church of God shall have great power

among the people of the earth. They shall have fire put into them, — the fire of the Holy Ghost; and they shall be like a lighted firebrand amongst the wood, or as a flaming torch in a sheaf of corn; and you know how soon the sheaf would be burnt up. If God has put within you fire from heaven, you will be sure to burn, and those with whom you live will soon feel the flame. Place one really gracious man in any district and if he is thoroughly on fire with the Holy Spirit, it will be like throwing a blazing firebrand into a field of dry corn. What a conflagration will there be! The Lord send us many such blessed burnings!

7. The LORD also shall save the tents of Judah first, that the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem do not magnify themselves against Judah.

God will begin by saving the most defenseless. The tents of the people were easily swept away by their powerful foes. “Therefore,” says the prophet, “the Lord shall save the tents of Judah first.” As for the people in the strongly defended city of Jerusalem he would protect them, but he would do it in such a way that they should not take the glory to themselves. God is always very jealous of his own honour. He will save us, but it will be in a way that shall prevent our pride from glorying in it. He will never allow one saved soul to be able to say, “I saved myself,” or “I contributed to the merit which has brought me to heaven.” No; God must have all the glory, — every jot and tittle of it; and all his people are glad that he should have it.

8. In that day shall the LORD defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and he that is feeble among them at that day shall be as David; and the house of David shall be as God, as the angel of the LORD before them.

What a blessed thing it is when the Lord strengthens all his people, so that the weakest amongst them are as strong as that ruddy-faced youth who smote Goliath, and the strongest of them are like the swift-winged angels of God, ready to do his bidding! Oh, that this church might be in that blessed state! You remember how it is written that, when Israel came up out of Egypt, “there was not one feeble person among their tribes.” When will the whole Church of Christ get to be in that condition? O ye feeble ones, lay hold upon the promise now before us, and do not rest till it is fulfilled in you! “He that is feeble among them at that day shall be as David, and the

house of David shall be as God, as the angel of the Lord before them.”

9-11. *And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon.*

No doubt these verses refer, primarily, to the great mourning when King Josiah fell in battle, when all the people wept and mourned for many days because their king had been slain by the arrows shot by the archers. But this is also typical of the lamentation of a heart when it is broken on account of the death of Christ. Sorrow for sin is to be after the fashion of that great national mourning of which Jeremiah sang so plaintively in the book of Lamentations.

12. *And the land shall mourn, every family apart; the family of the house of David apart, and their wives apart;*

For this was to be a personal sorrow, in which both husbands and wives must weep on their own account.

12. *The family of the house of Nathan apart, and their wives apart;*

Perhaps these names are mentioned to indicate different classes and orders of persons; — the family of the house of David the king shall mourn and the family of the house of Nathan the prophet shall mourn. Both David and Nathan had long since gone, but their descendants were still called by their names.

13. *The family of the house of Levi apart, and their wives apart;*

The priests, as well as the kings and the prophets, were to be represented in this universal mourning.

13. *The family of Shimei apart, and their wives apart;*

Shimei, or Simeon, as the Septuagint gives it, — which may either represent the scribes, or else may refer to the people in general. These shall all mourn, personally and separately, for him whom they have pierced.

14. *All the families that remain, every family apart, and their wives apart.*

Why these chapters were divided here, I cannot imagine, for it is clear that the passage should run right on.

Zechariah 13:1. *In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness.*

ZECHARIAH 12:1-4

1-4. *The burden of the word of the LORD for Israel, saith the LORD, which stretcheth forth the heavens, and layeth the foundation of the earth, and formeth the spirit of man within him. Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of trembling unto all the people round about, when they shall be in the siege both against Judah and against Jerusalem. And in that day will I make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people: all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it. In that day saith the LORD; I will smite every horse with astonishment, and his rider with madness; and I will open mine eyes upon the house of Judah, and will smite every horse of the people with blindness.*

When God comes to defend his own, then, however despised the people may be, however despised Israel may be, God will make it to be a cup of trembling to them. He will make it to be a burdensome stone which they cannot endure, and they will be glad to be rid of it. I remember a story in one of the legends of the old saints concerning a holy woman who was taken away from her place of retreat by the ungodly, with a view of forcing her into sin. The legend runs that as they carried her, she was quite unable to resist their power, but she became heavier and heavier, so that they could not carry her and were obliged to set her down and then she went back to where she was; and I believe that the legend pictorially sets forth what happens when a true child of God is carried captive by temptation and sin. Bye-and-bye, God comes and makes them to be a burdensome stone, and they are obliged to lay them down.

This exposition consisted of readings from ZECHARIAH 11:4-17; 12:1-4.

ZECHARIAH 12:10-14; 13:1-6

10-14. *And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon. And the land shall mourn, every family apart; the family of the house of David apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Nathan apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Levi apart, and their wives apart; the family of Shimei apart, and their wives apart; all the families that remain, every family apart, and their wives apart.*

Zechariah 13:1. *In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness. And it shall come to pass in that day,*

How much God can crowd into a single day!

2. *Saith the LORD of hosts, that I will cut off the names of the idols out of the land, and they shall no more be remembered: and also I will cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to pass out of the land.*

God will not only destroy the idols, but he will cut off the very names of them out of the land, and they shall no more be remembered.

3. *And it shall come to pass, that when any shall yet prophesy, then his father and his mother that begat him shall say unto him, Thou shalt not live; for thou speakest lies in the name of the LORD: and his father and his mother that begat him shall thrust him through when he prophesieth.*

It was a part of the law of God in the Book of Deuteronomy that any man who professed to be a prophet, and who sought to turn the people aside to the worship of idols, should be put to death; and it is here declared that, when God had cleansed the land, there would be no false prophets; and, if any man pretended to be a prophet of the Lord when he was not sent of God, his own father and mother would be the first to execute judgment upon him.

4. *And it shall come to pass in that day, that the prophets shall be ashamed every one of his vision, when he hath prophesied; neither shall they wear a rough garment to deceive:*

Imitating Elijah's garb, the false prophets hoped to win the attention of the people by the roughness of their dress; but all this would be dropped for the people would be so well instructed that they would refuse to hear the false prophet.

5. *But he shall say, I am no prophet, I am an husbandman; for man taught me to keep cattle from my youth.*

They shall be so ashamed of it that, to have kept cattle shall seem to be a far more noble employment than to have falsely set up to be a prophet of the Lord.

6. *And one shall say unto him, What are these wounds in thine hands?*

"You wear the marks usually seen in God's servants; you have scarred yourself as his prophets were accustomed to do, you have, as it were, tattooed yourself with the name of your God, what does it all mean?" But he shall be so ashamed of it that-

6. *Then he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends.*

He shall say anything rather than confess that he is a false prophet, he shall be so ashamed of himself. What a mercy it is when God makes men ashamed of sin, and when he makes them so ashamed of false doctrine that they cannot bear it, and will not any longer proclaim it! Oh, that that day were already come!

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 51; AND ZECHARIAH 12:10-14; 13:1-6.

ZECHARIAH 12:10-14

10. *And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications:*

This is a promise concerning Israel. Long have the Jews rejected the Christ, but the day is coming when they shall acknowledge Jesus of Nazareth to be the promised Messiah. In that day, this promise will be fulfilled. God must always give "the spirit of grace" ere men will pray aright; and wherever grace is given, there is always true prayer.

10. *And they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.*

Discovering that they have rejected the true Messiah, they will be overcome with the most acute grief that was ever endured, grief altogether inconceivable.

11. *In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon.*

One of the greatest mournings that was ever known was that when Josiah was slain in battle, and the people lamented that their best of kings was so early taken away from them. Such shall be the sorrow that shall fall upon repenting Israel.

12. *And the land shalt mourn, every family apart;*

There shall be universal mourning throughout the whole land; yet it shall be special and particular to each household: "every family apart."

12-14. *The family of the house of David apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Nathan apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Levi apart, and their wives apart; the family of Shimei apart, and their wives apart; all the families that remain, every family apart, and their wives apart.*

True repentance is the distinct act of each individual. It cannot as a rule be performed in the mass. There is a general repentance which, like that of the Ninevites, has a special excellence about it, because it affects a whole city or nation; but that is not the kind of repentance which is described here. In this case, the sharpness of personal conviction of sin cuts and wounds the conscience of each individual, and there is a bitter cry uttered by each one as if he were the only sinner in the world. Oh, how sincerely you and I would repent if we felt as if we were the only ones who had ever broken God's law; yet such a repentance as that we must feel if we would be personally forgiven.

This exposition consisted of readings from ZECHARIAH 12:10-14; AND, 13:1, 2.

ZECHARIAH 13

1. *In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and uncleanness.*

They shall see that pardon when they have truly seen their sin. When once the foulness of their transgression is perceived, then the fount, sin of cleansing shall be perceived, too. No man ever knows the preciousness of the God given remedy till he has felt the force of the terrible disease. No one by faith plunges into the crystal fount of perfect cleansing without first lamenting the filthiness which needs to be removed.

2. And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the LORD of hosts, that I will cut off the names of the idols out of the land, and they shall no more be remembered: and also I will cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to pass out of the land.

Where there is pardon, there is sure to be sanctification. The idols must fall, and the false prophets must go. We cannot have our sins and have a Saviour too. If we have Christ to blot out our sin, we must have the same Christ to remove sin as to its authority, and power, and dominion over us.

3. And it shall come to pass, that when any shall yet prophesy,—

When any false prophet shall still pretend to prophesy,—

3. Then his father and his mother that begat him shall say unto him, Thou shalt not live; for thou speakest lies in the name of the LORD: and his father and his mother that begat him shall thrust him through when he prophesieth.

So intense shall be the hatred of false prophets, that men shall not spare even their own children. They shall abhor them when they stand up against the Lord of hosts and against his truth.

4. And it shall come to pass in that day, that the prophets shall be ashamed every one of his vision, when he hath prophesied; neither shall they wear a rough garment to deceive:

They shall give up this wicked employment at once and for ever. Just as when one, who has pretended to tell fortunes, is converted, and he forsakes that evil occupation; so converted men must never be in association with those who are familiar with the spirits of the dead, and who practice sorcery and the like abominations. Everything of the kind is to be, abhorred by godly men, and they must turn away from it with holy horror and disgust.

5, 6. But he shall say, I am no prophet, I am an husbandman; for man taught me to keep cattle from my youth. And one shall say unto him, What are these wounds in thine hands?

What are these marks of the idol gods and goddesses? Have you not been branded with them? Did you not belong to the accursed fraternity that worship idols, and receive the sigmate in their hands?

6. *Then he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends.*

Idolatry shall become so detestable a thing that he will say anything rather than acknowledge that he has had aught to do with idols. Those very marks in which the false prophets once gloried, they shall loathe. The Brahmin shall throw away his sacred thread, and those who have been tattooed in honour of other false gods shall hate the marks of shame that are upon their persons. Now, brethren, inasmuch as the heathen prophets received in their bodies the marks of their gods, we understand something of what Paul meant when he wrote to the Galatians, "From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." He regarded his baptism as a kind of water-mark that could not be removed. He looked upon the marks of the scourge, with which he had been beaten again and again for Christ's sake, as being proofs that he belonged to Jesus. They stamped him with the broad arrow of the great King, so that all men might know that he was dedicated to him and to his service, tattooed with marks in his flesh that were indelible, and never to be removed.

7, 8. *Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the LORD of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones. And it shall come to pass, that in all the land, saith the LORD, two parts therein shall be cut off and die; but the third shall be left therein.*

So, in the times of God's fiercest judgments, he has a remnant according to the election of grace who shall escape the sword, because that sword has been awakened against him who was their Representative, their Surety, and who stood as Substitute in their place.

9. *And I will bring the third part through the fire,—*

"Saved; yet so as by fire." This is true in a certain sense of all the righteous. They shall certainly be saved, and though the fires of persecution should rage around, the Lord will bring them through

the fire. They shall not perish in it, but they shall even derive good from it; "I will bring the third part through the fire,"—

9. And will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried:

If you are God's people, you will certainly be tried and tested. As surely as ever God has put you in the third part that he will save, he has also ordained that you should pass through the fire. You shall have, both within and without, that which shall test your sincerity, and prove whether your faith is of divine origin or not. There is no easy road to heaven.

"The path of sorrow, and that path alone,
Leads to the land where sorrow is unknown."

Yet we who believe in Jesus are not an unhappy people. The character of God's saints is still according to Paul's paradoxes; "As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things."

9. They shall call on my name, and I will hear them:

What a precious little sentence: "they shall call on my name"! And God will give ear to their prayer: "And I will hear them." The "shall" and the "will" are put close together, and the one is as much the work of God's grace as the other is: "They shall call on my name, and I will hear them."

9. I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The LORD is my God.

Note these quick responses,—echoes, as it were. They call and God hears. God speaks, and they reply. God says, "It is my people." They answer, "The Lord is my God." Blessed are you if you can join in these heart-echoes, or can say, with the spouse, "My Beloved is mine, and I am his." Is there this mutual interchange of love between you and the all-glorious Lord? If so, thrice happy are you; but if not, God grant that you may speedily enter into this secret of the Lord! May he bless to every one of us the reading of his Word, for his dear Son's sake! Amen.

MALACHI

MALACHI 3

1. *Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me:*

The name Malachi means “my messenger.” The reference here is, of course, to John the Baptist, who was to prepare the way of the Lord.

1. *And the lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple,*

Now, the temple at Jerusalem is utterly destroyed, so how can the Jews still think the Lord, whom they profess to seek, will suddenly come to his temple? He must have come there already, — so we know he did, — for there is not one stone of the temple left standing upon another: “The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple,” —

1. *Even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts.*

Christ was the great messenger of the covenant, the messenger of mercy; and the Lord’s own people, even in that ancient time, delighted in anticipating the coming of the Christ of God, the anointed and appointed messenger of the Lord of hosts.

2. *But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner’s fire, and like fullers’ soap:*

All that only looked like religion, but was not real and genuine, was purged away at his coming. He was like a refiner’s fire, consuming the false pretensions of the Pharisees, and the vain boastings of the Scribes. There is, in the religion of Jesus Christ, a power that is a great purgative and a great refiner.

3. *And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver:*

Christ comes suddenly, but he comes to stay: “He shall sit.” If he comes into our heart at this moment, — and he may come there suddenly, — he will come to stay there, and he will sit there “as a refiner and purifier of silver.”

3. *And he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness.*

Those men, called to holy service, shall offer unto the Lord offerings in righteousness after he has cleansed and purified them. You cannot worship God aright until you have been cleansed by Christ. Till then, you are like priests with defiled feet, unfit to come into the sanctuary of God; but when Christ has purified you, fail not to draw near to God, and to present your thanks-offering unto him.

4, 5. *Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the LORD, as in the days of old, and as in former years. And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the Lord of hosts.*

See how hard taskmasters are put, by divine inspiration, with sorcerers, and adulterers, and false swearers. They do not think badly of themselves, but the Lord thinks badly of them, and his judgment is always just.

6. *For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.*

This is their comfort; even the immutability of God is on the side of his people. He is just, and always just, he hates sin, and always hates sin; yet that unchangeableness of his is always on the side of the people of his choice.

7. *Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the LORD of hosts.*

Ye wanderers from God, take this invitation home to your hearts, and act upon it. Arise, and return unto your Father; for when you are yet a great way off, he will see you, and will run to meet you, and have compassion upon you: "Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts."

7. *But ye said, Wherein shall we return?*

God takes notice of what men say to him after he has spoken to them. He will take notice of what you say when you go out of this house of prayer. Erring men usually have something to say for

themselves. The selfrighteous can always invent some excuse, or ask some question, as they did here: "Wherein shall we return?"

8. *Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me.*

They were always ready to deny or question a just accusation, instead of letting it operate upon their conscience, so they asked about this charge.

8. *But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings.*

They had kept back from God's service the money which was needful for the carrying on of the worship of his house. We read, in Nehemiah 13:10, that "the Levites and the singers, that did the work, were fled every one to his field," for they could not live at Jerusalem, because "the portions of the Levites had not been given them," — their supply of provisions having been stopped through the meanness of the people who had thus robbed the Lord "in tithes and offerings."

9. *Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation,*

They could not make out why they were so poor, and why they could not get on; the real reason was that there was a curse resting upon all that they did, because they had robbed God.

10. *Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.*

They had kept themselves poor by their own meanness. If they had behaved rightly towards God, he would have enriched them with the bounties of his providence; the very windows of heaven would have been thrown open to give them abundance for all their needs.

11. *And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, with the LORD of hosts.*

The locust and the caterpillar came up and ate their harvests, all because God was angry with them; and he alone could change their miserable circumstances.

12. *And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the LORD of hosts.*

God is able, simply with a turn of his hand, or a glance of his eye, to enrich or to impoverish. He gives in a thousand ways that we cannot control, and he takes from us in as many ways which perhaps we cannot understand. It is always best to be right with God.

13-15. *Your words have been stout against me, saith the LORD. Yet ye say, What have we spoken so much against thee? Ye have said, It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the LORD of hosts? And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered.*

Those were indeed bad old times when the mass of the people looked only to their own temporal comfort, when they saw the wicked become rich, they wished that they were wicked too, in order that they might be rich. They thought that it was of no use to serve God; but happily there was another set of people in the land, as there always is, more or less. God never leaves himself without witnesses; and when the wicked are proudest, God's people are often boldest.

16. *Then —*

At that very time, —

16. *They that feared the LORD spake often one to another:*

They could not bear to hear their God thus spoken of, so they went to one another's houses, they found one another out, and talked to one another.

16. *And the Lord hearkened, —*

He loves to listen to the holy talk of a holy people: "The Lord hearkened," —

16. *And heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name.*

That is a very precious expression; you cannot perhaps, speak much for the Lord, yet you think the more about him; and God remembers those who think upon his name. Yet, often, thinking leads to speaking; and there ought to be no speaking without previous thought. God loves to listen to the thoughtful conversation of a loving people who stand true to him in the midst of an ungodly crowd, and he thinks very highly of them.

17. *And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels;*

“Others, who thought much of themselves, shall be thrown away like worthless pebbles, but these faithful ones shall be mine in that day when I am putting my jewels into my crown, for they shall be precious in my sight.”

17. *And I will spare them, as a man prepareth his own son that serveth him.*

When the sword of the foeman is drawn from its sheath, when disease is putting down its myriads, when God’s vengeance has laid hold upon the ungodly, he will be a hiding-place for his people, and will care for them as a man would anxiously care, not only for his son, but for his only son, one who is obedient and faithful to his father: “his own son that serveth him.”

18. *Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked,*

Not now, but then; by-and-by, there shall be a distinguishing mark set upon all mankind: “Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked,” —

18. *Between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.*

This exposition consisted of readings from MALACHI 3. AND 4.

MALACHI 4

1, 2. *For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. But unto you —*

Here is the difference: “But unto you” —

2. *That fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise-*

Not like a scorching and burning oven as the sun of the heavens is in the East, but he shall arise —

2. *With healing in his wing; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.*

All is right with those who are right with God.

3-6. *And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the LORD of hosts.*

Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their father, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse. The Old Testament ends with the mutterings of a curse, but the New Testament begins with a message of blessing concerning the birth of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. What a mercy to come from under the old covenant unto the new!

This exposition consisted of readings from MALACHI 3. AND 4.

MATTHEW

MATTHEW 2

1. Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, —

Probably from that Assyria which is joined with Israel and Egypt in the remarkable prophecy in Isaiah 19:24, 25: “In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria even a blessing in the midst of the land: Whom the Lord of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance. “Behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,” —

2-3. Saying, Where is he that is, born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

He was troubled about the kingship which he had no right to possess, for he thought that, if the “King of the Jews” was really coming, he would be dethroned. And all Jerusalem was troubled with him, for the people over whom he reigned never knew what mischief he might do when once his suspicions were excited, for he was a cruel, blood-thirsty tyrant.

4-6. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the prince of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.

It was something to get a distinct declaration from the Jewish rulers that the Christ was to be born at Bethlehem, for Jesus was born there. Afterwards, they called him, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Nazareth was the place where he was brought up, but Bethlehem was the place of his birth, in fulfillment of the prophecy given hundreds of years before the event.

7, 8. *Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.*

Pretty “worship” was that which he would render to the infant King! He intended to murder him, and, in like manner, how often, under the pretense of worshipping Christ, has the very truth of Christ been murdered. Men invent new sacraments, new doctrines, new forms and Romanies, all avowedly for the edification of the Church and for the glory of Jesus; but really that they may stab at the very heart of God’s gospel, and put to death the living truth.

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

Yet it was not a wandering star, nor a shooting star; but a traveling star such as they had never seen before.

10-12. *When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.*

Very providentially, the magi had brought the gold with which Joseph would be able to pay the expenses incurred in journeying to the land of Egypt, and in supporting his family there till he could return to his home and his business. God always takes care of his own children; and specially did he provide for his firstborn and only-begotten Son.

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

How obedient Joseph was! He was a man of a docile spirit, who willingly did as God bade him. He has, perhaps, never had his

character sufficiently well set forth in the Church of God, for he was eminently honoured by being the guardian of the young child and his mother; and he discharged his duty with singular humility and gentleness.

15. *And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son.*

Which was true first of Israel, the nation, as God's ion, and now again true of Jesus, the great Son of God. It is true also of all sons of God; we have to be called out of Egypt. By the blood of the Paschal Lamb we too are saved, and we are brought out of Egypt with a high hand and an outstretched arm, in the day when God delivers us from our sin.

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

That was the light he put upon it: "that he was mocked of the wise men." He was exceeding wroth, and when he was wroth, his anger was terrible. Augustus said of him that it would be better to be Herod's sow than Herod's son, which was true, for he would not kill a sow, as he held to the Jewish faith. He did not kill swine, but he would not mind killing anybody in his passion: "He was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men." He took a wide range in order, so he thought, to make quite sure that he should kill the Child King whom he especially hated.

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

It must have been a very sorrowful day in Bethlehem; you can imagine the grief that filled the hearts of the mothers there. There is Herod, who acts the hypocrite, and tries to slay Christ at the first,

and there is Judas at the end, acts the hypocrite, too, and betrays his Lord. Thus is the life of Christ begun and ended in sorrow.

19-22. *But when Herod was dead behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life. And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judaea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither:*

Archelaus was another chip off the old block, and a chip of very hard wood, too, equally cruel, and without his father's greatness of mind. He had all Herod's vices without his mental vigor.

22. *Notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee:*

He did not follow his own judgment. This man, thoroughly a servant of God, waits for orders; he has his fears, but he will not even act upon them, but he waits till he is warned of God in a dream, and then he turns aside into the parts of Galilee.

23. *And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth:*

Galilee was despised, but Nazareth was thought to be the worst part of Galilee. Netzar is a word in the Hebrew signifying a sprout or branch, and Nazareth apparently comes from the same root.

23. *That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.*

This is the name commonly given to our Lord in the Old Testament. "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots." Jesus was the sprout, or the shoot out of the withered stem of Jesse. When the dynasty of David was like the tree cut down, and only the stem of it left there sprang up out of it the Netzar, the Nazarene; so he is found dwelling in a city that is called by that name, and he also is called a Nazarene. And the name clings to him to this day, there are those who will call him by no name but "the Nazarene." There was one who threatened to crush the Nazarene, but when he was dying he had to cry, "O Nazarene, thou hast triumphed;" and the Nazarene will always do so. He shall be crowned King of kings and Lord of lords, and he shall reign for ever and ever. Hallelujah!

MATTHEW 2:1-12

1. *Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,*

Our Lord was born in Bethlehem, an inconsiderable village of Judaea. Its name, however, is significant; it means, “the house of bread.” Truly Bethlehem has become, in a spiritual sense, the house of bread to all who feed on Christ. When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, —

2. *Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews?*

There was another king, of whom we have just read: “Herod the king,” but he was an Idumean, an Edomite. He had no right to the throne; but here is born the true heir to the throne of David, and the Magi from the east have come to ask for him.

2, 3. *For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.*

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

Tidings of the arrival of these strangers in the Jewish capital, asking for the new-born King, would be sure to spread rapidly. The news soon reached the palace; and Herod, one of the most suspicious and cruel of tyrants, and therefore the most cowardly of men, “was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.”

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

They could tell him if they wished to do so, for they were deeply versed in the Scriptures. The Scribes copied the Sacred Writings. The Pharisees had counted the very letters of the Word, they could tell which was the middle letter of the Old Testament. They were great at the letter; but, alas, they had missed the spirit! Men may know a great deal about the Bible, and yet really know nothing of it. The husks of Scripture yield small profit; we need to come to the kernel, the real corn, the spiritual meaning of the Inspired Word.

5-7. *And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel. Then King Herod, when*

he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.

He half suspected that he should not see them again, so he determined to get all the information he possibly could out of them.

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

It was like his deep, cunning spirit to try to find out where the child was, that he might kill him. He looked upon him as a rival, as one who might rob him of his throne, so he would put him to death if he could; and, meanwhile, he would pretend that he wanted to worship him.

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

It was probably not a star in the sense in which we use the word: that is a planet, or a fixed star; but a meteoric brightness, which moved in the sky, and so guided the wise men. They do not appear to have seen its light after they set out on their journey; it directed them to the region of Judaea so they came to the capital city, Jerusalem. When they departed from Herod, the star appeared again, and guided them to the little town of Bethlehem, where they found the Christ. God may sometimes send us stars, bright lights of joy, to guide us on our way; he may also take them away again, and then we must walk by faith. When they reappear, we shall be glad to have them once more, as the wise men were.

10, 11. *When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house,*

For it would seem that the mother and child had moved out of the stable into a house. The town was, perhaps, not now quite so crowded, and there was more room for Mary and her blessed baby: “When they were come into the house,” —

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

These were the products of their country, such as they would give to princes. Such treasures must have been of great use to Mary

and Joseph to help them take care of the wondrous child who had been entrusted to their charge.

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

I remember a long disquisition, by a learned man, to show that we may sometimes break our promise, if, upon further consideration, we find we did wrong in making it, saying that these wise men, though they had promised to go and tell Herod all about the young child, did not do so when warned of God by a dream. After reading his very ingenious dissertation, I turned to the text, and there discovered that the wise men never made any promise of the kind; so that it was a sermon on a non-existent text. They never agreed to return; Herod told them to do so, which is one thing; they did not promise to do so, that would have been quite another thing. They broke no promise, and hence needed no excuse. They were in supernatural communication with God, he had guided them by a star, and now he speaks to them in a dream, and bids them go back to their own country another way. May we all be under like unerring guidance!

Amen.

MATTHEW 2:1-12

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

Observe here that when the Son of God was born into the world, it was in a very lowly village, the village of Bethlehem. Very naturally, the wise men supposed that “the King of the Jews” would be born in the palace, in the metropolis of the country, at Jerusalem; but it pleased the Lord that everything about Christ’s birth should have the stamp of lowliness, that the poorest and humblest of men might understand. that Christ took not upon him the nature of princes, but the nature of men, not of the great ones of the earth, but of our common humanity. Hence Jesus was born of a lowly virgin, and was but roughly cradled in a manger, and the village chosen as the place of his birth was Bethlehem, well-named the “house of bread”, for it is there that the Bread of our souls is found. The holy

child Jesus was born “in the days of Herod the king.” The last spark of sovereignty was just dying out. Herod, an alien, held the kingdom under the Roman Empire. Did not old Jacob’s prophecy say, “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come”? Therefore is it expressly mentioned that Jesus was born “in the days of Herod the king.” We must also remember that, although our Lord’s birth is full of every circumstance of humiliation, it has a wondrous glory about it. The Magi, probably from Persia, “wise men”, philosophers and theologians, heard in far-off lands of his fame; and a star led them to his feet: “There came wise men from the east.” They supposed that the birth of Christ would be well known among the Jews, and be a common theme of conversation; so, when they reached Jerusalem, they enquired, “Where is he that is born King of the Jews?” Ah, when the heart is awakened to the love of Christ, it often dreams that everybody else feels an equal interest in him; but it is not so!

The world is dead and cold to Christ; and men look astonished when we ask the question, “Where is he? We have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.” These wise men were not Unitarians, who disbelieved the deity of Christ. It has been said by some that they only meant that they were come to pay him the homage of a king. Then, why did they not worship Herod, and why did Herod say that he wished to worship him? It will not do, the thought is not to be endured for a single moment. The magi believed that he who was born King of the Jews was more than a human being, and they had come to worship him.

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

The wise men brought the best news that ever was told, and yet it troubled people. Does the gospel trouble you, my friend? Then I am afraid you must be of Herod’s kith and kin. It is an ill sign of a man’s heart when that which is for the good of all men becomes a trouble to him. It is an ill stomach that turns good meat to poison. I suppose “all Jerusalem” was troubled with Herod because they knew that, whenever this gloomy tyrant had a fit upon him, he was sure to draw blood somewhere; therefore they were troubled with him.

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

Think of this vile wretch taking to studying his Bible. Yet there are some who do the like still. Reckoning that gain is godliness and therefore turning godliness into gain for sinister motives, they would be religious, and wish to be instructed in the truths of the Bible. Such was Herod; so he gathered all the chief priests and scribes together, and demanded of them where Christ should be born.

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

Now, you see, what Herod did with an ill design was overruled for good, for thus we know on the highest authority that Christ was born at Bethlehem; the chief priests and scribes, great students of the law, when they were assembled in the presence of Herod, declared that, according to prophecy, Christ was to be born in Bethlehem.

7, 8. *Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.*

Covering his bloody design with the pretense of reverence. There is never a worse sin in the world than that which a man covers over with the cloak of religion; let us ever beware of falling into this evil.

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

You see, the light of the star was taken from them for a time, just as sometimes the delightful presence of God is withdrawn from his people. Then, beloved, you walk by faith alone, and not by sight, as these men did; but oh! when the light comes back again, when, after hearing all the chatter of false priests and scribes, and all the talk of Herod the great one, they see the star again, how glad they are! When God sends to his people clear shinings after rain, the brightness of his presence after a time of gloom, then is it with them

as it was with the wise men, “they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.”

11. *And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him:*

The old Reformers used to say, “Here is a bone that sticks in the throat of the Romanists, and they can neither get it up nor down, for it does not say, They saw Mary and the young child, the young child is put first, they came to see him; and it does not say that ‘they fell down and worshipped them.’” If ever there was an opportunity for Mariolatry, surely this was the one, when the child was as yet newly-born, and depended so much upon his mother. Why did not the magi say, “Ave Maria!” and commence at once their Mariolatry? Ay, but these were wise men; they were not priests from Rome, else might they have done it.

11. *And when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.*

The best they had, presents fit for a King; offered as the tribute of the country from which they came, gold, and frankincense, and myrrh being found in the east. It is well to bring to Christ the best we have, and the boat of the best: “gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.”

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

MATTHEW 3

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

His was a preparatory ministry; his work was to prepare men’s minds for Christ; and never is the heart of man so ready to receive Christ as when it is in a state of repentance. When it is weary of sin, then is it that Christ comes in, and is welcomed by the soul conscious of its guilt, tired of it, and longing to be rid of it.

3, 4. *For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his path straight. And the same John had his raiment of camel’s hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey.*

Everything about him was impressive, and everything was suitable to the message he had to deliver. He was so dressed as to be noticed at once as a man of ascetic habit, he was not the chaplain of a prince, else would he have been clothed in soft raiment, He was not one who had a gentle message to deliver, else would he not have gone into the wilderness, and summoned the people to come away from their avocations to listen to him.

He was the rough pioneer to prepare the way for the King.

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

That was his baptism, — a baptism of repentance, and of confession, preparatory to the coming of the Master. See what power there was in John because God was with him. I do not know that he had any remarkable eloquence. Certainly, some things about him were rather repulsive than attractive. But when God is with a man, the people must listen to him. Jerusalem must pour her thousands out of her gates, and the rural districts must yield their hundreds; for if God speaks, no matter by whom, he will have human ears to listen to his voice.

7, 8. *But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath, to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet of repentance:*

Answerable to your repentance, congruous therewith, arising out of it, and truly proving its reality.

9, 10. *And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees:*

No mere pruning and trimming work did John come to do; he was the handler of a sharp axe that was to fell every worthless tree.

10. *Therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.*

It is not enough to hew it down. Into the fire it must go; and John minces not his words about the matter, he speaks straight out the message of his Master.

11, 12. *I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.*

See the humility of the true servant of Christ. He is not willing even to exercise the office of a slave, and to carry his Master's shoes, or to unloose the latchet of them. And who among us is worthy to occupy even the lowest office for Christ? There is an honour about it that far transcends any worthiness of ours. To serve him at all, is honour indeed. But, brethren, fix your eyes upon Christ, and recollect what a baptism it is into which he baptizes us; —not with water, but into the Holy Ghost and into fire. Can we bear it? Can we endure the fire? It will only burn up that which ought to be burned; and happy is he to whom God has imparted that eternal life which can never be consumed.

13, 14. *Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?*

This is one of the most striking proofs that the ordinance of baptism is not to be neglected by any of Christ's followers, for even he who, in himself, could have had no need for it, — who is himself the Baptizer with the Holy Ghost and with fire, yet comes to the baptizer in water, and asks to be immersed.

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

Nothing that appertains to righteousness must be neglected; the little as well as the great must be observed.

15-17. *Then he suffered him. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: and lo a voice from heaven saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*

This doctrine of repentance was preached by the Master as well as by the servant. Turn to the 11th chapter of Matthew's Gospel, and let us read a few verses, beginning at the 20th.

This exposition consisted of readings from MATTHEW 3, AND 11:20-30; AND REVELATION 7:9-17.

MATTHEW 3

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

There is no entering the kingdom of heaven without leaving the kingdom of darkness. We must repent of sin, or we cannot receive the blessings of salvation. Of every man, whoever he may be, whether outwardly moral or openly wicked, repentance is required. It is the door of hope; there is no other way into the kingdom: "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

3, 4. *For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts end wild honey.*

His raiment and his food were like his doctrine, rough and simple. There was no mincing of words, no making of pretty phrases with John the Baptist; his message was simply, "Repent ye: repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is coming." We want more of this John the Baptist teaching nowadays, that men may be plainly told their faults, and warned to put away those faults that they may receive Christ Jesus as their Saviour.

5-7. *Then went out to him Jerusalem, and at Judaea, and out the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come*

These were the influential people of the times; the Pharisees were the Ritualists of that age, and the Sadducees were the Paternalists of the period. Why, John, you ought to have smoothed your tongue a bit, and have said some very pleasant words to these great men; for, by so doing, perhaps you might have won some of these Pharisees, or coaxed some of these Sadducees into the kingdom! Ah, no; that is not John's method! He is plainspoken, and he deals truthfully with his hearers, for he knows that converts made by flattery are but flattering converts that are of no real value.

8, 9. *Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: and think not to say within ourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham*

Pointing to the stones in the River Jordan, and all along the banks, he said to the Pharisees and Sadducees, "There is nothing, after all, in your natural descent from Abraham. God has promised that Abraham shall have a seed, but think not that he is dependent upon you for that seed. - He can fulfill his promise without you. He can turn the very pebbles of the stream into children for Abraham. God is not short of men to save. If some of you will not have him, do not think that he shall have to come a-begging to you. There are others who will have him, and his rich sovereign grace will find them out. Beware, ye that are proud and think much of yourselves, for God will not humble himself to you. He hath regard to the humble and the lowly, but the proud he knoweth afar off."

10-12. *And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the holy Ghost, and with fire:-whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.*

The Christ is the minister of mercy, but there is about his doctrine a-searching and a trying power. Only the sincere in heart can endure Christ's winnowing fan. As for the insincere, they are blown away like the chaff on the threshing-floor, and their end is destruction. God gave us to be numbered amongst the wheat that Christ shall gather into his heavenly garner!

13, 14. *Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbid him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?*

It seemed very strange that John, the servant, should be required to baptize Jesus, the Master.

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

That is to say the Teacher must himself obey the laws, which he is about to lay down; and inasmuch as he is going to bid others to be baptized, he will set the example, and be himself baptized. I think also that the baptism of Christ was the picture, the type, the symbol of the work, which he afterwards accomplished. He was immersed in suffering; he died, and was buried in the tomb; he rose again from the grave; and all that is set forth in the outward symbol of his baptism in the River Jordan.

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

And we are well pleased with him.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 2., AND MATTHEW 3.

MATTHEW 3:1-12

We are going to read three passages relating to John the Baptist's testimony concerning Christ.

1-4. *In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, and saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey.*

Everything connected with John the Baptist was in harmony with his message. He was the preacher of repentance, so the place where he preached was most suitable; it was in the wilderness, where there was nothing to distract his hearers' attention, as there would have been in crowded cities. His dress was striking, and everything about him, even down to the food that he ate, went to show that he was the rough pioneer preacher preparing the way for his master. John did not teach the fullness of joy and peace; that was left for our Lord Jesus to proclaim; but John came to prepare the way of the Lord by preaching repentance.

5. *Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan,*

There seems to have been, about that time, a widespread anticipation of the coming of the Messiah; so, no sooner did the news come that a prophet was preaching in the desert, than great multitudes went out to hear him.

6-8. *And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance:*

Did he not speak after the style of the prophet Elijah? Yet those bold speeches of his were not at all stronger than the evils of the age required. When the self-righteous Pharisees and the skeptical Sadducees the Ritualists and the “modern thought” men of that day came to him to be baptized, he welcomed them not, but bade them “bring forth fruits meet for repentance,” evidences of a change of heart and life.

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

In the bed of Jordan, where he was baptizing, —

9. *To raise up children unto Abraham.*

John bade them boast not of their descent from Abraham; yet that was the great thing in which they did glory. They despised the Gentiles as so many does outside the true fold. Note how John the Baptist really preaches the gospel to us indirectly while he is denouncing these people’s confidence in their carnal descent. Regeneration is “not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

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

Other teachers came, as it were, only to lop and prune the trees, but the time had come for the felling of those that were fruitless. John did this, and so did our Lord Jesus Christ, for his preaching dug up the very roots of sin, superstition, and evil of every kind.

11, 12. *I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and*

gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

Now let us turn to the Gospel according to John, where we have another account of the ministry of John the Baptist.

This exposition consisted of readings from MATTHEW 3:1-12; JOHN 1:15-37; 3:22-36.

MATTHEW 3:13-17

13, 14. *Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?*

Who among us would not have felt as John did? Shall the servant baptize the Master, and such a Master, even his Lord and Saviour? But merely the condescension of our blessed Lord. He would do everything that he wished his people afterwards to do; and therefore he would be baptized, and set the example that he would have them all follow.

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

We are never to be so modest as to become disobedient to Christ's commands. We have known some who have allowed their humility to grow alone in the garden of their heart without the other sweet flowers that should have sprung up side by side with it, and thus their very humility has developed into a kind of pride. John was easily persuaded to do what his feelings at first seemed to forbid: "Then he suffered him."

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

It has also happened unto the servants of Christ, as well as to their Master, that in keeping the commandments of God there has been a sweet attestation borne by the Holy Spirit. I trust that we, too, according to our measure of sonship, have heard in our hearts the voice from heaven, saying, "This is my beloved son," and that we have experienced the descending of the dove-like Spirit, bringing us peace of mind and gentleness of nature.

This exposition consisted of readings from MATTHEW 3:13-17; AND 4:1-11.

MATTHEW 4:1-11

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

What a change it seems from the descent of the Holy Spirit to being led up into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil! Dear friends, be especially on the watch after a great spiritual joy, for it is just then that you may have some terrible temptation. Mayhap, the voice from heaven is to prepare you to do battle with the enemy. I have noticed that the Lord has two special seasons of blessing his people; — sometimes, before a great trial, to prepare them for it; and, at other times, after a great affliction, to remove the weakness which has been thereby occasioned. Think not that you can come up out of the waters of baptism, and then live without watchfulness. Imagine not, because the Spirit has sealed you, and borne witness with your spirit that you are the Lord's child, that therefore you are out of gunshot of the enemy. Oh, no! At that very time, he will be preparing his most subtle temptations for you, just as Jesus was led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil immediately after his baptism and his Father's testimony: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

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

I suppose that he was not "an hungered" during his long fast, and this renders it a fast altogether by itself. We are here told, "He was afterward an hungered."

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

"Thou canst do it if thou art indeed the Son of God. Thou art an hungered, therefore feed thyself, Thy Father has forgotten thee, his providence has failed thee; be thine own providence, work a miracle for thyself." How little the tempter, with all his knowledge, understood the true character of Christ! Our Lord. never wrought a miracle in order to supply his own needs.

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

He had been attached as a man who was hungering, so he quoted a text which evidently belonged to man: "Man shall not live by bread alone." It was a wilderness text; it concerned the children of Israel in the desert, so it was suitable to the position of our Lord in that wilderness. He meant to let the tempter know that, as God fed man by manna from the skies once, he could do it again. At any rate, this glorious Man, this true Son of God, was determined not to interfere with the ordinary working of providence, but he left himself and his needs in his Father's hands.

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

"It is written." Thus the devil tried to turn Christ's own sword against himself,— that two-edged sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God; and the devil can still quote scripture to suit his own purpose. Yet it was a misquotation as to the letter of it, for he left out the essential words, "to keep thee in all thy ways;" and it was a worse misquotation as to the spirit of it, for in the true meaning of the passage there is nothing to tempt us to presumption. There is a guarantee of safety when we are walking where we should walk, but not in leaping from a temple's pinnacle down into the abyss.

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

Here was a plain, positive precept, which clearly forbade Christ to tempt God by such a presumptuous action as casting himself down from the pinnacle of the temple; and we must always follow the precepts of Scripture whatever the tempter may say.

8. *Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them;*

Notice that these temptations were in high places. Alas! high places are often full of trial, whether they be places of wealth and rank, or of eminent service in the Church of God. A pinnacle is a dangerous position, even if it be a pinnacle of the temple; and on the summit of an exceeding high mountain is a perilous place even if the view from it is not the poverty of the city, nor the sin of the

people, but the glory of the kingdoms of the world. Ever with such a view as that, the mountain's brow is full of danger to our weak heads.

9. *And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.*

Why, they were Christ's already! They never belonged to Satan; and, though for a while he had to some extent usurped authority over them, it was like his impudence to offer to give away what was not his own.

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

Let the bribe be what it may, thou must not worship or serve either thyself or the devil. Thy God alone claims thy homage; and if the whole earth might be thine through one act of sin, thou would not be justified in committing it.

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

What a change! When the devil goes, the angels come. Perhaps some of you are just now sorely tempted and much troubled. Oh, that you might speedily come to Mahanaim, of which we read, "And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him;" that there you might be met by troops of angels come to minister to you, weary with the conflict with the evil one, just as they ministered to your Lord! You need them as much as he did, and therefore you are as sure to have them if you look up to him, and ask him to seal them to you.

This exposition consisted of readings from MATTHEW 3:13-17; AND 4:1-11.

MATTHEW 4:1-11

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

He had just been baptized, the Spirit of God had descended upon him, and the Father had borne witness to him, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," yet, immediately after all that, he was led into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. So, after your times of sweetest fellowship with God, after the happiest enjoyment of gospel ordinances. After the sealing of the Spirit

within your hearts, you must expect to be tempted of the devil. You must not suppose that, in your Christian life, all will be sweetness, — that all will be spiritual witness-bearing. You have to fight the good fight of faith, and your great adversary will not be slow to begin the encounter. You are a pilgrim in a strange land, so you must expect to find rough places on the road to heaven. Yet, since you are so much weaker than your Master was, you will do well to pray the prayer that he taught to his disciples, “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”

2, 3. *And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred. And when the tempter came to him,*

See how Satan seizes opportunities. When he finds us weak, as the Saviour was through long fasting; — when he finds us in trying circumstances, as the Saviour was when hungry in the desert; — then it is that he comes to tempt us. This dastardly foe of ours takes every possible advantage of us, that he may, by any means, overthrow us.

3. *He said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made into bread.*

He begins with an “if.” He tries to cast a doubt upon the Saviour’s Sonship, and this is the way that he often attacks a child of God now. He says to him, “If thou be a son of God, do so-and-so.” He challenged Christ to work a miracle for himself, — to use his divine power on his own behalf, but this the Saviour never did. He challenged Christ to distrust the providence of God, and to be his own Provider; and this is still a very common temptation to God’s people.

4. *But he answered and said, It is written, —*

That is the only sword that Christ used against Satan, — “the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.” There is nothing like it; and the old dragon himself knows what sharp edges this sword has. Christ said, “It is written,” —

4. *Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.*

God can sustain human life without the use of bread, although it is the staff of life; for bread does not sustain life unless God puts power into it to do so, and he can, if it pleases him, use that power without the outward means. Our Lord thus showed that God could

provide for him in a desert without his interference with the plans of divine providence by selfishly catering for himself. So the first victory was won,

5, 6 *Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple. And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written,—*

Here he plays with the Word of God, for the devil can quote Scripture when it suits his purpose to do so: “It is written,” —

6. *He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.*

The devil did not quote correctly from Psalm 91:11, 12; he left out the most important words: “He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways,” but it was not Christ’s way to cast himself down from the pinnacle of the temple. Jesus therefore answered Satan’s misquotation with a true quotation.

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

I know some people, who earn their living in employments which are very hazardous to their immortal souls. They are in the midst of evil, yet they tell me that God can keep them in safety there. I know that he can, but I also know that we have no right to go, voluntarily, where we are surrounded by temptation. If your calling is the wrong one, and you are continually tempted in it, you may not presume upon the goodness of God to keep you, for it is your business to get as far as you can from that which will lead you into sin. God does not put his servants on the pinnacle of the temple; it is the devil who puts them there; and if they ever are there, the best thing they can do is to get down as quickly and as safely as they can; but they must not cast themselves down, they must look to him who alone can bring them down safely. With some professors, presumption is a very common sin. They will go into worldly amusements and all sorts of frivolities, and say, “Oh, we can be Christians, and yet go there!” Can you? It may be that you can be hypocrites, and go there; that is far easier than going there as Christians.

8-10. *Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the*

glory of them; and saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

Christ will not endure any more of this talk. When it comes to a bribe the promise that the devil will give him earth's glory if he will but fall down and worship him, Christ ends the whole matter once for all. Thrice assaulted, thrice victorious, blessed Master, enable us also to be more than conquerors through thy grace!

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

Regarding it as their highest honour to be the servants of their Lord.

MATTHEW 4:12-24

4:12. *Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee;*

Notice that there were at that time only two great ministers of God, John the Baptist, he must go to prison and to death; — Jesus, the Son of God, he must go to the desert to be tempted of the devil. If any Christians escape temptation, they will not be the leaders of the hosts of God. Those who stand in the van must bear the brunt of the battle. Oh, that all who are called to such responsible positions might be as prepared to occupy them as John was, and as Jesus was!

13-16. *And leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; the people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up.*

Oh, the tender mercy of our God! Where the darkness is the deepest, there the light shines the brightest. Christ selects such dark regions as Nephthalim and Zabulon that he may dwell there, and shine in all his glory.

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

He was not afraid to give an earnest exhortation to sinners, and to bid men repent. He knew better than we do the inability of men concerning all that is good, yet he bade them repent.

18-23. *And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And he said unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets, and followed him. And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them. And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him. And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.*

I like those words “all manner”— that is, every kind and every sort of sickness and disease Christ met. Perhaps you, dear friend, are afflicted in your soul after a very peculiar fashion. Ay, but this great Physician heals all manner of diseases. None are excluded from the list of patients whom he can cure; twice the words “all manner” are used: “Healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.”

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

Our Lord Jesus lived as in a hospital while he was on earth; wherever he went, the sins and sorrows of men were all open before his sympathetic gaze. But oh, what joy it must have been to him to be able to deal so well with them all! Am I addressing any who are sick in soul? Our Master is used to cases just like yours; your malady is not new to him. He has healed many like you; of all that were brought to him, it is written, “he healed them.” Lie before him now, in all your sin and misery, and breathe the prayer, “Thou Son of David, have mercy on me,” and he will surely hear you, and heal you, for he delights to bless and save all who trust him.

This exposition consisted of readings from JOHN 1:19-51; and MATTHEW 4:12-24.

MATTHEW 5:1-12

1. *And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain:*

For convenience, and quietude, and to be out of the way of traffic, he went up into a mountain. Elevated doctrines would seem most at home on the high places of the earth.

1. *And when he was set,*

For that was the mode of Eastern teaching,

1. *His disciples came unto him:*

They made the inner ring around him, and others gathered around them.

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

Chrysostom says that he taught them even when he did not open his mouth; his very silence was instructive. But when he did open his mouth, what streams of wisdom flowed forth! He “taught them.” He did not open his mouth to make an oration, He was a Teacher, so his aim was to teach those who came to him; and his ministers best follow their Lord’s example when they keep to the vein of teaching. The pulpit is not the place for the display of oratory and eloquence, but for real instruction: “He opened his mouth, and taught them,”-

2, 3. *Saying, Blessed —*

The Old Testament closes with the word “curse.” The New Testament begins here, in the preaching of Christ, with the word “Blessed.” He has changed the curse into a blessing: “Blessed”-

3. *Are the poor in spirit: for their’s is the kingdom of heaven.*

This is a paradox that puzzles many, for the poor in spirit often seem to have nothing; yet they have the kingdom of heaven, so they have everything, he who thinks the least of himself is the man of whom God thinks the most. You are not poor in God’s sight if you are poor in spirit.

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

They are not only poor in spirit, but they are weeping, lamenting, mourning. Worldlings are frivolous, frolicsome, light-hearted, and loving everything that is akin to mirth; yet it is not said of them, but of those that mourn, that “they shall be comforted.”

5. *Blessed are the meek:*

Not your high-spirited, quick-tempered men, who will put up with no insult, your hectoring, lofty ones, who are ever ready to

resent any real or imagined disrespect, there is no blessing here for them; but blessed are the gentle, those who are ready to be thought nothing of, —

5. *For they shall inherit the earth.*

Some say that the best way to get through the world is to swagger along with a coarse impudence, and to push out of your way all who may be in it; but there is no truth in that idea. The truth lies in quite another direction: “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.”

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

The course of these beatitudes is like going downstairs. They began with spiritual poverty, went on to mourning, came down to gentle-spiritedness, and now we come to hunger and thirst. Yet we have been going up all the time, for here we read, “They shall be filled.” What more can we have than full satisfaction?

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

“The merciful” are those who are always ready to forgive, always ready to help the poor and needy, always ready to overlook what they might well condemn; and “they shall obtain mercy.”

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

When the heart is washed, the dirt is taken from the mental eye. The heart that loves God is connected with an understanding that perceives God. There is no way of seeing God until the heart is renewed by sovereign grace. It is not greatness of intellect, but purity of affection that enables us to see God.

9. *Blessed are the peacemakers :*

Not only the passively peaceful, but the actively peaceful, who try to rectify mistakes, and to end all quarrels in a peaceful way.

9. *For they shall be called the children of God.*

They shall not only be the children of God, but men shall call them so; they shall recognize in them the likeness to the peace-making God.

10. *Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for their's is the kingdom of heaven.*

They have it now, they are participating in it already; for, as Christ was persecuted, and he is again persecuted in them, as they are partakers of his sufferings, so are they sharers in his kingdom.

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

You have an elevation by persecution; you are lifted into the peerage of martyrdom, though you occupy but an inferior place in it, yet you are in it; therefore, “rejoice, and be exceeding glad.”

MATTHEW 5:1-12

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

You notice that the Preacher sat down, and that his disciples stood around him. If you find it somewhat warm and trying tonight, remember that you have the best of it, for you sit while the speaker stands. Concerning our Lord, we read: “When he was set, his disciples came unto him.” —

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

Perhaps someone says, “He could not have taught them without opening his mouth” I have found that a great many try to teach without opening their mouths; but the earnest preacher speaks with all his might. So did Jesus in the open air on the mountain side: “He opened his mouth, and taught them.” Such grand things as he had to say ought to come from open portals, so he mumbled not, but” opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,”—

3. *Blessed are the poor in spirit: for their's is the kingdom of heaven.*

“Blessed.” See how Jesus begins his Sermon on the Mount, he begins with benedictions. He is a cloud that is full of rain, and that empties itself upon the earth. The moment you begin to know Christ, you begin to have blessings; and the more you know of him, the more blessed you will be. “Blessed are the poor in spirit:” not those who boast themselves of spiritual riches and personal goodness, but the lowly, the meek, the trembling, the humble, the poor in spirit, “for their’s is the kingdom of heaven.”

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

Let them be comforted now in the prospect of future comfort. There are no mourning hearts that mourn over sin, and mourn after God, that shall be deserted by their God: “they shall be comforted.”

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

They do in the truest sense enjoy even this life; their contented spirit makes them monarchs. The great man, with all his wealth, is often uneasy with a craving ambition for more; but the quiet spirits of God's people find a kingdom everywhere. The mountains and the valleys belong really to him who can, with happy eye, look upon them, and then lift his face to heaven, and feel, "My Father made them all."

6. *Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness:*

They want to be better; they are hungry and thirsty after more holiness. They boast not of personal perfection, they are hungering and thirsting after righteousness, but they have not attained to it yet.

6. *For they shall be filled.*

God will fill them; and when he fills men with his fullness, they are full indeed.

7. *Blessed are the merciful:*

The forgiving, the generous, the kind: "Blessed are the merciful:" —

7, 8. *For they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.*

There is such a connection between purity of heart and purity of understanding that the man whose eye is clarified by holiness shall see God.

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

They shall not only be the children of God, but people shall call them by that name. There is something so Godlike in trying to put away discord, and to remove anger, and to promote love, that it makes men feel that peacemakers must be the children of God.

10, 11. *Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.*

It is not when men truthfully speak evil concerning you, but when they say it falsely; not when they say evil against you because of your ill tempers which provoke them, but when they do it falsely, for Christ's sake, then, "blessed are ye."

12. *Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.*

And you are treading in their steps, so you are entering into their heritage. You have your beginning with them, and you shall have your end with them. If persecuted with them, you shall also reign with them.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 149.; AND MATTHEW 5:1-12.

MATTHEW 5:1-30

1, 2. *And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,-*

Our Saviour soon gathered a congregation. The multitudes perceived in him a love to them, and a willingness to impart blessing to them, and therefore they gathered about him. He chose the mountain and the open air for the delivery of this great discourse, and we should be glad to find such a place for our assemblies; but in this variable climate we cannot often do so. "And when he was set." The Preacher sat, and the people stood. We might make a helpful change if we were sometimes to adopt a similar plan now. I am afraid that ease of posture may contribute to the creation of slumber of heart in the hearers. There Christ sat, and "his disciples came unto him." They formed the inner circle that was ever nearest to him, and to them he imparted his choicest secrets, but he also spoke to the multitude, and therefore it is said that "he opened his mouth," as well he might when there were such great truths to proceed from it, and so vast a crowd to hear them: "He opened his mouth, and taught them, saying," —

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

This is a gracious beginning to our Saviour's discourse, "Blessed are the poor." None ever considered the poor as Jesus did, but here he is speaking of a poverty of spirit, a lowliness of heart, an absence of self-esteem. Where that kind of spirit is found, it is sweet poverty: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

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

There is a blessing which often goes with mourning itself; but when the sorrow is of a spiritual sort,-mourning for sin,-then is it blest indeed.

“Lord, let me weep for nought but sin,
And after none but thee;
And then I would-oh, that I might-
A constant mourner be!”

5. *Blessed are the meek:*

The quiet-spirited, the gentle, the self-sacrificing,-

5. *For they shall inherit the earth.*

It looks as if they would be pushed out of the world but they shall not be, “for they shall inherit the earth.” The wolves devour the sheep, yet there are more sheep in the world than there are wolves, and the sheep, continue to multiply, and to feed in green pastures.

6. *Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness:*

Pining to be holy, longing to serve God, anxious to spread every righteous principle,-blessed are they.

6, 7. *For they shall be filled.*

Blessed are the merciful: Those who are kind, generous, sympathetic, ready to forgive those who have wronged them,-blessed are they.

7, 8. *For they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart:-*

It is a most blessed attainment to have such a longing for purity as to love everything that is chaste and holy, and to abhor everything that is questionable and unhallowed: blessed are the pure in heart:-

8. *For they shall see God.*

There is a wonderful connection between hearts and eyes. A man who has the stains of filth on his soul cannot see God, but they who are purified in heart are purified in vision too: “they shall see God.”

9. *Blessed are the peacemakers:*

Those who always end a quarrel if they can, those who lay themselves out to prevent discord,-

9, 10. *For they shall be called the children of God.*

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. They share the kingdom of heaven with the poor in spirit. They are often evil spoken of, they

have sometimes to suffer the spoiling of their goods, many of them have laid down their lives for Christ's sake, but they are truly blessed, for "theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

11. *Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shalt say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.*

Mind, it must be said falsely, and it must be for Christ's sake, if you are to be blessed; but there is no blessing in having evil spoken of you truthfully, or in having it spoken of you falsely because of some bitterness in your own spirit.

12. *Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.*

You are in the true prophetic succession, if you cheerfully bear reproach of this kind for Christ's sake, you prove that you have the stamp and seal of those who are in the service of God.

13. *Ye are the salt of the earth:*

Followers of Christ, "ye are the salt of the earth." You help to preserve it, and to subdue the corruption that is in it.

13. *But if the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted?*

A professing Christian with no grace in him, a religious man whose very religion is dead, what is the good of him? And he is himself in a hopeless condition. You can salt meat, but you cannot salt salt.

13. *It is thenceforth good for nothing but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.*

There are people who believe that you can be children of God today, and children of the devil tomorrow; then again children of God the next day and children of the devil again the day after; but, believe me, it is not so. If the work of grace be really wrought of God in your soul, it will last through your whole life, and if it does not so last, that proves that it is not the work of God. God does not put his hand to this work a second time. There is no regeneration twice over, you can be born again, but you cannot be born again, and again, and again, as some teach there is no note in Scripture of that kind. Hence I do rejoice that regeneration once truly wrought of the Spirit of God, is an incorruptible seed which liveth and abideth for ever. But beware, professor, lest you should be like salt that has lost its savor, and that therefore is good for nothing.

14. *Ye are the light of the world.*

Christ never contemplated the production of secret Christians, Christians whose virtues would never be displayed, pilgrims who would travel to heaven by night, and never be seen by their fellow-pilgrims or anyone else.

14, 15. *A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.*

Christians ought to be seen, and they ought to let their light be seen. They should never even attempt to conceal it. If you are a lamp, you have no right to be under a bushel, or under a bed; your place is on the lampstand where your light can be seen.

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

Not that they may glorify you, but that they may glorify your Father who is in heaven.

17, 18. *Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.*

No cross of a “t” and no dot of an “i” shall be taken from God’s law. Its requirements will always be the same; immutably fixed, and never to be abated by so little as “one jot or one tittle.”

19, 20. *Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees,-*

Who seemed to have reached the very highest degree of it; indeed, they themselves thought they went rather over the mark than under it, but Christ says to his disciples, “Unless your righteousness goes beyond that,-

20. *Ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.*

These are solemn words of warning. God grant that we may have a righteousness which exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, a righteousness inwrought by the Spirit of God, a righteousness of the heart and of the life!

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

Antiquity is often pleaded as an authority; but our King makes short work of “them of old time.” He begins with one of their alterations of his Father’s law. They added to the saved oracles. The first part of the saying which our Lord quoted was divine; but it was dragged down to a low level by the addition about the human court, and the murderer’s liability to appear there. It thus became rather a proverb among men than an inspired utterance from the mouth of God. Its meaning, as God spake it, had a far wider range than when the offence was restrained to actual killing, such as could be brought before a human judgment-seat. To narrow a command is measurably to annul it. We may not do this even with antiquity for our warrant. Better the whole truth newly stated than an old falsehood in ancient language.

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

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

23, 24. *Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

That which is the cause of sin is to be given up as well as the sin itself. It is not sinful to have an eye, or to cultivate keen perception; but if the eye of speculative knowledge leads us to offend by intellectual sin, it becomes the cause of evil, and must be mortified. Anything, however harmless, which leads me to do, or think, or feel wrongly, I am to get rid of as much as if it were in itself an evil. Though to have done with it would involve deprivation, yet must it be dispensed with, since even a serious loss in one direction is far better than the losing of the whole man. Better a blind saint than a quick-sighted sinner. If abstaining from alcohol caused weakness of body, it would be better to be weak, than to be strong and fall into drunkenness. Since vain speculations and reasonings land men in

unbelief, we will have none of them. To “be cast into hell” is too great a risk to run, merely to indulge the evil eye of lust or curiosity.

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

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

MATTHEW 5:13-26

13. *Ye are the salt of the earth:*

The earth would go putrid if there were no salt of grace to preserve it. So, dear friends, if God’s grace is in you, there is a pungent savor about you which tends to preserve others from going as far into sin as otherwise they would have done; “Ye are the salt of the earth.”

13. *But if the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted?*

If the God-given grace could be taken from you altogether, if you had no sanctifying power about you at all, what could be done with you? You would be like salt that has lost its savor.

13. *It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.*

Mark this, then, either the saints must persevere to the end, or else the grace of God has done nothing for them effectually. If they do not continue to be saints, and to exercise a saintly influence, there is no hope for them. There cannot be two new births for the same person; if the divine work has failed once, it will never be

begun again. If they really have been saved, if they have been made the children of God, and if it be possible for them to lose the grace which they have received, they can never have it again. The Word of God is very emphatic upon that point: ‘: If they shall fall away, it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance’ Falling may be retrieved, but falling away never can be happy. There are countries where there is found salt from which the pungency has completely gone. It is an altogether useless article; and if there are men, who ever did possess the grace of God, and who were truly God’s people, if the divine life could go out of them, they would be in an utterly hopeless case. Perhaps there are no powers of evil in the world greater than apostate churches; who can calculate the influence for evil that the Church of Rome exercises in the world today?

14. *Ye are the light of the world.*

The Bible is not the light of the world, it is the light of the Church; but the world does not read the Bible, the world reads Christians; “Ye are the light of the world.”

14. *A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.*

You Christians are like a city built upon a hilltop, you must be seen. As you will be seen, mind that you are worth seeing.

15. *Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.*

God’s intent is, first, to light you; and, secondly, to put you in a conspicuous position, where men can see you.

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

Let the light of your purity and your good works be as bright as possible, yet let not the light be to your own praise and glory; but let it be clearly seen that your good works are the result of sovereign grace, for which all the glory must be given to “your Father which is in heaven.”

17, 18. *Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.*

See how the great Lord of the New Testament confirms the Old Testament. He has not come to set up a destructive criticism that

will tear in pieces the Book of Deuteronomy, or cut out the very heart of the Psalms, or grind Ezekiel to powder between his own wheels; but Christ has come to establish yet more firmly than before all that was written aforetime, and to make it stand fast as the everlasting hills.

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

A true man may make mistakes, and so he may teach men to violate some one or other of the divine commandments. If he does so, he shall not perish, for he was honest in his blunder; but he shall be among the least in the kingdom of heaven. But he, who earnestly, perseveringly, and conscientiously teaches all that he knows of the divine will, “the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven”

20. *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.*

Christ does not teach a lower kind of morality than the Pharisees taught. They were very particular about little things, jots and tittles; but we must go further than they went; we must have more righteousness of life than they had, although they seemed to their fellow-men to be excessively precise. Christ aims at perfect purity in his people, and we must aim at it too, and we must really attain to more holiness than the best outward morals can produce.

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

God had said, “Thou shalt not kill;” but the remainder of the verse was the gloss of the Rabbis, a true one, yet one that very much diminishes the force of the divine command.

22. *But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment;*

And a far higher judgment than that of men;

22. *And whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, —*

A word of very uncertain meaning, a kind of snubbing word, a word of contempt which men used to one another, meaning that

there was nothing in them: “Whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca,” —

22. *Shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hellfire.*

Christ will not have us treat men with anger, or with contempt, which is a very evil form of hate, akin to murder, because we as good as say, “That man is nobody;” that is, we make nothing of him, which is morally to kill him. We must not treat our fellow-men with contempt and derision, nor indulge any angry temper against them, for anger is of the devil, but “love is of God.”

23, 24. *Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.*

Note that this injunction is addressed to the man who has offended against his brother; why is this? Because he is the least likely to try to make up the quarrel. It is the man who has been offended who usually exhibits the nobler spirit; but the offender is almost always the last to seek a reconciliation, and therefore the Saviour says to him, “If thy brother hath ought against thee, it is but right that thou shouldst be the first to seek reconciliation with him. Leave thy gift, go away from the prayer-meeting, turn back from the Lord’s table, and go and first be reconciled to thy brother.”

25. *Agree with thine adversary quickly,*

Always be ready to make peace, — not peace at any price; but, still, peace at any price except the sacrifice of righteousness.

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

And there are some debts of which we cannot pay the uttermost farthing; and there is a prison out of which no man shall come, for the uttermost farthing demanded there shall never be paid. God grant that we may none of us ever know what it is to be shut up in that dreadful dungeon!

MATTHEW 5:17-48

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

The life, work, and words of Christ are not an emendation of the Old Testament, or an abrogation of it. It stands fast and firm, fulfilled, carried to perfection, filled to the full in Christ.

18, 19. *For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.*

It is vain to teach the commandments without first doing them. The doing must always precede the teaching. If a man's example cannot be safely followed, it will be unsafe to trust his words.

20. *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.*

The scribes and Pharisees were supposed to be righteous beyond all others. "Nay," saith Christ; "you must go beyond them." They were, after all, superficial, flimsy, pretentious, unreal in their righteousness; and we must have a far nobler character than they ever attained, or we "shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."

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

This is a proof that Christ did not come to abolish the law, or to abate its demands in any degree whatsoever.

22. *But I say unto you, —*

Oh, what divine dignity there is in this majestic Person. He claims authority to speak, even though he should contradict all the Rabbis and all the learned men that went before him: "I say unto you," —

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

Christ here shows us that the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill," deals with anger, with angry words, with words of cursing, with words of derision, for all these are killing things, hurting and wounding things, and the passion of anger is forbidden under the command, "Thou shalt not kill." Men have not thought so, but it really is so, for he who is angry with his brother is a murderer; there is the spirit, the essence of that which leads to murder in the passion which breeds malice and revenge. The law is spiritual; it touches the emotions, the thoughts, the desires, as well as the words and actions of men. If I desire ill for a man, I have within me that which would desire his death; and what is that, after all, but murder in the heart? How strict is this law, and yet how just and right!

23, 24. *Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.*

It is said that, in Hindustan, there is a complete divorce of religion from morality, so that a man may be supposed to be eminently religious even while living in the utmost filthiness and vice; but it must never be so among us. We must never imagine that God can accept an offering from us while we harbor any enmity in our hearts. Perhaps, after reading this passage, you say, "If I had anything against my brother, I would go to him at once, and seek to be reconciled to him." That would be quite right; but you must go further than that, for Christ says, "If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee." It is much more easy to go to the man who has wronged you than to the one whom you have wronged. Yet the second is evidently the clearer duty, and should be attended to at once: neither can we expect the Lord to attend to us unless we attend to this duty.

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

There is nothing like ending disputes at once, before the rancor grows, and your adversary becomes determined to push you to extremes. Oh, for more of that spirit of yielding! You know how people say, "If you tread on a worm: it will turn;" but, brethren, a

worm is not an example for a Christian, even if the poor wounded creature does turn toward you in its agony. If you turn, turn to kiss the hand that smites you, and to do good to them that evil entreat you.

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

So that the unholy desire, the lascivious glance, everything that approximates towards licentiousness, is here condemned; and Christ is proved to be not the Abrogator of the law, but the Confirmer of it. See how he shows that the commandment is exceedingly broad, wide as the canopy of heaven, all-embracing. How sternly it condemns us all, and how well it becomes us to fall down at the feet of the God of infinite mercy, and seek his forgiveness.

“’Tis mercy — mercy we implore,
We would thy pity move;
Thy grace is an exhaustless store,
And thou thyself art Love.”

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

Give up the dearest, choicest, and apparently most needful thing, if it leads you into sin. The same rule that bids you avoid sin, bids you also avoid all that leads to sin. If adultery be forbidden, so also is that glance with which the sin usually begins. We are to turn away our eyes from beholding that which leads towards sin, and we are not to touch or taste that which would readily lead us into iniquity. Oh, that we had sufficient decision of character to make short work of everything which tends towards evil! Many persons, when their right eye offends them, put a green shade over it; and when their right hand offends them, they tie it up in a sling. But that is not obeying the command of Christ. He charges you to get rid of everything that would lead you wrong; make a clean sweep of it. You are wrong enough at your best, so do not permit anything to appertain to you, which would lead you still further astray,

31, 32. *It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: but I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, —*

Which is a sufficient and justifiable reason for divorce, —

32. *Caused her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced —*

That is to say, who is divorced without sufficient cause, —

32. *Committeth adultery.*

Among the Jews, divorce was the easiest thing in the world. A man might, in a fit, utter words which would divorce his wife. The Saviour abolished that evil once for all, and made divorce a crime, as it always is “saving for the cause of fornication.”

33, 34. *Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: but I say unto you, Swear not at all:-*

Christ thus abolishes the whole system of swearing, as it ought to be abolished in every place; and he goes on to show that he did not mean merely unclean, false oaths, or oaths taken as some men take them blasphemously, but every form and kind of oath, for he says, “Swear not at all” —

34-37. *Neither by heaven; for it is God’s throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.*

If words mean anything, this command of Christ is an utter abolishment of oaths taken before magistrates as well as everywhere else. I can make nothing else out of it; indeed, it must mean that, because Christ contrasts his teaching with that of former ages: “It hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: but I say unto you, Swear not at all.’ A man who cannot be believed upon his word certainly cannot be believed upon his oath; and, usually, when a man tells a lie, the next thing he does is to swear to it. When Peter denied his Master, the next thing he did was to curse and to swear, because he thought it likely that they would not imagine that he was

a follower of Christ if he did curse and swear; so he gave that as a pretty clear proof that he had not been with Christ, and was not one of his disciples. Alas, that we should need anything beside “Yea, yea,” and “Nay, nay!”

38-43. *Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: but I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.*

Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away. Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. There are many who do the second of those two things, but not the first.

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

God constantly does that which many people regard almost as a crime, namely, doing good to the undeserving. It is the very genius of Christianity to help those who are utterly unworthy, — to be kind and generous even to those who are pretty certain to repay us with ingratitude and malice.

46-48. *For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.*

Stretch towards the highest conceivable standard, and be not satisfied till you reach it.

MATTHEW 5:31-42

31, 32. *It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: But I say unto to you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of*

fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.

This time our King quotes and condemns a permissive enactment of the Jewish state. Men were wont to bid their wives “begone,” and a hasty word was thought sufficient as an act of divorce. Moses insisted upon “a writing of divorcement,” that angry passions might have time to cool and that the separation, if it must come, might be performed with deliberation and legal formality. The requirement of a writing was to a certain degree a check upon an evil habit, which was so engrained in the people that to refuse it altogether would have been useless, and would only have created another crime. The law of Moses went as far as it could practically be enforced; it was because of the hardness of their hearts that divorce was tolerated; it was never approved. But our Lord is more heroic in his legislation. He forbids divorce except for the one crime of infidelity to the marriage-vow. She who commits adultery does by that act and deed in effect sunder the marriage-bond, and it ought then to be formally recognized by the State as being sundered; but for nothing else should a man be divorced from his wife. Marriage is for life, and cannot be loosed, except by the one great crime which severs its bond, whichever of the two is guilty of it. Our Lord would never have tolerated the wicked laws of certain of the American States, which allow married men and women to separate on the merest pretext. A woman divorced for any cause but adultery, and marrying again, is committing adultery before God, whatever the laws of man may call it. This is very plain and positive; and thus a sanctity is given to marriage which human legislation ought not to violate. Let us not be among those who take up novel ideas of wedlock, and seek to deform the marriage laws under the pretense of reforming them. Our Lord knows better than our modern social reformers. We had better let the laws of God alone, for we shall never discover any better.

33-37. *Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: but I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither of heaven; for it is God's throne: nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make*

one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.

False swearing was forbidden of old, but every kind of swearing is forbidden now by the word of our Lord Jesus. He mentions several forms of oath, and forbids them all, and then prescribes simple forms of affirmation or denial, as all that his followers should employ. Notwithstanding much that may be advanced to the contrary, there is no evading the plain sense of this passage, that every sort of oath, however solemn or true, is forbidden to a follower of Jesus. Whether in court of law, or out of it the rule is, "Swear not at all." Yet, in this Christian country we have swearing everywhere, and especially among law-makers. Our legislators begin their official existence by swearing. By those who obey the law of the Saviour's kingdom, all swearing is set aside, that the simple word of affirmation or denial, calmly repeated, may remain as a sufficient bond of truth. A bad man cannot be believed on his oath, and a good man speaks the truth without an oath; to what purpose is the superfluous custom of legal swearing preserved? Christians should not yield to an evil custom, however great the pressure put upon them; but they should abide by the plain and unmistakable command of their Lord and King.

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

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

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

Non-resistance and forbearance are to be the rule among Christians. They are to endure personal ill-usage without coming to blows. They are to be as the anvil when bad men are the hammers,

and thus they are to overcome by patient forgiveness. The rule of the judgment seat is not for common life; but the rule of the cross and the all-enduring Sufferer is for us all. Yet how many regard all this as fanatical, utopian, and even cowardly! The Lord, our King, would have us bear and forbear, and conquer by mighty patience. Can we do it? How are we the servants of Christ if we have not his spirit?

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

Let him have all he asks, and more. Better lose a suit of cloth than be drawn into a suit in law. The courts of our Lord's day were vicious, and his disciples were advised to suffer wrong sooner than appeal to them. Our own courts often furnish the surest method of solving a difficulty by authority, and we have known them resorted to with the view of preventing strife. Yet even in a country where justice can be had, We are not to resort to law for every personal wrong. We should rather endure to be put upon than be for ever crying out, "I'll bring an action." At times this very rule of self-sacrifice may require us to take steps in the way of legal appeal, to stop injuries which would fall heavily upon others; but we ought often to forego our own advantage, yea, always when the main motive would be a proud desire for self-vindication. Lord, give me a patient spirit, so that I may not seek to avenge myself, even when I might righteously do so!

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

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

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

Be generous. A miser is no follower of Jesus. Discretion is to be used in our giving, lest we encourage idleness and beggary; but the general rule is, "Give to him that asketh thee." Sometimes a loan may be more useful than a gift, do not refuse it to those who will

make right use of it. These precepts are not meant for fools, they are set before us as our general rule; but each rule is balanced by other Scriptural commands, and there is the teaching of a philanthropic common-sense to guide us. Our spirit is to be one of readiness to help the needy by gift or loan, and we are not exceedingly likely to err by excess in this direction; hence the boldness of the command.

MATTHEW 5:41-48

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

If you can do him any service, do it cheerfully, do it readily. Do what he wants of you.

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

This is the spirit of the Christian — to live with the view of doing service.

43-46. *Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye?*

You have done what anybody would do.

46-48. *Do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.*

Rise out of ordinary manhood. Get beyond what others might expect of you. Have a high standard. “Be ye, therefore, perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”

This exposition consisted of readings from MATTHEW 5:41-48; 6:1-8

MATTHEW 5:43-48

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

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

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

Ours it is to persist in loving, even if men persist in enmity. We are to render blessing for cursing, prayers for persecutions. Even in the cases of cruel enemies, we are to "do good to them, and pray for them." We are no longer enemies to any, but friends to all. We do not merely cease to hate, and then abide in a cold neutrality, but we love where hatred seemed inevitable. We bless where our old nature bids us curse, and we are active in doing good to those who deserve to receive evil from us. Where this is practically carried out, men wonder, respect, and admire the followers of Jesus. The theory may be ridiculed, but the practice is revered, and is counted so surprising that men attribute it to some Godlike quality in Christians, and own that they are the children of the Father who is in heaven. Indeed, he is a child of God who can bless the unthankful and the evil; for in daily providence the Lord is doing this on a great scale, and none but his children will imitate him. To do good for the sake of the good done, and not because of the character of the person benefited, is a noble imitation of God. If the Lord only sent the fertilizing shower upon the land of the saintly, drought would deprive whole leagues of land of all hope of a harvest. We also must

do good to the evil, or we shall have a narrow sphere, our hearts will grow contracted, and our sonship towards the good God will be rendered doubtful.

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

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

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

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

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

Or, "Ye shall be perfect." We should reach after completeness in love, fullness of love to all around us. Love is the bond of perfectness; and if we have perfect love, it will form in us a perfect character. Here is that which we aim at, perfection like that of God; here is the manner of obtaining it, namely, by abounding in love; and this suggests the question of how far we have proceeded in this heavenly direction, and also the reason why we should persevere in it even to the end, because as children we ought to resemble our Father. Scriptural perfection is attainable, it dies rather in proportion than in degree. A man's character may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing; and yet such a man will be the very first to admit that the grace which is in him is at best in its infancy, and though perfect as a child in all its parts, it has not yet attained to the perfection of full-grown manhood. What a mark is set before us by our Perfect King, who, speaking from his mountain-throne, saith, "Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect!"

Lord, give what thou dost command; then both the grace and the glory will be thine alone.

This exposition consisted of readings from MATTHEW 5:43-48; AND 6:1-4.

MATTHEW 6:1-4

1. 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.

“You cannot expect to be paid twice, if therefore you take your reward in the applause of men, who give you a high character for generosity, you cannot expect to have any reward from God.” We ought to have a single eye to God’s accepting what we give, and to have little or no thought of what man may say concerning our charitable gifts.

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

And they will have no more; there is, in their case, no laying up of any store of good works before God. Whatever they may have done, they have taken full credit for it in the praise of men.

3. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth:

“Do it so by stealth as scarcely to know it thyself; think so little of it with regard to thyself that thou shalt scarcely know that thou hast done it. Do it unto God; let him know it.”

4. That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.

There is a blessed emphasis upon that word “himself” for, if God shall reward us, what a reward it will be! Any praise from his lips, any reward from his hands, will be of priceless value. Oh, to live with an eye to that alone!

This exposition consisted of readings from MATTHEW 5:43-48; AND 6:1-4.

MATTHEW 6:1-8

1. 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.

Our blessed Lord does not tell his disciples to give alms, but he takes it for granted that they do that. How could they be his disciples if they did not so? But he tells them to take care that they do not do this in order to get honour and credit from it. Oh! how much is done in this world that would be very good, but it is spoilt in the doing through the motive done to be seen of men. “Ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.”

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

So that they will never have another. They have been paid once for it by the approbation of their fellow-men. They will never have any further reward.

3-5. 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. And when thou prayest,

He does not tell his disciples to pray, but again takes it for granted that they do so, and he cannot be a Christian who does not pray. “A prayerless soul is a Christless soul.” “When thou prayest.”

5. 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.

All they will ever get. People say, “What a wonderfully pious man he is to pray up at the street corner.” Ay, but that is the reward. The prayer will die where it was offered.

6. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet,

Get into some quiet nook — some secret place, no matter where.

6. And when thou hast shut thy door,

So that nobody can hear you — not wishing anybody to know even that you are at prayer. “When thou hast shut thy door.”

6-8. 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.

Prayers are never measured by the yard in heaven. They are estimated by their weight. If there is earnestness in them, truth, sincerity, God accepts them, however brief they are. Indeed, brevity is often an excellence in prayer. Let us never, therefore, use vain repetitions.

This exposition consisted of readings from MATTHEW 5:41-48; 6:1-8

MATTHEW 6:1-24

1. *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.*

The motive which leads a man to give, will form the true estimate of what he does. If he gives to be seen of men then when he is seen of men he has the reward he sought for, and he will never have any other. Let us never do our alms before men, to be seen of them.

2-5. *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. And when thou prayest, thou shall 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.*

I have heard very great commendation give to certain Easterns, because at the hour of the rising of the sun, or the hour when the sound is heard from the summit of the mosque, wherever they may be, they put themselves in the posture of prayer. God forbid I should rob them of any credit they deserve, but far be it from us ever to imitate them. We are not to be ashamed of our prayers, but they are not things for the public street. They are intended for God's eye, and God's ear.

6, 7, *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 they shall be heard for their much speaking.

It is not very easy to repeat the same words often without it becoming a vain repetition. A repetition, however, is not forbidden, but a “vain” repetition. And how greatly do they err who measure prayers by the yard. They think they have prayed so much because they have prayed so long, whereas it is the work of the heart — the true pouring out of the desire before God — that is the thing to be looked at. Quality not quantity: truth, not length. Oftentimes the shortest prayers have the most prayer in them.

8, 9. *Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what thing ye have need of, before ye ask him. After this manner therefore pray ye:*

And then he gives us a model of prayer, which never can be excelled, containing all the parts of devotion. They do well who model their prayers upon this.

9-13 *Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.*

Our Saviour now makes a remark upon this prayer, and on one particular part of it which has stumbled a great many.

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

There are some who have altered this, and pray in this fashion, “Forgive us our debts as we desire to forgive our debtors.” It will not do. You will have to desire God to forgive you, and desire in vain, if you pray in that fashion. It must come to this point of literal immediate, completed forgiveness of every offence committed against you if you expect God to forgive you. There is no wriggling out of it. The man who refuses to forgive, refuses to be forgiven. God grant that we may, none of us, tolerate malice in our hearts. Anger glances in the bosom of wise men: it only burns in the heart

of the foolish. May we quench it, and feel that we do freely, and fully, and heartily forgive, knowing that we are forgiven.

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

Simpletons praise them — think much of them, and they plume themselves thereon, and think themselves the very best of men. They have their reward.

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

Yet have I heard persons speak of certain emaciated ecclesiastics as being such wonderfully holy men. “How they must have fasted! They look like it. You can see it in their faces.” Probably produced by a fault in their digestion much more likely, than by anything else and if not — if we are to suppose that the spareness of a person is to be the token of his holiness — then the living skeleton was a saint to perfection. But we are not beguiled by such follies as these. The Christian man fasts but he takes care that no one shall know it. He wears no ring or token even when his heart is heavy. Full often he puts on a cheerful air, lest by any means he should communicate unnecessary sorrow to others, and he will be cheerful and happy, apparently, in the midst of company, to prevent their being sad, for it is enough for him to be sad himself, and sad before his Father’s face.

19-21. *Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*

There is many a way of sending your treasure before you to heaven. God’s poor are his money boxes — his exchequer. You can pass your treasure over to heaven by their means. And the work of evangelizing the world by the labours of God’s servants in the ministry of the gospel — you can help this also. Thus also ye can pass your treasure over into the King’s exchequer, and your heart will follow it. I have heard of one who said his religion did not cost

him a shilling a year, and it was remarked that very probably it would have been expensive at the price. You will find people form a pretty accurate estimate of the value of their own religion by the proportion which they are prepared to sacrifice for it.

22. *The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single,*

If thy motive be single — if thou hast only one motive, and that a right one — the master one of glorifying God — if thy eye be single.

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

When a man's highest motive is himself, what a dark and selfish nature he has; but when his highest motive is his God, what brightness of light will shine upon all.

24. *No man can serve two masters:*

He can serve two persons very readily. For the matter of that, he can serve twenty, but not two masters. There cannot be two master principles in a man's heart, or master passions in a man's soul. "No man can serve two masters."

24. *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.*

Though some men's lives are a long experiment of how far they can serve the two.

This exposition consisted of readings from MATTHEW 6:1-24. 1 CORINTHIANS 3:1-16.

MATTHEW 6:5-34

5. *And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men.*

We ought to pray in the synagogue, and we may pray at the corners of the streets; but the wrong is to do it to "be seen of men," that is, to be looking for some present reward in the praises that fall from human lips.

5-7. *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.

They seem to attribute a sort of power to a certain form of words, as if it were a charm, and they repeat it over and over again. Not only do the poor Mohammedans and heathens “use vain repetitions,” but the members of the Romish and other churches that I might name do the same thing; words to which they attach but very slight meaning, and into which they put little or no heart, are repeated by them again and again, as if there could be some virtue in the words themselves. Let it not be so with you beloved. Pray as long as you like in secret, but do not pray long with the idea that God will hear you simply because you are a long while at your devotions.

8. *Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before you ask him.*

He does not need to be informed, nor even to be persuaded. Mere words are of no value in his ears. If you must needs use many words, ask them to lend you their ears, for they may have little else to do with them; but God careth not for words alone, it is the thought, the desire of the heart to which he ever hath regard.

9. *After this manner therefore pray ye:*

Here is a model prayer for you to copy as far as it is suited to your case: —

9-13. *After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.*

And then, as it there was one part of the prayer that would be sure to arrest the attention of his hearers, namely, that concerning forgiving our debtors, the Saviour makes the following remarks: —

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

Therefore, in order to succeed in prayer, we must have a heart purged from a spirit of revenge and from all unkindness; we must

ourselves be loving and forgiving, or we cannot expect that God will hear our supplications when we come to crave his forgiveness.

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

They seemed to say to everyone who looked at them, “We have been so engrossed with our devotions that we have not found time even to wash our faces.” But the Saviour says to his followers, “Do not imitate those hypocrites; do not make public our private religious exercises, perform them unto God, and not unto men. As for those hypocrites,” —

16. *Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.*

And a poor reward it is.

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

May God give us that modest, unselfish spirit which lives unto him, and does not want to walk in the sham light of men’s esteem! What matters it, after all, what men think of us? The hypocrite proudly boasts if he wins a little praise from his fellows but what is it except so much wind? If all men should speak well of us, all that we should gain would be this, “Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets.”

19, 20. *Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: Bbut lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:*

Christ here first teaches us how to pray, and then teaches us how really to live. He turns our thoughts from the object in life which allures and injures so many, but which is, after all, an object unworthy of our search; and he bids us seek something higher and better: “Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven,” —

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

It is sure to be so: your heart will follow your treasure. Send it away therefore up to the everlasting hills, lay up treasure in that blessed land before you go there yourself.

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

If thine eye be brooked up with gold dust, or if thou art living for self and this world, thy whole life will be a dark life, and the whole of thy being will dwell in darkness. "But," says someone, "may I not live for this world and the next too?" listen: —

24. *No man can serve two masters:*

He may serve two individuals, who have conflicting interests but they cannot both be his masters.

24. *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.*

Either the one or the other will be master, they are so opposed to each other that they will never agree to a divided service. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." It is the Lord Jesus Christ who says this, so do not attempt to do what he declares is impossible.

25. *Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, —*

It should be, "Take no distracting thought for your life," —

25. *What ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?*

You are obliged to leave your life with God, why not leave with him all care about your food and your raiment?

26. *Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, or gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?*

Do you believe that, after all your earnest labour and your industry, God will permit you to starve, when these creatures, that labour not, yet are fed?

27-29. *Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was never arrayed like one of these.*

Christ asks then whether, by taking thought, they can add a single cubit to their lives, for I take his question to mean, whether

they could, by any means, make the standard of existence any longer than it was. They could not do so, they could shorten it, and very often, carking care has brought men to their graves. Then Christ bade them note how the lilies grow, so that even Solomon could not excel them for beauty.

30-33. *Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore, take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*

If you want string and brown paper, you need not go into a shop to buy them, but if you buy certain articles, you get string and brown paper in the bargain. So, when you go to God, seeking first his kingdom and his righteousness, these other things, which are but the packing, as it were, the string and the brown paper, are given to you in the bargain. He who giveth you the golden treasures of heaven will not allow you to want for the copper treasures of earth.

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

You cannot live in tomorrow, so do not fret about tomorrow. You live in today, so think of today, spend today to God's glory, and leave the care about tomorrow until tomorrow comes.

MATTHEW 7

While we are reading, let us also be adoring at the same time, for the words of Christ have a gracious divinity about them; they are infinite; they are omnipotent. There is a kind of life in them; a life which communicates itself to those who hear them. Our Saviour did not preach sermons: he preached texts; all his sermons are full of golden sentences, not hammered gold leaf, like those of men, but they are ingots of solid gold, and the gold of that land is good, the most fine gold; there is none like it. Thus he preaches in the seventh chapter of Matthew.

1. *Judge not that ye be not judged.*

Set not up for critics, especially in the act of worship. Probably there is no greater destroyer of profit in the hearing of the word than is the spirit of carping criticism.

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

When the Lord comes in judgment, he might almost decline to mount the throne, for he might say, "These men have already tried and condemned each other; let their sentences abide." If he were to judge us as we have judged others, who amongst us would stand? But we may rest assured that our fellow-men will usually exercise towards us: much the same judgment that we exercise towards them.

3. *And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?*

It is a beam. You do not see it because it is in your own eye. How is it that you can be so severe towards that which is in another, and so lenient towards yourself?

4, 5. *Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.*

There may be, dear friends, a great deal of hypocrisy about us, of which we are not aware, for when a man sees a fault in another, and tells him of it, he says, "You know I am a very plain-spoken person; there is no hypocrisy about me." Well, but there is, and, according to the Saviour's description, this may be sheer hypocrisy because meanwhile in your own eye there is something else worse than you see in your fellow, and this you pass over, and this is simply untruthful dealing, and it amounts to hypocrisy. If you were really so zealous to make people see, you would begin by being zealous to see yourself, and if you were so concerned to have all eyes cleansed from impurity, you would begin by cleansing your own, or seeking to have them cleansed.

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

It is a pity to talk about some of the secrets of our holy faith in any and every company. It would be almost, profane to speak of

them in the company of profane men. We know that they would not understand us; they would find occasion for jest and ridicule, and therefore our own reverence for holy things must cause us to lay a finger on our lips when we are in the presence of profane persons. Do not let us, however, carry out one precept to the exclusion of others. There are dogs that eat of the crumbs that fall from the master's table. Drop them a crumb. And there are even swine that may yet be translearned; to whom the sight of a pearl might give some inkling of a better condition of heart. Cast not the pearls before them, but you may show them to them sometimes when they are in as good a state of mind as they are likely to be in. It is ours to preach the gospel to every creature; that is a precept of Christ, and yet all creatures are not always in the condition to hear the gospel. We must choose our time. Yet even this I would not push too far. We are to preach the gospel in season and out of season. Oh! that we may be able to follow precepts as far as they are meant to go, and no further.

7. Ask, and it shall be given you, seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you:

This is the simplest form of prayer. Follow up your prayer by the effort. "Knock, and it shall be opened unto you." Add force to your petitions and to your prayers. If the door blocks the way, knock until it is opened.

8. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

One way or another you will get the blessing if you are but persevering, and blessed is the man who is a master of the art of asking, but does not forget the labour of seeking an entrance through the importunity of knocking.

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

Our Lord will give us the real thing. Sometimes we should be quite satisfied with the imitation of it. And sometimes we have to wait and be prepared for the reception of the real thing; it is infinitely better for us to wait for months than immediately to get a stone; better to wait for a fish than the next moment to have a scorpion. There were some in the wilderness who asked to be satisfied, and they were so, with the flesh of quails. They got their

stones, they got their scorpions. But the Lord's people may sometimes find that they have to wait a while. God will not give to them that which is other than good for them.

11, 12. *If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him? Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.*

Wonderful condensation of the two tables off the law! God help us to remember it. This is a golden rule, and he that follows that shall lead a golden life.

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

Do not be ashamed of being called narrow. Do not be ashamed of being supposed to lead a life of great precision and exactness. There is nothing very grand about breadth, after all. And I have noticed one thing, the broadest men I have ever met in the best sense have always kept to the narrow way, and the narrowest people I know are those who are so fond of the broad way. I could indicate some literature which professes to be exceedingly liberal; it is liberal indeed in finding fault with everybody who holds the gospel, but its tone is bitterness itself towards all the orthodox. Wormwood and gall are honey compared with what the liberal people generally pour out upon those who keep close to the truth. I prefer to cultivate a broad spirit to a narrow heart, and then to talk about the breadth of the way.

15. *Beware of false prophets.*

But so long as he is a prophet, people will respect him; do not find fault with him, he is a clever man.

15-25. *Beware of false prophets, which come to you in, sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.*

Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils; and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.

For the best man will be tried, and perhaps all the more because he is such.

26-29. *And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it. And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine. For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.*

MATTHEW 7

1. Judge not, that ye be not judged.

You are not called to judge; you are not qualified to judge: "God is the Judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another." There is much better work to be done by us than that of setting up as judges of others.

2. For with what Judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.

Do not judge the whole character of a man by one single action; do not attempt to judge his motives; you cannot read his heart; you are not omniscient; you are not infallible. You will very soon find other people judging you; and when, one of these days, you shall be falsely judged and condemned, you will not need to have any surprise if you have done the same thing yourself; it will be only your corn measured back to you with the bushel you used in measuring other people's.

3. *And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?*

There is something in yourself that is worthy of your consideration, something that you ought to consider, it big, blinding beam in your own eye. As for the mote that is in your brother's eye, there is no need that you should even see it. Why beholdest thou it? Charity is ever a little blind to the faults of others, for it remembers so well its own.

4. *Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?*

A blind man cannot be a good oculist; he should see well who tries to mend other people's eyes; but with a beam in one's own eye, it must be poor work to attempt to take motes out of the eyes of others. This does not prevent our using reproof and rebuke when they are needed. Even under the Law, the command was given, "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbor, and not suffer sin upon him," as if it were a kind of hatred to avoid the duty of kindly and gentle rebuke. That is a very different thing from exposing the faults of others, and aggravating and exaggerating the faults of others, as, alas, so many do! Oh, how much misery might be saved in the world if the scandal-market were not so brisk! Perhaps tongues would not move so fast if eyes were used to a better purpose.

5, 6. *Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye. Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.*

There are some holy enjoyments, some gracious experiences, some deep doctrines of the Word of God, which it would be out of place to speak of before certain profane and unclean persons. They would only make a jest of them; perhaps they might persecute you on account of them. No; holy things are for holy men; and as of old the crier in the Grecian temple was wont to say, before the mysteries were performed, "Far hence, ye profane!" so sometimes, before we enter into the innermost circle of Christian converse, it would be well for us to notice who is listening.

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

This is the rule of God's kingdom invariably, whenever the request is a right one, and is presented in a right manner.

8-11. *And he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son, ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?*

The point is, not only that God gives, but that he knows how to give. If he were always to give according to our prayers, it might be very injurious to us. He might give us that with which we could do hurt, as when a father should put a stone into a boy's hand; or he might give us that which might do us hurt, as if a father were to give his child a serpent. He will do neither of these things; but he will answer us in discretion, and with prudence will he fulfill our desires. You know how to give to your children; how much more shall your infinitely wise Father, who from heaven sees all the surroundings of men, give good things to them that ask him?

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

"The law and the prophets" are here condensed into a single sentence. This is the golden rule, a handy rule, a perpetually-applicable rule, useful in every condition, and it never makes a mistake.

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

It is a way of self-denial, it is a way of humility, it is a way which is distasteful to the natural pride of men; it is a precise way, it is a holy way, a strait way, and therefore men do not care for it. They are too big, too proud, to go along a narrow lane to heaven; yet this is the right way. There are many broad ways, as Banyan says, that abut it; but you may know them by their being broad, and you may know them by their being crowded. The Christian man has to swim against the current; he has to do more than that, he has to go

against himself, so strait is the road; but if you wish to go down to perdition, you have only to float with the stream, and you can have any quantity of company that you like.

15. *Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing,*

Dressed like Elijah.

15. *But inwardly they are ravening wolves.*

Very Ahabs and Jezebels; and they will deceive you, if you are not divinely guarded against them.

16. *Ye shall know them —*

How? By their eloquence? No. Some of the worst of teachers have had great persuasiveness. You shall know them by their earnestness? No. Some have compassed sea and land to make proselytes to a lie. You shall know them how, then?

16. *By their fruits.*

If their teaching makes you better, if it makes you love God, if it draws you to holiness, if it inspires you with noble and heroic sentiments, so that you imitate Christ, then listen to them.

16-20. *Do men, gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.*

After all, this is the best test of any doctrine, the practice to which it leads. I remember one day discussing with a person about the doctrine of future punishment. We were arguing, and the gentleman, who owned the vessel on which we were, said, "Come up on deck, and enjoy the fresh air, and leave that subject; but," he said, "you, sir, will kindly go as far as possible from my men, for they are bad enough as they are, and if you tell them there is no punishment for sin, they will be worse than ever. As for you, Mr. Spurgeon, you may go where you like, you won't do them any harm." I thought that rough and ready mode of argument was about as good a commendation as I could wish to have.

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

Not talking, but doing, not loud profession, but quiet, practical godliness, wins the day.

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

If Christ does not know us, it matters not what we do. Even if we work miracles, if we astound the world with our abilities, it is all nothing if Christ does not know us. Now, I think there are many here who can humbly but confidently say, "He knows me." He knows some of us, if by nothing else, by our constantly begging of him. We have been at him day and night in our necessities, pleading for his bounty, his mercy, his company; and he cannot say he does not know us. He knows a great deal about us, even through our prayers, if by no other way.

24. *Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock:*

What a mercy there is a rock to build on! We could not have made one; but there is the rock.

25. *And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew,*

For the best man will have his troubles.

25. *And beat upon that house;*

For the best man will feel the troubles; they will come home to him.

25-27. *And it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth, them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended,*

For the worst of men will have their troubles. There is no escaping the trials of life by sin.

27. *And the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.*

There was no building it again; it was altogether gone, swept right away,
no vestige of it remained.

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

He touched their conscience; his teaching came home to them; they could not help feeling that it was true. Besides, he did not keep on quoting Rabbi this and Rabbi that, but he spoke from his own knowledge: "He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes."

MATTHEW 7

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

Some people are of a censorious disposition; they see nothing in others to praise, but everything to blame, and such people generally find that they are condemned according to their own wicked rule. Other people begin to judge those who are so fond of judging. If they are so wise, and so discriminating, others expect more from them; and not finding it, they are not slow to condemn them. It is an old proverb that chickens come home to roost, and so they do. If you judge ill of others, that judgment will, sooner or later, come home to yourself.

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

At the bottom of all censoriousness lies hypocrisy. An honest man would apply to himself the judgment which he exercises upon others, but it usually happens that those who are so busy spying out other people's faults have no time to see their own; and what is this, at the bottom, but insincerity and hypocrisy?

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

Zeal should always be tempered by prudence. There are times when it would be treason to truth to introduce it as a topic of

conversation,-when men are in such a frame of mind that they will be sure rather to cavil at it than to believe it. Not only speak thou well, but speak thou at the right time, for silence is sometimes golden. See that thou hast thy measure of golden silence as well as of silver speech.

7. Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you:

Here is a three-fold encouragement to us to pray. When we cannot use one style of prayer, let us use another, for each shall be successful at the right time. O child of God, let nothing keep thee from prayer! It has been well said that a Christian may be hedged in, but he cannot be roofed in; there is always a passage way upwards to the throne of the great Father; and asking, knocking, seeking, he shall be sure to be successful with his suit.

8. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

Ask the people of God whether it is not so. Go among them, and question them upon this matter. They know the power of prayer, so let them tell you whether they have been deceived or not. Well, then, as it has been so with them, let this encourage you to expect that it shall be the same with you also.

9-12. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him.? Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them for this is the law and the prophets.

Is there a connection between this conduct on our part and answers to our prayer? Undoubtedly it is so from the position of the text. If we will never grant the requests of those who need our help, in oases where we should expect to be ourselves helped, how can we go to God with any confidence, and ask him to help us? I doubt not that many a man has received no answer to his prayer because that prayer has come out of a heart hard and untender, which would not permit him to grant the requests of others. O child of God, do thou to others as thou wouldst that they should do to thee, then canst thou

go to thy God in prayer with the confidence that he will hear and answer thee!

13. *Enter ye in at the strait gate:*

Do not be ashamed of being called Puritanical, precise, and particular:

Enter ye in at the narrow gate.”

13. *For wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction,*

Do not choose that way.

13-21. *And many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father, which is in heaven.*

That still remains as the great test of the true heir of heaven, the doing of the divine will. All the talking, thinking, posturing in the world will not save a man. There must be in him such a faith as produces holiness.

22-25. *Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house;-*

Whoever you are, and whatever you build, it will be tried. No matter how firm is the rock beneath you, the winds will blow, and the rains will pour down upon your building. Whether you are in a palace or in a hovel, trial and testing must and will come to you: “The floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house,-

25. *And it fell not:*

There is the mercy “it fell not.”

25-27. *For it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house,*

Even if you live to the world, or live unto Satan, you will not live without trial. The ungodly, who have their portion in this life, have to eat some bitter herbs with it, and have to dip their morsel in vinegar quite as much as believers do. “The floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house;

27. *And it fell:*

Just when the tenant most needed shelter, it fell. He did not need it so much till the floods came, and the winds blew; but now, when he would fain have crouched down beneath his roof-tree, and have been at peace from the howling hurricane, then “it fell.”

27. *And great was the fall of it.*

The fall was so great because he could never build again.

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

Not quoting Rabbi so-and-so, to show how well he was acquainted with his writings, but speaking as one who knew what he had to say, and who spoke, out of the fullness of his heart, truth that was evidently inspired; and his hearers felt the force of the solemn message which he thus delivered.

MATTHEW 7:1-8

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

Use your judgment, of course: the verse implies that you will judge in a right sense. But do not indulge the criticizing faculty upon others in censorious manner, or as if you were set in authority, and had a right to dispense judgment among your fellows. If you impute motives, and pretend to read hearts, others will do the same towards you. A hard and censorious behaviour is sure to provoke reprisals.

Those around you will pick up the peck measure you have been using, and measure your corn with it. You do not object to men forming a fair opinion of your character, neither are you forbidden to do the same towards them, but as you would object to their sitting in judgment upon you, do not sit in judgment upon them. This is not the day of judgment, neither are we his Majesty's judges, and therefore we may not anticipate the time appointed for the final assize, nor usurp the prerogatives of the Judge of all the earth. Surely, if I know myself aright, I need not send my judgment upon circuit to try other men, for I can give it full occupation in my own Court of Conscience to try the traitors within my own bosom.

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

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

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

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

When men are evidently unable to perceive the purity of a great truth, do not set it before them. They are like mere dogs, and if you set holy things before them they will be provoked to "turn again and rend you": holy things are not for the profane. "Without are dogs": they must not be allowed to enter the holy place. When you are in the midst of the vicious, who are like "swine," do not bring forth the precious mysteries of the faith, for they will despise them, and "trample them under their feet" in the mire.

You are not needlessly to provoke attack upon yourself, or upon the higher truths of the gospel. You are not to judge, but you are not to act without judgment. Count not men to be dogs or swine; but when they avow themselves to be such, or by their conduct act as if they were such, do not put occasions in their way for displaying their evil character. Saints are not to be simpletons; they are not to be judges, but, also, they are not to be fools. Great King, how much wisdom thy precepts require! I need thee, not only to open my mouth, but also at times to keep it shut.

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

To men you may not always speak of heavenly things, but to God you may. "Ask, seek, knock"; let your prayer be adapted to the case; let it increase in intensity, let it advance in the largeness of its object. To receive a gift is simple, to find a treasure is more enriching, to enter into a palace is best of all. Each form of prayer is prescribed, accepted, and rewarded in a manner suitable to its character. The promise is universal to all who obey the precept. The commands are in opposition to the methods of carking care which have been denounced in the former chapter; and they are encouragements to the precepts of giving and non-recessional set forth previously, since he that can have of God for the asking may well give to men who ask, and even yield to those who unjustly

demand. With such boundless stores at command, we should not be either niggardly or litigious. Lord, help me to have done with fretting, and to abound in asking, seeking, knocking; so shall I soon overflow with thanksgiving.

MATTHEW 7:7-29

7. Ask, and it shall be given you;

He that will not ask for it deserves to go without it. Have you ever asked for it? If not, whose fault is it that you have it not?

7. Seek, and ye shall find;

How can you hope to find if you do not seek? Have you never found it? Have you never sought it? And if you have never sought it, how do you excuse yourselves for your neglect?

7. Knock, and it shall be opened unto you:

Is that all-knock? Is the gate of heaven not opened to you? Have you never knocked? Do you wonder, therefore, that the door is shut? Take care; for the time may come when you will knock, and the door will not be opened to you; for, “when once the Master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door,” then knocking shall be in vain. But at present this verse is still God’s gracious word of command and promise; let me read it to you again: “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.”

8. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

When you are dealing with men, this is not always true. You may ask, and not receive; you may seek, and not find; you may knock, and not have the door opened to you. But when you deal with God, there are no failures or refusals. Every true asker receives; every true seeker finds; and every true knocker has the door opened to him. Will you not try it, and prove for yourself that it is even so?

9-11. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?

You not only give, but you know how to give so as not to disappoint the asker. It is most blessedly so with the great Father in

heaven. He will not give you that which will mock and disappoint you: he will give you bread, not a stone; fish, not a serpent; nay, more, he will give you the bread of life, and the water of life, that you may live for ever.

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

This is rightly called “the golden rule.” Christ says of it that it is “the law and the prophets.” It is the essence of them, it is the sum and substance of the highest morality. What you would that others should do to you, do that to them. Do not let that golden rule remain merely as a record in this Book, but take it out with you into your daily life. If we did all act to others as we would that others should act to us, how different would the lives of many men become! Ours would be a happy world if this law of Christ were the law of England, and the law of all nations. God send us the Spirit by whom alone we shall be able to obey so high a rule!

13. *Enter ye in at the strait gate*

The narrow gate

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

Do not try to go with the majority; truth is usually with the minority. Do not count heads, and say, “I am for that which has the most on its side;” but prefer that which is least liked among men, choose that which is most difficult, most trying to flesh and blood, that which gives you least license, because “strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.” You will not hit upon it, then, in a “happy-go-lucky” sort of style. Heaven’s gate is not found open by accident; there never was anybody yet who was saved by accident. No: “few there be that find it,” is still true. God grant that we may be among the few! And why should we not be?

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

There are always plenty of them about; there is nothing of the sheep about them but the skin, and there is no connection between that skin and those that wear it.

16-20. *Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.*

You may judge men as well as trees that way; and you may judge doctrines that way. That which gives a license to sin cannot be true; but that which makes for holiness is true; for, somehow, truth of doctrine and holiness of life run together. We cannot expect holiness to grow out of falsehood, but we may expect all manner of evil to come out of false teaching.

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

Practice is the true test, not words. Not he that saith, “Lord, Lord,” but “he that doeth the will of God;” not he that merely has good words on his tongue, but he that has the will of God laid up in his heart, and wrought out in his life, that is the man who “shall enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

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

If our lives are evil, it does not matter to what denomination we belong; we may be clever preachers, or mighty teachers, we may fancy that we have had dreams and visions, we may set ourselves up to be some great ones; but if we have not done the will of God, we shall at the last hear Christ say to us, “Depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”

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

He was a good man, and a practical man; yet he was also a tried man. His house was built on the rock, but that did not prevent the

rain descending, and the floods coming, and the winds blowing. The highest type of godliness will not save you from troubles and trials; it will, in some measure, even necessitate them. But, blessed be God, here lies the gem of the parable or narrative: "It fell not: for it was founded upon a rock." It could stand the strain and endure the test, for it had a good foundation.

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

He was a great hearer, but he was a bad doer; yet he thought that he was a good doer, for he built a house. Alas, the house was on the sand! There was no real obedience to Christ, no true trusting in him; and so, when the time of trouble came, and trouble will come even to the hypocrite and to the false professor, we read of his house, "It fell: and great was the fall of it," because it could never be built up again. It fell hopelessly; it fell forever; therefore, "Great was the fall of it."

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

There was a force and power about what Jesus said, he spoke from the heart, he spoke with the accent of conviction; whereas the scribes and Pharisees only spoke magisterially and officially, with no heart in their utterance, and there was therefore no power about it. God give to all of us the grace to know the power of the words of Christ! Amen.

MATTHEW 7:13-23

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

Be up and on your journey. Enter in at the gate at the head of the way, and do not stand hesitating. If it be the right road, you will find the entrance somewhat difficult, and exceedingly narrow; for it demands self-denial, add calls for strictness of obedience, and

watchfulness of spirit. Nevertheless, “enter ye in at the strait gate.” Whatever its drawbacks of fewness of pilgrims, or straitness of entrance, yet choose it and use it. True, there is another road, broad and much frequented; but it leadeth to destruction. Men go to ruin along the turnpike road, but the way to heaven is a bridle-path. There may come other days, when the many will crowd the narrow way; but, at this time, to be popular, the road must be broad — broad in doctrine, in morals, and in spirituals. But those on the strait road shall go straight to glory, and those on the broad road are all abroad. All is well that ends well: we can afford to be straitened in the right way rather than enlarged in the wrong way; because the first endeth in endless life, and the second hastens down to everlasting death. Lord, deliver me from the temptation to be “broad,” and keep me in the narrow way, though few find it!

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

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

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

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

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

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

19. *Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Here is the end to which evil things are tending, The ax and the fire await the ungodly, however fine they may look with the leafage of profession.*

Only let time enough be given, and every man on earth who bears no good fruit will meet his doom. It is not merely the wicked, the bearer of poison berries, that will be cut down but the neutral, the man who bears no fruit of positive virtue must also be cast into the fire.

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

It is not ours to hew or to burn, but it is ours to know. This knowledge is to save us from coming under the shadow or influence of false teachers. Who wants to build his nest upon a tree which is soon to be cut down? Who would choose a barren tree for the center of his orchard? Lord, let me remember that I am to judge myself by this rule. Make me a true fruit-bearing tree.

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

No verbal homage will suffice: "Not every one that saith." We may believe in our Lord's Deity, and we may take great pains to affirm it over and over again with our "Lord, Lord"; but unless we carry out the commands of the Father, we pay no true homage to the Son. We may own our obligations to Jesus, and so call him "Lord,

Lord”; but if we never practically carry out those obligations, what is the value of our admissions? Our King receives not into his kingdom those whose religion lies in words and ceremonies, but only those whose lives display the obedience of true discipleship.

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

An orthodox creed will not save if it stands alone, neither will it be sure to do so if accompanied by official position and service. These people said, “Lord, Lord,” and, in addition, pleaded their prophesying or preaching in his name. All the preaching in the world will not save the preacher if he does not practice. Yes, and he may have been successful — successful to a very high degree — “and in thy name have cast out devils,” and yet, without personal holiness, the caster-out of devils will be cast out himself. The success boasted of may have had about it surprising circumstances of varied interest — “and in thy name done many wonderful works”; and yet the man may be unknown to Christ. Three times over the person is described as doing all “in thy name”; and yet the Lord, whose name he used so freely, so boldly, knew nothing of him, and would not suffer him to remain in his company. The Lord cannot endure the presence of those who call him “Lord, Lord,” and then work iniquity. They professed to him that they knew him, but he will “profess unto them, I never knew you.” How solemn is this reminder to me and to others! Nothing will prove us to be true Christians but a sincere doing of the Father’s will! We may be known by all to have great spiritual power over devils, and men, and yet our Lord may not own us in that great day, but may drive us out as impostors whom he cannot tolerate in his presences.

MATTHEW 7:13-29

13. *Enter ye in at the strait gate.*

It is very unpopular. The great ones will recommend to you great liberality and breadth; but enter yet in at the strait gate.

13. *For wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat .’*

That is a rule that is very unfashionable in these times; but depend upon it, the Lord, who gave it to us, meant it for all times. That which seems narrow, which costs you self-denial — that which is contrary to the will of the flesh — that which does not seem to charm the eye and fascinate the senses — go after that “Enter ye in at the strait gate.” You will not be likely to err much, or too much on that side. Let this be a gauge to you. That kind of preaching which allows you to indulge in sin — that sort of teaching which lowers the standard of God’s Word for you, and makes you think more of your own judgment than of the teachings of Christ — away with it. Let others have it if they like. “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat.”

14. *Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that of it.*

It is still so. Indeed, none find it. unless grace finds them. He who made that gate must go after the wandering’ sheep, and bring them through that gate. They will never choose it of themselves.

15. *Beware of false prophets.*

Some honour and esteem all prophets. “Is not it a very high office? Is not a prophet a man sent from God?” Yes, and for that very reason there are counterfeits whom God has never sent. Beware of false prophets.

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

They look just like sheep. They look just like shepherds, but it is only their clothing. The mere hypocrite is the goat in sheep’s clothing. But a false prophet is a wolf in sheep’s clothing, because he can do so much more harm, and will do, so much more damage to the church of God.

16. *Ye shall know them by their fruits.*

They are sure to come out in their actions If you have not got the knowledge of theology, and the like, to, be able to judge their teaching, yet the simplest persons can judge their actions.. “You shall know them ‘by their fruits,’ which are sure to come out sooner or later.

16. *Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?*

Did you ever find a cluster of grapes growing upon a thorn-bush? Grapes and figs are pleasant fruit, and holy living, true devotion, communion with God — these are the things that are sweet to God and to good men. But they come not of false doctrine. They are not seen in false prophets. Such prophets despise such things as these. They are for worldly ways, and places of worldly gaiety they can frequent. Not so the servants of God.

17-19. *Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit: but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.*

That is what comes of it in the end. It may spread itself abroad, and may gather much admiration, to itself for its verdure, but there is an axe being sharpened, and a fire being kindled

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

You cannot judge them by their bark, or by the spread of their branches, or by the verdure of their leaves, or even by the beauty of their blossoms in spring time. “By their fruits ye shall know them.” The Saviour here gives us a very earnest and very necessary warning, lest we should be deceived, for there are such who are not only deceived by their own sins, but deceived by false prophets, who are among Satan’s best agents.

21. *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven;*

They were very sound in doctrine. They called Jesus “Lord.” They believed in his Deity. Apparently, they were very devout. They said, “Lord.” They worshipped him. They were very importunate and earnest. They said, “Lord, Lord,” owing to him again and again. But “not everyone that saith unto me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter into the kingdom of heaven.” External utterances, however orthodox; professions, however sound, are not enough.

21. *But he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.*

Oh! dear friends, there must be holiness in us, for without holiness no man can see the Lord. It is not knowing the will of the heavenly Father, but doing it which is the mark of divine election. If God’s grace has really entered into us, we, like the prophets, shall be

known by our fruits; and if we are not doing the will of our Father who is in heaven, we shall not come to the heaven where he is.

22. *Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name?*

Yes, so did Balaam. Was not Saul also among the prophets, and yet neither Balaam nor Saul was accepted of God, but they were castaways, "Have we not prophesied in thy name?" A man may be a preacher, and an eloquent preacher, and he may even have some blessing upon his preaching, and yet be cast away for ever.

22. *And in thy name have cast out devils;*

Yes, and there was one that cast out devils, and he was a devil himself, namely, Judas Iscariot, which also betrayed him. He went out and wrought miracles in the name of Christ, and then sold Christ for pieces of silver.

22. *And in thy name done many wonderful works?*

Yes, and we may do many wonderful works, and yet be wonderfully deceived. It is not wonderful works: it is holy works; not works that amaze men, but works that please God, which are the proof of grace in the soul. Well, there will be some who will be able to say that they prophesied —that they cast out devils — that they did wonders.

23. *And then, will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.*

MATTHEW 8:1-13

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

There was a charm about his preaching, not that he modified his doctrine, or that he cut down his precepts; he spoke very plainly, very searchingly, and yet the people came to hear him. There is a something in the conscience of man that makes him turn away from that which flatters him, and makes him hear, almost against his liking, that which searches him.

2. *And, behold,*

Never mind about the crowd; fix your eye on the one man; behold, etc. —here is a mark of attention.

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

He could not live in the city, but he might be found on the mount, in the outskirts of the crowd, where he would hear that gracious voice; and he came and “worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean,” in which I detect no unbelief, but rather a very strong faith. “If thou dost but will, I can be made clean.” And Jesus, seeing the man was willing to dispense with any outward form used one.

3. *And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him,*

Not making himself unclean, as any other man would have done, but making him clean whom he touched.

3. *Saying, I will;*

A word of encouragement.

3. *Be thou clean.*

A word of power.

3. *And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.*

Christ’s grace, which usually wrought at once, in an instant, wrought for ever — the man was cleansed, never to be sick again; cured perfectly; the leprosy was cleansed.

4. *And Jesus said unto him, See thou tell no man;*

Do not spread the news, the crowd is inconvenient already. It was not only Christ’s modesty, but Christ’s wisdom to keep down the throng a little, for they were too many which gathered about him.

4. *But go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.*

While the ceremonial law stood, Christ was very careful to pay it honour. He came not to destroy, but he came to build up and to fulfill. He would have this man go and get a certificate from the priest that he was cleansed. Perhaps if he did not go at once, when it was found out that Christ healed him, the certificate might have been denied, and the man might not have been able to mingle with the company, so he sent him away quickly, to go to the priest with his offering to get the assurance that he was really cleansed. When Christ’s work is certified by Christ’s voice, then is it sure indeed.

5. *And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum,*

Which I may call his headquarters, he seems to have taken up his abode here for a time, to have gone to and fro to Capernaum.

5. *There came unto him a centurion,*

An officer over a hundred men, of some importance in those days; a small band of the Roman army placed in Herod's territory, perhaps to keep watch.

5, 6. *Beseeching him, and saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented.*

Sir Risdon Bennett tells us that there is a species of palsy which is accompanied with great pain, and we know, even from the apocrypha, there is a case there of a man grievously tormented with palsy — not exactly the same thing, perhaps, that we call palsy nowadays.

7. *And Jesus said unto him, I will come and heal him.*

He did not say, "I will come and see him"; that would have been kind — he did not say what you and I would say, "I will come and pray with him"; that is all we can do — but "I will come and heal him." Here is the tenderness of man and the power of God.

8, 9. *The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof; but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority,*

Here was a great point — here was a man commissioned, a man authorized, girt with authority; and he looked upon Christ in the same manner, sent of God, under divine authority, girt about with a heavenly commission.

9. *Having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth: and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.*

He did not further explain. It is a pity sometimes when we explain things to God in prayer, as I am afraid we often do, God knows what we mean. And so here he did not explain his meaning; we can see it clearly enough. "Thou too, O Christ, art under the authority of God, and sent by him, and thou hast the powers of nature under thy control. Thou hast but to say the word, and they go; do this, and they do it."

10. *When Jesus heard it, he marveled,*

He had marveled at men's unbelief; now he marvels at their faith, so that the thing which touches the wonder of God is man's unbelief and man's faith.

10. *And said to them that followed, Verily, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel,*

This man is not an Israelite; he is a Roman soldier; but I have never found so much faith in those to the manner born as I find in this stranger.

11. *And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west,*

From differing lands and extreme distances.

11. *And shall sit down*

Or recline in ease and rest.

11-12. *With Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom,*

Those born in Israel, who belong to the promised seed.

12-13. *Shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way, and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the self same hour.*

It is greatly important not only that we believe, but that we believe as much as ever we can, that we believe all that Christ has spoken. Some people, when they are converted, believe that they may fall from grace, and they do; according to their faith, so is it unto them. If they could believe for eternal life and lay hold on everlasting life, they would find it so, for generally it is according to their faith that it is unto them.

MATTHEW 8:1-27

1, 2. *When he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him. And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him,*

Great multitudes often count for nothing; it is here or there one who is the notable individual. There may be a great company come up outwardly to worship, but it is the soul that comes into contact with Christ that is the most worthy of observation. There is no "Behold!" when the great multitudes are mentioned by Matthew; but there is a "Behold!" before the record of the leper coming to Christ:

“Behold, there came a leper and worshipped him.” Let us all be of the leper’s mind, let us worship Christ. Surely we may do so, if only out of gratitude for having escaped from so dire a disease; but, inasmuch as, spiritually, by nature that disease is upon us, we have good reason to come to Jesus as the “leper came, and worshipped him,”-

2, 3. Saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

Come, then, to Christ, even though your faith be very incomplete. There may be, as there was with the leper, an “if” about it, and an “if” about a very vital point, namely, concerning the Master’s willingness; but he will shut his eye to that imperfection, and only look at that part of your faith which is acceptable to him, that is, your faith in his power. “Thou canst make me clean,” said the leper; and Christ dealt with him upon the terms of that “thou canst,” end as to the “If thou wilt,” he blotted that out by saying, “I will; be thou clean.” So, sinner, come to Jesus, even though the doubting phrase, “If thou wilt,” shall still linger on thy lip. If the leprosy shall show itself even there, in thine unbelief as to Christ’s willingness to cleanse thee, yet come to him, and he will say to thee, “I will; be thou clean;” and it shall be with you as it was with the leper: “immediately his leprosy was cleansed.”

4. And Jesus saith unto him, See thou tell no man;

He will never say that to you, or to me; but while he was here on earth, our Lord was very modest and retiring. He wished to conceal himself as much as possible. He did not strive, nor cry, nor cause his voice to be heard in the streets. He sets us an example of what true power is; for true power does not flaunt itself before the eyes of men, or advertise itself at every corner of the street, but it longs rather to conceal itself, being well aware that it will have all the publicity that is needful, for such wonders cannot be hid.

4. But go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.

The man was to make his cleansing known in the legal way. Our Lord Jesus Christ was very scrupulous to observe the law while it still stood; and we also should take care not to observe that

ceremonialism which has passed away, but diligently to keep that which still is of divine authority and of present force.

5. *And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion,*

There came, doubtless, a great number of people when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, but Matthew does not mention them; yet he does say, "There came unto him a centurion." Notice how these individuals are brought out by the Scriptural narrative—"a leper"—"a centurion." May there not also be some here who will come to Jesus, and prove in their own persons, or in the persons of others for whom they shall pray, his power to bless and save? The Lord grant it!

5-8. *Beseeking him, and saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him. The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof:*

What a blessed thing it is to have that sense of unworthiness! Some are very flippant in the expression of their piety; after they have heard half-a-dozen sermons, they attain to perfect holiness! I wish that they were half as deeply humbled, and knew half as much of themselves as this centurion did. "Lord, I am not worthy." That is a good lesson for anyone to learn. Still, when we can say, "Lord, we are not worthy," do not let us therefore think that Christ may not come to us. Let us ask him to come whatever we may be, for our want of worthiness must not stint or limit the condescension of our Divine Master. However, in this case, albeit that the centurion seemed almost to decline the privilege of having Christ come under his roof, yet he gave to Jesus high honour by believing in the power of his word even without his presence

8,9. *But speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority,*

He was, therefore, only a subordinate officer, for he was subject to his superiors.

9. *Having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.*

He left the Saviour to infer what he meant, namely, that Christ, who acted under the authority of God, could readily speak to palsies

and fevers, and say to them, “Go,” and they would go, just as quickly as a soldier would obey his officer’s command. Brother, thou art a Christian, and thou hast known the Lord for twenty years,- hast thou as much faith as this Roman centurion had? Dost thou believe that thy Master’s word can remove sickness, that he can clear difficulties, that he can supply needs, that he can break bonds, that he can send, by whichsoever angel or man he chooses, whatsoever blessing he pleases? Oh, that we did all believe as truly as this man did!

10-12. *When Jesus heard it, he marveled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

Some of the rank outsiders shall be brought in by rich mercy, while others, piously trained, nursed at the very gates of the Church, shall, nevertheless, for want of faith in Christ, be utterly cast away.

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

Oh! pray for your friends, pray for your children, pray for your servants; and if you have faith like that of the centurion, according to your faith, so shall it be done unto you.

14, 15. *And when Jesus was come into Peter’s house, he saw his wife’s mother laid, and sick of a fever. And he touched her hand, and the fever left her: and she arose, and ministered unto them.*

Peter had a wife, you see. Romanists say that he was the first pope, therefore the first pope had a wife; and, mark you, if other popes had had wives, there would not have been any declaration of infallibility, for there is no man who will believe himself to be infallible if he has someone near enough to remind him that he is not. But one evil usually goes with another; so it is recorded here that Peter had a wife as a kind of incidental rebuke of the sin of compulsory celibacy that was yet to be committed by priests and popes.

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

Was not that centurion a kind of prophet He had not long spoken about Christ's command over this man and that before Christ had an opportunity of putting his words to the test. Jesus cast out devils, and cast out sicknesses,-

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

That is a singular quotation, and it teaches us that Christ has power to heal because he "himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses." Am I not to understand, from the connection here, that Jesus Christ's power is to be seen in his sufferings, in his humiliation, and specially in his wounds, and in his death? He would have had no power to meet our maladies if he had not himself been compassed with infirmities for our sake. O blessed Master, thou dost teach us where power lies; not in grandeur, but in self-sacrifice; not in personal glory, but in personal humiliation.

18-24. *Now when Jesus saw great multitudes about him, he gave commandment to depart unto the other side. And a certain scribe came, and said unto him, Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head. And another of his disciples said 'unto him, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. But Jesus said unto him, Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead. And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him. And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea,*

We may go where Christ goes, and yet we may get into danger. Never judge the rightness of your path by the providence which attends it. You may have safe sailing to the port of destruction, and you may have a rough voyage when you are bound for heaven. "When he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him. And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea,"-

24. Insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep.

Weary with his toil, he lay down to rest. There was his humanity serenely confident, and therefore sleeping through the storm; there was the glory of his innocence: “he was asleep;” and there was also the majesty of his deity, only waiting for the moment when he should arise and still the tumult of the winds and waves.

25-27. And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish. And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm. But the men marveled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?

Glory be to his blessed name! Amen.

MATTHEW 8:1-27

1, 2. When he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him. And, behold, there came a leper —

You see that particular mention is made of this one special case, and, in any congregation, while it may be recorded that so many people came together, the special case that will be noted by the recording angel will be that of anyone who comes to Christ with his own personal distresses, and who thereby obtains relief from them: “Behold, there came a leper” —

2, 3. And worshipped him, saying, Lord if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus put forth his hand and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

His faith was not as strong as it might have been. There was an “if” in it; but, still, it was genuine faith, and our loving Lord fixed his eye upon the faith rather than upon the flaw that was in it, and if he sees in you, dear friend, even a trembling faith, he will rejoice in it, and bless you because of it. He will not withhold his blessing because you are not as strong in faith as you should be. Probably, you will have a greater blessing if you have greater faith; but even little faith gets great blessings from Christ. The leper said to him, “If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean;” so Christ answered to the faith that he did possess,” and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.”

4-7. And Jesus saith unto him, See thou tell no man; but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them. And when Jesus was entered into

Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion beseeking him, And saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him.

He had not asked Christ to “come and heal him.” He wished his servant to be healed, but he considered that it was too great an honour for Christ to come to him. I am not sure, but I think that this man’s judgment is correct, — that, for Christ to come to a man is better than for healing to come to him. Indeed, brethren and sisters, all the gifts of Christ fall far short of himself. If he will but come, and abide with us, that means more than all else that he can bestow upon us.

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

From his own power over his soldiers and servants, he argued that Christ must have at least equal power over all the forces of nature; and, as a centurion did not need to go and do everything himself, but gave his orders to his servant, and he did it, so, surely, there could be no need for the great Commander, to whom he was speaking to honour the sick man with his own personal presence. He had simply to utter the command and it would be obeyed, and the centurion’s servant would be healed. Do you think this is an ingenious argument? It is so, certainly, but it is also a very plain and very forcible one. I have read or heard many ingenious arguments for unbelief, and I have often wished that half the ingenuity thus vainly spent could be exercised in discovering reasons for believing so, I am pleased to notice that this commander of a hundred Roman soldiers did but argue from his own position, and so wrought in his mind still greater confidence in Christ’s power to heal his sick servant. Is there not something about yourself, from which, if you would look at it in the right light, you might gather arguments concerning the power of the Lord Jesus Christ?

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

“Not in Israel,” — where the light and the knowledge were, there was not such faith as this centurion possessed. This Roman soldier, rough by training and experience, who was more familiar with stern fighting men than with those who could instruct him concerning Christ, had more faith than Jesus had so far found “in Israel.”

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

This is a strange thing, yet it is continually happening still, despite its strangeness, that the persons, who are placed in such positions of privilege, that you naturally expect that they would become believers, remain unbelievers, while others, who are placed at a terrible disadvantage, nevertheless often come right out from sin, and right away from ignorance, and become believers in Christ. Oh, that none of us, who sit under the sound of the gospel from Sabbath to Sabbath, might be sad illustrations of this truth, while others, unaccustomed to listen to the Word, may be happy instances of the way in which the Lord still takes strangers, and adopts them into his family.

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

Jesus will treat all alike according to this rule: “As thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee.” If thou canst believe great things of him, thou shalt receive great things from him. If thou dost think him good, and great, and mighty, thou shalt find him to be so. If thou canst conceive greater things of him than anyone else has ever done, thou shalt find him equal to all thy conceptions, and thy greatest faith shall be surpassed. It is a law of his kingdom, from which Christ never swerves: “According to thy faith, be it unto thee.”

14,15. *And when Jesus was come into Peter’s house, he saw his wife’s mother laid, and sick of a fever, And he touched her hand, and the fever left her: and she arose and ministered unto them.*

That was, perhaps, the most remarkable thing of all; for, when a fever is cured, it usually leaves great weakness behind it. Persons recovered of fever cannot immediately leave their bed, and begin at once to attend to household matters, but Peter's wife's mother did this. Learn, hence, that the Lord Jesus can not only take away from us the disease of sin, but all the effects of it as well. He can make the man, who has been worn out in the service of Satan, to become young again in the service of the Lord; and when it seems as if we never, even if converted, could be of any use to him, he can take away the consequences of evil habits, and make us into bright and sanctified believers. What is there that is impossible to him? In the olden time, kings claimed to have the power of healing with a touch. That was a superstition; but this King can do it, all glory to his blessed name! May he lay his gracious hand upon many of you; for, if it could heal before it was pierced, much more can it now heal every sin-stricken soul it touches.

16-18. *When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses. Now when Jesus saw great multitudes about him, he gave commandment to depart unto the other side.*

For he neither loved nor courted popularity, but did his utmost to shun it. It followed him like his shadow but he always went before it, he never followed it, or sought after it: "When Jesus saw great multitudes about him, he gave commandment to depart unto the other side."

19. *And a certain scribe came, and said unto him, Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.*

How bold he is with his boasting! But Jesus knows that the fastest professors are often just as fast deserters, so he tests him before he takes him into the band of his followers.

20. *And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.*

Christ means, — "Can you follow the Son of man when there is no reward except himself, — not even a place for your head to rest

upon, or a home wherein you may find comfort? Can you cleave to him when the lone mountain side shall be the place where he spends whole nights in prayer while the dews falls heavily upon him? Can you follow him then? "This is a test of love which makes many to be "found wanting."

21, 22. *And another of his disciples said unto him, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. But Jesus said unto him, Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead.*

It must be Christ first, and father afterwards. We pay no disrespect to our dearest relatives and friends when we put them after Christ, that is their proper place. To put them before Christ, to prefer the creature to the Creator, is to be traitors to the King of kings. Whoever may come next, Christ must be first.

23-26. *And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him. And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep. And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish. And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds; and the sea; and there was a great calm.*

Probably no calm is so profound as that which follows the tempest of the soul which Jesus stills by his peace-speaking word. The calm of nature, the calm of long-continued prosperity, the calm of an easy temper, — these are all deceitful, and are apt to be broken by sudden and furious tempests. But, after the soul has been rent to its foundations, — after the awful ground-swell, and the Atlantic billows of deep temptation, — when Jesus gives peace, there is "a great calm."

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

We have often marvelled in the same way, but we know that it is not any "manner of man" alone, but that he, who was truly man, who was also "very God of very God," the God-man, the man Christ Jesus, the mediator between God and men.

MATTHEW 8:16-34, AND 9:1

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

It was the evening after the Sabbath. They did not venture even to bring out their sick till the day of rest was ended; and the Saviour, saying nothing about their lingering superstition, began to work mightily among them. "He cast out the spirits with his word." What a power there is in the word of Jesus! There is nothing like it for the casting out of devils. All our philosophies will not do what it does, the enemy will say, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are ye?" "He cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick."

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

It does not look like a fulfillment, except upon the wondrous principle of the power of substitution. Jesus takes the sickness, and therefore he removes it from us. He heals our infirmities because he took them upon Himself. Is it so, do you think, that every miracle of healing that Christ wrought took something out of him? We remember that, when the woman with the issue of blood was cured by touching his garment, Jesus said, "I perceive that virtue is gone out of me." Was it so that he suffered while he was thus relieving the suffering? It was the joy of his heart to bless mankind; but every blessing that he gave was very costly to him. I think that truth lies embedded in the Evangelist's declaration.

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

This again looks like a non sequitur. You and I would have said, "If there are great multitudes about us, let us speak to them while we are here." But then, again, you see, we may not always judge by the apparent usefulness of the present moment, we have to consider the rest of our career. Our Saviour knew that the governors of the country were very jealous, and that if people came together in large numbers, they might suspect insurrections and revolutions, and they would be there with their troops, and many innocent folk might be slain, and, speaking after the manner of men, his work of usefulness might be quickly brought to an end. Therefore, when he saw the

great multitudes, he judged it wise to go elsewhere. Besides, he was no lover of popularity; he looked upon it as a shadow which necessarily followed him, rather than as a thing to be sought after. This he showed in the intense humility of his spirit, and in that love of solitude which was so natural to one who walked in continual fellowship with God. Sometimes we shall really do more by apparently for the moment doing less.

19, 20. *And a certain scribe came, and said unto him, Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath nowhere to lay his head.*

We hear no more of this man. Our Saviour's faithfulness probably dismissed him.

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

Now this man was a disciple, mark you, and, according to Luke, the Lord had said to him, "Follow me," yet he urged this plea, "Suffer me first to go and bury my father."

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

Nothing, not even the duties of filial love, must be allowed to come in conflict with the command of Christ, "Follow me." I take it that this is not so much a word to the common disciple as to a disciple called out to a special ministry: "Your ministry is to be your first, your main, your only occupation: 'follow me: and let the dead bury their dead.' Let the politicians attend to the politics; let the reformers see to the reforms; but, as for you, keep to your own work, and follow me." When God's ministers come to this point, that they have to win souls, and that this is their only business, then souls will be won. There are plenty of dead people to bury the dead, there are plenty of moral people to see after the ordinary affairs of morality. As for us, let us follow Christ, and keep to our one business.

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

He went first, and they followed afterwards. If the ship be the type of the Church, then Christ is the first on board, he is the Captain, and the disciples make up the crew: "His disciples followed him."

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

What! a tempest where Christ is? Yes, it is generally so. If all seems very calm, thou mayest question whether Christ is there, but when he goes into the ship, and his disciples follow him, it is not remarkable that the devil comes after him. "The ship was covered with the waves." That sea of Galilee lies very deep indeed, and it is surrounded by lofty crags and yawning chasms that act like funnels to the wind, so that to this day it is very dangerous for those who are on it in a boat. "The ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep." Here is the weakness of humanity; and here is also the strength of faith. Jesus went to sleep because that boat was in his Father's hands, and he would take care of it. "He was asleep." Sometimes, the best thing that we can do is to go to bed. You are worrying and troubling yourself, and you can do nothing; go to sleep, brother. It is the climax of faith to be able to shake off all care, and to feel, "If the Lord careth for me, why should I not sleep? "Remember what Alexander the Great said of his friend Parmenio: "Alexander may sleep, for Parmenio watches, "and surely we, who have a far greater friend than Parmenio, can say at any time, "We may sleep, for God watches." "He was asleep." To sleep was the best thing that Jesus could do to recruit his bodily energies and to prepare himself for the time when his efforts would be needed for the deliverance of his disciples from danger.

25, 26 *And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish. And he saith unto them: Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?*

The disciples might have answered, "Lord, how canst thou ask us why we are fearful? The ship is covered with waves, the sea threatens to swallow it and all of us up." Still, they might have thought, "If Christ be on board the ship, will he allow it to sink? Can he be drowned? We carry Christ and all his fortunes, is not our vessel thus insured beyond all risk? He may well say to us, 'Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?'"

26. *Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm.*

"A great calm." No ordinary stillness of the sea; but it was a great calm, as the tempest had been great which had preceded it. What! and all on a sudden too? Storms sob themselves to sleep

through lengthened intervals of fretfulness, but when Jesus gives the word of command, the storm is gone at once. "There was a great calm."

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

They did not know their Lord yet; nor do we. Perhaps we have to go to sea to learn more of him, I mean that troubles and trials of a greater sort than we have known before may yet have to come to be our schoolmasters to teach us what Jesus is. "They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters, these see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep." You landsmen are thankful for your quiet, but you do not see so much of Jesus as others of his disciples do, you must go to sea to be able to cry, "What manner of man is this?"

28, 29. *And when he was come to the other side into the country of the Gergesenes, there met him two possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way. And, behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?*

They know that there is a time when he will judge them, and when their torment will begin. Say what you please, sin in men or devils will be followed with torment, with sorrow indescribable, unutterable; and these devils knew it, and they were obliged to confess the truth. They were afraid lest Jesus had come to inflict upon them the penalty of their evil deeds before that last great day.

30. *And there was a good way off from them an herd of many swine feeding.*

The owners of these animals had no business to have any swine there; swine were forbidden in that holy country, and they should not have been kept there.

31. *So the devils besought him, saying, If thou cast us out, suffer us to go away into the herd of swine.*

What a wonderful creature a man is, as compared with an animal! A legion of devils could be packed away into these two men, but they needed a whole herd of swine to contain them all. How much greater is a man than a beast; that is to say, how much more capable of spiritual influence for evil as well as for good!

32. *And he said unto them, Go.*

Jesus never wastes words upon devils; he is always short and sharp with them: "Go."

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

The proverb has it, "They run fast whom the devil drives," they run to destruction, even as these swine perished in the waters.

33, 34. *And they that kept them fled, and went their ways into the city, and told every thing, and what was befallen to the possessed of the devils. And, behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus:*

You feel that they are going to worship him, or at least to ask him to come, and teach them the way of salvation; nothing of the sort.

34. *And when they saw him, they besought him that he would depart out of their coasts. And there are many still who try all they can to get Christ to go away from them. Woe be to them if he grants their desire!*

Matthew 9:1. *And he entered into a ship, and passed over, and came into his own city.*

I think I see the departing sail, — love, hope, and peace melting away upon the distant horizon, and the Gergesenes left to perish. O God, do not so with any of us! Say not, "Ephraim is joined to idols. Let him alone."

MATTHEW 8:23-34

Matthew's Gospel is the Gospel of the Kingdom, and of the King. Here you see the King amid the storms of nature.

23, 24. *And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him. And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep.*

In the quiet confidence of faith, resting upon his God.

25, 26. *And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish. And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm.*

As great a calm as there had been tempest. After great trouble, expect deep, delightful rest and peace, if you are a child of God.

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

Now see the King in conflict with the powers of darkness.

28-31. *And when he was come to the other side into the country of the Gergesenes, there met him two possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way. And, behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time? And there was a good way off from them an herd of many swine feeding. So the devils besought him,*

How the demons crouched at his feet! The dogs of bell knew the power of his tongue; that was a whip whose lash they had felt before.

31, 32. *Saying, If thou, cast us out, suffer us to go away into the herd of swine. And he said unto them, Go.*

He never wastes words on demons.

32-34. *And when they were come out, they went into the herd of swine: and, behold, the whole herd of swine ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished in the waters. And they that kept them fled, and went their ways into the city, and told every thing, and what was befallen to the possessed of the devils. And, behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus: and when they saw him, they besought him that he would depart out of their coasts.*

A sad prayer; yet Jesus granted their request. Men may once too often ask the Holy Spirit to depart from them. They may grieve him once more, and then he will have done with them for ever. Now we shall see the King in conflict with the diseases of mankind, and with human sin.

This exposition consisted of readings from MATTHEW 8:23-34, 9:1-13.

MATTHEW 9

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

Our Lord had given these Gergesenes an opportunity of becoming his disciples, the kingdom of God had come very near to them, but as they accounted themselves unworthy of it, and

besought him to depart out of their coasts, he did not force himself upon them. Take heed, dear friends, if you do but hear the gospel once, that you do not reject it, for you may never have the opportunity of hearing it again.

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

He saw the faith of the one man who was brought to him, and also the faith of the four bearers who had let him down through the roof.

3, 4. *And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth. And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts?*

His knowledge of the thoughts of their hearts ought to have convinced them that he was divine, and that therefore he had the right to forgive sins. They were not, however, in a condition to learn anything, for they thought that they already knew everything.

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

Each of these actions needed divine power; but divinity being present, there was no difference as to the manifestation of this power between the forgiveness of sins and the healing of sickness.

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

Carrying the mattress whereon he had lain. Would he keep that bed stored, think you, for a memorial? Or if he used it in future to sleep upon would he not by night upon his bed wake up, and praise the Lord for what he had done for him? I think that we should treasure up in our memory the deeds of Christ on our behalf, if indeed we know his great salvation. I should not wonder if there is a mattress that you have somewhere at home, a bed, or a book, or something with which there is connected the remembrance of some deed of infinite love and almighty grace.

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

They did not think deeply enough, and go really to the bottom of the matter, but they concluded that it was a wonderful thing that any man — that any men, as they put it, — should have such power given unto them.

9. *And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom:*

Notice how Matthew describes himself: “As Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom.”

9. *And he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him.*

See how everything is obedient to Christ. Paralysis leaves the palsied man, and hardness of heart departs from the tax-gatherer.

10. *And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples.*

Note the modesty of these early recorders; Matthew does not say that it was his own house where this gathering took place, nor that he was the giver of the feast. Mark and Luke supply this information.

11-13. *And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners? But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice:*

God prefers the doing of good to all outward ritual and ordinances, even the best of them: “I will have mercy, and not sacrifice:”

13-22. *For I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. Then came to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not? And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shalt be taken from them, and then shall they fast. No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment, for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse. Neither do men put new wine into old bottles: else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but*

they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved. While he spake these things unto them, behold, there came a certain ruler, and worshipped him, saying, My daughter is even now dead: but come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live. And Jesus arose, and followed him, and so did his disciples. And, behold, a woman, which was diseased with an issue of blood twelve years, came behind him, and touched the hem of his garment: For she said within herself, If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole. But Jesus turned him about, and when he saw her, he said, Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole. And the woman was made whole from that hour.

See how he scatters mercy all around. He is charged to the full with the divine electricity of health, and whoever comes in his way gets a blessing. Oh, for the presence of that full and overflowing Christ in the midst of every worshipping assembly, for there are still many sick folk who need a Saviour as much as these people did in the days of Jesus!

23. *And when Jesus came into the ruler's house, and saw the minstrels and the people making a noise,*

They were gathered together for the funeral of this young girl.

24. *He said unto them, Give place: for the maid is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn.*

They did not understand his expression; yet, apparently, sleep only differs from death in this respect, that the sleeper wakes again, and returns to consciousness. The Lord Jesus Christ did not mean that the maiden was not dead; but he meant that, as she was soon coming to life again, it was, as it were, only like the image of death. To her, death was not a cul-de-sac, a dark cave without an opening at the further end; it was rather a tunnel through which she was passing back again into life.

25, 26. *But when the people were put forth, he went in, and took her by the hand, and the maid arose. And the fame hereof went abroad into all that land.*

And well it might; this was the marvel of marvels that he should even raise the dead.

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

See, my brethren, how miracle follows upon miracle, how the way of Christ is, as it were, paved with mercy upon mercy.

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

It is a great thing to have faith about the particular point that most concerns us: "Believe ye that I am able to do this?" Some can believe everything except the one thing for which faith is most needed,

28. *They said unto him, Yea, Lord.*

Can you, dear friend, say, "Yes, Lord," about yourself?

29-31. *Then touched he their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it unto you. And their eyes were opened; and Jesus straitly charged them, saying, See that no man know it. But they, when they were departed, spread abroad his fame in all that country.*

This was very wrong of them, for they ought to have obeyed Christ's orders. They were doing much mischief, although, no doubt, they thought they were doing good. The Saviour, first of all, was modest, and did not wish his cures reported. In the next place, he wanted to have an opportunity of doing more good, and the reporting of this cure brought him immense crowds who encumbered him, and also excited the animosity of the Pharisees, who would the more persecute him. Moreover, our Lord did not wish the Pharisees to think that he cured people that they might simply advertise him. I do think that we often err in imagining that making known every little thing that happens, and even every great thing, is the best course to pursue. There is a way of walking in wisdom toward them that are without, and Christ knew that way; and these blind men whose eyes he had opened should not have disobeyed him.

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

"As they went out." Do notice what a succession of mercies Christ dispersed; it was a sort of tempest of blessing, peal upon peal, following almost without intermission.

33, 34. *And when the devil was cast out, the dumb spake: and the multitudes marvelled, saying, It was never so seen in Israel. But the Pharisees said, He casteth out devils through the prince of the devils.*

How does Christ answer this wicked taunt?

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

That is the best answer to give to cavillers, do more good than ever. There is no stopping the barking of dogs; so go you on your way, as the moon shines, let the hounds bay as they may. Oh, the glory of the Master! Like a cloud that dispenses showers of blessing wherever it moves, so did he continue to do his life-work.

36-38. *But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.*

Or, "that he will thrust forth labourers into his harvest." He who does the most is always the one who wants to see more done. This blessed Christ, with his hands so full of holy work, is the one who bows his knee, and cries to the great Lord of the harvest to thrust forth labourers into his harvest. Let us imitate him both in the working and in the praying.

MATTHEW 9:1-13

1, 2. *And he entered into a ship, and passed over, and came into his own city. And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith —*

The faith of the bearers, and the faith of the palsied man himself,

2. *Said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.*

It was remarked, by a mediaeval writer, that we do not find Christ calling any of the apostles, not even the very chief of them, by the name that he gave to this palsied man, "Son." This is the title that he gives to a sin-sick sinner, lying on a bed before him, waiting to be healed. Oh, the tenderness of Christ to sin and misery! He puts a kind of sonship upon this man which he had not possessed before.

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

“He arrogates to himself the prerogative of God. Who can forgive sins but God only?”

4-8. *And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house. And he arose, and departed to his house. But when the multitudes saw it, they marvelled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men.*

They rightly saw in this miracle, wrought by Christ, power given to man for, as you observe, Christ said, “The Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins;” and these people magnified God that one Man should have such power granted to him. There is an elevation to the whole of manhood in the alliance of Christ with it; through him the Lord hath given great power unto men.

9. *And as Jesus passed forth from thence,*

The King is now going to show his power over the human will.

9. *He saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him.*

Everything bows before him. Is he not King of kings, and Lord of lords? Have we ever comprehended the true measure of his divine and human nature? Even when he was on earth, and known as the Son of man, what gleams of his divine glory shone forth in these truly royal acts of his! Yet bow condescending was our King! Where is his court? Who are his attendants? Listen, —

10. *And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples.*

Lord of the sea, Conqueror of demons, Healer of the sick, Forgiver of sin, and now he has for his company publicans and sinners! When the Pharisees saw it, they did not see condescension in it, but they saw wickedness in it.

11. *And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?*

Ah! why, indeed? You and I know; that is a secret that has made us love him better than almost anything beside.

12. *But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.*

He has come here on purpose that he might heal our sicknesses. Oh, you who feel tonight sick with sin, and sick of sin, come and sit down with him! He add, "Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out," and he will not cast you out, notwithstanding your sinnership, if you come unto him by faith.

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

Let us never forget that Jesus is the sinner's Saviour. He does not come to save saints; he comes to save sinners, and the saints who are saved are kept from becoming sinners by his almighty love.

May God bless this reading of the Scriptures to us! Amen.

This exposition consisted of readings from MATTHEW 8:23-34, 9:1-13.

MATTHEW 9:1-17

1, 2. *And he entered into a ship, and passed over, and came into his own city. And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.*

Our Lord dealt first with the greater evil, for sin is worse than even such a dreadful disease as the palsy. Forgiveness of sin is an even greater mercy than the healing of sickness.

3-7. *And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth. And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house. And he arose, and departed to his house.*

Jesus first proved his divinity by reading the secret thoughts of the caviling scribes, and then gave a further evidence of it by working this very notable miracle.

8-9. *But when the multitudes saw it, they marveled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men. And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the*

receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him.

This was another notable miracle, and equally set forth the power of divine grace.

10-11. *And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciple. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?*

He was more at home with publicans and sinners than with scribes and Pharisees, and they were more likely to welcome him as their Lord and Saviour.

12-13. *But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*

If he had come to call the righteous, where would he have found them? His call was not likely to be heeded by the self-righteous, but sinners heard it with joy, and so were made righteous by him.

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

We must not suppose that, because a thing is proper for ourselves, it must therefore be binding upon everybody else. It might be fit and right that the disciples of John should fast often, their circumstances might require it; but it might be quite wrong for the disciples of Christ to fast, as they might be in very different circumstances.

15. *And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them?*

Could Christ's disciples fast while Christ fed them with heavenly foods? While his presence was to them like heaven begun below, it would have been inconsistent for them to be mourning and fasting.

15. *But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast.*

And nobody would say that they were turncoats if, when their circumstances had so greatly altered, they acted in harmony with their changed circumstances. The disciples could not mourn while Christ was with them; can you, believer, fast while Christ is with

you? It cannot be; but when he has gone from you, then you will sorrow fast enough. So we must neither judge others by ourselves, nor judge ourselves at one time by what we were at some other time.

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

When it shrinks, —

16. *And the rent is made worse.*

There must be a fitness about things; do not impose fasting upon a joyful heart, or the singing of joyful hymns upon a sad spirit.

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

Do not expect from a young beginner that which would be unsuitable to him, even though it should be most comely and seemly in an aged Christian; and do not expect to see in an aged Christian all the vigor and alertness of spirit that you look for in ardent souls in all the fervor of their first love to Christ. Let us mind the relations of things.

MATTHEW 9:18-38

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

This was grand faith on the ruler's part, believing that the touch of Christ's hand would raise his dead daughter to life; we do not wonder that the Saviour honoured such faith as that at once.

19, 20. *And Jesus arose, and followed him, and so did his disciples. And, behold, a woman, which was diseased with an issue of blood twelve years, came behind him, and touched the hem of his garment:*

This was while he was on the way to the ruler's house. Jesus Christ can work many miracles while he is on the way to work other miracles.

21. *For she said within herself, If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole.*

This also is wonderful faith again; in this chapter we get among the great believers. The man believes that the touch of Jesus can

raise the dead the woman believes that the touch of his garment will make her whole

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

Christ never comes short of our faith, but he often goes beyond it.

23. *And when Jesus came into the ruler's house, and saw the minstrels and the people making a noise,*

These were hired men and women who were brought in to act as mourners

24, 25. *He said unto them, Give place: for the maid is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn. But when the people were put forth, he went in, —*

There is a good deal that has to be “put forth” before the Lord Jesus Christ will fully reveal his power to bless. He would have you put forth your doubts, your fears, your wandering thoughts, your self-trust, in fact, everything that is contrary to his righteous rule. “When the people were put forth, he went in,” —

25-27. *And took her by the hand, and the maid arose. And the fame hereof went abroad into all that land. And when Jesus departed thence, two blind men followed him, crying, and saying, Thou son of David, have mercy on us.*

See how busy our Lord was, and how ready for every application that was made to him, and note how he adapted his power to every case that came before him. First he heals an issue of blood, then he raises the dead, and now he is ready to open blind eyes. I wish the Lord might have such blessed business among us here, and he may have, for, if thou wilt cry to him for thy child, dead in trespasses and sins, he will make her to live; if thou wilt bring thy blind eyes to him, he will open them; and if thou wilt come to him with a disease that is sapping thy very life, he will heal thee.

Give the Lord plenty of this holy work to do. Drawn wells, they say, are sweetest; and a Saviour who is constantly used is most enjoyed.

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

That is the question the Lord puts to any who are in soul trouble. “Believe ye that I am able to do this?” — to forgive your sins once for all, — to give you a new nature at this very moment, — to make you, a sinner, into a saint, — to save you, not merely for the next few weeks, but to save you eternally so that you shall see my face in glory with exceeding joy; — ‘Believe ye that I am able to do this?’”

28, 29. *They said unto him, Yea, Lord. Then touched he their eyes, saying, according to your faith be it unto you.*

That is what Jesus says to every person here, “According to your faith be it unto you. “If you believe Christ a little, he will bless you a little, but if you believe him up to the hilt, he will bless you to the full. Your faith shall never outrun the manifestations of divine love. Believest thou this? Then thou shalt see it. “According to your faith be it unto you.”

30-32. *And their eyes were opened; and Jesus straitly charged them, saying, See that no man know it. But they, when they were departed, spread abroad his fame in all that country. As they went out, behold, they brought to him a dumb man possessed with a devil.*

These miracles were wrought so rapidly, and they concerned such different cases that, as we read of them, we rejoice to see how Christ Was ready for anything, and ready for everything. It did not matter what case was brought to him, he was never taken aback. Here he is just as fully prepared to heal the dumb as just now he was to cure the blind.

33. *And when the devil was cast out, the dumb spake: —*

There is nothing like going at once to the root of the matter. Christ did not heal the dumb man, and leave the devil in him, but he first cast the devil out, and then “ the dumb spake. “And this is his way of saving men. He renews them by his Spirit, he casts the devil out, and then their despair goes, their prayerlessness disappears, their love of vice is killed. All evil is expelled when once the root of the evil is pulled up. “When the devil was cast out, the dumb spake:” —

33. *And the multitudes marveled, saying, It was never before seen in Israel.*

Christ had wrought such miracles as the multitudes had never before seen, and they might well marvel.

34, 35. *But the Pharisees said, He casteth out devils through the prince of the devils. And Jesus went about all the cities and villages,*

—
What the Pharisees said was of such very small consequence that, for the time being, Christ vouchsafed them no answer but this, “Jesus went about all the cities and villages.” In like manner, it will be your best plan not to reply to slander. There are some lies that smell so strongly of the pit from which they came that everybody will recognize their origin, and therefore you need not take the trouble to point out that they are falsehoods. And the best reply to all scandal and slander is to go on with your work just as if you had never heard it. The Pharisees said that Christ cast out devils through the prince of the devils, and the very next sentence is, “And Jesus went about all the cities and villages,” —

35-36. *Teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, —*

Yet Christ, while upon the earth in the flesh, never saw such multitudes as are gathered in London today, he never saw such multitudes as make up this nation; there never passed before the eyes of the Redeemer such multitudes as are crowded together in China and India today. No; the population of the world has wondrously increased since those days, so what must be the compassion of his heart when he sees the multitudes that are living in the world today! “When he saw the multitudes he was moved” — in the original, this is a very striking word; it signifies that he trembled with emotion, his inmost powers were moved, his heart was stirred “with compassion on them,” —

36-37. *Because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few;*

Not the preachers, but the labourers are few; not the talkers, but the labourers, — the patient, plodding, resolute, disinterested, industrious toilers who really go in for winning souls for Christ, — the men and women who do real work for God, and do not play at Christian service as some do, making it a kind of amusement to go and do some little good now and then it is these labourers who are few. You know the difference between a dock labourer, or a farm

labourer, and the gentleman who takes a tool in his hand just for a pastime now and then.

38. *Pray ye therefore the lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.*

It is earnest workers that we are to pray God to thrust forth into his harvest, for still the harvest is plenteous, and the labourers are few.

MATTHEW 9:27-35

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

No sooner does Jesus move than fresh candidates for his bounty appear: the blind seek sight from him. Two sightless men had become companions in affliction, they may have been father and son. They were in downright earnest, for they “followed him, crying, and saying, Have mercy on us.” Persevering, vehement, yet intelligent was their appeal. They were of one mind in reference to Jesus, and therefore they went one way, and used one prayer, to one and the same person. Our Lord is here called by his royal name: “Thou Son of David.” Even the blind could see that he was a king’s son. As Son of David, he is entreated to show mercy, and act according to his royal nature. It is mercy which gives us our faculties, and mercy alone can restore them. This prayer suits us when we perceive our own darkness of mind. When we cannot see our way into truth, let us appeal to the Lord for gracious instruction, ever remembering that we have no claim except that which originates in his mercy.

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

They were most eager for the boon. They gave him no leisure: they pressed into the house where he had sought privacy and rest: they came to him, even to Jesus himself. The Lord would have them express their faith, and so he makes inquiry of them as to what they believe about himself. Jesus makes no inquiry about their eyes, but only about their faith this is ever the vital point. They could not see, but they could believe, and they did so.

They had a specific faith as to the matter about which they prayed; for our Lord put it plainly, "Believe ye that I am able to do THIS?" They had also a clear view of the character of him to whom they applied; for they had already styled him "Son of David," and now they called him "Lord."

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

Again he arouses their faith; and this time he throws the whole responsibility upon their confidence in him. "According to your faith be it unto you." He touched them with his hand; but they must also touch him with their faith. The word of power in the last sentence is one upon which he acts so continually, that we may call it, as to many blessings, a rule of the kingdom. We have the measuring of our own mercies; our faith obtains less or more according to its own capacity to receive. Had these men been mere pretenders to faith they would have remained blind. If we will not in very truth trust our Lord, we shall die in our sins.

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

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

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

They most industriously published what they were bidden to conceal till "all that country" rang with the news. In this they erred greatly, and probably caused the Saviour so much inconvenience by the pressure of the crowd, that he had to remove from the town. We may not hope that we are doing right if we disobey our Lord. However natural disobedience may appear to be, it is disobedience, and must not be excused. Even if the results turned out to be

advantageous, it would not make it right to break the command of our Lord. Silence is more than golden when our King commands it. He doth not seek applause, nor cause his voice to be heard in the streets that he may be known to be doing a great work. His followers do well to copy his example. We do not wonder that our Lord's name became famous when there were such persons to advertise it. How earnestly and eloquently would the two formerly blind men tell the story of how he opened their eyes! We are not forbidden, but exhorted to make known the wonders of his grace. Let us not fail in this natural, this necessary, this useful duty. More and more let us "spread abroad his fame."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

This exposition consisted of readings from MATTHEW 9:27-35; AND 20:29-34.

MATTHEW 9:27-38

27, 28. *And when Jesus departed thence, two blind men followed him, crying, and saying, thou son of David, have mercy on us. And when he was come into the house,*

I suppose the house at Capernaum, where he was wont to stay.

28. *The blind men came to him;*

Forced their way in. They must be attended to. Hunger breaks through stone walls, they say, and an earnest heart will follow after what it seeks.

28, 29. *And Jesus saith unto them, Believe ye that I am able to do this? They said unto him, Yea, Lord. Then touched he their eyes, saying, According to your faith, be it unto you.*

That is, “If you do not believe, you shall not see, but if there be faith in you, behold you shall have sight.”

30-32. *And their eyes were opened; and Jesus straitly charged them, saying, See that no man know it. But they, when they were departed, spread abroad his fame in all that country. As they went out, behold, they brought to him a dumb man possessed with a devil.*

Here we have had the dead, those that were bleeding to death, the blind, and the dumb, and the possessed of a devil.

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

No; but Jesus does wonders. Something off the common, and altogether out of the ordinary way, his work of grace must be.

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

There is always somebody or other who has got an ugly word to put in. It matters not how much God may bless the gospel, there is no stopping the sneers and objections; but the mercy is that it does not matter much. Our Lord was not hurt, and the work went on, notwithstanding all the cavilling of the Pharisees.

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

That was the answer to the Pharisees. Christian activity, fervent devotion to the cause of God, is the best answer that can be given to cavillers of any sort or every sort. In your work hold on, my brother, and those who cavil at thee now may come to honour thee one of these days.

36-37. *But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few.*

We are all loiterers, but where are the labourers? Where are they with the sharp sickle that can cut down the wheat, and, with a ready hand, can bind it, and, with a strong shoulder, carry it? Alas! in this great city, the harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few!

38. *Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.*

MATTHEW 9:35-38; 10:1

9:35. *And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.*

This was his answer to the blasphemous slanders of the Pharisees. A glorious reply it was. Let us answer calumny by greater zeal in doing good. Small places were not despised by our Lord: he went about the villages as well as the cities. Village piety is of the utmost importance, and has a close relation to city life. Jesus turned old institutions to good account: the “synagogues” became his seminaries. Three-fold was his ministry: expounding the old, proclaiming the new, healing the diseased. Observe the repetition of the word “every” as showing the breadth of his healing power. All this stood in relation to his royalty; for it was “the gospel of the

kingdom” which he proclaimed. Our Lord was “ the Great Itinerant”: Jesus went about preaching, and healing. His was on a Medical Mission as well as an evangelistic tour. Happy people who have Jesus among them! Oh, that we might now see more of his working among our own people!

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

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

37, 38. *Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.*

His heavy heart sought solace among “his disciples”, and he spake to them. He mourned the scantiness of workers. Pretenders were many, but real “labourers” in the harvest were few. The sheaves were spoiling. The crowds were ready to be taught, even as ripe wheat is ready for the sickle; but there were few to instruct them, and where could more teaching men be found? God only can thrust out, or “send forth labourers.” Man-made ministers are useless. Still are the fields encumbered with gentlemen who cannot use the sickle. Still the real ingatherers are few and far between. Where are the instructive, soul-winning ministries? Where are those who travail in birth for their hearers’ salvation? Let us plead with the Lord of the harvest to care for his own harvest, and send out his own men. May many a true heart be moved by the question, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” to answer, “Here am I! Send me.”

10:1. *And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease.*

See the way of making apostles. They were first disciples, and afterwards teachers of others: they were specially his, and then they were given to be a blessing to men. They were “called unto him”; and thus their higher call came to them. In the presence of their Lord they received their equipment:

“He gave them power.” Is that so with us in our own special office? Let us come to him, that we may be clothed with his authority and girded with his strength. Their power was miraculous; but it was an imitation of their Lord’s, and the words applied to it are very much the same as we have seen in use about his miracles of healing. The twelve were made to represent their Lord. We, too, may be enabled to do what Jesus did among men. Oh, for such an endowment!

This exposition consisted of readings from MATTHEW 9:35-38; 10:1; 13:3-8; AND 18-23.

MATTHEW 9:36-38

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

The sight that Christ saw with his eye, deeply affected his heart: “He was moved with compassion on them.” The expression is a very strong one indicating that his whole being was stirred with an emotion which put every faculty into forceful movement.

37, 38. *Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.*

Pretenders were many, but real “labourers” were few. God only can thrust out or “send forth labourers.” Man-made ministers are useless, yet they abound all around us; but where are the instructive soul-winning ministries? Let us plead with the Lord of the harvest to care for his own harvest, and to thrust out his own harvestmen.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 80; AND MATTHEW 9:36-38; AND 10.

MATTHEW 10

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

They were first Christ's disciples, and then he sent them forth as his apostles, clothed with power and authority very similar to his own.

2-4. *Now the names of the twelve apostles are these; The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip, and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the publican; James the son of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddeu;, Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him.*

The twelve apostles linked the spiritual Israel with the twelve tribes of the literal Israel which had typified it. They are mentioned in pairs, but this last couple is not a pair, for Simon the Zealot had little in common with the cool, cunning, calculating Judas Iscariot. There were only twelve apostles, yet one of them was a traitor; among the leaders of the nominal Christian Church today, is it possible that there is one traitor in every twelve?

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

This was "a mission to the Jews" only, meant for the general arousing of the chosen nation. It was a mission from Israel to Israel; not to the Gentiles, and not even to the people who were most like the Jews: "Into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not." After our Lord's resurrection he gave the wider commission, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature."

7, 8. *And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give.*

They were to be medical missionaries, preaching the gospel, and healing the sick, and it was all to be done "freely."

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

The people at that time were favourably disposed to our Lord, and thus his apostles might expect treatment of a more generous kind than can be looked for in these times. Certain of these regulations were altered on a subsequent mission, when the people were less favourably disposed.

11-15. *And into whatsoever city or town ye shall enter, enquire who in it is worthy; and there abide till ye go thence. And when ye come into an house, salute it. And if the house be worthy, let your peace come upon it: but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake of the dust of your feet. Verily I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city.*

Disclaim all fellowship with those who will not have fellowship with your Lord; let them know that you quit them because they refuse to receive your Master's message. If they continue to reject the Saviour, their doom will be even more terrible than that of Sodom and Gomorrah.

16. *Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves:*

“Behold, I send you forth.” What power there is in the word of the King of kings! “I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves.’ You are like sheep, helpless and defenseless; yet ‘I send you forth,’ and therefore it is right for you to go even into ‘the midst of wolves.’” We might have imagined that the wolves would have devoured the sheep yet, at the present time, there are a great many more sheep in the world than there are wolves. Sheep have always been weak and helpless, yet they have multiplied, wolves have always been strong and savage, yet they have diminished until there is not one of them left in this land, and in many other countries the same thing has happened. So, the weak, the helpless, who come under the care of “our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep,” shall be preserved from all the wolves that would devour them, and even from the devil, who, “as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.”

16. *Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.*

“Be ye harmless because ye are like sheep, but be ye wise as serpents because you have to dwell with wolves.” You, too, beloved, ought to be very wise because of the wisdom which has

been imparted to you by the Master who has sent you forth, and you ought to use your best wits in his service, yet never use that wisdom with any ill intent, for the Christ who sends you does no harm to men, but only good.

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

“Do not try to live on popular applause, ‘but beware of men.’ Expect ill treatment from them; if they can persecute you with the scourge, they will do so, but if that is out of their power, they will persecute you with their tongues. You will be misunderstood, misrepresented, maligned; expect such treatment for I, your Lord and Master, have had it before you.”

19, 20. *But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.*

It is very remarkable what wise answers many of the martyrs often gave. Illiterate men, when confronted by the learned ones of the earth, completely baffled them; and weak women nonplused their assailants and judges. A notable instance of that is recorded in the history of the brave Anne Askew. After they had tortured her upon the rack, and her poor body was full of pain, she sat upon the cold slabs of her prison, and put such questions to the popish bishops and inquisitors as utterly confounded them: and Christ still, by his Holy Spirit, enables his faithful followers to triumph over all the graft and malice of men.

21, 22. *And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.*

When we give ourselves to Christ, we must do it without any reserve and be prepared to follow him even to the bitter end if necessary. If all men should forsake us, if death should be our portion because of our allegiance to Christ, we dare not draw back.

To do that, would lead to our destination; but to endure unto the end, this is eternal salvation.

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

I suppose Christ here alludes to that wondrous coming of his in the destruction of Jerusalem. They had but a short time in which to evangelize that land, so they had to be quick in gathering out the Lord's elect ere he came in that terrible judgment. This same truth ought to quicken the action of every servant of Christ today. Be quick about your work, for your Master is on the road, and will soon be here. You may almost hear the rattling of his chariot wheels, for long ago he said "Surely I come quickly." The trumpets are beginning to sound, and you will scarcely have gone over all the cities of the world before the Son of man shall come unless you hasten with the great task which he has entrusted to you.

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

I do not know what worse names they might give to us than they gave to our master, but, no doubt, they might do so; for, as the servants are worse and less than their master, the world might, if it acted upon the rule of proportion, apply much worse names to us than it has ever done to our blessed Lord and Master. Are we to be esteemed and revered in a world that persecuted and crucified Christ our Lord and Saviour? Be not so foolish as to think so; and when you receive scorn and contumely, accept it as being the lot of follower of Christ.

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

When men slander you, they cannot take away your good name before God. There will be a resurrection of reputations as well as a resurrection of bodies; and good men, though their good names lie deeply buried, will certainly have a resurrection. There is Wycliffe, how little, comparatively, has ever been said about probably the greatest man since the time of the apostle Paul; but his name and fame will yet arise, and all history will ring with the praise of it.

Depend upon it, no man, who has faithfully served his Saviour, shall miss the honour which he has truly deserved. "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father," so be content to wait.

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

There must first be that quiet lonely hearing,-that calm still sitting at the Master's feet to learn the lesson; and then afterwards must come the brave telling of it out,-speaking out though kings should hear, and never being silenced because of sinful shame.

28-31. *And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.*

Do you not see the force of this argument? These little creatures, that are of so little account among men, are watched over by your Heavenly Father. They cannot die, nay they cannot even light upon the ground, without your Father noting it; can he then forget you, who are worth so much more than many sparrows? Will he not deal very gently, and tenderly, and considerately with you?

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

You own Christ here, and Christ will own you there. Dare to bear reproach for him, and you shall be glorified together with him by-and-by, but if the tenor of your life be that you do not own Christ, if you practically live as if there were no Saviour, ignoring him, depriving him of the trust which he deserves, and the honour which he has earned, then, when he comes in the glory of the Father, he will say, "You never knew me, and I never knew you. Depart!"

34. *Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.*

That is to say, the first consequence of Christ's coming will not be that we shall lead easy and comfortable lives, but, on the

contrary, he comes to enlist us in his army, and to make soldiers of us, and soldiers have to endure many hardships.

35, 36. *For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household.*

Many of the children of God have found this to be true, greatly to their sorrow. No foes can wound us so sorely as those of our own household. They get at our hearts, and cut us to the very quick, while others can only give us flesh wounds. Well, it must be so. Wherever light comes, darkness will be opposed to it. Truth will always find error ready to devour it if it can. Expect this, and half the bitterness of it will be gone when it comes because you did expect it. "To be forewarned" here "is to be forearmed."

37-42. *He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.*

He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it. He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me. He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward, and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward. God's great reward for little service are given, not of debt, but of grace, "according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 80; AND MATTHEW 9:36-38; AND 10.

MATTHEW 10:1-27

1-4. *And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease. Now the names of the twelve apostles are these; The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip, and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the publican; James the son of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus, whose*

surname was Thaddaeus; Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him.

The lesson to be learnt from these names are, first, that these men are mentioned in couples, and I think that, as a rule, God's servants work best in pairs. In other senses than the matrimonial one, it is not good that man should be alone. Moses needs Aaron; Peter needs Andrew; James needs John. It is well to be of such a temperament and disposition that you can work harmoniously with another of your Lord's servants. If ye cannot, pray God to alter you. Notice that expression, in the 3rd verse, "and Bartholomew." I think there is not a single instance in the New Testament where Bartholomew is mentioned without the word "and" before or after his name, — "and Bartholomew," or "Bartholomew and" someone else. Perhaps he was not a man who ever began any work by himself, but he was a grand man to join in and help it on when somebody else had started it. So, dear friend, if you are not qualified to be a leader in the Church of Christ, be willing to be Number Two; but do serve the Master, in some capacity or other, with all your might. Be a brother who carries an "and" with him wherever he goes; be like a horse, that has his harness on, and is ready to be hooked into the team. That is the lesson of the two words "and Bartholomew." The last lesson from the names is at the end of the 4th verse: "and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him." He preached of Christ, he worked miracles in the name of Christ, he was ordained as one of the apostles of Christ, yet he was "the son of perdition." Oh! let none of us be content merely with our official position, or trust in the good which we hope we have done, or in any gifts with which the Master has entrusted us. Judas Iscariot had all these marks of distinction, yet he betrayed his Lord. God grant that no one among us may turn out to be a Judas Iscariot!

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

The gospel is now to be preached to every creature in all the world; but, in those days, it was to be proclaimed first to the Jews, then to the Samaritans, and afterwards to the Gentiles as a whole. The largeness of our commission to "preach the gospel to every creature" need not prevent our following providential directions to

make it known in one place rather' than in another. It is well for the servants of Christ always to ask their Master where they are to go. You know how it is recorded, in the Acts of the Apostles, that Paul and Silas "essayed to go into Bithynia; but the Spirit suffered them not." Ask the Lord, therefore, where thou shalt work, as well as what thy work shall be, for thy Master knows how thou canst best serve him.

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

That blessed kingdom, which is now set up among men, of which Christ is the King, and I hope many of us are the subjects. That kingdom was then "at hand."

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

"Exercise your healing arts most freely. They cost you nothing; let them not cost anything to those who receive the benefit of them."

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

They were to "quarter on the enemy," as we say. Wherever they went, they would be furnished with food, and raiment, and shelter, if they faithfully executed the commission with which their Master had entrusted them.

11-13. *And into whatsoever city or town ye shall enter, enquire who in it is worthy; and there abide till ye go thence. And when ye come into an house, salute it. And if the house be worthy, let your peace come upon it: but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you.*

How about your houses, dear friends. Are they "worthy" houses, in this New Testament sense? If an apostle came there, could he bring "peace" to it? Or would he have to take the peace away with him to some other house that was more worthy to receive it?

14, 15. *And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city.*

Despised and rejected privileges make the fiercest fuel for the fires of hell. They who might have heard the gospel, and would not hear it, shall find the hand of God more heavy upon them than it will be even upon the accursed Sodomites. Woe, then, unto such as live

in London, yet who will not hear the Word of the Lord, or, when they do hear it, will not accept it!

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

“Do not trust yourselves with them.”

17-19. *For they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; and ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak.*

“Let it not fret you that you are not orators, that you are not men of culture; speak what God the Holy Spirit shall teach you to say, and leave the result with him.”

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

Oh! that is grand, — when a man has so communed with God that the very Spirit of the Father has entered into him. Then shall there be a wondrous power about his speech; men may not understand whence it came, but they will be obliged to feel the force of it.

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

Read the marterologies, and see whether it was not exactly as our Lord foretold that it would be. In martyr times, men often burst all the bonds of natural affection, and betrayed even their own fathers or children to death. Yet the saints quaffed not; they were content to let every earthly tie be snapped so that the tie of their heavenly and eternal relationship might be confirmed. So may it be with us also!

22-27. *And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved. But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come. The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant*

as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household! Fear them not therefore: for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known. What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops.

God help us so to do, for Christ's sake! Amen.

MATTHEW 10:16-23

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

It is a strange errand that you are sent upon — not as dogs to fight with the wolves. Yet you are to fight with them, but you are to go as lambs in the midst of wolves. Expect, therefore that they will rend you. Bear much, for ever in that you shall conquer. If they kill you, you shall be honoured in your death. As I have often said, the fight looks very unequal between sheep and wolves, yet at the present moment there are vastly more sheep in the world than wolves, the sheep having outlived the wolves. In this country at any rate, the last wolf is gone, and the sheep, with all their weaknesses, continue to multiply. “That is due,” you say, “to the shepherd.” And to him shall your safety and your victory be due. He will take care of you. “I send you forth as sheep among wolves.” But do not, therefore, provoke the wolves. “Be wise as serpents.” Have a holy prudence. “Be as harmless as doves,” but not as silly as doves

17-19. *But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak.*

And very remarkable were the answers given by the martyrs to those who persecuted them. In some cases they were altogether unlettered men, feeble women, unused to the quibbles and the catches which ungodly wise men use, and yet with is holy ability they answered all their adversaries and often stopped their mouths. It is wonderful what God can make of the weakest of men when he dwelleth in them, and speaks through them.

20, 21. *For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you. And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death.*

Strange venom of human nature. It never grows so angry against anything as against God's truth. Why is this? False religions will tolerate one another but they will not tolerate the religion of Christ. Is not this all accounted for by that old dark saying at the gates of Eden, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman — between thy seed and her seed." That enmity is sure to come up as long as the world stands.

22, 23. *And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved. But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come.*

They had not been able to get all through Palestine before the destruction of Jerusalem. Perhaps we shall scarcely have been able to preach the gospel in every part of the world before our Master's speedy footsteps shall be heard.

MATTHEW 10:16-33

16-25. *Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues. And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you. And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise against their parents, and cause them to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved. But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come. The disciple is not above his master, nor his servant above his lord. It is*

enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord.

It is more than enough, for the disciple might expect to fare more hardly than his Master, and the servant to have less comfort than the lord. So it is in worldly things — that our Lord and Master has such fellowship with his people that he does not put it so, but he says, “It is enough for the disciple that he be as his Master, and the servant as his Lord.”

25. *If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?*

But they cannot call them any more or any worse. They have given our Master the blackest of all the epithet, and any hard and opprobrious titles that can ever be applied to us must fall short of these which were applied to him. Surely we ought not to wince: not for a single moment.

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

They may cover your name and character with temporary dishonour, but the covering will break off soon. Like fire hidden under autumn leaves, it will burn up by-and-by, and there will be a resurrection of reputations, as well as of persons; and what a wondrous resurrection that will be for those who are cast out as the off-scouring of all things; when they shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father!

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

There is a secret learning, but there must be a public teaching. Christ takes us aside to reveal himself, that afterwards we may boldly go forth to others, and tell them what we have learned in private. Oh! child of God, if you have a sweet morsel in the chamber by yourself, do not be so selfish as to keep it to yourself. Go and tell your brethren, and your house, and of the same place, the things which you have learned. If any of you have had a very choice experience, and a more than usual manifestation of divine love, be sure to let others be enriched with your riches. Hast thou found honey? Eat it not all thyself, but, like Samson, when he found it in the carcase of the lion, go to father, and mother, and friends with thy hands full of the secret, and let them eat it also.

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

Oh! fearful destruction! This is what we may well fear — both body and soul, to undergo everlasting ruin, broken in pieces and destroyed as to all excellency, and happiness, and peace,. This we may fear.

29. *Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father.*

He over-rules all things, the least as well as the greatest. We see his hand in the tempest, and we look at the black wing of the storm and see that God rides it. But the wing of the tiny sparrows, so insignificant in value, is equally directed by his power and wisdom.

30. *But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.*

Minute is the providence of God, taking care of you, even as to that part of your person which is not vital, and without which you could still live on. “The very hairs of your head are all numbered.” The tiniest and most insignificant benefits are all ordered by his eternal purpose.

31-33. *Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows, Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men,*

And you see from the connection, that here the denying means not confessing. “Whosoever shall deny me before men.”

33. *Him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.*

The attempt, therefore, to avoid all publicity in religion — to endeavor to slink into heaven by the back gate — to somehow or other find an underground road to salvation, is a futile attempt. Christ requires that we should own him, seeing that he so graciously owns us. He puts it as a solemn command; and I would press it upon the conscience of any believer here who has never confessed his faith. You miss, at any rate, the promise here: you miss some others besides. You are walking in the path of disobedience. You are to some extent guilty of putting Christ to shame, for if others see that you are ashamed of him, they conclude that there is something to be ashamed of in him. Your provice dishonours him.

Wherefore should you hold back? Are you not going to take year place among his people? You tell me that they have many faults. Have they more than you? If you never join a church till you find a perfect one, you will never join one this side of heaven, and if the church were perfect when you joined it, it would certainly cease to be so then,, for you would bring your shortcomings and imperfections into it. I have lived among the people of God now these many years, and I, as pastor of this church, have had to mourn over many a man for his faults; but still, there is no people like God's people, and of his house I will say: —

“Here my best friends — my kindred — dwell:
Here God my Saviour reigns.”

Some of the best and noblest spirits that ever lived have not been ashamed to associate with their fellow-Christians, though they perceived their errors, but they have rather cast in their lot with them, poor and despised as they were, and have accounted it even their honour if they might but be numbered with the redeemed among men.

34. *Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace but a sword.*

The ultimate result of Christ's mission will be peace. Swords shall be broken into ploughshares, and the spears into pruning hooks; but on the way to peace there will be war. On the way to universal peace there will be a general confusion. When true religion comes into a man's heart, it makes him a warrior at once. He begins to contend against evil — to contend against contention. He fights for peace, though it may seem strange that it should be so.

35, 36. *For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household.*

They will drive us back when they perceive that our face is set towards heaven. When you see a fish swimming with the stream, it is almost always a dead one. The living fish goes against the stream; and the true child of God has to go against the current of mankind, and oftentimes the hardest push in life is to go against father, mother, brother, sister, far Christ's sake and the gospel.

MATTHEW 10:24-42

Our Lord had been sending forth his twelve apostles to preach the gospel of the kingdom, and to work miracles in his name. Having given them their commission, he warned them of the treatment they must expect to receive, and then fortified their minds against the persecutions they would have to endure.

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

The name, Beelzebub or Beelzebul, meaning the god of filth, or as some say, the god of flies, was applied by the Jews to the very worst of the evil spirits. They supposed that there were some devils worse than others, and the very head and master of them all they called Beelzebub, and now they supplied this title to our Lord Jesus himself. Well then, if men should give us ill names and evil characters, need we marvel? Shall Christ be spit upon and despised, and shall you and I be honoured and exalted? You have heard of Godfrey de Bouillon, the crusader, who entered Jerusalem in triumph, but who refused to have a golden crown put upon his head because he said, he never would be crowned with gold where Christ was crowned with thorns. So do you expect to be honoured in the world where your Lord was crucified?

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

“They will misrepresent you, slander you, and speak evil of you; but if your good name be covered up now, it shall be revealed one of these days, perhaps in this life; but if not in this life, certainly at the day of judgment, when the secrets of all hearts shall be made known.” It really is marvellous how sometimes in this life, misrepresented men suddenly obtain a refutation of their calumniators, and then it seems as if the world would serve them as the Greeks did their successful runners or wrestlers when they lifted them upon their shoulders, and carried them in triumph.

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

This is what we are to preach, what Christ tells us, and this is how we are to get the matter of our discourses, be alone with Christ,

let him talk to us in the darkness, in the quietude of the closet where we commune with him in prayer. Then this is where we are to preach, “upon the housetops.” “We cannot literally do this here in this land upon our slanting roofs; but, in the East, “the housetops” were the most public places in the city, and all of them flat, so that anyone proclaiming anything from the housetops would be sure of an audience, and especially at certain times of the day. Preach ye, then, ye servants of God, in the most public places of the land. Where ever there are people to hear, let there not be any lack of tongues to speak for God.

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

A philosopher — Anaxarchus, I think it was, — was wont to say when a certain tyrant had threatened to kill him, “You cannot kill me; you may crush this body, but you cannot touch Anaxarchus.” So fear not those who cannot kill the soul, if that be safe, you are safe. Even Seneca frequently asserted that it was not in the power of any man to hurt a good philosopher, “for,” said he “even death is gain to such a man;” and certainly it is so to the Christian. For him to die is indeed gain. But oh! fear that God who can destroy the soul, for then the body also is destroyed with a terrible and tremendous destruction: “fear him.”

29, 30. *Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.*

So, then, God takes more care of us than we take of ourselves. You never heard of a man who numbered the hairs of his head. Men number their sheep and their cattle, but the Christian is so precious in God’s esteem that he takes care of the meatiest parts of his frame, and numbers even the hairs of his head.

31, 32. *Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows. Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.*

What a glorious promise is this! “I will confess him to have been bought with my blood, I will confess him to have been my faithful follower and friend I will confess him to be my brother, and in so

doing I will favor him with a share of my glory.” Have you confessed Christ before men? If you have trusted him as your Saviour, but have not publicly professed your faith in him, however sincere you may be, you are living in the neglect of a known duty, and you cannot expect to have this promise fulfilled to you if you do not keep the condition that is appended to it. Christ’s promise is to confess those who confess him. Be ye then, avowedly on the Lord’s side.

“Come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord.” Without the camp the Saviour suffered, and without the camp must his disciples follow him, bearing his reproach.

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

Not to confess Christ is practically to deny him, not to follow him is to go away from him; not to be with him is to be against him. Looking at this matter of confessing Christ in that light, there is cause for solemn self-examination by all who regard themselves as his disciples.

34. *Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.*

Do not misunderstand the Saviour’s words. Christ’s usually spoke in a very plain manner, and plainness is not always compatible with guardedness. Christ did come to make peace, this is the ultimate end of his mission; text for the present, Christ did not come to make peace. Wherever Christianity comes, it causes a quarrel, because the light must always quarrel with the darkness, and sin can never be friendly with righteousness. It is not possible that honesty should live in peace with theft; it cannot be that there should be harmony between God’s servants and the servants of the devil. In this sense, then, understand our Saviour’s words.

35, 36. *For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man’s foes shall be they of his own household.*

This is always the case, and I suppose will be to the end of the chapter. Whenever true religion comes into a man’s heart and life, those who are without the grace of God, however near and dear they may be to him, will be sure to oppose him.

37-39. *He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.*

In the days of the martyrs, one man was brought before the judges, and through fear of the flames he recanted, and denied the faith. He went home, and before the year was ended his own house caught fire, and he was miserably consumed in it, having had to suffer quite as much pain as he would have had to endure for Christ's sake but having no consolation in it. He found his life, yet he lost it. Now, in a higher degree, all who, to save themselves, shun the cross of Christ, only run into the fire to escape from the sparks. They shall suffer more than they would otherwise have done; but whosoever is willing to give up everything for Christ shall learn that no man is ever really a loser by Christ in the long run. Sooner or later, if not in this life, certainly in the next, the Lord will abundantly make up to every man all that he has ever suffered for his sake. Now comes a very delightful passage: —

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

When, therefore, you are kind to the poor, when you help the people of God in their difficulties and necessities, you are really helping Christ in the person of his poor but faithful followers.

41. *He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet —*

That is, not as a gentleman, nor merely as a man, nor as a talented individual, but as a prophet of God, —

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

Just the same reward which God gives to prophets and righteous men, he will give to those who receive them in the name of a prophet or of a righteous man. A prophet's reward must be something great, and such shall be the reward of those who generously receive the servants of God.

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

There have been times, even in our own country when to give “a cup of cold water” has been to run the risk of suffering death. In the dark days of persecution, some who were called heretics were driven out into the fields in the depth of winter to perish by the cold, the king’s subjects being forbidden, upon pain of death, to give them anything either to eat or to drink. Now, in such a case as that, giving “a cup of cold water” would mean far more than if you or I simply gave a cup of water to someone who happened to be thirsty, but our Lord Jesus Christ here promises to reward any who, for his servants’ sake, will dare to risk any consequences that may fall upon themselves.

MATTHEW 10:37-40

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

What a wonderful sight, then, the church is as it passes through this world. The head of it is Christ, the cross bearer, and, following in the train, are all his faithful disciples, all carrying crosses still — the very picture of a church. You know how Simon carried the cross after Christ: he is the type of all his disciples.

“Did Simon bear the cross alone,
And all the rest go free?
No, there’s a cross for everyone,
And there’s a cross for me.”

38, 39. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.

You gain life by dying for Christ, but if you saved life by denying the faith, you would in the worst sense lose all that makes existence to be life. There is an existence which is nothing but eternal death, and this is the doom of those who depart from Christ. But blessed are they who can give up this temporary mortal life for the sake of an eternal one. I have heard of one who used often to boast of what he would do if it came to his being burnt; but just before the day on which he was to be burnt alive for the faith, he recanted. He was suffered to go home. In a few months it happened that he was burnt alive in his house. Unhappy man that could not

burn for Christ, but had to burn after all. “He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.”

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

Think of that, you that have received Christ. You have received God himself, and he has come to dwell and reign with your soul.

This exposition consisted of readings from 1 PETER 1:1-16 AND MATTHEW 10:37-40.

MATTHEW 11

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

Whatever he commanded, he himself did. He was always the example as well as the legislator of his people. How well it will be for us who are called upon to teach others, if we can teach them as much by what we do as by what we say! “When Jesus had made an end of commanding his twelve disciples, he departed thence to teach and to preach in their cities.”

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

Poor John! His spirit was brave enough amid the wilds when he was by the riverside; but shut up in prison, it was probably otherwise with him. Those bold spirits, when they lose liberty, are apt to be depressed. Perhaps, too, John sent the disciples as much for their sakes as for his own. At any rate, what a question it was to put to our Lord, “Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?” I would call your attention to the quietness of our Saviour’s mind — the absence of anything like anger. See how he answers them.

4-6. *Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.*

Now if it had been the very least of us who had been attempting to do such service for God, and we had been questioned about what

we were doing, should we not have felt hurt and aggrieved? And, may be, there are some that would not have deigned an answer, especially if they were dignified with the name of an office. But our blessed Lord does not take a huff at it. He is not vexed, but he answers with the utmost gentleness, not by a word of authority commanding John to believe, but by an exposition of those blessed seals of grace which were the best evidence that he was indeed the Messiah. He pointed to the very miracles which prophecy declared the Messiah would perform, and he did this with that suavity of temper which was ever about our Divine Master, in which let us copy him.

7-11. And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

Never did our Saviour bear a more emphatic testimony to John than on this occasion; and it is remarkable that it, Should have followed upon the heels of John's doubt and John's question. How generously the Master repays his servant — not in his own coin, but in the heavenly coin of love. He seems to say, "Through the infirmity of thy flesh thou hast been half-inclined to question me; but through the strength of my grace I turn round and extol thee. Time was when thou couldst say, 'He must increase, but I must decrease,' and now I turn round and say to those whom thou hast sent, and to those who saw thy messengers, that there is none like to thee." Not even Moses himself is greater than John the Baptist; though he that has entered into the light and the glory of the kingdom of grace, since the coming of the Master, is greater than he.

12-15. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied unto John. And if ye will

receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

But how many there are that have ears and do not hear! The external organ is affected, but the internal ear of the soul is not reached at all. Blessed are they who, having ears, do in very truth hear.

16, 17. *But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows. And saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented.*

The children would not agree, Whatever game was proposed, some of them would not follow it. At one time they imitated the pipers, and then the offsets would not dance. Then they imitated the lamentations of a funeral, and then the others would not join in them.

18, 19. *For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil. The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.*

There was no pleasing them. And there is no pleasing people now, whoever it is that God sends. One man is much too homely. In fact, he is vulgar. Another is much too rhetorical. In fact, his rhetoric runs away with him. One man is doctrinal. Oh! he is dogmatical. Another man is practical. He is much too censorious. Another man is full of experience. He is mystical. Oh! surely God himself cannot please the evil tempers of ungodly men. One thing is that he does not try to do so, nor do his servants, if they are truly sent of him. That is a matter about which they have small concern.

19. *But wisdom is justified of her children.*

Whoever Christ sends, he sends in wisdom, and there is an adaptation about each of his servants, even if men do not perceive it. The day shall come when wisdom shall be justified of her children.

20-24. *Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not: Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto these Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment,*

than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee.

There was a tenderness about the tone of Christ when he spoke thus. The words are burning, but the eyes were full of tears. He could not contemplate the possibility of the gospel being rejected without a broken heart. He sighed and cried as he bore testimony against those who refused eternal life. With what tenderness must Christ regard some that are present here tonight, whose privileges from their childhood until now have been so great that they could scarcely be greater, and yet they seem determined to reject the admonitions of love, and trample over tenderness in their desperate resolve to perish. God have mercy upon such.

25. *At that time Jesus answered,*

He seemed to answer himself. He answered to the thoughts that passed through his own mind. "At that time Jesus answered."

25-27. *And said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight. All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.*

Did the Lord Jesus Christ in his address to Bethsaida and Capernaum awaken in his own mind all those difficulties that hover round about the doctrine of predestination? Did it not seem strange that God should send the gospel to people who rejected it, and did not send the gospel to a people who would have received it? How can these things be? And the dear Saviour answers the question to his own mind by falling back upon that other truth sublime and, to him, full of thanksgiving — the infinite sovereignty of God. I do not know what some of us would do if we did not believe that truth. There are so many things which puzzle us — so many questions, but the Judge of all the earth must do right. He must, he will do as he pleases with his own, and it is not for us to question the prerogatives of the Most High. Now the Saviour at last seems to give vent to his soul in one grand burst of gospel preaching. And whenever you and

I get worried about any doctrine, it is always well to come back to the simplicity of the gospel and proclaim it again.

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

There is no rest in the difficulties of metaphysics. There is no rest in the labours of human merit. "Come unto me, and I will give you rest."

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

First; he gives rest to all that come, But afterwards there is a second rest which they find who become obedient and bear his yoke. The rest that comes of pardoned sin is sweet, but the rest that comes of conquered sin through obedience is sweeter still. The rest he gives is precious, but there is rest upon rest, as there is grace upon grace, and let us go in for the highest form of that rest. "Ye shall find rest unto your souls." The very innermost part of your being shall be full of peace.

30. *For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*

Blessed be his name, we have found it so.

MATTHEW 11

1-3. *And it came to pass, when Jesus had made an end of commanding his twelve disciples, he departed thence to teach and to preach in their cities. Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?*

Had John's faith begun to waver? It is possible that it had. Elijah had his times of trembling and depression; then, why might not the second Elijah have the same sort of experience? Possibly, John wished to strengthen the faith of his followers, and therefore he sent two of his leading disciples to Jesus, that they might make the enquiry for themselves as to whether he was the Christ or not.

4. *Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see:*

For the works of Christ are the proofs of his Messiahship. His teaching and his action must ever be the seals of his mission.

5. *The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.*

This is the last, but not the least, of the signs of his Messiahship, that Jesus Christ preached so that the poor understood him, and delighted to follow him wherever he went. Many despised his preaching for this reason; but the Saviour mentioned this among the signs of his being sent of God: “The poor have the gospel preached to them.”

6-11. *And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me. And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.*

His position was a very high one; he was the evening star of the old dispensation, and the morning star of the new; but the light which shines after the sun has risen is brighter than any that the morning star can bring. He who has the gospel to preach has a greater thing to do than John the Baptist, who did but herald the coming of the Saviour.

12-15. *And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.*

Let him listen to what the heaven-sent messenger has to say; let him especially pay attention to his accents when he says, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”

16, 17. *But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows, And*

saying, *We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented.*

“You would not join in our game; whichever we chose to do, to imitate a festival or a funeral, you would not take part with us.”

18, 19. *For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil. The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children.*

There was no pleasing them anyhow; they were prepared to find fault with any sort of man, whether he lived an ascetic life, or mixed with others as a man among men. “But wisdom is justified of her children.” She sends the right sort of men to do her work, and God will take care that those who reject them shall not be without guilt: “wisdom is justified of her children.”

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

That was the point that Christ aimed at,—their repentance. He did not seek to dazzle them with wonders and marvels, but to break their hearts away from their sins. This is what his mighty works ought to have done, for they proved him to be the Messiah; and those mighty works also warned those who witnessed them that God had come near to them; and that, therefore, it was time for them to turn from their evil ways.

21-24. *Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee*

There is a great depth of mystery here, which we cannot hope to fathom. The gospel was not preached to those who would have repented if they had heard it, and it was preached to those who did not repent when they listened to it even from the lips of Christ himself. Upon this latter class, the sole effect of the gospel preached

to them was to plunge them into yet deeper depths of guilt because of their refusal of it. It is not for us to solve the mystery; it will be our wisdom to see that, being ourselves favored with the plain declaration of the gospel, we do not put it from us, lest we perish even more miserably than those who never heard it.

25. *At that time Jesus answered and said,—*

So he had been talking with his Father: “Jesus answered.” Very often, no doubt, the Saviour spoke with God when it is not recorded in the Gospels that he did so; but here a plain hint is given that Christ was in intimate communion and fellowship with God. At such times, great doctrines which, to the shallow minds of those who live at a distance from God, even seem dreadful, become delightful, and are lit up with unusual splendor. At that time, the doctrine of election was specially upon the heart of Christ because he was dwelling near to God himself: “Jesus answered and said,”—

25-30. *I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight. All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him. Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*

MATTHEW 11:1-6

1-5. *And it came to pass, when Jesus had made an end of commanding his twelve disciples, he departed thence to teach and preach in their cities. Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples. And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.*

These were Christ’s seals and proofs: he needed not to seek others. These were the very works of which prophecy had said they

would be the marks of the Messiah. If then, these marks were found in him, he left John and his disciples to draw the inference that he was, indeed, the One that was to come. Christ is always best known by his works, and in his people especially; he is seen in their lives. There are two great precepts for the conquest of the world for Christ: the first is, preach the gospel; but the second is, live the gospel, and if we do not live the gospel we shall not succeed in preaching the gospel. In fact, those members of our churches who do not live the gospel undo through all the week what the preacher of the gospel endeavors to do on the Lord's Day. It is a fine thing to preach with your mouth; but the best thing in the world is to preach with your feet and with your hands — in your walk and in your work; and if you are enabled to do this, the people will be able to say very little against the preaching of the gospel when they see the result of it in those who accept it. God grant that we may be all preachers in some way or another.

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

This exposition consisted of readings from EPHESIANS 2. MATTHEW 11:1-6.

MATTHEW 11:20-30

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

They listened; sometimes, they applauded; but they repented not; and there is nothing really accomplished until men have repented. In vain have we preached until men are brought to repent; so the Master said: —

21, 22. *Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you.*

Listen to that, you gospel-hardened sinners, you who have heard, and heard, and heard, but have not repented. See how great is your sin, for you have rejected what others would have received if it had been presented to them. See how your guilt accumulates, and its punishment also.

23, 24. *And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been*

done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee.

Sodom! — that is the blackest place of all. Ah, me! will that verse ever fall, like a millstone, upon any one of my hearers, to grind him to powder, because you heard the gospel, and rejected it, intending always to receive it, but never receiving it at all? From such a doom, may God in mercy deliver you!

25-30. *At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight. All things are delivered unto me of my Father.’ and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him. Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*

Just by way of contrast to what I am going to say in my sermon, let us read a few verses in Revelation 7.

This exposition consisted of readings from MATTHEW 3, AND 11:20-30; AND REVELATION 7:9-17.

MATTHEW 11:25-30

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

“Jesus answered”: sovereign grace is the answer to abounding guilt. With rejoicing spirit Jesus sees how sovereign grace meets the unreasonable abounding of human sin, and chooses out its own, according to the good pleasure of the Father’s will. Here is the spirit in which to regard the electing grace of God: “I thank thee.” It is cause for deepest gratitude.

Here is the author of election: “O Father.” It is the Father who makes the choice, and reveals the blessings. Here is his right to act as he does: he is “Lord of heaven and earth.” Who shall question the good pleasure of his will? Here we see the objects of election, under

both aspects; the chosen and the passed-over. Babes see because sacred truths are revealed to them, and not otherwise. They are weak and inexperienced. They are simple and unsophisticated. They can cling, and trust, and cry, and love; and to such the Lord opens up the treasures of wisdom. The objects of divine choice are such as these. Lord, let me be one among them! The truths of the heavenly kingdom are hid, by a judicial act of God, from men who, in their own esteem, are “the wise and prudent.” They cannot see, because they trust their own dim light, and will not accept the light of God.

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

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

Here we have the channel through which electing love works towards men: “All things are delivered unto me of my Father.” All things are put into the Mediator’s hands; fit hands both towards God and towards man; for he alone knows both to perfection. Jesus reveals the Father to the babes whom he has chosen. Only the Father can fill the Son with benediction, and only through the Son can that benediction flow to any one of the race of men. Know Christ, and you know the Father, and know that the Father himself loveth you. There is no other way of knowing the Father but through the Son. In this our Lord rejoiced; for his office of Mediator is dear to him, and he loves to be the way of communication between the Father whom he loves, and the people whom he loves for the Father’s sake. Observe the intimate fellowship between the Father and the Son, and how they know each other as none else ever can. Oh, to see all things in Jesus by the Father’s appointment, and so to find the Father’s love and grace in finding Christ! My soul, there are great mysteries here! Enjoy what thou canst not explain.

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

Here is the gracious invitation of the gospel in which the Saviour’s tears and smiles were blended, as in a covenant rainbow

of promise. "Come:" he drives none away: he calls them to himself. His favourite word is, "Come." Not-go to Moses; but, "Come unto me." To Jesus himself we must come, by a personal trust. Not to doctrine, ordinance, or ministry are we to come first; but to the personal Saviour. All labouring and laden ones may come: he does not limit the call to the spiritually labouring, but every working and wearied one is called. It is well to give the largest sense to all that mercy speaks. Jesus calls me. Jesus promises "rest" as his gift: his immediate, personal, effectual rest he freely gives to all who come to him by faith. To come to him is the first step, and he entreats us to take it. In himself, as the great sacrifice for sin, the conscience, the heart, the understanding obtain complete rest. When we have obtained the rest he gives, we shall be ready to hear of a further rest, which we find.

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

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

errands. “Come unto me,” is thus a divine prescription, curing our ills by the pardon of sin through our Lord’s sacrifice, and causing us the greatest peace by sanctifying us to his service. Oh, for grace to be always coming to Jesus, and to be constantly inviting others to do the same! Always free, yet always bearing his yoke; always having the rest once given, yet always finding more: this is the experience of those who come to Jesus always, and for everything. Blessed heritage; and it is ours if we are really his!

MATTHEW 12:38-42

38, 39. *Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee. But he answered and said unto them, an evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas:*

The Pharisees change their manner, but they are in pursuit of the same object. How hopeless had the religionists of that age become! Nothing would convince them. They manifested their hate of the Lord Jesus, by ignoring all the wonders he had wrought. What further signs could they seek than those he had already given? Pretty enquirers these! They treat all the miracles of our Lord as if they had never occurred. Well might the Lord call them “evil and adulterous,” since they were so given to personal lasciviousness, and were spiritually so untrue to God. We have those among us now who are so uncandid as to treat all the achievements of evangelical doctrine as if they were nothing, and talk to us as if no result had followed the preaching of the gospel. There is need of great patience to deal wisely with such.

40. *For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.*

The great sign of our Lord’s mission is his resurrection, and his preparing a gospel of salvation for the heathen. His life-story is well symbolized by that of Jonah. They cast our Lord overboard, even as the sailors did the man of God. The sacrifice of Jonah calmed the sea for the mariners, our Lord’s death made peace for us. Our Lord was a while in the heart of the earth as Jonah was in the depth of the sea, but, he rose again, and his ministry was full of the power of his

resurrection. As Jonah's ministry was certified by his restoration from the sea, so is our Lord's ministry attested by his rising from the dead. The man who had come back from death and burial in the sea commanded the attention of all Nineveh, and so does the risen Saviour demand and deserve the obedient faith of all to whom his message comes.

41. *The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and behold a greater than Jonas is here.*

The heathen of Nineveh were convinced by the sign of a prophet restored from burial in the sea; and moved by that convincement, they repented at his preaching. Without cavil or delay they put the whole city in mourning, and pleaded with God to turn from his anger. Jesus came with a clearer command of repentance, and a brighter promise of deliverance; but he spoke to obdurate hearts. Our Lord reminds the Pharisees of this, and as they were the most Jewish of Jews, they were touched to the quick by the fact that heathens perceived what Israel did not understand, and that Ninevites repented while Jews were hardened. All men will rise at the judgment: "The men of Nineveh shall rise." The lives of penitents will condemn those who did not repent: the Ninevites will condemn the Jews, "because they repented at the preaching of Jonas," and the Jews did not. Those who heard Jonah and repented will be swift witnesses against those who heard Jesus, and refused his testimony. The standing witness to our Lord is his resurrection from the dead. God grant that every one of us, believing that unquestionable fact, may be so assured of his mission, that we may repent and believe the gospel. RESURRECTION is one proof, in fact, it is THE SIGN; although, as we shall see, it is supplemented by another. The two will convince us or condemn us.

42. *The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here.*

The second sign of our Lord's mission is HIS KINGLY WISDOM. As the fame of Solomon brought the queen of the south from the uttermost parts of the earth, so does the doctrine of our Lord command attention from the utmost isles of the sea. If Israel perceives not his glorious wisdom, Ethiopia and Seba shall hear of

it, and come bowing before him. The queen of Sheba will rise again, and will “rise up” as a witness against unbelieving Jews, for she journeyed far to hear Solomon, while they would not hear the Son of God himself who came into their midst. The superlative excellence of his wisdom stands for our Lord as a sign, which can never be effectually disputed. What other teaching meets all the wants of men? Who else has revealed such grace and truth? He is infinitely greater than Solomon, who from a moral point of view exhibited a sorrowful littleness. Who but the Son of God could have made known the Father as he has done?

MATTHEW 12:38-45

38, 39. *Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee. But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas:*

The queen of Sheba did not ask for a sign. She did not expect Solomon to work a miracle; but, sitting down in his presence, she proposed her hard questions, and meekly awaited his answers. So should these scribes and Pharisees have done with the Lord Jesus Christ. These were his signs: —

40, 41. *For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.*

Jonas was a servant: Jesus was the Master. Jonas preached only one sermon: Jesus preached many. That sermon was a short one: Jesus Christ laboured long after souls. Jonas was a man full of infirmities, and with an unloving heart: Jesus was tender and compassionate. Jonas did but hurry through the streets, crying, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown,” — without a word of mercy: Jesus lived long among the people, giving them directions, and warnings, and invitations to seek and find salvation: “Behold, a greater than Jonas is here.”

42. *The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost*

parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here.

As I have so recently preached upon this verse, I need not say anything about it just now.

43. *When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, —*

Mark, not when he is turned out of him by superior force, but when he has gone out of his own accord, —

43. *He walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none.*

The devil was in the Jews of old, but he went out of them at the time of the Babylonian captivity; that heavy punishment cured them of idolatry. But the devil could never find a resting-place, in Gentile hearts, so pleasant to himself as among God's own people.

44. *Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished.*

"I will go back to those Jews," saith the devil; and, when he comes back, he finds them without any true love to God: "empty, swept, and garnished." See how correctly the Pharisee is dressed, and note with what sanctimonious unction he repeats his hypocritical prayers. He fasts twice in the week, and pays tithes of his mint, and anise, and cummin. The devil finds the house "empty, swept, garnished ;" and as he does not care whether he lives in a foul heart or a clean one, so long as he can but live in it, he takes up his abode there again.

45. *Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first.*

If idolatry did not come back to the Jews, the devil of pride, and self-conceit, and many more came, and fought against the Son of God, so that they became worse than they were before, and the first devil of the Jewish people was nothing compared with the seven devils which afterwards possessed them. We have seen some men of this kind. Under temporary conviction, they have given up certain outward sins, but, afterwards, they have been ten times worse than they were before. We have known a man to be a drunkard, and we have rejoiced to see him leave his cups; but, yet, when he has made a self-righteousness out of his temperance, and set himself up against God and his truth, we have verily believed that he has had within him seven devils worse than the first. A man may reform

himself to blacker stains, and wash himself with the waters of his self-righteousness till he becomes more hard to cleanse than he would have been at the first. Oh, for the mighty hand of One, who is stronger than the prince of hell, to throw the devil out, and then he will never come back again; but if he goes out by mere human persuasion, or by our own wills and wishes, he will most certainly come back to us. If the Holy Ghost turns him out, he will never gain an entrance any more.

45. *Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation.*

This exposition consisted of readings from 1 KINGS 10:1-13; AND MATTHEW 12:38-45.

MATTHEW 13:1-23

1, 2. *The same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the sea side. And great multitudes were gathered together unto him, so that he went into a ship, and sat, and the whole multitude stood on the shore.*

He had thus a little breathing space between him and the people — a better opportunity for his being both heard and seen. A noble instance of open-air preaching. And if our climate would permit, what a blessing it would be if we could turn out of these houses and sit in a boat or stand on the sea-shore.

3-9. *And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow; And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up: Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: And when the sun was up, they were scorched: and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them; but other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.*

Upon the very surface of it, this parable teaches those of us who have to sow that we must not expect to have our choice of the ground, and that we are not even to make a choice of the matter, but we are bound to go, as this sower did, and cast a handful there upon the hard trodden road, and a handful there among the thorns and nettles, and a handful here again where there is no deepness of earth, and God be thanked if a handful shall fall on good ground. Still, for

us to suppose that we are to sort out the characters, and to select the ground, is a very great mistake. "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." A distinction will soon come. The seed will be the grand detective of the soil. It will show what the soil is. Just as Christ on the cross is the discerner of men thoughts, that the thoughts of many hearts might be revealed, so is the preaching of Christ crucified the test of human condition. You shall see now who it is that has the honest and good ground, and who has not. Not by a geological inspection, but simply by throwing a handful of seed on it. That will soon discern between the precious and the vile.

10-16. *And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand, and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed: lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear.*

A judicial blindness and deafness of heart had come over the nation of Israel, so that even when the sun shone in its strength in the person and teaching of Christ, they could not see. And when God spake more plainly than he ever spoke before, by his Son, yet they could not hear so as to understand. And I sometimes fear that some measure of this judicial blindness has happened unto many in our Land. Those who take the metaphors of Scripture, and interpret them literally, and dare to take out of the old law excuses for ritualistic observance — what can we say of them but that this people's hearts have waxed gross? God has done very much for our country. He has seeded it with the blood of martyrs. The scars of martyrdom have hardly passed away, and, after all this, if men will

go back to the fooleries of popish ceremony — if they will put from them the blessed light of the gospel of Jesus Christ — depend upon it God will give them up to some kind of hardness of heart, so that they will plunge from one superstition to another, and their last end shall be worse than the first. But blessed are they who, being taught of God, can perceive the spirit beneath the letter, and do not confound the emblems which the Saviour used, but suck out the meaning from them as bees do the honey from the flowers.

17-19. *For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them. Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower. When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side.*

Do you notice here the importance of the word? But when it is heard, but not understood, you would suppose that the devil might as well let it stop where it was, for what hurt could it do to his kingdom for the man to hear it and not to understand it? But he is so frightened at the word of God that he comes, like an evil bird, and takes it away for fear lest lying even in the dull heart without understanding, yet, somehow, it should breed an understanding in the heart. And so he takes it away from the thoughts and the memory, so fearful is he of it. “Nothing quakes the devil tremble like the gospel,” said Martin Luther; and I do not doubt that all the churches in the world, with all their ceremonies, are less feared by the devil than one single doctrine or text out of the Word of God; so he comes, like an evil bird, and catches away that which was sown in the heart. You must expect to lose a good deal of your teaching. As farmers drop several beans in the hole and say, “That one is for the worm; this one is for the crow”; then there is another which they hope will spring up, so must we expect it to be with our teaching, much of which will be lost.

20, 21. *But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.*

A straw fire blazes fiercely, but lasts not long. And so there are some that we hope are converts who show an extraordinary zeal,

and you would fancy that, surely, they would outrun all Christians, but they have not breath. They are not good stayers. They soon cease in the race. They are soon hot — soon cold. And we may expect to have many disappoint meets from persons of this character, and all the more so among children — readily impressed, but easily do they lose the impression.

22. *He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.*

Dear friends, who have to teach the young, you have, in their case, less danger in this respect. They have not yet come to the time when the care of this world and the deceitfulness of riches will choke the word. You have some advantage over us, though even the little things of a child's play may make nettles and thorns. Things which we could not consider to be cares that seem too trivial — are cares to them. It may be that our heavenly Father thinks of our cares very much as we think of our children's cares, and as we should smile to see them distrustful, so it may be that he smiles and grieves whenever he finds us so, for, mark you, even among God's own people, God's Word cannot grow in our hearts at the rate it should, for we have the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches. We must cry to be lifted above these — delivered from the evil influences of the world in which we dwell — or else our good Lord and Master will waste many a handful of good seed upon us, though, I trust, that yet out of us he will get some harvest.

23. *But he that received seed into good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.*

For all Christians are not alike fruitful. Would God they all reached to the hundredfold, and went beyond it! Such seed, and such a sower, and such fruitful seasons as he has given to some of us, and such ploughing, and such tilling, and such manuring, and such watering, and such sunshine, and such dew — oh! we ought to bring forth a hundredfold. Let us chide ourselves, and whenever we have to complain that we do not get harvest from our sowing, or as much as we could desire, let us look within and say, "My heart, thou art like the field I have to sow. My Master, I fear, gets as little out of thee as I get when I go unsuccessfully to my work."

This exposition consisted of readings from MATTHEW 13:1-23: 15:13-28. 1 CORINTHIANS 3:17-23.

MATTHEW 13:1-23

1, 2. *The same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the sea side. And great multitudes were gathered together unto him, so that he went into a ship, and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore.*

I think I can see the little ship at a convenient distance from the shore so as to keep off the multitudes of people, in order that the Saviour might speak the more freely, there he sits with a boat for a pulpit. There were no conventionalities about the Lord Jesus when he was upon the earth, he was willing to speak to the people anywhere from any pulpit whatsoever

3. *And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow;*

It was probably at that season of the year when the sowers were going forth to sow their seed, so Jesus pointed to them as to a living text. He was always wide-awake to make use of everything that occurred round about him. "A sower went forth to sow." For what else should he go forth? Yet some sowers that I know of do not go forth to sow, but to exhibit themselves, and to show how well they can do their work. This man aimed at sowing and nothing else. Oh, that all preachers did the same!

4. *And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side,*

He could not help that; he was not sent to pick the soil, that would be too much responsibility for him. If we had to preach only to certain characters, we should be taking up all our time in picking out those characters, and probably we should make many mistakes while trying to do it. Our business is to scatter the good seed broadcast. We are not to dabble in the Word, we are to throw it as far as we can, and to let it fall wherever God pleases. "Some seeds fell by the way side," — on ground trodden hard by the passers-by.

4. *And the fowls came and devoured them up:*

Those fowls are always ready to devour the good seed. Wherever there is a congregation met to hear the Word, there are always plenty of devils ready to do their evil work. "The fowls came," they had not far to fly. The birds know a sower by the very look of him, so they hurry up, and come wherever the seed may be

cast that they may devour it. O Lord, keep the fowls away; or, better still, break up the soil so that the seed may enter, and not lie upon the surface!

5. *Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth:*

There was a pan of unbroken limestone an inch or two below the soil, but there was no depth of earth where the seeds could grow.

5. *And forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth:*

They seemed to be converts, but they proved to be worthless. They were enthusiastic, carried away with excitement, but all was soon over with them “because they had no deepness of earth.” Everything was superficial, there was no depth of character, or feeling, or emotion.

6. *And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away*

They seemed to be alive at the top, but they were really dead below. How many there are of that sort still; they make a bold profession, but it is only for a while, and then they wither away.

7, 8. *And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them: but other fell into good ground, —*

Thank God, we do not lose all our efforts. If one in four succeeds, it is great deal for which we ought to praise the Lord. So, brother, sister, —

“Sow in the morn thy seed,
At eve hold not thine hand;
To doubt and fear give thou no heed,
Broadcast it o’er the land.”

8. *And brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold.*

There are degrees even in fruitfulness; Christians are not all alike. Oh, that we had a hundredfold return for our sowing everywhere! We do not get it, and can scarcely expect it; let us thank God if we have “some a hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold.”

9-12. *Who hath ears to hear, let him hear. And the disciple came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.*

For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.

It is so even in common things, the man of intelligence, who has a good groundwork of education, picks up something everywhere, but the ignorant man learns nothing anywhere. He only finds out more and more of his own ignorance till there is taken away from him even that which he had.

Oh, that the Lord would give us a good groundwork of saving knowledge, so that we might go on learning more and more under the Holy Spirit's teaching!

13-16. *Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear.*

It is an awful thing when God gives men up to spiritual blindness, and dullness, and hardness, but it does happen. If you hear the Word, and refuse to receive it, you do to that extent harden your heart; and if you continue to do so, you will by degrees lose the capacity for understanding the Word. Take heed what you hear. O my dear hearers, I am afraid that many of you are not aware of the solemn responsibility of hearing the gospel, and of the terrible peril of having your ears made dull and your heart made hard! I am responsible for preaching to you faithfully, but you are equally responsible for hearing what is preached. Let us not waste any opportunity that we have of hearing the Word, but use it wisely and well that we may be able to give a good account of it before God in our fruitfulness. Now, if the Saviour's main design, in the use of parables, had been that men should not understand him, he could have answered that end better by not speaking at all. But see how mercy blends with justice, and gives them another opportunity of hearing the Word. They might have come to Jesus even as his disciples did, and asked him questions, and he would have explained

the truth to them. If any of you today hear anything which you do not understand, go to the Lord about it in private prayer, and he will explain it to you. I tremble lest any of you should hear the Word and not receive it, and yet be contented. That is the worst state of all for anyone to be in may God save you from it! But as for you who know the lord, “blessed are your eyes, for they see.” Those are blessed eyes that can really see, eyes that cannot see are a trial, but “blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear.” It is nothing but the grace of God that can make our ears spiritually hear. He that made the ear can alone make an open passage from the ear to the heart. If you have received this blessing, be very grateful for it, and bless the God of grace for giving it to you.

17. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.

To you Christian people, there is given a very full revelation of the truth of God. You live in the mid-day glory of the gospel, but the “prophets and righteous men” of old lived in the morning twilight. Be the more grateful, and bless the Lord with all your hearts

18, 19. Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower. When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side.

There are many such hearers, thy just hear the Word, and that is all. They are very like the countryman, who said that he liked Sunday for it was such an easy day, he had nothing to do but go to church, put up his legs, and think of nothing. There are far too many hearers of that sort who think of nothing, and therefore they get no good out of what they hear.

20, 21. But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it, yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.

He soon ceases even to profess to be a Christian, he jumped into religion, and he jumps out again. Revival always produce a large quantity of such people, and yet, if there is one soul truly saved, the revival is a success so far as that one is concerned.

22, 23. *He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word, and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful. But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; —*

Knows what it means, thinks it over, takes it in as the good ground takes in the seed, and keeps it; —

23. *Which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.*

I say again, — Oh, that we had a hundredfold return for our sowing! Yet let us not forget to give God thanks if we have sixtyfold or even thirtyfold.

MATTHEW 13:3-8, 18-23

3. *And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow;*

He had much instruction to give, and he chose to convey it in parables. What wonderful pictures they were! What a world of meaning they have for us, as well as for those who heard them! This parable of the sower is a mine of teaching concerning the kingdom; for the seed was “the word of the kingdom.” (See verse 19.) “Behold”: every word is worthy of attention. May be, the preacher pointed to a farmer on the shore, who was beginning to sow one of the terraces. “A sower”, read “The Sower.” Jesus, our Lord, has taken up this business of the Sower at his Father’s bidding. The sower “went forth.” See him leaving the Father’s house, with this one design upon his heart — “to sow.”

4. *And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up:*

When HE sowed, some seeds fell by the wayside: even when the Chief Sower is at work, some seed fails. We know he sows the best of seed, and in the best manner; but some of it falls on the trodden path, and so lies uncovered and unaccepted of the soil. That soil was hard, and beaten down with traffic. There, too, on the wayside, we meet with dust to blind, settlements of mud to foul, and birds to pilfer: it is not a good place for good seed. No wonder, as the seeds lay all exposed, that the fowls came and devoured them up. If truth does not enter the heart, evil influences soon remove it.

5, 6. *Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away.*

Among the rocks, or on the shallow soil, with the unbroken rock-pan underneath, the seed fell; for if the sower had altogether avoided such places he might have missed some of the good ground. In these stony places the seed speedily sprang up, because the rock gave it all the heat that fell on it, and so hastened its germination. But, soon up, soon down. When the time came for the sun to put forth his force, the rootless plants instantly pined and died. They had no deepness of earth, and “no root”; what could they do but wither quite away? Everything was hurried with them; the seeds had no time to root themselves, and so in hot haste the speedy growth met with speedy death. No trace remained.

7. *And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them:*

The ground was originally a thorn-brake, and had been cleared by the thorns being cut down; but speedily the old roots sent out new shoots, and other weeds came up with them; and the tangled beds of thistles, thorns, nettles, and what not, strangled the feeble up-shootings of the wheat. The native plants choked the poor stranger. They would not permit the intrusive corn to share the field with them: evil claims a monopoly of our nature. Thus we have seen three sets of seed come to an untimely end.

8. *But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixty fold, some thirty fold.*

This would repay all losses, especially at the highest rate of increase here quoted. To the bird, the weather, and the weeds, three sets of seeds have gone; yet, happily, one remains to increase and fill the barn. The sowing of good seed can never be a total failure: “other fell into good ground.” The harvest was not equally great on every spot of fertile soil: it varied from an hundredfold to thirtyfold. All good ground is not alike good; and, besides, the situation may differ. Harvests are not all alike in the same farm, in the same season, and under the same farmer; and yet each field may yield a fairly good harvest. Lord, if I cannot reach to a hundredfold, let me at least prove to be good ground by bearing thirtyfold.

18. *Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower.*

Because you see behind the curtain, and have grace given to discern the inner meaning through the outer metaphor, come and hear the explanation of the parable of the sower.

19. *When anyone heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side.*

The gospel is “the word of the kingdom”: it has royal authority in it; it proclaims and reveals King Jesus, and it leads men to obedience to his way. To hear but not to understand, is to leave the good seed on the outside of your nature, and not to take it into yourself. Nothing can come of such hearing to anyone. Satan is always on the watch to hinder the Word: “Then cometh the wicked one”, even at the moment when the seed fell. He is always afraid to leave the truth even in hard and dry contact with a mind, and so he catcheth it away at once, and it is forgotten, or even disbelieved. It is gone, at any rate; and we have not in our hearer’s mind a corn-field, but a highway, hard, and much frequented. The man was not an opposer, he “received seed”; but he received the truth as he was, without the soil of his nature being changed; and the seed remained as it was, till the foul bird of hell took it off the place, and there was an end of it. So far as the truth was sown in his heart, it was in his natural, unrenewed heart, and therefore it took no living hold. How many such hearers we have! To these we preach in vain; for what they learn they unlearn, and what they receive they reject almost as soon as it comes to them. Lord, suffer none of us to be impervious to thy royal word; but whenever the smallest seed of truth falls on us, may we open our soul to it!

20, 21. *But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for awhile: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.*

Here the seed was the same and the sower the same, but the result somewhat different. In this case there was earth enough to cover the seed, and heat enough to make it grow quickly. The convert was attentive, and easily persuaded; he seemed glad to accept the gospel at once, he was even eager and enthusiastic, joyful and demonstrative. He heareth the word, and anon with joy

receiveth it. Surely this looked very promising! But the soft was essentially evil, hard, barren, superficial. The man had no living entrance into the mystery of the gospel, no root in himself, no principle, no hold of the truth with a renewed heart; and so he flourished hurriedly and showily for a season, and only for a season. It is tersely put, "He dureth for a while." That "while" may be longer or shorter according to circumstances. When matters grow hot with Christians, either through affliction from the Lord, or persecution from the world, the temporary believer is so sapless, so rootless, so deficient in moisture of grace, that he dries up, and his profession withers. Thus, again, the sower's hopes are disappointed, and his labour is lost. Till stony hearts are changed it must always be so. We meet with many who are soon hot and as soon cold. They receive the gospel "anon," and leave it "by-and-by" Everything is on the surface, and therefore is hasty and unreal. May we all have broken hearts and prepared minds, that when truth comes to us it may take root in us and abide.

22. *He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.*

This class of hearers we know by personal acquaintance in this busy age. They hear the word, they are affected by the gospel, they take it as seed into their minds, and it grows well for a season; but the heart cannot belong to two absorbing objects at the same time, and therefore these men cannot long yield themselves up to the world and Christ too. Care to get money, covetousness, trickery, and sins which come from hasting to be rich, or else pride, luxury, oppression, and other sins which come of having obtained wealth, prevent the man from being useful in religious matters, or even sincere to himself: "He becometh unfruitful." He keeps his profession; he occupies his place; but his religion does not grow; in fact, it shows sad signs of being choked and checked by worldliness. The leaf of outward religiousness is there, but there is no dew on it; the ear of promised fruit is there, but there are no kernels in it. The weeds have outgrown the wheat, and smothered it. We cannot grow thorn and corn at the same time: the attempt is fatal to a harvest for Jesus. See how wealth is here associated with care, deceitfulness, and unfruitfulness. It is a thing to be handled with care. Why are men so eager to make their thorn-brake more dense with briars?

Would not a good husbandman root out the thorns and brambles? Should we not, as much as possible, keep free from the care to get, to preserve, to increase, and to hoard worldly riches? Our heavenly Father will see that we have enough; why do we fret about earthly things? We cannot give our minds to these things and to the kingdom also.

23. *But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.*

Here is the story of the Word's success. This fourth piece of land will repay all charges. Of course, no one parable teaches all truth, and therefore we have no mention here of the plowing which always precedes a fruitful harvest. No heart of man is good by nature: the good Lord had made this plot into "good ground." In this case, both thought and heart are engaged about the heavenly message, and the man "heareth the word, and understandeth it." By being understood lovingly, the truth gets into the man, and then it roots, it grows, it fruits, it rewards the sower. We must aim at the inward apprehension and comprehension of the Word of God; for only in this way can we be made fruitful by it. Be it ours to aim to be amongst those who would bear fruit an hundredfold! Ah, we would give our Lord ten thousandfold if we could. For every sermon we hear we should endeavor to do a hundred gracious, charitable, or self-denying acts. Our divine Sower, with such heavenly seed, deserves to be rewarded with a glorious harvest.

This exposition consisted of readings from MATTHEW 9:35-38; 10:1; 13:3-8; AND 18-23.

MATTHEW 13:10-17

10-12. *And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in, parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.*

You can understand this truth if you go into certain museums. I will suppose that you know nothing whatever of comparative anatomy, and you go into the museum of comparative anatomy at Paris. If you understand a little of the science, you will learn a great

deal more: “for whosoever hath, to him shall be given.” If you do not know anything about the subject, you will say, “Well, this is the most uninteresting exhibition I ever saw,” and you will come out with the feeling that you do not know anything. What you did know will have vanished in the sight of all that mass of bones arranged in those extraordinary shapes. You will only feel your own lack of knowledge in that department; you will show your ignorance, and nothing else. So it is in the things of God. If you understand the fundamental principles of true godliness, you will soon understand more; but if you do not comprehend as much as that, even the reading of the Scriptures will be but slightly instructive to you.

13-15. *Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; Lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.*

Now the Saviour turned to his disciples, and spoke specially to them.

16. *But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear.*

It is no use having eyes that do not see, or ears that do not hear; and yet I fear that there are many eyes of that kind, and many ears of that sort, in this congregation tonight.

17. *For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.*

Now let us read one other passage, to show how the Lord heals the blind, and makes them see.

This exposition consisted of readings from ISAIAH 6; MATTHEW 13:10-17; AND LUKE 18:35-3.

MATTHEW 13:24-50

24. *Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field:*

He knew that it was good. It had been tested: it was unmixed: it was good throughout.

25. *But while men slept his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way.*

It was a very malicious action. The thing has been done many times. Bastard wheat was sown in among the true wheat, so as to injure the crop.

26-27. *But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares?*

We often have to ask that question. How comes this about? It was a true gospel that was preached, from whence then come these hypocrites —these that are like the wheat, but are not wheat? For it is not the tare that we call a tare in England that is meant here, but a false wheat — very like to wheat, but not wheat.

28. *He said unto them, An enemy hath done this.*

The enemy could not do a worse thing than to adulterate the Church of God. Pretenders outside do little hurt. Inside the fold they do much mischief.

28-30. *The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.*

The separation will be more in season, move easily and more accurately done when both shall have been fully developed — when the wheat shall have come to its fullness, and the counterfeit wheat shall have ripened.

31, 32. *Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: Which indeed is the least of all seeds:*

Commonly known in that country.

32-35. *But when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof. Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened. All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world.*

How thoroughly impregnated our Lord was with the very spirit of Scripture. And he ever acted as if the Scriptures were uppermost in his mind. They seemed to be ever in their fullness before his soul.

36. *Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him,*

Those house-talks, those explanations of the great public sermons and parables — were sweet privileges which he reserved for those who had given their utter confidence to him.

36-44. *Saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field. He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them unto a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found,*

Stumbling upon it, perhaps, when he was at the plough — turning up the old crop in which it was concealed.

44. *He hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.*

Some persons do stumble upon the gospel when they are not looking for it. “I am found of them that sought me not” is a grand

free grace text. Some of those who have been most earnest in the kingdom of heaven were at one time most indifferent and careless, but God in infinite sovereignty put the treasure in their way — gave them the heart to value it, and they obtained it to their own joy.

45. *Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls:*

He does not stumble at it: he is seeking pearls.

46, 47. *Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind:*

Bad fish and good fish, end creeping things and broken shells, and bite of seaweed, and pieces of old wreck. Did you ever see such an odd assortment as they get upon the deck of a fishing vessel when they empty out the contents of a drag net? Such is the effect of the ministry. It drags together all sorts of people. It is quite as well that we have not eyes enough to see one another's hearts tonight, or else I dare say we should make about as queer a medley as I have already attempted to describe as being in the fisherman's vessel.

48. *Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away.*

All a mixture. We cannot sort one from the other now, but when the net comes to shore then will be the picking over the heap. No mistakes will be made. The good will go into vessels, and the bad, and none but the bad, will be cast away.

49, 50. *So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just. And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.*

Not fire, then, which annihilates, but fire which leaves in pain and causes weeping and gnashing of teeth.

MATTHEW 13:24-58

24. *Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field:*

Jesus never sowed any other kind of seed. The truth which he taught is pure and unadulterated. It is good seed, — good and only good, the very best of seed.

25. *But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way.*

Wherever Christ is active the enemy is sure to be active too. If you have a sleeping church, you may have a sleeping devil; but as soon as ever Christ is in the congregation sowing the good seed, the devil wakes up, and by night, when men are off their guard, the bad seed — the mock wheat — here translated “tares” — is sown among the true wheat.

26. *But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also.*

The false wheat came up with the true. Perhaps the seed in the one case may have looked like the other even as there is “another gospel which is not another” with which come still trouble us. The only true test is, “By their fruits ye shall know them;” so, when the seeds had sprung up, there was the blade of true wheat, and “then appeared the tares also.”

27. *So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares?*

How often we have asked that question! We have seen children trained by the most godly parents, yet they have developed a sad propensity to sin, and we have said, “From whence then have these tares come?” We have seen a ministry which has been sound and faithful, and yet in the congregation there have sprung up divers errors which have done a world of mischief, and we have had sorrowfully to ask, “From whence then have these tares come?”

28, 29. *He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.*

We are so fallible, we make so many mistakes, that we cannot be trusted to do this uprooting, for we might pull up wheat as well as tares. If there had been briars or thorns growing in that field, those servants might have pulled them up without damage to the corn, just as an open evil liver, who breaks the laws of God openly, may be cut off from the church without damage; but these tares must be left for the present.

30. *Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.*

There will be an end of this mixture in due time; the hypocrite shall not always stand in the congregation of the righteous; the wheat and the tares shall be separated “in the time of harvest.”

31, 32. *Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.*

The kingdom of heaven is just like that in this world; wherever it comes, it comes to grow. And it is just like that in our hearts. Oh, how small is the first sign of grace in the soul! Perhaps it is only a single thought. The life divine may begin with but a wish, or with one painful conviction of error;

but if it be the true and living seed of God, it will grow. And there is no telling how great will be its growth till, in that soul where all was darkness, many graces, like sweet song-birds, shall come and sing, and make joy and gladness there. Oh, that you and I might experimentally know the meaning of the parable of the mustard seed!

33. *Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.*

And although leaven is usually the symbol of evil, yet it may be here a fair representation of the kingdom of heaven itself, for it operates mysteriously and secretly, yet powerfully, till it permeates the whole of man’s nature; and the gospel will keep on winning its way till the whole world shall yet be leavened by it.

“More and more it spreads and grows,
Ever mighty to prevail.”

34-36. *All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things which have been kept secret*

from the foundation of the world. Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field.

I again remind you that, wherever there is anything that you do not understand, the best way is to consult the Master concerning it. If I read a book in which there is an obscure passage, and I can write to the author, and ask him what he means by it, I shall most probably get to understand it. So, the best Expositor of the Word of God is the Spirit of God; therefore appeal to him whenever you are puzzled with anything that is taught in the Scriptures, and say to him, “Blessed Spirit, wilt thou graciously expound to me this parable, this doctrine, this experience ?” and he will do it, and so you shall become wise unto salvation.

37-43. *He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.*

May God give us such ears as can hear his voice, and may we take to heart the solemn teachings of our Lord !

44-46. *Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.*

It would be a good bargain for anyone to part with all he has in exchange for the kingdom of heaven, yet that great “treasure” is to be had for nothing by everyone who trusts the Lord Jesus Christ.

47-50. *Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: Which, when it was full,*

they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

We are to cast the great seine-net of the gospel into the sea of humanity, but we must not expect that all we catch will prove to be good. There is time of separation coming when “the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just.”

51. *Jesus saith unto them, Have ye understood all these things?*

This is a question which constantly needs to be put to all hearers and readers of the Word. “Have ye understood all these things?” To be hearers only, or readers only, will avail nothing; the Word must be understood, accepted, assimilated, and so shall it make us wise unto salvation.

51. *They say unto him, Yea, Lord.*

They answered very glibly, yet probably not one of them fully understood the seven parables in this chapter. If anyone did so, he would be like the instructed scribe described in the next verse: —

52. *Then said he unto them, Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.*

He who has learned anything concerning the kingdom of heaven should teach it to others, bringing forth the truth in pleasing variety, “new and old,” to edify all his hearers.

53, 54. *And it came to pass, that when Jesus had finished these parables, he departed thence. And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works?*

They were highly privileged in having Jesus back in their midst, yet they failed to appreciate his teaching; they were astonished at his wisdom, but were unable to perceive the divine source from which it sprang.

55-58. *Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? and his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man*

all these things? And they were offended in him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house. And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief.

This was a notable illustration of John's words concerning Christ, "He came unto his own, but his own received him not." Let us beware of unbelief lest it should tie the hands of Christ as it did there in his own country.

MATTHEW 14:13-36

13. *When Jesus heard of it, he departed thence by a ship into a desert place apart:*

It is well for us to get alone with God when he takes home the best and most faithful of his servants. Neither the Church nor the world could afford to lose such a man as John the Baptist; so it was well for Christ's disciples to retire with him to a desert place that he might teach them the lesson of that proto-martyr's death.

13, 14. *And when the people had heard thereof, they followed him on foot out of the cities. And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick.*

He needed quiet, but he could not get it; yet he was not "moved" with indignation against the crowd that had sought him out, but he "was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick." Out of the fullness of his heart of love, he condescended to do for the people what they most needed.

15. *And when it was evening, his disciples came to him, saying, This is a desert place, and the time is now past; send the multitude away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves victuals.*

Human compassion might have moved the disciples to say something more kind than that heartless request, "Send the multitude away." Perhaps they wished to spare themselves the sight of so much distress; but they evidently did not expect the answer that Christ gave them: —

16. *But Jesus said unto them, They need not depart; give ye them to eat.*

Christ seemed to say to his disciples, "If you only exercise the power that is within your reach, with Me in your midst, you are equal to this emergency:

'Give ye them to eat.' "

17, 18. *And they say unto him, We have here but five loaves, and two fishes. He said, Bring them hither to me.*

"They are little enough in your hands, but they will be ample when they get into mine." When everything that we have is in the hands of Christ, it is wonderful how much he can make of it. Bring your talent to the Lord Jesus, be it never so little; sanctify to him every possibility that lies within your reach; you cannot tell how much he can and will do with it.

19. *And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass, —*

It must have been a beautiful sight to see those thousands of men, women, and children at once obeying his command. There were five loaves and two fishes, — probably five small barley cakes and a couple of sardines; so the people might have said, "What is the use of such a multitude sitting down on the grass to partake of such scanty fare as that?" But they did not say so; there was a divine power about the very simplest command of Christ which compelled instant obedience: "He commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass," —

19. *And took the five loaves, and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed, —*

This was that "blessing of the Lord" of which Solomon says that "it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it." If you get this blessing on your five loaves and two fishes, you may feed five thousand men with them, besides the women and the children.

19, 20. *And brake, and gave the loaves to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude. And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full.*

Much more than they began with; for it is a law of the Heavenly Kingdom that he who gives to God shall be no loser; his five loaves and two fishes shall turn to twelve baskets full after thousands have eaten, and been satisfied. The more there is of complete consecration to Christ, and his blessed service, the more reward will there be in the world to come; and,

possibly, even here.

21, 22. *And they that had eaten were about five thousand men, beside women and children. And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away.*

He always takes the heavier task upon himself. They may go off by themselves, but he will remain to send the multitudes away. Besides, no one but Christ could have done it, only he who had made them sit down to the feast could make them go to their homes.

23. *And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray:*

He had had a long day of preaching, and healing, and distributing the bread and fish, and now he closed the day with prayer to his Father.

23. *And when the evening was come, he was there alone.*

Dr. Watts was right in saying to his Lord, —

“Cold mountains, and the midnight air
Witnessed the fervor of thy prayer.”

He is not now on the bare mountain side, but he is engaged in the same holy exercise up yonder before his Father’s throne.

24. *But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary.*

This is the case with the good ship of the Church of Christ today; it is “tossed with waves,” and “the wind” is “contrary.” It is very contrary just now; but, then, Christ is still pleading for the ship and all on board; and while he pleads, it can never sink.

25-29. *And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit: and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. And Peter answered him, and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus.*

You, who are wanting to get to Jesus, should make a desperate effort to get to him; even walk on the water to get to Jesus. Walking on the water might be an idle and evil exhibition; but to walk on the water to go to Jesus is another matter. Try it, and the Lord enable you to get to him!

30-32. *But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased.*

The Greek word implies that the wind was tired, weary, “done up,” as we say. It had had its boisterous time, and spent its force; and now it knew its Lord’s voice, and, like a tired child, fell asleep.

33. *Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God.*

This seems to have been the first time that the disciples arrived at this conclusion so as to state it so positively; yet, do you not think that, after the miraculous multiplication of the loaves and fishes, they might have very fitly said, “Of a truth thou art the Son of God”? Sometimes, however, one wonder will strike us more than another; and, possibly, it was because they were in danger when this second miracle was wrought, and therefore they the more appreciated the coming of Christ to them at midnight. They were in no danger when the multitude were fed; perhaps they were not themselves hungry. That strikes us most which comes most home to us, as this miracle did.

34-36. *And when they were gone over, they came into the land of Gennesaret. And when the men of that place had knowledge of him, they sent out into all that country round about, and brought unto him all that were diseased; And besought him that they might only touch the hem of his garment: and as many as touched were made perfectly whole.*

MATTHEW 14:14-33

14. *And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick.*

Different persons take different views of multitudes, according to the state of their minds. Many an officer when he sees a multitude considers how long it would take to march them from a certain place. Another man begins calculating how much food they will all need. Another begins to estimate their wealth, another to calculate how many per cent will die in the year. But the Lord Jesus Christ’s heart was full of pity and mercy, that the thing for him to do as he

looked upon them was to have compassion upon them. He healed their sick, and helped them in their sorrows.

15. *And when it was evening, his disciples came to him, saying, This is a desert place, and the time is now past; send the multitudes away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves victuals.*

This really meant “Get us out of the difficulty.” There was no hope that so many of them could get victuals in the villages; but the disciples as good as said “We cannot bear to see them starving. Help us to forget it.”

16. *But Jesus said unto them, They need not depart; give ye them to eat.*

“You do not know what you can do, seeing I am with you,” the Lord answered. “You can feed them all.” O Christian church, never give up the most difficult problem. It may be worked out. The city may be evangelized, crowded as it is; the nations may be brought to Christ superstitious though they be; for he is with us.

17, 18. *And they say unto him, We have here but five loaves, and two fishes. He said, Bring them hither to me.*

He will not work without us. Whatever little gift or ability we have must be consecrated. Christ could easily have made loaves and fishes without taking their little stock, but that is not his way of working. “Bring what you have hither to me.” Whenever we have a church that brings all its store to Christ — (when shall we ever see such a church?) — then he will be pleased to make sufficient for the multitude.

19-21. *And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass and took the five loaves, and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed, and brake, and gave the loaves to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude. And they did all eat and were filled: and they took up of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full. And they that had eaten were about five thousand men, beside women and children.*

A wonderful evening that must have been. Just as the sun’s slanting rays would fall upon the mighty mass of people, Jesus Christ, the sun of righteousness, was scattering his beams of mercy over them at the same time. To him it is nothing to feed five thousand — nothing to do it with five loaves. Where he is present

we may expect wonders, unless indeed our unbelief should hamper him, for sometimes it is too sadly true he could not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief. O my soul, chide thyself if thou hast ever thus hampered the hands of Christ.

22, 23. *And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away. And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray.*

It was a very busy day that he had had. If you read the narrative for yourself you will be astonished at the number of miracles which he wrought that day, and all of them in addition to the preaching, so he must have been well worn with weariness, but he sought rather the rest and refreshment of prayer than that of sleep.

23, 24. *And when the evening was come, he was there alone. But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary.*

It did not matter however. For if his disciples be in a storm, so long as Christ is praying for them all the storms in the world are unable to sink them. They had a good protector. From the outlook of that hill his eyes, which could see through the distance, observed and regulated every breath of wind, and every wave upon the lake.

25, 26. *And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus' went unto them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit;*

“A phantom!” Having all the superstition so natural to sailors, they thought that this was something quite supernatural and boded ill to them.

26-28. *And they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer it is I, be not afraid. And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water.*

Strange impulse! It showed genuine faith mixed with that imperfection and presumption which was so common a feature in Peter's character.

However, his master admired the confidence.

29, 30. *And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw*

the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me.

When he began to be afraid he began to sink. As long as his confidence in his Master lasted he could walk the waves.

31-33. *And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased. Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, of a truth thou art the Son of God.*

Well might they worship, for they had seen abundant proof of his deity. They worshipped him, saying, "of a truth thou art the Son of God." They could not have meant by this, "Thou art a superior person, an excellent character." They would not, if they were Jews, have worshipped a mere man; for of all things you ever saw in this life, you never saw a Jew that would worship any form that was visible to the eye. The captivity of Babylon delivered the Hebrew race from idolatry altogether. They may fall into superstition of another sort, but never into idolatry. Mark that. There has not been since that time a man of Jewish race who would have worshipped Christ if he had not believed him to be God.

MATTHEW 14:22-33

22. *And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away.*

Straightway is a business word: Jesus loses no time. No sooner is the banquet over than he sends off the guests to their homes. While they are well fed he bids them make the best of their way home. He who made the multitude sit down was able also to send the multitude away, but they needed sending, for they were loth to go. The sea must be crossed again, or Jesus cannot find seclusion. How he must run the gauntlet to get a little rest! Before he starts again across the sea, he performs another act of self-denial; for he cannot leave till he sees the crowd happily dispersed. He attends to that business himself giving the disciples the opportunity to depart in peace. As the captain is the last to leave the ship, so is the Lord the last to leave the scene of labour. The disciples would have chosen to stay in his company, and to enjoy the thanks of the

people; but he constrained them to get into a ship. He could not get anyone to go away from him at this time without sending and constraining. This loadstone has great attractions. He evidently promised his disciples that he would follow them; for the words are, "to go before him unto the other side." How he was to follow he did not say, but he could always find a way of keeping his appointments. How considerate of him to wait amid the throng while the disciples sailed away in peace He always takes the heavy end of the load himself.

23. *And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone.*

Now that the crowd is gone, he can take his rest, and he finds it in prayer. He went up into a mountain apart: in a place where he might speak aloud, and not be overheard or disturbed, he communed with the Father alone. This was his refreshment and his delight. He continued therein till the thickest shades of night had gathered, and the day was gone. "Alone," yet not alone, he drank in new strength as he communed with his Father. He must have revealed this private matter to the recording evangelist, and surely it was with the intent that we should learn from his example. We cannot afford to be always in company, since even our blessed Lord felt that he must be alone.

24. *But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary.*

While Jesus was alone, they, in the ship, were in the same condition, but not occupied with the same spiritual exercise. When they first quitted the shore it was fair sailing in the cool of the evening; but a storm gathered hastily as night covered the sky. On the lake of Galilee the wind rushes down from the gullies between the mountains, and causes grievous peril to little boats; sometimes fairly lifting them out of the water, and anon submerging them beneath the waves. That deep lake was peculiarly dangerous for small craft. They were far from land, for they were "in the midst of the sea," equally distant from either shore. The sea was furious and their ship was "tossed with waves." The hurricane was terrible. "The wind was contrary," and would not let them go to any place which they sought. It was a whirlwind, and they were whirled about by it, but could not use it for reaching either shore. How much did their

case resemble ours when we are in sore distress! We are tossed about and can do nothing; the blast is too furious for us to bear up against it, or even to live while driven before it. One happy fact remains: Jesus is pleading on the shore though we are struggling on the sea. It is also comfortable to know that we are where he constrained us to go (See verse 22), and he has promised to come to us in due time, and therefore all must be safe, though the tempest rages terribly.

25. *And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea.*

Jesus is sure to come. The night wears on and the darkness thickens; the fourth watch of the night draws near, but where is he? Faith says, "He must come." Though he should stay away till almost break of day, he must come. Unbelief asks, "How can he come?" Ah, he will answer for himself: he can make his own way. "Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea." He comes in the teeth of the wind, and on the face of the wave. Never fear that he will fail to reach the storm-tossed barque: his love will find out the way. Whither it be to a single disciple, or to the church as a whole, Jesus will appear in his own chosen hour, and his time is sure to be the most timely.

26. *And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit, and they cried out for fear.*

Yes, the disciples saw him; saw Jesus their Lord, and derived no comfort from the sight. Poor human nature's sight is a blind thing compared with the vision of a spiritual faith. They saw, but knew not what they saw. What could it be but a phantom? How could a real man walk on those foaming billows? How could he stand in the teeth of such a hurricane? They were already at their wits' end, and the apparition put an end to their courage. We seem to hear their shriek of alarm: "they cried out for fear." We read not that "they were troubled" before: they were old sailors, and had no dread of natural forces; but a spirit — ah, that was too much of a terror. They were at their worst now, and yet, if they had known it, they were on the verge of their best. It is noteworthy that the nearer Jesus was to them, the greater was their fear. Want of discernment blinds the soul to its richest consolations. Lord, be near, and let me know thee! Let me not have to say with Jacob, "Surely God was in this place; and I knew it not!"

27. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.

He did not keep them in suspense: "Straightway Jesus spake unto them." How sweetly sounded that loving and majestic voice! Above the roar of waves and howling of winds, they heard the voice of the Lord. This was his old word also, "Be of good cheer." The most conclusive reason for courage was his own presence. "It is I; be not afraid." If Jesus be near, if the spirit of the storm be, after all, the Lord of love, all room for fear is gone. Can Jesus come to us through the storm? Then we shall weather it, and come to him. He who rules the tempest is not the devil, not chance, not a malicious enemy; but Jesus. This should end all fear.

28. And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water.

Peter must be the first to speak, he is impulsive, and besides, he was a sort of foreman in the company. The first speaker is not always the wisest man. Peter's fears have gone, all but one "if"; but that "if" was working him no good, for it seemed to challenge his Master: "Lord if it be thou." What a test to suggest: "Bid me come unto thee on the water!" What did Peter want with walking the waters? His name might have suggested that like a stone he would go to the bottom. It was an imprudent request: it was the swing of the pendulum in Peter from despair to an injudicious venturing. Surely, he wist not what he said. Yet we, too, have put our Lord to tests almost as improper. Have we not said, "If thou hast ever blessed me, give me this and that"? We, too, have had our water-walking, and have ventured where nothing but special grace could uphold us. Lord, what is man?

29. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus.

When good men are unwise and presumptuous, it may be for their lasting good to learn their folly by experience. "He said, Come." Peter's Lord is about to teach him a practical lesson. He asked to be bidden to come. He may come. He does come. He leaves the boat, he treads the wave. He is on the way towards his Lord. We can do anything if we have divine authorization, and courage enough to take the Lord at his word. Now there were two on the sea, two wonders! Which was the greater? The reader may not find it easy to reply. Let him consider.

30. *But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid, and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me.*

“But”: a sorrowful “but” for poor Peter. His eye was off his Lord and on the raging of the wind: “he saw the wind boisterous.” His heart failed him, and then his foot failed him. Down he began to go — an awful moment is this “beginning to sink”, yet it was only a “beginning,” he had time to cry to his Lord, who was not sinking. Peter cried, and was safe. His prayer was as full as it was short. He had brought his eye and his faith back to Jesus, for he cried, “Lord!” He had come into this danger through obedience, and therefore he had an appeal in the word “Lord.” Whether in danger or not, Jesus was still his Lord. He is a lost man, and he feels it, unless his Lord will save him — save him altogether, save him now. Blessed prayer: “Lord, save me.” Reader, does it not suit you? Peter was nearer his Lord when he was sinking than when he was walking. In our low estate we are often nearer to Jesus than in our more glorious seasons.

31. *And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?*

Our Lord delays not when our peril is imminent and our cry is urgent: “Immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand.” He first “caught him” and then taught him. Jesus saves first, and upbraids afterwards, when he must needs do so. When we are saved is the fit time for us to chasten ourselves for our unbelief. Let us learn from our Lord, that we may not reprove others till we have first helped them out of their difficulties. Our doubts are unreasonable: “Wherefore didst thou doubt?” If there be reason for little faith, there is evidently reason for great confidence. If it be right to trust Jesus at all, why not trust him altogether? Trust was Peter’s strength, doubt was his danger. It looked like great faith when Peter walked the water; but a little wind soon proved it to be “little faith.” Till our faith is tried, we can form no reliable estimate of it. After his Lord had taken him by the hand, Peter sank no further, but resumed the walk of faith. How easy to have faith when we are close to Jesus! Lord, when our faith fails, come thou to us, and we shall walk on the wave.

32. *And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased.*

So that Peter’s walk and his rescue had happened in the face of the tempest. He could walk the water well enough when his Lord

held his hand and so can we. What a sight! Jesus and Peter, hand in hand, walking upon the sea! The two made for the ship at once: miracles are never spun out to undue length. Was not Peter glad to leave the tumultuous element, and at the same time to perceive that the gale was over? “When they were come into the ship, the wind ceased,” it is well to be safe in a storm, but more pleasant to find the calm return and the hurricane end. How gladly did the disciples welcome their Lord, and their brother, Peter, who though wet to the skin, was a wiser man for his adventure!

33. *Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God.*

No wonder that Peter “worshipped him,” nor that his comrades did the same. The whole of the disciples, who had been thus rescued by their Lord’s coming to them on the stormy sea, were overwhelmingly convinced of his Godhead. Now they were doubly sure of it by unquestionable evidence, and in lowly reverence they expressed to him their adoring faith, saying, “Of a truth thou art the Son of God.”

MATTHEW 15

1. *Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying,*

Our Lord had been busily engaged in healing the sick, and now these pettifoggers came round about him to try and worry him. They were a kind of mosquito swarm to Christ, had he not been a perfect man they might have worried him.

2. *Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread.*

“Why do thy disciples transgress the traditions of the elders? “Generally a good man is held responsible for the acts of his followers. If they cannot find fault with Christ they will find fault with his disciples, who must have been men of admirable character when even scribes and Pharisees had no worse charge to bring than the following: “For they wash not their hands when they eat bread.” The Saviour must have been gentle, indeed, to bear with such people as these, it would have given us the fidgets to have such folks round about us. Here is he healing the sick, curing the lepers, feeding the hungry, and these people are talking about washing their hands. Oh!

how many religious people there are that are occupying their time about nothing of vital importance at all, questions of washing their hands or something of that kind.

3. *But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?*

He did not deign to answer their question, but posed them with another.

4-6. *For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; And honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition.*

They actually taught that a man might escape the happy duty of succoring his father and mother, the first duty surely of a son, by saying, “ I have dedicated so much of my goods to the Temple and the worship of God that I cannot afford it.” There as not many in these days that talk that way; they generally cannot afford to dedicate anything to the Temple because they are keeping their father and mother, they go the other way but one way or another, men will if possible escape from moral or religious duty. Now God loves not that we should bring one duty to him smeared with the blood of another, and for a man to give his money to the Temple which he ought to have given to his father and mother was a violation of the strict law of God, and could not possibly be acceptable to him. Thus they made void the law of God by their traditions.

7-9. *Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrine the commandments of men.*

Christ spoke very plainly to them, there is no dealing with hypocrites with kid gloves; these nettles must be boldly grasped, and the Saviour did so. Brethren, stick to the Scriptures in doctrine and in precept; what have you to do with modern thought, the imaginations of men, the vain thoughts of crazy brains. Hold you to God’s thoughts, which are as high above men’s thoughts as the heavens are above the earth. One word of God is worth a whole

world full of the thoughts of men, and time shall show us yet that it is so. We have but to wait, and we shall see that the thoughts of man are vanity, but the word of God abideth for ever. “ And he called the multitude”-one of the finest ways of rebuking the Pharisees and scribes-he seemed to turn his back on there gentlemen who knew so much.

10, 11. *And he called the multitude, and said unto them, Hear, and understand: Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.*

Religion stands not in meats and drinks and divers washings or anything external: it lies in the heart; it is that which comes out of the heart that is the true index of the character, not that which is done externally.

12,13. *Then came his disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying? But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up.*

They stand like a grove of trees, men take shelter under their great knowledge, but God never planted them; and therefore they shall be plucked up; and he did pluck them up without ceremony.

14. *Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.*

So you need not trouble to shove them in, you let them alone, it will come to an end. There are some forms of error which Christ may denounce, but which his disciples had better let alone, there is a ditch ready and waiting for them somewhere or other.

15-20. *Then answered Peter and said unto him, Declare unto us this parable. And Jesus said, Are ye also yet without understanding? Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart, and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.*

By-and-bye in the chapter we shall see thousands of people eating with unwashen hands, who could not have eaten at all, if it had been requisite first for them to wash their hands, for they were

in a desert place. Not but what it is well even to wash the hands and every other part of the flesh. It should be true of every Christian, "Having your bodies washed with pure water, " cleanliness should always go with godliness. But this was a mere ceremonial rite, a washing of the hands whether they wanted it or not for form's sake, and the Saviour pours contempt upon it.

21, 22. *Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.*

He made a long journey to go and meet one woman. An instance of how far you and I ought to be willing to go to save a soul. " And behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts." She came a little way but he had come a long way. Perhaps some sinner has come here today as, Christ has come too. The woman " cried unto him." Sinners and the Saviour will meet; for the sinners are seeking Him and they will perhaps meet sooner than they expect. Perhaps she meant to have gone a long journey, but he met her, and she cried unto Him, saying, Have mercy on me O Lord, Thou Son of David." She knew his Deity, " O Lord. ' She knew his humanity, " The Son of David." She knew his royalty, " The Son of David." She had but one prayer, ' Have mercy on me." That prayer suits me very well too, today; is it too humble for you? I pity you then. " Have mercy on me, O Lord, Thou Son of David." And yet her prayer was not for herself. " Have mercy on me, for my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil." Many a mother feels that the greatest mercy to herself would be salvation for her child. How we are wrapped up in these who are the offspring of our body, how we desire their salvation, how careful we should be if they are saved, how should we pray for the children of others, that God would have mercy on mothers by healing daughters. " But he answered her not a word. " You may pray, and pray acceptably, and yet not get an immediate answer.

23. *But he answered her not a word. And his disciple came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us.*

She makes too much noise. Oh! the poor disciples! " She crieth after us "That she did not, she cried after the Master, not after them. Oh! the big disciples, how large they are, and how easily troubled. " She crieth after us."

24. *But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*

My mission as a prophet is to Israel, not to the Gentiles just now.

25-27. *Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me. But he answered, and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to the dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters table.*

Splendid faith, to make it out, that to heal her daughter would be after all to Christ nothing but to give her a lot of crumbs! She thought so much of him, he was so great in her estimate that much as she valued the healing of her daughter she reckoned it to be to his royal majesty only as a bit of dog's food. Oh! splendid faith!

28. *Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.*

Write, sir, out a blank check, she may fill it in just as she likes, there is no limit to what God will give an unlimited faith. If we limit our faith, then we limit the Holy One of Israel. ‘ And Jesus departed from thence.’ He had done his business, he is always on the move but loiters never.

29, 30. *And Jesus departed from thence, and came nigh unto the sea of Galilee; and went up into a mountain, and sat down there. And great multitudes came unto him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus feet; and he healed them:*

What an assemblage and in the middle of a great hospital. What a sight for him to see all these sick people carried like so many burdens and then laid down at his feet! Cannot we today each one bring somebody? Think of somebody, some friend of yours, that is yet unsaved. Take him on your back, nay, carry him in your bosom, and bring him by faith and lay him down at Jesus' feet just now. Who shall it be? Think about it!

31-34. *Insomuch that the multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see: and they gloried the God of Israel. Then Jesus called his disciples unto him, and said, I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint*

in the way. And his disciples say unto him, Whence should we have so much bread in the wilderness, as to feed so great a multitude? And Jesus saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven, and a few little fishes.

And I daresay they thought, “We shall want all these ourselves.” It was noble on their part that they were willing to give away all they had: every bit of it, little fish and loaves and all-none too much for the company, and yet they parted with all at the Easter’s bidding.

36. *And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground.*

I think I see him rising from the place where he sat, and saying, “Now you have been standing up and you are all hungry, sit down all of you.” What a sight to see them all dropping into their places. According to Mark they fell into order by rank, by hundreds and by fifties. What a Commander-in-Chief Christ is. When he makes a banquet it is not a scramble, it is always orderly, and when there is anything very disorderly it is generally because Christ is not there, if he is there, everything seems to fit into its place.

36. *And he took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks, and brake them, and gave to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude.*

“They did all eat and were filled.” I remember a country brother putting it, “And they did all eat,” which I think is very likely; they were very hungry they did all eat, and were filled; they were ravenous, but they were not stinted.

37, 39. *And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets full. And they that did eat were four thousand men, beside women and children. And he sent away the multitude, and took ship, and came into the coasts of Magdala.*

And if the women and children bore any proportion to most congregations they would make a larger number than the men. And then comes the finish, “And he sent away the multitude.” You and I if we had done this, would have let them stop for an hour while somebody proposed and somebody else seconded a vote of thanks for this good dinner that they had had, but He fed them, and then he sent away the multitude and took ship, and came into the coasts of Magdala. May we learn Our Lord’s blessed absence of self-seeking!

This exposition consisted of readings from MATTHEW 15.; AND PSALM 42.

MATTHEW 15:1-12

1, 2. *Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying, Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread.*

A very wonderful omission certainly, but it seems to have struck them as a very great crime. “They wash not their hands when they eat bread” — as if the commands of God were not enough, men must overload us with their own commands, and sometimes the very people who would see us break God’s commands without being at all distressed are dreadfully shocked if we do not keep theirs, showing clearly that they have a higher estimate of themselves than they have of God.

3-6. *But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; And honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition.*

The cant said, “I cannot give you any help: I have vowed to give it as a subscription to the synagogue, or to the temple; therefore, I cannot give it to you,” and if he could plead that he had given it as a gift in the form of a religious offering, he was exempted from assisting his own parents. “Well,” said Christ, “ye do by this make the commandment of God of none effect.” “Ye hypocrites “ — -our Saviour is the, most gentle of men, but how plainly does he talk, and how honestly does he denounce everything like hypocrisy.

7-9. *Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.*

Now, may God save us from these two faults. The first is that of being content with the outside worship of God. Unless our very hearts worship, there is nothing whatever in the outward performance of religious rites or religious worship; indeed, it is hypocrisy to draw near to God with the lip and knee when the heart is not there. The next evil to be dreaded is teaching for doctrines the

commandments of men. Whatever is not plainly taught in Scripture is of no binding force upon any conscience, and it is evil to invent rites and ceremonies which are not taught in Holy Scripture. We must mind what we are at. If we have not the plain warrant of Christ's command for our teachings and our doings, we shall rather vex the spirit of God than honour him. Whatever our intention may be, we have not any right to worship God, otherwise than according to his own mind. If we do, it will not be worship, and not acceptable with him.

10, 11. *And he called the multitude, and said unto them, Hear, and understand: Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.*

“And he called the multitude and said unto them: Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man “ — not that which he eats and drinks, “but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man “ — what he says —there is the point.

12. *Then came his disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying?*

Some very kind friends are very jealous of the preacher, lest he should offend anybody, and they will come in all tenderness of spirit and say, “Knowest thou, that the Pharisees were offended after they heard this saying?”

MATTHEW 15:1-13

1. *Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying, —*

They had taken a journey to come and attack him; perhaps they had been sent as a deputation to try to thwart the Saviour. What a vexation of spirit it must have been to his pure and holy mind to come into conflict with these triflers, these self-righteous, self-confident men? Why did they come to Christ? To plead with him for the poor people who were perishing for lack of knowledge, or to ask him how souls could be saved, and how God could be glorified? Oh, no! They came to ask the Saviour about a very different subject, —

2. *Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread.*

Would you have thought that full-grown men could have made it a matter of business to come from Jerusalem down into the country

to talk to Christ about the fact that his disciples did not always wash their hands before they ate their breakfasts? Yet we have men, nowadays, who make a great point of what is to be done with any of the so-called “consecrated” bread that is left, and who are much concerned about what kind of a dress a “priest” ought to wear when he is engaged in the performance of certain duties. How sad is it that such trifles as these should occupy the minds of immortal beings while men are dying, and God is dishonoured!

3. *But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?*

He answered their question by asking another, in which he drew the contrast between transgressing the tradition of the elders and transgressing the commandment of God.

4-6. *For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, Whoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; And honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition.*

Whatever might be said about regarding the tradition of men, God’s commandment must be regarded. That stands first, and therefore our Lord demanded of these scribes and Pharisee an answer to his charge that they had overridden and overlaid a commandment of God by a tradition of their own. If a father and mother, in great need, said to their son, “Help us, for we are wanting bread,” and he answered, “I cannot give you anything, for all I have is dedicated to God,” the Rabbis taught that he might be exempted from relieving his parents, although they also said that, the next day, he might undo the dedication of his property, and employ it exactly as he pleased. He might use the fact that he had said, “That shekel is for God,” as a reason for not giving it to his father who was in need; and then, the very next day, he might take that shekel, and spend it exactly as he chose. So God’s commandment to honour, and love, and aid our parents, was set aside by their tradition.

7-9. *Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.*

Our Lord never flattered anybody; see how honestly, and in what plain terms, he addressed these scribes and Pharisees! Yet these were the great teachers of his day, and thought themselves the bright light of the age, the very leaders of the people in all that was good. But Christ addressed them as, “Ye hypocrites,” and gave them a text of Scripture which clearly applied to them. They had all manner of outward forms of worship, they talked very much about the Bible, they studied every word of it, and even counted the letters in every chapter, but they had no regard to the real meaning of God’s Word, and their heart was not right with the Lord. The Saviour patiently talked with them, but he also sternly rebuked them, and denounced them as hypocrites.

10. *And he called the multitude,*

As much as if he had said to the scribes and Pharisees, “I cannot waste my time arguing with you; I am going to talk to these poor people who are perishing, and I shall have more hope of doing good among the multitude than among you, though you do consider yourselves the aristocracy of the church.”

10, 11. *And said unto them, Hear, and understand: Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.*

This was not very clear at first, it needed to be thought over and well considered. The Saviour dropped it into the popular mind, like a seed, and left it to grow, and develop in due season.

12. *Then came his disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying?*

The wonder was that they were not offended before. It certainly was not a matter of concern to Christ whether they were offended or not; he would not tone down the truth in order to please them.

13. *But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father not planted, shall be rooted up.*

Every teacher whom God has not sent will find his teaching contradicted by Christ. The truth is like a spade; it turns up the soil for that life to grow in it which should grow, and it is also the means of killing the weeds: “Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up.” May we all be plants of his right-hand planting! Amen.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 119:129-144; AND MATTHEW 15:1-13.

MATTHEW 15:1-20; AND 29-39

1-14. *then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying, Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread. But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? For God commanded, saying, honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me And honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition. Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. And he called the multitude, and said unto them, Hear, and understand: Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man. Then came his disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying? But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.*

Teacher and taught, Pharisee and disciple, “both shall fall into the ditch.” Great responsibility rests upon the blind leader, but not all of it; for great responsibility also attaches to the blind follower. He should not follow a blind leader, he above all others needs a leader who can see. It is a pity that the man who can see should follow a blind leader; but if a man cannot see at all, then is he doubly unwise if he has a blind leader.

15, 16. *Then answered Peter and said unto him, Declare unto us this parable. And Jesus said, Are ye also yet without understanding?*

It was not a parable, it was a plain piece of simple language that the Saviour had uttered: “not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.”

17, 18. *Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught . — But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man.*

It is not that which we eat that defileth us. If it is such food as we ought to take, it builds up the body. If it is improper food, it may injure the body, yet it is not in itself capable of being regarded as sin; but a spiritual thing, — a thought, a desire, an imagination, — comes out of the heart, and if that is evil, it does defile the man.

19. *For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies:*

What a horrible den the heart itself must be, then! If all these evils come out of it, what a nest of unclean things it must be! A dreadful sight to the all-seeing God must be an uncleansed human heart. Let me read this verse again' "for out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies." All these evils come out of the heart of man, out of such a heart as yours until it is renewed by grace. Though you sit very attentively in the house of God, unless his grace has changed your heart, all these evil things are there, and they only want an opportunity to come out. and reveal themselves.

20. *These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unclean hands defileth not a man.*

You should understand that the washing here meant was not such as you and I give our hands when we feel that we have soiled them with our labour; then, it is very proper to cleanse them. But this was a ceremonial washing which the scribes and Pharisees would have everybody give, whether his hands were clean or not, before he sat down to meat, and was a mere piece of absurdity, if not something worse. Yet they magnified it into a most important matter, and our Saviour here shows what an idle thing it was.

29-32. *And Jesus departed from thence, and came nigh unto the sea of Galilee; and went up into a mountain and sat down there. And great multitudes came unto him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet; and he healed them: Insomuch that the multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see: and they glorified the*

God of Israel. Then Jesus called his disciples unto him and said, I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way.

Was not that a most gracious utterance? “I will not send them away fasting” What confidence the disciples ought to have had that the people could be fed, and would be fed, when the Master gave that solemn promise, “I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way.”

33, 34. *And his disciples say unto him, Whence should we have so much bread in the wilderness, as to fill so great a multitude? And Jesus saith unto them, How many loaves have ye?*

That is always a good form of enquiry: “How many loaves have ye?” How much grace have you? How much gift have you? How much ability have you? Are you using it all? Have you consecrated it all to the Master’s service?

34, 35. *And they said, Seven, and a few little fishes. And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground.*

It is very wonderful that they did as he told them; they could not see anything to eat, and yet, when he bade them sit down, they obeyed him, and did so. Thus the Lord prepares men’s hearts for the reception of the Gospel. I do not doubt that, whenever we go forth faithfully to break the bread of life, the Lord makes the people sit down in readiness to receive it.

36. *And he took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks, and brake them, and gave to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude.*

Notice the order of our Lord’s action, thanksgiving first, and then the breaking of the bread. We do not always thank God for what we have already received, but the Lord here sets us the example of giving thanks for what is yet to come. For the multiplied loaves and fishes, he first gives thanks, and then passes them to his disciples to hand to the multitude.

37-39. *And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets full. And they that did eat were four thousand men, beside women and children. And he send away the multitude, and took ship, and came into the coasts of Magdala.*

MATTHEW 15. 10-31

10. *And he called the multitude, and said unto them, Hear, and understand: Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man, but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.*

True religion does not consist in meats and drinks, in feasting or in fasting.

It is not that which goes into us, but that which comes out of us, which is the main matter.

12. *Then came his disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying?*

They thought a very great deal of the opinion of the Pharisees; and they were greatly concerned because their Master had offended them. These Pharisees set themselves up as the judges of everything that was correct and proper in religion; yet Christ offended them by his plain speaking.

13. *But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up.*

The truth is often intended to be a rooter up. I have no doubt that our Lord said many things which had no other intention than the discovery of these deceitful men to themselves and others, that their baneful influence might be destroyed. Our Saviour was a true iconoclast, a great image-smasher; and these men, who were the chief icons or images of the day, had to be broken down. He therefore put the truth in the very form that would offend them.

14. *Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.*

Our Lord did not soften or tone down his previous language, but he revealed the true character of the false guides by whom so many were deluded.

15. *Then answered Peter and said unto him, Declare unto us this parable.*

“We do not understand it; what is its meaning?”

16, 17. *And Jesus said, Are ye also yet without understanding? Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught?*

And so there is an end of it.

18. *But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man.*

The main matter to be considered is the heart, not the mouth, and other parts of the body. Note how our Lord, by this great truth, puts the axe to much that looks very fair stood good, and cuts it down as worthless. If we serve God with the heart, there is the core of true religion; but if not, we may have as many ceremonial washings as there are hours in the day and days in the year, and we may be careful to avoid this article, of diet and to feed on that, to wear this garment and not to wear that, and to observe this day and not that; but all this outward religion will be of no avail whatever, if our heart is not savingly affected by the grace of God.

19-21. *For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man. Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon.*

He did not like the Pharisees well enough to stay among them. His own word concerning them was, "Let them alone;" and he did very severely let them alone: "Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon." He must not go into Tyre and Sidon, for his commission for the present was confined to Palestine, the chosen land. Do not regret this, dear friends. To have extended our Saviour's work over a greater area, would not have been really to increase it; and it was very important that, during the very short active lifetime of our Saviour, — a little more than three years, — he should confine his operations to a comparatively small district, so as to produce a permanent result there which would afterwards radiate over the whole world. So our Saviour, who knew what was best for men, confined himself within a very narrow sphere; and, my brethren and sisters, I am not sure that we are always wise when we want a great sphere. I have myself sometimes envied the man with about five hundred people to watch over, who could see them all, know them all, and enter into sympathy with them all, and so could do his work well. But, with so large a number as I have under my charge, what can one man do? And you, my brethren may increase the quantity of your acreage, and yet grow no larger crops. You may think that you will succeed better on a wider scale; but if you do not do so well in the greater field, it might have been wiser to narrow

your boundaries rather than to widen them. However, if our Lord might not go into Tyre and Sidon, he went as near to them as he could: "Jesus departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon." And if you, dear friends, think there is a limit to your sphere of usefulness, always go as near as ever you can to the limit; go up to the coasts of Tyre and Sidon.

22. *And, behold, —*

For it is a great wonder that such a person should have come to Jesus: "And, behold," —

22, 23. *A woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But he answered her not a word.*

This was another marvel, — a silent Saviour, — silent when it would have been so natural for him to speak a kind and gracious word: "He answered her not a word."

23. *And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us.*

"She crieth after us,' and it is very important that we should not be troubled." We disciples are apt to think so, especially if we get a little lifted up, and come to be apostles: "Send her away; for she crieth after us." She knew better than to cry after the disciples, it was the Master whose help she wanted. Some sinners are a great nuisance, they make so much noise in seeking Christ; and what a mercy it is that they do so! Oh, to have such troublesome people about us all day long, and all night long, too! It would be worth while to be vexed in this style. But the disciples said to Jesus, "Send her away; for she crieth after us."

24. *But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*

"Therefore, I cannot attend to her."

25, 26. *Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me. But he answered and said, It is not meet-*

"It is not comely, it is not fit," —

26. *To take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs.*

The original means, the little dogs that play with the children; they lie under the table, and pick up the crumbs that their masters

(the children) let fall. The woman caught at that expression at once

27. And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.

“I may be only a dog, and these Jews round about you are your children, but I have got in among them, and I am looking for a crumb or two as it falls from their table.” This was grand faith on her part, and it was speedily rewarded.

28-31. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour. And Jesus departed from thence, and came nigh unto the sea of Galilee; and went up into a mountain, and sat down there. And great multitudes came unto him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet; and he healed them: insomuch that the multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see: and they glorified the God of Israel.

The Saviour appears to have gone this journey on purpose to bless this woman and her daughter; and, having wrought the miracle, he went where great multitudes came to him, bringing their sick folk to be healed, and the result was: “They glorified the God of Israel.” There may be some poor soul here in as great distress as this woman was; if so, may that one get a blessing; and then may the blessing spread through all the neighborhood till multitudes are saved!

MATTHEW 15:13-28

13. But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up.

He had not any peculiar tenderness towards them, they were no plants of his Father's planting: they deserved to be rooted up, and their teaching was so utterly false that, if he had offended against it, he was glad to have done so.

14. Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.

The bad teacher and he that is badly taught, for they are both responsible, shall both fall into the ditch. No man can lay the sin of

his being misdirected entirely upon his priest or his teacher. He had no business to have submitted to him. At the same time, it is a very serious responsibility for a man who knows not God to attempt to teach the things of God. I know a man who, in a certain place of worship was deeply convinced of sin — the arrows of God stuck in him, and, being in great distress, he went to the minister and told him how he felt the burden of his guilt. The minister said to him, “My dear friend, I really had no intention of making you uneasy — what was it I said? — I will get the sermon — I am very sorry, but really I do not know anything about it.” The man said, “You told us we must be born again.” “Oh!”, said the minister, “that was done for you when a child — your parents did it.” “You know sir, we must be converted.” “Well, really I do not understand it. I am afraid I have disturbed you unnecessarily.” Our friend, however, was not to be put off so; he sought and found a Saviour. But how dreadful a thing it is when the blind lead the blind: they shall both fall into the ditch.

15. *Then answered Peter and said unto him Declare unto us this parable.*

And Jesus said Are ye also yet without understanding? Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly and is cast out into the draught? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man. There is no defilement about that. Cleanliness is to be observed, but not the mere act of washing just for the sake of it, every time you eat bread, which defiles not a man; but oh! what defilement there is in evil thought, In anger which breeds murder, in lust which leads to adultery and fornication, in covetousness which begets theft, and in a false heart which leads to false witness, and in a profane mind which leads to blasphemy. Oh! that God would cleanse our secret thoughts, the very center of our hearts, for until the fountain is made clean, the stream that comes from it cannot be pure.

21, 22. *Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same*

coasts and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me O Lord, thou son of David: my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.

“But he answered her not a word.” How painful that silence must have been! In what suspense she was.

23. *But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away: for she crieth after us.*

They were under a mistake. She did not cry after them: she knew better than that: she cried after the Lord, after the great Son of David, not after them, but, however, she disturbed them.

24. *But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*

Christ’s personal ministry was confined to the Jews. He came as a Saviour to redeem all mankind, but as a preacher he was a minister to the circumcision, and he came to speak only to Israel.

25. *Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me.*

Her prayer got shorter, and she grew more intense, more energetic, more determined to win the blessing. “Lord help me.”

26-28. *But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children’s bread, and to cast it to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.*

Oh! can you exercise a like faith in Christ? If so you shall get a like blessing. Only believe in him, only make up your mind, and, however great the mercy, it cannot be too great for him to give, and believe that he will give it, rest on him to bestow it, and you shall have it. God grant that many may receive it at this very hour.

This exposition consisted of readings from MATTHEW 13:1-23: 15:13-28. 1 CORINTHIANS 3:17-23.

MATTHEW 15:18-31

18-21. *But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: these are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man. Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon.*

He went right away, not because he was afraid to speak the truth, but because, having done so, he did not care to remain in the company of those who were round about him. He would rather go even to the verge of heathendom than live in the midst of Pharisaic hypocrisy: "Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon."

22. *And, behold,* —

There is something here that is worth beholding, so the Holy Ghost draws attention to it, just as we sometimes print N.B., Nota bene; mark well;

"behold," —

22. *A woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts,*

Possibly she did not know that Christ had come; but, anyhow, when Christ comes, sinners come. He journeyed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, and this woman met him.

22, 23. *And cried unto him, saying, 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. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us.*

Perhaps they meant, "Give her the blessing, and let her go. Thou art seeking quiet here, and she will not let thee, nor us either, have any. 'Send her away.'" They made a great mistake when they said, "She crieth after us." It was Christ to whom she cried, not his disciples.

24. *But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*

"My ministerial commission is only to the Jews." As a Saviour, he comes to save sinners, out of all nations; but as the Messiah, his special mission was to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

25. *Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me.*

"Then came she, and worshipped him." If Jesus Christ was not really and truly God, he was a base imposter to allow this woman to worship him. She had called him "Lord," once before, and he did not rebuke her, and now she not only calls him "Lord," but she worships him. She was doing quite right, for he is none other than very God of very God: "Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me."

26. *But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs.*

Or, "to little dogs," for the word is, in that form in the Greek.

27. *And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.*

It was well for her that the Master had used that diminutive form of the word, for the bigger dogs in the East were not permitted in the house, but the little dogs were admitted to play with the children. She seemed to snatch at that idea as she cried, "Truth, Lord: yet the little dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table," as though the greatest possible boon to her was, but a crumb to him, and but a crumb compared with the bread which he was putting upon the table of Israel. The greater blessing which he was giving to the children might prompt him to give a crumb to her.

28. *Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.*

Oh, the triumph of faith! God grant it to us! Yet this woman may surely shame many of us; we have not half her discouragements, and we have not half her confidence in Christ.

29. *And Jesus departed from thence,*

He is always on the move, for he has always something else to do. As soon as his deed of grace is done in one part, he hastens to another: "And Jesus departed from thence," —

29-31. *And came nigh unto the sea of Galilee; and went up into a mountain, and sat down there. And great multitudes came unto him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet; and he healed them: insomuch that the multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see: and they glorified the God of Israel.*

This was Israel's table indeed; and when you see these many mighty cures that Christ wrought, you can easily justify the speech of the Syrophenician woman, and agree with her that what she sought was only a crumb compared with the bountiful feast of fat things that was prepared for the favored nation.

MATTHEW 15:21-28

21. *Then Jesus went thence,*

He was glad to get away from the scribes and Pharisees, who had been disputing about such trifles as the washing of his disciples' hands; he was tired of the murmuring of these cantankerous, frivolous triflers.

21. *And departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon.*

He felt that he would rather be with "sinners of the Gentiles" than with these Ritualistic and hypocritical Hebrews. He will get as far away from them as he well can he will go even to the heathen, for among them he will be able to do his real business, and not be trifled with.

22. *And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts,*

When sinners come to Christ, it is because Christ comes to them. Notice the two statements, how they coincide. Jesus "departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon," and this "woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts," and so they met. Oh, that there might be such a meeting here tonight, between someone who has come from a long distance to meet Christ, and Christ who has come on purpose to meet that person!

22. *And cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.*

The devil had extraordinary power at that time, so that he possessed the bodies and minds of men. I am not certain that there are not instances of Satan's possession even now amongst us; there are cases that look very much like it, but in the Saviour's day there were evidently singular and remarkable possessions of men and women by Satan. This poor mother says, "My daughter is grievously vexed with a devil."

23. *But he answered her not a word.*

Has the Saviour become deaf and dumb? Will he not hear a suppliant cry? He heard her, but he said nothing.

23. *And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us.*

"She is a stranger, and, as far as we can judge, she means to hang on until she gets what she wants. If thou wilt not give it to her, bid her begone, for she crieth after us." One thing I notice that they said, which was not true, "She crieth after us." Not she! She never

cried after them she was crying after Christ, she would have pleaded in vain if she had cried after them, for all they had to say was, "Send her away." A very different result came from her crying unto the Lord.

24. *But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*

As a Preacher and a Teacher, Christ came to administer to the circumcision, the Jews, the seed of Israel. He did not go about among the nations, it was his work to be a witness to the Jews. As a Preacher, he must begin somewhere, and he chose to begin with them. "I am not sent," said he; therefore, how could he go if he was not sent? Our Saviour had a greater regard to the sending of the Father than some preachers have, for they run before they are sent, sometimes they run when they are never sent at all; but, as Paul asked, "How shall they preach, except they be sent?"

25. *Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me.*

She takes a humbler attitude than she had at first assumed. She comes closer, and she is more earnest and personal in her pleading than she had been: "Lord help me." Her prayer is shorter than it was at first; and I think that, when prayers grow shorter, they grow stronger. There is often more proof of earnestness in a short prayer than there is in a long one; glibness of speech is not prevalence in intercession.

26, 27. *But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord.*

You remember the sermon that we had upon this text not long ago. The woman did not contradict the Saviour, she did not enter into any controversy with him, but she said, "Truth, Lord." Whatever he says however black the words may look to her, she accepts them as true, and says, "Truth, Lord."

27. *Yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.*

When the children drop the crumbs then the little dogs which have been fondled by the children feed on the crumbs which fall, not from "the" master's table, but from "their masters' table" — that is, from the table of the children.

28. *Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith:*

He seems quite amazed at the woman's faith, but he admires it, and exclaimed, "O woman, great is thy faith."

28. *Be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter made whole from that very hour.*

It was as she wished, and she went home to glorify the Christ, and to tell everybody how her prayer to him had sped.

MATTHEW 15:21-39

Jesus had been in conflict with the Scribes and Pharisees. He never liked such discussions, and though he was always victorious in every controversy, it grieved his spirit.

21. *Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon.*

He was glad to get away, and made a journey over the hills to get at as great a distance as possible from these cavillers.

22. *And behold, a woman of Canaan came.*

A Syrophenician woman, one of the old, condensed race living in Tyre and Sidon.

23. *But he answered her not a word.*

Answers to prayers may be delayed; but delays are not always denials.

Christ's silence must have been a great trial to the poor woman; but our Lord knew with whom he was dealing.

23. *And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us.*

Ah, these disciples made a grand mistake! She did not cry after them; she cried after him; but so they understood it: therefore they said, "Get rid of her; she disturbs us; when we are in the street, we can hear her cry. Send her away; for she crieth after us." Ah! Poor disciples, she was not so foolish as to cry after you; she was crying after your Master. If any here have come only to hear the preacher, they have made a great mistake; but if you have come for a word from the Master, I pray that you may be gratified.

24. *But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*

Christ did what he was sent to do; he was the Messiah, the sent One. He would not go beyond his mission, so he says, "I am sent."

He was sent as a Preacher and a Teacher, not to the Gentiles, but to Israel. He had a larger commission in reserve, and was yet to be a Saviour to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews; but for the present he was to be a Shepherd to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

25. *Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord help me.*

A very short prayer; but how much there was in it!

26, 27. *But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children’s bread, and to cast it to the dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.*

It is the faculty of faith to see in the dark. This woman spied out light in what seemed to be a very dark saying. Did Christ call her a dog? Well, dogs have their privileges when they lie under the table. Even if their master does not throw them a crumb, yet they may take that which falls from his hand. If Jesus would but allow any mercy to drop, as it were, accidentally, this woman would be content.

28, 29. *Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour. And Jesus departed from thence.*

When he had done his business, he was off. Our Lord was a great itinerant; he was always on the move/ He had come all the way to the parts of Tyre and Sidon to help one woman; and when that one woman had been attended to, he goes back again immediately to his old post by the sea of Galilee.

29, 30. *And Jesus departed from thence, and came nigh unto the sea of Galilee; and went up into a mountain, and sat down there. And great multitudes came unto him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus’ feet; and he healed them.*

In the prayer-meeting, held by the deacons and elders this morning, before I came in here, one of our friends observed in prayer that there might be many lame, blind, and maimed in the congregation, and he prayed that they might be brought to Jesus. Let us, by faith, bring them to him, and lay them at his feet. Oh, that this word, “He healed them,” might be true again today!

31. *Insomuch that the multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be made whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see: and they glorified the God of Israel.*

Oh, for glory to God! There is no glory to god which equals that which comes from blind eyes which have been made to see; and from dumb lips which have been made to speak. The glories of nature and providence are eclipsed by the glories of grace. May we see such things today.

32. *Then Jesus called his disciples unto him, and said, I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way.*

Ah, dear friends, they were willing to put up with inconvenience to hear the gospel in those days! Three days of sermon-hearing! People want sermons wonderfully short now, and the sermons must be marvelously interesting, too, or else the people grow dreadfully tired. If dinner-time came around, the dinner-bell, at any time, in these days, would drown all the attraction of the pulpit. But here were people that attended Christ's ministry for three days, and they had nothing to eat. He had compassion upon them, and said to his disciples, "I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way."

33, 34. *And his disciples say unto him, Whence should we have so much bread in the wilderness, as to fill so great a multitude? And Jesus saith unto them, How many loaves have ye?*

That is the point. It is idle to enquire about how much you want. "How many loaves have ye?"

34, 35. *And they said, Seven, and a few little fishes. And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground.*

It was a token of Christ's presence and power that they were willing to sit down on the ground. Think of thousands of people taking their places in an orderly way to feed upon seven cakes and a few little fishes! Without any demur, the crowd arranged itself into banquet order at the command of Jesus.

36, 37. *And he took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks, and brake them, and gave to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude. And they did all eat, and were filled; and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets full.*

They were large baskets, too; not like the small food-baskets mentioned when the five thousand were fed. The word used here is

the same word that is employed to describe the basket in which Saul was let down by the wall of Damascus.

38. *And they that did eat were four thousand men, beside women and children.*

Now, if the women and children bore the same proportion to the men as they generally do in our congregation, there must have been a very large crowd indeed. Why is the number of the women and children not mentioned? Was it because there were so many? Or was it because their appetites being smaller than the appetites of men, the men are put down as the great eaters, and the women and children, as it were, thrown into the count? What a mercy it is that the Lord adds to the church daily a vast number of men, women, and children! The Lord sends us many more, until we cannot count them!

39. *And he sent away the multitude, and took ship, and came into the coasts of Magdala.*

He had taught the people, and fed them; so now he goes elsewhere to carry similar blessings to others also.

MATTHEW 16:21-23

21. *From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.*

He had previously spoken somewhat darkly concerning his death; but it was so sad and so strange a revelation to his disciples that they could not think he really meant quite what he said. But now he began definitely and plainly to tell them about the future, and even to enter into details concerning his death and resurrection. He knew all that the work of redemption would involve for him; he had counted the cost; but—

“When the Saviour knew The price of pardon was his blood,
His pity ne'er withdrew.”

It must have been very saddening, but, at the same time, very profitable to the minds of the apostles to be led by their Lord in this direction.

22. *Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.*

The margin reads, “Pity thyself, Lord,” as though Peter meant to say, “God grant, of his infinite mercy, that this may not be true! How can it be that such an one as thou art should die?” He probably thought that Christ’s death would be the end of his kingdom, the ruin of all his people’s hopes, the quenching of the light of Israel; so, in his zeal for his Master’s cause, he cried, “This shall not be unto thee.”

23. *But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.*

Notice the contrast between the 18th verse and the 23rd. In the 18th verse, Christ had said, “Thou art Peter, and upon this rock will I build my church;” and here he is saying, “Get thee behind me, Satan.” I do not understand our Lord to have called Peter Satan, but to have looked right through Peter, and to have seen Satan standing behind him, and making use of the apostle to be his spokesman. The best of men may sometimes serve the devil’s turn better than a bad man would. He may speak, through those who love the Lord, words which are clean contrary to the mind of Christ. So Christ sees Satan lurking, as in an entrenchment, behind Peter, and he says, “Get thee behind me: thou art an offence unto me.” The idea of pitying himself—the thought of shirking the task upon which he had entered—was offensive to him. There was a savor about it of the things of men,—of self and of self-saving, instead of self-denial, and generous, disinterested, Godlike self-sacrifice. Oh, that we would always speak, as Christ did on this occasion, whenever anything is proposed to us by which we should avoid the cross that he intends us to carry! When anyone wants us to moderate our zeal, or to tone down our opinions, less we should have to suffer for our faithfulness, let us reply, “Get thee behind me, Satan.” What has a soldier of the cross to do with avoiding the battle with evil? He should be ever ready for the good fight of faith. What has an heir of heaven to do with the saving of himself? Let him say, with the apostle Paul, “I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.”

This exposition consisted of readings from ISAIAH 40.; AND MATTHEW 16:21-23.

MATTHEW 16:24-28

24, 25. *Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.*

This is the law of self-sacrifice, based on the sacrifice of Christ, and leading up to the complete sacrifice of the redeemed. We are not our own; we are bought with a price. To try to keep ourselves to ourselves, would be acting contrary to the whole spirit of the redemption which Christ has wrought for us; and that is the last thing that any Christian should think of doing.

26-28. *For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works. Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.*

By which, I suppose he meant that they should see him in his majesty; —that, notwithstanding the cross, they should see something of his crown of glory, as they did when they beheld him after his resurrection, and as they did, even better, when he ascended on high; and as they did, some of them, in vision, when they saw him standing at the right hand of God, even the Father.

This exposition consisted of readings from MATTHEW 16:24-28; AND 17:1-13.

MATTHEW 17:1-5

1, 2. *And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.*

Were these “six days” a week’s quiet interval, in which our Lord prepared himself for the singular transaction upon the “mountain apart”? Did the little company of three know from one Sabbath to another that such an amazing joy awaited them? The three were elect out of the elect, and favored to see what none else in all the world might behold. Doubt—less our Lord had reasons for his choice, as he has for every choice he makes; but he does not unveil

them to us. The same three beheld the agony in the garden; perhaps the first sight was necessary to sustain their faith under the second. The name of the “high mountain” can never be known; for those who knew the locality have left no information. Tabor, if you please; Hermon, if you prefer it. No one can decide. It was a lone and lofty hill. While in prayer, the splendor of the Lord shone out. His face, lit up with its own inner glory, became a sun; and all his dress, like clouds irradiated by that sun, became white as the light itself. “He was transfigured before them;” he alone was the center of what they saw. It was a marvellous unveiling of the hidden nature of the Lord Jesus. Then was, in one way, fulfilled the word of John: “The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory.” The transfiguration occurred but once: special views of the glory of Christ are not enjoyed every day. Our highest joy on earth is to see Jesus. There can be no greater bliss in heaven; but we shall be better able to endure the exceeding bliss when we have laid aside the burden of this flesh.

3. *And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him.*

Thus the Law and the Prophets, “Moses and Elias,” communed with our Lord, “talking with him,” and entering into familiar conversation with their Lord. Saints long departed still live; live in their personality; are known by their names; and enjoy near access to Christ. It is a great joy to holy ones to be with Jesus: they find it heaven to be where they can talk with him. The heads of former dispensations conversed with the Lord as to his decease, by which a new economy would be ushered in. After condescending so long to his ignorant followers, it must have been a great relief to the human soul of Jesus to talk with two master-minds like those of Moses and Elijah. What a sight for the apostles, this glorious trio! They “appeared unto them,” but they “talked with him;” the object of the two holy ones was not to converse with apostles, but with their Master.

Although saints are seen of men, their fellowship is with Jesus

4. *Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here; if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.*

The sight spoke to the three beholders, and they felt bound to answer to it. Peter must speak: “Then answered Peter.” That which

is upper—most comes out: “Lord, it is good for us to be here.” Everybody was of his opinion. Who would not have, been? Because it was so good, he would fain stay in this beatific state, and get still more good from it. But he has not lost his reverence, and therefore he would have the great ones sheltered suitably. He submits the proposal to Jesus: “If thou wilt.” He offers that, with his brethren, he will plan and build shrines for the three holy ones: “Let us make here three tabernacles.” He does not propose to build for himself, and James, and John; but he says, “One for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.” His talk sounds rather like that of a bewildered child. He wanders a little; yet his expression is a most natural one. Who would not wish to abide in such society as this? Moses, and Elias, and Jesus: what company! But yet how unpractical is Peter! How selfish the one thought, “It is good for us”! What was to be done for the rest of the twelve, and for the other disciples, and for the wide, wide world? A sip of such bliss might be good for the three, but to continue to drink thereof might not have been really good even for them. Peter knew not what he said. The like might be said of many another excited utterance of enthusiastic saints.

5. While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.

“While he yet spake.” Such wild talk might well be interrupted. What a blessed interruption! We may often thank the Lord for stopping our babbling. “A bright cloud overshadowed them.” It was bright, and cast a shadow. They felt that they were entering it, and feared as they did so. It was a singular experience; yet we have had it repeated in our own cases. Do we not know what it is to get shadow out of brightness, and “a voice out of the cloud”? This is after the frequent manner of the Lord in dealing with his favored ones. The voice was clear and distinct. First came the divine attestation of the Sonship of our Lord, “This is my beloved Son,” and the Father’s declaration of delight in him, “in whom I am well pleased.” What happiness for us that Jehovah is well pleased in Christ, and with all who are in him! Then followed the consequent divine requirement, “Hear ye him.” It is better to hear the Son of God than to see saints, or to build tabernacles. This will please the Father more than all else that love can suggest. The good pleasure of the Father in the Lord Jesus is a conspicuous part of his glory. The

voice conveyed to the ear a greater glory than the luster of light could communicate through the eye. The audible part of the transfiguration was as wonderful as the visible.

MATTHEW 17:1-13

1. *And after six days* —

Luke says, “about an eight days after these sayings;” but I suppose he counted the day before and the day after. “After six days,” — and the first day was, probably, the first day of the week, so he was now coming to another Lord’s day. One of the high Christian festivals of the life of Christ was about to be celebrated. Jesus was not yet dead, therefore it was not the resurrection that was celebrated on that day, but the transfiguration. “After six days,” — six days’ teaching concerning the cross before he revealed his glory. Dear brethren, there are many in these days who delight to speak almost exclusively about the glory of the second advent. Now, God forbid that we should be silent concerning that great theme! But I think our teaching concerning it must be given after six days’ consideration of the sufferings of Christ. Let those who will say, “We preach Christ glorified;” I mean still to say, with Paul, “But we preach Christ crucified.” When I have had my six days for that topic, then am I right glad to have another day to speak concerning Christ’s glory. We must never forget his death; all our immortal hopes are centered in the death of our great Substitute. “After six days” —

1, 2. *Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up unto an high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.*

“White and glistening,” says Luke; “exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them,” says Mark.

3. *And, behold,* —

As if this was a great wonder. The transfiguration of Christ could scarcely be called miraculous, for it is according to the nature of Christ that his face should shine, and his very raiment become glorious.

3. *There appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him.*

Moses, the great representative of the law, and Elias, the chief of the prophets, — one who had died, and one who had entered heaven without dying, — thus representing both the quick and the dead.

4. *Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.*

If Peter had known that hymn by Dr. Watts, —

“My willing soul would stay In such a frame as this,
And sit and sing herself away To everlasting bliss;” —

he would have thought it appropriate to sing at that moment; and whenever we get up on the mount, we have no desire to go down again. Our one thought is, “Oh, that this happy experience would last! Oh, that we might keep in this blessed company for ever!” Yet our highest religious excitements cannot continue, even as the sea is not always at flood tide. The talk between those three — Jesus, and Moses, and Elias, — must have been well worth hearing. I would like to have been one of the three untransfigured, unglorified apostles, to listen to the conversation of the three glorified ones. We know what they talked about, for Luke tells us that they “spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem;” and it is very singular that the Greek word which he used to describe Christ’s decease is the word “exodus.” They “spake of his exodus which he should accomplish at Jerusalem.” Moses knew all about the exodus out of Egypt; and what a type that was of Christ’s departure out of this world; —the death of the lamb, — the sprinkling of the blood, — the slaying of the firstborn among the Egyptians, even as Christ smote sin, death, and hell; —the triumphant coming out of Israel, with silver and gold, setting forth Christ’s ascension to his Father with all his precious treasures captured from the hand of the enemy. How changed must the feelings of Elias have been since the day when he said, “I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away;” for now he was seeing the King in his glory, and talking with him about his approaching departure. How did Peter, and James, and John know that these two men were Moses and Elias? They had never seen them in the flesh, yet they evidently recognized them; so, as they knew people whom they had not known on earth, I am sure that I shall know in heaven those whom I did know here; I shall have the advantage of them in that respect. I suppose they said to one another, as soon as they saw these men, “That is Moses, and

that is Elijah;” yet they had never seen them; and shall not we, when we meet our dear kindred and friends, say at once, “That is So-and-so, with whom I took sweet counsel on earth when we walked to the house of God in company”? Surely, the mutual recognition of the saints hardly needs a better support than this passage supplies.

5. *While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them:*

The Shekinah cloud, which was the type of the divine presence in the wilderness, — bright, yet a cloud, softening the excessive glory of the face of Jesus with its overshadowing, yet casting no dimness upon it: “a bright cloud overshadowed them.”

5, 6. *And behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him. And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid.*

We cannot bear for God to come too near us; for we are such frail earthen vessels that, if he reveals his glory too much within us, we are ready to break.

7. *And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid.*

Ay, it was Jesus only who could give them comfort; and I have to say, —

“Till God in human flesh I see,
My thoughts no comfort find;
The holy, just, and sacred
Three Are terrors to my mind.
“But if Immanuel’s face appear,
My hope, my joy, begins;
His name forbids my slavish fear,
His grace removes my sins.”

The hand of a man touched the apostles, and the voice of a man said to them, “Arise, and be not afraid.”

8. *And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only.*

And they did not want any other man “save Jesus only.” Let Moses, and Elijah, and all others go, so long as Christ remains. There will be the most blessed company for us so long as he abides with us.

9, 10. *And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead. And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come?*

“May we not tell the story, of what has happened on this mountain? Elias has come. If we publish this news, it may convince even the scribes that thou art the Messiah.”

11, 12. *And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them.*

How he comes back to that point! Evidently the chief thought in our Saviour’s mind was concerning his suffering. On another occasion, he said, “I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!” As the magnetic needle ever points to the pole, so did the heart of Jesus ever point to the cross.

13. *Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist.*

John had indeed come “in the spirit and power of Elias,” yet Herod had put him to death, as other wicked men would deal with his Lord and Master whose way he so gloriously prepared.

This exposition consisted of readings from MATTHEW 16:24-28; AND 17:1-13.

MATTHEW 18:1-22

1. *At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?*

The question we have sometimes heard asked in other forms, “Which is the highest office; which form of service shall have the greatest honour?” As if we were courtiers and were to take our positions according to precedent.

2. *And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them.*

They all wondered what he was going to do. The little child was no doubt pleased to find itself in such happy company.

3. *And said, Verily I say unto you,*

“And said Verily I say unto you” — to you, men or women, who think no small things of yourselves, and are wanting to know which

is greatest, implying that you, each one, think yourself pretty good as it is.

3. *Except ye converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.*

Someone said to me this morning, “This is a growing day.” “Ah!” I said, “I hope we shall all grow spiritually.” “Which way?” said he; “smaller or larger?” Let it be smaller, brethren that will be the surest way of growth certainly. If we can become much less today, we shall be growing. We have grown up, as we call it, let us grow down today, and become as little children, or else we shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

4. *Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*

The lower down, the higher up. In a certain sense the way to heaven is downward in our own esteem certainly. “He must increase; I must decrease.” And when that straight-backed letter “I,” which often becomes so prominent, vanishes altogether, till there is not an iota of it left, then we shall become like our Lord.

5. *And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me.*

The humblest and the least in the family of divine love, if received brings with that reception the same blessing as the reception of Christ.

6. *But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me,*

It does not mean put him out of temper by his taking his silly offence but shall cause him to sin, shall make him stumble, shall scandalize him —whosoever shall do that.

6. *It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.*

If you have the revised version, you will see in the margin that it is an ass millstone — not a common millstone, which women used to turn, but a bigger stone, which was turned by an ass, in a mill which thus was of a larger kind altogether. The very heaviest conceivable doom were better than to be a stumbling block in the way of the very least of God’s people. Yet I have known some say “Well, the thing is lawful, and if a weak brother does not like it, I cannot help it, he should not be weak.” No, my dear brother, but that

is not the way Christ would have you talk. You must consider the weakness of your brother; all things may be lawful to you, but all things are not expedient, and if meat make your brother to offend, eat no meat while the world standeth. Remember, we must, after all, measure the pace which the flock can travel by the weakest in the flock, or else we shall have to leave behind us many of the sheep of Christ. The pace at which a company must go, must depend upon how fast the weak and the sick can travel — is it not so? — unless we are willing to part company with them, which I trust we are not willing to do. So let us take care that we cause not even the weakest to stumble by anything that we can do without harm to ourselves, but which would bring harm to them. Then I am not sure if it would harm the weakest, whether it would not harm us also, because we are not as strong as we think we are; and, perhaps, if we took a better measure, we might put ourselves among the weakest, too.

7, 8. Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh! Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee:

Get rid of that which is most useful to you, most necessary to you, rather than be led astray by it, and made to sin — for

8. It is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire.

Remember that is the word of Jesus — “everlasting fire” — not the word of some of those coarse, cruel theologians that you hear a great deal about now-a-days, but the word of Jesus Christ, the Master himself. You cannot be more tender than he; to pretend to be so, with only prove us to be very foolish.

9. And if thine eye offend thee,

So needful to thy pleasure, and to thy knowledge, and to thy guidance yet if it make thee sin,

9. Pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hellfire.

Better to be but a maimed believer than to be an accomplished unbeliever; better to be an uncultured saint than a cultured modern thinker; better that thou lose an eye, or lose a hand, than lose thy

faith in God and his word, and so lose thy soul and be cast into hell fire.

10. *Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones;*

So apt to do so, when a man appears to have no perfect knowledge, no large pretensions, we are so apt to think, "Oh! he is a nobody."

10. *For I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.*

There is an angel to watch over each child of God; the heirs of heaven have those holy spirits to keep watch and ward over them. These sacred intelligences, who watch over the people of God, do at the same time behold God's face. They do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word, and beholding his face all the while. And if these little ones are thus honourably attended by the angels of God, never despise them. They may be dressed in fustian, they may wear the very poorest of print, but they are attended like princes; therefore, treat them as such.

11. *For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.*

Another reason why you must not despise them. "How think ye?" Put on your considering cap, and think a minute.

12-14. *How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray? And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.*

Nor shall they. Christ has come on purpose that He may send them out, and find them out he will; and having an hundred, whom his Father gave him, he will not be satisfied with ninety-and-nine, but the whole hundred shall be there. Now, as if to show us that we are not to despise the very least in the family, nor even the most erring, he brings it personally home to us.

15. *Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.*

Do not say, "You must come to me." Go to him; he has trespassed against you, it is a personal affair; go and seek him out. It

is useless to expect the person who does the injury to try and make peace. It is the injured one who always has to forgive, though he has nothing to be forgiven, it always comes to that, and it is the injured one who should, if he be of the mind of Christ, be the one to commence the reconciliation.

16, 17. *But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.*

Quit his company he has despised the last tribunal. Now you must leave him. Be not angry with him. Freely forgive him, but quit him.

18. *Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*

Where the church acts rightly, it has the solemn sanction of God; this lesser tribunal on earth shall have its decrease sanctioned by the great tribunal above. Hence it becomes a very serious matter, this binding and loosing which Christ has given to his Church.

19-20. *Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.*

It is not a large church, therefore, that is girded with the wonderful power of prayer, but even two or three. Christ will not have us despise one, he will not have us despise two or three. Who hath despised the day of small things? On the contrary, measure by quality, rather than by quantity, and even if the quality fail measure by love, rather than by some rule of justice that you have set up.

21. *Then came Peter to him and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?*

He thought he had opened his mouth very wide when he said that.

22. *Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Unto seventy times seven.*

I do not wonder that we read in another place that the disciples said, "Lord, increase our faith." For it needs much faith to have so much patience, and to continue still to forgive.

MATTHEW 19:13-30

All sorts of persons are invited to come to Christ, whatever their age may be. We begin here with the children.

13-15. *Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put his hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven. And he laid his hands on them, and departed thence.*

The principal difficulty of children in coming to Christ frequently lies in their friends. Their parents or their other relatives think they are too young, and discourage them. Oh, that we all had a right idea of the possibility of the conversion of little children; nay, not only of the possibility, but that we looked for it, watched for it, and encouraged young children to come to Christ! You know that, in the parable I am going to read presently, we are told that the householder "went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard." What a privilege it is to be Brought to Christ early in the morning,—that is, while we are yet children.

16. *And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?*

This was not a child, but a young man, who had come to riper years.

17-20. *And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?*

Externally, in the letter, very likely this young man had kept these commandments, and so far he was to be commended; yet internally, in their spirit, he had not kept one of them. Our Saviour did not tell him that he had failed, but he took him on his own

ground. "You say that you love your neighbor as yourself; I will give you a test to prove whether you do."

21, 22. *Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.*

See, then, that often with men—with young men—the great hindrance in coming to Christ may be the world. They may have riches, or they may have a great craving for riches; and this may stand in the way of their coming to the Saviour. If any man loves riches better than he loves Christ, he cannot be saved.

23, 24. *Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man go enter into the kingdom of God.*

Somehow or other,-

"Gold and the gospel seldom do agree,
Religion always sides with poverty;"

because a man's possessions are so liable to get into his heart. He is apt to turn them into idols, and to make devotion to them the great object of his life; as long as he does so, he cannot be saved.

25-27. *When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved? But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible. Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?*

Always too fast is this impetuous Peter; ever ready to put in a good word for himself if he can.

28, 29. *And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.*

He shall find himself a gainer by his losses for Christ's sake. If he has lost friends, he shall find better and truer friends in the

Church of God. If he has lost possessions, he shall get a spiritual wealth that shall be better to him than houses and lands.

30. *But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.*

This exposition consisted of readings from MATTHEW 19:13-30; and 20:1-16.

MATTHEW 20:1-7

1, 2. *For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard.*

The kingdom of heaven is all of grace, and so is the service connected with it. Let this be remembered in the exposition of this parable. The call to work, the ability, and the reward, are all on the principle of grace, and not upon that of merit. This was no common man that is an householder, and his going out to hire labourers into his vineyard was not after the usual manner of men, for they will have a full day's work for a full day's wage. This householder considered the labourers rather than himself. He was up before the dew was gone from the grass, and found labourers, and sent them into the vineyard. It was a choice privilege to be allowed to begin holy service so early in the morning. They agreed with the householder, and went to work on his terms. They might well be content, since they were promised a full day's hire, and were sure to get it: a penny a day represented the usual and accepted wage. The householder and the labourers agreed upon the amount; and this is the point which has to be noted further on. Young believers have a blessed prospect: they may well be happy to do good work, in a good place, for a good Master, and on good terms.

3, 4. *And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, And said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way.*

Hating indolence, and grieving that he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, he hired more workers about the third hour. They would make only three-quarters of a day; but it was for their good to cease from loafing at the street-corner. These are like persons whose childhood is past, but who are not yet old. They are favored to have a good part of their day of life available for

hallowed service. To these the good householder said, "Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you." He pointed to those already in the field, and said, "Go ye also;" and he promised them not a definite sum, as he did those whom he first hired, but he said, "Whatsoever is right I will give you." They went their way to their labour, for they did not wish to remain idlers; and as right-minded men, they could not quarrel with the householder's agreement to give them whatsoever was right. Oh, that those around us, who are in their rising manhood, would at once take up their tools, and begin to serve the great Lord!

5. Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise.

Had it been altogether and alone a business transaction, the householder would have waited to begin a new day, and would not have given a whole day's wage for a fraction of a day's work. The entire matter was alone of grace; and, therefore, when half the day was gone, about the sixth hour, he called in labourers. Men of forty and fifty are bidden to enter the vineyard. Yes, and about the ninth hour, men were engaged. At sixty, the Lord calls a number by his grace! It is wrong to assert that men are not saved after forty; we know to the contrary, and could mention instances. God in the greatness of his love calls into his service men from whom the exuberance of useful vigor has departed; he accepts the waning hours of their day. He has work for the weak as well as for the strong. He allows none to labour for him without the reward of grace, even though they have spent their best days in sin. This is no encouragement to procrastination; but it should induce old sinners to seek the Lord at once.

6, 7. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive.

The day was nearly over: only a single hour remained; yet about the eleventh hour he went out. The generous householder was willing to take on more workmen, and give them hire, though the sun was going down. He found a group lingering at the loafers' corner — standing idle. He wished to clear the whole town of sluggards, so he said to them, "Why stand ye here all the day idle?"

His question to them may be read by making each word in its turn emphatic, and then it yields a fullness of meaning. Why are ye idle? What is the good of it? Why stand ye here idle where all are busy? Why all the day idle? Will not a shorter space suffice? Why are ye idle? You have need to work, you are able to do it, and you should set about it at once. Why is any one of us remaining idle towards God? Has nothing yet had power to engage us in sacred service? Can we dare to say, "No man hath hired us"? Nearly seventy years of age, and yet unsaved! Let us bestir ourselves. It is time that we went, without delay, to hill the weeds, and prune the vines, and do something for our Lord in his vineyard. What but rich grace could lead him to take on the eleven o'clock lingerers? Yet he invites them as earnestly as those who came in the morning, and he will as surely give them their reward.

MATTHEW 20:1-16

1, 2. *For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard.*

That was the usual wage of the time, the daily pay of a Roman soldier.

3, 4. *And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, And said unto them; go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way.*

You notice that the first labourers made a bargain with the householder, he agreed with them for a penny a day, and then sent them into his vineyard. So our Lord seemed to say to Peter, "If you are going to make a bargain concerning your service, you Will not find it pay. You are saying, 'We have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?'" That spirit will not do; Christ is not to be served by hirelings. The moment the idea comes in that we deserve to have anything at his hands, we spoil all our service; and those who might be first come to be last if they once get that notion into their heads. This parable shows that it is so.

5-9. *Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others*

standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive. So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny.

This was the gift of grace, through the generosity of the employer.

10-12. *But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house, Saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day.*

See. They put forth their claim on the ground of deserving, so they had what they had bargained for, but they had no more. They were engaged first, but because they had the hireling spirit they were put last.

13-15. *But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?*

God will have us know that, in dealing with us when we are his servants, he is under no obligation to us. If he chooses to give a reward, the reward is not of debt, but of his sovereign grace. We are bound to serve him by the fact that he is our Creator, altogether apart from any reward; and we must not talk of dealing with him on terms of reward; it is too high a style for us, poor worms, to assume in the presence of Almighty God. If we do talk so, he will soon put us clown into our right place.

16. *So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.*

This exposition consisted of readings from MATTHEW 19:13-30; and 20:1-16.

MATTHEW 20:1-28

1, 2. *For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard.*

It was a fair wage. It was for fair and healthful work which they were to do in the vineyard. They were happy men to be hired so early in the morning. Never do those that serve Christ reject him; and though in this parable some are represented as finding fault with their wages, yet Christ's true servants do not so. Their only request is, "Dismiss me not thy service, Lord." They feel it to be reward enough to be permitted to go on working. Indeed, this is one way in which we get our wages during the day. If we keep one precept, God gives us grace to keep another. If we perform one duty, God gives us the privilege to perform another. So we are paid well. We work in the work. We say not "for the work," for we are unprofitable servants. Yet is there the penny a day.

3. *And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace,*

It was bad for them to be standing there. No good is learnt by idlers in idle company. Idle men together kindle a fire that burns like the flames of hell.

4, 5. *And said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way. Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise.*

Much more out of charity than out of any good that he could get from them. Especially was this manifest, when it got towards the latter end of the day. So late, so very late, it was but little they could do. Yet for their good he bade them come in.

6. *And about the eleventh hour--*

Why, then, surely the day was over. They were ready to put away their tools and go home. But--

6. *He went out, and find others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle?*

"Why?" Can you give a reason for it? Why stand ye here in the market-place, where men come together on purpose to be hired? Why stand ye here, ye able-bodied ones that still might work? Why stand ye here all the day? That ye should be idle a little while is bad

enough. Why stand ye here all the day, and why stand ye here all the day idle, when there is so much work to be done, and such a wage to receive for it?

7. They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the Vineyard; and, whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive.

And so the great householder was glad when he had emptied the marketplace of the idlers, and brought in from early morning, even till set of sun, so many that should be at work — happily at work there. I wonder whether there are any here early in the morning of life who have not yet come into the vineyard. If so, the Master calls you. Are you in middle life? Have you reached the sixth hour, and are you not enlisted in his service? Again the Master calls you. And if you have reached the eleventh hour, where are you? Decrepit — leaning on your staff — leaning downward to your grave; yet if you are not called now, now he calleth you and bids you, even at this late hour, come into the vineyard.

8, 9. So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny.

And when souls come to Christ, however late it is, they have the same joy, the same matchless, perfect peace, the same salvation even, as those who have come while yet they are young. True, they have lost many days, many hours of happy service. They have permitted the sun to decline, and have wasted much time; but yet the Master gives them the same life within them, the same adoption into the family of God, the same blessing.

10. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny.

Why, there are some of us that have now been in Christ's vineyard ever since we were boys, but we must not think that we shall receive, or can have, more than those who have just come in. I have heard people say, "Why, here are these people just lately converted, and they are singing and rejoicing; and there some of the old people that have been following the Lord for years, and do not seem to have half the joy. No, no; that is true. It is the old story of the elder brother and the prodigal, over again. But do not — do not

let us repeat that for ever and ever. Do not let us get off of the lines of free, rich, sovereign grace, and begin to think that there is some desert in us, some merit in us. Oh! my brothers, I will be glad enough to sit at the feet of the meanest child of God, if I am but to be humored in the family — glad enough to have the same salvation which the dying thief obtained, though at the last moment only he looked to Christ. Yet there is this spirit that will grow up — that some who have been longer in the work ought certainly to have more joy, more of everything, than those that have just come in. See the answer to it.

11-16. *And when they had received it, they murmured against the good-man of the house, Saying, These last have wrought but one hour. and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day. But he answered one of them. and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil. because I am good? So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.*

The great principle of election in divine sovereignty will crop up, not in one place, but in many. God will have us know that he is Master, and that in the kingdom of grace he will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and in the distribution of that grace he will give according to his own good pleasure; and the moment we begin to murmur or set up claims he answers us at once with, “Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with my own?” Yet that unevangelical spirit, that ungospel spirit of fancying that we have some Sort of claim or right will crone in, and it must be sternly repressed. It is of grace — of grace alone — of grace to begin with, of grace to go on with, of grace to close with: and human merit must not be allowed to put a single finger anywhere. “Where is boasting, then?” says the Apostle. “It is excluded.” It is shut out — the door shut in its face. It must not come in. If you and I serve God throughout a long life, we shall certainly have much greater happiness in life than those can have who come to Christ only at the last. But, as far as the gospel blessing is concerned, which Christ gives, it is the same salvation which the newly-born Christian enjoys as that which the most advanced believer is now enjoying. It is to every man the penny, hearing the King’s own impress.

17-20. *And Jesus going up to Jerusalem, took the twelve disciples apart in the way, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death. And shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him: and the third day he shall rise again. Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him.*

Then, in the most inopportune time in all the world, when Jesus was talking of being mocked and crucified, and put to death, here comes Mistress Zebedee with an ambitious request about her sons

21. *And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom.*

He is thinking of a cross, and they are dreaming of a crown. He is speaking of being mocked and put to death, and they have ideas of royalty, that they want to have the chief place in the coming kingdom. Oh! how like ourselves. Our Master thinks of how he can condescend, and we are thinking of how people ought to respect us, and treat us better than they do. Oh! the selfishness that there is in us. May our Master's example help to stay it.

22-24. *But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able. And he said unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give. but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father. And when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren*

Thus showing that they were exactly like them, "For," said they, "look at these two — these James and John — they want to have the preference over us. We will not have it." It was exactly the same spirit in each one — ambition in them all for priority of honour. Ah! dear friends, it often happens that when we are so intense in our condemnation of others, it is only because we fall into the same sin. Some, I have no doubt whatever, hate the Pope because they have the essence of popery in themselves. Two of a trade will never agree; and one man is very angry with another because he is so

angry; and one is quite indignant that another should be so proud. He is not proud. He is proud to say he is humble — he is; therein proving how proud he is. Oh! that those beams in our eyes could be got out. Then the motes in our brothers' eyes would probably no more be seen.

25-28. *But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.*

MATTHEW 20:29-34

29, 30. *And as they departed from Jericho, a great multitude followed him. And, behold, two blind men sitting by the way side when they heard that Jesus passed by, cried out, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou son of David*

On Jericho a curse had rested, but the presence of Jesus brought it a blessing. We suppose he must needs go through Jericho as once before he must needs go through Samaria. Our Lord departed from Jericho, and a vast crowd attended him; for his fame had spread far and wide. Nothing striking is noted concerning his doings till two beggars come upon the scene. Mercy needs misery to give it an occasion to work. Behold, two blind men sitting by the way side. They could not behold Jesus, but we are asked to behold them. They had taken up a hopeful position, by the way side, for there they would be likely to hear any good news, and there they would be seen by the compassionate. They had ears if they had not eyes and they used their hearing well. On enquiry, they learned that Jesus passed by, and believing that he could restore their sight, they grew earnest in prayer to him: they cried out. Their plea was pity: "Have mercy on us." Their appeal was to the royal heart of Jesus: "O Lord, thou son of David." Our Lord's sermon was interrupted by the repeated outcries of these two blind beggars of Jericho; but this never displeased him; neither would true preachers of the gospel be disconcerted if some of their hearers were to cry out with similar eagerness for salvation.

31. *And the multitude rebuked them, because they should hold their peace: but they cried the more, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou son of David.*

The crowd desired to hear Jesus, but could not do so because of the shouts of the blind men: therefore the multitude rebuked them. Did they upbraid them for ill manners, or for noise, or for harshness of tone, or for selfishly wishing to monopolize Jesus? It is always easy to find a stick when you wish to beat a dog. The people wanted them to be quiet, and hold their peace, and found plenty of arguments why they should do so. This was all very well for those who were in possession of their faculties; but men who have lost their sight cannot be quieted if there is an opportunity of obtaining sight; and as that opportunity was rapidly passing away from these poor men, they became vehement in their earnestness. Unhindered by the threats of the crowd, they cried the more. Some men are urged onward by all attempts to pull them back. When we are seeking the Lord, we shall be wise to make every hindrance into a stimulus. We may well bear rebukes and rebuffs when our great aim is to obtain mercy from Jesus. Unvarying was the blind beggars' cry: "Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David!" Variety of words they had no time to study. Having asked for what they needed, in words which leaped from their hearts, they repeated their prayer and their plea, and it was no vain repetition.

32. *And Jesus stood still, and called them, and said, What will ye that I shall do unto you?*

Jesus stood still. At the voice of prayer, the Sun of righteousness paused in his progress. Believing cries can hold the Son of God by the feet. He called them: and this because they had called him. What comfort that call yielded them! We are not told that they came to him: there is no need to tell us that. They were at his feet as soon as the words were uttered. How sadly blind are those who, being called a thousand times by the voice of mercy, yet refuse to come! Our Lord enlightened minds as well as eyes, and so he would have the blind men intelligently feel and express their needs. He puts to them the personal enquiry: "What will ye that I shall do unto you?" It was not a hard question, yet it is one which many an attendant at our places of worship would find it difficult to answer. You say you "wish to be saved": what do you mean by those words?

33. *They say unto him, Lord, that our eyes may be opened.*

Just so. They needed no time for second thoughts. Oh, that our people were as quick to pray, "Lord, that our eyes may be opened"! They went straight to the point. There is not a word to spare in their explanatory prayer. No book was wanted, no form of words, the desire clothed itself in simple, natural, earnest speech.

34. *So Jesus had compassion on them, and touched their eyes: and immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed him.*

So, that is, since they thus stated their desire, and had so great a need Jesus had compassion on them, pitying their loneliness in the dark, their deprivation of enjoyment, their loss of power to follow a handicraft, and their consequent, poverty. He touched their eyes. What hands were those which undertook such lowly fellowship with human flesh, and wrought such deeds of power! Immediately their eyes received sight. Only a touch and light entered. Time is not necessary to the cures of Jesus. Proof of their sight was at once forthcoming, for they followed him. We best use our spiritual sight when we look to Jesus, and keep close to his heel. Oh, that the reader, if he be spiritually blind, may ask for the touch of Jesus, and receive it at once, for immediately he will receive sight! An inward light will in an instant shine forth upon the soul, and the spiritual world will become apparent to the enlightened mind. The Son of David still lives, and still opens the eyes of the blind. He still hears the humble prayer of those who know their blindness and their poverty. If the reader fears that he, too, is spiritually blind, let him cry unto the Lord at this very instant, and he will see what he shall see, and he will for ever bless the hand which gave sight to the eyes of his soul.

This exposition consisted of readings from MATTHEW 9:27-35; AND 20:29-34.

MATTHEW 21:1-5

1-3. *And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come the Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples, Saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me. And if any man say aught unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them.*

The time was for our Lord to finish his great work on earth, and his going up to Jerusalem was with this intent. He now determines

to enter his capital city openly, and there to reveal himself as King. To this end, when he came near to the city, Jesus sent two disciples to bring him the foal of an ass whereon he would ride. His orders to the two disciples whom he commissioned, when they were come to Bethphage, are worthy of our serious attention. He directed them as to the place where they should find the animal: "Go into the village over against you." The Lord knows where that which he requires is to be found. Perhaps it is nearer to us than we dream: "over against you." He told them that they would not have to search: "straightway ye shall find." When the Lord sends us on an errand, he will speed us on our way. He described the condition of the creatures: "an ass tied, and a colt with her." Our Lord knows the position of every animal in the world, and he counts no circumstances to be beneath his notice. Nor did he leave the disciples without orders how they were to proceed: "loose them, and bring them." Demur and debate there would be none; they might act at once. To stand questioning is not for the messengers of our King: it is their duty to obey their Lord's orders, and to fear nothing. The two animals would be willingly yielded up by their owner when the disciples said, "The lord hath need of them;" nay, he would not only give them up, but "straightway he will send them." Either the owner was himself a secret disciple, or some awe of the Lord Jesus was on his mind, but he would right joyfully consent to lend the ass and its foal for the purpose for which they were required. What a singular conjunction of words is here, "the Lord" and "hath need"! Jesus, without laying aside his sovereignty, had taken a nature full of needs; yet, being in need, he was still the Lord, and could commend his subjects, and requisition their property. Whenever we have anything of which the Lord's cause has need, how cheerfully should we hand it over to him! The owner of the ass and her colt regarded it as an honour to furnish Jesus with a creature to ride upon. How great is the power of Jesus over human minds, as that by a word he quietly moves them to do his bidding! We have here the record of two disciples being sent to fetch an ass: those who do little things for Jesus are honoured thereby. Their errand appeared strange, for what they did might seem like robbery; but he who sent them took care to protect them from the least shade of suspicion. The messengers raised no question, offered no objection and met with no difficulty. It is ours

to do what Jesus bids us, just as he bids us, and because he bids us; for his command is our authority.

4, 5. *All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.*

Matthew is always reminding us of the Old Testament, as well, indeed, he may, for our Lord is always fulfilling it. Every point of detail is according to the prophetic model: All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet. The Old and New Testaments dovetail into each other. Men have written “Harmonies of the Gospels”; but God has given us a Harmony of the Old and New Testament. The passage referred to is in Zechariah 9:9. It represents Zion’s King as meek and lowly even in the hour of his triumphant entrance to his metropolis, riding, not upon a war-horse, but upon a young ass, whereon no man had sat. He had before said of himself, “I am meek and lowly in heart,” and now he gives one more proof of the truth of his own words; and, at the same time of the fulfillment of prophecy: “Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy king cometh unto thee, meek and sitting upon an ass.” He did not, like Solomon, fetch horses out of Egypt to minister to his pride; but he who was greater than Solomon was content with a colt the foal of an ass, and even that humble creature was borrowed, for he had none of his own. The tenderness of Jesus comes out in the fact of his having the ass brought with her foal that they might not be parted. He was, as a King, all gentleness and mercy: his grandeur involved no pain, even for the meanest living thing. How blessed is it for us to be ruled by such a King!

MATTHEW 21:23-46

23. *And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto, him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority?*

Jesus knew that these men came to him for no good purpose, mad that willing were only trying to trip him up in his speech. He was always willing to teach when men were willing to learn, but he did not care to cast his pearls before swine. Therefore, mark the holy

caution, the sacred ingenuity with which our Lord replied to these men.

24-27. *And Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one thing, which if ye tell me, I in likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him? But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet. And they answered Jesus, and said, We cannot tell. And he said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.*

He carried the war into the enemy's camp. He answered his accusers by asking them a question which they could not answer in either way without condemning themselves.

28-32. *But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work today in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him.*

Those poor fallen women and degraded tax-gatherers practically said, by their conduct, "We will not serve the Lord." Their past evil life had been a deliberate rejection of the authority of God; and yet, when John the Baptist came, they repented, and they believed. Each of them had said, like the elder son, "I will not," yet they did it. But as for these chief priests and elders, who all their lives had been outwardly serving the Lord, and Saying, "We will go and work in God's vineyard." when John came, and pointed them to God's own Son, they would not accept him. They had, just now, by refusing to tell whether the Lord's messenger was from heaven or of men, again rejected him, and proved that they had not repented. They did not believe John, they had themselves confessed that it was so; and, therefore, out of their own mouths they were condemned. I wonder whether there is any lesson in this parable to some who are here; I

should not be surprised if there is. I hope that there are some among you, who hitherto have said, "I will not go," who will repent, and go and serve your God; and, on the other hand, it is to be feared that there may be some here, who have always been saying, "I go, sir," who nevertheless have not gone, and perhaps never will go; but will remain to the last disobedient to the command of God. The Lord grant that it may not be so!

33-41. *Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country: And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise. But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him. When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen? They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen which shall render him the fruits in their seasons.*

You see at once how this parable related to the leaders of the Jewish people. From generation to generation, they scorned the prophets of God, persecuted them, and put them to death; and when our Lord himself appeared, though his glory might easily have been seen by them, yet they cast him out from among them, and put him to death. Yet, beloved friends, we must never regard the Scriptures as referring only to strangers and people of past ages; we must also look to see what bearing they have upon ourselves. The rejection of God's prophets is the sin of our common humanity; and the murder of the Son of God was the crime, not of the Jews only, 'but of the whole human race. We, too, have a share in it, for we have rejected the Son of the Highest. "But we were not there," say you. No; and yet we may have repeated that terrible tragedy in our own lives. God has sent you many messengers; and if you remain, at this moment, unconverted, you have not treated them well, else you would have

yielded your heart to God. Some of them you have rejected by your neglect, and others have been the subject of your ridicule and contempt. Against some, you have striven violently, for your own conscience has been touched, and you have had to do violence to conscience in order to reject their message. Last of all, the Son of God himself has come to you in the preaching of the gospel. You have heard of his death, and of his atoning sacrifice, but you have rejected them; and, in acting thus, you have done, as far as you could, the same as they did who crucified the Saviour. You still refuse to have him for your Saviour; you disown him as your King; you strive against his righteous sway. You tell me that you do not. Well, then, you have yielded to him, and you are saved. But if that be not the case, you still remain such an adversary of God that you reject his Son. Take care lest of you also that prophecy should become true, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons.”

42. *Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures,—*

What a question this was for our Lord to put to men who professed to have the whole of the Scriptures at their fingers ends, and to be the only qualified interpreters of them: “Did ye never read in the Scriptures,”—

42, 43. *The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head, of the corner: this is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.*

And, at this day, we Gentiles enjoy the privileges of the gospel, while poor Israel is scattered to the four winds of heaven. But he, that spared not the natural olive, will not spare the engrafted branches if we are found unfruitful. God takes the gospel away from one nation, and gives it to another; but it is not accepted by the other one, and if he has not all the glory of it ascribed to him, he will take it away from that nation, too. He may deal there with us; if England becomes and remains a drunken nation, a cruel nation, a proud nation, an unbelieving nation, a superstitious nation, and brings forth the evil fruits of the vine of Sodom, we may not expect that God will always continue his kingdom amongst us. He will say to us, as Christ said to these chief priests and elders, “The kingdom of

God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.”

44. *And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken:*

If you stumble over Christ, the chief Corner-stone of God’s building, you will be broken in pieces. If you reject him, you shall suffer serious loss.

44. *But on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.*

If you arouse the wrath of Christ, and the Rock of ages falls on you,—a huge cliff comes toppling from its lofty height upon the traveler, and crushes him past all recognition,—you will be ground to powder.

45, 46. *And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them. But when they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitude, because they took him for a prophet.*

Unhappy people, to reject him who alone could bless them, and yet to stand in fear of him whom they tried to despise! Let it not be so with any of us, but may Jesus become our Teacher, and our Friend, and our Saviour for ever, by his abounding grace! Amen.

MATTHEW 22:1-14

1-3. *And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said, The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come.*

Observe, that it was a king who made this wedding feast; therefore, to refuse to come to it when the command implied great honour to those who were bidden, was as distinct an insult as could very well be perpetrated against both the king and his son. “They would not come.” Had the one who invited them been only an ordinary person, it might not have been their duty to come, and they might even have been justified in their refusal. But this was a king, who sent his servants to summon the guests to the marriage of his son; and I bid you to take notice that the gospel marriage feast, to which you are invited, is the feast, not only of a king, but of the King of kings, your Creator, and your God; and in refusing to come, in obedience to his command, you commit an overt act of rebellion against his Divine Majesty. The king “sent forth his servants to call

them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come.” They were bidden, yet they would not come; from whence I gather that those who think the invitations of the gospel are to be restricted to certain characters, because they say it is useless to invite others, “do err, not knowing the Scriptures.” What have we to do with the apparent uselessness of what we are commanded to do? It is our duty to give the invitation according as our King directs us; but it is not our business to decide whether that invitation will be accepted or rejected. In this case, we know what happened: “They would not come.”

4. *Again he sent forth other servants,-*

Perhaps, in the kindness of his heart, he thought that the first servants, whom he sent, were somewhat offensive in their manner; and that, therefore, the guests would not come; just as it may be that some of you will never receive the gospel from one minister, for you have a prejudice against his way of putting it; so the Lord may, in the greatness of his mercy, send you his Word by the mouth of another. I am quite sure that any of us, who are the King’s servants, would be very glad for somebody else to take our place if he could succeed better with you than we can. This king, in his wisdom and kindness, “sent forth other servants,”-

4-6. Saying, Tell them, which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise: And the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them.

The great majority of those who heard the invitation, “made light of it;” and still is this the habit of the hulk of mankind, and even of many whom I am now addressing. Any day will do for you to think about Christ, so you seem to fancy. He may have your leavings; when it shall come to the last, you think that you can send for a minister to come and pray with you, and that then all will be well. You make light of it,-you make light of present mercy, of immediate reconciliation to God, you make light of the love and grace of God, and of the precious blood of Jesus. Take heed what ye are doing, for the great King in heaven regards this as high treason against himself, he looks upon it as a presumptuous attempt to lower his infinite majesty in the eyes of men. When a king has killed his

oxen and fatlings for his son's wedding feast, and there is nobody to eat the provision, then is it a dishonour to him; and if it were possible for the gospel provisions to be universally rejected, God would be dishonoured. There are some, however, who go further than merely making light of the invitation; "the remnant" who would, if they could, maltreat and slay the messengers of mercy; and, as they cannot, nowadays, kill their bodies, they try to slay their reputations. Any slander which they have heard, or any lie which they have invented, will do to tell in order to make the minister of Christ of less repute than he deserves to be.

7-10. But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests.

This is the glorious rule of the gospel still. Those who were first bidden to the great wedding feast were the Jews; they would not come, and there fore, Jerusalem was destroyed. Now the gospel is preached to all nations, and all sorts of people in all nations; yet the same sinful rejection of the invitation is constantly being repeated. You, who hear the gospel from Sunday to Sunday, are bidden by it to come to the great supper; and, as some of you will not come, God, in his infinite mercy, is sending his gospel to the poorest and the vilest of mankind. Many of them do come, and thus the Lord provokes you to jealousy by a people who were not a people; and astonishes you as you find that many come from the East, and from the West, and from the North, and from the South, and sit down in the kingdom of God, while you, who reckoned yourselves to be the children of the kingdom, because you have long been privileged to hear the gospel, shall be cast out. The king's servants "gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good." The best gathering into the visible church is sure to be a mixture; there will be some coming into it who should not be there.

11. And when the king came in to see the guests,

For whom he had provided sumptuous garments suitable for the wedding,-for, as we provide what is supposed to be appropriate

array for mourners at a funeral, so, in the East, they provide, on a much larger scale, suitable apparel for wedding guests.

11. *He saw there a man, which had not on a wedding garment:*

He might have had one, for it was provided. The fact that he had not one was as great an insult to the king as a refusal of his invitation would have been. He was not bound to provide himself with a wedding garment; he could not have done it, for he was probably one of those swept up out of the highways. But there it hung, and he was requested to put it on; but he refused, and he had the impertinence to sit there without the indispensable wedding garment. If he could not show his contempt for the king in one way, he would do so in another; and he dared, in the midst of the wedding feasters, to defy the authority of the king, and to refuse to do honour to the newly-married prince.

12. *And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless.*

He could give no reply; the king's presence awed him into silence.

13. *Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

You may manage to get into the church even though you are not converted; but if you are not trusting in Christ, you are not saved, and your false profession will only make your destruction the more terrible. Woe unto us unless we are found wearing the righteousness of Christ, - unless our lives are made holy by the gracious influence of his blessed Spirit! These are the wedding garments which we are to wear. If we have them not, our presence at the festival will not avail us in the great testing time that is coming.

14. *For many are called, but few are chosen.*

All who hear the gospel are called, but the call does not come with equal power to every heart. And with some, the power with which it comes is not that which saves; it only convinces the intellect, so that an outward homage is paid to the Word, and the inward obedience of the soul is not rendered to the Lord. God grant that each of us may have on the wedding garment when the King comes in to see the guests!

MATTHEW 23:29-39

29-31. *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchers 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.*

They talk in the same conceited manner, and they claim self-righteousness, as their fathers did; and if their ancestors killed the prophets, these men garnish their sepulchers, and so are sharers in their forefathers' deeds. How often it happens that men say they would not have done such crimes as others have committed, whereas they do not know the vileness of their own hearts. If they were under the same conditions as others, they would act in the same way. It would have been a better sign if the scribes and Pharisees had lamented before God that they themselves were not treating his prophets as they ought to be treated. How very faithful was our Master! He was very tender in spirit; but still, he spoke very severely. The old proverb says that "a good surgeon often cuts deeply," and so it was with the Lord Jesus Christ. He did not film the evil matter over, he lanced the wound. He is not the most loving who speaks the smoothest words; true love often compels an honest man to say that which pains him far more than it affects his callous hearers.

32, 33. *Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?*

This is Christ's utterance, let me remind you. Our modern preachers would not talk like this, even to scribes and Pharisees who were crucifying Christ afresh, and putting Him to an open flame. They would search the dictionary through to find very smooth and pretty words to say to Christ's enemies. We are not of their way of thinking and speaking, nor shall there be while we desire to follow in the footsteps of our Lord.

34. *Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city:*

Which they did; the servants of Christ were thus worried and harried all over the land.

35, 36. *That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation.*

So they did. The destruction of Jerusalem was more terrible than anything that the world has ever witnessed, either before or since. There must have been nearly a million and a quarter of people killed during that terrible siege, and even Titus, when he saw the awful carnage, said, "What must be the folly of this people that they drive me to such work as this? Surely, the hand of an avenging God must be in it." Truly, the blood of the martyrs slain in Jerusalem was amply avenged when the whole city became a veritable Aceldama, or field of blood.

37, 38. *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.*

What a picture of pity and disappointed love the king's face must have presented when, with flowing tears, he spoke these words! It was the utterance of the righteous Judge, choked with emotion. Jerusalem was too far gone to be rescued from its self-sought doom, and its guilt was about to culminate in the death of the Son of God.

39. *For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.*

This exposition consisted of readings from MATTHEW 23:29-39; AND 24:1-21.

MATTHEW 24:1-21

1. *And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple.*

Ah, me! the rejected king took but slight interest in the temple of which his disciples thought so much. To them the appearance was glorious; but to their Lord it was a sad sight. His Father's house,

which ought to have been a house of prayer for all nations, had become a den of thieves, and soon would be utterly destroyed.

2. And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.

And it was so. Josephus tells us that Titus at first tried to save the temple, even after it was set on fire, but his efforts were of no avail; and at last he gave orders that the whole city and temple should be leveled, except a small portion reserved for the garrison. Yet the stones of the temple were such as men very seldom see, so exceedingly great; they looked as if, once in their place, they would stand there throughout eternity, but all are gone, according to our Lord's prophecy.

3. And as he sat upon the mount of Olives,

The little procession continued ascending the Mount of Olives, until Jesus reached a resting-place from which he could see the temple.

3. The disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?

There are here two distinct questions, perhaps three. The disciples enquired first about the time of the destruction of the temple, and then about the sign of Christ's coming, and of "the consummation of the age", as it is in the margin of the Revised Version. The answers of Jesus contained much that was mysterious, and that could only be fully understood as that which he foretold actually occurred. He told his disciples some things which related to the siege of Jerusalem, some which concerned his Second Advent, and some which would immediately precede "the end of the world." When we have clearer light, we may possibly perceive that all our Saviour's predictions on this memorable occasion had some connection with all three of these great events.

4. And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you.

Jesus was always practical. The most important thing for his disciples was not that they might know when "these things" would be, but that they might be preserved from the peculiar evils of the time.

5. *For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.*

And they did. A large number of impostors came forward before the destruction of Jerusalem, giving out that they were Messiahs.

6. *And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars:*

And they did. The armies of Rome were soon after this on their way to the doomed city.

6-8. *See that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquake, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows.*

One would think that there was sorrow enough in famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places; but our Lord said that all these were only “the beginning of sorrows” — the first birth-pangs of the travail that must precede his coming, either to Jerusalem or to the whole world.

9-14. *Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name’s sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.*

But as for this destruction of Jerusalem, the Saviour gave them clear warning.

15, 16. *When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains:*

As soon as Christ’s disciples saw “the abomination of desolation”, that is, the Roman ensigns, with their idolatrous emblems, stand in the holy place, they knew that the time for them to escape had arrived, and they did “flee into the mountains.” You will say to me, perhaps, “but there were Romans there before.” Yes, the Romans were in possession, but the eagles and other idolatrous

symbols were never exhibited in Jerusalem. The Romans were often very lenient to the different people whom they subdued, and these symbols were kept out of sight until the last war came. Then wherever the Jews and Christians looked, they could see those various images of Caesar and of the Roman state which were worshipped by the soldiery, and then were the faithful to flee to the mountains. It is a remarkable fact that no Christians perished in the siege of Jerusalem; the followers of Christ fled away to the mountain city of Pella, in Perea, where they were preserved from the general destruction which overthrew the unbelieving Jews.

17, 18. *Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house: Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes.*

They were to flee in all haste the moment they saw the Roman standards,

19-21. *And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day: for then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.*

You and I would have believed that all this came true without any confirmation from outside history, but it was very remarkable that God should raise up the Jew Josephus, and put it into his mind to write a record of the siege of Jerusalem, which curdles the blood of everyone who reads it, and exactly bears out the statement of the Master that there was to be “great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world, no, nor ever shall be.”

This exposition consisted of readings from MATTHEW 23:29-39; AND 24:1-21.

MATTHEW 24:1-28

1, 2. *And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciple came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.*

The King, having finished his first discourse in the temple, left it, never to return: “Jesus went out, and departed from the temple.” His ministry there was ended. As his disciples moved away with

him towards the mount of Olives, they called his attention to the great stones of which the temple was constructed, and the costly adornments of the beautiful building. To them the appearance was glorious; but to their Lord it was a sad sight. His Father's house, which ought to have been a house of prayer for all nations, had become a den of thieves, and soon would be utterly destroyed: Jesus said unto them, "See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down." Josephus tells us that Titus at first tried to save the temple, even after it was set on fire, but his efforts were of no avail; and at last he gave orders that the whole city and temple should be leveled, except a small portion reserved for the garrison. This was so thoroughly done that the historian says that there was but nothing to make those that came thither believe it had ever been inhabited. We sometimes delight in the temporal prosperity of the Church as if it were something that must certainly endure; but all that is external will pass away or be destroyed. Let us only reckon that to be substantial which comes from God, and is God's work. The things which are seen are temporal.

3. *And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?*

The little procession continued ascending the mount of Olives until Jesus reached a resting-place from which he could see the temple (Mark 13:3). There he sat down, and the disciples came unto him privately, saying, "Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" These are the questions that have been asked in every age since our Saviour's day. There are here two distinct questions, perhaps three. The disciples enquired first about the time of the destruction of the temple, and then about the sign of Christ's coming, and of "the consummation of the age" (R.V. margin). The answers of Jesus contained much that was mysterious, and that could only be fully understood as that which he foretold actually occurred. He told his disciples some things which related to the siege of Jerusalem, some which concerned his Second Advent, and some which would immediately precede "the end of the world." When we have clearer light, we may possibly perceive that all our Saviour's predictions on

this memorable occasion had some connection with all three of these great events.

4-6. And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.

Jesus was always practical. The most important thing for his disciples was not that they might know when “these things” would be, but that they might be preserved from the peculiar evils of the time. Therefore, Jesus answered and said unto them, “Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.” They were to beware lest any of the pretended Messiahs should lead them astray, as they would pervert many others. A large number of impostors, came forward before the destruction of Jerusalem, giving out that they were the anointed of God, almost every page of history is blotted with the names of such deceivers; and in our own day we have seen some come in Christ’s name, saying that they are Christ’s. Such men seduce many; but they who heed their Lord’s warning will not be deluded by them. Our Saviour’s words, “Ye shall hear of wars, and rumors of wars,” might be applied to almost any period of the world’s history. Earth has seldom had a long spell of quiet, there have almost always been both the realities of war, and the rumors of war. There were many such ere Jerusalem was overthrown; there have been many such ever since; and there will be many such until that glorious period when “nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.” “See that ye be not troubled” is a timely message for the disciples of Christ in every age. “For all these things must come to pass,” therefore let us not be surprised or alarmed at them, “but the end is not yet.” The destruction of Jerusalem was the beginning of the end, the great type and anticipation of all that will take place when Christ shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. It was an end; but not the end: “the end is not yet.”

7, 8. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famine, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places, All these are the beginning of sorrows.

One would think that there was sorrow enough in “famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places”, but our Lord said that “all these” were only “the beginning of sorrows”, the first birth-pangs of the travail that must precede his coming, either to Jerusalem, or to the whole world. If famines, pestilences, and earthquakes are only “the beginning of sorrows”, what may we not expect the end to be? This prophecy ought both to warn the disciples of Christ what they may expect, and wean them from the world where all these and greater sorrows are to be experienced.

9. *Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake.*

Our Lord not only foretold the general trial that would come upon the Jews, and upon the world; but also the special persecution which would be the portion of his chosen followers: “Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake.” The New Testament gives abundant proof of the fulfillment of these words. Even in Paul's day, “this sect” was “everywhere spoken against.” Since then, has there been any land unstained by the blood of the martyrs? Wherever Christ's gospel has been preached, men have risen up in arms against the messengers of mercy, and afflicted and killed them wherever they could.

10. *And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another.*

This would be a bitter trial for the followers of Christ, yet this they have always had to endure. Persecution would reveal the traitors within the Church as well as the enemies without. In the midst of the chosen ones there would be found successors of Judas, who would be willing to betray the disciples as he betrayed his Lord. Saddest of all is the betrayal of good men by their own relatives; but even this they have many of them had to bear for Christ's sake.

11, 12. *And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.*

What could not be accomplished by persecutors outside the Church, and traitors inside, would be attempted by teachers of heresy: “Many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many.” They have risen in all ages; in these modern times they have risen in

clouds, till the air is thick with them, as with an army of devouring locusts. These are the men who invent new doctrines, and who seem to think that the religion of Jesus Christ is something that a man may twist into any form and shape that he pleased. Alas that such teachers should have any disciples! It is doubly sad that they should be able to lead astray “many.” Yet, when it so happens, let us remember that the King said that it would be so. Is it any wonder that, where such “iniquity abounds” and such lawlessness is multiplied, “the love of many shall wax cold”? If the teachers deceive the people, and give them “another gospel which is not another”, it is no marvel that there is a lack of love and zeal. The wonder is that there is any love and zeal left after they have been subjected to such a chilling and killing process as that adopted by the advocates of the modern “destructive criticism.” Verily, it is rightly named “destructive”, for it destroys almost everything that is worth preserving.

13. *But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall he saved.*

Again our Saviour reminded his disciples of the personal responsibility of each one of them in such a time of trial and testing as they were about to pass through. He would have them remember that it is not the man who starts in the race, but the one who runs to the goal, who wins the prize: “He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.” If this doctrine were not supplemented by another, there would be but little good tidings for poor, tempted, tried and struggling saints in such words as these. Who among us would persevere in running the heavenly race if God did not preserve us from falling, and give us persevering grace? But, blessed be his name, “the righteous shall hold on his way.” “He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.”

14. *And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.*

The world is to the Church like a scaffold to a building. When the Church is built, the scaffold will be taken down; the world must remain until the last elect one is saved: “Then shall the end come.” Before Jerusalem was destroyed, “this gospel of the kingdom” was probably “preached in all the world” so far as it was then known, but there is to be a fuller proclamation of it “for a witness unto all nations” before the great consummation of all things: “then shall the

end come,” and the King shall sit upon the throne of his glory, and decide the eternal destiny of the whole human race.

15-18. *When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet stand in the holy place, (whose readeth, let him understand;) Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains: Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take anything out of his house: Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes.*

This portion of our Saviour’s words appears to relate solely to the destruction of Jerusalem. As soon as Christ’s disciples saw “the abomination of desolation”, that is, the Roman ensigns, with their idolatrous emblems, “stand in the holy place”, they knew that the time for them to escape had arrived; and they did “flee into the mountains.” The Christians in Jerusalem and the surrounding towns and villages, “in Judaea”, availed themselves of the first opportunity for eluding the Roman armies, and fled to the mountain city of Pella, in Perea, where they were preserved from the general destruction which overthrew the Jews. There was no time to spare before the final investment of the guilty city, the man “on the housetop” could “not come down to take anything out of his house”, and the man “in the field” could not “return back to take his clothes.” They must flee to the mountains in the greatest haste the moment that they saw “Jerusalem compassed with armies” (Luke 21:20).

19-21. *And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day: For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.*

It must have been a peculiarly trying time for the women who had to flee from their homes just when they needed quiet and rest. How thoughtful and tender was our pitiful Saviour in thus sympathizing with suffering mothers in their hour of need! “Flight . . . in the winter” or “on the sabbath day” would have been attended with special difficulties; so the disciples were exhorted to “pray” that come other time might be available. The Lord knew exactly when they would be able to escape, yet he bade them pray that their flight might not be in the winter, nor on the Sabbath-day. The wise men of the present day would have said that prayer was useless under such conditions, not so the great Teacher and Example

of his praying people; he taught that such a season was the very time for special supplication. The reason for this injunction was thus stated by the Saviour: "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be." Read the record written by Josephus of the destruction of Jerusalem, and see how truly our Lord's words were fulfilled. The Jews impiously said, concerning the death of Christ, "His blood be on us, and on our children." Never did any other people invoke such an awful curse upon themselves, and upon no other nation did such a judgment ever fall. We read of Jews crucified till there was no more wood for making crosses; of thousands of the people slaying one another in their fierce faction fights within the city; of so many of them being sold for slaves that they became a drug in the market, and all but valueless, and of the fearful carnage when the Romans at length entered the doomed capital and the blood-curdling story exactly bears out the Saviour's statement uttered nearly forty years before the terrible events occurred.

22. *And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.*

These were the words of the King as well as of the Prophet, and as such, they were both authentic and authoritative. Jesus spoke of what "should be", not only as the Seer who was able to gaze into the future, but as the Sovereign Disposer of all events. He knew what a fiery trial awaited the unbelieving nation, and that "except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved." If the horrors of the siege were to continue long, the whole race of the Jews would be destroyed. The King had the power to cut short the evil days, and he explained his reason for using that power: "For the elect's sake those days shall be shortened." Those who had been hated and persecuted by their own countrymen became the means of preserving them from absolute annihilation. Thus has it often been since those days, and for the sake of his elect the Lord has withheld many judgments, and shortened others. The ungodly owe to the godly more than they know, or would care to own.

23-26. *Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before. Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold he is*

in the desert; go not forth behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not.

It is a grand thing to have such faith in Christ that you have none to spare for imposters. It is important not to distribute your faith too widely. Those who believe in a little of everything will, in the end, believe nothing of anything. If you exercise full faith in that which is sure and steadfast, “false Christs and false prophets” will not be able to make you their dupes. In one respect, the modern teachers of heresy are more successful than their Judaeen prototypes, for they do actually “deceive the very elect”, even though they cannot “shew great signs and wonders.” One of the saddest signs of the times in which we live is the ease with which “the very elect” are deceived by the smooth-tongued “false Christs and false prophets” who abound in our midst. Yet our Saviour expressly forewarned his followers against them: “Behold, I have told you before.” Forewarned is forearmed. Let it be so in our owe. Our Saviour’s expressive command may be fitly applied to the whole system of “modern thought” which is contrary to the inspired Word of God: “Believe it not.”

27. *For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.*

When HE comes, we shall know who he is, and why he has come. There will be no longer any mystery or secret about “the coming of the Son of man.” There will be no need to ad: any questions then; no one will make a mistake about his appearing when it actually takes place. “Every eye shall see him.” Christ’s coming will be sudden, startling, universally visible, and terrifying to the ungodly:” as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west.” His first coming to judgment at the destruction of Jerusalem had terrors about it that till then had never been realized on the earth; his last coming will be more dreadful still.

28. *For whersoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together.*

Judaism had become a “carcass”, dead and corrupt; fit prey for the cultures or carrion-kites of Rome. By-and-by, there will arrive another day, when there will be a dead church in a dead world, and “the eagles” of divine judgment “will be gathered together” to tear in pieces those whom there shall be none to deliver. The birds of prey gather wherever dead bodies are to be found; and the

judgments of Christ will be poured out when the body politic or religious becomes unbearably corrupt.

MATTHEW 24:42-51

42. *Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.*

That he will come, is certain. That his coming may be at any moment, is equally sure; and, therefore, we ought to be always ready for his appearing.

The Lord mate us to be so!

43, 44. *But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.*

Perhaps you can imagine how eagerly the householder watches when he expects thieves. Every little sound alarms him. He thinks he hears someone at the door; then he fancies it is someone at the window; but he is on the alert, with eye and ear and his whole being wide awake. So ought we to be, with regard to the coming of the Lord, as watchful as if we knew that Christ would come tonight; we do not know that he will come so soon, yet it may be so, “for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.”

45, 46. *Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing.*

Doing whatever the Master has appointed him to do; if he be a minister, preaching the truth with all his heart; if he be a teacher, endeavoring to feel the minds of the young with sound doctrine; whatever may be his calling, endeavoring to fulfill it to the great Taskmaster’s satisfaction, as if he should suddenly break in upon the work, and loots at it there and then, and judge his servant by it. This is the way to live.

47. *Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods.*

There are rewards for faithful service; — not of debt, but of grace; — not according to the law, but according to the discipline of

the house of God. Oh, that we may be such faithful servants that our Lord may make us rulers over all that he has!

48-51. *But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; And shall begin to smite his fellowservants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; the lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that, he is not aware of, And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

He was a servant, you see; so this is a warning, not to the outside world, but to you who are inside the nominal church, and who profess to be servants of God; and it is especially a warning to those of us who are ministers of the gospel. Oh, that we may never begin to smite our fellowservants! Of course, we shall not do it with the fist, but we may do it with the tongue; and may we never be numbered with those who are living for the delights of the flesh! If so, see what must come to us. Our Lord still continued to speak upon the same subject of watchfulness by delivering the very stirring parable of the wise and foolish virgins.

This exposition consisted of readings from MATTHEW 24:42-51; AND MATTHEW 25:1-13.

MATTHEW 25:1-13

1-4. *Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.*

And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. There did not seem to be much difference between them. They were all virgins, they all carried lamps, their lamps were all lit; sad, peradventure, the lamps of the foolish were quite as bright as those of the wise. The difference was unobservable to most onlookers, but it was an essential and fatal difference. Ah! dear friends, it is the lack of oil that is the ruin of many a professor's lamp. Men have a name to live, but they have not the true life which is the evidence of the effectual working of the grace of God within their souls. They make a profession of religion, but they have not the secret grace to keep it up. There is a glitter and flash, but there is no permanency; and there cannot be any, unless the Spirit of God be in us indeed, and of a

truth. We may make a fair show in the flesh for a while, but what will be the end of it? This is the all-important question,— Can we hold on and hold out? Certainly, not without that heavenly oil which only the Spirit of God can supply.

5. *While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.*

Oh, how sadly true it is that, sometimes, true saints as well as mere professors slumber and sleep! Even those who have the oil of grace are not always wide awake to serve their Master, and to proclaim the gospel as they should. There are, alas! sleeping believers and sleeping hypocrites side by side.

6, 7. *And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps.*

They were suddenly awakened, and they leaped to their feet,—
Upstarting at the midnight cry,
‘Behold the heavenly Bridegroom nigh!’

They all trimmed their lamps. That was the first thing for them to do, to look to their torches, and have them ready. They could not meet the Bridegroom in the dark; they must each have a light; so they began their lamp-trimming. It is a pity to have to trim your lamp at the last. O dear friends, it is hard work, upon a dying bed, to have to be tending to one’s lamp! You want your evidences to be bright there,— your faith to be firm, and all your graces brilliant. There must be no doubts and questions there, else they make a dying bed feel hard as granite to the head. May we none of us have at last to trim our lamps! Those virgins who had oil in their vessels were able to trim their lamps; and, though the work was done hurriedly, it was done, and they were able to take their places in the bridal procession.

8. *And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out.*

The modern rendering of this request is, “Send for the minister, and ask him to pray for us, for our lamps are gone out.” Take heed, I pray you, you who are bold professors now,— lest you should have to say at the last, “Our lamps are gone out.” It was too late for trimming and lighting then.

9, 10. *But the wise answered, saying, Not so; test there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy*

for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came;

There are death-bed repentances, undoubtedly; but I fear that, in the great majority of cases, people who wake up so late will find that, while they go to buy, the Bridegroom will come, and there will not be, after all, the time in which to find the Saviour. The mental capacity with which to think of him may fail. The poor head may be so distracted with pain that it may not be able to catch the meaning of what faith in Christ is, or how it can be exercised; and so, the lamp will have gone out, and it will be too late to buy the oil which alone can make it burn. "While they went to buy, the bridegroom came; "

10, 11. *And they that were ready went in with him to the marriage; and the door was shut.*

Afterward came also the other margins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. "Open the door at least to us, for we came to meet thee, and we carried lamps, and we were with the other virgins: 'Lord, Lord, open to us.'" You know, perhaps, those striking lines which describe the foolish virgins request, and the Bridegroom's response to it,—

'Late, late, so late; and dark the night and chill!

Late, late, so late; but we may enter still.'

'Too late! Too late! Ye cannot enter now.'

12. *But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not.*

When that door is once shut, it will never again be opened; all Scripture goes to prove that. There are some who foolishly dream about an opening of that door, after death, for men who have died impenitent; but there is nothing in Scripture to warrant us in having any such expectation. The anal answer of the Bridegroom to these foolish virgins is, "Verily I say unto you, I know you not."

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

That is, we do not know when it will be. Some have foolishly said, "We do not know the day, or the hour, of Christ's coming, but we may find out the year." We shall not do anything of the kind; the time is hidden altogether, it is not revealed to us, and it shall not be known till, suddenly, the Lord himself shall come in the clouds, with his bright heavenly retinue, to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe. Wherefore, be always on the

watch, beloved, “for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.” God help us to be ready for his appearing at any moment, for his dear name’s sake! Amen.

This exposition consisted of readings from MATTHEW 24:42-51; AND MATTHEW 25:1-13.

MATTHEW 25:1-13

1, 2. *Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, And five were foolish.*

What a division this makes in the visible Church of God! Let us hope that we are not to gather from this that as many as half the professors of Christianity at any time are like these foolish virgins; yet our Lord would not have mentioned so high a proportion if there were not a very large admixture of foolish with the wise: “Five of them were wise, and five were foolish.”

3. *They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them:*

They thought that, if they had the external, it would be quite enough. The secret store of oil, they judged to be unnecessary, because it would be unseen. They would employ one hand in carrying the lamp, but to occupy the other hand by holding the oil-flask seemed to them to be doing too much,— giving themselves up too thoroughly to the work; so they “took their lamps, and took no oil with them.” They might just as well have had no lamps at all.

4. *But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.*

Oil in their lamps, and oil with their lamps. Lamps are of no use without oil; yet the oil needs the lamp, or else it cannot be rightly used. The light of profession cannot be truly sustained without the oil of grace. Grace, wherever it exists, ought to show itself, as the oil is made to burn by means of the lamp; but it is no use to attempt to make a show unless there is that secret store somewhere by which the external part of religion may be maintained.

5. *While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.*

Both the wise and the foolish fell into a state which seemed alike in them both. In the case of good men, Christ’s delaying his coming often causes disappointment, weariness, and then lethargy, and even the true Church falls into a deep slumber. In the foolish, the mere

professors, this condition goes much further. There being in them no true life, the very name to live becomes abandoned, and before long, they give up even the profession of religion when there is no secret oil of grace to sustain it.

6. *And at midnight*

When things had come to the worst,—at midnight”— the coldest and. darkest hour, when everybody was asleep.

6. *There was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.*

That was a cry which startled everybody; none of the virgins could sleep when once it was announced that the bridegroom was coming. I wish, dear friends, that we thought more of the great truth of the Second Advent. The oftener it is preached, in due proportion with other truths, the better. We need still to hear that midnight cry, “Go ye out to meet him.”

7. *Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps.*

They could not sleep any longer; they were fairly startled and aroused.

8. *And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil;*

Ah, me! now they began to value what they had aforesaid despised. They were foolish enough to think that oil was unnecessary; but now they saw that it was the one essential thing, so they cried to the wise virgins, “Give us of your oil.” And hear the dreadful reason: —

8. *For our lamps are gone out.*

I do not know any more terrible words than those, “Our lamps are gone out.” It is worse to have a lamp that has gone out than never to have had a lamp at all. “‘Our lamps are gone out.’ We once rejoiced in them. We promised ourselves a bright future. We said, ‘All is well for the marriage supper.’ But ‘our lamps are gone out,’ and we have no oil with which to replenish them.” O sirs, may none of us ever have to lift up that mournful cry! On a dying bed, in the extremity of pain, in the depth of human weakness, it is an awful thing to find one’s profession burning low, one’s hope of heaven going out, like the snuff of a candle.

9. *But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.*

It is no easy matter to go and rouse up the seller of oil when the midnight hour has struck. O you who are putting off repentance to a dying bed, you are foolish virgins indeed! Your folly has reached the utmost height. You will have more than enough to do, when you lie there with the death-sweat cold upon your brow, without then having to seek the grace which you are neglecting to obtain today, but which you will value then.

10. *And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; —*

While they were going.

10, 11. *And they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us.*

Too late, so that they could not enter.

12. *But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not.*

“I never knew you,” says Christ in another place; and this knowledge of his is always bound up with affection. He loves no heart that he knows not in this sense. Those whom he knows, he loves. Will he ever say to me or to you, dear friend, “I know you not”? God grant that he never may have cause to do so I

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

MATTHEW 25:14-30

14. *For the kingdom of heaven is as a man traveling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods.*

This parable has to do with you who are professors of Christianity. He “called his own servants,” those who, by their own consent, were numbered amongst his household servitors: “He called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods.” Not theirs, but his; and therefore to be used for him. If you are Christ’s servant, your abilities are his, he has lent them to you to be employed for your Lord. “He called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods.”

15. *And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey.*

He is gone; our Lord has risen; and we, his servants, are left behind to trade with his goods for his glory.

16-18. *Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. But he that had receded one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money.*

We are grieved to know that there are persons with five talents, and others with two talents, who do as this man did; but the case is put in this way, so as to reach us all. Since most persons have but one talent, they are the most often found each one saying, "I have so little ability, I will not do anything. If I had five talents, I might become distinguished; if I had two, I might be very useful; but with one, I need not attempt anything. I am a private person,— a mother, quite obscure, with my little family around me, what can I do?" It is very often a strong temptation from Satan, to those who have but one talent, to make them think that they may, with impunity, hide that one. And then, you see, the argument cuts the other way. If it be wrong to hide one talent, much more wrong is it to hide two, and far worse to dig in the earth, and bury five.

19. *After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them.*

Always remember the reclining. We have heard of one, who went into a house of entertainment, and fed most luxuriously; but, when the landlord brought him the bill, he said, "Oh, I never thought of that!" And there are many who spend their whole lives without ever thinking of the reckoning; yet it must come, and for every hour, for every opportunity, for every ability, for every sin, and for every omission of duty, they must give account. "The lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them."

20, 21. *And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou delivered unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.*

I do not doubt that this man had often reckoned with himself,— for he that never reckons with himself may well be afraid of being called to reckon with his God; — and I expect that he had often

grieved to think that he had not turned the five talents into twenty. He must have thought that, to gain only five talents more, was very little; but he found his master was well content with what he had done. Do you think, brother, that all of you who have five talents have gained five talents more? You were richly endowed as a youth; have you increased the ability to serve your God? You see, the parable speaks not so much of what they had done for other people, as of what they had themselves gained, and still had in hand. Have you more grace? Have you more tact? Have you more adaptation to your Master's service? Are you conscious that it is so? I should not wonder if you are mourning that you are not more useful, and more fit to be used. It is well that you should mourn in that way; but when your Master comes, I trust that he will say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

22, 23. *He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.*

That is a beautiful reward,— not so much to have a joy of our own as to enter into the joy of our Lord. It is not a servant's portion that is given to us; it is the Master's portion shared by his servants. How it ennobles Christian work to feel that it is not simply our work, but work done by the Master through the servant; and the reward shall not so much be our joy as our entrance into our Master's joy. That is indeed giving to us the best of the best in return for our poor service here.

24, 25. *Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine.*

"I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth." See, friends, how fear may often be the mother of presumption. Confidence in God begets holy fear; but unholy fear begets a doubt of God, and leads us to desperate rebellion of unbelief. God save us from such fear!

26, 27. *His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury.*

His lord took him on his own ground, and condemned him out of his own mouth.

28, 29. *Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance:*

He that has faith shall have more faith. He that has a secret taste for heavenly things shall have a greater love for them. He that has some understanding of the truth of God shall get more understanding of it. God gives to those that have; it is equally true that he gives to those who confess that they have not.

29. *But from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.*

If you want an instance of taking away from a man what he has not got, you may have seen it sometimes in the case of a person without any education or knowledge, who is quite content to remain in that condition. Rut, on a sudden, he is introduced into learned society; he hears what educated people have to say, and he exclaims, "What a fool I am!" What he thought he had, though he never had it, suddenly goes from him.

30. *And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

If we give any description of the world to come which is at all terrible, those who reject the Scriptures begin to cry out that we have borrowed it from Dante, or taken it from Milton; but I take leave to say that the most awful and harrowing descriptions of the woes of the lost that ever fell from human lip do not exceed or even equal the language of the loving Christ himself. Listen: "Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." He is the true lover of men's souls who does not deceive them. He that paints the miseries of hell as though they were but little is seeking to murder men's souls under the pretense of being their friend. May God give all of you grace to trust in Jesus

for yourselves, and then to point others to him, for Christ's sake! Amen.

MATTHEW 26:6-30

6, 7. *Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, There came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head, as he sat at meat.*

This is not the woman who anointed Christ's feet with ointment, but another of the holy women who ministered to him. I believe this was Mary, the sister of Lazarus, who came to Jesus, "having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head, as he sat at meat."

8, 9. *But when his disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor.*

When you do the best you can do, from the purest motives, and your Lord accepts your service, do not expect that your brethren will approve all your actions. If you do, you will be greatly disappointed. There was never a more beautiful proof of love to Christ than this anointing at Bethany, yet the disciples found fault with it. As they could not object to the thing itself, they objected that there might have been another thing done that would have been better. There is a great deal of that kind of wisdom in the world which can always teach you how you might have done a thing better, but if you wait until you learn that wisdom, you will never do anything for your Lord. If this devoted and enthusiastic woman had waited for the advice of these prudent people, she would neither have sold the ointment, nor poured it out. She did well to take council with her own loving heart, and then to pour the precious oil upon that dear head which was so soon to be crowned with thorns. She thus showed that there was at least one heart in the world that thought nothing was too good for her Lord, and that the best of the best ought to be given to him. May she have many imitators in every age until Jesus comes again!

10. *When Jesus understood it, he said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman?*

She had been very happy in the act, probably it was the happiest hour in all her life when she gave this costly gift to the Lord she

loved so well. But a cloud passed over her bright face as the whispered complaints reached her ear. She was evidently a tender-hearted soul, so the Saviour said to the disciples, "Why trouble ye the woman?"

10. *For she hath wrought a good work upon me.*

We cannot do what this woman did; but we can perform good works upon others for Christ's sake; and he will accept them as though they were done unto himself.

11-13. *For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always. For in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial. Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her.*

She probably did not know all that her action meant when she anointed her Lord for his burial. We often do much more than we think we do. The consequences of the simplest action done for Christ may be much greater than we suppose. This woman is preparing Christ's body for his approaching burial. Little dreams she that it is so, but so it is. Go thou my sister, and do what God bids thee; and it shall be seen that thou hast done far more than thou knowest. Obey the holy impulse within thy spirit, my brother; and thou mayest do ten thousand times more than thou hast ever imagined to be possible. This woman's outburst of affection, this simple-hearted act of love to Christ himself, is one of those things which are to live as long as the gospel lives. The aroma of this loving deed is to abide as long as the world itself endures.

14, 15. *Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, And said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you?*

Out of twelve apostles, one was a Judas Iscariot. Marvel not, therefore, if, among thy friends and kinsfolk, thou hast one who turns against thee, and betrays thee to thine enemies.

15. *And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver.*

The price of a slave, thus they were fulfilling the ancient prophecy: "So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver."

16. *And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him.*

The traitor sold his Master for thirty pieces of dirty silver; yet many have sold Jesus for a less price than Judas received: a smile or a sneer has been sufficient to induce them to betray their Lord.

17, 18. *Now the first day of the feast of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the passover? And he said, Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the passover at thy house with my disciples.*

How truly royal was Jesus of Nazareth even in his humility! He had only to send two of his disciples “into the city to such a man,” and the guest chamber, furnished and prepared, was at once placed at his disposal. He did not take the room by arbitrary force, as an earthly monarch might have done; but he obtained it by the diviner compulsion of almighty love. Jesus knew something about this man that you and I do not know, so he said to his disciples: Just go and say to him, ‘The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the passover at thy house with my disciples.’” Was he not himself a disciple? I cannot say but this I do know, that the Lord Jesus has a certain number who are willing to help his cause, even though as yet they hardly call themselves his disciples. I should think, however, that after this man had once had the Master and his disciples in his house, there must have been a blessing left behind, and he would want to become one of that goodly company. It is well, dear friend, that thou art willing to have the prayer-meeting in thy house, it is well that thou wilt stand up on the side of truth, even if thou hast no share in it as yet, for maybe, — and I hope the “maybe” will become a certainty, — thou wilt yet be one of Christ’s disciples.

19. *And the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them; and they made ready the passover.*

They went to this man, delivered Christ’s message, and he showed them a large upper room, furnished and prepared. If Christ’s disciples always loyally did as Jesus appointed them, they would always speed well on his errands. There are many more people in the world ready to yield to Christ than some of us think. The person sitting or standing by your side is quite unknown to you, but, if you will speak to him about the Saviour, he will probably respond to your word. At any rate, try him, and see if it be not so. Whether standing or sitting, there must be someone here not yet a disciple,

who only needs for you to speak a kind word, and the deciding work will be done.

20, 21. *Now when the even was come, he sat down with the twelve. And as they did eat, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.*

“One of you” — and his eyes would glance round the table as he said it, — “one of you shall betray me.”

22. *And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him Lord, is it I?*

No one said, “Lord, is it Judas?” Perhaps no one of the eleven thought that Judas was base enough to betray the Lord who had given him an honourable place among his apostles. It is certainly a mark of grace that “every one” of the apostles put to their Lord the question, “Is it I?”

23, 24. *And he answered and said, He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me. The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born.*

We learn from our Lord’s words that divine decrees do not deprive a sinful action of its guilt: “The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! “The criminality of Judas was just as great as though there had been no “determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God” even as it was with those to whom Peter spoke so boldly on the day of Pentecost, when he charged them with the murder of Jesus.

20. *Then Judas, which betrayed him, answered and said, Master, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said.*

What a chill that answer must have cast over the little band around the table, especially when Judas rose, and started off, to carry out his dreadful purpose of staining his soul with the blood of his Lord!

26-29. *And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat, this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.*

Thus Jesus took the great Nazarite vow never to drink of the fruit of the vine till he should drink it new with His disciples in His Father's kingdom. O Lord, thou hast pledged us in this cup, and thou wilt return before long, and then what festivals we will hold with thee, what joy we shall have in thee for ever and ever!

30. *And when they had sung an hymn, they went out unto the mount of Olives.*

Was it not truly brave of our dear Lord to sing under such circumstances? He was going forth to his last dread conflict, to Gethsemane, and Gabbatha, and Golgotha; yet he went with a song on His lips. The door opens, they go downstairs, they are in the open-air, that night of the full moon, and they wend their way to the Mount of Olives. Then came that desperate struggle in which the great Captain of our salvation wrestled even to a bloody sweat, and prevailed.

This exposition consisted of readings from Psalm 147, And Matthew 26:6-30.

MATTHEW 26:14-35

14-16. *Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, And said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver. And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him.*

It was one of the twelve, who went unto the chief priests, to bargain for the price of his Lord's betrayal. He did not even mention Christ's name in his infamous question, "What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you?" The amount agreed upon, thirty pieces of silver, was the price of a slave; and showed how little value the chief priests set upon Jesus, and also revealed the greed of Judas in selling his Master for so small a sum. Yet many have sold Jesus for a less price than Judas received; a smile or a sneer has been sufficient to induce them to betray their Lord. Let us, who have been redeemed with Christ's precious blood, set high store by him, think much of him, and praise him much. As we remember with shame and sorrow, these thirty pieces of silver, let us never undervalue him, or forget the priceless preciousness of him who was reckoned as worth no more than a slave.

17, 18. *Now the first day of the feast of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the passover? And he said, Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the Passover at thy house with my disciples.*

How truly royal was Jesus of Nazareth even in his humiliation! He had no home of his own therein he could “keep the Passover” with his disciples; he was soon to be put to a public and shameful death; yet he had only to send two of his disciples “into the city to such a man,” and the guest-chamber, furnished and prepared, was at once placed at his disposal. He did not take the room by arbitrary force, as an earthly monarch might have done; but he obtained it by the diviner compulsion of almighty love. Even in his lowest estate, our Lord Jesus had the hearts of all men beneath his control. What power he has now that he reigns in glory!

19. *And the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them; and they made ready the Passover.*

If Christ’s disciples always loyally did a Jesus appointed them, they would always speed well on his errands. There are many more people in the world ready to yield to Christ than some of us think. If we would only go to them as Peter and John went to this man in Jerusalem, and say to them what “the Master saith”, we should find that their hearts would be opened to receive Christ even as this man’s house was willingly yielded up at our Lord’s request.

20, 21. *Now when the even was come, he sat down with the twelve. And as they did eat, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.*

Our Lord remained in seclusion until the evening, and then went to the appointed place, and sat down, or rather, reclined at the paschal table, with the twelve. And as they did eat, he said, “Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.” This was a most unpleasant thought to bring to a feast, yet it was most appropriate to the Passover, for God’s commandment to Moses concerning the first paschal lamb was, “With bitter herbs they shalt eat it.” This was a painful reflection for our Lord, and also for his twelve chosen companions: “One of you”, and his eyes would glance round the table so he said it, “One of you shall betray me.”

22. *And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I?*

That short sentence fell like a bomb-shell among the Saviour's bodyguard. It startled them; they had all made great professions of affection for him, and, for the most part, those professions were true. And they were exceeding sorrowful: and well they might be. Such a revelation was enough to produce the deepest emotions of sorrow and sadness. It is a beautiful trait in the character of the disciples that they did not suspect one another, but every one of them enquired, almost incredulously, as the form of the question implies "Lord, is it I?" "No one said, "Lord, is it Judas?" "Perhaps no one of the eleven thought that Judas was base enough to betray the Lord who had given him an honourable place among his apostles. We cannot do any good by suspecting our brethren; but we may do great services by suspecting ourselves. Self-suspicion is near akin to humility.

23, 24. *And he answered and said, He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me. The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed ! it had been good for that man if he had not been born.*

A man may get very near to Christ, ay, may dippeth his hand in the same dish with the Saviour, and yet betray him. We may be high in office, and may apparently be very useful, as Judas was; yet we may betray Christ. We learn from our Lord's words that divine decrees do not deprive a sinful action of its guilt: "The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed." His criminality is just as great as though there had been no "determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God." "It had been good for that man if he had not been born." The doom of Judas is worse than non-existence. To have consorted with Christ as he had done, and then to deliver him into the hands of his enemies, sealed the traitor's eternal destiny.

25. *Then Judas which betrayed him, answered and said, Master, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said.*

Judas appears to have been the last of the twelve to ask the question, "Is it I?" Those who are the last to suspect themselves are usually those who ought to be the first to exercise self-suspicion. Judas did not address Christ as "Lord," as the other disciples had done; but called him Rabbi, "Master." Otherwise his question was

like that of his eleven companions; but he received from Christ an answer that was given to no one else: He said unto him, "Thou hast said." Probably the reply reached his ear alone, and if he had not been a hopeless reprobate, this unmasking of his traitorous design might have driven him to repentance, but there was nothing in his heart to respond to Christ's voice. He had sold himself to Satan before he sold his Lord.

26-28. *And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples and said, Take, eat, this is my body. And he took the cup and gave thanks and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.*

The Jewish Passover was made to melt into the Lord's supper, as the stars of the morning dissolve into the light of the sun. As they were eating, while the paschal supper was proceeding, Jesus instituted the new memorial which is to be observed until he comes again. How simple was the whole ceremony! Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to his disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." Christ could not have meant that the bread was his body, for his body was reclining by the table; but he intended that broken bread to represent his body which was about to be broken on the cross. Then followed the second memorial, the cup, filled with "the fruit of the vine", of which Christ said, "Drink ye all of it." There is no trace here of any altar or priest; there is nothing about the elevation or adoration of the host; there is no resemblance between the Lord's supper and the Romish mass. Let us keep strictly to the letter and spirit of God's Word in everything; for, if one adds a little, another will add more, and if one alters one point, and another alters another point, there is no telling how far we shall get from the truth. The disciples had been reminded of their own liability to sin; now their Saviour gives them a personal pledge of the pardon of sin, according to Luke's record of his words, "This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you."

29. *But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.*

Thus Jesus took the great Nazarite vow never to drink of the fruit of the vine till he should drink it new with his disciples in his Father's kingdom.

He will keep his tryst with all his followers, and they with him shall hold high festival for ever.

30. *And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.*

Was it not truly brave of our dear Lord to sing under such circumstances? He was going forth to his last dread conflict, to Gethsemane, and Gabbatha and Golgotha; yet he went with a song on his lips. He must have led the singing, for the disciples were too sad to start the hallel with which the paschal feast closed: And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives. Then came that desperate struggle in which the great Captain of our salvation wrestled even to a bloody sweat, and prevailed.

31, 32. *Then said Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me, this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee.*

Observe our Lord's habit of quoting Scripture. He was able to speak words of infallible truth, yet he fell back upon the Inspired Record in the Old Testament. His quotation from Zechariah does not seem to have been really necessary, but it was most appropriate to his prophecy to his disciples: "All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad." Jesus was the Shepherd who was about to be smitten, but he foretold the scattering of the sheep. Even those leaders of the flock that had been first chosen by Christ, and had been most with him, would stumble and fall awe from him on that dread night, but the Shepherd would not loose them, there would be a re-union between him and his sheep: "After I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee." Once again he would resume, for a little while, the character of their Shepherd-King, and with them he would revisit some of their old haunts in Galilee, ere he ascended to his heavenly home. "I will go before you," suggests the idea of the good Shepherd leading his flock after the Eastern manner. Happy are his sheep in having such a Leader, and blessed are they in following him whithersoever he goeth.

33. *Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended.*

This was a very presumptuous speech, not only because of the self-confidence it betrayed, but also because it was a flat contradiction of the Master's declaration. Jesus said, "All ye shall be offended because of me this night," but Peter thought he knew better than Christ, so he answered, "Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended." No doubt these words were spoken from his heart; but "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." Peter must have been amazed, the next morning, as he discovered the deceitfulness and wickedness of his own heart, as manifested in his triple denial of his Lord. He who thinks himself so much stronger than his brethren, is the very man who will prove to be weaker than many of them, as did Peter, not many hours after his boast was uttered.

34. *Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.*

Jesus now tells his boastful disciple that, before the next morning's cock-crowing, he will thrice deny his Lord. Not only would he stumble and fall with his fellow-disciples, but he would go beyond them all in his repeated denials of that dear Master whom he professed to love with intense affection than even John possessed. Peter declared that he would remain true to Christ if he were the only; faithful friend left, Jesus foretold that, of all the twelve, only Judas would exceed the boaster in wickedness.

35. *Peter said unto him, Though I shall die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples.*

Here again Peter contradicts his Master straight to his face. It was a pity that he should have boasted once after his Lord's plain prophecy that all the disciples would that night be offended; but it was shameful that Peter should repeat his self-confident declaration in the teeth of Christ's express prediction concerning him. He was not alone in his utterance, for likewise also said all the disciples. They all felt that under no circumstances could they deny their Lord. We have no record of the denial of Christ by the other ten apostles, although they all forsook him and fled, and thus practically disowned him. Remembering all that they had seen and heard of him, and especially bearing in mind his most recent discourse, the communion in the upper room, and his wondrous intercessory prayer on their behalf, we are not surprised that they felt themselves bound to him for ever. But, alas, notwithstanding their protests, the

King's prophesy was completely fulfilled, for that night they were all "offended."

MATTHEW 26:14-45

14, 15. *Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, and said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver.*

At what a price did the traitor sell our blessed Master! O ye who have been redeemed with his precious blood, set a high value upon him, think much of him, say much in praise of him! Remember these thirty pieces of silver, and never be guilty of despising the Lord of glory, as these chief priests did when they paid for him the price of a slave.

16-19. *And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him. Now the first day of the feast of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the passover? And he said, go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the passover at thy house with my disciples. And the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them; and they made ready the passover.*

See the absolute control which Jesus has over the minds of men. He can have any man's house that we wants, and he knows who will be glad to welcome him. Yet this same Jesus was about to die, and this shows how perfectly voluntary was his sacrifice. He was not forced to stand in our stead, nor was he compelled to suffer except by the constraint of his own great love. All was free, as became the freedom of his grace. Then, shall not our heart's love flow out freely to him? Shall we need to be scourged to obedience? Oh, no, beloved! So let us think what we can voluntarily do in honour of our Divine Lord, who gave his all for us.

20-22. *Now when the even was come, he sat down with the twelve. And as they did eat, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me. And they were exceeding sorrowful,*

And well might they be sad.

22. *And began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I?*

What anguish does that question always stir within the heart and mind of every true believer! "Shall I ever betray my Lord and

Master? Shall I every deny or forsake him?" God grant that none of us may ever do as Judas did!

23. *And he answered and said, He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me.*

He who had been entrusted with the charge of the finances of the little band of Christ's immediate disciples, he who carried the bag, was the one who was about to betray his Lord. Since then, Christ has often been betrayed by those who have been in positions of trust, those who have led the way among the disciples of Christ, those who have, as it were, been so familiar with Christ as to dip their hand with him in the dish.

24, 25. *The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born. Then Judas, which betrayed him, answered and said, Master, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said.*

Judas seems to have been the last to ask the question, "Master, is it I?" yet he was the guilty one, —the one who had already covenanted with the chief priests to sell his Lord.

26-31. *And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and give it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom. And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives. Then said Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad.*

Observe our blessed Lord's habit of quoting Scripture. He was able to utter words of infallible truth which had never before been used, yet he constantly quoted from the inspired Scriptures. Those who nowadays cavil at the Word of God, and yet profess to be followers of Christ, find no excuse for their conduct in the example that he has left us, for he even quoted Scripture sometimes when it might not have seemed to be necessary to do so. Brethren and sisters in Christ, have your Bible first in you hearts, then at your tongue's

end, I was going to say at your fingers' end, so that you may always be able to give a good reason, a solid and divinely-authoritative reason, for any statement that you may make.

32, 33. *But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee. Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended.*

No doubt Peter said this from his heart, but "the heart is deceitful above all things." Peter may have thought that he was stronger than his brethren, yet he was the very one who proved to be the weakest of the whole apostolic band. "Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended."

34. *Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, —*

That is to say, before that period of time which was called the cock-crowing, —

34. *Thou shalt deny me thrice.*

According to Mark's record, the cock was to crow once before Peter had denied his Lord thrice, and this it did; and when he had give his third denial, it crowed a second time, and then his slumbering conscience was awakened, and "he went out, and wept bitterly." Some persons, who are well acquainted with the religious ceremonies of the Jews, say that the period called the cock-crowing was the time for the sacrifice of the morning lamb, and that it was about that time that Peter denied his lord.

35. *Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee.*

It is a great pity that peter said this after he had received so plain a warning from his Master, yet he was not alone in his boasting.

35. *Likewise also said all the disciples.*

They all felt quite sure that, under no circumstances, could they be so base as to forsake their Lord; and if you think of the washing of their feet by their Lord and Master, the wonderful words of Christ to which they had listened, and that solemn communion service in the large upper room, you may not be surprised that they felt themselves bound to Christ forever, —felt that they could never leave him, nor forsake him; yet they all did so.

36-39. *Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and*

pray yonder. And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death; tarry ye here, and watch with me. 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.

Christ had to tread the winepress alone, yet he showed how complete was his humanity by wishing to have a few choice friends near at hand. Yet even the chosen three failed him in his hour of greatest need.

40. *And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour?*

Peter had constituted himself the spokesman of the apostolic company, so the Master addressed the question to him, though it also applied to his companions: “What, could ye not watch with me one hour?” They had all declared their devotion to him, yet they had fallen asleep while he had bidden them watch.

41-45. *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. And he came and found them asleep again; for their eyes were heavy. And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.*

MATTHEW 26:17-30

17-19. *Now the first day of the feast of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the passover? And he said, Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the passover at thy house with my disciples. And the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them; and they made ready the passover.*

Note their prompt obedience: “the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them.” In this respect, they set an example we shall do well to follow.

20. *Now when the even was come, he sat down with the twelve.*

This was the memorable night when the Jewish passover was to melt into the Lord's supper, just as the stars of the morning dissolve into the daylight.

21. *And as they did eat, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.*

This saying of our Lord must have startled his disciples; they had all made great professions of affection for him, and for the most part those professions were true; but this sentence must have fallen like a bomb-shell among them: "One of you shall betray me."

22. *And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it?*

They did not doubt their Lord's declaration, they knew it must be true; and it produced in them deep emotion: "They were exceeding sorrowful." It also wrought in them earnest self-examination; they did not any one of them say, "Lord, is it Judas?" Perhaps there was not one of them who could have thought so badly of Judas as to suppose that he would betray his Lord; they had such esteem for him that they had made him their treasurer. It is always wise for us to turn the glass of critical examination upon ourselves; we cannot do any good by suspecting our brethren. Suspicion stings like an adder; but we may do ourselves great service by suspecting and examining ourselves. Self-suspicion is near akin to humility and truthfulness; it was so with all but one of these disciples who began to say to Christ, "Lord, is it I?"

23, 24. *And he answered and said, He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me. The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born.*

So, you see, dear friends, that a man may get very near to Christ, — ay, he may even dip his morsel in the same dish with his Lord, and yet he may betray him, even as Judas did. We may be very high in office; we may apparently be very useful; — I have no doubt that Judas was exceedingly useful to the twelve and to the Master; — and yet, for all that, we may betray him. God grant that we never may! Better far that we perished at our birth than that we should live to be traitors to our Lord.

25. *Then Judas, which betrayed him, answered and said, Master, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said.*

And if he had not been a hopeless reprobate, this unmasking of him ought to have driven him to repentance. A man may secretly indulge in his heart a wretched design, and, when discovered, he may loathe it; but, alas! there was nothing in Judas which could respond to the grace of God.

26-28. *And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.*

Go into any Romish church, and watch the priest's performance at the altar, and see whether there is the least likeness between that mummery and this divinely appointed ordinance. I can hardly imagine two things which are so widely apart. How did the Lord's supper ever grow into the mass? It must have taken long years of moss and ivy and lichen and all kinds of clinging things to overgrow the original, natural column which the Saviour set up, and to turn it into that mingle-mangle of which the Romanists and Ritualists think so much. The only safe rule is to keep close to Scripture in everything; for, if you add a little, somebody will add more; and if you alter one thing, the next person will alter another, and, by-and-by, you will not know what the original was. I have seen a peasant, in Italy, wearing a coat of which I believe neither man nor angel could tell which was the material of which it was originally made, for it had been patched so often; and, in like manner, if we did not know what was the original of the mass, it would be impossible for us now to tell, for it has been so patched and mended that it is not at all like the original. Let us, beloved, keep strictly to the letter of God's Word, and also to the spirit of it, lest we err from the truth as so many others have done.

29, 30. *But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Fathers kingdom. And when they had sung a hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.*

Was it not brave of our dear Lord to join in singing a hymn at such a time as that, and under such circumstances? He knew that he was very soon to die; he was going out to his last dread conflict; yet

he went to it singing a Psalm. It was to his Passion that he was going, — to Gethsemane's agony and bloody sweat; yet he led the way there with a sacred song upon his lips: "And when they had sung a hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives." Now let us turn to Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians, at the eleventh chapter. We shall there see how this supper of the Lord had been changed, even in the few years since the death of the Master.

This exposition consisted of readings from MATTHEW 26:17-30; AND 1 CORINTHIANS 11:20-34.

MATTHEW 26:17-30

17, 18. *Now the first day of the feast of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the passover? And he said. Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the passover at thy house with my disciples.*

See here the blending of Christ's humiliation and his Godhead. The Master had no room of his own in which he could keep the passover. He had not even where to lay his head; yet such was his power, that he had only to send messengers to one whom he knew, though perhaps the man knew not him; and as soon as ever the message was delivered, the large upper room, furnished and prepared, was at once freely tendered for the celebration of the supper. Jesus Christ, even in his lowest estate, had the hearts of all men beneath his control.

19-21. *And the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them; and they made ready the passover. Now when the even was come, he sat down with the twelve. And as they did eat, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.*

This was a very unpleasant thought to bring into the midst of those who were gathered there for the memorial feast, yet it was most suitable for such a message to be spoken at the passover, for at its institution the Lord said to Moses, "With bitter herbs they shall eat it;" and here was something bitter enough. I hope we shall have our Master's presence at the communion table, yet it will be well for our joy to be sobered with such a painful thought as this, — there may be a traitor with us even here.

22. *And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I?*

The habit of self-suspicion, rather than suspecting somebody else, is a good one. If there is anyone in this place who is going to commit a gross sin, why may it not be myself? The natural tendency of each one of us is to say, "I shall never do such a thing as that, I am sure." Ah, me! If grace were truly reigning in our heart, we should each one be suspicious of itself, and not of others, and the question of each one would be, "Lord, is it I?" Not one of the apostles asked, "Lord, is it Judas?" or, "Is it So-and-so?" but every one of them began to say unto him, "Lord, is it I?"

23, 24. *And he answered and said, He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me. The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born.*

Remember, this "woe" applies, not only to Judas Iscariot, but to anyone else who betrays Christ. Oh! if, under the pressure of persecution, or if, being bribed by some present pleasure, or if, through our own natural fickleness, we should betray our Master, woe unto us! May the Lord, by his almighty grace, keep us from committing such a sin as that! If we do betray our Lord, it would have been better for us that we had not been born.

25, 26. *Then Judas, which betrayed him, answered and said, Master, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said. And as they were eating, —*

While yet the paschal supper was proceeding: "As they were eating," —

26. *Jesus took bread, and blessed it, —*

Or, as the marginal reading says, "gave thanks for it," —

26. *And brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body.*

That is to say, "This represents my body." Our Lord could not possibly have meant that the bread was his body, for there was his body sitting whole and entire at the table; and they would have been astonished beyond measure if they had understood him literally. But they did not do so, for they were well used too the Oriental custom of leaving out the word for "like", and just saying, "It is so-and-so." Besides, Christ had also said, "I am the door," "I am the way," "I am the good Shepherd;" and there is also that striking sentence, "I am the rose of Sharon." No idiot ever understood these passages

literally; and those are more foolish than idiots who render literally these words: "This is my body." They are wickedly, and wantonly, and willfully foolish, in thus misrepresenting our Saviour's meaning.

27. *And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it;*

That is," Drink of it, every one of you." Was this the institution of the Lord's supper? Yes; but what say the Romanists? Why, that the people may not drink of the cup, and so they keep it away from them; but our Saviour says to this representative company of all his disciples, "Drink ye all of it."

28, 29. *For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you. I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.*

"In that joy-day, that day of days, when the battle will have been fought, and the victory won for ever, then will I pledge you in my Father's kingdom, and keep the feast with you for ever there.

30. *And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.*

Oh, how brave it was on the Master's part to sing a Psalm just before he went out to be betrayed and to be crucified! Our second reading is also concerning the Lord's supper. Turn to the first Epistle to the Corinthians, chapter 11, verse 20. The Corinthian church, as I have often explained to you, was one that had no pastor. They had what is called "open" worship, everybody speaking who pleased; and there being no kind of government or discipline, they fell into every sort of disorder conceivable, and even the ordinance of the Lord's supper was utterly degraded among them. Here is what Paul wrote to them: —

This exposition consisted of readings from MATTHEW 26:17-30; AND 1 CORINTHIANS 11:20-34.

MATTHEW 26:17-30

17-26. *Now the first day of the feast of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the Passover? And he said, Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Master saith, My time is at*

hand; I will keep the Passover, at thy house with my disciples. And the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them; and they made ready the Passover. Now when the even was come, he sat down with the twelve. And as they did eat, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me. And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I? And he answered and said, He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me. The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born. Then Judas, which betrayed him, answered and said, Master, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said. And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it.

So the Jewish Passover melted away into the Lord's Supper. Indeed, so gently did the one dissolve into the other that we scarcely know whether this incident, relating to Judas Iscariot, occurred during the Passover or the Supper. According to one account, it would seem to be one; and according to another account, the other, but, indeed, the one ordinance was almost imperceptibly merged into the other. I want you carefully to notice, as we read this narrative through, whether you can see here any trace of an altar. Look with both your eyes, and see whether you can find any trace of a priest offering a sacrifice. Watch diligently to see whether you can perceive anything about kneeling down, or about the elevation or the adoration of "the host." Why, even the Romish church knows better than to believe in what it practices. Most of you have seen copies of the famous painting by Leonardo da Vinci, himself a Catholic of the old school. How does he picture those who were at the institution of the Lord's Supper? Why, they are all sitting around a table, with the Lord Jesus in their midst. I wonder that they exhibit, and still allow to be in their churches, a picture like that, which, painted by one of their own artists, most effectually condemns their base idolatry, in which a wafer-god is lifted up, to be adored by men, who must be besotted indeed before they can prostitute their intellects so grossly as to commit such an act of sin. What a rebuke to that idolatry is conveyed by this simple statement: "As they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it," —

26. *And brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said. Take, eat; this is my body.*

The Romanists do not even break the bread. They have a wafer so as to avoid anything like an imitation of the example set by our blessed Lord and Master. He took a piece of the bread which was provided for the paschal feast, — the ordinary unleavened bread, and he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, and said to them, “Take, eat, this is my body.” Not, of course, the literal body, which was there at the table; but this was the emblem of his body about to be broken on the cross on the behalf of all his people.

27. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it;

“Every one of you, take your own personal share.” This also the Papists have perverted by denying the cup to the laity.

28-30. For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom. And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the Mount of Olives.

It was a social feast, somewhat funereal, and tintured with sadness, for Jesus was about to go from them, to die, still, it was a joyous celebration, closing with a hymn. At the paschal feast, the Jews always sang Psalms 113 to 118. Probably our Lord sang all these through. At any rate, Christ and his apostles sang a hymn; and I always like to think of him as leading the little company, — going to his death with a song upon his lips, his voice full of melody, and made more sweet than ever by the near approach of Gethsemane and Calvary. I would like always to sing, whenever we come to the communion table, after the fashion in which they sang that night: “When they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.” Now let us read what the apostle Paul writes concerning the Lord’s Supper.

This exposition consisted of readings from MATTHEW 26:17-30; AND 1 CORINTHIANS 11:18-34.

MATTHEW 26:20-30

20. Now when the even was come, he sat down with the twelve.

Why so many people celebrate the Lord’s supper in the morning, I cannot imagine, unless it be that they desire to do everything contrary to their Lord’s command and example: “When the even was come, he sat down with the twelve.” I do not think there is any

binding ordinance making the evening the only time for the observance of this ordinance; but to make the morning the only time is certainly not according to the Word of God.

21, 22. *And as they did eat, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me. And they were exceeding sorrowful, —*

There was enough to make them sorrowful in the fact that their Lord had just told them that one of the twelve who were his body-guard, his closest companions, his nearest and dearest friends, would betray him. “They were exceeding sorrowful,” —

22. *And began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I?*

It shows a beautiful trait in their character that they did not suspect one another, and least of all, I suppose, did they suspect Judas; but each one asked, “Lord, is it I?” It is an admirable way of hearing a sermon to take it home to yourself, especially if there be a rebuke or a caution in it.

23, 24. *And he answered and said, He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me. The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born.*

The doom of the wicked is something far worse than non-existence, or Christ would not have said, concerning Judas Iscariot, “It had been good for that man if he had never been born.” This is especially true of all those who, having for a while consorted with Christ, afterwards deny it and betray him. O brothers and sisters, may all of us be kept from this terrible sin! May none of us ever betray our Master after all the fellowship we have had with him! It would be better to die for him than to deny him; and it would be better never to have been born than to have been in intimate association with him, and then to have betrayed him.

23. *Then Judas, which betrayed him, answered and said, Master, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said.*

“It is even so,” With a sorrowful gesture, he made it plain to his sad little circle of friends and followers that he knew all that was going to happen, and that Judas was the man who was going to turn traitor.

26. *And as they were eating, —*

As they were eating the Passover. The one ordinance gradually melted into the other: “As they were eating,” —

26, 27. *Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it;*

“Each one of you, my disciples, take a draught of this cup.”

28. *For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.*

They had had gross sin brought prominently to their minds; they had had a personal reminder of their own liability to sin; and now they were to have a personal pledge concerning the pardon of sin: “For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sin.”

29. *But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.*

Taking, as it were, the great Nazarite vow never to taste of the fruit of the vine “until that day.” He will keep his tryst with us, my brethren; and we shall drink the new vine of his Father’s kingdom with him by-and by; but, until then, he waits.

30. *And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.*

This exposition consisted of readings from MATTHEW 26:20-30; And 1 CORINTHIANS 11:20-26.

MATTHEW 26:26-30

We will read, first, Matthew’s account of the institution of the Lord’s supper.

26. *And as they were eating,*

In the middle of the Paschal Feast our Lord instituted the sacred festival which was ever afterwards to be known as “the Lord’s supper.” The one ordinance was made to melt gradually into the other: “as they were eating.”

26. *Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take eat; this is my body.*

“This represents my body.” He could not possibly have meant that the bread was his body; for there was his body sitting at the table, whole and entire. They would have been astonished beyond measure if they had understood him literally; but they did not do so,

any more than when Christ said, “I am the door,” or “I am the Good Shepherd.”

27. *And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it;*

“Every one of you.” Was this the Lord’s supper? Yes. What say the Romanists about it? Why, that the people may not drink the cup! Yet our Saviour says to his disciples, “Drink ye all of it.”

28. *For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.*

They had had sin brought to their minds; they had had a personal reminder of their own liability to sin; now they were to have a perpetual pledge of the pardon of sin, in the cup, which was the emblem of Christ’s blood, “shed for many for the remission of sins.”

29. *But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of the fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.*

Jesus took the Nazarite vow to drink no more, to partake no more of the fruit of the vine, till he should meet us again in his Father’s kingdom. He has pledged us once for all in that cup, and now he abstains until he meets us again. Thus he looks forward to a glorious meeting; but he bids us take the cup, and thus remember him until he come.

30. *And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.*

To his last great battle the Champion goes singing, attended by feeble followers, who could not protect him; but who could sing with him. I think he must have led the tune; his disciples were too sorrowful to sing until his clear voice started the Hallelujah Psalms; but they joined him in the holy exercise, for “they” as well as their Lord sang the hymn. When you are about to face a trial, offer a prayer; but, if you can, also sing a hymn. It will show great faith if, before you enter into the burning fiery furnace, you can sing psalms unto the Lord who redeemeth his people. Now let us read Paul’s version of this same matter.

This exposition consisted of readings from MATTHEW 26:26-30; 1 CORINTHIANS 11:20-34

MATTHEW 26:31-35, 57, 58, 69-75

The story of Peter's denial of his Master is recorded in all four of the Gospels. There are some differences of expression in each version, so it will not be tautology if we read all four of them; and if we read them attentively, we shall get a clear view of the whole incident.

31-33. *Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee. Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended.*

This was a very presumptuous speech, not only because of the self-confidence which it displayed, but also because it was a flat contradiction of what the Master had just said "All ye shall be offended because of me this night." Peter thought he knew better than Christ did, so he said, "Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended."

34. *Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow,-*

The cock-crowing was a recognized mark of time; it was just before the rising of the sun "This night, before the cock crow,"-

34, 35. *Thou shalt deny me thrice. Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee.*

Here, again, he contradicts his Master straight to his face.

35. *Likewise also said all the disciples.*

57, 58. *And they that had laid hold on Jesus led him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled. But Peter followed him afar off unto the high priest's palace, and went in, and sat with the servants, to see the end.*

69-75. *Now Peter sat without in the palace: and a damsel came unto him, saying, Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee. But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest. And when he was gone out into the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth. And again he denied with an oath I do not know the man. And after a while came unto him they that stood by, and said to*

Peter, Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech betrayeth thee. Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly.

Now let us read Mark's account, which will specially interest you if you remember that, probably, Mark wrote under the direction of Peter, and, no doubt, received many of his facts from Peter. You will notice how severe is this description of the whole scene; it is just snob an one as the chief actor in it would be sure to give as he recalled his fall and restoration.

This exposition consisted of readings from MATTHEW 26 31-35, 57, 58, 69-75 MARK 14 53, 54, 66-72 LUKE 2 54-62; AND JOHN 18 15-18, 25-27.

MATTHEW 26:36-46

36-40. *Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me. 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?*

He felt the need of human sympathy in that awful hour; yet he trod the winepress alone.

41. *Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.*

Admire the tenderness of Jesus in making this apology for his disciples. What he said about them was true: but it is not everybody who would have uttered that gentle truth at such a trying time. Dear friends, make excuses for one another whenever you can; never make them for yourselves, but often make them for others, and especially, when some treat you as you think very untenderly, be the more tender towards them.

42-44. *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. And he came and found them asleep again: for their eyes were heavy. And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words.

You cannot use much variety of language when your heart is very heavy; you will usually dwell upon just a few words at such a time. Do not blame yourself for doing so; it is natural, and it is right. Even your Lord, the Master of language, “prayed the third time, saying the same words.”

45, 46. *Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray me.*

May the Master never have to say this concerning any one of us, for his dear name’s sake! Amen.

This exposition consisted of readings from John 17:15-26; And Matthew 26:36-46.

MATTHEW 26:57-68

We shall read two or three short portions of God’s Word in order to bring before you the wonderful contrast to which I am about to direct your thoughts.

57. *And they that had laid hold on Jesus led him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled.*

It was night, but these wicked men could sit up for this gruel deed, to judge the Lord of glory, and to put the innocent One to shame. They “led him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled.”

58. *But Peter followed him afar off unto the high priest’s palace, and went in, and sat with the servants, to see the end.*

I have heard Peter represented as if he did wrong to follow Christ “afar off.” I think he was the bravest of all the apostles, for scarcely one of them followed Christ at all at that time. Afterwards, John bethought himself, and came into the judgment hall. Peter kept at a distance from his Lord, but he did follow him, and he did go into the high priest’s palace. He “went in, and sat with the servants, to see the end.” Peter was right enough in following Christ; it was afterward, when the temptation came, that he fell so grievously.

59, 60. *Now the chief priests, and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus, to put him to death; but found none:*

Because they did not agree, they would not hold together. This is the weakness of falsehood, that it contradicts itself. These men felt that they must have some show of truth-likeness even in condemning Christ, and this they could not get at first even from their false witnesses.

60, 61. *Yea, though many false witnesses came, yet found they none. At the last came two false witnesses, and said, This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days.*

Brethren, observe, that this was a little twisting of Christ's words, but that slight wresting made them as different as possible from what Christ had really said. I suppose that, if you want to know how this twisting or wresting is done, any one of our general elections will give you the most wonderful examples of how everything that any man may say can be twisted to mean the very reverse of what he said. If there is one thing in which English people are expert beyond all others, it is in the art of misquoting, misstating, and misrepresenting. As our Lord was wronged in this fashion, nobody need be surprised if the like should happen unto him. "This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days."

62. *And the high priest arose, and said unto him, Answerest thou nothing? what is it which these witness against thee?*

What was the good of answering? What is ever the good of answering when the only evidence brought against one is palpable and willful misrepresentation? So the Saviour was silent; and thus, he not only proved his wisdom, but he also fulfilled that marvellous prophecy of Isaiah, "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth."

63. *But Jesus held his peace. And the high priest answered and said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ the Son of God.*

Now came the answer, the good confession that our Lord witnessed before his cruel adversaries.

64. *Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.*

How that sentence must have come with the vividness of a lightning flash before their faces! What a declaration of power from One who stood there bound before his enemies, apparently helpless, and about to die!

65-68. *Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy. What think ye? They answered and said, He is guilty of death. Then did they spit in his face, and buffeted him; and others smote him with the palms of their hands, saying, Prophecy unto us, thou Christ, Who is he that smote thee?*

Our Lord had told these mockers that they should one day see him coming in the clouds of heaven. Let us read in the Book of the Revelation concerning that great event.

This exposition consisted of readings from MATTHEW 26:57-68. REVELATION 6:12-17, 19:11-6, 20:11-15, 21:1.

MATTHEW 26:59-68

59-60. *Now the chief priests, and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus, to put him to death; but found none:*

Neither for love nor money.

60. *Yea, though many false witnesses came, yet found they none.*

That is, none that agree; the lie that one man spoke was refuted by the next.

61. *At last came two false witness, and said this —*

They did not say any other word, as if they did not know any word in any language vile enough for him. “This”; our translators have very properly put in the word fellow.

61. *Fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days.*

He never said anything of the kind; it was a most wicked misrepresents of what he had said. If men wish to find an accusation against us, they can do it without any materials.

62-64. *And the high priest arose and said unto him, Answerest thou nothing? what is it which these witness against thee? But Jesus held his peace. And the high priest answered and said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say*

unto you. Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.

He binds them over to make their appearance before him when he becomes the judge, and they shall take the place of the criminal.

65, 66, *Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy, What think ye?*

He looks round upon the seventy elders of the people who were sitting there in the great council, and "They answered and said, He is guilty of death:." Probably Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus were not there; they were the only two friends the Lord had in the Sanhedrim.

66, 67, 68. *They answered and said, He is guilty of death. Then did they spit in his face, and buffeted him; and others smote him with the palms of their hands, Saying, prophesy unto us, thou Christ, Who is he that smote thee?*

This ended the regular ecclesiastical trial of Christ. A little time was spent, before Pilate, the judicial ruler, was ready to see Christ, but soon as the dawn was come, they dragged him before another tribunal. We shall now turn to Luke 23.

This exposition consisted of readings from MATTHEW 26:59-68; LUKE 23.

MATTHEW 27:15-54

We are now to read about our Lord before Pontius Pilate.

15-30. *Now at that feast the governor was wont to release unto the people a prisoner, whom they would. And they had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas. Therefore when they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ? For he knew that for envy they had delivered him. When he was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him. But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus. The governor answered and said unto them, Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you? They said, Barabbas. Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ? They all say unto him, Let him be crucified. And the governor said, Why,*

what evil hath he done? But they cried out the more, saying, Let him be crucified. When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it. Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children. Then released he Barabbas unto them: and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified. Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers. And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe. And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews! And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head.

Surely, mockery could have gone no further; we marvel at the boldness and ingenuity of their scorn. Oh, that we were half as earnest in seeking to honour him, — as careful to think of everything that might make our homage perfect. But we, alas! too often fail to give him due honour and glory, even when others are all aflame with zeal to insult him.

31. *And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him.*

Perhaps they were afraid that he would die from sheer exhaustion and so, with a cruel mercy, they would keep him alive for the infliction of further tortures.

32. *And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to bear his cross.*

Any one of us might well have wished to have been Simon, yet we need not envy him.

There is a cross for every one who is a follower of the Crucified; may we have grace to carry it after him!

33, 34. *And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, a place of a skull, they gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink.*

He wholly abstained from that which might have lessened his pain. He came to suffer, and he intended to go through with all that he had undertaken. He would do nothing that would blunt the edge

of the sacrificial knife. He forbids not the soothing draught to other sufferers who are in pain; but, as for himself, he will not partake of it.

35-37. *And they crucified him, and parted his garment, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots. And sitting down they watched him there, and set up over his head his accusation written, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.*

And so he is, and so he shall be, — King of the Jews even on that cross, and never so royal as when he had surrendered everything for love of those whom he came to redeem.

38-43. *Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left. And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, and saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others, himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God.*

What pain this taunt must have caused to the Saviour! Because he is so pure, and never yields to temptation, we are very apt to forget that temptation was really temptation even to him, and that it grieved his pure and holy Soul thus to be tempted to turn aside from the path of perfect trust in his Father, and complete obedience to him. No doubt the pain of temptation is in inverse ratio to our willingness to yield to it. When we yield to temptation, we feel a pleasure in it; but when we are horrified at it, and start back from it, then we feel the pain of it. Oh, for a mind and heart, so perfectly subject to the will of God, that we should feel such a temptation as this to be the very agony of grief to us, as it was to our Lord!

44. *The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth.*

Nobody seemed to look upon him with any desire to help him, but even the lowest of the low would contribute their portion of mockery to increase his misery.

45-54. *Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, This man calleth for Elias. And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink. The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him. Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost, and, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many. Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God.*

John gives us some details of our Lord before Pilate which Matthew does not mention.

This exposition consisted of readings from MATTHEW 27:15-54; AND JOHN 18:28-38.

MATTHEW 27:22-50

Our Lord was brought before the Roman governor Pilate. He was anxious to let Jesus go; but he was a weak-minded man, easily swayed by the noisy cry of the people, prompted by the chief priests and elders.

22, 23. *Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ? They all say unto him, Let him be crucified. And the governor said, Why, what evil hath he done? But they cried out the more, saying, Let him be crucified.*

A blind, unreasoning hate had taken possession of the people. They gave no answer to Pilate's wondering enquiry, "Why, what evil hath he done?" for he had done nothing amiss; they only repeated the brutal demand, "Let him be crucified! Let him be crucified!" The world's hatred of Christ is shown in similar fashion today. He has done no evil, no one has suffered harm at his hands, all unite to pronounce him innocent; and yet they practically say, "Away with him! Crucify him!"

24. *When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it.*

Ah, Pilate, you cannot rid yourself of responsibility by that farce! He who has power to prevent a wrong is guilty of the act if he permits others to do it, even though he does not actually commit it himself. If you are placed in positions of power and responsibility, do not dream that you can escape from guilt by merely allowing other people to do what you would not do yourself.

25. *Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children.*

All the people willingly took upon themselves the guilt of the murder of our dear Lord: "His blood be on us, and on our children." This fearful imprecation must have been remembered by many when the soldiers of Titus spared neither age nor sex, and the Jewish capital became the veritable Aceldama, the field of blood.

26. *Then released he Barabbas unto them: and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.*

Why scourge him before delivering him up to be crucified? Surely this was a superfluity of cruelty. The Roman scourging was something which I scarcely care to describe, one of the most terrible punishments to which anyone could be subjected; yet Pilate first scourged Jesus, and then gave him up to die by crucifixion.

27, 28. *Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers. And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe.*

Some old soldier's coat, that they found lying about, they cast upon Christ in imitation of the royal robes of Caesar or Herod.

29-31. *And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews! And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head. And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him.*

By that fact, though they did not intend it, our Lord was recognized in the street as the same person who had been taken into

the Praetorium by the soldiers. Had Jesus been brought forth in the scarlet robe, persons looking at him might not have known him to be the same man who wore the garment woven from the top throughout; but in his own seamless raiment, they readily recognized the Nazarene.

32. *And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to bear his cross.*

I wonder if he was a black man. There was a Simon in the early Church; and it certainly was the lot of the Ethiopian to bear the cross for many and many an age. This Simon was a stranger, anyhow, and a foreigner; truly honoured was he to be compelled to bear the cross after Christ.

33. *And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, a place of a skull,*

From its shape. There appears to be to this day a hill still in the form of a human skull outside the gate of Jerusalem. When they came to that common place of execution, the Tyburn or Old Bailey of the city,

34. *They gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink.*

A stupefying draught was given to the condemned that is the only mercy that there was about the whole thing. The Romans did give to the crucified a draught of myrrh to take away something of the agony of crucifixion; but our Lord came not to be stupefied, he came to suffer, therefore he would not take anything that would at all impair his faculties. He drank even to the dregs the bitter cup of grief and woe.

35. *And they crucified him,*

Horrible scene, to see those blessed hands and feet pierced with nails, and fastened to the cross!

35. *And parted his garments, casting lots:*

Rattling the dice-box at the foot of the cross! Gambling is the most hardening of all vices. I believe that crimes have been committed by persons, under the influence of gambling, which never could have been committed by them in any other condition of mind: "They parted his garments, casting lots." See here, ye gamblers! With Christ's blood bespattering them, these soldiers dared still to raffle for his robe.

35, 36. *That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots. And sitting down they watched him there;*

His enemies gloating their cruel eyes with the sight of his sufferings; his friends with many tears watching his amazing griefs. It is for us, tonight, with humble faith and grateful love, to mark the incidents connected with his painful death.

37, 38. *And set up over his head his accusation written, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS. Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left.*

Giving him the place of honour, which means in this case the place of dishonour. He was the apex of that terrible triangle.

39, 40. *And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, and saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.*

This is the cry of the Socinians today, "Come down from the cross. Give up the atoning sacrifice, and we will be Christians." But, by rejecting his vicarious atonement, they practically un-Christ the Christ, as those mockers at Golgotha did.

41, 42. *Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him.*

Just so. Get rid of a crucified Saviour, then they will believe in Him. Atonement, substitution, vicarious sacrifice, this staggers them. They will have Christ if they can have him without his cross.

43-46. *He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God. The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth. Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*

Every word in this terrible cry from the cross is emphatic; every syllable cuts and pierces to the heart.

47. *Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, This man calleth for Elias.*

They knew better, yet they jested at the Saviour's prayer.

48. *And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge,*

It always seems to me very remarkable that the sponge, which is the very lowest form of animal life, should have been brought into contact with Christ, who is at the top of all life. In his death, the whole circle of creation was completed.

48-50. *And filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink. The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him. Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost.*

Christ's strength was not exhausted; his last word was uttered "with a loud voice", like the shout of a conquering warrior. He need not have died on account of any infirmity in himself; but voluntarily, for your sake, for your sake and mine, he "yielded up the ghost." Blessed be his holy name!

MATTHEW 27:27-54

27-30. *Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers. And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe. And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews! And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head.*

These soldiers were men to whom the taking of human life was mere amusement, or, at best, a duty to be performed. If the ordinary Roman citizen found his greatest delight in the amphitheater, where men fiercely fought with each other, and shed each other's blood, or were devoured by wild beasts, you may imagine what Roman soldiery-the roughest part of the whole population-would be like; and now that One was given up into their hands, charged with making himself a king, you can conceive what a subject for jest it was to them, and how they determined to make all the mockery they could of this pretended king. They were not touched by the gentleness of his demeanor, nor by his sorrowful countenance; but they proceeded to pour all possible scorn and insult upon his devoted head. Surely, the world never saw a more marvelous scene

than this,-the King of kings derided, and made nothing of,-treated as a mimic monarch by the very vilest and most brutal of men.

31. *And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him.*

Their action, in restoring to him his own seamless robe, was overruled by God,-whatever their motive may have been,-so that nobody might say that some other person had been substituted for the Saviour. He went forth wearing that well-known garment, which was woven from the top throughout, which he had always worn; and all who looked upon him said, It is he,-the Nazarene. We know his face, his dress, his person.” There was no possibility of mistaking him for anybody else.

32. *And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to bear his cross.*

It was too heavy for him to carry alone, so they bade Simon help him; and, truly, I think that Simon was thereby highly honoured. If this was Simon, who is called Niger, then there may be some truth in the common belief that he was a black man; and, assuredly, the coloured race has long had to carry a very heavy cross, yet there may be a great destiny before it. All Christ’s followers are called to be cross-bearers.

“Shall Simon bear the cross alone,
And all the rest go free?
No; there’s a cross for every one,
And there’s a cross for me.”

If we belong to Christ, we must be as willing to take up his cross as he was to carry ours, and die upon it.

33, 34. *And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, a place of a skull, they gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink.*

It was not because of its bitterness that our Lord refused it, for he did not decline to endure anything that would add to his grief; but this was a stupefying draught, a death potion, which was given to those who were executed, in order somewhat to mitigate their pains; but the Saviour did not intend that his senses should be beclouded by any such draught as that, so, “when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink.”

35. *And they crucified him,--*

A short sentence, but what an awful depth of meaning there is in it! "They crucified him,"—driving their iron bolts through his hands and feet, and lifting him up to hang there upon the gibbet which was reserved for felons and for slaves: "They crucified him,"—

35. *And parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots.*

It was the executioners perquisite to have the garments of the man they put to death; so, in order that no single portion of the shame of the cross might be spared to the Saviour, these soldiers divided his garments amongst them, and raffled for his seamless robe. It must have taken a hard heart to gamble at the foot of the cross; but I suppose that, of all sins under heaven, there is none that does so harden the heart as gambling. Beware of it!

36. *And sitting down they watched him there;*

Some to gloat, in their fiendish malice, over his sufferings; others, to make sure that he did really die; and, possibly, some few to pity him in his agony:

"Sitting down they watched him there."

37-44. *And set up over his head his accusation written, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS. Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left. And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, and saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God. The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth.*

So that, as he looked all around, he met with nothing but ribaldry, and jest, and scorn. His disciples had all forsaken him. One or two of them afterwards rallied a little, and came and stood by the cross; but, just then, he looked, and there was none to pity, and none to help him, even as it had been foretold.

45. *Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour.*

From twelve o'clock at noon, according to the Roman and Jewish time, till three in the afternoon, there was a thick darkness,- whether over all the world, or only over the land of Palestine, we cannot very well say. It was not an eclipse of the sun, it was a miracle specially wrought by God. Some have supposed that dense clouds came rolling up obscuring everything; but, whatever it was, deep darkness came over all the land. Dore' has, in his wonderful imagination, given us a sketch of Jerusalem during that darkness. The inhabitants are all trembling at what they had done; and as Judas goes down the street, they point at him as the man who sold his Master, and brought all this evil upon the city. I should think that such darkness at mid-day must have made them fear that the last day had come, or that some great judgment would overtake them for their wicked slaughter of the innocent Jesus of Nazareth. Even the sun could no longer look upon its Maker surrounded by those who mocked him, so it traveled on in tenfold night, as if in very shame that the great Sun of righteousness should himself be in such awful darkness.

46-48. *And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, This man calleth for Elias. And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink.*

For he had also said, "I thirst," which John records, specially mentioning that he said this, "that the Scripture might be fulfilled."

49-51. *The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him. Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom;*

That rending of the great veil of the temple was intended to symbolize the end of Judaism; the horror of the sanctuary that its Lord was put to death; the opening of the mysteries of heaven; the clearing of the way of access between man and God.

51. *And the earth did quake, and the rocks rent;*

Well says our poet,—“ Of feeling, all things show some sign But this unfeeling heart of mine.”

52-54. *And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many. Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God.*

MATTHEW 27:27-54

27-30. *Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers. And they stripped him and put on him a scarlet robe. And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews! And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head.*

Ridicule is very painful to bear at any time, and soldiers have been masters of that cruel art when they have been encouraged in it by their leaders. Remember, brethren and sisters, who it was that bore all this shameful treatment from these brutal men, — your Lord and the angels' Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth, who had designed, for a while, to veil his Deity in human flesh. And there he stood, to be “set at nought,” — to be made nothing of, — by those rough Roman legionaries, the creatures of his own hand, whom he could have destroyed in a moment by a word or a wish. What matchless condescension our gracious redeemer displayed even in his own deepest degradation and agony!

31, 32. *And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him. And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to bear his cross.*

And methinks that he must have been a glad man to have such an honour thrust upon him, yet you need not envy him, for there is a cross for you also to carry. Bear it cheerfully. If anything happens to you, by way of ridicule, for Christ's sake and the gospel's, bow your shoulder willingly to the burden, and as knights are made by a

stroke from a sword held in their sovereign's hand, so shall you be made princes of the realm of Christ by bearing the cross after him.

33. *And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, a place of a skull, —*

We do not know why it was so called. There have been many conjectures concerning the name, but they are only conjectures. It was probably just a little knoll, outside the gate of the city, — the common place of execution for malefactors, and the special points to be noted are that Jesus suffered without the gate, in the regular place of doom, — the Tyburn or Old Bailey of Jerusalem, — and so was numbered with the transgressors.

34. *They gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall:*

A stupefying draught was usually given to the criminals who were crucified, to mitigate their agony; but Christ did not wish for that to be done in his case.

34. *And when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink.*

He came to earth that he might suffer, and he would retain all his faculties while suffering, he would have every nerve made into a straight road for the hot feet of pain to travel over, for he would drink, even to the last dregs, every drop that was in the cup of suffering for his people's sin.

35, 36. *And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots. And sitting down they watched him there;*

Some of them gloating their cruel eyes with the sight of his suffering others watching him out of mere curiosity, but there were some, hard by the cross, who stood there to weep in sympathy with him, — a sword piercing through their own hearts while the Son of man was being put to death.

37. *And set up over his head his accusation written, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.*

And so he is. When will the Jews own him as their King? They will do so one day, perhaps they will do so when Christians begin to think and speak more kindly of them than they usually do. When the hardness of heart on our part towards them shall pass away, it may be that their hardness of heart towards Christ will also pass away. Long have they been despised, and oppressed, and persecuted in

many lands, so that, by some means, they might be brought to look, in penitence, upon him whom they crucified, and to own him as their Lord and Saviour!

38-40. *Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left. And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, and saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thy self. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.*

That is the devil's old doctrine: "Save thyself; look out for yourselves; live for yourselves; be selfish." But Christ could never act like that; he came to live and die for others. "Save thyself," was not the doctrine that he either preached or practiced. And this is another old taunt of Satan and those who follow him: "If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross, and we will believe in thee." There are plenty who would be willing to believe in Christ, but not in Christ crucified. "He was a good man," say they, "a great prophet, no doubt, far in advance of his times," and so on. But, if you talk like that, you are not on safe ground, for if Christ was not the Son of God, at any rate he professed to be, and he made people think he was; and if he was not, he was an impostor, and not a good man at all. You must either repudiate Christ altogether, or take him with his cross; it must be Christ crucified, or no Christ at all.

41-44. *Likewise also the chief priest mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God. The thieves also, —*

Those subjects who were crucified with him, and were sharers of his misery, — ,

44-46. *Which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth. Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*

This was the climax of his grief, — not merely to suffer intense agony of body, not only to be mocked alike by priests and people, but to be forsaken of his God. Yet this was needful as a part of the penalty that was due to sin. God must turn away from anyone who

has sin upon him, so, as sin was laid upon Christ, God had to turn away his face even from his well beloved Son because he was bearing his people's sins upon the accursed tree.

47-49. Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, This man calleth for Elias. And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink. The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him.

Mocking him even in his prayers, for they well knew the difference between Eloi and Elias.

50. Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost.

You know what he said when he cried with a loud voice: "It is finished."

51-54. And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many. Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquakes, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly that was the Son of God.

MATTHEW 27:32-49

32. And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to bear his cross.

Perhaps they were afraid that Christ would die from exhaustion; so they compelled Simon to bear his cross. Any one of Christ's followers might have wished to have been this man of Cyrene; but we need not envy him, for there is a cross for each of us to carry. Oh! that we were as willing to bear Christ's cross as Christ was to bear our sins on his cross! If anything happens to us by way of persecution or ridicule for our Lord's sake, and the gospel's, let us cheerfully endure it. As knights are made by a stroke from the sovereign's sword, so shall we become princes in Christ's realm as he lays his cross on our shoulders.

33, 34. *And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, a place of a skull, They gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink.*

Golgotha was the common place of execution for malefactors, the Tyburn or Old Bailey of Jerusalem, outside the gate of the city. There was a special symbolical reason for Christ's suffering without the gate, and his followers are bidden to "go forth unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach" (Hebrews 13:11-13). A stupefying draught was given to the condemned, to take away something of the agony of crucifixion; but our Lord came to suffer, and he would not take anything that would at all impair his faculties. He did not forbid his fellow-sufferers drinking the vinegar mingled with gall ("wine mingled with myrrh," Mark 15:23), but he would not drink thereof. Jesus did not refuse this draught because of its bitterness, for he was prepared to drink even to the last dreadful dregs the bitter cup of wrath which was his people's due.

35. *And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots.*

There is a world of meaning in that short sentence, "and they crucified him," driving their bolts of iron through his blessed hands and feet, fastening him to the cross, and lifting him up to hang there upon a gibbet reserved for felons. We can scarcely realize all that the crucifixion meant to our dear Lord; but we can join in Faber's prayer: —

"Lord Jesus! may we love and weep,
Since thou for us art crucified."

Then was fulfilled all that our Lord had foretold in chapter 20:17-19, except his resurrection, the time for which had not arrived. The criminals clothes were the executioners' perquisite. The Roman soldiers who crucified Christ had no thought of fulfilling the Scriptures when they parted his garments, casting lots; yet their action was exactly that which had been foretold in Psalm 22:18. The seamless robe would have been spoiled if it had been rent, so the soldiers raffled for the vesture, while they shared the other garments of our Lord. The dice would be almost stained with the blood of Christ, yet the gamblers played on beneath the shadow of his cross. Gambling is the most hardening of all vices. Beware of it in any

form! No games of chance should be played by Christians, for the blood of Christ seems to have bespattered them all.

36. *And sitting down they watched him there;*

Some watched him from curiosity, some to make sure that he really did die, some even delighted their cruel eyes with his sufferings; and there were some, hard by the cross, who wept and bewailed, a sword passing through their own hearts while the Son of man was agonizing even unto death.

37. *And set up over his head his accusation written, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.*

What a marvelous providence it was that moved Pilate's pen! The representative of the Roman Emperor was little likely to concede kingship to any man; yet he deliberately wrote, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews," and nothing would induce him to alter what he had written. Even on his cross, Christ was proclaimed King, in the sacerdotal Hebrew, the classical Greek, and the common Latin, so that everybody in the crowd could read the inscription. When will the Jews own Jesus as their King? They will do so one day, looking on him whom they pierced. Perhaps they will think more of Christ when Christians think more of them; when our hardness of heart towards them has gone, possibly their hardness of heart towards Christ may also disappear.

38. *Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left.*

As if to show that they regarded Christ as the worst of the three criminals, they put him between the two thieves, giving him the place of dishonour. Thus was the prophecy fulfilled, "He was numbered with the transgressors." The two malefactors deserved to die, as one of them admitted (Luke 23:40, 41); but a greater load of guilt vested upon Christ, for "he bare the sin of many," and, therefore, he was rightly distinguished as the King of sufferers, who could truly ask: — "Was ever grief like mine?"

39, 40. *And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the son of God, come down from the cross.*

Nothing torments a man when in pain more than mockery. When Jesus Christ most wanted words of pity and looks of kindness, they

that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads. Perhaps the most painful part of ridicule is to have one's most solemn sayings turned to scorn, as were our Lord's words about the temple of his body: "Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself." He might have saved himself; he might have "come down from the cross"; but if he had done so, we could never have become the sons of God. It was because he was the Son of God that he did not come down from the cross, but hung there until he had completed the sacrifice for his people's sin. Christ's cross is the Jacob's ladder by which we mount up to heaven. This is the cry of the Socinians today, "Come down from the cross. Give up the atoning sacrifice, and we will be Christians." Many are willing to believe in Christ, but not in Christ crucified. They admit that he was a good man and a great teacher; but by rejecting his vicarious atonement, they practically un-Christ the Christ, as these mockers at Golgotha did.

41-43. *Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God.*

The chief priests, with the scribes and elders, forgetting their high station and rank, joined the ribald crew in mocking Jesus in his death pangs. Every word, was emphatic; every syllable cut and pierced our Lord to the heart. They mocked him as a Saviour; "He saved others; himself he cannot save." They mocked him as a King; "If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him." They mocked him as a believer; "He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him." They mocked him as the Son of God; "For he said, I am the Son of God." Those who say that Christ was a good man virtually admit his deity, for he claimed to be the Son of God. If he was not what he professed to be, he was an impostor. Notice the testimony that Christ's bitterest enemies bore even as they reviled him: "He saved others"; "He is the King of Israel" (R.V.); "He trusted in God."

44. *The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth.*

The sharers of his misery, the abjects who were crucified with him, joined in reviling Jesus. Nothing was wanting to fill up his cup

of suffering and shame. The conversion of the penitent thief was all the more remarkable because he had but a little while before been amongst the mockers of his Saviour. What a trophy of divine grace he became!

45. *Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour.*

Some have thought that this darkness covered the whole world, and so caused even a heathen to exclaim, "Either the world is about to expire, or the God who made the world is in anguish." This darkness was supernatural; it was not an eclipse. The sun could no longer look upon his Maker surrounded by these who mocked him. He covered his face, and traveled on in tenfold night, in very shame that the great Sun of righteousness should himself be in such terrible darkness.

46. *And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*

In order that the sacrifice of Christ might be complete, it pleased the Father to forsake his well-beloved Son. Sin was laid on Christ, so God must turn away his face from the Sin-bearer. To be deserted of his God was the climax of Christ's grief, the quintessence of his sorrow. See here the distinction between the martyrs and their Lord; in their dying agonies they have been divinely sustained; but Jesus, suffering as the Substitute for sinners, was forsaken of God. The saints who have known what it is to have their Father's face hidden from them, even for a brief space, can scarcely imagine the suffering that wrung from our Saviour the agonizing cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

47. *Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, This man calleth for Elias.*

They knew better, yet they jested at the Saviour's prayer. Wickedly, willfully, and scornfully, they turned his death-shriek into ridicule.

48, 49. *And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink. The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him.*

A person in such agony as Jesus was suffering might have mentioned many pangs that he was enduring; but it was necessary

for him to say, "I thirst," in order that another Scripture might be fulfilled. One of them, more compassionate than his companions, ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, from the vessel probably brought by the soldiers for their own use, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink. It always seems to me very remarkable that the sponge, which is the very lowest form of animal life, should have been brought into contact with Christ, who is at the top of all life. In his death the whole circle of creation was completed. As the sponge brought refreshment to the lips of our dying Lord, so may the least of God's living ones help to refresh him now that he has ascended from the cross to the throne.

MATTHEW 27:33-44

33, 34. *And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, a place of a skull, they gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink.*

This was a stupefying draught, which was usually given to prisoners about to die in order to mitigate their pain, and therefore Christ would not drink it, for he was determined to suffer even to the bitter end. He had no mitigation of his agony when he was offering his atonement for us; and so, "when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink."

35. *And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots.*

This is a point upon which we cannot say much, but, to the peculiarly sensitive soul of Jesus, it must have been a great part of his shame thus to be stripped of every garment, and hung up before the sun.

36, 37. *And sitting down they watched him there; and set up over his head his accusation written: THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.*

By their own confession, he died for being a King, and he died for being too greatly good, too royal in his love. He, being King of kings, died that you and I might live for ever, and be kings and priests unto God,

38, 39. *Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left. And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads.*

Not only they that sat there, such as the scribes, and Pharisee, and soldiers, and they that hung there, the thieves that were crucified with him, but the passers-by must needs revile him, indulging in a sneer.

40-43. *And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, Hhe saved others: himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him.*

That is the cry of the mockers today. If we will but give up the Atonement, men say that they will believe in Christ. His character is so excellent that they will accept him as an example, (no they say,) but they will not have his Godhead, nor his precious blood. This proves that they are enemies, for they use the same language as his bitterest foes did when he hung upon the cross. As for the scribes, they were learned in the Psalms, and therefore they quoted what we have already read.

43, 44. *He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God. The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth.*

Thus the Master passed through bitter trial and ignominy for our sakes.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 22:1-9; AND MATTHEW 27:33-44.

MATTHEW 27:50-54

50. *Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost.*

Christ's strength was not exhausted; his last word was uttered with a loud voice, like the shout of a conquering warrior. And what a word it was, "It is finished"! Thousands of sermons have been preached upon that little sentence; but who can tell all the meaning that lies compacted within it? It is a kind of infinite expression for breadth, and depth, and length, and height altogether immeasurable. Christ's life being finished, perfected, completed, he yielded up the

ghost, willingly dying, laying down his life as he said he would: "I lay down my life for the sheep. I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again."

51-53. *And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.*

Christ's death was the end of Judaism: The veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom. As if shocked at the sacrilegious murder of her Lord, the temple rent her garments, like one stricken with horror at some stupendous crime. The body of Christ being rent, the veil of the temple was torn in twain from the top to the bottom. Now was there an entrance made into the holiest of all, by the blood of Jesus; and a way of access to God was opened for every sinner who trusted in Christ's atoning sacrifice. See what marvels accompanied and followed the death of Christ: The earth did quake, and the rocks rent; and the graves were opened. Thus did the material world pay homage to him whom man had rejected; while nature's convulsions foretold what will happen when Christ's voice once more shakes not the earth only, but also heaven. These first miracles wrought in connection with the death of Christ were typical of spiritual wonders that will be continued till he comes again, —rocky hearts are rent, graves of sin are opened, those who have been dead in trespasses and sins, and buried in sepulchers of lust and evil, are quickened, and come out from among the dead, and go unto the holy city, the New Jerusalem.

54. *Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God.*

These Roman soldiers had never witnessed such scenes in connection with an execution before, and they could only come to one conclusion about the illustrious prisoner whom they had put to death: "Truly this was the Son of God." It was strange that those men should confess what the chief priests and scribes and elders denied; yet since their day it has often happened that the most abandoned and profane have acknowledged Jesus as the Son of God while their religious rulers have denied his divinity.

This exposition consisted of readings from LUKE 23:27-49, AND MATTHEW 27:50-54.

MATTHEW 27:50-66

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Christ's strength was not exhausted; his last word was uttered with a loud voice, like the shout of a conquering warrior. And what a word it was, "It is finished"! Thousands of sermons have been preached upon that little sentence, but who can tell all the meaning that lies compacted, length, and height altogether unmeasurable. Christ's life being finished, perfected, completed; he yielded up the ghost, willingly dying, laying down his life as he said he would: "I lay down my life for the sheep . . . I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again."

51-53. *And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; And the graves were opened; and many of the bodies of the saints which slept arose. And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.*

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55-56. *And many women were there beholding afar off, which followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto him: Among which was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the Mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's children.*

We have no record of any unkindness to our Lord from any woman, though we have many narratives of the loving ministry of women at various periods in his life. It was meet, therefore, that even at Calvary "many women were there beholding afar off." The ribald crowd and the rough soldiers would not permit these timid yet brave souls to come near; but we learn from John 19:25 that some of them edged their way through the throng till they "stood by the cross of Jesus." Love will dare anything.

57, 58. *When the even was come, there came a rich man of Arimathaea, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus' disciple: He went to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be delivered.*

This rich man of Arimathaea, named Joseph, a member of the Jewish Sanhedrim, was Jesus' disciple, "but secretly for fear of the Jews" (John 19:38); yet when his Lord was actually dead, extraordinary courage nerved his spirit, and boldly he went to Pilate and begged the body of Jesus. Joseph and Nicodemus are types of many more who have been emboldened by the cross of Christ to do what, without that mighty magnet, they would never have attempted. When night comes, the stars appear; so in the night of Christ's death these two bright stars shone forth with blessed radiance. Some flowers bloom only at night; such a blossom was the courage of Joseph and Nicodemus.

59, 60. *And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, And laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulcher, and departed.*

Our King, even in the grave, must have the best of the best; his body was “wrapped in a clean linen cloth, and laid in Joseph’s own new tomb, thus completing the fulfillment of Isaiah 53:9. Some see in this linen shroud an allusion to the garments in which priests were to be clothed. Joseph’s was a virgin sepulcher, wherein up to that time no one had been buried, so that, when Jesus rose, none could say that another came forth from the tomb instead of him. That rock-hewn cell in the garden sanctified every part of God’s acre where saints lie buried. Instead of longing to live till Christ comes, as some do, we might rather pray to have fellowship with Jesus in his death and burial.

61. *And there was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulcher.*

Love and faith were both typified by these two Mary’s sitting over against the sepulcher. They will be the last to leave their Lord’s resting-place, and the first to return to it when the Sabbath is past.

Can we cling to Christ when his cause seems to be dead and buried? When truth is fallen in the streets, or is even buried in the sepulcher of skepticism or superstition, can we still believe in it, and look forward to its resurrection? That is what-some of us are doing at the present time. O Lord, keep us faithful!

62-64. *Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, Saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the Sepulcher be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first.*

Those punctilious priests and Pharisees, who were so scrupulous about keeping the Sabbath, did not mind profaning the day of rest by holding a consultation with the Roman governor. They knew that Christ was dead and buried, but they still stood in dread of his power. They called him a “deceiver,” and they even pretended to “remember” what “he said, while he was yet alive.” At his trial, their false witnesses gave another meaning to his words, but they

knew all the while that he was speaking of his resurrection, not of the Temple on Mount Zion. Now they are afraid that, even in the sepulcher, he will bring to nought all their plans for his destruction. They must have known that the disciples of Jesus would not steal him away, and say unto the people, "He is risen from the dead"; so they probably feared that he really would come forth from the tomb. Whatever conscience they had made great cowards of them; so they begged Pilate to do what he could to prevent the rising of their victim.

65, 66. *Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can. So they went, and made the sepulcher sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch.*

The chief priests and Pharisees wanted Pilate to make the sepulcher sure, but he left them to secure it. There seems to have been a grim sort of irony about the governor's reply, "Ye have a watch; go your way, make it as sure as ye can." Whether he mean it as a taunt, or as a command to secure the sepulcher, they became unconsciously witnesses that Christ's resurrection was a supernatural act. The tomb in the rock could not be entered except by rolling away the stone, and they guarded that by sealing the stone, and setting a watch. According to the absurd teaching of the Rabbis, rubbing ears of corn was a kind of threshing, and, therefore, was unlawful on the Sabbath; yet here were these men doing what, by similar reasoning, might be called furnace and foundry work, and calling out a guard of Roman legionaries to assist them in breaking the Sabbath. Unintentionally, they did honour to the sleeping King when they obtained the representatives of the Roman emperor to watch his resting-place till the third morning, when he came forth Victor over sin, and death, and the grave. Thus once more was the wrath of man made to praise the King of glory, and the remainder of that wrath was restrained.

MATTHEW 28

1. *In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulcher.*

While the Jewish Sabbath lasted, they paid to it due respect. They did not even go the sepulcher to perform the kindly offices of

embalment; but when the old Sabbath was dying away, and the new and better Sabbath began to dawn, these holy women found their way back to their Lord's tomb. Woman must be first at the sepulcher as she was last at the cross. We may well forget that she was first in the transgression; the honour which Christ put upon her took away that shame. Who but Mary Magdalene should be the first at the tomb? Out of her Christ had cast seven devils, and now she acts as if into her he had sent seven angels. She had received so much grace that she was full of love to her Lord. "In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulcher." You can just see them in the gray light of the dawn; it is not clear enough to make out their form and shape; but in the twilight they are coming into the garden, and finding their way to the new sepulcher.

2. And, behold, there was a great earthquake:—

The women must have wondered as they felt that tremor beneath their

feet. If you have ever felt an earthquake, you will never forget it; and this was a great one, not one of an ordinary kind: "a great earthquake." Death was being upheaved, and all the bars of the sepulcher were beginning to burst. When the King awoke from the sleep of death, he shook the world; the bed-chamber in which he rested for a little while trembled as the heavenly Hero arose from his couch: "Behold, there was a great earthquake." Nor was the King unattended in his rising,—

2. For the angel of the Lord—

It was not merely one of the angelic host, but some mighty presence-angel:

"the angel of the Lord"—

2. Descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it.

Jesus was put in the prison of the tomb as a hostage for his people; therefore he must not break out by himself, but the angelic sheriff's officer must bring the warrant for his deliverance, and set the captive at liberty. He was immured because of human debt; but the debt is paid, so he must go free. Like a flash of fire, the angel descends from the right hand of God. He stands at the mouth of the tomb, he touches the great stone, sealed as it was, and guarded by

the soldiery, and it rolls back; and when he has rolled back the stone from the door, he sits upon it, as if to defy earth and hell ever to roll it back again. That great stone seems to represent the sin of all Christ's people, which shut them up in prison; it can never be laid again over the mouth of the sepulcher of any child of God. Christ has risen, and all his saints must rise, too. The angel "rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it." I think I see there one of the grandest sights that ever man beheld, for one greater than an earthly king is sitting on something better than a throne.

3. *His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow:*

Dazzling in its purity, like the raiment worn by Christ upon the Mount of Transfiguration, whiter than any fuller can make it.

4. *And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men.*

First a palsy of fear, and then a stiffening of fright, fell upon them, for they had never seen such a sight as this before. They were Roman soldiers, who knew nothing of the meaning of cowardice; yet at the sight of this messenger of God, "the keepers did shake, and became as dead men."

5. *And the angel answered and said unto the women,—*

We had almost forgotten them; we had been thinking of the earthquake, and the angel, and the flaming lightning, and the frightened soldiers; but this angel's thought is all about the women. He whose countenance was like lightning, and whose garments were white as snow, said to the women,—

5-7. *Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead;*

Notice the angel's words; first "See," and then "Go." You cannot tell the message till you know it. You who would serve God, must first be instructed yourselves. "Come, see the place where the Lord lay;" and then, "Go quickly." If you have seen, then go. Do not sit down, and admire the sight, and forget the thousands who have never seen it; but come, see the place where the Lord lay, and then go, and "go quickly."

7. And Behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you.

That is a very beautiful touch of condescension on the Saviour's part,—that he would go before his disciples into Galilee. Why, Galilee was the very opposite of a classic region; it was a district that was much despised. The clod-hoppers, the boors, the illiterate people of no account, lived in “Galilee of the Gentiles.” “Yet,” says Christ, “I will meet you there.” It was the King's own rendezvous,—not in the courts of earthly monarchs, nor in the palaces of the priests, but away down in Galilee. What cares he for the grandeur of men, and their empty pomp and boasted wisdom? He goes to places that are despised, that he may lift them up by the glory of his light: “Behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you.”

8. And they departed quickly from the sepulcher with fear and great joy;

That seems a strange mixture: “fear and great joy.” Yet there was plenty of reason for both emotions. Who would not fear that had felt an earthquake, and seen an angel, and marked the tomb broken open? Yet who would not rejoice that had had such a cheering message, and such an assurance that the crucified Christ had risen from the dead? Experience is the best explanation of experience; you must feel for yourself these two emotions working together before you can understand how they can live in anyone at the same time: “They departed quickly from the sepulcher with fear and great joy.”

8. And did run to bring his disciples word.

Good women! “They did run.” These staid matrons did run, and who would not run to tell of a risen Lord?

9. And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them,—

Happy are the ministers who meet their Lord when they are going up the pulpit stairs; blessed are the teachers who meet Jesus when they are going to the class. They will be sure to preach and teach well when that is the case: “As they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them.”

9. Saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him.

These holy women were not Unitarians; knowing that Jesus was the Son of God, they had no hesitation in worshipping him. Perhaps these timid souls clung to their Lord through fear that he might be again taken from them, so “they held him by the feet, and worshipped him,” fear and faith striving within them for the mastery.

10. *Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.*

Note how Jesus dwells upon this despised district of Galilee; I should like to dwell upon it, too. He said nothing about classic Corinth, or imperial Rome, or proud Jerusalem; but his message is, “Tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.” If we will be humble, if we will cast aside the pride of life, there shall we meet him who is meek and lowly of heart.

11-13. *Now when they were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done. And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept.*

You must often have noticed what a mixture of falsehood this was. “You were asleep; you are sure that you were asleep?” “Yes.” “Yet you say that the disciples came; you knew they were the disciples though you were asleep. And they stole him away? You know how they did it, you can describe the stealthy way in which they took away the body of Jesus; you were the witnesses of it, although you were sound asleep all the while.” Go, sirs, it is worse than trifling to listen to the lying of a witness who begins by swearing that he was fast asleep all the time; yet this was the tale that the soldiers were bribed to tell; and many a worse lie than this has been told to try to put the truth of God out of countenance. The modern philosophy which is thrust forward to cast a slur upon the great truths of revelation, is no more worthy of credence than this lie put into the mouths of the soldiers; yet common report gives it currency, and amongst a certain clique it pays. But the soldiers naturally said, “We shall be put to death for sleeping while on duty;” so the chief priests said,—

14. *And if this come to the governor’s ears, we will persuade him, and secure you.*

“We can give some more of those arguments that have been so telling in your hands, and they will prevail with the governor as they have prevailed with you.”

15. *So they took the money, and did as they were taught:—*

Plenty do this still, and I have no doubt they will continue to do so as long as the world is what it is: “They took the money, and did as they were taught.”—

15-17. *And this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day. Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted.*

Where will not Mr. Doubting, and other members of his troublesome family be found? We can never expect to be quite free from doubters in the Church, since even in the presence of the newly-risen Christ some doubted. Yet the Lord revealed himself to the assembled company, although he knew that some among them would doubt that it was really their Lord who was risen from the dead.

18-20. *And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in, earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.*

We say, “Amen,” too. May he be most manifestly with us here even now, for his sweet love’s sake! Amen.

MATTHEW 28:1-15

1, 2. *In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulcher. And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it.*

See what concern angels have about our Lord. Are they here tonight? Do they make a habit of coming where the saints meet together? I think they do. We have intimations in Scripture that that is the case. Let us behave ourselves aright tonight “because of the angels”; and as they worship and count it their highest honour to

serve the Son of man, let us also worship Jesus, and adore him. What a picture this scene would make!

3, 4. *His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow; and for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men.*

He said nothing as he rolled back the stone; he did not shake a sword at them, or over them, to fill them with terror. The presence of perfect purity, the presence of heavenly things, is a terror to ungodly men. May you and I be such that our very presence in company will cast a hush over it! "It was e'en as though an angel shook his wings," they said of one good man, when he spake in common conversation. May there be about us enough of the heavenly to make the powers of evil quail before us!

5. *And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye:*

But I notice that they did fear, although the angel said, "Fear not." Neither men nor angels can so speak as to silence fears in trembling hearts; but Jesus can, as we shall see farther on. One word from his lips has infinitely more power than all the words of angels or of saints.

5. *For I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified.*

And if you and I tonight can truly say that we are on the side of Jesus, that we seek him who was crucified, then we can bear all the shame with which philosophy would fain cover the cross, and we have no cause for fear. Ridicule and all that it brings from this ungodly generation will not hurt you.

6. *He is not here: for he is risen, as he said.*

"As he said." A few words, but what a world of meaning! "As he said." He always does "as he said." He always gives "as he said." He always reveals himself "as he said" not otherwise. He never fails to fulfill a promise, or forgets even the mode of promising; not only does he do what he said, but as he said: "He is risen, as he said."

6. *Come, see the place where the Lord lay.*

For even the place where he lay is hallowed to you. And, beloved, if there is a place where you have ever had communion with Christ, you will remember it. You might bless the spot of ground where Jesus met with you. Here, tonight, I hope that some of you can see the place where the Lord appeared to you.

7. And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead;

Such good news ought to be spread quickly. "Go and tell his disciples," they are trembling, they have fled, — "that he is risen from the dead."

7. And, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you.

Brethren, this is good news for us tonight, though all may not, perhaps, feel the power of it. "He is risen." We have no dead Christ; we serve a living Saviour. He is risen, and therefore he can come to us tonight in the power of his resurrection-life, and he can make us glad. "Behold, he goeth before you into Galilee." There is a great deal about Galilee in Matthew's Gospel; it is the Gospel of the Kingdom, and yet it often talks about Galilee, that border-land which touches Gentiles, as well as the chosen seed of Abraham. There is the place where Jesus will meet his people, in the border-land between Jew and Gentile, there the risen Christ will hold the first general assembly of his Church.

8. And they departed quickly from the sepulcher with fear and great joy;

What a mixture, fear and joy! But notice that the fear was not great, and the joy was: "Fear and great joy." Observe the proportions of the mixture; and if tonight you have some fear, yet I hope you will have great joy; and then the bitterness of the fear will pass away. A holy fear, mixed with great joy, is one of the sweetest compounds we can bring to God's altar. Some of us have brought those spices with us tonight. These holy women brought other spices to the sepulcher; but these were the spices that they took away from it, "Fear and great joy."

8, 9. And did run to bring his disciples word. And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him.

He would not let Mary Magdalene do that when they were alone, but he said to her, "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: it is more needful for you to go now and tell my disciples that I have risen from the dead. There will be time by-and-by for further fellowship with me." But now Jesus permits these godly women to hold him by the feet. It was an act of humility,

worshipping and holding; and holding not his hands, but his feet. They must have seen the nail-prints before Thomas did, as they held him by the feet, and worshipped him. I do not find that these women ran to the angels, they rather shrank back from them; but they came to Jesus, for we are told that they came, and held him by the feet. I think that there must have been a new attraction about Christ after he had risen from the dead, something more sweet about the tones of his voice, something more charming about the countenance that had been so maimed at Gethsemane, and Gabbatha, and Golgotha.

10. *Then said Jesus unto them,*

As he saw their palpitating hearts, and perceived that they were still all in a flurry, for the angel had not dispelled their fears,

10. *Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.*

The angel talked of “disciples”; Christ talks of “brethren.” He always has the sweeter word.

11. *Now when they were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done.*

While good people were active, bad people were active, too. It is wonderful to think of how much good and evil is being done at the same time. While we are thankful that holy women are running with holy messages for Christ, here come the soldiers of the watch, and they are going in to those vile priests.

12. *And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel,*

They ought at once to have repented when the watch came, and told them that Jesus was risen. Ought they not to have gone, and fallen at his feet, and begged for mercy? But instead of that

12. *They gave large money unto the soldiers,*

Money, wherever it comes in, seems to do mischief. For money Christ was betrayed, and for money the truth about his resurrection was kept back as far as it could be. Money has had a hardening effect on some of the highest servants of God, and all who have to touch the filthy lucre have need to pray for grace to keep them from being harmed by being brought into contact with it.

13. *Saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept.*

If they were asleep, how did they know what happened? How could they know it if they were asleep? Evidence which is borne by men who were asleep at the time is evidently not worth regarding; but when you have to tell a lie, I suppose that, as any stick is good enough to beat a dog with, any lie will do to slander one whom you hate.

14, 15. *And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you. So they took the money, and did as they were taught:*

No doubt you have heard of the man who said that he did not believe all the articles of his church because his salary was so small that he could not be expected to believe them all for the money. Oh, the depraving and debasing power of the whole system of bribery and falsehood! May none of us ever be affected by considerations of profit and loss in matters of doctrine, matters of duty, and matters of right and wrong!

15. *And this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.*

You may start a lie, but you cannot stop it; there is no telling how long it will live. Let us never teach even the least error to a little child, for it may live on and become a great heresy long after we are dead. There is scarcely any limit to its life and to its power.

MATTHEW 28:16-20

16. *Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them.*

Away from the haunts of men, where he had been wont to be, in a country familiar to them, and with which he was familiar, in a despised country, "Galilee of the Gentiles."

17. *And when they saw him, they worshipped him:*

Probably this was the occasion referred to by Paul, when the risen Saviour "was seen of above five hundred brethren at once."

17. *But some doubted.*

There were some honest doubters then. The breed has been kept up ever since, only there are more dishonest doubters by a great deal than there are of honest ones now. We can never expect to be quite free from doubters in the church, since even in the presence of the newly-risen Christ "some doubted."

18. *And Jesus came and spake unto them,*

These words seem to imply that he came nearer to them than he was at first; unveiling himself still more, and revealing himself more clearly.

18, 19. *Saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations,*

“Teach”, that is, disciple, make disciples of “all nations.”

19, 20. *Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you:*

There is teaching again. It is as much the duty of the Christian to teach after baptism as to teach before baptism; he must be ever teaching. Hence believers are always to be learners, since Christ would have his servants always to be teachers: “Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.” We are not to invent a gospel; we are not to change, and shift, and cut, and shape it to meet the advancement of the age; Christ’s command is plain: “Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.”

20. *And, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.*

They have their commission, here is the seal to it; here is the source of their power; here is the society in which they are to work: “Lo, I am with you alway.” God grant that you and I, going forth to teach for Christ. may always have the sound of our Master’s feet with us, even to the end of the world! Amen.

This exposition consisted of readings from LUKE 4:16-30, 9:57-62; AND MATTHEW 28:16-20.

MARK

MARK 1:14-35

14. *Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, —*

When one servant of God is laid aside, it is a call to the rest to be the more earnest. So after John the Baptist was put into prison, “Jesus came into Galilee.” Sometimes a loss may be a gain, and if the loss of John was the means of bringing out Jesus, certainly both the Church and the world were the gainers: “Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God,” —

15. *And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.*

It is clear, from this passage, that our Lord exhorted men to repent, and to believe the gospel. There are some, who profess to be his followers, who will not suffer us to do this. We may teach men, and warn them, they say, but we must not exhort them to repent and believe. Well, as the contention of these people is not in accordance with the Scriptures, we are content to follow the Scriptures, and to do as Jesus did, so we shall say to sinners, “Repent ye, and believe the gospel.”

16-18. *Now as he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And Jesus said unto them; Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men. And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him.*

The gospel minister is like the fisherman with a net. I have sometimes heard the comparison drawn as though the gospel fisherman had a hook and a line, which he has not. His business is not to entice a fish to swallow his bait but to cast the net all round him, and lift him, by his grace, out of the element in which he lies in sin, into the boat where Christ still sits, as he sat, in the olden days, in the boat on the sea of Galilee. To shut the sinner up to faith in Jesus Christ, — that is the main work of the true gospel fisherman.

19, 20. *And when he had gone a little further thence, he saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also were in the ship mending their nets. And straightway he called them: and they left their father Zebedee in the ship with the hired servants, and went after him.*

They never had cause to regret that they did so. Whatever they left, they were abundantly rewarded. They had a rich reward here on earth; and they have a far richer reward in heaven. Whatever a man gives up for Christ is a blessed investment, which will, sooner or later, bring him good interest.

21, 22. *And they went into Capernaum; and straightway on the sabbath day he entered into the synagogue, and taught. And they were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes.*

He did not do as the scribes did, who made a great parade of learning by quoting this Rabbi and the other, but Jesus said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you." He spoke as one who felt that he had authority to speak in his own name, and in the name of God his Father. This method of teaching quite astonished the Jews. I wish that those who now hear the gospel, might be astonished at it, and be astonished into the belief of it by the power with which it comes home to their consciences and hearts.

23, 24. *And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, saying, Let us alone;*

How often that is still the cry of sinners, "Let us alone. Why do not you hold your own views, and let us alone?" "Yes the devils, and those whom they control, still say, "Let us alone." But it is a part of the gospel to attack that which is not the gospel, and it is as much the duty of the minister of the gospel to denounce error as to proclaim truth. If we do so, the old cry will still be heard, "Let us alone. Let us alone."

24, 25. *What have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? Art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God. And Jesus rebuked him, —*

He did not want any testimony from the devil. When a man of ill character once praised Plato, the philosopher said, "What can I have done wrong that such a fellow as that speaks well of me?" So when

the devil bore testimony to the divinity of Christ, “Jesus rebuked him,” —

25, 26. *Saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. And when the unclean spirit had torn him, and cried with a loud voice, he came out of him.*

For, if Satan must come out of a man, he will do him as much mischief as ever he can before he departs. His wrath is all the greater because his time is so short.

“He worries whom he can’t devour,
With a malicious joy.”

27. *And they were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What thing is this? what new doctrine is this? for with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him.*

It was the authority of his preaching which first astonished them; and then the authority with which he wrought his miracle, and subdued the world of demons. Blessed be God. Christ has not abdicated his authority. He is still the great Messenger of God, full of divine authority to save men, and to deliver them from the power of Satan.

28-30. *And immediately his fame spread abroad throughout all the region round about Galilee. And forthwith, when they were come out of the synagogue, they entered into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. But Simon’s wife’s mother lay sick of a fever, and anon they tell him of her.*

Christ was a house-to-house missionary, as well as an open-air preacher. There is much good to be done by those who know how to visit, and to look after individual cases; there is great good to be done in that way, as well as by dealing with mankind in the bulk.

31-35. *And he came and took her by the hand, and lifted her up; and immediately the fever left her, and she ministered unto them. And at even, when the sun did set, they brought unto him all that were diseased, and them that were possessed with devils. And all the city was gathered together at the door. And he healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils: and suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew him. And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.*

His hard day's work probably ran on far into the night. Yet, "a great while before day," he was up at the sacred work of supplication. The more work we have to do with men for God, the longer we ought to be at work with God for men. If you plead with men, you cannot hope to prevail unless you first plead with God. And, inasmuch as our Lord had great success the day before, it teaches us that the greatest success does not release us from the necessity of still waiting upon God. If God has given you much, my brother, go with thy basket, and ask for more. Never stay thy prayer. Increase thy spiritual hunger, and God will increase the richness of the gift he will bestow upon thee.

MARK 1:28-45

28. *And immediately his fame spread abroad throughout all the region round about Galilee.*

"Immediately." That is, as soon as Jesus had healed the man with an unclean spirit, his fame spread like wildfire. The miracle was reported from mouth to mouth till everybody in that region knew of it. It was said that the words and writings of Martin Luther were carried as by the wings of angels, so speedily was everything that he said and wrote made known far and wide. On this occasion, it was so with our Lord's wondrous deed of mercy and power: "Immediately his fame spread abroad throughout all the region round about Galilee."

29. *And forthwith, when they were come out of the synagogue, they entered into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.*

"Forthwith," or, again, "immediately." Simon and Andrew and James and John were intimately connected, we are told that they were "partners" in their fishing business. James and John, the sons of Zebedee, seem to have been in a good position in life; we read that their father had "hired servants" employed in the boats. So James and John went with Simon and Andrew into their partners' house when Christ went there after performing that notable miracle in the synagogue.

30. *But Simon's wife's mother lay sick of a fever, and anon they tell him of her.*

There were at least four of Christ's followers in the house, yet the mother of the wife of one of them lay sick of a fever. Grace does

not prevent suffering in the body; there will still be physical diseases even though in the soul there is spiritual health.

31. *And he came and took her by the hand, and lifted her up; and immediately the fever left her, and she ministered unto them.*

Jesus was very calm; he was not afraid of catching the fever. See how deliberately, and with what solemn, kindly dignity he deals with this sick woman: "He came and took her by the hand." I think I see him doing it "and lifted her up." He gently raises her, and she yields to his tender uplifting hand, and suddenly finds herself cooled of the burning fever, and perfectly restored to health and strength; so she rises from her bed, and the first thing she does is to minister unto them. I am sure that, whenever the Lord helps any of his people out of their temporal or spiritual distresses, they feel at once that they must say, "What shall we render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward us?" Her ministering unto them proved that the fever was quite gone, and gone in a way in which it does not ordinarily go; for, as you all know, fever usually leaves behind it extreme weakness. It seems to burn up the strength that is in one; and after it is gone, one is not fit even to wait at table for a long while. But Peter's wife's mother immediately when the fever was gone, rose and "ministered unto them." Christ's cures are always complete. If he saves us from the burning fever, he saves us from the weakness that follows it, and when he deals with soul maladies, his cures are equally complete, there are no after-effects to the soul as there are in many diseases that afflict the body. When the great Physician restores the soul, he restores it completely.

32. *And at even, when the sun did set, they brought unto him all that were diseased, and them that were possessed with devils.*

It was the Sabbath, and they would not even bring out their sick folk until the day of rest was over. The Jewish Sabbath ended at the setting of the sun, so these people were all watching and waiting until the sun dipped below the horizon, and then, straightaway, they brought their suffering ones to Jesus. What a mass of misery filled the streets of Capernaum that memorable night! The whole city was turned into a hospital.

33. *And all the city was gathered together at the door.*

It seemed as if everybody had come either to be healed or to witness the healing of others: "All the city was gathered together at

the door.” Oh, when shall we see our places of worship thronged in this fashion with the spiritually sick? When will this great city of London begin to turn towards the Lord Jesus Christ? Will any of us live to see all our fellow-citizens gathered together around the Saviour to be healed by him of all the wounds that sin hath made?

34. *And he healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils; and suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew him.*

They would persist in acknowledging him; perhaps with the design of injuring his cause, for nothing hurts the cause of Christ more than to have it praised by bad men or evil spirits. I do not know that an outrageous sinner, if he will not repent, can do Christ a better turn than to abuse him for then he is speaking after his own natural manner but when the devil or his servants go into the pulpit, and begin to speak in praise of Christ, then is Christ’s cause in an evil case indeed; so he “suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew him;” or, as the margin puts it, even to say that they knew him.”

35. *And in the morning, rising up a great while before day,*

While it was yet dark, he stole away even from his favored disciples that he might be alone with his Father.

35-37. *He went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed. And Simon and they that were with him followed after him. And when they had found him,--*

For he had endeavored to conceal himself in the loneliest spot that he could find. Possibly, the disciples overheard his groans, his cries, his supplications, as he poured out his very soul in prayer to his Father: “when they had found him,” —

37, 38. *They said unto him, All men seek for thee. And he said unto them, Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth.*

Jesus Christ came forth from God the Father that he might proclaim throughout the land the message of redeeming grace and dying love.

39, 40. *And he preached in their synagogues throughout all Galilee, and cast out devils. And there came a leper to him, beseeching him, and kneeling down to him, and saying unto him, If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.*

It is a pity that he could not go further than to say to Christ. "If thou wilt," but it is a great mercy that he could go as far as that, so, if you, dear friend, cannot pray a prayer that is full of faith, pray one that has at least some faith in it. If you cannot go as far as some do, go as far as you can. I have often told you to bless God for moonlight, and then he will give you sunlight; but for anyone to say, "I will not pray at all because I cannot pray as I would like to pray," is a very foolish thing. Say what you can, even as this poor leper said to Jesus, "If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean."

41. *And Jesus, moved with compassion,--*

This is a wonderful expression: "moved with compassion." The face of Jesus and his whole person showed that his very soul was stirred by an intense fellow-feeling for this poor leper: Jesus, moved with compassion,-

41. *Put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean.*

If you or I were to touch a leper, his uncleanness would at once be communicated to us, but when Christ touches a leper, his cleanliness is communicated to the leper. Oh, how high our blessed Lord stands above us! When we have to deal with certain peculiarly sad cases, we ought to go to the work with much earnest prayer that we ourselves may not be contaminated by contact with gross sinners, but Christ has such virtue in himself that he can even touch the fevered and the leprous, and yet sustain no injury.

42. *And as soon as he had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed from him, and he was cleansed.*

This was another very wonderful miracle. All that dryness of the skin, that scurf, that peeling, that inward foulness that eats into the bones, and pollutes the very current of the blood — all this was quite gone, the Lord Jesus Christ made this foul, unclean leper perfectly clean and whole in a single moment.

43, 44. *And he straitly charged him, and forthwith sent him away; and saith unto him, See thou say nothing to any man: but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing those things which Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.*

That was all he was to do, — to go and show himself to the priest, so that it might be officially known and certified that he was clean, and he was not to tell anyone else of his cure. He was

disobedient to Christ; perhaps you will think that he was very naturally and excusably so, but we must never make excuses for doing what Christ tells us not to do. Our duty is not to judge whether such-and-such a course will be profitable or beneficial, but to consider whether such-and-such a course is in accordance with the Word of the Lord. This man ought to have held his tongue, for Christ had told him to do so. I have no doubt that he said within himself, "The more I talk about this miracle, the more good I shall do, and the more famous Christ's name will become." But he had no business to think that, his business was to obey Christ's command.

45. *But he went out, and began to publish it much, and to blaze abroad the matter, insomuch that Jesus could no more openly enter the city,-*

There were such crowds that he could not work his miracles of healing. The disobedient man was no doubt moved by gratitude, which seems a very proper motive; yet his disobedience caused Christ serious inconvenience, and hindered his work; and I have no doubt that there are many things done in the Church of God today of which many say, "They are very proper, and very nice;" yes, but are they Scriptural? Did the Master command them? If not, they will cause him and his kingdom serious inconvenience and loss at some time or other. We cannot too fully realize that, as Christ's disciples, we are to obey him implicitly; and the best proof of our gratitude is to do exactly as Christ bids us. This man blazed abroad the news of his cure, so that "Jesus could no more openly enter into the city," —

45. *But was without in desert places: and they came to him from every quarter.*

This exposition consisted of readings from MARK 1:28-45; 2:1-12,

MARK 2

1, 2. *And again he entered into Capernaum, after some days; and it was noised that he was in the house. And straightaway many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door: and he preached the word unto them.*

It is a very singular feat that, although man, in his natural state of heart, is opposed to the gospel, yet he is drawn to hear it. Even though he abhors it, yet oftentimes he cannot help listening to it.

Wherever Jesus Christ is, whether he is present in person, or in the preaching of the Word, it will be certain to be noised abroad, and multitudes will come to hear. The grandest attraction either in or out of heaven, is still the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

3-5. *And they come unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four. And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press, they uncovered the roof where he was: and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay. When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.*

In Luke's account of this gathering, we read that "the power of the Lord was present to heal them," and when we ask, "Why was that power so remarkably present?" We think that one reason was, because there were persons present who were anxious about the good of others; and, today, wherever four persons come together praying for some poor soul, you may rest assured that the power of the Lord will there be present to heal. I do not think that so much of the success of sermons depends upon the preacher, as upon those model hearers who are all the while praying for a blessing, and who are making other members of the congregation — those who are converted, — the constant subject of their supplication. Christ blessed this man because of the faith of the four who carried him, and possibly because of his own faith. Notice that our Lord did not at first say to the sick man, "Thou art healed of thy palsy;" but he said, "Thy sins be forgiven thee." This was laying the axe at the root, because sin is at the bottom of sorrow; and where sin is pardoned, even the effects of sin will be removed.

6-9. *But there were certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts, Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only? And immediately when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts? Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk?*

Whichever is spoken, Omnipotence is implied. The presence and power of God alone could give efficacy to either sentence; but, to him, the one is as easy as the other.

10-14. But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house. And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, we never saw it on this fashion. And he went forth again by the sea side; and all the multitude resorted unto him, and he taught them. And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the receipt of custom, and said unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him.

There is a change in the method of displaying Christ's power, but his power is always the same. To the palsied man, he said "Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk;" but to the man engaged in a galling which degraded him, Christ said, "Follow me;" and "he arose and followed him." Blessed be God, still we have in our midst the living Lord, who is as able to work miracles of mercy today as when he was upon the earth; and we have not merely to exhort, to persuade, and to entreat, though we have to do all that, but we have also to speak with authority in the name of this glorious Son of God, and to command men to repent and believe in him. He is with us, by his Spirit, to make his Word mighty, so that, to this day, palsied men do arise, and walk, and sinful men are led to turn from evil, and to follow Christ.

15-17. And it came to pass, that, as Jesus sat at meat in his house, many publicans and sinners sat also together with Jesus and his disciples: for there were many, and they followed him. And when the scribes and Pharisees saw him eat with publicans and sinners, they said unto his disciples, How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners? When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

For ordinary Christians to associate with those who are like the publicans and sinners of Christ's day, might be dangerous, for "evil communications corrupt good manners;" and Christians should be careful as to the company in which they are found; but for Christians to go amongst such people to try to do them good, is Christlike. The Church of Christ always fails in her duty when she looks upon any class of persons as being beneath her observation, or

too far gone for her to reach. Our Lord's mission was to find out, and to supply the needs of mankind, and he seems to have paid particular attention to the very worst of men because they needed him most; and his Church should always be guided in her choice of work by the necessity of the objects that need her care. And brethren, you and I, who are in the ministry, will do well to choose, not that sphere in which we may be most happy and comfortable, but that one in which we are most needed. If I were a lamp, and had my choice of where I would be hung, I should prefer to be hung up in the darkest place in London, where I could be of most service, and I think that every one of us would make just such a choice if we judged rightly, and desired to be where we were wanted, and to do as the Saviour did when he was on the earth.

18-20. *And the disciples of John and of the Pharisees used to fast: and they come and say unto him, Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but thy disciples fast not? And Jesus said unto them, If the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? as long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days.*

While Christ was with his people in person, they could not help having joy and gladness; but when he was gone from them, they must lament his absence.

21, 22. *The man also seweth a piece of new cloth on an old garment: else the new piece that filled it up taketh away from the old, and the rent is made worse. And no man putteth new wine into old bottles: else the new wine doth burst the bottles, and the wine is spilled, and the bottles will be marred: but new wine must be put into new bottles.*

The bottles were made of skin, and the wine put into them must be of a suitable port. To prescribe fasting to his disciples, while he was making them glad with his personal presence, would have been incongruous and absurd; and there are some things that we ought not to expect from young Christians, and other things that we ought not to expect from old and mature Christians. We should not expect to find new wine in old bottles, nor old wine in new bottles. "A place for everything, and everything in its place," is not only a rule for the home and the merchant's counting-house, but it is also a rule which

should be observed in the Church of Christ; for God, as a God of order, always puts things in their proper places, and in due order.

23. *And it came to pass, that he went through the corn fields on the sabbath day; and his disciples began, as they went, to pluck the ears of corn.*

They had offended the Pharisees by not fasting, and now they were offending them again in a similar way, though with reference to a different matter.

24. *And the Pharisees said unto him, Behold, why do they on the sabbath day that which is not lawful?*

According to some Rabbis, you might pick an ear of wheat on the Sabbath-day, but if you rubbed it between your hands, they said that was a sort of thieving which was a kind of labour that must not be performed on the Sabbath. They made all sorts of ingenious restrictions, too ridiculous for us to quote. These disciples were therefore, according to them, chargeable with sin, because they had plucked ears of corn, and had performed the operation of threshing them on the Sabbath-day, and we have some of that sort of folk living now who take the smallest matter, which is altogether insignificant, and in which there is neither good nor harm, and magnify and distort it, and then make a man a grave offender all for next to nothing. We have learned not to be very much troubled by anything that they choose to say.

25-28. *And he said unto them, have ye never read what David did, when he had need, and was an hungred, he, and they that were with him? How he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the High priest, and did eat the shewbread, which is not lawful to eat but for the priests, and gave also to them which were with him? And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath.*

He has made it to be no longer a day of bondage, but a day of blessed rest and holy service for God. Works of necessity, works of piety, and works of mercy, are not only allowed to be done, but are commanded to be done upon the Sabbath-day.

MARK 2:1-12

1,2. *And again he entered into Capernaum, after some days; and it was noised that he was in the house. And straightway many were*

gathered together, inasmuch that there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door: and he preached the word unto them.

He could not be hid; the healed leper had made his name so famous that men crowded to see him, and he took advantage of their curiosity, and “preached the word unto them.”

3-5. *And they came unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four. And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press, they uncovered the roof where he was: and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay. When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.*

Those who brought this man to Jesus believed that he could and would heal him, and Christ delighted to honour their faith, and perhaps also the faith of the man himself.

6-9. *But there were certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts, Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only? And immediately when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts? Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk?*

It was just as easy to say either the one or the other.

10-12. *But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house. And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion.*

This exposition consisted of readings from MARK 1:28-45; 2:1-12,

MARK 2:1-14

1, 2. *And again he entered into Capernaum, after some days; and it was noised that he was in the house. And straightway many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door: and he preached the word unto them.*

We expect to see the crowd round the door, but there was not room, even for the doorway hearers, when Jesus Christ was preaching. There is an attracting power about the voice of Jesus. We may expect that if we will let Jesus speak in the ministry, and not speak too much our own thought and our own words, there will still be the same attraction about the gospel. "He preached the Word unto them."

3. *And they come unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy,*

A paralyzed person: that is the exact word — one, who could not come himself, but had a very anxious desire to come. They came to him, bringing a paralytic.

3. *Which was borne of four.*

Your neighbors agreed to lift him

4. *And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press,*

They had tried the door very many times, but could not possibly enter.

4. *They uncovered the roof where he was:*

They, perhaps, went up the stairway of the next house, and then from one flat roof to another till they came to the top of the verandah which sheltered Christ while he preached to the people in the court. They uncovered this roof where he was.

4. *And when they had broken it up,*

For it does not seem to have been a very light structure, but to have required some labour; yet they broke it up.

4. *They let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay.*

Where there is a will there is a way, and when there is no way a resolute will, will make one. Better to come to Christ through the ceiling than not to come at all. Better to be let down to him by a rope than not to be in his presence.

5. *When Jesus saw their faith,*

For he has a very quick eye to faith: and though we do not read that they had said anything, and, therefore, they had not expressed their faith, yet this bold and venturesome action in breaking up the roof and letting all the dust fall about the Saviour's head, not fearing that they should provoke him, but trusting in his gentleness and patience, showed their confidence that they had only to get the man where Christ could see him, and good would come of it. "When he saw their faith."

5, 6. *He said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee. But there were certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts.*

They had come with a bad motive. They wanted to find fault, and they took their seats that they might hear everything very carefully, take notes of it, and put it down, and make as much mischief of it as ever they could.

They had all their ears open. They did not know, however, that he could read their hearts, or they might not have been so forward in coming into his presence. They were “sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts.”

7. *Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only.*

Which was quite true, but then he was God, and therefore it was not blasphemy. Blasphemy it would have been had he not been divine.

8, 9. *And immediately when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts? Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk?*

Do they not each require a divine power? If I be divine, I shall prove I am by healing this man. Then I have a right to say, “Thy sins be forgiven thee.”

10-12. *But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house. And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion.*

Admire and imitate the faith and the obedience of this paralytic, He did better than some, for there have been some who, out of very gratitude, have disobeyed Christ. I mean, when he said to one that he should not tell what Christ had done. He did tell it, but this man, though no doubt his gratitude would have prompted him to stay and throw himself at his benefactor’s feet, or to stop at least and sing a hymn of thankfulness to God, yet he knows that to obey is the best form of gratitude, and as Christ had told him, “Go thy way into thy

house,” he did just that. The best thing to do for Christ is to do what Christ bids you. There are many glittering forms of gratitude, but all is not gold that glitters. The most golden gratitude is that which scrupulously renders obedience to every command of Jesus Christ. Take this to heart, and do ye so.

13. And he went forth again by the sea side; and all the multitude resorted unto him, and he taught them.

Better air than there was in the house, and more room, but he kept to the same gospel. He taught them.

14. And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the receipt of custom, and said unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him.

Swept up his shekels — gathered up his account books — stopped no longer. He rose from taking toll to follow the Master. Oh! for just such a word tonight to some here present. “Follow me.” And would to God there would be such a heart in them as there was in this man named Levi, alias Matthew, that they may come and follow Jesus too.

MARK 4:1-25

1. And he began again to teach by the sea side: and there was gathered unto him a great multitude, so that he entered into a ship, and sat in the sea; and the whole multitude was by the sea on the land.

You can easily picture that scene, — the Master sitting down in the vessel, with a little breathing space of water between himself and the crowd, and then the multitude on the rising bank, standing one above another, and all gazing upon the Teacher who sat down and taught them. It ought to reconcile any of you who have to stand in the crowd here when you remember that the hearers all stood in those days, and only the preacher sat down.

2, 3. And he taught them many things by parables, and said unto them in his doctrine, Hearken; Behold, there went out a sower to sow:

He did not go out to show himself, to let people see how dexterous he was at the art of sowing seed; but he “went out to sow.” And every true preacher should go out with this one design,

— to scatter broadcast the good seed of the kingdom, and to try to obtain for it an entrance into the hearts of their hearers.

4. *And it came to pass, as he sowed, some fell by the way side, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up.*

He could not help that; it was not his fault, but the fault of the way side and of the fowls. So, when the Word of God is denied entrance into men's hearts, if it be faithfully preached, the preacher shall not be blamed by his Master; the fault shall lie between the hard heart that will not let the seed enter in and the devil who came and took it away.

5. *And some fell on stony ground, where it had not much earth; and immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth:*

Persons with shallow characters are often very quick in receiving religious impressions, but they also lose them just as quickly. Those who are hasty and impulsive are as easily turned the wrong way as the right way.

6-8. *But when the sun was up, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up, and choked it, and it yielded no fruit. And other fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased; and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred.*

Thank God for that! There were three failures, but there was one success; or, perhaps we might more correctly say, three successes. There were three sorts of ground that yielded nothing, but at last the sower came to a piece of soil that had been well prepared, and therefore was good ground, which yielded fruit, though the quantity varied even there: "some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred."

9. *Had he said unto them, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.*

Some people have ears, but they have not "ears to hear." They have ears, but they close them to that which they ought to hear. When a man is really willing to listen to the truth, then may God help him to listen with all his heart, and spiritually!

10-12. *And when he was alone, they that were about him with the twelve asked of him the parable. And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables: That seeing*

they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them.

This judicial blindness had happened to the Jews; they had so long closed their eyes to the light that, at last, God closed them, and they were blinded. They had refused to heed so many messages sent to them from the great God that, at last, this sentence was pronounced as the punishment of their sin, — that they should die in their sins, and that even the preaching of the Word by the mouth of the Lord Jesus himself, should be of no use to them. That is one of the most awful judgments that can ever happen to anyone, when God puts a curse even on a man's blessings; and when the gospel, which should be a savor of life unto life, becomes a savor of death unto death.

13. *And he said unto them, Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables?*

“For this is one of the simplest of them all; if you do not understand this parable, what will you understand?”

14, 15. *The sower soweth the word. And these are they by the wayside, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts,*

There is always a bird where there is a seed lying on the road, and there is always a devil where there is a sermon heard, but not received into the heart. “Satan cometh immediately.” He is very prompt; we may delay, but the devil never does: “When they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts.”

16, 17. *And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness; And have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended.*

These are the people that trouble and grieve the hearts of earnest ministers; and there are some revivalists who never go to a place without getting quite a lot of persons to come forward and say that they are converted. Why, I know a town where, according to the accounts that were put forth by certain preachers, there were so

many professed converts every night that all the people in the town must have been converted, and a good many more from the surrounding villages; but nobody can find them now. Were they converted, then? I trow not; but that is the style in which much has been done by some whom I might name. Yet there is some good even in their work. The sower in the parable is not blamed because his work was so evanescent; how could he prevent it? As the soil was so shallow, the apparent result was very quick, and the disappointment was equally quick. I do trust, dear friends, that you will never be satisfied with temporary godliness, with slight impressions, soon received and soon lost. Beware of that is not the work of the Holy Ghost. There must be a breaking up of the iron pan of the heart, there must be a tearing out of the rocks that underlie the soil; or else there will be no harvest unto God.

18, 19. *And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word, And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.*

The seed cannot grow in such soil as that. The man is too busy, or he is wholly taken up with pleasure; the women are too proud of themselves, or even of the clothes that cover them. How can there be room for Christ in the inn when it is crowded with other guests?

20. *And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirty fold, some sixty, and some an hundred.*

All converts are not equally good. I am afraid that, in our churches, there is a large number of the thirty-fold people. We are glad to have them, but they are not very brilliant Christians. Oh, for some sixty-fold converts, — some who are fit to be very leaders in the Church of God! And when we get up to a hundred-fold, — when it is not merely one hundred per cent., but one hundred gathered for every one sown, — then are we indeed rejoiced. When everything that is good is multiplied over, and over, and over, and over, and over again, a hundred for one, and when each one of that hundred bears another hundred, that is the blessing we long to see. This hundred-fold seed has in it the capacity for almost boundless multiplication; at the first sowing, we get a hundred-fold return; but what comes of the next sowing, and the next, and the next? God send us this style of wheat. May we have a great quantity of it!

21. *And he said unto them, Is a candle brought to be put under a bushel, or under a bed? and not to be set on a candlestick?*

So this wheat, then, is meant to be sown; the Word of God is intended to be spread. "Is a candle brought to be put under a bushel, or under a bed?" If it were put under a bed, it would set the bed on fire; and so, if you have true grace in your heart, there is nothing that can smother its light; the fire and the light together will force their way out.

22, 23, *For there is nothing hid, which shall not be manifested; neither any thing kept secret, but that it should come abroad. If any man have ears to hear, let him hear.*

Tell out, then, what God has told to you; and let everybody hear from you the truth as you yourself have heard it. See the compound interest that there is to be in this blessed trading for Christ.

24, 25. *And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you: and unto you that hear shall more be given. For he that hath, to him shall be given: and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath.*

When the gospel is not received, when a man refuses it, it becomes a positive loss to him. There is a way by which it so works that, what a man thought he had, disappears. Some have been made worse by the preaching of that Word which ought to have made them better. May it not be so with any one of us!

MARK 4:35-41

35, 36 *And the same day, when the even was come, he saith unto them, Let us pass over unto the other side. And when they had sent away the multitude,--*

Telling them that Christ would give them no more instruction that day, and that they had better go back to their homes. There are some preachers who have great gifts of dispersion, it does not take them long to scatter a congregation; but I expect that Christ's disciples found it to be no easy task to send away the crowds that had been listening to their Master's wondrous words. But, "when they had sent away the multitude,"-

36. *They took him even as he was in the ship. And there were also with him other little ships.*

Christ was Lord High Admiral of the Galilean lake that night, and he had quite a little fleet of vessels around his flagship.

37. *And there arose a great storm of wind,--*

Our friend, John Macgregor, "Rob Roy," tells us that the lake is subject to very sudden and severe storms; it lies in a deep hollow, and down from the surrounding ravines and valleys the air comes with a tremendous rush seldom experienced even upon a real sea; for this was, of course, only a lake though sometimes called a sea. I have been told that, on some Scotch lochs, the wind will occasionally come from three or four quarters at once, lifting the boat bodily out of the water, and sometimes seeming to lift the water up towards heaven, with the boat and all in it; so was it, that night, when "there arose a great storm of wind,"-

37. *And the wave beat into the ship, so that it was now full.*

No doubt they baled out the boat with all their might, and did their best to prevent it from sinking, yet "it was now full of water." But where was their Lord and Master, and what was he doing while the storm was raging?

38. *And he waves in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow:*

He was quite at home upon the wild waves,-"Rocked in the cradle of the deep,"-for winds and waves were but his Father's servants, obeying his commands. "He was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow;" doubtless weary and worn with the labours of the day. We do not always think enough of the weariness of Christ's human body. There was not only the effort of preaching, but his preaching was so full of high thought, and the expressions he used were so pregnant with meaning, that it must have taken much out of him to preach thus from the heart, with intense agony of spirit, and with his brain actively at work all the while. Remember that he was truly man as well as the Son of God, and that what he did was of so high an order, not to be reached by any of us, that it must have exhausted him and therefore he needed sleep to refresh him; and there he was wisely taking it, and serving God by sleeping soundly, and thus preparing himself for the toil of the following day.

38, 39. *And they awake him, and say unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish? And he arose, and rebuked the wind,--*

It was boisterous and noisy, and he bade it obey its Master's will;

39. *And said unto the sea, Peace, be still.*

Can you not almost fancy that you can hear that commanding voice addressing the raging, roaring, tumultuous winds and waves?

39. *And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.*

Not only was the wind quieted, and the sea hushed to slumber, but a deep, dead, mysterious calm transformed the lake into a molten looking glass. When Christ stills winds and waves, it is “a great calm.” Did you ever feel “a great calm”? It is much more than ordinary peace of mind; it is to your heart as if there were no further possibilities of fear. Your troubles have so completely gone that you can scarcely recollect them. There is no one but the Lord himself who can speak so to produce “a great calm.” Master, we entreat thee to speak such a calm so that for those of us who need it.

40. *And he said unto them,-*

When he had calmed the winds and the waves, he had to speak to another fickle set, more fickle than either winds or waves: “and he said unto them,”-

40, 41. *Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith? And they feared exceedingly,--*

They went from one fear to another, but this time it was the fear of awe—a hallowed dread of what might happen to a ship which had “oh a mysterious Person on board. Though there was probably in their minds no fear of death, it seemed to them a fearsome thing to live in the presence of One who had such power over the raging elements.” They feared exceedingly,-

41. *And said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?*

Blessed God-man, we worship and adore thee!

MARK 5

1-6. *And they came over unto the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gadarenes. And when he was come out of the ship, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no man could bind him, no, not with chains: because that he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces: neither could any man tame*

him. And always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones.

What a pitiful object this poor creature must have been, — a terror to the whole region! So far as man was concerned, he was in an utterly hopeless condition; yet there was hope for him, for Jesus had crossed the sea apparently with the special purpose of healing him. Our Saviour had proved his power over the winds and waves, and he was about to show that demons were equally subject to his control.

6, 7. *But when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped him, and cried with a loud voice and said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the of most high God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not.*

The voice was the voice of the man, but the devil so completely dominated the whole of him, being that he could only speak as the unclean spirit directed him.

8. *For he said unto him, Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit.*

So that the demon's adjuration was an answer to the Lord's command, "Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit."

9-13. *And he asked him, What is thy name? And he answered, saying, My name is Legion: for we are many. And he besought him much that he would not send them away out of the country. Now there was there nigh unto the mountains a great herd of swine feeding. And all the devils besought him, saying, Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them. And forthwith Jesus gave them leave. And the unclean spirits went out, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea, (they were about two thousand;) and were choked in the sea.*

It is clear from this narrative that the demons knew that Jesus was the Son of the most high God, and that he had absolute power to do with them whatever he pleased. It is else clear that they believed in prayer, and that they were all agreed in their supplication to him; and it is significant that Jesus granted their request: "Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them." There was a certain congruity in the unclean spirit entering into the unclean animals, so "forthwith Jesus gave them leave."

14, 16. *And they that fed the swine fled, and told it in the city, and in the country. And they went out to see what it was that was done.*

And they come to Jesus, and see him that was possessed with the devil, and had the legion, sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid.

What a wonderful sight that was for them to see! Yet they need not have been afraid, they ought rather to have rejoiced to see the poor demoniac “sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind.”

16, 17. *And they that saw it told them how it befell to him that was possessed with the devil, and also concerning the swine. And they began to pray him to depart out of their coasts.*

Here is a second prayer in which many united, a very foolish and wicked prayer, yet the Saviour did as these people wished. He would not force his company upon those who wanted him to go, so he at once turned his face to the ship that he might “depart out of their coasts.”

18, 19. *And when he was come into the ship, he that had been possessed with the devil prayed him that he might be with him. Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him, go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee.*

This is the third prayer in this chapter; not like the two previous ones, the petition of many who were not Christ’s followers, it was the earnest supplication of one who was so grateful for what Jesus had done for him that he longed to be always with him. Yet it was not granted, because Jesus saw that the man could serve him better by bearing testimony among those who knew him to the great things the Lord had done for him.

20. *And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him: and all men did marvel.*

His testimony not only made men marvel, but it helped to prepare the people to welcome the Saviour when he returned to that region.

21. *And when Jesus was passed over again by ship unto the other side, much people gathered unto him: and he was nigh unto the sea.*

How many missionary voyages Jesus made, sometimes to one side of the sea, sometimes to the other side! What an example of holy diligence he is to us! So long as he lived here below, he never ceased to labour for he never ceased to love.

22. *And, behold, there cometh one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name; and when he saw him, he fell at his feet,*

It was an unusual thing for a ruler of the synagogue to be at the feet of Jesus, yet that is the best place for us all. If God has placed any of you in an eminent position, it will well become you to fall at the feet of Jesus as Jairus did. There is no place more suitable, no place more honourable, no place more profitable, than at the feet of Jesus. What brought Jairus there? It was his great necessity; and that is what will bring us there, a sense of our great need.

23. *And besought him greatly, saying, My little daughter lieth at the point of death: I pray thee, come and lay thy hands on her, that she may be healed; and she shall live.*

This was great faith, yet it was also little faith, for he limits Christ's power to his bodily presence, and he stipulates about the way in which the cure is to be wrought: "I pray thee, come and lay thy hands on her, that she may be healed." Yet we never like to criticize faith, there is so little of it, and it is so precious a thing that we are glad to see it anywhere, and especially in a ruler of the synagogue. Oh, that we all prayed thus for our little daughters and our little sons: "Lord, come and lay thy hands on them! There is sin in them, and sin means spiritual death, come and lay thy hands on them, that they may be healed, and live for ever."

24. *And Jesus went with him;*

He will always regard true prayer; if we can believe, Jesus will come.

24, 25. *And much people followed him, and thronged him. And a certain woman, —*

There were many in the throng around Jesus who did not touch him, and there were many who touched him, but not as she did; so she is singled out from the crowd: "A certain woman," —

25-28. *Which had an issue of blood twelve years, and had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse, when she had heard of Jesus, came in the press behind, and touched his garment. For she said, If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole.*

Was this woman sent, do you think, to encourage the faith of Jairus? It has been well said that the child of Jairus had been twelve years living, but this woman had been twelve years dying, so, if

Christ could heal the woman who had been twelve years dying, he could raise the child who had been twelve years living. It is significant that there should have been this equalization of the number of years in the two cases. Although Jairus seemed strong in faith, he was not really so. He put the best side of his faith forward; while this woman, who was strong in faith, yet coming behind Christ, and touching him as it were by stealth, put the worst side of her faith forward. We have known this to be the case in others, some who seem to be strong in faith are none too strong, and some who seem to be very weak in faith are much stronger than they seem.

29-31. *And straightway the fountain of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of that plague. And Jesus, immediately knowing in himself that virtue had gone out of him, turned him about in the press, and said, Who touched my clothes? And his disciple said unto him, Thou seest the multitude thronging thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me?*

They spoke too fast, as we also sometimes do, it would have been well if they had said nothing which looked like questioning their Master's word.

32, 33. *And he looked round about to see her that had done this thing. But the woman fearing and trembling, knowing what was done in her, came and fell down before him, and told him all the truth.*

The miracle had been wrought in her, yet she was fearing and trembling because she perceived the imperfection of her way of approaching the Saviour. Probably, after we are saved, we see more of our mistakes than we did before; and when the blessing really comes to us, we begin to be anxious lest we should lose Christ because of some misapprehension in our way of finding him. The woman "fell down before him, and told him all the truth."

34. *And he said unto her, Daughter, —*

This was a very unusual way for Christ to speak to a woman, so careful was he in his speech, but then she was a very exceptional woman:

"Daughter," —

34, 35. *Thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague. While he yet spake, there came from the ruler of the*

synagogue's house certain which said, Thy daughter is dead: why troublest thou the Master any further?

This ruler of the synagogue was on the brink of getting the blessing he sought, and then the very worst news comes to him. It may be that just now some of you have seemed to receive the sentence of death to all your hopes, yet you are on the very verge of getting the blessing. It is often so; just when the devil knows that the blessing is near, he struggles the hardest with the soul that is seeking it. Do not be cast down if that sentence of death comes to you, but still believe.

36-39. *As soon as Jesus heard the word that was spoken, he saith unto the ruler of the synagogue, Be not afraid, only believe. And he suffered no man to follow him, save Peter, and James, and John the brother of James. And he cometh to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and seeth the tumult, and them that wept and wailed greatly. And when he was come in, he saith unto them, Why make ye this ado, and weep? the damsel is not dead, but sleepeth.*

Jesus knew what he was about to do, and, speaking with the knowledge of the miracle he was about to perform, he said, "The damsel is not dead but sleepeth." A charlatan, who wanted to make himself famous, and in order to increase the clat of the miracle, would have said, "The damsel is really dead," but the Saviour, in his infinite modesty of heart, puts it thus, "The damsel is not dead, but sleepeth."

40. *And they laughed him to scorn.*

Can you picture the scene? These people, who had been hired to weep and wail, had not much of the spirit of mourning in them, for they laughed directly and derisively; they turned upon the mighty Master of life and death, and "laughed him to scorn."

40. *But when he had put them all out, —*

That was the best way to answer the scorners. It is no good arguing with people who can cry or laugh to order: "when he had put them all out," —

40-42. *He taketh the father and the mother of the damsel, and them that were with him, and entereth in where the damsel was lying. And he took the damsel by the hand, and said unto her, Talitha cumi; which is, being interpreted, Damsel, I say unto thee, arise. And straightway —*

Notice how this word “straightway” comes in again. It is the characteristic word in reference to Christ’s miracles; they are usually wrought at once. We read, in the 29th verse, “Straightway the fountain of her blood was dried up.” Now we read, “Straightway”

42. *The damsel arose, and walked;*

Oh, that the Lord Jesus Christ would work some “straightway” miracles in our midst just now! He can do it if he pleases; before this service ends, there may be some who shall have passed from death unto life, out of the darkness of sin into the marvelous light of grace. Blessed be God for this; who will it be?

42, 43. *For she was of the age of twelve years. And they were astonished with a great astonishment. And he charged them straitly that no man should know it;*

He did not want to blaze abroad the story of these wondrous deeds of his. The crowd was already inconveniently large, so that “he charged them straitly that no man should know it;”

43. *And commanded that something should be given her to eat.*

She might have continued to live by a miracle as she had been miraculously raised from the dead; but it was needless, and Christ never wrought an unnecessary miracle. Do not look for miracles when ordinary means will suffice. “He commanded that something should be given her to eat.” When life is given or restored, the next thing needed is nourishment; when you are made spiritually to live, be sure to attend a soul-feeding ministry; and diligently read the Word, that you may get all needful nourishment for your soul out of it.

MARK 5:1-20

1. *And they came over unto the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gadarenes. And when he was come out of the ship, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit.*

Our Lord crossed the Sea of Galilee on purpose to rescue this poor man from the power of the unclean spirit that possessed him. He knew that there were many who needed him on the Galilean side of the lake, and he could foresee the storm that would threaten to sink the little ship; yet he calmly said to his disciples (see chapter

4:Verse 35), “Let us pass over unto the other side.” As soon as the great Physician landed, a dreadful apparition appeared. “Out of the tombs”, an uncanny place, rushed a man, howling and yelling like some wild beast; or worse still, under the influence of Satan, who had taken possession of him.

3. Who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no man could bind him, no, not with chains; because that he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces: neither could any man tame him.

See how the world deals with furiously guilty men. It tries to fetter them, or else to tame them; to keep them in check by fear of punishment, or else to subdue them to a gentleness of morality: poor work this! Christ neither binds nor tames; he changes and renews. Oh, that everywhere his aid were sought, and not so much reliance placed on the fetters of law, or the power of morals!

5. And always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones.

It must have been dreadful for travelers to pass that way at night, or to meet with this terrible madman at any hour of the day. But how terrible must have been the poor creature’s own condition! We get just a glimpse of it from the words, “always in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying and cutting himself with stones.” See what Satan does with those who are in his power.

6. But when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped him,

The devil does not like doing it; but if it will serve his purpose, he will pretend to be a worshipper of Christ. He comes here sometimes; he goes to all sorts of places of worship, and makes men turn worshippers who have no worship in their hearts; for there is no end to the depth of his cunning, and many are they that have served the devil best when they have pretended to worship Christ.

7. And cried with a loud voice, and said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou son of the Most High God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not.

Using the lips of this poor man, Satan spoke in him and through him. He is afraid of Christ. This dog of hell knows his Master, and crouches at his feet. He beseeches the “Son of the Most High God” not to torment him before his time.

8. For he said unto him, Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit.

Christ never wastes words over the devil. He speaks to him very shortly and very sharply. It would be well sometimes if we could be more laconic when we are dealing with evil. It does not deserve our words as it did not observe Christ's words. Jesus said to the devil, "Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit."

9, 10. *And he asked him, What is thy name? And he answered, saying, My name is Legion: for we are many. And he besought him much that he would not send them away out of the country.*

The devil can pray; he did so in this case. It is not because a man is fluent in prayer that we are sure of his salvation. It is not because a man prays with such fervor that his knees knock together, that we may conclude that he is a saint. It may be that he is trembling through fear of God's judgment. Satan besought Christ much.

11. *Now there was there nigh unto the mountains a great herd of swine feeding. And all the devils besought him, saying, Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them.*

Satan would rather vex swine than do no mischief at all. He is so fond of evil that he would work it upon animals if he cannot work it upon men. What unanimity there is amongst the evil spirits! "All the devils besought him, saying, Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them."

13. *And forthwith Jesus gave them leave.*

The devil cannot enter even a pig without Christ's leave. So he cannot tempt you, my friend, without our Lord's permission. You may rest assured that even this great monster of evil is under Christ's control. He cannot molest you till Jesus gives him leave. There is a chain around the roaring lion, and he can only go just as far as the Lord allows him.

13, 14. *And the unclean spirits went out, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a deep place into the sea, (they were about two thousand;) and were choked in the sea. And they that fed the swine fled,*

At which we do not at all wonder. Who would not flee when they thus saw the power of Christ?

14, 15. *And told it in the city, and in the country. And they went out to see what it was that was done. And they come to Jesus, and see him that was possessed with the devil, and had the legion, sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid.*

You would have thought that it would have been said, “They marvelled, and they praised Christ for this great and wonderful deed.” No, “They were afraid.” If you see another converted, do not be afraid; but rather have hope that you may be saved yourself. What a beautiful sight these people saw: “they come to Jesus, and see him that was possessed with the devil, and had the legion, sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind.”! That thought ought to have made them rejoice instead of being afraid. There are still people who are afraid of what will happen when they see those whom Christ has blessed spiritually as he had healed this man.

16, 17. *And they that saw it told them how it befell to him that was possessed with the devil, and also concerning the swine. And they began to pray him to depart out of their coasts.*

If Jesus should come to you tonight, do not ask him to go away. Open wide the door of your heart, and entreat the Lord to come in, and dwell there for ever and ever. This narrative teaches us that the Lord Jesus Christ will go away if he is asked to do so; he will not remain where his room is preferred to his company.

18-20. *And when he was come into the ship, he that had been possessed with the devil prayed him that he might be with him. Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion with thee. And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him: and all men did marvel.*

He was told to publish what great things the Lord had done for him. He went and published what great things Jesus had done for him. Did he make any mistake? Oh, no! It is but another name for the same Person: for Jesus is the Lord; and when you speak of him as divine, and talk of him in terms fit only for God, you do but speak rightly; for so he deserveth to be praised. “And all men did marvel.” So our Lord left them all wondering. Leaving this one messenger to bear testimony to him, he went his way elsewhere, to carry blessings to many others on the other side of the sea. The man appears to have gone through the wide district that bore the name Decapolis, and his testimony to the power of Christ was so convincing that, when the Saviour revisited that part of the country, he had a very different reception from that which he received on this occasion. (see chapters 7:31-37, 8:1-10).

MARK 5:1-24, AND 35-43.

1. And they came over unto the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gadarenes.

They had had a very eventful passage across that small but stormy sea, and Christ had proved himself to be the Lord High Admiral of the seas; but now that he steps ashore they are to see his power quite as distinctly displayed as upon the stormy wave.

2, 3. And when he was come out of the ship, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no man could bind him, no, not with chains:

Those ancient graveyards were in remote places, for the people were too wise to bury their dead inside their cities. Very often, the tombs were hewn in caverns in the sides of hills and rocks, and here the dead were laid. Of course, every man who touched a tomb was thereby ceremonially defiled, so that the tombs were fit places for an unclean person possessed by an unclean spirit. What a ghastly dwelling-place! What a grim abode for the man, and yet most fitting, for he was dangerous to all who passed by, — a raving lunatic, who could not be restrained by any bonds or chains that could be put upon him!

4, 5. Because that he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces: neither could any man tame him. And always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones.

Poor creature! His howlings must have made night hideous indeed. Those who passed that way were startled by his unearthly cries, he was a terror to the whole district, persons could not bear to live anywhere near the places where he resorted. "Night and day" he was a misery to himself and a terror to all around him, — sad type of some whom we know, to our sorrow, who have gone madly into sin. It certainly is madness, whatever else it may be; and when madness and badness go together, what a terror such a man becomes!

6. But when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped him, —

There is a wondrous attraction in the person of our Divine Lord and Master. Though he was a long way off, yet a gracious magnetic influence proceeded from him by which he drew this poor object of pity to him: "When he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped him."

7. And cried with a loud voice, and said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not.

Who was speaking then? The man himself, or the devil within him? It is very hard to tell; the man and the devil were two personalities, but they were so effectually blended into one that it is scarcely possible to tell when it was the man speaking, and when it was the devil. So, when sin enters into a man, it gets so completely into his very nature that, sometimes, we feel it must be the evil spirit speaking in the man, and yet it is not easy to be quite sure that it is so, and we cannot free the man himself from the guilt of his words and actions.

8. For he said unto him, Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit.

Whenever Christ speaks to the devil, his message is a very short and very sharp one. The Lord treats him like the dog that he is: "Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit." Christ has no compliment for devils; and it is a pity that some of his servants have such soft words when they are dealing with unbelief, which is but a devil, or one of the devil's imps.

9. And he asked him, What is thy name? And he answered, saying, My name is Legion: for we are many.

The devil is obliged to tell his name when Christ treats him like a catechized child, and he is compelled to crouch before Christ like a whipped cur at his master's feet.

10. And he besought him much that he would not send them away out of the country.

Satan clings to this world, and to any place where he has had a signal triumph, as he had among those tombs and those rocky ravines.

11, 12. Now there was nigh unto the mountains a great herd of swine feeding. And all the devils besought him, saying, Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them.

Such is the malice of these evil spirits, that they would rather do mischief among swine than nowhere. But notice their unanimity; with all the faults that can be laid at the door of demons, you cannot find them divided and quarrelling. They are unanimous in evil, and it is a shame that those who are the followers of Christ should often be divided, whereas the kingdom of Satan is not divided against itself. Let us learn from our great enemy at least this one lesson.

13. *And forthwith Jesus gave them leave. And the unclean spirits went out, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea, (they were about two thousand;)*

It was strange that there should be so many swine in the country where lived God's people Israel, and as they had no right to be there, and were there contrary to Jewish law, it was well that they should be destroyed.

13-15. *And were choked in the sea. And they that fed the swine fled, and told it in the city, and in the country. And they went out to see what it was that was done. And they come to Jesus, and see him that was possessed with the devil, and had the legion, sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid.*

Ah, me! How variously different people look upon the same thing! If you and I, who are Christ's disciples, had gone there, and seen this poor lunatic fully restored, we should have been filled with holy joy, and we would have composed new hymns of praise in honour of the great Physician who had cured him. But these people, in their alienation of heart from the Lord Jesus Christ, "were afraid." They feared and trembled in the presence of almighty mercy; omnipotent love awoke no joy in their hearts, but the spirit of bondage was upon them.

16. *And they that saw it told them how it befell to him that was possessed with the devil, and also concerning the swine.*

You may be sure that they dwelt upon the latter part of the story, for the loss of the swine touched them more than the healing of the demoniac.

17. *And they began to pray him to depart out of their coasts.*

O dear friends, let none of us ever get into such a state of mind and heart as to pray Christ to go away from us! Yet we have known people act in such a dreadful way as that; a person troubled in conscience has said, "I will never go and hear that preacher again; I

cannot sleep at nights after listening to him. I will never read such and such a book again, it disturbs me so that I cannot enjoy myself.” This is, in effect, to pray Christ to depart out of your coasts. What! is salvation worth so little that you have no care to possess it? Is Christ himself so small a blessing that you even tremble lest he should change your nature, and save you? I think there were more lunatics than one on that Gadarene shore, the people were all as mad at heart as that one poor man was mad in brain.

18. *And when he was come into the ship, —*

Christ will go from you if you want him to go. He forces himself upon no man; the grace of God does not violate the will of man, it acts in accordance with man’s nature, and achieves the divine purpose without disturbing the individuality of the man. So Christ went from Gadara: “And when he was come into the ship,” —

18. *He that had been possessed with the devil prayed him that he might be with him.*

Was not that a proper prayer? I think, dear friends, that not only nature, but the man’s new nature must have suggested this petition; he prayed Christ that he might be with him. In our day, it is very natural that, as soon as we are converted, we should wish to go home to heaven; but what is the reason why we should not do so? It is in order that we may bear witness for Christ here on earth, and gather in others unto him.

19. *Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee.*

That is one of the chief points on which we ought always to speak, not only to tell of the greatness of the change which the grace of God has wrought in us, but especially to testify to the tenderness of God to us. Oh, how gently did he handle our broken bones! That good Physician of ours has a lion’s heart, but he has a lady’s hand; he does not spare us needful pain, but he never inflicts even a twinge that is unnecessary. And, oh! the pity of his heart toward us when he sees the sorrow which our sin has brought upon us.

20. *And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis —*

In the ten little cities that were in that region: “he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis” —

20. *How great things Jesus had done for him: and all men did marvel.*

This is the kind of ready-made preacher whose service for his Lord is usually most effectual. The man who, though he has studied little on many points, yet knows by experience what the grace of God has done for him, and keeps to that one theme, and tells out the story with simple untrained eloquence, is the man who will do much for his Master, as we read here: "all men did marvel." If he had plunged into deep doctrinal subjects, it may be that men would have ridiculed him; but inasmuch as he spoke of what he did know, and told of the greatness and graciousness of God, "all men did marvel."

21, 22. *And when Jesus was passed over again by ship unto the other side, much people gathered unto him: and he was nigh unto the sea. And, behold, —*

Wherever we see that word, "behold," it is saying to us, "Mark well what is coming." "Behold," —

22-24. *There cometh one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name; and when he saw him, he fell at his feet, and besought him greatly, saying, My little daughter lieth at the point of death: I pray thee, come and lay thy hands on her, that she may be healed; and she shall live. And Jesus went with him; and much people followed him, and thronged him.*

35, 36. *While he yet spake, there came from the ruler of the synagogue's house certain which said, Thy daughter is dead: why troublest thou the Master any further? As soon as Jesus heard the word that was spoken, he saith unto the ruler of the synagogue, Be not afraid, only believe.*

I can imagine that, if Jairus had not been a man of much faith, he would have looked at the Saviour with a meaning glance, as much as to say, "Only believe"? Couldst thou ask more of me when my child is dead? Yet thou biddest me, 'Only believe.'" But, brethren, here is the very sphere of faith. Where there is no wading, there must be swimming; and where there is no hope in the creature, then we must throw ourselves upon the Creator. So, the child's death made room for the father's faith.

37, 39. *And he suffered no man to follow him, save Peter, and James, and John the brother of James. And he cometh to the house*

of the ruler of the synagogue, and seeth the tumult, and them that wept and wailed greatly. And when he was come in, he saith unto them, Why make ye this ado, and weep? the damsel is not dead, but sleepeth.

She was dead, but not dead as far as Christ's intention was concerned; she was not so dead as to remain dead. He meant soon to bring her back again to life, and therefore to him it was as if she were but sleeping.

40. *And they laughed him to scorn.*

What a wonderful picture this must have been, — The Lord of glory in the center of a ribald crew who laughed him to scorn! But it is not the man who is laughed at who is necessarily contemptible, it is often the laughers who are the most deserving of scorn. It was so here in Christ's day, and it has often been so since.

40. *But when he had put them all out,*

They were not worthy to be answered in any other fashion.

40-42. *He taketh the father and the mother of the damsel, and them that were with him, and entereth in where the damsel was lying. And he took the damsel by the hand, and said unto her, Talitha cumi; which is, being interpreted, Damsel, I say unto thee, arise. And straightway the damsel arose, and walked; for she was of the age of twelve years. And they were astonished with a great astonishment.*

How very often persons were "astonished" in Christ's day! Sometimes it is put, "they marvelled;" at other times, "they were amazed," or, "they wondered." It would have been well if wonder had always turned to faith; but sometimes it corrupted into hate. God grant that our wonder at Christ may always be of that kind which crystallizes into love!

43. *And he charged them straitly that no man should know it; and commanded that something should be given her to eat.*

Life must be nourished; young life especially needs frequent food. If Christ has spiritually quickened your child, see that you feed the child with food convenient. If you have won a convert to Christ in the Sabbath-school, take care that the unadulterated milk of the Word is brought forth, that the new-born child may be fed and nourished till it comes unto the perfect stature of a man in Christ Jesus.

MARK 7:24-30

24-29. *And from thence he arose, and went into the borders of Tyre and Sidon, and entered into an house, and would have no man know it: but he could not be hid. For a certain woman, whose young daughter had an unclean spirit, heard of him, and came and fell at his feet: the woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician by nation; and she besought him that he would cast forth the devil out of her daughter. But Jesus said unto her, Let the children first be filled: for it is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it unto the dogs. And she answered and said unto him, Yes, Lord: yet the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs. And he said unto her, For this saying go thy way; the devil is gone out of thy daughter.*

Christ capitulated at once, yielded to the strong arms of conquering prayer and faith, and so the pleading woman had her will.

30. *And when she was come to her house, she found the devil gone out, and her daughter laid upon the bed.*

This exposition consisted of readings from GENESIS 32:22-30; EXODUS 32:7-14; AND MARK 7:24-0.

MARK 8:1-30

1-4. *In those days the multitude being very great, and having nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples unto him, and saith unto them, I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat: and if I send them away fasting to their own houses, they will faint by the way: for divers of them came from far. And his disciples answered him, From whence can a man satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness.*

Why did they not ask their Master what he could do in such an emergency as that? After so much experience of his power as they had already had, it is wonderful that they did not refer the matter to him, and say, "Lord, thou canst feed the multitude; we beseech thee do it." But they did not act so wisely; instead, they began questioning about ways and means. "From whence can a man satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness?"

5-9. *And he asked them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven. And he commanded the people to sit down on the ground:*

and he took the seven loaves, and gave thanks, and brake, and gave to his disciples to set before them; and they did set them before the people. And they had a few small fishes: and he blessed, and commanded to set them also before them. So they did eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets. And they that had eaten were about four thousand: and he sent them away.

Christ is the great Master of the art of multiplication. However small is the stock with which we begin, we have only to dedicate it all to him, and he will multiply and increase it until it will go far beyond our utmost expectations, and there will be more left after the feast is over than there was before it began. Bring your small talents, bring the little grace you have, to Christ, for he can so increase your store that you will never know any lack, but shall have all the greater abundance the greater the demand that is made upon that store. Had these four thousand people not been miraculously fed by Christ, the seven loaves and the few small fishes would have remained just as they were; but now that the four thousand have to be fed, the loaves and fishes are multiplied by Christ in a very extraordinary manner, so that, in the end, there is far more provision than they had at the beginning. Expect, beloved, to be enriched by your losses, to grow by that which looks as if it would crush you, and to become greater by that which threatens to annihilate you. Only put yourself into Christ's hands, and he will make good use of you, and leave you better than you were before he used you as the means of helping and blessing others.

10-12. *And straightway he entered into a ship with his disciples, and came into the parts of Dalmanutha. And the Pharisees came forth, and began to question with him, seeking of him a sign from heaven, tempting him. And he sighed deeply in his spirit, and saith, Why doth this generation seek after a sign? verily I say unto you, There shall no sign be given unto this generation.*

Unbelief always pricked him to the heart, and greatly grieved him. When men trusted him, he delighted to exhibit his matchless grace; but when they caviled and questioned, his heart was heavy, and he turned away from them.

13. *And he left them, and entering into the ship again departed to the other side.*

But, alas! even on board that little ship there was unbelief; and from the small and select circle of his own disciples he had fresh reason for sorrow from the same cause.

14-21. *Now the disciples had forgotten to take bread, neither had they in the ship with them more than one loaf. And he charged them, saying, Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod. And they reasoned among themselves, saying, It is because we have no bread. And when Jesus knew it, he saith unto them, Why reason ye, because ye have no bread? perceive ye not yet, neither understand? have ye your heart yet hardened? Having eyes, see ye not? and having ears, hear ye not? and do ye not remember? When I brake the five loaves among five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? They say unto him, Twelve. And when the seven among four thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? And they said, Seven. And he said unto them, How is it that ye do not understand?*

Can we not learn from past experience? If the Lord has helped us before, is he not equally ready to help us again? What! when there are only a few of you disciples on board ship, do you begin to distrust your Lord because you have only one loaf, when he found enough food for five thousand and for four thousand out of a few scanty loaves? O ye unbelieving children of God, what infinite patience your gracious God has with you, though you so often and so shamefully doubt him! “Do ye not remember?” “How is it that ye do not understand?” Can it be that all your Lord’s lessons of love and deeds of kindness have taught you nothing? Do you still doubt him, -still distrust him? Has he delivered you in six troubles, and can you not trust him in the seventh? Has he kept you, by his grace, till you are seventy years of age, and can you not trust him for the few remaining years of your earthly pilgrimage? Oh, shame upon us that we are such dull scholars in the school of Christ!

22-26. *And he cometh to Bethsaida; and they bring a blind man unto him, and besought him to touch him. And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town; and when he had spit on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, he asked him if he saw ought. And he looked up, and said, I see men as trees, walking. After that he put his hands again upon his eyes, and made him look up: and he was restored, and saw every man clearly. And he sent him away to*

his house, saying, Neither go into the town, nor tell it to any in the town.

“Your house is outside Bethsaida, so go round-about, and get home without going into the town; and if any of your neighbors call to see you, say nothing about me to them, for I wish to remain concealed for the present.”

27. *And Jesus went out, and his disciples, into the towns of Caesarea Philippi: and by the way he asked his disciples, saying unto them, Whom do men say that I am?*

It was Christ’s usual way, when he took a walk with his disciples, to beguile the time with holy conversation. It would be well if we always did the same. We might do much good, and we might get much good, if we made our Lord Jesus the theme of our talks “by the way.” It was an important question that he put to his disciples, “Whom do men say that I am?”

28, 29. *And they answered, John the Baptist: but some say, Elias; and others, One of the prophets. And he saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?*

“That is the main point. It matters little to you what other men say about me;—whether they are right, or wrong, may not concern you; but what is your own opinion? What do you know about me? ‘Whom say ye that I am?’”

29. *And Peter answereth and saith unto him, Thou art the Christ.*

“Thou art the Messiah.” We know, from Matthew’s Gospel, that it was this confession of which our Lord said to Peter, “Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona,” son of Jonas:—“for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.”

30. *And he charged them that they should tell no man of him.*

He wished, at that time, to remain in comparative retirement; he was not anxious that his miracles should be blazoned abroad. By-and-by, he was to die; and he preferred to derive his fame from his death rather than from his life, and to gather his honours from his cross rather than from his miracles.

He never bade any man to be silent about his death on the cross; but when honour was likely to come to him among men from his miracles, he frequently “charged them that they should tell no man of him.” That restriction is no longer in force; it was entirely abrogated after our Lord’s resurrection, when he said to his

disciples, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen."

MARK 9:2-21

2-7. And after six days Jesus taketh with him Peter, and James, and John, and leadeth them up into an high mountain apart by themselves: and he was transfigured before them. And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them. And there appeared unto them Elias with Moses: and they were talking with Jesus. And Peter answered and said to Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles, one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. For he wist not what to say; for they were sore afraid. And there was a cloud that overshadowed them: and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him.

You and I have sometimes wished that we could see Christ in his earthly glory. We need not however wish it; for, if such a sight were permitted to us, in all probability we should be more full of fear than of joy. These three men, the elect out of the elect, the very choicest of the apostles, yet had little delight in what they saw at the time, for the glory was too bright for their overwhelmed natures.

"At the too transporting sight,
Darkness rushes o'er my sight."

We had better wait awhile until these eyes shall have been cleansed, and our whole fabric shall be fit for such a weight of glory as the sight of our exalted Lord will be.

8. And suddenly, when they had looked round about, they saw no man any more, save Jesus only with themselves.

Unhappy, indeed, would they have been if they had looked about and seen none but Moses, for poor comfort could Moses bring. Or if, looking around, they had seen none but Elias, for the stern prophet of fire would have been but a poor consolation to them in their life struggles. But Moses may go, and Elijah may go. Lawgiver and prophet may vanish so long as Jesus Christ remains, it

is enough. Jesus only is enough for all our wants, —for all our desires.

9, 10. *And as they came down from the mountain, he charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen, till the Son of man were risen from the dead. And they kept that saying with themselves, questioning one with another what the rising from the dead should mean.*

For they did not understand the Master's words — not even these apostles for the Spirit of God was not yet fully given. Happy indeed is he upon whom the spirit of God resteth, and in whom he dwells, for as John says "Ye have an anointing from the Holy One, and know all things", and these men without that measure of anointing did not know at that time even such a simple word as this — that the Son of man should rise again from the dead. Brethren, we must be taught of the Holy Spirit, or we shall never know anything profoundly. We might go to school to Christ himself — now, mark this word — we might go to school to Christ himself and yet learn nothing until the Holy Ghost should come upon us to write the truth upon our heart which Christ has spoken to the ear. Oh, if ye lack wisdom, ask of God, and he will give you of his Spirit.

11-13. *And they asked him, saying, Why say the scribes that Elias must first come? And he answered and told them, Elias verily cometh first, and restoreth all things, and how it is written of the Son of man, that he must suffer many things, and be set at naught. But I say unto you, That Elias is indeed come, —*

John the Baptist was he.

13. *And they have done unto him whatsoever they listed, as it is written of him.*

It is rather singular that the disciples should begin to ask about the scribes, for this was, as it were, a sort of warning note for a battle into which they were about to plunge. They talked about the scribes, but the scribes were down below in conflict with the rest of the apostolic brotherhood, and now, while they are talking about them, they find themselves immediately in their presence.

14, 15. *And when he came to his disciples, he saw a great multitude about them, and the scribes questioning with them. And straightway all the people, when they beheld him, were greatly amazed, and running to him saluted him.*

The probability is that the face of Jesus Christ was shining like the face of Moses when he came down from the mount, and the people were amazed though not with that same amazement which seized upon Israel when they saw the face of Moses, for Moses had to cover his face with a veil. But they ran to him and saluted him. The glory of Christ attracts, whereas the glory of Moses repels. The glory of the law is terrible, but the glory of the Gospel is cheering and attractive.

16. *And he asked the scribes, What question ye with them?*

Like some great commander stepping into the field when his under followers are being beaten, he comes right to the front and charges the foe boldly. Christ said, “What question ye with them?” — as much as to say, “Why did ye not wait a bit and ask me. I could have answered you if they can not.”

17, 18. *And one the multitude answered and said, Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit; and wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away:*

A case of dreadful epilepsy accompanied with satanic possession.

18, 19. *And I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out; and they could not. He answereth him, and saith, O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him unto me.*

That is a grand piece of advice, and a blessed word of permit — “Bring him unto me.” There is no case so bad but, if you bring it to Jesus, he can meet it. “Bring him unto me.” Now, good woman, bring your daughter’s case to Christ tonight in prayer while you are sitting in the pew. Now, come, brother, bring the case of your son who seems utterly to be abandoned to vice. Bring the case before Christ tonight. “Bring him unto me.” Oh, who would not bring his friend — his wife? Who would not bring her husband or her child unto Jesus Christ? “Bring him unto me.”

20. *And they brought him unto him:*

Some came to help the father, probably the bringing of the young man was too much an effort for one alone. “They brought him unto him.” Two or three of you with united prayer can do what, peradventure, one man’s prayer would not. Come, help one another.

“Bear ye one another’s burdens” in prayer. I would suggest that, if one of you should have an ungodly son who causes you trouble, you should communicate with some few of your brethren and sisters in Christ, and say, “Let us conjointly make this case a matter of prayer till God hears us.” And then you must take up a case of theirs, you know, turn and turn about, and see whether God does not in answer to prayer bless one after another that you thus bring to Christ. I know what the result will be, if it be honestly tried in simple confidence in the power of Jesus.

20, 21. *And when he saw him, straightway the spirit tare him, and he fell on the ground, and wallowed foaming. And he asked his father, how long is it ago since this came unto him? And he said, of a child.*

A terrible case.

MARK 9:2-29

2-4. *And after six days Jesus taketh with him Peter, and James, and John, and leadeth them up into an high mountain apart by themselves: and he was transfigured before them. And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them. And there appeared unto them Elias with Moses: and they were talking with Jesus.*

In the midst of all his sorrow and humiliation, our Lord let out some gleams of his glory, to remind us who he was even while he was here in the depths of his grief. He was still none other than the all-glorious Lord of heaven and earth, whose raiment, if he chose to make it so, would be whiter than snow, and brighter than the sun. Let us think of him with great love and gratitude as we see what glory he willingly laid aside for our sakes, and see how low he stooped who was in himself immeasurably high.

5, 6. *And Peter answered and said to Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. For he wist not what to say; for they were sore afraid.*

Peter had enough wit left to wish to keep where he was; and, sometimes, when we are with our Lord in the mount, we can only say, “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us stay where we are! Let our union and communion with thyself continue for evermore!”

7, 8. *And there was a cloud that overshadowed them: and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This my beloved Son: hear him. And suddenly, when they had looked round about, they saw no man any more, save Jesus only with themselves.*

Moses is gone, and Elias is gone, but Jesus remains; and it is much the same with us now, and we are quite content that all others should go that we may have “Jesus only.” If he be with us, we have the best company in the world.

9, 10. *And as they came down from the mountain, he charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen, till the Son of man were risen from the dead. And they kept that saying with themselves, questioning one with another what the rising from the dead should mean.*

You see the great modesty and patience of our Lord. Though these three favored apostles might see his glory, and afterwards bear witness concerning it, yet for the time being they must hold their tongues. All this glory, and only three men to see it, and these three must be quite silent! Our Lord seeketh not honour from men; neither ought we to do so. His mind was even then occupied with thoughts of his great sacrifice. When he spoke to Moses and Elias, his theme was, “his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem,” and when he spoke with these three eye-witnesses of his majesty, the subject of his converse was his own death and resurrection. That was the object on which his heart’s affection was set.

11-13. *And they asked him, saying, Why say the scribes that Elias must first come? And he answered and told them, Elias verily cometh first, and restoreth all things; and how it is written of the Son of man, that he must suffer many things, and be set at nought. But I say unto you, That Elias is indeed come, and they have done unto him whatsoever they listed, as it is written of him.*

Notice that, even when our Saviour was answering his disciples’ question about Elias and John, the ruling passion being strong upon him, he introduced into that answer something about his own death. That subject is ever before his eye; he never forgets it; he is in a sense undergoing his passion even as he descends the mount of transfiguration.

14. *And when he came to his disciples, he saw a great multitude about them, and the scribes questioning with them.*

What a descent for Christ, from the peace and quiet of the hill of communion with the glorified, to the noise and tumult of a surging multitude, and the mocking question of the jeering scribes!

15. *And straightaway all the people, when they beheld him, were greatly amazed, and running to him saluted him.*

I think there must be some truth in the common tradition that the face of our Lord Jesus still shone with the light of the transfiguration. It does appear so to me from these words: "All the people, when they beheld him, were greatly amazed." Surely, it was not an amazement at the mere fact of seeing him whom they had so often seen, but his face, I doubt not, glowed as the face of Moses did when he came down from the mount. Only observe that, when the face of Moses burned with the reflected glory of God's presence, the people could not bear to look upon him, but when the face of Christ shone with supernatural splendor, they "were greatly amazed, and running to him saluted him." There is an attractive glory about the Christ of God. Oh, for such a sight of his face at this moment that we should all run to him, and salute him!

16. *And he asked the scribes, What question ye with them?*

There had been a skirmish between the scribes and the disciples of Christ, and the scribes were winning the day; but when the Captain had come, the tide of battle was soon turned.

17, 18. *And one of the multitude answered and said, Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit; and wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away: and I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out; and they could not.*

It was an aggravated case of epilepsy, attended with possession by an evil spirit. The disciples could not cast out this devil, and the scribes had therefore attacked their faith in the Master himself while he was away.

19. *He answereth him, and saith, O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him unto me.*

Unbelief is a great trouble to Christ. I never read that he said to the poor or to the sick, "How long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you?" I never read that he expressed any weariness of human ignorance, or scarcely even of human sin, but when it is a matter of unbelief, then it stings him, and he cries, "O faithless

generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? Bring him unto me.”

20, 21. *And they brought him unto him: and when he saw him, straightway the spirit tare him; and he fell on the ground, and wallowed foaming. And he asked his father, How long is it ago since this came unto him? And he said, Of a child.*

And having begun with that sorrowful subject, the father, with the painful eloquence of pity, went on to tell the tale of woe: —

22. *And ofttimes it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him: but if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us.*

Here was unbelief, it is true; but there was with it a pitying entreaty that meant more faith than it could express. Men do not usually beg where they expect nothing, and they do not make pitiful entreaties with tears unless they have some hope. Even though it was almost covered up, still the Saviour fastened on that one utterance of unbelief: “if.”

23. *Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.*

“It is not, ‘If I can;’ but, ‘If thou canst.’”

24. *And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.*

There was faith, even though it was mixed with unbelief. It was a faith that made him pray, as I have already told you, and the Lord Jesus Christ found out where the faith was. He had, as it were, broken the great black lump of dead coal that looked to be nothing but unbelief, and there was the living light of faith burning in the very center of it.

25. *When Jesus saw that the people came running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him.*

That is Christ’s way of curing. Our Lord does not save sinners as some say that he does, just for a short time, and then let his work all grumble back to nothingness. This would be unworthy of himself, and unworthy of that gracious Spirit by whom he works. No, if he casts out a devil, he shall enter no more into the one he formerly tormented.

26. *And the spirit cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him: and he was as one dead; insomuch that many said, He is dead.*

As old Thomas Fuller says, the devil knew that he had to go out, so, like a bad tenant, he did all the mischief he could before he left. Satan often acts in this fashion; just when Christ has come to cast him out, he drives the poor soul into deeper despair, and perhaps into greater sin than he ever fell into in all his life before.

27. *But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up; and he arose.*

He was not dead, though many thought he was, and said so. Christ does not cure and then kill, he cures so that we shall never die. No, no, poor sinner, the last pangs of despair shall not destroy you, the fiercest, bitterest assaults of Satan shall not cause you to die: Christ will take you by the hand, and you shall arise.

28-29. *And when he was come into the house, his disciples asked him privately, Why could not we cast him out? And he said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.*

MARK 9:2-29

2-6. *And after six days Jesus taketh with him Peter, and James, and John, and leadeth them up into an high mountain apart by themselves: and he was transfigured before them. And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them. And there appeared unto them Elias with Moses: and they were talking with Jesus. And Peter answered and said to Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. For he wist not what to say; for they were sore afraid.*

Brethren, like these disciples of our Lord, we are not yet fit to be favored with a sight of his glory. As we now are, we could not bear it. As our poet says, —

“At the too-transporting light,
Darkness rushes o’er my sight.”

These three apostles of Christ were too bewildered to know what to say, they were quite lost, and I suppose that, if we could go to heaven as we are, our bewilderment would even exceed our bliss. But we may rest assured that God will prepare us for that which he has prepared for us.

7, 8. *And there was a cloud that overshadowed them: and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him. And suddenly, when they had looked round about, they saw no man any more, save Jesus only with themselves.*

And although this was not so ravishing or so astonishing a sight, yet it was more encouraging to them, — something which they could more easily bear with joy and peace: “they saw no man any more, save Jesus only with themselves.” May God grant to us, as long as we are here below, that, If no Moses or Elias shall ever come to visit us, at any rate Jesus may never be absent from us! May our fellowship with him be unbroken!

9, 10. *And as they came down from the mountain, he charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen, till the Son of man were risen from the dead. And they kept that saying with themselves, questioning one with another what the rising from the dead should mean.*

These were Peter, and James, and John, the three most privileged disciples of Christ, — probably, the best scholars in that class which had the Lord Jesus Christ himself for its Teacher; yet his plain language, was without meaning to them: “questioning one with another what the rising from the dead should mean.” I wonder whether, when our Lord comes the second time, we shall discover that the prophecies concerning his advent were wonderfully clear, but that we could not understand them till he came. Plain as his teaching concerning his resurrection was, his disciples could not understand it till that great event had really occurred.

11-13. *And they asked him, saying, Why say the scribes that Elias must first come? And he answered and told them, Elias verily cometh first, and restoreth all things; and how it is written of the Son of man, that he must suffer many things, and be set at nought. But I say unto you, That Elias is indeed come, and they have done unto him whatsoever they listed, as it is written of him.*

John the Baptist had come, in the spirit and power of Elijah, and had reconstituted matters, and prepared the people for the advent of the Saviour, whose herald he was.

14, 16. *And when he came to his disciples, he saw a great multitude about them, and the scribes questioning with them. And straightway*

all the people, when they beheld him, were greatly amazed, and running to him saluted him.

Some relics of the glory on the mount still remained upon his face, and the people were astounded; so, though deeply interested in the battle which was proceeding between the scribes and the disciples, they left them, and turned to look upon that mysterious radiance which hovered about his brow.

16. *And he asked the scribes, What question ye with them?*

The circumstances of the disciples resembled a battlefield on which the enemy was winning the day, and the loyal troops were about to die defeated; when suddenly, the great Commander himself appears for their relief. His presence is worth more than a thousand battalions of men; and he charges at once upon the adversary, and puts them to rout: "He asked the scribes, What question ye with them?"

17. *And one of the multitude answered —*

One who had a peculiar reason for answering; just as, I trust there will be one in this multitude before me who will have a peculiar reason for listening to my message, and a peculiar reason for remembering it after it is delivered: "One of the multitude answered" —

17-19. *And said, Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit; and wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away: and I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out; and they could not. He answereth him, and saith, O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him unto me.*

I suppose our Lord's rebuke was meant specially for his disciples. It was something like the speech of a schoolmaster, who, having taught his pupils the same lesson a great many times, and laboured hard with them, from year to year, yet finds them failing in the very elements of knowledge. Christ does not speak as if he were tired of his life, and wished to get away from his disciples; but this is his way of saying how disappointed he is that these learners have learnt so little.

"How long shall I suffer you? bring him unto me" Those words struck my heart very forcibly as I read them: "How long shall I suffer you?" Does not the Lord Jesus Christ have to put up with a

great deal from every one of us? I applied his words to myself, and I thought I heard him saying to me, "How long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you?" Often, he must derive more pain than pleasure from intercourse with many of his people. How grieved he often must be to see their slowness to learn, their readiness to forget, and the difficulty with which they can be brought to live the lessons which he so carefully imparts to them! Then note what his action is concerning the poor child: "Bring him unto me."

20. *And they brought him unto him: and when he saw him, straightway the spirit tare him;*

As soon as ever Christ looked at him, "the spirit tare him." One look from Christ awakes the devil. Sometimes, sinners are worse for a time when Christ looks upon them. The devil always has great wrath, when he knoweth that his time is short; and he rages and tears most violently when he is about to be ejected. The Jews have a proverb, "When the tale of bricks is doubled, Moses appears," and we may make it into a Scriptural proverb, "When the devil's torment of the heart is doubled, then Jesus appears to cast him out."

20. *And he fell on the ground, and wallowed foaming.*

And Jesus, instead of curing him at once, gave his first attention to the other patient before him, namely, the father of the child, He was suffering from an equally bad disease, though the symptoms were different, and Jesus meant to cure him as well as his boy.

21, 22. *And he asked his father, how long is it ago since this came unto him? And he said, Of a child. And oftentimes it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him: but if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us.*

He put himself on a level with his child, and that is the best way to pray for your children: "Have compassion on us, and help us." It will be compassion on you, as well as upon your son, if the Lord saves him.

23. *Jesus said unto him, —*

Catching at his words, "If thou canst do anything," —

23-29. *If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief. When Jesus saw that the people came running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out*

of him, and enter no more into him. And the spirit cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him: and he was as one dead; insomuch that many said, He is dead. But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up; and he arose. And when he was come into the house, his disciples asked him privately, Why could not we cast him out? And he said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.

There are some things, which we are not fit to do until we have drawn very near to God, and have been deeply humbled, and, with sincere repentance, and the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit, have been cleansed so as to receive so great a boon. Faith alone will not accomplish everything. Faith must be accompanied by prayer, and prayer must be at least sometimes, in special cases, attended with fasting. The Lord makes reserves of his mercies, which he does not give immediately even to the request of faith, he demands importunity on our part, and heart-searching, and heart-cleansing, before the blessing will be bestowed.

MARK 9:14-32, 43-48

Our Lord had been absent from the people, and transfigured on the top of the mountain; when he came down from this manifestation of his glory, he was brought face to face with Satan's work at almost the first step he took.

Let us read about what he did.

14, 15. *And when he came to his disciples, he saw a great multitude about them, and the scribes questioning with them. And straightway all the people, when they beheld him, were greatly amazed, and running to him saluted him.*

There was a glory about his face not altogether unlike that of Moses when he came down from the other mountain, so that the people were struck with wonder when they looked upon him.

16. *And he asked the scribes, What question ye with them?*

The battle had been raging between Christ's enemies and his disciples but now that their Captain has come, he rallies his forces, and at once attacks his foes: "What question ye with them?"

17. *And one of the multitude answered and said, Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit;*

We do not know if the scribes gave any answer to Christ's question; and it does not signify at all. What does always signify is practical, living, earnest prayer. So what the scribes may have said is not recorded, but the prayer of the poor father is: "Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit." If any of you have come here to cavil, we shall take no notice of that; but if there is a soul that has come here to pray, the recording angel will write it down in the eternal book.

18. *And wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away: and I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out; and they could not.*

No, it was no use going to the disciples, it is of no avail to pray to saints and angels; go to the Master himself. "Straightforward makes the best runner." There is nothing like carrying your case to headquarters. Get to the Court of King's Bench as soon as you can, for there the matter will be finally settled.

19. *He answereth him, and saith, O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him unto me.*

Grand words: "Bring him unto me." Lord, he has a dumb spirit. "Bring him unto me." It is the devil who is his enemy. "Bring him unto me."

20. *And they brought him unto him: and when he saw him, straightway the spirit tare him; and he fell on the ground, and wallowed foaming.*

What a dreadful sight! He struggled on the ground, like one in a fit of epilepsy.

21, 22. *And he asked his father, How long is it ago since this came unto him?. And he said, Of a child. And oftentimes it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him: but if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us.*

"Help us," he cries, identifying himself with his child. Father, mother, when you pray, use the plural, as this man did, "Have compassion on us and help us." That is the way to pray for every sinner whom you bring before Christ. Join yourself to the poor soul for whom you are pleading and say, "Have compassion on us, and help us."

23. *Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.*

Hear that, any of you who have come in here, desiring to be delivered from sin, to be made holy, to break off old habits, and to become new men in Christ Jesus. "All things are possible to him that believeth." So, take courage, trust in Christ, and cry unto him to save you.

24. *And straightway the father of the child, cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.*

There were within him two men, as it were, a believing man, and an unbelieving man, and the two struggled for mastery; "Lord, I do believe; but there is so much unbelief in me, I pray thee to drive it out, that I may believe in thee wholly."

25, 26. *When Jesus saw that the people came running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him. And the spirit cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him:*

It must obey Christ. The Master bids that dog of a devil to lie down, and he must do so. It shows what an abject creature, after all, the prince of darkness is; he must obey the voice of Christ. Lord, speak to him at this moment, and drive him out of other souls by thine omnipotent word!

26. *And he was as one dead; inasmuch that many said, He is dead.*

It was not a case of "kill or cure," but it seemed to be one of "cure and kill," and, sometimes, poor sinners, in their struggles with sin and Satan are brought to such despair that they are afraid that they will die before they get a glimpse of hope. "Many said, He is dead;" but he was not.

27. *But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up; and he arose.*

So may the Lord come, and take by the hand any here who seem to be dead in despair! A touch of his hand will enable them to stand.

28, 29. *And when he was come into the house, his disciples asked him privately, Why could not we cast him out? And he said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.*

The watchword for Christ's disciples is "intensity." Here was the devil in an intensely terrible form, and he could only be driven out by intense grace. There must be prayer and fasting. Even Christ

himself must exert the greatness of his power to work a cure in such a case as this. Oh, for more intensity in us all! Carry that word in your ear as we read on.

30-32. *And they departed thence, and passed through Galilee; and he would not that any man should know it. For he taught his disciples, and said unto them, The Son of man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him; and after that he is killed, he shall rise the third day. But they understood not that saying, and were afraid to ask him.*

See how intense he was; always thinking of his approaching death, that cruel, bitter death, yet he hastened towards it, longed for that baptism to be accomplished, for the great redeeming price to be paid. Oh, that you and I were as fully absorbed in the service of God as our great Master was!

Now let us see what intensity he requires of us.

43. *And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched:*

Anything is better than the loss of your soul. It is better to lose the greatest joy, skill, comfort, honour, that you ever had, than to lose your soul for ever.

44-46. *Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off; it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.*

That is the second time he said these words. Our Lord was not fond of dreadful metaphors and terrible language, but he knew that they must be used, though some of his servants shrink from the use of them. Are they more loving than he is? Is it, after all, a greater love for souls that makes men keep back terrible truths? Is it not more honest and loving to tell the whole truth, whatever it may be? It is harder to speak, but does it not show a tenderer heart to be able to speak so as to warn men of their peril? If anything should seem as necessary to you as your foot, so that you can make no progress in life without it, yet if it would cost you your soul, give it up. Just as it would be better to live without a foot than to die, so is it better to go

to heaven without even the necessities of life on the road than to perish everlastingly.

47. *And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out:*

Notice how severe our Saviour is, how deep he goes. He does not say, "Shut it, cover it up with a green shade;" but, "Pluck it out."

47, 48. *It is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hellfire: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.*

That is the third time he has uttered those terrible words; then they must mean something, what do they mean? Can they mean anything less than everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord? Oh, that we might be prepared to sacrifice everything rather than be lost for ever! Dear hearts, are you saved or not? If you are not saved, see first to this all-important business; let everything else go sooner than that, in eternity, you should find yourself for ever shut in where hope can never come.

MARK 9:20-41

This miracle is one that shows the transforming power of the Saviour in a remarkable fashion.

20-21. *And when he saw him, straightway the spirit tare him; and he fell on the ground, and wallowed foaming. And he asked his father, How long is it ago since this came unto him? And he said, Of a child.*

A terrible case.

22-25. *And oftentimes it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him: but if thou canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us. Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief. When Jesus saw that the people came running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him.*

That is one way in which Christ cures. When he drives the devil out of a man, he adds, "Enter no more into him." I believe in the final perseverance of the saints, because I believe in the omnipotent

ejection of Satan out of men, when Christ speaks the word, “Come out of him, and enter no more into him.”

26-29. *And the spirit cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him: and he was as one dead; insomuch that many said, He is dead. But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up; and he arose. And when he was come into the house, his disciples asked him privately, Why could not we cast him out? And he said unto them, —*

According to another evangelist, it was from want of faith. Howbeit, he added: —

29. *This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.*

God does not give us everything in answer to one prayer. It may be necessary for some blessings that the prayer should be reiterated — that it should deepen — that it should grow into an aching. It may be even necessary, in order that a blessing should come, that fasting should be used with prayer in order to show the intense eagerness and earnestness of the petitioner.

Now notice the 38th verse.

38. *And John answered him, saying, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us: and we forbad him, because he followeth not us.*

John in this case was like a good many people at the present day. You notice it. They could not cast out the devils themselves, and when they found somebody else that did it, they forbade his doing it because he did not follow with them. I have known learned, eloquent, respectable ministers who cannot save sinners. And they hear that certain poor, illiterate, uneducated men have snatched sinners like brands from the burning, and they forbid them to do what they cannot do themselves. It is insanity — that would stop any man from doing what God enables him to do; and we ought to be the very last to forbid others from doing it.

39. *But Jesus said, Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me.*

These people were dissenters, we may say — a sort of outsiders. And John puts forth the whole power of his apostolical authority to put them down; and then Jesus Christ puts forth the full power of his divine authority to give them liberty to go on.

40-41. *For he that is not against us is on our part. For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward.*

MARK 9:30-40

30-32. *And they departed thence, and passed through Galilee; and he would not that any man should know it. For he taught his disciples, and said unto them, The Son of Man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him; and after that he is killed, he shall rise the third day. But they understood not that saying, and were afraid to ask him.*

Here is the ruling passion of Christ which was ever prominent throughout his life; though he has just won a glorious victory over Satan, he does not stay to congratulate himself upon it, but his heart is still away to the cross where he is to suffer. He is thinking of his dying for his people, and lodging until he shall have paid the ransom price for their redemption, and set them free. Oh, the heights and depths of the love of Christ! See how steadfastly he sets his face to go unto Jerusalem where he must die. Let us imitate him; let us think as much of his passion now it is over as he thought of it ere it was come.

33-34, *And he came to Capernaum: and being in the house he asked them, What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way? But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest.*

It was a dreadful descent from communing with Moses and Elias on the mount of transfiguration to meeting the furious demon at the hill-foot; but this looks like a far greater descent, from the self-sacrifice of the Divine Master to the petty jealousies and self-seeking of his chosen servants. Oh, sometimes, it makes our hearts sick - when we have been almost lost in rapturous meditation, when we have been taken up well-nigh to heaven in communion with the Lord, and then we have had to attend to some paltry squabble between two brothers or two sisters! It does seem such a terrible come-down, yet our Lord and Master does not disdain thus to come down, for in tenderness he deals with these diseases of the sheep like a good shepherd.

35-37. *And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all. And he took a child, and set him in the midst of them: and when he had taken him in his arms, he said unto them, Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me.*

Perhaps they were jealous of Peter; possibly they were even more jealous of James and John. So the Lord gently pacifies them; he does not impatiently say, "I cannot enter into your disputes, I cannot be worried with you." Oh, no! but he just sits down, and talks with them. I like that picture, it is almost as grand as the group of Christ and his disciples at the supper table in the upper room. "He sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all." That is the way they come to be first, by being willing to be last of all, and the servant of all. This is the only way to get to the front of Christ's army; he who would be chief, must always be aiming at the rear rank, willing to do the most humble service, and to be the lowest menial in his Master's service. Only in this way can we rise. In Christ's kingdom, the way to go up is to go down. Sink self, and you shall surely rise.

38. *And John answered him, saying, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us: and we forbad him, because he followeth not us.*

He did it, I daresay, in love to his Master; but not in the love of his Master. He did it, no doubt, with the desire to honour his Master, but he did not honour his Master by what he did.

39, 40. *But Jesus said, Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me. For he that is not against us is on our part.*

Thus the Master had to talk to his poor disciples after having conversed with Moses and Elias. Again, I say, what a come-down it was from fellowship with the great law-giver of Israel, and with the mighty prophet of fire, to talk with these childish men who had fallen out among themselves, and fallen out with other people! O blessed Master, we may fain hope that thou wilt commune with us as thou didst commune with them! We may also trust that some

poor sinner, even though the devil may be in him, may catch thine eye of pity and love, and that thou mayest heal him.

MARK 10:13-27, 32-52

13. *And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and his disciples rebuked those that brought them.*

They thought them too little, too insignificant, and that the Master had greater things to do; but he thinketh not so. None are too little for him. He receiveth even childish honours to himself.

14. *But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.*

Many of them come into that kingdom, and all who some think must be like them. The child is not the hardest subject of conversion; nay, rather:

15. *Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.*

Instead of growing wiser, in order to be fit for Christ, we must be more conscious of ignorance, more trustful towards him, more dependent upon him, mere childlike.

16-18. *And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them. And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God.*

He did not here unveil his Deity to that young man, but if he had thought a while, he might have seen it. However, he answered his question. "If you are to be saved by your doings, this is what you have to do — not attend to sacraments and go through performances, but this."

19, 20. *Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother. And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth.*

And he probably had very cautiously and anxiously done so, yet, for all that, he had not really kept all those commands without a

flaw. We are right well sure of that, but as yet his eyes were not open to see his own shortcomings.

21. *Then Jesus beholding him loved him,*

There was so much that was amiable about him.

21. *And said unto him, One thing thou lackest: 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.*

He knew that there was a weak point in the young man's character — that he did not yet supremely love God, but loved his wealth — that he was living for this world, after all. And are there not many such — most correct in character? No one could point to a single flaw in their morals, but they are living purely for self — altogether that they may buy and sell, and get gain. No thought of God, except a fear lest they should come under his rod, but no thought of serving him, and laying themselves out for his glory, nor much thought, either, for their fellow-men. Christ had hit the blot — marked it out for him.

23, 24. *And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions. And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! And the disciples were astonished at his words.*

For the Rabbis had pretty well taught that money would answer every-thing — that if you could give so much, and pay so much, it was all well with you. Christ went against all such teaching, and showed that, in this respect, money was of no service — in fact, that it often was a hindrance.

24. *But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trustest in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!*

It is an impossibility. Only God can do it.

25-27. *It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved? And Jesus looking upon them saith, With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible.*

32-34. *And they were in the way going up to Jerusalem; and Jesus went before them: and they were amazed: and as they followed, they*

were afraid. And he took the twelve again, and began to tell them what things should happen unto him, Saying, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be delivered unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes; and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles: And they shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him, and shall kill him: and the third day he shall rise again.

From the number of these sentences it is clear that our Saviour entered into a very detailed account of his sufferings, dwelling upon each particular which he plainly foresaw, wherein we see his prophetic character. But it is more to our point to see that he knew beforehand what it would cost him to redeem our souls. "When the Saviour knew the price of pardon was his blood, his pity ne'er withdrew." He knew not only that he must die, but he knew all the circumstances of pain and shame with which that death should be attended. They should condemn him: should deliver him to the Gentiles; mock him; scourge him; spit upon him; kill him. Thus we learn that we also should dwell in holy, grateful meditation upon every point of our Lord's passion. There is something in it. He would not himself thus have divided it out, and laid it, as it were, piece by piece, if he had not intended us to do with it as they did with the burnt-offering of old, when they divided it — a picture of what every intelligent, instructed believer should do with the passion of his Master. He should try to look into the details of the great sacrifice, and have communion with God therein. Now, albeit that this revelation of his coming shame, and sorrow, and death afflicted the hearts of his disciples, yet, for all that, observe what they did.

35. *And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto him, saying, Master, we would that thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire.*

Strange request! First of all, read those words, "We would that thou shouldest do for us." Now the genuine spirit of a Christian is not to ask that something should be done to him, but to ask his Master, especially in such a time as that, what they could do for him. Christ was all unselfishness, but his disciples had not yet learned the lesson. "We would that thou shouldest do for us." And then see how much they indulged their ambition. "We wouldst that thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we desire." And yet I question

whether we are, any of us, free from this spirit; for when the Lord reproves us a little, and we have not everything our own way, how apt we are to rebel! The fact is, we have got this tincture — this gall — in us — we would that he should do for us whatsoever we shall desire. Should it be according to thy mind? Should the disciple dictate to his Master? Should the child Be lord of the family?

36-39. *And he said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you? They said unto him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory. But Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? And they said unto him, We can.*

Again, he might have said, “Ye know not what ye say.”

39, 40. *And Jesus said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized: But to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared.*

They are not content, you see, with being ambitious themselves: they would fire him with ambition — that humble, lowly servant of God, who had laid aside for a while the power to distribute crowns and thrones. But he does not forget himself, nor the position which he had taken up in reference to the Father, but said, “It is not mine to give.”

41-43. *And when the ten heard it, they began to be much displeased with James and John. But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you:*

However, how sad the contrast is — the Master’s thoughts all taken up with his death for others, and their thoughts occupied with little petty jealousies as to who should be the greatest! It is a sad thing when this creeps into Christian churches (and it still does), when souls are perishing, and this poor world wants our weeping eyes and our labourious hands, and we get quarreling about points of precedence. This brother thinks the other too forward. This one has not enough respect paid to him. This one has spoken sharply,

and the other cannot bear it. Oh! what poor disciples we are! What a blessing it is we have a patient Master, who still bears with us, and will not leave us until he has infused his own spirit into us, which spirit is the spirit of self-denial, self-abnegation — the spirit which desireth not its own, but looketh on the things of others. God grant us all to be full of it.

43. *But whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister:*
Your servant.

44. *And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all.*

And that is the way to be truly great in the Church of God. It is to be less and less in your own esteem, and willing to be nothing. The way up is downward That is not a contradiction, but it is a paradox. Sink, and you shall rise. Be willing to serve the very least, and you shall have honour amongst your brethren. Remember that the King of kings was the servant of servants. “Whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all.”

45-49. *For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. And they came to Jericho: and as he went out of Jericho with his disciples and a great number of people, blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, sat by the highway side begging. And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out, and say, Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me. And many charged him that he should hold his peace: but he cried the more a great deal, thou son of David, have mercy on me. And Jesus stood still, and commanded him to be called. And they call the blind man, saying unto him, Be of good comfort,*

“Cheer up.” That would be a very exact translation.

49-51. *Rise; he calleth thee. And he, casting away his garment, rose, and came to Jesus. And Jesus answered and said unto him, What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?*

Do you notice here a sort of gentle rebuke that the Saviour gives to James and John? Read the 36th verse, and then read this again. “He said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you?” And now here is a blind beggar, and he sweetly puts the same question to him, “What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?”

51. *The blind man said unto him,*

And here he might well have shamed John and James. He asked for no thrones or kingdoms.

51. *Lord, that I might receive my sight.*

“Lord, that I might look up.” That was the word he used exactly; for no doubt he had been conscious that the light came from the sun as he felt its warmth upon him as he sat by the wayside; and, therefore, he thought that seeing must be looking up towards the place whence the sunlight came. “Lord, that I might look up.”

52, 53. *And Jesus said unto him, Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole. And immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way.*

It is a very remarkable thing that you will not often find the Lord Jesus Christ granting a favor without ascribing it to some excellency in that person to whom he grants it. It is generally “Great is thy faith,” or something of that sort — “I have not seen such faith.” Now this is a very remarkable thing, because we know there really was nothing whatever in the persons that they should deserve his great favor.

MARK 10:17-45

17, 18. *And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God.*

This was a hint that Christ was more than man. If he was really worthy of the title that the enquirer gave him, he was God as well as man, for “there is none good but one, that is God.”

19, 20. *Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother. And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth.*

Possibly, in the ordinary sense of the words, he had observed these commandments, but Christ tested the reality of his declaration.

21, 22. *Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: 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. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions.*

Thus he proved that he had not kept either table of the law perfectly, for he did not love the Lord with all his heart, nor did he love his neighbor as himself.

23-27. *And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved? And Jesus looking upon them saith, With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible.*

It is impossible for man, unaided by the Spirit of God, to enter the kingdom of heaven, but that which is impossible to man by himself is made possible by the grace and power of God.

28. *Then Peter began to say unto him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee.*

He spoke as if they had done what the rich man had failed to do, and evidently he thought they should be rewarded, for, according to Matthew, he added, "What shall we have therefore?"

29-31. *And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospels, but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life. But many that are first shall be last; and the last first.*

In the final account, it shall be found that no man has been a loser through giving up anything for the Lord Jesus Christ though he has his own method of deciding who are to be first and who are to be last.

32. *And they were in the way going up to Jerusalem;*

It was well known to them all that the crisis of our Saviour's history was close at hand and a sort of indefinable dread was upon them all. The bravest spirit in the whole company was their blessed Lord and Master. He knew that he was going up to Jerusalem to die, so you may view him as the Sacrifice going to the altar, or as the

Hero going to the conflict in which he would die and yet conquer. They were in the way going up to Jerusalem; —

32. *And Jesus went before them:*

The disciples might well have been filled with holy courage as their Leader was in the van. This is true concerning the whole life of all the saints: Jesus went before them.” What if trials lie beyond, and the dark river itself is in front of them, yet Jesus goes before them, so they need not fear to follow.

32. *And they were amazed; and as they followed, they were afraid.*

They did not know much about what was to happen, but a great depression was upon their spirits. They must have wondered at the cheerful bravery of their Master when all of them were ready to turn back from this mournful march.

32-34. *And he took again the twelve, and began to tell them what things should happen unto him, Saying, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be delivered unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes; and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles: and they shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him, and shall kill him: and the third day he shall rise again.*

He thought it right that the twelve, who led the way, should be better acquainted than the rest with the sad history that was so soon to be enacted. So he tells them about it in private, and I want you to notice how he dwells in detail upon his sufferings. He does not describe them in general terms, but he brings out into strong relief each separate set of infamy: “they shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him and shall kill him;” — from which we learn that our Saviour knew all that he had to endure, yet he went bravely forward to bear it for our sakes. For this reason, we should admire his divine courage and complete self-sacrifice. Mere men may promise to do a certain thing without knowing what it will involve, but —

“This was compassion like a God,

That when the Saviour knew The price of pardon was his blood,
His pity ne'er withdrew.”

I think, too, that as our Lord thus dwells upon each point, he means us also to dwell upon the details of his redeeming griefs. We should not be strangers at the cross-foot, nor in Gethsemane; but

should hear each one of these notes ring out its sorrowful yet joyful music: "They shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him, and shall kill him." But what a glad note that concluding one is: "and the third day he shall rise again." Death cannot hold him in her bands, the sepulcher cannot continue to enclose him in her gloomy prison This is the glory and boast of our Christianity, our hope and our joy, for —

"As the Lord our Saviour rose,
So all his followers must."

35, 36. *And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto him saying, Master, we would that thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire. And he said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you?*

Our Saviour's question suggests to us the prudent lesson, never to promise in the dark. If anyone shall say to you, "Promise that you will do whatever I ask," follow the example of Christ and first ask, "What would you that I should do for you?" Otherwise, you may entangle yourself with your own words. These young men evidently needed to have this question put to them, for they had not themselves thoroughly considered what they were asking their Lord to do for them.

37. *They said unto him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory.*

There was, undoubtedly, much that was wrong about this request, and you have often heard that view of the matter dwelt upon, so I will call your attention to that which was right about it. These disciples showed their faith that this same Jesus, who was to be mocked, and scourged, and spit upon, and killed, would yet reign; and I think it was wonderful faith that, after they had heard from his own lips, in sorrowful detail, the description of how he should die, yet nevertheless they so fully believed in his kingdom that they asked to have a share in its honours. It is true that they were ambitious, but their ambition was to be near the Saviour. It would be well if all those, who ask for right hand and left hand places, wanted them at the right hand and the left hand of the Saviour.

38. *But Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask:*

Has the Lord ever said to us, when we have been praying, “Ye know not what ye ask”? I suppose that is usually true in a certain sense; we do not fully understand the compass of the most of our prayers, and sometimes we ask so unadvisedly that we prove that we know not what we are asking.

38. *Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?*

“Can ye share my drinking in Gethsemane and my sinking on Golgotha?”

39. *And they said unto him, We can.*

They knew not what they said, but they felt that such was the strength of their love, that they could share anything that had to do with Christ! His throne! Yes, they would like to sit at the right hand of it. His cup! Yes, they can drink of it. Immersion into his suffering! Yes, they can endure that baptism.

39. *And Jesus said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized:*

And so they were, for James was soon put to death, and John lived, the last and longest of the apostles, a life-long martyrdom for the Master’s sake.

40, 41. *But to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared. And when the ten heard it, they began to be much displeased with James and John.*

Why were they displeased? Because they were of the same spirit as James and John. As they were displeased with James and John, it is evident that they wanted those places themselves, and many a man is thus displeased with his own faults. Did you ever see a dog bark at himself in a glass? You and I have often done that; we have even grown very angry with what was, after all, only our own image.

42-45. *But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: and whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to*

be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

Christ instituted bishops, that is, overseers; but never prelates. He never had any idea of setting some men in his Church over the heads of others, but he put all his servants upon an equality. They are to exercise no lordship the one over the other, nor to seek it, for the truest honour in the Church of God is found in service. He that serves most is the greatest He that will occupy the lowest office, he that will bear patiently to be the most put upon, he that is readiest to be despised, and to be the servant of all, shall be the chiefest of all. The way to rise in the kingdom of heaven is to descend, for even so was it with our Lord himself. God give to all of us the humble and lowly spirit that will make us willing to be the least of all!

MARK 10:46-52

Let us listen to the record of one of our Lord's most striking miracles.

46, 47. *And they came to Jericho: and as he went out of Jericho with his disciples and a great number of people, blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, sat by the highway side begging. And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out, and say, Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me.*

If he could not see, he could hear, and he made good use of his hearing. If thou hast not every spiritual ability, yet, soul, dost thou use such ability as thou hast? Thou canst hear the gospel. Then search into the Word, and labour to understand it. Art thou doing that? Alas! men talk of what they cannot do, but they are not doing what they can.

48. *And many charged him that he should hold his peace:*

“Hush! Be quiet! Do not disturb him! Hear what an eloquent sermon he is delivering.” Ay, but he thought of his Poor blind eyes, and of the only hope he now had before him of having them opened.

48, 49. *But he cried the more a great deal, Thou son of David, have mercy on me. And Jesus stood still, and commanded him to be called. And they call the blind man, saying unto him, Be of good comfort, rise; he calleth thee.*

How soon they changed their hotel. The very persons that would have kept him back now help him on. Ah! when Christ speaks to his

people, if they have been indifferent about the good of men, they also grow warm in heart, and they are ready to help and take interest in the case.

50. *And he, casting away his garment,*
Throwing off his old beggar's cloak.

50, 51. *Rose, and came to Jesus. And Jesus answered and said unto him, What wilt thou that I should do unto thee? The blind man said unto him, Lord, that I might receive my sight.*

He knew what he wanted, which is more than some people do. It is better, however, to know what is wanted by the soul — even the salvation of God.

52. *And Jesus said unto him, Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole.*

And immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way.

Christ's cures do not take many minutes. When he comes to save, he saves men at once. He says, "Light be," and there is light.

MARK 10:46-52

We have several records of blind men being cured by the Lord Jesus Christ. One of them is in Mark 10:46-52.

10:46. *And they came to Jericho: and as he went out of Jericho with his disciples and a great number of people, —*

For, now, his march to the battle was like a triumphal march, which was by-and-by to be attended with the waving of palms and the shout of Hosannas: "as he went out of Jericho with his disciples and a great number of people,"-

46, 47. *Blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, sat by the highway side begging. And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, —*

That is all that the crowd called him "Jesus of Nazareth —

47. *He began to cry out, and say, Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me.*

He had advanced much further than the mass of the people. To him it was not "Jesus of Nazareth," but it was "Jesus, thou Son of David."

49-50. *And many charged him that he should hold his peace: but he cried the more a great deal, Thou son of David, have mercy on me.*

And Jesus stood still, and commanded him to be called. And they call the blind man, saying unto him, Be of good comfort, rise; he calleth thee. And he, casting away his garment, rose, and came to Jesus.

Blind as he was, he found his way to the Saviour: I suppose the ear directed by the voice helped him to do so.

51. *And Jesus answered and said unto him, What wilt thou that I should do unto thee? The blind man said unto him, Lord, that I might receive my sight.*

His request was plainly put, but it was most respectfully and even adoringly addressed to Christ.

52. *And Jesus said unto him, Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole.*

You will find that it is often the Saviour's way thus to give the credit of his own work, to the patient's faith. "Thy faith," saith he, "hath made thee whole." Whereas, you and I, if we do a good thing, are very anxious that nobody else should take the credit of it. We are very willing to have all the honour put upon ourselves, but Jesus does not say, "I have made thee whole," though that was true enough; but, "Thy faith hath made thee whole." And why is it, think you, that Christ takes the crown of his own head to put it on the head of faith? Why? Because he loves faith, and because faith is quite certain not to wear that crown, but to lay it at his feet; for, of all the graces, faith is the surest to deny herself, and ascribe all to him in whom she trusts.

52. *And immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way.*

Another of these records is in John 9:1-7.

This exposition consisted of readings from MARK 10:46-52; AND JOHN 9:1-7.

MARK 12:12-44

12. *And they sought to lay hold on him, but feared the people: for they knew that he had spoken the parable against them: and they left him, and went their way.*

Christ's enemies could not injure him then, partly because the people heard him gladly, and were ready to protect him, but still more because the appointed time for his suffering and death had not fully come.

13, 14. *And they send unto him certain of the Pharisees and of the Herodians, to catch him in his word. And when they were come, they say unto him, Master, we know that thou art true, and carest for no man: for thou regardest not the person of men, but teachest the way of God in truth:*

They meant “to catch him in his words,” if they could, so they baited their trap with flattery. Whenever a man begins to flatter you, be on your guard against him. If he tries to commence a conversation with you by uttering words of excessive admiration, depend upon it that he admires something that you have got more than he admires you; and, therefore, be on the watch against him. Our Saviour must, in his heart, have utterly despised men who were so foolish as to imagine that they could entrap him by their flattering words. After that preface, they asked the questions which they thought would impale him upon the horns of a dilemma: —

14, 15. *Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not? Shall we give, or shall we not give?*

They knew very well that, if Christ said, “Do not give tribute to Caesar,” the Romans would have taken him up, and imprisoned him for preaching sedition, but, on the other hand, if he said, “Pay tribute to Caesar,” the Jews would have said that he was their enemy, and not a true patriot, or else he would not have admitted that the chosen people were bound to pay taxes to their Roman conquerors.

15-17. *But he, knowing their hypocrisy, said unto them, Why tempt ye me? bring me a penny, that I may see it. And they brought it. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? And they said unto him, Caesar’s. And Jesus answering said unto them, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s. And they marvelled at him.*

He had answered them with matchless wisdom without committing himself in any way.

18-23. *Then come unto him the Sadducees, which say there is no resurrection; and they asked him, saying, Master, Moses wrote unto us, If a man’s brother die, and leave his wife behind him, and leave no children, that his brother should take his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. Now there were seven brethren: and the first took a wife, and dying left no seed. And the second took her, and died, neither left he any seed: and the third likewise. And the seven had*

her, and left no seed: last of all the woman died also. In the resurrection therefore, when they shall rise, whose wife shall she be of them, for the seven had her to wife.

No doubt they thought that they had completely entangled him that time. How could he answer such a difficult question as that? But, you see, they had based their enquiry upon the erroneous supposition that things are to be in another state as they are here; so Jesus was able at once to answer them as effectively as he had just answered the Pharisees and Herodians.

24-27. *And Jesus answering said unto them, Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the scriptures, neither the power of God? For when they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels which are in heaven. And as touching the dead, that they rise: have ye not read in the book of Moses, how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living: ye therefore do greatly err.*

His answer carried the war into the enemies' camp. They professed to believe in Moses, yet they denied the existence of spirits and the fact of the resurrection; but Jesus Christ proved to a demonstration that God cannot be the God of the dead. If, therefore, he is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are still alive; and if he be your God, and my God, dear friends, we need not fear extinction; we must live, and we must live for ever.

28-34. *And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all? And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these. And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he; and to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbor as himself, is more*

than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices. And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God. And no man after that durst ask him any question.

He had so decidedly put all his questioners to the rout that no other man had the audacity to court defeat at his hands. The infallible wisdom of Christ had put all his accusers and tempters to flight.

35, 36. *And Jesus answered and said, while he taught in the temple, How say the scribes that Christ is the son of David? For David himself said by the Holy Ghost, —*

In Psalm 110:1, —

36, 37. *The Lord said to my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool. David therefore himself calleth him Lord; and whence is he then his son?*

They could not answer that riddle, but we can. We know that Jesus is both David's son and David's Lord; a man like ourselves, of the great human race, yet "very God of very God," blessed be his holy name!

37-40. *And the common people heard him gladly. And he said unto them in his doctrine, Beware of the scribes, which love to go in long clothing, and love salutations in the marketplaces, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and the uppermost rooms at feasts: which devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers: these shall receive greater damnation.*

We often hear foolish people say "You must always preach in love, and not say anything against anybody; Jesus did not denounce anybody." Oh, dear! then what about this denunciation of the scribes? Were Jesus here today, he would not be the molluscus creature that some people want us to be. He had a backbone, and a conscience, and a very heavy right hand, and he brought that hand down, like a sledge-hammer, upon cant and hypocrisy and error, and if we would be like Christ, we must be manly, and bold, and outspoken. They tell us this in order that we may easily glide through the world, and that all men may speak well of us. But so did their fathers to the false prophets; and do you suppose that we who preach God's Word, are going to keep back any part of our testimony because it will bring us into ill repute with the ungodly?

God forbid! We live for something higher and nobler than being fed upon the breath of evil men. If there be error in high places, if there be vice anywhere, it is the duty of the minister of Christ, in his Master's name, to attack it with all his might. Here we find our Lord and Master plainly declaring that the scribes, the great masters of the law, were a set of pretentious hypocrites who robbed even the widow and the fatherless, and who would, in due time, "receive greater damnation." Even so must the truth still be spoken, whoever may be offended by it.

41, 42. *And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow, —*

Doubly poor, because she was not only a widow, but in poverty: "a certain poor widow," —

42-44. *And she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: for all they did cast in of their abundance; —*

Christ measures what we really give by what we have left, — by the proportion which what we give bears to what we possess: "For all they did cast in of their abundance;" —

44. *But she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.*

So she gave more than any or all the others did.

MARK 14:1-9

1-3. *After two days was the feast of the passover, and of unleavened bread: and the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take him by craft, and put him to death. But they said, Not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar of the people. And being in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper,*

A well-known person. There were plenty of Simons, and so they had to put another name to distinguish him. You remember Simon the Pharisee, in whose house Christ was anointed by a woman, who washed his feet with tears. This is another Simon. Not Simon the Pharisee, but Simon the Leper.

A healed man, no doubt, or he could not have entertained guests. There can be no question by whom he was healed; for there was nobody else that could heal leprosy, except our Divine Lord. “And being at Bethany in the house of Simon the Leper.”

3. As he sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured it on his head.

It does not want any “it,” “poured on his head.” The liquid nard flowed over his locks, and, as it was with Aaron, it went, doubtless, down his beard to the utmost skirts of his garments.

4. And there were some that had indignation within themselves, and said, Why was this waste of the ointment made?

Matthew says that they were disciples. Shame upon them. The ointment was put to its proper use. It was more wasted when it was in the box than when it was out of it, for it was doing nothing inside the alabaster box. But when it came out, it was answering its purpose. It was perfuming all round about. “Why was this waste of the ointment made?” When lives are lost in Christ’s honour, or strength is spent in his service there is no waste. It is what life and strength are made for — that they may be spent for him.

5,6. For it might have been sold for more than three hundred pence, and have been given to the poor. And they murmured against her. And Jesus said, Let her alone; why trouble ye her? she hath wrought a good work on me.

Or “in me.”

7. For ye have the poor with you always,

If you help them one day, they are poor, and they want helping the next. Or if you help them and leave them, leaving them because they go home to God, there are other poor people sure to come, for they will never cease out of the land. “Ye have the poor with you always.”

7. And whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but me ye have not always.

“Ye can only do this for me during the few days that I shall be with you.

Within a week I shall be crucified. Forty more days I shall be gone from you. Me ye have not always.”

8, 9. *She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying. Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.*

And it is so to this day. Christ's gospel is preached tonight, and this woman's love will be remembered. John also speaks of this in his 12th chapter.

This exposition consisted of readings from JOHN 8:29-59. MARK 14:1-9. JOHN 12:1-7.

MARK 14:22-41

22. *And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it, and gave to them, and said, Take, eat: this is my body.*

It was part of a meal. It was no celebration. It was no sacrifice, bloody or unbloody. It was simply a commemorative ceremony, of which he would now give them a specimen even before it became commemorative. "As they did eat, Jesus took bread." No seeking for consecrated wafers or some special food, but such bread as they had been eating. "Blessed" — thanking God for it. "And break it and gave it to them, and said, Take, eat: this is my body."

23, 24. *And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them: and they all drank of it. And he said unto them, This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many.*

There was no fear of their making the mistake, which had been made by Humanists, of taking these words literally, because Jesus Christ was sitting there. They could not imagine that, as he took bread, he would say literally, "This bread is my body." Why, there was his body sitting there before them. Had he two bodies? When he gave them the cup and said, "This is my blood in the new covenant," they never dreamt of such a thing as that the wine in the cup was really and literally his blood. His blood was in his veins. They saw him living there, not bleeding. No, it is an extraordinary thing that men who have the life of God in them, and have some spiritual discernment, have, nevertheless, in some instances, been found driving their faith into the belief of the absurd fable of transubstantiation. Jesus Christ means "This represents my body. This represents my blood" — the usual way of uttering such a sense both in the Old and New Testament, even as Christ said, "I am the door." Yet nobody thought that he was a door. "I am the way."

Nobody thought he was a roadway. "I am the shepherd," and yet nobody supposed that he carried a crook, and that he literally kept sheep. So says he, "This is my body, this is my blood" and they who sat there were in their senses, and they were not superstitious. They knew what he meant.

25, 26. *Verily I say unto you, I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God. And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.*

I cannot resist repeating the remark I have often made about that singing of a hymn. It seems to me such a grand, brave thing for the Saviour to sing a hymn after the last meal that he would eat with his disciples before his death when he knew that he was going forth to all the torture of Pilate's hall, and to death at Calvary. Yet he says, "Let us sing a hymn." He chose a Psalm of David, and, I dare say, himself pitched a tune. "And when they had sung a hymn, they went out unto the Mount of Olives."

27. *And Jesus saith unto them,*
As they walked along.

27, 28. *All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered. But after that I am risen, I will go before you into Galilee.*

What sweet comfort was there — as much as to say, "Though you are scattered, I will gather you. Though you forsake me, I will not forsake you. I will go before you into our old haunts, into that Galilee of the Gentiles where I was wont to preach aforetime. I will go before you into Galilee."

29-30. *But Peter said unto him, Although all shall be offended, yet will not I. And Jesus saith unto him, Verily I say unto thee, that this day, even in this night,*

The day begins at sunset.

30, 31. *Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice, But he spake the more vehemently, if I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise. Likewise also said they all.*

So Peter was not alone in his intense, though rash expression of attachment. They did mean, all of them, to stand to their Master, and to die with him, as you and I mean to. But shall we carry it out

better than they, think you? Not if our resolve, like theirs, is made in our own strength.

32. *And they came to a place which was named Gethsemane:*

The garden on the side of the hill of Olivet.

32. *And he saith to his disciples, Sit ye here, while I shall pray.*

Eight of you keep watching at the garden gate to let me know when my betrayer comes.

33. *And he taketh with him Peter and James and John, and began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy;*

They had not seen him in that state before. He seemed like one distracted, so amazed — like one astonished out of all composure unable to collect himself or to contain himself, and to be very heavy, as if an awful weight pressed on his soul.

34. *And saith unto them, my soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death: tarry ye here, and watch.*

These three were to make his closest bodyguard, to intimate to him if any came.

35. *And he went forward a little,*

A stone's cast, so as to be retired from them.

35, 36. *And fell on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt.*

That was the point of the prayer, the very pith and marrow of it not what I will, but what thou wilt.

37. *And he cometh, and findeth them sleeping.*

Three choice guards — his bosom companions.

37. *And saith unto Peter, Simon, sleepest thou? couldst not thou watch one hour?*

Matthew and Luke tell us that he said "Could ye not watch with me one hour?" and Mark tells us here that he especially said that to Peter. Now remember that Mark is the gospel of Peter. No doubt Mark was the great friend of Peter, and writes his gospel from Peter's point, so Peter in the Gospel of Mark records the worst things about himself, and he just puts it here that the Master said, "Simon, sleepest thou?" Bad enough for the others to be asleep, but "Simon, sleepest thou? Couldst not thou watch one hour?"

38. *Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak.*

Oh! that was a kind excuse to make for them — to say something good about them, even though they slept when they ought to have comforted him. He did see that their spirit was ready, but the flesh was weak.

39, 40. *And again he went away, and prayed, and spake the same words. And when he returned, he found them asleep again, (for their eyes were heavy), neither wist they what to answer him.*

How could they excuse their conduct? A second time asleep! They were in a muddled state.

41. *And he cometh the third time, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: it is enough, the hour is come; behold, the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.*

This exposition consisted of readings from 2 SAMUEL 15:13-23; ISAIAH 61.; MARK 14:22-41.

MARK 14:27-31; 53, 54; 66-72

27-29. *And Jesus saith unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered. But after that I am risen, I will go before you into Galilee. But Peter said unto him, Although all shall be offended, yet will not I.*

There was love in that utterance, and so far it was commendable; but there was also much self-trust in it, but there was great presumption, for Peter dared even to contradict his Master to his face; and, at the same time, he contradicted the inspired Scripture, for Jesus had told the disciples that it was written that the sheep should be scattered. Yet Peter boldly denied both what God had written and what Christ had said. Alas! there is nothing of evil which proud self-confidence will not make us do. God save us from such a spirit as that!

30, 31. *And Jesus saith unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this day, even in this night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice. But he spake the more vehemently, If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise.*

See how positive he was, how reliant upon the strength of his own love. It was well to feel such love, but it was ill to mix with it such self-confidence.

31. *Likewise also said they all.*

Whenever a man, who is called to be a leader, goes astray, others are pretty sure to follow him. It was so on this occasion, for when Peter made his boastful speech, “Likewise also said they all,” all the rest of his brethren chimed in, and so shared in his sin, but he was chief in the wrong-doing, for he led them all. In the 53rd verse, we read what happened after Christ’s agony and betrayal in Gethsemane:—

53, 54. *And they led Jesus away to the high priest: and with him were assembled all the chief priests and, the elders and the scribes. And Peter followed him afar off, even into the palace of the high priest: and he sat with the servants, and warmed himself at the fire.*

Meanwhile, Christ was being put to the utmost derision and contempt. In the 66th verse, we are told more concerning the boastful apostle:—

66-70. *And as Peter was beneath in the palace, there cometh one of the maids of the high priest: and when she saw Peter warming Himself, she looked upon him, and said, And thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth. But he denied, saying, I know not, neither understand I what thou sayest. And he went out into the porch; and the cock crew. And a maid saw him again, and began to say to them that stood by, This is one of them. And he denied it again. And a little after, they that stood by said again to Peter, Surely thou art one of them: for thou art a Galilaeen, and thy speech agreeth thereto.*

He could not hold his tongue, you see. He was always fast and forward in speech; and no sooner did he begin to speak than the people said, “That is the Galilaeen brogue; you come from that part of the country, your speech betrays you.”

71, 72. *But he began to curse and to swear, saying, I know not this man of whom ye speak. And the second time the cock crew. And Peter called to mind the word that Jesus said unto him, Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice. And when he thought thereon, he wept.*

This exposition consisted of readings from MARK 14:27-31; 53, 54; 66-72; and JOHN 18:15-18; 25-27.

MARK 14:53, 54, 66-72

53, 54. *And they led Jesus away to the high priest: and with him were assembled all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes. And Peter followed him afar off, even into the palace of the high priest: and he sat with the servants, and warmed himself at the fire.*

Thus we learn what a cold night it was,-that night in which the Saviour's "sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground." Often, at Jerusalem, the days are extremely hot, yet the nights are as cold as if it were winter, through the abundant dews that fall, and cause a dampness everywhere.

66, 67. *And as Peter was beneath in the palace, there cometh one of the maids of the high priest: and when she saw Peter warming himself, she looked upon him,-*

I think I see her, with her eyes fixed upon him, as he was warming himself at the fire: "She looked upon him,"-

67, 68. *And said, And thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth. But he denied, saying, I know not, neither understand I what thou sayest. And he went out into the porch; and the cock crew.*

This first time was not the regular season of cock-crowing, but those birds crow when they please. Before the fixed period called the cock-crowing, Peter was to deny his Master three times; this was the first time.

69, 70. *And a maid saw him again, and began to say to them that stood by, This is one of them. And he denied it again. And a little after, they that stood by said again to Peter, Surely thou art one of them: for thou art a Galilaean, and thy speech agreeth thereto.*

"Thou hast the peculiar brogue of that part of the country: 'Thou art a Galilaean, and thy speech agreeth thereto.'"

71, 72. *But he began to curse and to swear, saying, I know not this man of whom ye speak. And the second time the cock crew. And Peter called to mind the word that Jesus said unto him, Before the cockcrow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice. And when he thought thereon, he wept.*

He does not say that he went out, and wept bitterly, as Luke says in his version of the incident. This is Peter's own account of it, so he says as little as he can to his own credit, while he tells all that is to his discredit. You notice that there seem to be some slight

differences between these two accounts, and it is quite natural that it should be so. If any two honest men here were to describe any scene that they had witnessed, the two would be sure to differ in some particulars, yet both accounts might be true. Matthew tells us that Jesus said to Peter, "Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice;" but Mark tells us that he said, "Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice." Yes; but there is no real contradiction, and the incident introduced by Mark shows how, to the very letter, both of those utterances of our Saviour were fulfilled, So is it with regard to those who spoke to Peter; when we come to another account, you will see that they differ very considerably, yet they are all true, for all that. (See LUKE 22 54-62)

This exposition consisted of readings from MATTHEW 26 31-35, 57, 58, 69-75 MARK 14 53, 54, 66-72 LUKE 2 54-62; AND JOHN 18 15-18, 25-27.

MARK 14:53-65

53, 54. *And they led Jesus away to the high priest: and with him were assembled all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes. And Peter followed him afar off, even into the palace of the high priest: and he sat with the servants, and warmed himself at the fire.*

We may regard what was said to Jesus, by Annas and Caiaphas, as a sort of unofficial preliminary examination; and, meanwhile, their fellow conspirators were scouring the streets of Jerusalem to gather together the members of the Sanhedrim, and also searching among the slums in order to find witnesses who could be bribed to give false evidence against Jesus.

55. *And the chief priests and all the council sought for witness against Jesus to put him to death; and found none.*

A pretty court that was, occupied in seeking for witnesses who might enable them to condemn to death a prisoner against whom no charge had yet been formulated.

56-59. *For many bare false witness against him, but their witness agreed not together. And there arose certain, and bare false witness against him, saying, We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands. But neither so did their witness agree together.*

It was a rule that they should be examined separately, and there had not been time for them to be coached up as to what they were to

say, so one contradicted the other, and it looked as if the trial must break down.

60. *And the high priest stood up in the midst,*

Losing all patience, he stood up, in a furious rage at the turn things were taking.

60, 61. *And asked Jesus, saying, Answered thou nothing? what is it which these witness against thee? But he held his peace, and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked him, and said unto him, art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?*

This time, according to Matthew's account, the high priest said to Jesus, "I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God." Being thus, as it were, put upon his oath, the Saviour felt compelled to answer. He could not remain silent when such a great and important question was at stake.

62-65. *And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. Then the high priest rent his clothes, and saith, What need we any further witnesses? Ye have heard the blasphemy: what think ye? And they all condemned him to be guilty of death. And some began to spit on him, and to cover his face, and to buffet him, and to say unto him, Prophecy: and the servants did strike him with the palms of their hands.*

Perhaps we have the same narrative in Luke; possibly, however, he gives us a continuation of the sad story; it is difficult to say which is the case. (See Luke 22:63-71)

This exposition consisted of readings from JOHN 18:12-14,19-26; MARK 14:53-65; and LUKE 22:63-71; 3:1.

MARK 15:1-41

Let us read again what we have often read before, that saddest of all stories which, nevertheless, is the fountain of the highest gladness,-the story of our Saviour's death, as recorded by Mark.

1. *And straightway in the morning the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council, and bound Jesus, and carried him away, and delivered him to Pilate.*

"The whole council" could be there, so early in the morning, for such an evil purpose. Wicked men are very diligent in carrying out their sinful schemes; so, when Christ was to be murdered, his

enemies were there, as Luke tells us, “as soon as it was day.” How much more diligent ought the followers of Christ to be to give him their devoted service! It is a good thing to begin the day with united prayer and holy converse with his people. Let these wicked men, who were so early in the morning seeking to secure the death of Christ, make us ashamed that we are not more diligent in his blessed service.

2, 3. *And Pilate asked him, Art thou the King of the Jews? And he answering said unto him, Thou sayest it. And the chief priests accused him of many things: but he answered nothing.*

Silence was the best answer, the most eloquent reply, that he could give to each accusers; they deserved no other answer. Moreover, by his silence, he was fulfilling the prophecy, “As a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.”

4, 5. *And Pilate asked him again, saying, Answerest thou nothing? behold how many things they witness against thee. But Jesus yet answered nothing; so that Pilate marvelled.*

You will often find that your highest wisdom, when you are slandered, will lie in the imitation of your Lord and Master. Live a blameless life, and it shall be the best reply to the false charges of the wicked.

6-10. *Now at that feast he released unto them one prisoner, whomsoever they desired. And there was one named Barabbas, which lay bound with them that had made insurrection with him, who had committed murder in the insurrection. And the multitude crying aloud began to desire him to do as he had ever done unto them. But Pilate answered them, saying, Will ye that I release unto you the King of the Jews? For he knew that the chief priests had delivered him for envy.*

And he therefore hoped that the people, who were not moved by the same envy, would have chosen to have Jesus set at liberty.

11-13. *But the chief priests moved the people, that he should rather release Barabbas unto them. And Pilate answered and said again unto them, What will ye then that I shall do unto him whom ye call the King of the Jews? And they cried out again, Crucify him.*

This was the very best reply to the charge of high treason; for, if Jesus had really set himself up as a king in the place of Caesar, the people; when they were thus publicly appealed to, would not have

cried out, "Crucify him." If there had been and truth in the allegation that he was the ringleader of a sedition, the Jews would not have said again and again, "Crucify him." Thus Christ gave Pilate a much more effectual answer than if he had himself spoken.

14-16. *Then Pilate said unto them, Why, what evil hath he done? And they cried out the more exceedingly, Crucify him. And so Pilate, willing to content the people, released Barabbas unto them, and delivered Jesus, when he had scourged him, to be crucified. And the soldiers led him away into the hall, called Praetorium;-*

The hall of the Praetorian guard; —

16; 17. *And they call together the whole band. And they clothed him with purple,*

The uniform of the Roman soldiers was purple, as if to indicate that they belonged to an imperial master; so, when these soldiers, in mockery put on our Lord the old cloak of one of their comrades, it sufficed to clothe him with the royal purple to which, as King, he was fully entitled.

17-19. *And platted a crown of thorns, and put it about his head, and began to salute him, Hail, King of the Jews! And they smote him on the head with a reed, and did spit upon him, and bowing their knees worshipped him.*

All this homage was paid to him in mockery yet what stern reality there was in that mockery! That band of soldiers really preached to Christ such homage as a whole world could give him.

20. *And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple from him, and put his own clothes on him, and led him out to crucify him.*

They "led him out to crucify him." It seems as if Christ had to lean upon those who led him; the word almost signifies as much as that; at least, it might be the word employed concerning anyone leading a child or a sick man who needed support, for the Saviour's weakness must have been very apparent by that time. After the agony and bloody sweat in Gethsemane, and the night and morning trials, and scourging, and mockery, and the awful strain upon his mind and heart in being made a sacrifice for sin, it was no wonder that he was weak. Besides, he was not like the rough, brutal criminals that are often condemned to die for their crimes; he was a man of gentle mould and more delicate sensibilities than they were,

and he suffered much more than any ordinary man would have done in similar circumstances.

21. *And they compel one Simon a Cyrenian, who passed by, coming out of the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to bear his cross.*

Christ would not bear it himself; the soldiers saw that he was faint and weary, so they laid the cross, or at least one end of it, on Simon's shoulders.

22. *And they bring him-*

Here the word almost implies that they lifted him, and-carried him, for his faintness had increased. They "led him out to crucify him," but now they bear him —

22. *Unto the place Golgotha, which is, being interpreted, The place of a skull.*

We sometimes speak of it as mount Calvary, but it was not so; it was a little rising ground, the common place of execution, the Tyburn or Old Bailey of Jerusalem.

23. *And they gave him to drink wine mingled with myrrh: but he received it not.*

He did not wish to have his sufferings abated, but to bear them to the bitter end. Christ forbids not that pain should be alleviated, in the case of others, wherever that is possible; but, in his own case, it was not fit that it should be so relieved, since he was to bear the full brunt of the storm of vengeance that was due on account of sin.

24. *And when they had crucified him, they parted his garments, casting lots upon them, what every man should take.*

Christ's garments must go to his executioners in order to carry out the full shame associated with his death as well as to fulfill the prophecy, "They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture."

25-27. *And it was the third hour, and they crucified him. And the superscription of his accusation was written over, THE KING OF THE JEWS. And with him they crucify two thieves; the one on his right hand, and the other on his left.*

As if, in carrying out that ordinary etiquette which gives the central place to the chief criminal, they gave to Christ the place of greatest contempt and scorn.

28. *And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, And he was numbered with the transgressors.*

You could not count the “transgressors” on those crosses without counting him, there were three, and the One in the middle could not be passed by as you counted the others.

29-32. *And they that passed by railed on him, wagging their heads, and saying, Ah, thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself, and come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests mocking said among themselves with the scribes, He saved others; himself he cannot save. Let Christ the King of Israel descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe.*

That is the world’s way: “that we may see and believe.” But Christ’s way is, “Believe, and thou shalt see.” Christ off the cross is admired by worldlings, but Christ on the cross is our hope and stay, especially as we know that this same Christ is now on the throne waiting for the time when he should return to claim his own, all who have trusted in the Crucified.

32. *And they that were crucified with him reviled him.*

Out of their black hearts and mouths came words of obloquy and scorn even then.

33. *And when the sixth hour was come,--*

When the sun had reached the zenith, at high noon, —

33-41. *There was darkness over the whole land until this ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me? And some of them that stood by, when they heard it, said, Behold, he calleth Elias. And one ran and filled a sponge full of vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink, saying, Let alone; let us see whether Elias will come to take him down. And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost. And the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom. And when the centurion, which stood over against him, saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God. There were also women looking on afar off: among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the less and of Joses, and Salome (who also, when he was in*

Galilee, followed him, and ministered unto him;) and many other women which came up with him unto Jerusalem.

We can read further about these gracious women if we turn to Luke 8.

This exposition consisted of readings from MARK 15:1-41, AND LUKE 8:1-3.

MARK 15:15-23

15-23. And so Pilate, willing to content the people, released Barabbas unto them, and delivered Jesus, when he had scourged him, to be crucified. And the soldiers led him away into the hall, called Praetorium; and they call together the whole band. And they clothed him with purple, and platted a crown of thorns, and put it about his head, And began to salute him, Hail, King of the Jews! And they smote him on the head with a reed, and did spit upon him, and bowing their knees worshipped him. And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple from him, and put his own clothes on him, and led him out to crucify him. And they compel one Simon a Cyrenian, who passed by, coming out of the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to bear his cross. And they bring him unto the place called Golgotha, which is, being interpreted, the place of a skull. And they gave him to drink wine mingled with myrrh: but he received it not.

I shall have to show you that this was given to him in mercy. The Romans always gave, before crucifixion, a cup of myrrhed wine, in order to lessen the sensibilities of the victim. In this case there was not only myrrh in the cup, but gall; a second cup of gall Christ did drink, but this cup, being intoxicating, he would not receive; when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink. He needed the possession of all his faculties, and in their clearest state, in order to do combat with the dreadful powers of darkness.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 69:1-21. MARK 15:15-23. LUKE 23:26-33.

MARK 15:15-39

We will read two short passages from the Gospels this evening. May the blessed Spirit, who taught the Evangelists to record the sad story of our Lord's sufferings and death, give us fully to enter into the blessed meaning of it while we read it! First turn to Mark 15., verse 15.

15, 16. *And so Pilate, willing to content the people, released Barabbas unto them, and delivered Jesus, when he had scourged him, to be crucified. And the soldiers led him away into the hall, called Praetorium;*

The guard-room of Herod's palace, where the Praetorian guards were wont to gather.

16-20. *And they call together the whole band. And they clothed him with purple, and platted a crown of thorns, and put it about his head, and began to salute him, Hail, King of the Jews! And they smote him on the head with a reed, and did spit upon him, and bowing their knees worshipped him. And when they had mocked him,*

To the utmost, and gone the full length of their cruel scorn,

20-23. *They took off the purple from him, and put his own clothes on him, and led him out to crucify him. And they compel one Simon a Cyrenian, who passed by, coming out of the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to bear his cross. And they bring him unto the place Golgotha, which is, being interpreted, The place of a skull. And they gave him to drink wine mingled with myrrh: but he received it not.*

They did for him what they did for others who were crucified, they gave him myrrhed wine, as a stupefying draught; "but he received it not." He came to suffer, and he would bear even to the end the full tale of his suffering.

24-27. *And when they had crucified him, they parted his garments, casting lots upon them, what every man should take. And it was the third hour, and they crucified him. And the superscription of his accusation was written over, THE KING OF THE JEWS. And with him they crucify two thieves; the one on his right hand, and the other on his left.*

They gave him the place of eminence, as if he were a greater offender than either of the two thieves.

28. *And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, And he was numbered with the transgressors.*

Sinners to the right of him, sinners to the left of him, sinners all round him, compassed about with those who sinned in the very highest degree by putting him to death: "He was numbered with the transgressors." Oh, that sweet word! It is the hope of transgressors

now that he was counted with them, and for his sake all the benefactions of heaven now descend upon transgressors who accept him as their Substitute and Saviour.

29. *And they that passed by railed on him,*

Not only those who sat down to gloat their cruel eyes upon his miseries,

but even the passers-by, “They that passed by, railed on him,”-

29, 30. *Wagging their heads, and saying, Ah, thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three day, Save thyself, and come down from the cross.*

He never said he would destroy the literal temple. He did, however, say concerning the temple of his body, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up,” and he did raise it up in three days after they had destroyed it.

31. *Likewise also the chief priests mocking said among themselves with the scribes, He saved others; himself he cannot save.*

What they said in bitter scorn was true; for mighty love had bound his hands for self-salvation. Infinite in love, found guilty of excess of love to men, “He saved others; himself he could not save.”

32, 33. *Let Christ the King of Israel descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe. And they that were crucified with him reviled him. And when the sixth hour was come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.*

A supernatural darkness, which could not have occurred according to the laws of nature. It did, as it were, “set a tabernacle for the sun,”-the Sun of Righteousness was canopied a while in darkness, that no longer might those horrible eyes gaze upon his terrible anguish.

34. *And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*

There was a denser darkness over his spirit than was over all the land, and out of that darkness came this cry of agony.

35. *And some of them that stood by, when they heard it, said, Behold, he calleth Elias.*

Ah, me! This was either a cruel jest upon our Saviour’s prayer, or an utter misapprehension of it.

36. *And one ran and filled a sponge full of vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink, saying, Let alone; let us see whether Elias will come to take him down.*

Jesus did receive this vinegar, and so fulfilled Psalm 69:21: “In my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.”

37, 38. *And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost. And the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.*

Even as the flesh of Christ, which is the veil of the Incarnate God, was rent, so now was the veil of mystery taken away. The temple in her sorrow rent her veil. The old ceremonial law passed away with this token of grief by the rending of the veil. It was a strong, I might say, a massive veil; it could not have been rent by any ordinary means; but when the hand of God takes hold upon the veil of Jewish types, it readily rends, and into the innermost mystery of the holy of holies we may gaze, yea, and through it we may enter.

39. *And when the centurion, which stood over against him, saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God.*

Convinced by the cross. Oh, the triumphs of Christ! The last word he speaks won this testimony from the centurion in charge of the crucifixion. Now we will read part of Luke’s narrative.

This exposition consisted of readings from MARK 15:15-39; AND LUKE 23:27-49.

MARK 15:34-47

Concerning the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, we shall read in three portions of the New Testament. First, in the Gospel according to Mark, the fifteenth chapter, beginning at the thirty-fourth verse.

34. *And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*

It is, “My El, my strong God, my mighty One, why hast thou forsaken me?” — the bitterest words that were ever uttered by mortal lips, and expressing the quintessence of agony. Alas! that my Saviour should ever have had to say as much as this when he hung upon the cross, suffering and dying for me.

35. *And some of them that stood by, when they heard it, said, Behold, he calleth Elias.*

Did they misunderstand his bitter cry of woe? Could they mistake what he meant? Was it not, on the part of these people that stood by, a willful wicked witticism upon what our Lord Jesus had said? We fear that it was so.

36, 37. *And one ran and filled a sponge full of vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink, saying, Let alone; let us see whether Elias will come to take him down. And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost.*

His last words were, "It is finished."

"It is finish'd!"

— Oh what pleasure Do these charming words afford!

Heavenly blessings without measure Flow to us from Christ the

Lord:

"It is finish'd!"

Saints, the dying words record."

38, 39. *And the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom. And when the centurion, which stood over against him,*

The officer who had charge of the arrangements for the execution: "when the centurion, which stood over against him," —

39. *Saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God.*

Probably saying a great deal more than he understood. There was something so extraordinary about this central Sufferer that the Centurion could not understand who he could be unless he was truly "the Son of God."

40, 41. *There were also women looking on afar off: among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the less and of Joses, and Salome; (Who also, when he was in Galilee, followed him, and ministered unto him;) and many other women which came up with him unto Jerusalem.*

Where was Peter? We know that John was near the cross; but James and the rest of the apostles were apparently hiding away; yet the holy women were there.

42, 43. *And now when the even was come, because it was the preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, an honourable counselor, which also waited for the kingdom of God, came, and went in boldly unto Pilate, and craved the body of Jesus.*

I have no doubt that Pilate was very surprised that a member of the Sanhedrim should come and ask for the body of Jesus, when, a little while before, he had put him to death really by the mandate of that body of men.

44, 46. *And Pilate marvelled if he were already dead: and calling unto him the centurion, he asked him whether he had been any while dead. And when he knew it of the centurion, he gave the body to Joseph.*

This very centurion, who had declared that Jesus was the Son of God now came forward to bear witness that he had seen him die; and then Pilate told Joseph that he might go and take the body.

46. *And he bought fine linen,*

This was probably the first time that fine linen had touched the flesh of the Son of man; he had been accustomed to much coarser stuff in his lifetime, but now Joseph “bought fine linen.”

46,47. *And took him down, and wrapped him in the linen, and laid him in a sepulcher which was hewn out of a rock, and rolled a stone unto the door of the sepulcher. And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses beheld where he was laid.*

That is Mark’s account of our Lord’s death and burial, very terse, and very suggestive. Let us now read John’s description of the sad scene.

This exposition consisted of readings from MARK 15:34-47; JOHN 19:38-42; AND 1 CORINTHIAN 5:1-9.

MARK 16

1. *And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him.*

We know that “him” whose name is not given here. There is scarcely need to mention that it was Jesus whom the women came to anoint. Oh, how gladly would we also anoint “him” whose name is The Anointed One! But not as a dead Christ, for “He is risen.” Our sweet spices must henceforth be for that living One whom we anoint with our living joy and consecration; or, rather, we must receive our anointing from him, for he is the Christ, and we the Christians who get our very name and life from him. As he was supposed to be

dead, and still lying in the tomb, these holy women came to anoint him,

2. *And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulcher at the rising of the sun.*

We often lose a great blessing by not rising early for devotion. While yet the flowers are wet with dew, it were well if our souls had the dew of heaven resting upon them.

3, 4. *And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulcher? And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great.*

Which was, I suppose, the reason for their thinking about the stone but still, I cannot help reading it as a reason why it was rolled away. At all events, this was the argument that David used when he prayed, "For thy name's sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great;" as if the greatness of the sin had in it some reason for pardon. So the greatness of the care may be some reason why we might expect a great God to come to our relief. It was a very great stone, therefore God, who knew that poor feeble women could not move it, himself had it rolled away.

5, 6. *And entering into the sepulcher, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted. And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted:*

They were afraid of an angel. "Conscience doth make cowards of us all," and even good men and good women are apt to be afraid of anything celestial and bright. The angel said to the women, "Be not affrighted:" —

8, 7. *Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him. But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you.*

Does not that lent clause drop out very sweetly? Yet there is somewhat of a rebuke in it: "as he said unto you." "Did he not tell you that he would rise from the dead? Did he not say that he would meet you in Galilee?" And the day shall come, beloved, when you also shall rejoice in your Deliverer and your deliverance, and you shall not wonder so much then as you do now, for you shall see that the deliverance was what you ought to have expected: "as he said unto you." Poor seeking sinner, if you have found the Saviour, you

are full of wonder; but the day will come when you will see it in another light, you will be equally grateful, but you will say "I ought to have had faith to expect this, as he said to me." It will always be so. Just as God says, so it is, — in creation, in providence, in grace; and as he has said to you, so shall it be in your spiritual experience.

8. *And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulcher; for they trembled and were amazed: neither said they any thing to any man; for they were afraid.*

There was no reason in Christ's resurrection for anything but delight, yet these dear women were overwhelmed, silenced, struck dumb, by that which made the angels sing.

9. *Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils.*

It has been a general tradition in the Church of Christ that Mary Magdalene was a great sinner; I do not feel sure that she was, but still, she is the type of a great sinner. The seven devils that were within her do not represent actual guilt on her part, but they depict or symbolize the subjection of her nature to the power of Satan. It is very beautiful to notice that those people for whom Christ does most he seems to love best; yet this is also according to human nature, for if there be a child in the family that the mother loves most, it is the one that was the hardest to bring up, and who has cost her most of care and most of labour. The casting out of seven devils endears the Magdalene to Christ, and first of all he appears to her. Besides, she loved much, doubtless, and she was quick of sight, so she saw him first. O my soul, if thou hast been a great sinner, do not take any place but that of first in love and first in fellowship with Christ! Be thou content to be nothing, but be thou anxious to make him thy all in all.

10. *And she went and told them that had been with him, as they mourned and wept.*

It is a curious "interior" that Mark here sketches, or rather stippled, with just a few touches. There are most of Christ's disciples, who had been with him, sitting mourning and weeping over his death, and in comes Mary, and says that she has seen him alive.

11. *And they, when they had heard that he was alive, and had been seen of her, believed not.*

This was both cruel to the Magdalene and forgetful of their Master's word, but unbelief is a very cruel thing. It is not only grievous to ourselves, but it acts in a shameful manner to Christian brethren and sisters, and worst of all is its treatment of our Divine Master himself. It says that he is dead, when truly he is alive. Unbelief has no good in it; it is altogether evil, only evil, and that continually. The Lord deliver us from it!

12-13. *After that he appeared in another form unto two of them, as they walked, and went into the country. And they went and told it unto the residue: neither believed they them.*

It is very hard to kill unbelief, it has more lives than a cat is supposed to possess. There is no end to it, and if men sit down and indulge in it, and look upon it as an infirmity, or as a painful trial, instead of regarding it as an abominable sin against the Lord, they are likely to sink deeper and deeper into this horrible mire.

14. *Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, —*

Christ is full of love to them, yet he must upbraid them, he loves them, but he loves not their unbelief; nay, he is more vexed with unbelief in them than in other people.

14, 15. *Because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen. And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.*

That commission of our Lord makes me smile, for it seems such a curious cure for unbelief, yet I have proved the usefulness of it many a time. There have I been sitting down, fretting and worrying, and my Master, instead of giving me some gracious promise, that I might sit there by myself, and enjoy its sweetness, has said, "Up with you; go into the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." Those who preach most, if they preach with all their hearts, will believe most, and they will grow strong enough to tread their doubts beneath their feet. So ought it to be. In the lives of those who have brought many to Christ, I do not, as a rule, read long chapters about their doubts and fears. No, but God encourages them by the signs and seals which he gives them; they see his hand with them, they mark how the Lord works with them and by them, and

they forget their unbelief. Does not this passage seem to run so? “He upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen. And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.”

16. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

This is a weighty message for us to carry, and we have need to carry it with due solemnity, with our hearts on fire with love.

17, 18. And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.

The apostles and the early Christians had these miraculous signs, there was no need that they should be given over again. The seal was set upon the gospel at the first. A man buys a house, and on the first day when he takes possession, he gets the signature of the seller, and the legal seal upon the conveyance. That matter is done; if he ever doubts his right to the property, he can always look back to that seal. He does not want a fresh lot of sealing wax every five minutes; neither do we need continual miracles. The Church of Christ at first was like a ship going to sea, the tug takes her out of the harbour, but when she is fairly out at sea, she does not need the tug any longer, she is dependent then upon the wind from heaven and so she speeds on her way. Or, the Church is like a young tree newly planted in the orchard; it has a stake stuck in the ground by the side of it, to which it is tied; but when it grows into a strong tree, where is the stake? The tree does not require it, for it stands fast by other means; it is just so with us and the miracles which were needed at the first.

19. So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God.

The disciples were not at once received up into heaven, though they might have been if God had so willed it, there was work for them to do here below, so Christ alone “was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God;” and as for his followers,

20. *And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen.*

These last verses of Mark's Gospel have, as some of you know, been questioned as to their inspiration and authenticity, but they are so like Mark that you cannot read them without feeling that they are part and parcel of what the Evangelist wrote. Set any critic you please to work; and if he knows the idiom and style of Mark's writing, he will be bound to say that this is part of the Gospel according to Mark; and God the Holy Spirit, blessing these words to our hearts, as I trust he will, will set his seal to what we believe and know to be his inspired Word.

MARK 16

1. *And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him.*

True love had made a mistake; but it was true love for all that, and the Lord accepted it, although he had no need of the sweet spices that the women brought.

2. *And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulcher at the rising of the sun.*

There had already been another rising of the sun that morning, for the Sun of righteousness had risen; and, with his rising, our hopes had risen, and eternal life had come to light. These holy women proved their affection to their Lord by being there so early. Love will not wait; it delights to render its service as speedily as ever it can: "They came unto the sepulcher at the rising of the sun."

3, 4. *And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulcher? And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great.*

Take comfort from this verse, you who are seeking to serve your Lord. There will be sure to be stones in your way, and some of them may be very great ones; but they will be rolled away in the Lord's good time, and in the rolling away often you will have all the greater joy. If the effort shall need the strength of an angel, then an angel will be sent from heaven for the purpose. There might have been no angel if there had been no stone; and you might have no revelation

of the power of heaven to help you if you had not first had a revelation of your own weakness and inability to roll away the stone.

5. *And entering into the sepulcher, they saw a young man silting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted.*

An angel had assumed the appearance of a young man sitting inside the sepulcher.

6. *And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted:*

Why should they be affrighted? They had come to serve their Lord, and so had the angel, so there was no cause for fear. Those who love Jesus need never be afraid of angels; nor, for the matter of that, of devils either; for the Lord, whom they serve, will take care of them.

6. *Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified:*

This was the first gospel sermon preached after the resurrection, so note particularly how the angel describes Christ. He calls him by his lowly name, "Jesus of Nazareth," and does not speak of him as the risen or reigning Christ, but as "Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified." The angels are evidently not ashamed of the cross of Christ, they do not attempt to hide the shame of it; for this one speaks of "Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified."

6. *He is risen; he is not here:*

That is the epitaph inscribed on Christ's tomb: "He is not here." On other people's graves it is written, "Here lies so-and-so;" but on Christ's sepulcher it is recorded, "He is not here." He is everywhere else, but "he is not here." He is with us in our solitude, he is with us in our public assemblies; but there is one place where he is not; and that is, in the empty tomb. Thank God that he is not there; we do not worship a dead man lying in the grave. He, on whom we rely, has risen from the dead, and gone up into the glory, where he ever liveth to carry out the great design of salvation. "He is not here."

6-8. *Behold the place where they laid him. But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you. And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulcher; for they trembled and were amazed: neither said they any thing to any man; for they were afraid.*

There was a mixture of joy with their fear, and of fear with their joy, and that tended to keep them silent for a while. Some people tell all they know, even when it would be wiser not to speak; but these godly women waited till they reached those to whom they were bidden to speak. They said nothing to anybody by the way, but hurried on to find the disciples, that they might give them the blessed tidings of their Lord's resurrection.

9. *Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils.*

Where grace had wrought its greatest wonders, there Christ paid his first visit: "He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils."

10, 11. *And she went and told them that had been with him, as they mourned and wept. And they, when they had heard that he was alive, and had been seen of her, believed not.*

I can imagine that scone,-the weeping and mourning disciples, and this eager woman telling out her story, and telling it with evident truthfulness and deep pathos, but they believed her not. Do you expect to be believed whenever you tell the story of your Lord's resurrection, or any other part of the gospel message? You have to tell it, not to Christ's disciples, but to those who are aliens from the commonwealth of Israel; and, probably, you do not tell it as well as Mary Magdalene did. Marvel not, therefore, if many a time those who hear your message believe it not. Mind that you believe it yourself, and keep on telling it whether others believe it or not, and God will bless it to some of them by-and-by

12, 13. *After that he appeared in another form unto two of them, as they walked, and went into the country. And they went and told it unto the residue: neither believed they them.*

Unbelief is not easily driven out of even true disciples; but let none of us ever harbor it in our hearts. As we see how unbelieving these disciples were, and know how wrong their unbelief was, let us not be like them.

14-20. *Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen. And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach*

the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover. So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following.

A-men God bless to us the reading of his holy Word! Amen,

MARK 16:1-14

1, 2. *And when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him. And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulcher at the rising of the sun.*

Their love made them prompt. Their affection was about to attempt a needless, and, indeed, impossible thing; yet I do not doubt that it was acceptable before God. Oh, that we had such hope that even the dead body of the Christ should be so dear to us that we should be ready at great expense to anoint it! I fear that, nowadays, even his living Word is not valued as it should be. How few, therefore, should we be likely to find who would have cared for his dead body! These holy women had had cause enough to love their Lord, and they showed that their hearts were full of affection for him even after he had been taken from them.

3. *And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulcher?*

A question that has puzzled many other people concerning many other things perplexed these holy women, yet there was no reason for the question to be raised at all. Peradventure, some of you are at this time distressed when there is no cause for distress, and in fear where no fear is. It was so with these women, who said, one to another, “Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulcher?”

4. *And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great.*

And, therefore, hard to roll away; and, therefore, the more easily seen when it was rolled away; and, therefore, the greater cause for joy that it was rolled away. In the greatness of our troubles there may often be space for the greater display of the goodness of God; a great trial may be nothing more than the prelude of a great joy. Do not dread the foaming billows, for they may wash you ashore; it is the worst that they can do, and it is the best also. The stone at the door of the sepulcher was very great, but it was rolled away, so that it mattered not to the women how great it was.

5. *And entering into the sepulcher, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted.*

An angel had been allowed to assume the appearance of a man; that usually seems to be the way in which angels appear to men. I suppose there is, after all, a great kinship between angels and men; otherwise, angelic beings would not so constantly assume that form when they appear to men. At the sight of the young man clothed in a long white garment, these good women were affrighted.

6, 7. *And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: Ye such Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him. But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you.*

Make sure, beloved, that you know the truth for yourselves, and then hasten to tell it to others. I pray you, run not without knowing what your errand is to be; but I also pray you, when you have an errand for the Lord, do not tarry, but, "Go your way, tell his disciples." It was very thoughtful of this angel to say "and Peter," thus linking with the disciples the name of him who had most glaringly transgressed, and denied his Master,

8. *And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulcher; for they trembled and were amazed: neither said they anything to any man; for they were afraid.*

But, after this, they summoned up courage, and did tell the story of their Lord's resurrection.

9-13. *Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils. And she went and told them that had been with him, as they mourned and wept. And they, when they had heard that he was alive, and had been seen of her, believed not. After that he appeared in another form unto two of them, as they walked, and went into the country. And they went and told it unto the residue: neither believed they them.*

Unbelief is very hard to kill, even in hearts that are right with God; so we need not wonder that divine grace is required to expel unbelief from the hearts of the unregenerate.

14. *Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen.*

The story of our Lord's appearance to the disciples is more fully told by Luke in the twenty-fourth chapter of his Gospel, to which let us turn.

This exposition consisted of readings from MARK 16:1-14; LUKE 24:32-44.

LUKE

LUKE 1:5-17

5, 6. There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.

You have here a very interesting couple, Zacharias and Elisabeth, a priest with a wife. I have often marveled why the Church of Rome should think it wrong that priests should be married, when it is evident that the priests under the law were so. The priests had grown so numerous that there was not room for them all to work at the Temple at one time; they were divided into twenty-four courses, and Zacharias would, therefore, come up to Jerusalem for a fortnight to take his share of the service. Zacharias and Elisabeth were notable for excellence of character: "They were both righteous before God." Not only did they stand high in the esteem of men, but the great God, who reads the hearts of all, and sees how they live in secret, reckoned them to be righteous: "They were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments"-that is, in the moral precepts of the law-"and ordinances"-that is in the ceremonial rites-" of the Lord blameless."

7-9. And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were now well stricken in years. And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course, according to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord,

Certain offices of the priest were considered to be more honourable than others; and so, to prevent any jealousy, they cast lots as to which they should take in turn. It fell to the lot of Zacharias to burn incense; this did not happen by chance. "The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord;" and there was a special reason why this good man should stand at the altar at this particular time.

10. *And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense.*

While he, in the inner shrine, was burning incense, the multitudes in the outer courts were engaging in prayer. I think that is a very beautiful symbol,-the priest unseen, like the Lord Jesus Christ in the Holy of Holies above, and the mass of the people engaged in prayer while the unseen priest is offering the sacred perfume before the altar of Jehovah.

11, 12. *And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.*

He was a good man, yet he was troubled at the sight of an angel.

Consciousness of sin, even in an outwardly blameless man, makes us all tremble in the presence of anything heavenly. This bright spirit had come fresh from the courts of God; he was a courtier of the heavenly Temple, and he had come down on a sudden with a sweet and cheering message for the earthly priest; but the priest "was troubled, and fear fell upon him." Brethren, we cannot know much of heaven here below, because it would cause us trembling; we are as yet unfit for all the glories of that upper state. Good John Berridge wrote,-

And now they range the heavenly plains,
And sing their hymns in melting strains;
And now their souls begin to prove The heights and depths of
Jesus' love.

"Ah Lord, with tardy steps I creep,
And sometimes sing, and sometimes weep;
Yet strip me of this house of clay,
And I will sing as loud as they."

Yes, and so will we; we will be as much at home as the happy saints, who dwell in light, when once we are delivered from this hampering flesh and blood.

13. *But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard;*

The best quietus to fear is answered prayer. If God has heard thee, be not thou again afraid.

13. *And thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John.*

“The grace” or “the gift of God”, so the name “John” signifies; and it is a sweet name for anyone to bear: “Thou shalt call his name John.” I do not think the prayer alluded to here was so much a prayer for a son; if so, methinks that Zacharias had long ago left off praying it, and now his old prayers are heard, after he had discontinued them. I think that it alludes rather to his prayer for the coming of the Christ, the appearance of the Messiah; that prayer was heard, as we shall see further on.

14, 15. *And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink;*

I do not say that it is the duty of every man to drink neither wine nor strong drink, but I beg every man to notice that if anyone was to be peculiarly consecrated to a holy calling, it was always to be so; “He shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink.” If there be nothing defiling about wine or strong drink, there is certainly nothing sanctifying about it; and the tendency seems to lie the other way, else it is a strange thing that men dedicated to God were so continually bidden to drink neither wine nor strong drink.

15-17. *And he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother’s womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.*

In the third chapter of this Gospel, you will find the record of John beginning to fulfill this prophecy concerning himself.

This exposition consisted of readings from LUKE 1:5-17, 3:1-18.

LUKE 1:5-35; 46-56

5, 6. *There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.*

There have been some good people who have lived in very bad times; never was there a worse reign than that of Herod; seldom or

never a better man and woman than Zacharias and Elisabeth. Let no man excuse himself for sinning because of the times in which he lives. You may be rich in grace when others around you have none, even as Gideon's fleece was wet with dew when the whole floor was dry. God help us, in these evil days, to be "righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless"!

7. And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were now well stricken in years.

We do not, at the present time, understand the anguish which filled the heart of an Eastern woman who had no child. It was considered to be a disgrace, and many suffered very bitterly on that account; as did Hannah, and Rachel, and others besides.

8-12. *And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course, according to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense. And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.*

Zacharias must have been astonished as he saw that strange visitant; no wonder that "fear fell upon him."

13-17. *But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.*

Happy is the father of such a child! Happy is that man whose office it is to be the herald of Christ! Brethren, many of us are called to that office in a certain sense as we come in our Master's name, and preach concerning him "'Tis all my business here below To cry,

‘Behold the Lamb.’” And in this way we may be partakers of John the Baptist’s joy.

18-20. *And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years. And, the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to show thee these glad tidings. And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things —*

These glad tidings —

20. *Shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season.*

Many a child of God is dumb, because of unbelief. Mary believed, and therefore she sang a holy, joyous song, — a sweet canticle of delight: “My soul doth magnify the Lord.” But Zacharias, because of his unbelief, was unable to speak. I wonder whether there is a man here who might have spoken for his God with power, but whose mouth is closed because of his unbelief. If so, may the Lord hasten the time when his dumbness shall be ended!

21, 22. *And the people waited for Zacharias, and marvelled that he tarried so long in the temple. And when he came out, he could not speak unto them: and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple: for he beckoned unto them, and remained speechless.*

By the signs he made, he impressed them with the fact that something extraordinary had happened.

23-25. *And it came to pass, that, as soon as the days of his ministration were accomplished, he departed to his own house. And after those days his wife Elisabeth conceived, and hid herself five months, saying, Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men.*

I do not wonder that, in her solemn joy, she shunned the gossips of the neighborhood and kept herself in seclusion. I do believe that there is many a soul which, when it has found Christ, feels itself much too full of joy to speak, and asks not for a crowded temple, but for a quiet chamber where the heart may pour itself out before God.

26-35. *And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the*

virgin's name was Mary. And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favor with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man! And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.

So was she thus visited, and thus she believed with a wonderful faith, much too wonderful for me to describe in this place. But now let us see what Mary said when she went to visit her cousin Elisabeth.

46, 47. *And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.*

She needed a Saviour, you see. Though about to become the mother of Jesus, Mary did not think herself without sin. Her eyes still looked to him who should be her Saviour from guilt and condemnation.

48-55. *For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name. And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation. He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away. He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy; as he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever.*

This is one of the sweetest songs that was ever sung, and is equal to any of those which came from the inspired lips of the Hebrew prophets. Well might she sing who had been thus favored.

Oh, if Christ Jesus should come to any of us by faith, what reason should we have for singing! And will not each one of us, who has been thus honoured, cry with Mary, “My soul doth magnify the Lord”?

56. *And Mary abode with her about three months, and returned to her own house.*

What wonderful interviews those two holy women had! The one well stricken in years, and the other youthful; yet both highly favored of God. I wonder what they said; doubtless angels remember their charming conversation. May the day come when all that fear the Lord, both men and women, shall speak often one to another concerning their Redeemer, and all that relates to his glorious cause; and then the Lord shall write another Book of Remembrance concerning their hallowed fellowship and intercourse!

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 148; AND LUKE 1:5-35; 46-56.

LUKE 1:26-56

26, 27. *And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.*

It was by the temptation of an evil angel that man fell, and Paradise was lost, it was, therefore, most appropriate that good angels should be sent to announce the coming of the Restorer, through whom Paradise is regained: “Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth.” Christ’s coming to earth must be announced in the lowliest of cities, and he must be born in the small Judaeian town of Bethlehem; but it was also decreed that he must die at Jerusalem, — in the metropolitan city. Mark the simplicity, and yet the sublimity, of the arrangement by which the meek and lowly Saviour was to be born in our nature. The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a virgin, whose name was Mary.

28, 29. *And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be.*

The best of news may sometimes cause the greatest perturbation of mind and heart. If you feel troubled when you receive a message from God do not be astonished, as though some strange thing had happened unto you. See how Mary, who was told that she was to receive the greatest honour and favor possible to a mortal being, was troubled by the angel's speech, perplexed by his extraordinary salutation.

30. *And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favor with God.*

If we have found favor with God, there is no cause for us to fear. If God is gracious to us, we are raised above all reason for alarm. Some court the fickle favor of men; but, even if they gain it, they may well fear that they may shortly lose it, but the angel said, "Fear not, Mary; for thou hast found favor with God;" and having found that favor, she would never lose it.

31, 32. *And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, —*

How true is that prophecy; "He shall be great." Christ is the greatest of all great ones. How great he is in our esteem! The tongues of men and of angels could not tell all his greatness. "He shall be great," —

32-37. *And shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end. Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, the Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. And, behold, thy cousin Elizabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible.*

It seemed meet that the gospel dispensation should thus begin with two great wonders. The age of wonders has opened upon us now that the day of grace has dawned. Now shall the barren woman keep house, and be the joyful mother of children, according to the ancient prophecy.

38. *And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.*

Oh, that we all had such a spirit of submission as she had, that we might be willing to place ourselves absolutely at God's disposal, for him to do with us as he pleased!

38. *And the angel of the Lord departed from her.*

His mission was accomplished, so he might go back to the glory from which he had come at God's command.

39-43. *And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Judah; and entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elizabeth. And it came to pass, that, when Elizabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?*

The most gracious people are always the most humble people. This question of Elizabeth, "Whence is this to me?" has been one that we have often put concerning ourselves. She was the older woman of the two, but she felt herself highly honoured by this visit from her younger relative, whom the Lord had so wondrously favored. It is well when Christian people have a high regard for one another, and think less of themselves than they do of others whom God has especially favored. It is one of the traits in the character of God's true people, that they have this mind in them; while they who think themselves great prove that they are not the Lord's. If you think much of yourself, he thinks little of you.

44, 45. *For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed is she that believed:*

Not only Mary, who believed the angel's message, and was therefore blessed; but every one of us, who believes in God, may share in this benediction.

45, 46. *For there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord. And Mary said,*

This humble Jewish maiden was a woman of great natural ability. This song of hers is worthy to be sung throughout all ages. It is true that it is mainly taken from the song of Hannah, and other

songs of devout persons in former ages; but this shows how Mary had studied the Word of God, and laid it up in her heart. The best preparation that you young people can have for the highest honour and service in your future life is to bathe frequently in the Word of God, and to perfume your whole life by a familiar and accurate acquaintance with Scripture truth. Nothing else can make you so pure, or so prepared for all service which God may yet have for you to perform.

46. *My soul doth magnify the Lord, —*

That is a good beginning. Mary does not magnify herself in her Magnificat, she has nothing to say concerning her own dignity, though she was of a noble lineage; but she sang, “My soul doth magnify the Lord,” —

47. *And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.*

She needed a Saviour as much as we do, for she was a sinner like ourselves; and though she was blessed among women, she here indicates that she owed all that blessedness to the grace of God, who had become a Saviour to her, as well as to us.

48. *For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden:*

The family from which Mary sprang had become poor, and she dwelt in lowliness at Nazareth.

48, 49. *For, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name.*

She was indeed a blessed woman to have such holy thoughts, such reverence for God, such a true idea of his might and majesty, and of the marvellous favor which he had shown to her.

50. *And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation.*

Remember this, it was not mercy to Mary only; it was mercy to us, and mercy to all, who truly trust the Saviour in whom she trusted.

51. *He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.*

Sometimes, we read of God’s “finger,” That refers to a part of his great power. At other times, we read of his “hand.” That is a more brilliant display of his power. But here, as elsewhere, we read of his “arm.” This is the majesty of his omnipotence. Pharaoh’s

magicians told the king that it was the finger of God that wrought the plagues of Egypt, but it was with his outstretched arm that he divided the Red Sea, and overthrew Pharaoh and his hosts: Mary felt that, in the work of salvation we see God's arm; not merely his finger, or his hand.

52. *He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree.*

This is what God is constantly doing, — casting down the high and mighty ones, and lifting up the meek and lowly.

53. *He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away.*

They who are self-satisfied shall sooner or later be cast out; but those who look to God alone, and are hungry after him, shall be satisfied with his favor.

54-56. *He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy: As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever. And Mary abode with her about three months and returned to her own house.*

LUKE 1:39-56

39-41. *And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda; and entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth. And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost:*

We do not read that Mary was filled with the Holy Ghost, possibly because she was always in that condition, living very near to God in hallowed fellowship. Some of us have occasional fillings with the Holy Spirit, but blessed are they who dwell in him, having been baptized into him, and enjoying continual nearness to God as the blessed result.

42, 43. *And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?*

Those who are most holy are most humble; you will always find those two things go together. Elisabeth was the older woman, but, inasmuch as Mary was more highly favored than she was, she asked,

“Whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” Genuine Christians do not exalt themselves above their fellow-believers, but they have a self-depreciatory spirit, and each one esteems others better than himself.

44, 45. *For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.*

What a benediction that is! If any of us truly believe God’s Word, we are blessed from that very fact, for God’s promise never misses its due performance. Men find it convenient to forget their promises, but God never forgets; he takes as much delight in keeping his promise as he does in making it.

46. *And Mary said, —*

We do not read that she spoke with a loud voice. Occasionally, the visitation of the Spirit causes excitement. Thus, Elisabeth spoke with a loud voice; but Mary, though full of a rapturous joy, spoke calmly and quietly, in a royal tone of holy calm. “Mary said,” —

46. *My soul doth magnify the Lord, —*

She was weary, for she had come a long journey, but she was like Abraham’s servant, who said, “I will not eat, until I have told mine errand.” So Mary will not eat until she has sung the praises of her God: “My soul doth magnify the Lord,” —

47, 48. *And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.*

Some have done so to the grief of genuine Christians, for they have apostatized from the faith, and made Mary into a kind of goddess, and, therefore, Protestant Christians have gone to the other extreme, and have not always given to her the respect which is due to her.

49, 50. *For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name. And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation.*

Notice how Mary quotes Scripture. Her mind seems to have been saturated with the Word of God, as though she had learned the books of Scripture through, and had them “by heart” in more senses than one; and it is significant that, though the Holy Spirit was

speaking by her, yet even he quoted the older Scriptures in preference to uttering new sentences. What honour he put upon the Old Testament by so continually quoting it in the New Testament, even as the Lord Jesus also did. Let us, too, prize every part of God's Word, let us lie asoak in it till we are saturated with Scriptural expressions; we cannot find any better ones, for there are none.

51-53. *He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away.*

Mary's song reminds us of the song of Hannah, yet there is a different tone in it. Hannah's has more of exultation over enemies cast down, but Mary's is more becoming to the new dispensation as Hannah's was to the old. There is a gentle quietness of tone about the Magnificat all through, yet even Mary cannot help rejoicing that the Lord "hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away."

54-56. *He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy; As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever. And Mary abode with her about three months, and returned to her own house.*

Wondrous as her future was to be, she would not neglect the duties of her home. When any of you are privileged to share high spiritual enjoyments, mind that you always return to your own home not unfitted for your domestic duties. We read that David, after he had danced before the ark, "is returned to bless his household." We must never set up God's altar in opposition to the lawful duties of our home. The two together will make us strong for service, and enable us to glorify the name of the Lord.

LUKE 1:46-55

46, 47. *And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.*

The burden of Mary's Magnificat is very similar to Hannah's song, though there was one respect in which she could raise an even loftier note, for she had been chosen to be the mother of our Lord.

48-55. *For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name. And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation. He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he hath sent empty away He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy; as he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever.*

You see that the theme of the song is the same all through,-the casting down of the proud and the mighty, and the uplifting of those that are bowed down and despised; and all this is ascribed to the sovereignty of God.

This exposition consisted of readings from 1 SAMUEL 2:1-10; AND LUKE 1:46-55.

LUKE 2:1-19

We WILL now read the story of our Saviour's birth as it is recorded in the Gospel according to Luke.

1-6. *And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the City of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:;) to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.*

Little did any idea enter into Caesar's head that he was accomplishing the purpose of God by bringing Mary to Bethlehem, at that particular time, so that her child might be born there. But God can accomplish the purpose of his providence, and of his grace, in any way that he pleases and although Caesar is not aware of all that is involved in his action, his decree, which he intends simply to be a means of registering his subjects, and of filling his exchequer, is to be overruled by God for the fulfillment of the prophecy, uttered centuries before the event happened, that Christ must be born at Bethlehem. It may seem, to some of you, a strange thing that there should be an imperial edict, issued from Rome, which should have

an important influence upon the place of birth of the Child; yet I do not doubt that, in God's esteem, the whole of the great Roman Empire was of very small account in comparison with his Son, our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ; and today, the thrones and dominions of the mightiest monarchs are only like the small cogs of the wheels of divine providence where the welfare of even the least of the Lord's people is concerned. He reckons not events according to their apparent importance; the standard of the sanctuary is a very different measure from that which worldlings use. When any purpose of God is to be accomplished, all other things will be subordinated to it.

6, 7. *And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.*

Now hath heavenly glory wedded earthly poverty; and, henceforth, let no man dare to despise the poor and needy, since the son of the Highest is born in a stable, and cradled in a manger. How low the King of glory stoops, and how gloriously he uplifts the lowly to share his glory!

8, 9. *And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.*

For such is the condition, even of gracious souls, that the near approach of the divine glory begets in them trembling and alarm. Oh, how wondrously changed shall we be when we are able to bear even the glories of heaven! Have you ever thought of this, dear friends? The beloved apostle, John, saw Christ in his glory, and he wrote, "When I saw him, I fell at his feet, as dead; "and these shepherds, even at the sight of "the angel of the Lord," "were sore afraid." You and I, beloved, must undergo a marvellous change before we shall be able to be at home with God in his glory; but that change shall, through his abundant grace, take place ere long.

10-12. *And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ*

the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

“This shall be a sign unto you,” said the angel to the shepherds; and this is the ensign of the Christ of God even unto this day. There are some, who are constantly bringing discredit upon religion by their pompous ritual and gorgeous ceremonies, and it is buried beneath the weight of their sensuous worship, but the living Christ is still found in simple, lowly guise, “wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.”

13. *And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host —*

They had heard the heavenly herald’s proclamation, and hurried down to join him in publishing the glad tidings. They could not bear that only one angel should announce the birth of the Christ; so, “suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host” —

13-19. *Praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.*

Mary laid these things up in store, and pondered them, giving them their due weight and value. Oh, that we did the same with every truth that we learn!

LUKE 2:1-40

1-9. *And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the*

house and lineage of David:) to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

These men were probably poor and illiterate, but that did not hinder God from revealing himself to them, nor prevent the coming of his Son to them. They were engaged in their ordinary calling, “keeping watch over their flock by night,” when this great blessing came to them. Seldom does such a blessing as this come to idlers. It was not while they were gadding abroad, and wasting their time, but while they kept watch over their flock that “the angel of the Lord came upon them.” First one angel led the way, and then a multitude of the heavenly host followed and these poor men, perhaps troubled with the common superstition of the Jews that the appearance of God, or any supernatural visitation, would always be followed by death, “were sore afraid.”

10, 11. *And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.*

The anointed Saviour has full power to save, for he “is Christ the Lord;” and therefore he is able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by him.

12. *And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.*

Not in marble halls, wrapped in purple and fine linen, and welcomed by the great and mighty of earth, nay, this greatest of all princes is born amid the poverty of our ordinary manhood. He is One chosen out of the people, the people’s Saviour, and a manger receives the people’s King.

13. *And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God,--*

They could not stay behind. The news spread through heaven that an angel had gone to announce the birth of Christ, and the others flew through the pearly gates, and hastened to overtake the herald, and reached him just as he had concluded his message: "Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host." These cohorts of the Lord came riding post haste, Praising God,--

13-17. And saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.

Good news is not to be kept to ourselves. When we have ascertained its truth we are to tell it to others, and we are especially to tell the goodness of salvation. Tell it, O ye who know it in your own hearts by blessed experience! Tell it, though it will sometimes be with broken accents in the feebleness of your flesh yet even then tell it in the ardor of your heart's affection, and God will bless your testimony, and others will learn the good news through you.

18, 19. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them--

Weighed them, estimated them at their right value,!

19. In her heart.

The best of coffers to lay up anything in is the heart. Happy are those who, like Mary, store up the things of Christ, not in their brain though that would make them orthodox; but in their heart, for that will bring them salvation.

20-24. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them. And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called JESUS, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb. And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord; (as it is

written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;) and to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.

Our Saviour put himself under the law for our sakes, and in every jot and tittle he observed it. So we are delivered from its dominion; for if Christ hath fulfilled the law on our account, it hath no more claim upon us. “Ye are not under the law, but under grace.”

25. *And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout,!*

This combination makes up a complete character, “just” towards man, “devout” towards God. There are many who think they are just, but their justness does not extend to their fellow-creatures, and they forget the claims of the Most High upon them. On the other hand, I have known men who have pretended to a vast amount of devotion, but who have never been just. Such persons are hypocrites, as the others are robbers of God; but he who is just and devout, just towards man and devout towards God, hath the character of a true man. Such was Simeon, “just and devout,” —

25-29. *Waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law, then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word:*

You see, dear friends, he was not afraid to die, and he knew that he could not die until he had seen the Messiah. Some of us, if we had a revelation that, on the occurrence of a certain event, we should die, might be filled with alarm or anxiety, but it is not so with holy Simeon; he rather longs to depart in peace. He looks upon the coming of “the Lord’s Christ” with great joy, because now he knows the battle of life for him will soon be over, and that he will enter into his victory.

30-34. *For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel. And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him. And*

Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel;

There were many who fell through their offences against Jesus: but blessed be his name, there are still many who rise through him, rise first to newness of life on earth and afterwards to resurrection life in glory. Jesus is set for both, he must be to one the savor of death unto death, and to another he must be the savor of life unto life.

34. *And for a sign which shall be spoken against;*

How true has this been. The cross has been to many a stumbling block, and to the worldly wise it has been foolishness; and so will it be to the world's end.

35. *(Yea, a sword shall pierce through thine own soul also,)*

Great privileges often involve great troubles. Mary was highly favored, and truly blessed among women, yet no woman ever had greater sorrow than she had.

35. *That the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.*

Christ's death revealed the thoughts of many hearts. It revealed the thought in the heart of Pilate, that he loved popularity better than the truth. It revealed the thought of the heart of Judas, that he loved gold better than he loved his Master. It revealed the thought in the heart of Caiaphas, that he would keep to old customs rather than to the right. It revealed the thought in the hearts of the disciples, and showed what poor timid, trembling hearts they had. Peter's impulsive spirit, too, was revealed in all its weakness by the death of the Saviour. The cross is the great touchstone; wherever it comes, it tests and tries us, ! even as the crucible tries the metal that is put into it,! and lets us know what manner of men we are. Dost thou love Christ? Dost thou glory in his cross? Then it is well with thee. But dost thou despise the cross? Dost thou set up thine own righteousness in opposition to it? Art thou depending upon anything beside Jesus Christ and him crucified? Then his cross reveals thee to be self-righteous, and dead in trespasses and sins. Our Saviour was not only to be received by men, but he was to be welcomed by women also, so now we read:!

36-40. *And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; and she was a*

widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem. And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth. And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him.

LUKE 2:21-38

21. *And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called Jesus, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb.*

Although the old law ends with Christ, it is very instructive to notice that he came under the law, and conformed to all its appointments. Jesus, therefore, had to be circumcised. In him the law was fulfilled in every point, even to the jots and tittles; nothing was omitted. Behold, how perfect is the righteousness which he wrought out for his people!

22. *And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord;*

Everything was done that was required by the Jewish law, you see. "When the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." "Being found in fashion as a man," and a man under the Jewish law, Jesus and his parents were obedient to all its requirements.

23, 24. *(As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;) and to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtle-doves, or two young pigeons.*

This proves the poverty of our Lord's parents. If they had been able to bring a costlier sacrifice, they should have done so. The law required the offering of a lamb for a burnt offering; but there was a gracious provision in the case of the poor mother: "If she be not able to bring a lamb, then she shall bring two turtles, or two young pigeons; the one for the burnt offering, and the other for a sin

offering: and the priest shall make an atonement for her, and she shall be clean.” Even in the case of a working-woman, the birth of her first-born son required from her a sacrifice; but it might be of the smallest kind: “A pair of turtle-doves, or two young pigeons.” Think of your Lord himself redeemed by a sacrifice, a pair of doves offered in his stead! What a wonderful coming down to our condition and position was this!

25. *And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout,*

He blended in his character his duty to man and his duty to God, he was just and devout.”

25. *Waiting for the consolation of Israel:*

His devotion was not that of a blind devotee. He had eyes of expectation, he was expecting the Messiah to come, who is “the consolation of Israel.”

25, 26. *And the Holy Ghost was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord’s Christ.*

That which the Holy Ghost reveals will assuredly come to pass, as it did in the experience of old Simeon.

27. *And he came by the Spirit into the temple:*

Men who have the Spirit will be led by the Spirit. Simeon came into the temple at the right moment. Just when a young man was entering, with his wife and new-born child, “He came by the Spirit into the temple.”

27, 28. *And when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law, then took he him up in his arms,*

He came in, I say, at the right time. Did ever anybody, who was not led by the Spirit, find Christ? Somebody has come in here tonight, and he does not know why he has come; but he has been led here by the Spirit that he may see Jesus, and may have such a sight of him as shall be his salvation. God grant that it may be proved that many an aged Simeon has traveled here this Sabbath night, led by the Spirit for this purpose, to find the Saviour in his own house!

28, 32. *And blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all*

people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.

Simeon had studied the ancient prophecies to good purpose, and he perceived from them that “the Lord’s Christ” would be “a light to lighten the Gentiles” as well as “the glory of” God’s ancient people, “Israel.”

33. *And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him.*

We may be very near to Christ, and yet know very little about him. Joseph and the virgin mother did not understand “those things which were spoken of him.” One wonders it was so after all that had been revealed to them; we marvel that they marvelled.

34. *And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel;*

Do you understand that? Whenever Christ comes to a man, there is a fall first, and a rising again afterwards. You never knew the Lord aright if he did not give you a fall first. He pulls us down from our pride and self-sufficiency, and then he lifts us up to a position of eternal safety. He is “set” for this purpose; this is the great design of Christ’s coming: “This child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel.”

34. *And for a sign which shall be spoken against;*

Christ and his gospel will always be spoken against. If you know a gospel which is approved by the age, and patronized by the learned, that gospel is a lie. You may be sure of that; but if it be spoken against, if it be slandered, if it be called absurd, unscientific, and I know not what, all that is in its favor.

35. *(Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,)*

This favored woman had the greatest smart to go with her great honour. She saw the suffering and anguish of her son; and the nearer you are to Christ, the more of sorrow it will cost you, sorrow which you may be well content to bear. You know how it is put in that hymn of which many of us are very fond, —

“If I find him, if I follow,
What his guerdon here?
Many a labour, many a sorrow,
Many a tear.”

Yet, I say again, you may be well content to bear it all for his sake; for you remember what the next verse of the hymn is, —

“If I still hold closely to him,
What hath be at last?
‘Borrow vanquished, labour ended,
Jordan past.’”

35. *That the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.*

Christ and his cross are the revealers of the thoughts of men’s hearts. Men’s hearts can conceal their thoughts until Christ’s cross comes near; then the old enmity rises up, the heart rebels, and we see what is really in men’s hearts.

36, 37. *And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; and she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. It would have been a pity for Christ to have been received in the temple only by a man. There must be a woman there, too, to join in Simeon’s swan song, and to unite her testimony with his.*

38. *And she coming in that instant —*

God knows how to time what we call our accidental walks: “She coming in that instant” —

38. *Gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.*

So that the song of Simeon was sweetened by the voice of Anna, and they both rejoiced in God their Saviour; and their joy was shared by “all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.” May many of us have a share in that same joy as, by faith, we lovingly gaze upon “the Lord’s Christ.”

LUKE 3:1-18

1-7. *Now in the fifteenth yea of the reign of Tiberias Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judaea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituraea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene, Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for*

the remission of sins; as it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filed and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God. Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned yea to flee from the wrath to come?

Does not John the Baptist speak like Elijah? Here are no honeyed phrases to delight the popular ear. The prophet of the wilderness talks like one who is all on fire with zeal for God, and indignation against evil.

8-11. *Bring forth therefore worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn is laid down, and cast into the fire. And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise.*

John was wonderfully practical in his advocacy of a holy charity and benevolence. His words cut against all greed, all hoarding, all hardening of the heart towards our fellow men.

12, 13. *Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you.*

They were accustomed to gather the taxes unfairly, and to increase the rates by oppressing the people, getting, perhaps, twice or even ten times more out of them than they could legally claim. John speaks to the point, does he not?

14. *And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do And he said unto them, Do violence to no man,*

Those rough Roman soldiers, as they had conquered the country, were very apt to treat the people as though they were their slaves; so John says to them, "Do violence to no man,!"

14. *Neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wage!*

“With your rations, your allowances,” so it runs. They were very apt to be contending for an increase in their pay, and to drag civilians before the courts with false accusations unless they chose to give them bribes to let them go. John does not mince matters with any of his hearers; he speaks with wonderful plainness and courage, and therein proves himself to be a true herald of his Master.

15-18. *And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not; John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire: whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable. And many other things in his exhortation preached he unto the people.’*

This exposition consisted of readings from LUKE 1:5-17, 3:1-18.

LUKE 4:1-15

1. *And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness !*

“Full of the Holy Ghost” ! and then led “into the wilderness” to be tempted. You would not expect that. Yet it is a sadder thing to be led into a wilderness when you are not filled with the Spirit, and a sadder thing to be tempted when the Spirit of God is not resting upon you. The temptation of our Lord was not one to which he wantonly exposed himself, he “was led by the Spirit into the wilderness.” The Spirit of God may lead us where we shall have to endure trial. If he does so, we are safe; and we shall come off conquerors even as our Master did.

2. *Being forty days tempted of the devil.*

Six weeks of temptation. We read the story of the temptation, perhaps, in six minutes; but it lasted for nearly six weeks Forty days tempted of the devil.”

2. *And in those days he did eat nothing: and when they were ended, he afterward hungered.*

It does not appear, therefore, that Jesus hungered while he was fasting. He was miraculously sustained during that period. After fasting, one looks for deeper spiritual feeling, and more holy joy;

but the most prominent fact here is that “he afterward hungered,” Think not that you have lost the benefit of your devout exercises when you do not at once feel it. Perhaps the very best thing that can happen to you, after much prayer, is a holy hunger; I mean not a natural hunger, as it was with our Lord; but a blessed hungering after divine things. “Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.”

3. *And the devil said unto him, “If thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread.”*

Satan met the hungry Man, and suited his temptation to his present pangs, to his special weakness at that moment: “If thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread.” The devil suspected, and I think he knew that Jesus was the Son of God; but he began his temptation with an “if.” He hissed that into the Saviour’s ear: “If thou be the Son of God.” If you, believer, can be led to doubt your sonship, and to fear that you are not a son of God, Satan will have begun to win the battle. So he begins to storm the fort royal of faith: “If thou be the Son of God.” Our Lord was the Son of God, but he was then suffering as our Substitute; and in that condition he was a lone and humble man; what if I call him “a common soldier in the ranks”? Satan invites him to work a miracle of an improper kind on his own behalf; but Jesus wrought no miracle for himself. Now, it may be, that the devil is trying some of you tonight. You are very poor, or business is going very awkwardly, and Satan suggests that you should help yourself in an improper manner. He tells you that you can get out of your trouble very easily by some action which, although it may not be strictly right, may not be so very wrong after all. He said to Jesus, “If thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread.”

4. *And Jesus answered him, saying, “It is written,”*

That is Christ’s sword. See how swiftly he drew it out of its sheath. What a sharp two-edged sword is this to be used against Satan! You also, believer, have this powerful weapon in your hand; let no man take it from you. Believe in the inspiration of Scripture. Just now there is a fierce attack upon the Book of Deuteronomy. It is a very curious thing that all the texts Christ used during the temptation were taken out of Deuteronomy, as if that was to be the very armoury out of which he would select this true Jerusalem blade,

with which he should overcome the tempter, “It is written,” “It is written,” “It is said.”

4. *That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.*

“God can sustain me without my turning the stone into bread. God can bring me through my trouble without my saying or doing anything wrong I am not dependent upon the outward and visible.” If you can feel like that, if you can appropriate the promise of God, and quote it to Satan, saying, “It is written,” Using it as Christ did, you will come off conqueror in the time of temptation even as he did.

5. *And the devil,*

Now he tries him again. There is wave upon wave trying to wash the Son of man off his feet.

5. *Taking him up into an high mountain, shewed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time.*

Skeptics have asked how that could be done. Well, they had better ask him who did it. He knows more about them, and they know more about him, than I do; but he did it: I am sure, for here it is written, that he “shewed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time.”

6. *And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me and to whomsoever I will I give it.*

Does not he talk proudly in the, presence of his Lord and Master? What an audacious dog he must have been thus to howl in the presence of him who could have destroyed him by a look or a word, if he had wished to do so!

7, 8. *If thou therefore, wilt worship me, all shall be thine. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan:*

The temptation annoyed him, it was so foreign to his holy nature, it vexed his gracious spirit, so he cried out indignantly to the tempter: “Get thee behind me, Satan.”

8. *For it is written,*

Here flashed forth the sword again.

8. *Thou, shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.*

Then let us pay no reverence, no worship, to any but God. Consciences and minds are made for God alone; before him let us

bow; but if all the world were proffered us for a moment's idolatry, let us not fall into the snare of the tempter.

9. *And he brought him to Jerusalem,*

Satan now takes Christ to holy ground. Temptations are generally more severe there.

9. *And set him on a pinnacle of the temple,*

The highest point of all; elevated high above the earth.

9-11. *And said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from hence: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, test at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.*

Now Satan tries to quote Scripture, as he can do when it answers his purpose; but he never quotes it correctly. You young brethren who go out preaching, mind that you do not imitate the devil by quoting part of a text, or quoting Scripture incorrectly. He did it, however, with a purpose; not by misadventure or from forgetfulness; he left out the very necessary words, "*In all thy ways.*" "He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways." Satan left out those last four words, for it was not the way of a child of God to come down from a pinnacle of the temple headlong into the gulf beneath.

12. *And Jesus answering said unto him, It is said, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.*

Do nothing presumptuously. Do nothing which would lead the Lord to act otherwise than according to his settled laws, which are always right and good.

13, 14. *And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season. And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee:*

He had not lost anything by the temptation, the power of the Spirit was still upon him.

14, 15. *And there went out a fame of him through all the region round about. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all.*

He became popular; the people resorted to him, and were glad to hear him. He who has had secret temptation and private conflict is prepared to bear open success without being elevated by it. Hast

thou stood foot to foot with Satan? Thou wilt think little of the applause or of the attacks of thy fellow-men.

LUKE 4:14-32

14. *And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee:*

Ah, dear brethren, if our Lord Jesus needed “the power of the Spirit”, how much more do you and I need it! We have no power of our own, but he was the Son of God. He was a divine Teacher, and yet, when he went to his work, it was “in the power of the Spirit.” Tarry, brother, till you have that power; it is of no use for you to go without it.

14, 15. *And there went out a fame of him through all the region round about. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all.*

There was a wondrous power about his teaching: “Never man spake like this man.” Perhaps his hearers did not understand what the power was; but they glorified the new Teacher who had come into their midst.

16. *And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up:*

It is always a difficult thing for a young man to begin preaching in His own native town. A prophet is not without honour save in his own country, yet Jesus “came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up.”

16. *And, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read.*

It was the custom to read parts of Holy Writ in the synagogue, and then to say a few words by way of exposition; and this the Saviour did.

17. *And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Isaiah.*

And when he had opened the book, that is, unrolled the parchment containing Isaiah’s prophecy, —

17. *He found the place where it was written,*

You will find the passage in the sixty-first chapter of Isaiah.

18, 19. *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and*

recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

There he stopped; it was all of the passage that then seemed suitable.

20. *And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down.*

In those days, the preacher sat down, and those who listened stood up, I daresay that practice tended to keep the hearers awake, and it was all the easier for the speaker. Well might the Saviour sit down, weighted as he was with a burden of holy instruction that he was about to impart to the people; or, perhaps, sitting down as if himself at rest, he appeared the more ready to give rest to them also.

20. *And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him.*

The young Nazarene, who had quitted them for a while, and had come home again, was the center of his fellow-townsmen's attention.

21. *And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.*

He thus declared that he was the anointed Messiah.

22. *And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious word which proceeded out of his mouth.*

They did not at first cavil at or deny what Jesus said; his doctrine was pleasing and comforting; and they were ready to accept it.

22. *And they said, Is not this Joseph's son?*

Now they began to question: "Is not this the son of the carpenter?"

23. *And he said unto them, Ye will surely say unto me the proverb, Physician, heal thyself: whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in thy country.*

"You have been doing great things over yonder at Capernaum, do the same at Nazareth. You should not leave your own native town without working miracles here." Now there was an opportunity for Jesus to ingratiate himself with the people, and win their good word. If he would only perform miracles among them, he should be highly exalted in their esteem.

24, 25. *And he said, Verily I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country. But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in*

Israel in the day, of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land;

Many husbands died, and many widows in Israel were left desolate in those terrible days of trial.

26. *But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow.*

This was as much as to say, "It is not because I lived here that I shall work miracles in this place. There were many widows round about Elijah, but he was not sent to one of them, he was sent to a widow in Sarepta, a city of Sidon, a heathen woman in another country." Mark the sovereignty of God; he bestows his mercy where he wills, according to his declaration to Moses, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy." We dare not ask God why he does this, "for he giveth not account of any of his matters." He acts wisely; but he acts according to the good pleasure of his own will.

27. *And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman; the Syrian.*

He, too, was a heathen from a distant country. Healing came unto him, but unto none of the lepers of Israel. God will do as he pleases with his own mercy and grace. The question that he asks is, "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?" "This doctrine of divine sovereignty was not according to the taste of these people, they did not like it, and some of you, I fear, do not like it. They grew very angry, they began to gnash their teeth, and to say, "This young man must be silenced; we will not listen to such doctrine as this from him."

28. *And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath,*

They did not mind hearing the first part of his teaching; but now that he exalts the sovereignty of God, and lays the sinner low, he speaks too plainly for them: "They were filled with wrath."

29, 30. *And rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong. But he passing through the midst of them went his way,*

They could not destroy him at that time. His work was not done, and he was immortal till it was fully accomplished.

31, 32. *And came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and taught them on the sabbath day. And they were astonished at his doctrine: for his word was with power.*

God grant that his Word may be with power tonight! Amen.

LUKE 4:16-30

We will read three short passages of Scripture, all relating to Christ's service. The first concerns the ministry of the Lord Jesus himself.

16-19. *And he came to Nazareth, where he had been, brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when, he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord, is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.*

What a glorious passage! This was the text of Christ's whole ministry not only of that day at Nazareth, but of all his life ever after.

20. *And he closed the book,*
Rolled up the sacred writing, —

20. *And he gave it again, to the minister, and sat down.*

Their practice was to sit down to speak, while the people usually stood to hear; a very good custom, indeed. If we did the same, perhaps we should have fewer of our hearers going to sleep.

20, 21. *And the eyes of all them that were in, the synagogue were fastened on, him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.*

That is the way to preach; bring home the Scripture to the present time, show its application to every-day life, especially point out its connection with Christ, and prove how it is fulfilled and verified in his sacred person. Doubtless, Jesus said a great deal besides what is here recorded; but there were no shorthand writers there to take down every word he uttered.

22. *And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his month. And they said, Is not this Joseph's son?*

There! Did it matter whose son Jesus was? Yet, in order to abate the force and even the blessedness of divine truth, men turn their thoughts to the Speaker rather than to what he says. How foolish!

23. *And he said? into them, Ye quill surely say unto me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself: whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in thy country.*

“Begin at home, work miracles here. You are the Son of the carpenter who lives here; now, do some wonderful work among us.”

24-26. *And he said, Verily I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country. But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow.*

Elias did not feel bound to labour always among the Jews, but he went right to Sidon, to a heathen woman, and he sojourned with the widow in the far-away country. God is a Sovereign; he can save whom he wills; and he will exercise that sovereignty, and bless some of those who appear to be most hopeless, and to have the least signs of good about them, and to be the farthest removed from the means of grace.

27. *And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian.*

Only the stranger and foreigner was cured of the disease of leprosy; another instance of divine sovereignty. Men do not like this doctrine of sovereignty; they are willing to have a god if he is not God; they do not mind believing in a god who is not King, and who does not do as he wills with his own. They believe in free will, they say. Yes, yes, free will for everybody but God! Man is to be the god of man and of God, too, according to the talk of some. But this is the thunder from the divine throne: “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.” Blessed is he who humbly boweth his bead, and saith,

“Be it so, my Lord!” Absolute power cannot be in better hands than in those of the God of love.

28. *And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath,*

They were at first very pleased to have a promising young Preacher out of their own town, and they said one to another, “Did not he speak well?” Now they have changed their note; he has been too faithful for them. He has exalted God instead of man; and now they are filled with wrath.

29, 30. *And rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down, headlong. But he passing through the midst of them went his way.*

With that holy calm in which he always dwelt, with wondrous self-possession, he passed through the midst of them, and escaped their malice. Now let us read what Christ says to those who would be his followers. Turn to —Luke 9:57-

This exposition consisted of readings from LUKE 4:16-30, 9:57-62; AND MATTHEW 28:16-20.

LUKE 4:16-30. (R.V.)

We will read, from the Revised Version, two passages which record attempts made to kill our Lord before his time had come. You will see, from the sermon, why we read them.

16-21. *And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and he entered, as his custom was, into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Isaiah. And he opened the book, and found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor: he hath sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down: and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, Today hath this scripture been fulfilled in your ears.*

Alas, not in their hearts. They had heard Christ read the prophecy that related to himself, but they had not accepted its message.

22-27. *And all bare him witness, and wondered at the words of grace which proceeded out of his mouth: and they said, Is not this Joseph's son? And he said unto them, Doubtless ye will say unto me this parable, Physician, heal thyself: whatsoever we have heard done at Capernaum, do also here in thine own country. And he said, Verily I say unto you, No prophet is acceptable in his own country. But of a truth I say unto you, There were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when there came a great famine over all the land; and unto none of them was Elijah sent, but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.*

Thus the Saviour taught God's absolute right to deal out his mercies as he pleases. To that great doctrine of divine sovereignty, Christ's hearers would not submit, even as many in the present day will not yield.

28. *And they were all filled with wrath in the synagogue,—*

They admired Christ's style of speech, but when he came to that man-humbling and God-glorifying doctrine, they were filled with wrath,—

28-30. *As they heard these things; and they rose up, and cast him forth out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might throw him down headlong. But he passing through the midst of them went his way.*

This exposition consisted of readings from LUKE 4:16-30; AND JOHN 8:37-59. (R.V.)

LUKE 4:33-36

We are going to read the inspired records of several of our Saviour's Sabbath cures, for they are very instructive.

33-36. *And in the synagogue there was a man, which had a spirit of an unclean devil, and cried out with a loud voice, saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? Art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art; the Holy One of God. And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. And when the devil had thrown him in the midst, he came out of him, and hurt him not.*

And they were all amazed, and spake among themselves, saying, What a word is this! For with authority and power he commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out, This was a very remarkable cure wrought by the Lord Jesus Christ on the Sabbath-day. Now let us turn to another, which is recorded in the sixth chapter of this same Gospel. (See Luke 6:6-11)

This exposition consisted of readings from LUKE 4:33-36; 6:6-11; 13:10-17; 14:1-6; JOHN 5:1-9; ND 9:1-14.

LUKE 4:33-41

We are going to read some verses in the fourth and fifth chapters of Luke's Gospel, — hospital chapters, I may call them, for they record many marvellous cures which were wrought by the great Physician, the Lord Jesus Christ. We shall begin at the 33rd verse of the fourth chapter.

33, 34. *And in the synagogue there was a man, which had a spirit of an unclean devil, and cried out with a loud voice, saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth?*

There are many people, at the present day, who have this evil spirit in them and they also say, "Let us alone." They do not want to have their consciences disturbed; they would rather sleep on until they wake up in another world where their awaking will be too late to avail for their repentance.

34. *Art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God.*

That is an old trick of the devil, to acknowledge the excellence of the Preacher that he may avoid the personal application of the sermon; and there are many people, who are quite satisfied when they have said concerning the Word which they have heard, "Yes, it was all true, and it was very well put." But that is not the purpose of a true minister of the gospel, — simply to win the compliment of your approbation; he wants to see the devil cast out of you, and to stir up your hearts so that you will no longer let religion alone, but will flee to Christ to save you.

35, 36. *And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. And when the devil had thrown him in the midst, he came out of him, and hurt him not. And they were all amazed, and spake among themselves, saying, What a word is this! for with*

authority and power he commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out.

Ah, dear friends! when we see what the gospel can do, — how it can re-claim the thief, how it can make chaste the harlot, how it can lift up the very vilest of men from the lowest depths of degradation, — we may well say, “What a Word is this!” The power of the gospel does not lie in the preacher, but in the truth which he proclaims. What a Word is this, which not only knocks at the door of the human heart, but which carries on its girdle the key with which it can open that door? It does not simply invite the sinner to trust the Saviour, but there is a power, which goes with it, which sweetly woos the heart until the unwilling become willing, and those who have hitherto despised God and his great salvation, cheerfully yield themselves to him. Christ not only comes to those who seek him; but, in the splendor of his grace, he is often found of them that sought him not; yea, those who cried “Let us alone,” are not let alone, for grace brings them beneath her blessed sway.

37 - 39. *And the fame of him went out into every place of the country round about. And he arose out of the synagogue and entered into Simon's house. And Simon's wife's mother was taken with a great fever; and they besought him for her. And he stood over her, and rebuked the fever; and it left her: and immediately she arose and ministered unto them.*

Here is a type of another form of the disease of sin. This time it is a hot and burning fever, and there are many men who have the fever of pride, or the fever of ambition, and some who have the fever of impetuous lust. Yet we have never read of such a cure as this in the lives of the doctors of ancient or modern times. They have wrought remarkable cures by long dosing the patient with various drugs, but Christ just stood over Peter's wife's mother, and rebuked the fever, and instantly it fled.

40. *Now when the sun was setting,*

Ah, it is setting with some of you! Those gray hairs are like the streaks of light upon the horizon as the sun goes down; but blessed be God, he who heals the spiritually sick in the early morning, by bringing children to himself, does not cease to work until the sun goes down.

40. *All they that had any sick with divers diseases brought them unto him and he laid his hands on every one of them, and healed them.*

Oh, that he would do that just now! Still is he mighty to save; oh, that he would now display his ancient power, and lay his healing hands on every one of you! What fame he would get if he would do so! What joy there would be if all of you should now be turned to God! And why should it not be? Christ is able to do this; then, let us ask it of him in earnest believing prayer

41. *And devils also came out of many, crying out, and, saying, Thou art Christ, the Son of God. And he rebuking them suffered them not to speak: for they knew that he was Christ.*

Perhaps they thought that their testimony would tend to blacken his character. We are, in a sense, pleased when bad men find fault with us, for that is really the best commendation that they can give us; but when they begin to praise us, we feel suspicious that there is something wrong. We think of how Christ acted when the devils said to him, “Thou art Christ, the Son of God,” and we would fain have them hold their tongues. What a vile thing sin is, for it makes even good words to be evil when they come out of sinful lips!

This exposition consisted of readings from LUKE 4:33-41; AND 5:12-17.

LUKE 5:1-32

1, 2. *And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret, and saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets.*

Before folding them up, as if they intended to do no more with them just then, as they had been working all night in vain.

3. *And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land.*

It is very difficult to speak effectively when the people come too close to the speaker; and, sometimes, a little inconvenience like that may interfere with the flow of the speaker's thoughts and words. Even the Saviour seems to have felt that he needed a little breathing space between himself and his audience.

3. *And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship.*

That was what some people would have called an unconsecrated place, but Christ's presence consecrated it, as it does every place where he condescends to meet with us.

“Where're we seek him, he is found,
And every place is hallowed ground.”

4. *Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught.*

Whenever he borrows a pulpit, or anything else, he pays good interest for the loan. Christ will not be in even a boatman's debt. For every cup of cold water given to his disciples in his name the Master will take care to pay.

5. *And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.*

Out of personal respect and obedience to Christ, having perhaps but a slender hope of any good coming of it, yet, nevertheless, he will let down the net.

6, 7. *And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake. And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them.*

For they had launched out so far into the sea so scarcely to be within hearing, so they beckoned to their partners in the other ship, and they rowed out to them.

7. *And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink.*

We can have too much of a good thing, aye, too much even of the best things, for our poor frail vessel cannot hold all that God would be willing to put into it.

8. *When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.*

Not knowing what he said, though he knew what he meant; feeling as if he, so sinful, had come too close to the Lord who was so gracious, so he must not dare to keep near to him. Have you never felt the same as that? If not, methinks you have neither known your Lord, not yet yourselves for the knowledge of Christ, combined with the knowledge of ourselves, is sure to produce this holy shrinking, in which we have no need for anyone to say to us, “Put off thy shoes from off thy feet,” for we are almost ready to put

off our very body, for we can scarcely bear the glory of the presence of the Lord.

9,10. *For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken: and so was also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men.*

He seemed to imply that he should catch them after the same rate, too; and so he did, for the first throw of the net brought in three thousand, and very soon the number caught was increased to five thousand. That was good fishing by those first Gospel fishermen; oh, that we could throw the net as they did!

11, 12. *And when they had brought the ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him, and it came to pass, when he was in a certain city, behold a man full of leprosy:*

That is a characteristic touch of Luke, who, as a physician, with a glance of his eye, took in the condition of the man, not as merely a leper, but as one “full of leprosy.”

12, 13. *Who seeing Jesus fell on his face, and brought him, saying, Lord if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And he put forth his hand, and touched him, —*

The perfectly pure One touched the leprous man without himself becoming contaminated. In any other house, the man who touched a leper would have been defiled; but, when Christ comes into contact with impurity, he is not defiled, but he removes it. This is what the gospel is meant to do to the world. We are to go and seek the good of the most fallen and abandoned of men and those who do so, ought to have so much of the spirit of Jesus Christ in them, and so much vitality in their piety, that they will not be tempted by the sin upon which they look, but, on the contrary, will overcome that sin, and impart spiritual health instead of receiving infection. May we be in such a state of health as Jesus was! Then shall we be able to touch the leper, and not be defiled. Jesus touched him, —

13. *Saying, I will: be thou clean. And immediately the leprosy departed from him. —*

Ask him to touch thee also, poor leprous soul; thou who art full of sin, thou who art deeply conscious that the deadly disease of sin is upon thee incurably. Ask him but to touch thee, for the touch of

his finger shall make thee clean in a moment. Christ's cures are often instantaneous. He, who could speak a world into being with a word, can also speak a man into perfect spiritual sanity with a word.

14, 15. *And he charged him to tell no man: but go, and shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing, according as Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them. But so much the more went there a fame abroad of him:*

Some fires burn the more fiercely for being damped, and such was the fame of Christ; it was not to be kept under. The more he bade men be quiet, "so much the more went there a fame abroad of him."

15. *And great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities.*

Two words that I long to see linked together in this house: "to hear, and to be healed by him." You come to hear; can you not also come "to be healed by him of your infirmities"?

16. *And he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed.*

The tense of the verb implies that he often did this; it was his habit to withdraw himself for private prayer even in his busiest times, and when he could occupy every minute with great advantage to the people. Thus he gathered new strength from above for each day's work; and when there was most to be done, then he took most time to pray. It is an evil economy that tries to take time for other things that should be spent in prayer, for the shortening of prayer will be the weakening of our power.

17. *And it came to pass on a certain day, as he was teaching, that there were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by, which were come out of every town of Galilee, and Judaea, and Jerusalem: and the power of the Lord was present to heal them.*

Not the Pharisees and doctors of the law; they do not often get healed by Christ, but "the power of the Lord was present to heal the multitude." The only people for whom there seems to be no power to heal are these Pharisees and doctors, as will appear by the following narrative.

18. *And, behold, men brought in a bed a man which was taken with a palsy:*

He had had a stroke of paralysis.

18, 19. *And they sought means to bring him in, and to lay him before him.*

And when they could not find by what way they might bring him in because of the multitude, they went upon the housetop, — By the external staircase, —

19. *And let him down through the tiling with his couch into the midst before Jesus.*

Probably into the courtyard of the house where Jesus was preaching.

20. *And when he saw their faith, he said unto him, Man, thy sins are forgiven thee.*

Laying the axe at the root; not healing the paralysis at first, but forgiving the sin which depressed the man's spirit, and so was, in a measure, the cause of the paralysis. By removing the sin, he raised the man's spirits, and with his renewed spirits, there came back strength. Note that it was when he saw their faith that he said unto the man, "Thy sins are forgiven thee."

21. *And the scribes and the Pharisees*

Here they are, these caviling gentlemen, these Pharisees and doctors of the law, —

21-23. *Began to reason, saying, Who it this which speaketh blasphemies? ho can forgive sins, but God alone. But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answering said unto them, What reason ye in your hearts? Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk?*

He that could do the one could do the other. He who bids the paralyzed man walk is divine; he, therefore, can forgive sin.

24-26. *But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins, (he said unto the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house. And immediately he rose up before them, and took up that whereon he lay, and departed to his own house, glorifying God. And they were all amazed, and they glorified God, and were filled with fear, saying, we have seen strange things today.*

May we often see such "strange things" spiritually!

27-32. *And after these things he went forth, and saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he said unto him, Follow me. And he left all, rose up, and followed him. And Levi made him a great feast in his own house: and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them. But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners? And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*

The murmuring of those Pharisees and doctors of the law had one good result, for it led the Saviour to declare the purpose of his mission to the earth: "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

LUKE 5:12-17

12. *And it came to pass, when he was in a certain city, behold a man full of leprosy: who seeing Jesus fell on his face, and besought him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.*

There was not much faith there, but faith even as a grain of mustard seed will serve; and therefore Christ did not refuse the poor leper's plea.

13-15. *And he put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will: be thou clean. And immediately the leprosy departed from him. And he charged him to tell no man: but go, and shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing, according as Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.*

But so much the more went there a fame abroad of him: and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities. Oh, that sinners would come to Christ in this spirit now, — "to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities!" Some of you have come to hear, but have you come to Christ to be healed? Have you really come for that purpose? Alas! Some come even to God's house only to see, or to be seen; how can such people expect to receive a blessing? Yet my Master is so gracious that, often, he is found of them that sought him not. So may it be with any careless ones who are with us now!

16, 17. *And he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed. And it came to pass on a certain day, as he was teaching, that there were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by, which were come*

out of every town of Galilee, and Judaea, and Jerusalem: and the power of the Lord was present to heal them.

These were the least hopeful patients that the great Physician ever had; for to heal these doctors of divinity, and to bring these proud learned Pharisees down to accept the gospel, needed an omnipotent display of divine power. Penitent sinners are readily brought to Christ; but, often, the self-righteous, who think they are rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing, are not to be persuaded to accept the fine gold which Christ presents to all who ask him for it. The Lord grant that, if any such people be here, the power of the Lord may be here to heal them!

This exposition consisted of readings from LUKE 4:33-41; AND 5:12-17.

LUKE 5:12-26

12. *And it came to pass, when he was in a certain city, behold a man full of leprosy:*

As far gone with leprosy as he could be; thoroughly tainted, and eaten up with that loathsome disease.

12. *Who seeing Jesus fell on his face, and besought him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.*

He felt that the difficulty lay in the will of Christ, not in his power. No other teacher would have looked at such a man. Everybody shrank from him, for he scattered defilement wherever he moved. A leper was a being from whom all kept clear, so this one was afraid that the great Teacher was not willing to cure him. "If thou wilt," said he, "thou canst," ! 'I know that thou canst make me clean.'

13. *And he put forth his hand, and touched him,*

This was a wonderful instance of condescending love on the part of the Lord Jesus; and touching the leper did not defile him. On the contrary, Christ removed the defilement from the leper: "He touched him,"

13. *Saying, I will: be thou clean.*

It was the will of Christ that wrought the miracle, that secret movement of the heart of Christ, that silent omnipotent going forth of divine energy that accomplished the leper's cure.

13. *And immediately the leprosy departed from him.*

Christ can heal sin in the same way that he cured this leper. If he touches the worst man in this place, he can make sin to depart from him the moment he touches him. It does not require years in order to perfect the work of salvation, it can be done in a moment. Such is the wonderworking power of Christ: “immediately the leprosy departed from him.”

14. *And he charged him to tell no man: but go, and shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing, according as Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.*

Our blessed Master did not court fame; he did not wish to make himself notorious, the crowds that flocked around him were inconvenient to him, so he did not wish to have them increased. There was danger in such crowding, and Jesus was wise in his generation, so he charged the healed leper to tell no man, but to show himself to the priest, and to present the offering enjoined under the law.

15. *But so much the more went there a fame abroad of him:*

Fame is like fire. If you heap anything on it to prevent it from spreading, it often acts as fuel to the flame; so, the very effort to hide the light of Christ’s power, made it spread all the more widely.

15. *And great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities.*

I wish that all congregations would come together from the same motives, ! to hear and to be healed by Christ. What is thy disease, my hearer? What ails thy soul? What is the mischief in thy spirit? What is the malady in thy heart? Jesus can heal thee. Oh, that thou wouldst at once seek to be healed by him!

16. *And he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed.*

Just when there were such grand opportunities of doing good, just when everybody sought him, does he get right away from them into the wilderness to pray? Yes, because he felt what we ought to feel but often do not, that he needed fresh power, that as the servant of God he must wait upon God for fresh power for his great life-work: “He withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed.” No doubt it was the constant habit of Christ to pray, but there were certain special times when he retired into lonely places, and his prayer was peculiarly fervent and prolonged.

17. *And it came to pass on a certain day, as he was teaching, that there were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by, which were come out of every town of Galilee, and Judaea, and Jerusalem: and the power of the Lord was present to heal them.*

The word “them” scarcely gives the right sense of the original; it should be, “the power of the Lord was present to heal.” Jesus did not heal the Pharisees and doctors of the law, but he healed many of the congregation. Now, how do you account for this power present to heal? Why, by that wilderness prayer: “He withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed,” and afterward, in a very high and remarkable manner, “the power of the Lord was present to heal.” And when the power to heal was present, the patient to be healed was very soon present, too.

18, 19. *And, behold, men brought in a bed a man which was taken with a palsy: and they sought means to bring him in, and to lay him before him.*

And when they could not find by what way they might bring him in because of the multitude, they went upon the housetop, and let him down through the tiling with his couch into the midst before Jesus. There does appear to have been, according to Mark, some breaking up of the material that formed the roof of the house where Christ was. It was not altogether such an easy matter as some have imagined to let this poor palsied man down into the presence of Jesus; and if some of the dust from the roof fell down upon the Pharisees and doctors of the law who were sitting by, it would only be what they were accustomed to throw into other people’s eyes.

20. *And when he saw their faith, he said unto him, Man, thy sins are forgiven thee.*

Christ has eyes with which he can see faith. You and I cannot see it; but he can: “When he saw their faith, he said unto him, Man, thy sins be forgiven thee.” This was going to the very root of his disease. Jesus knew what the man really ailed; he was palsied in spirit as well as in body, and Christ removed the root of his disease by forgiving his sin.

21. *And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason,*

The gentlemen I alluded to just now began to reason. It was just like them; instead of beginning to praise God, they “began to reason,”-

22. *Saying, Who is this, which speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone? But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answering said unto them, Why reason ye in your hearts?*

See, Jesus can perceive thoughts. I have heard of “thought-reading.” Here is a true specimen of it: “Jesus perceived their thoughts, and said unto them, Why reason ye in your hearts?”

23. *Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk?*

Anyone can say, “Thy sins be forgiven thee,” or, “Rise up and walk,” but to forgive sins, or to give the power to rise up and walk, equally needs a God. If God be present, and can make the palsied man arise and walk, he is also able to forgive his sins.

24-26. *But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins, (he said unto the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house. And immediately he rose up before them, and took up that whereon he lay, and departed to his own house, glorifying God. And they were all amazed, and they glorified God, and were filled with fear,*

With awe, and reverence. They felt that God had come very near to them, and they perhaps said, like Jacob of old, when he was afraid, “flow dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.” They were filled with fear!

26. *Saying, We have seen strange things today.*

Oh, that we might see such “strange things” in this house tonight, and whenever we meet to worship God!

LUKE 5:12-32

12. *And it came to pass, when he was in a certain city, behold a man full of leprosy:*

What a contrast there was between these two persons,— the Lord Jesus full of purity,— and this man full of impurity,— full of leprosy! He could not be more than full; he had as much leprosy as a man could contain.

12. *Who seeing Jesus fell on his face, and besought him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.*

This was splendid faith. Here was adoration of the noblest kind; no angel before the throne of God could render the Son of God more honour than this poor leprous man did. He believed in Christ's power at once to rid him of that otherwise incurable disease: "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean."

13. *And he put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will: be thou clean. And immediately the leprosy departed from him.*

This is just what Christ can do also in the spiritual realm. If a man be full of sin, let him but fall down on his face before Jesus, and say, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean," and the Lord will put out his hand, and touch him, and he will be clean in a moment. "Immediately "not needing the lapse of a single hour, —"immediately the leprosy departed from him."

14. *And he charged him to tell no man: but go, and shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing, according as Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.*

As long as the ceremonial law was in force, Christ very diligently obeyed it, and bade others do the same. That law is now abolished, and the Jewish priesthood has also ceased to be. But mark the modesty of our Saviour. As a man, he sought no fame or honour, but, as far as he could do so, he suppressed the voices that would have brought him notoriety; yet grateful tongues could not all be silenced, even at his bidding.

15. *But so much the more went there a fame abroad of him: and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities.*

There was a double attraction about the Lord Jesus, —his sweet, instructive speech, and his gracious, healing hand. There is a somewhat similar attraction still in every true gospel ministry, not the attraction of the mere words of human eloquence, but in the truth which every faithful minister preaches, and in that matchless soul-healing power which goes with the Word wherever it is believably heard.

16. *And he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed.*

That is just what you and I would probably not have done under such circumstances. We should have said, "We must seize this golden opportunity of publishing our message. There is a tide in the affairs of men which, taken at the flood, leads on to plenitude of

blessing; and we must take advantage of it.” But our Saviour did not wish for fame, he cared nothing about excitement and popularity; so “he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed” for more of that real power which touches the hearts of men so as to save them, caring nothing for that power which merely attracts a crowd, and excites momentary attention. O servant of God, when thou art succeeding best in thy service, imitate thy Lord, withdraw thyself and pray!

17. *And it came to pass on a certain day, as he was teaching, that there were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by, which were come out of every town of Galilee, and Judaea, and Jerusalem; and the power of the Lord was present to heal them.*

To heal the people? Yes, and to heal the doctors, too; and that was a far more difficult thing than to heal the ordinary folk. It must have been a time of great mercy and favor when Christ was ready to bless even the Pharisee and doctors of the law who were sitting by.

18. *And, behold,—*

For it was a great wonder,—

18. *Men brought in a bed a man which was taken with palsy:*

A paralyzed man.

18, 19. *And they sought means to bring him in, and to lay him before him. And when they could not find by what way they might bring him in because of the multitude, they went upon the housetop,*

—

There was, no doubt, a staircase outside, as there usually is to Eastern houses: “They went upon the housetop,”

19-21. *And let him down through the tiling with his couch into the midst before Jesus. And when he saw their faith, he said unto him, Man, thy sins are forgiven thee. And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, Who is this which speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?*

Most true, O Pharisees; and, therefore he is God, for he can forgive sins, and he has forgiven this poor sinner!

22, 23. *But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answering said unto them, Why reason ye in your hearts? Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, rise up and walk?*

“Does not each of these require the same divine power? If I am able to bid him rise up and walk, I am also able, by the same divine authority, to forgive his sins.”

24-26. *But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins, (he said unto the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house. And immediately he rose up before them, and took up that whereon he lay, and departed to his own house, glorifying God. And they were all amazed, and they glorified God, and were filled with fear,*

With a reverent awe,

26, 27. *Saying, We have seen strange things today. And after these things he went forth, and saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom:*

This Levi, or Matthew, was a tax collector; not like those of our own day, but one who farmed the taxes for the Roman governor, and made what he could for himself out of them; at least, that is what many of the “publicans” did.

27, 28. *And he said unto him, Follow me. And he left all, rose up, and followed him.*

This was just a parallel case to that of curing the palsied man; it is precisely the same morally as the other was physically. The office of a publican was disreputable in the eyes of the Jews, and this Levi was probably making money fast at the cost of his own countrymen. He was paralyzed morally as the other man was physically; but as soon as Christ said to him, “Follow me,” “he left all, rose up, and followed him.”

29, 30. *And Levi made him a great feast in his own house: and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them. But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners?*

It seems that there can never be a great wonder wrought by Christ without somebody or other objecting to it. I suppose that the sun never rose without annoying thieves, who would like a longer time to perpetrate their deeds of darkness; and no miracle of mercy is ever wrought without somebody finding fault with it for some reason or other. Be not dismayed, therefore, now that in these modern days there have arisen many cunning objectors to the gospel

of Jesus Christ. Let them object to it, as the dog barks at the moon; but still the moon shines on in her silver brightness. So, when all objectors shall have howled themselves to silence, the eternal gospel will shine on with never-failing splendor. These scribes and Pharisees murmured against Christ's disciples, and said to them, "Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners?" Their Master did not leave there to defend themselves, but he took the case into his own hands.

31. *And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole —*
"Such as you scribes and Pharisees claim to be

31. *Need not a physician; but they that are sick.*

"You regard them as sick, and I regard them in the same way, and therefore am I found where these sick ones are. Why should I turn aside from them to insult you, who are so wonderfully healthy and think yourselves so good?"

32. *I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*

LUKE 6:6-11

6-10. *And it came to pass also on another sabbath, that he entered into the synagogue and taught: and there was a man whose right hand was withered. And the scribes and Pharisees watched him, whether he would heal on the sabbath day; that they might find an accusation against him. But he knew their thoughts, and said to the man which had the withered hand, Rise up, and stand forth in the midst. And he arose and stood forth. Then said Jesus unto them, I will ask you one thing; Is it lawful on the sabbath days to do good, or to do evil? To save life, or to destroy it? And looking round about upon them all, —*

I think I see that piercing glance, which read their very hearts, and condemned the wickedness it saw there: "Looking round about upon them all," —

10, 11. *He said unto the man, Stretch forth thy hand. And he did so and his hand was restored whole as the other. And they were filled with madness; and communed one with another what they might do to Jesus.*

This was a second miracle wrought by our Lord on the Sabbath-day, and it also was a very notable one. Follow on in the same

Gospel until you come to the thirteenth chapter, at the tenth verse. (See Luke 13:10-17)

This exposition consisted of readings from LUKE 4:33-36; 6:6-11; 13:10-17; 14:1-6; JOHN 5:1-9; ND 9:1-14.

LUKE 7:18-50

18. *And the disciples of John shewed him of all these things.*

John was in prison, and, possibly, troubled in spirit.

19. *And John calling unto him two of his disciples sent them to Jesus saying, art thou he that should come? or look we for another?*

Did John doubt, then? Perhaps not. It may be that he saw that his disciples doubted, and that he wished their fears to be removed. It is possible, however, that he did himself have doubts. It is no unusual thing for the bravest hearts to be subject to fits of doubt. Elijah, you remember sat under a juniper tree in the wilderness, “and he requested for himself that he might die,” though he was the man who never was to die. And John, — the Elijah of the Christian dispensation, though a man of iron, was but a man, so he sent two of his disciples to Jesus, saying, “Art thou he that should come, or look we for another?”

20-22. *When the men were come unto him, they said, John Baptist hath sent us unto thee, saying, Art thou he that should come, or look we for another? And in that same hour he cured many of their infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits; and unto many that were blind he gave sight. Then Jesus answering said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard;*

Our old proverb says that actions speak louder than words, so an answer in his actions would be more eloquent with these inquirers than even an answer in our Lord’s own words. He bade them look at the evidences of his Messiahship which he gave them by his miraculous cures, and then he said to them, “Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard.” It would be well if our lives were such that, if any enquired what we were, we should only have to say that they might judge us by what they had seen and heard in our common everyday life and conversation.

22, 23. *How that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel*

is preached. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.

According to our Lord's testimony, the preaching of the gospel to the poor is as great a proof of his Messiahship as the raising of the dead. Then how highly it ought to be prized by them, and how glad should they be who have the gospel now preached freely in their hearing!

24. *And when the messengers of John were departed, he began to speak unto the people concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness for to see? A reed shaken with the wind?*

The wind on the banks of the Jordan, where there are plenty of reeds growing; — did you see a man who would bow before every breath of popular favor or popular wrath? Was John the Baptist such a man as that? No, certainly not.

25. *But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment Behold, they which are gorgeously appareled, and live delicately, are in kings' courts.*

They do not preach repentance. As is their clothing, so is their doctrine. They try to show a royal road to heaven — a smooth and easy path. But was John the Baptist a preacher of that kind? No, that he was not.

26-28. *But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and much more than a prophet. This is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.*

Passing into the dispensation of clearer light, he who is least among the believers of the gospel of Jesus is, in some respects, greater than this man, who could only preach repentance, and point to a coming Saviour.

29-32. *And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him. And the Lord said, Whereunto then shall I liken the men of this generation and to what are they like?*

They are like unto children sitting in the marketplace, at play; the playing of children is often according to the manners and customs of grown up people.

32. *And calling one to another, and saying, we have piped unto you, and ye have not danced;*

“You would not play a merry game when we asked you to do so.”

32. *We have mourned to you, and ye have not wept.*

“You would not play either at funerals or weddings.”

33. *For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine; and ye say, he hath a devil.*

“He came among you as an ascetic, denying himself, not only the luxuries of life, but even the common comforts that others enjoyed, and ye say, ‘He hath a devil.’”

34. *The Son of man is come eating and drinking;*

“He does not pretend to be an ascetic, he comes, on the contrary, to show that neither meat nor drink can save a man. What do you say, then, of this Son of man?”

34, 35. *And ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners! But wisdom is justified of all her children.*

Though the world contemns all wisdom’s children, whichever way they go, and is not pleased with their manners, whatever manners they possess, yet, in the long run, when the wisdom of God shall be all unfolded, it will be seen that the roughness of John and the gentleness and lovingkindness of Jesus were both right in their proper place. If fish are not caught in the gospel fishery, it may sometimes be the fisherman’s fault, but more often, it is the fault of the fish themselves. Here we have two very different kinds of fishermen, yet neither of them attracts all, though each of them draws some.

36, 37. *And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee’s house, and sat down to meat. And, behold, —*

For it is a wonder of grace: “Behold,” —

37. *A woman in the city, which was a sinner, —*

A sinner by profession, a public and notorious sinner, —

37-44. *When she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box; of ointment, and stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner. And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged. And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet:*

“Though it was only a common act of courtesy, such as should always be shown to a guest, thou didst neglect that;” —

44. *But she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head.*

“She has given my feet no common washing, for she has washed them with her tears. You would only have brought me a linen napkin, but she hath ‘wiped them with the hairs of her head.’”

45. *Thou gavest me no kiss,*

Which was usually given as a greeting to guests at that time. Simon had not given to Jesus the honour which was due to him, which would have been to kiss his forehead.

45. *But this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet.*

Every word is emphatic to show how far she had gone beyond Simon, who thought himself so much better than she was.

46. *My head with oil thou didst not anoint:*

Another usual Eastern custom with guests whom the host intended to honour.

46. *But this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment.*

Anointed them, not with ordinary olive oil, but with precious costly ointment.

47. Wherefore I say unto thee, her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much:

“You know that her sins were many, and I tell you that they have been forgiven, and you can see, by her actions, that she loves much.”

47, 48. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven.

What music that sentence “Thy sins are forgiven,” must have been to her! ‘Ah!’ says one, “I also should like to hear that sentence. Beyond everything else in the whole world would I desire to hear Jesus say to me, ‘Thy sins are forgiven.’ Then put yourself in the place that this woman occupied.

When Joab clung to the horns of the altar, he had to die there, but this woman had fled to the feet of Jesus, and she did not die there; nor shall you, but at those blessed feet, weeping for sin, and trusting the great Sin-bearer, you shall receive assurance of pardon: “Thy sins are forgiven.”

49, 50. And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also? and he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.

He did not want this young convert, this beginner in the Christian life to hear the bickerings and controversies of these coarse spirits, so he said to her, “Go in peace; and, dear soul, if you have begun to find out that, even in the Christian Church there are many opinions concerning many things, do not trouble yourself about those things. This is enough for thee: “Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.” There may be some who are called to contend for this or that point of the faith; but, as for thee, poor child, if,

with thy broken heart, thou hast found the Saviour, and if thou lovest him with an inward, warm, and hearty love, do not spoil that love by getting into a controversial spirit: “Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.”

LUKE 7:24-50

24. And when the messengers of John were departed, he began to speak unto the people concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness for to see? A reed shaken with the wind?

Certainly not; John could never be compared to a reed shaken with the wind, for he was strong, sturdy, firm, and steadfast. He was not like so many preachers, nowadays, who are swayed by the ever-changing opinion of the age, — the thought of these modern times, — and so prove themselves to be mere reeds shaken with the wind.

25. *But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment! Behold, they which are gorgeously appareled, and live delicately, are in kings' courts.*

John had been preaching in the desert, with all his might warning sinners to flee from the wrath to come. He was no court preacher, but a minister to the multitude, who delivered his heaven-inspired message in his own straightforward earnest style.

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

John was the morning star, and Christ the glorious Sun. John was the herald proclaiming the coming of Christ, and Christ himself followed close at his heels.

28. *For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist:*

His was the highest office of all, immediately to precede Messiah himself.

28. *But he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.*

We have a fuller gospel to preach than John had, and we may expect to see greater results from the preaching of that gospel than John could hope to see.

29-32. *And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him. And the Lord said, whereunto then shall I liken the men of this generation? and to what are they like? They are like unto children sitting in the marketplace, and calling one to another, and saying, we have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned to you, and ye have not wept.*

These children could not agree as to what game they would play. "Come," they said, "let us imitate a wedding, we will pipe, and you can dance." But the others would not dance. "Well," they said, "let

us play at something. Let us imitate a funeral; we will be the mourners.” Then the others would not weep. They would agree to nothing that was proposed, and that is the point of the Saviour’s analogy, that there are multitudes of men who always quarrel with any kind of ministry that God may send to them. This man’s style is much too florid; he has a superabundance of the flowers of oratory. That other man is much too dull; there is nothing interesting about his discourses. This man is too coarse; he is so rough as even to be vulgar. That other man is too refined, and uses language which shoots over people’s heads. It is easy to find fault when you want to do so. And stick will do to beat a dog, and any kind of excuse will do to allow your conscience to escape from the message of an earnest ministry. Our Lord told the people that this was the way they had acted towards himself and John the Baptist.

33. *For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine; —*

An ascetic of ascetics, —

33. *And ye say, He hath a devil.*

“He is out of his mind altogether, possessed by the devil.”

34. *The Son of man is come eating and drinking; —*

That is the Lord Jesus himself. He comes as a man among men, and sits with you at your feasts, and does not lead the life of an ascetic.

34. *And ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners!*

There was no pleasing them either way; whichever form of preacher the Lord sent, whether an ascetic or one like themselves, they found fault.

35. *But wisdom is justified of all her children.*

There shall come a day when it shall be seen that, after all, God knew best what style of preacher to send. He had work for each man to do, and he adapted the man for the work he had entrusted to his charge.

36. *And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee’s house, and sat down to meat.*

Invitations from Pharisees were rather scarce; they did not often ask Christ to their houses. Even before this meal is over, there will be sure to be something like a quarrel, depend upon it.

37. *And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, —*

Her name is not given; and there are good reasons why it should not be given. Certainly, she was not Mary the sister of Lazarus, nor yet Mary Magdalene, we may be quite sure of that. Our Saviour leaves her in an anonymous condition; and it is usually best that converts of this character should not be exhibited, and their names made known. I believe that much cruel wrong has been done to reclaimed sinners when they have been pushed to the front. “Behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner,” —

37, 38. *When she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, and stood at his feet behind him weeping, —*

His feet probably lay towards the door as he reclined at the table, and she could readily get at them without becoming too conspicuous in the room: she “stood at his feet behind him weeping,” —

38. *And began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.*

What a blessed amalgam of humility, penitence, gratitude, and love! All these are seen in what she did, especially in that unbinding of the tresses of her beauty, which had been her nets in which she had taken the souls of men, now she uses these for a towel. She “began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.”

39. *Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, —*

He did not like to say it in so many words, but he spoke loudly enough for himself to hear it, and for Christ to hear it, too.

39-44. *Saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner. And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly*

judged. And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman?

“You did see this woman, and you looked upon her with a frowning face; now take another look at her by the light of my parable.” “Simon, seest thou this woman?”

44. *I entered into thine house, —*

“Therefore thou wast bound by the obligations of a host,” —

44. *Thou gavest me no water for my feet: —*

An ordinary commonplace courtesy in the East, almost a necessity for those who have walked far, and whose feet are weary and dusty: “Thou gavest me no water for my feet.” —

44. *But she hath washed my feet with tears, —*

Costly water this! “She hath washed my feet with tears.”

44. *And wiped them with the hairs of her head.*

“She has done it, she has done it better than thou wouldst have done it, she has done it best of all, she has done what thou oughtest to have done, she has done it when there seemed to be no claim upon her to do it.”

45. *Thou gavest me no kiss: —*

Though that was the ordinary mode of !an honoured guest, —

46. *But this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet.*

You said in your heart that, if I had been a prophet, I should have known who and what manner of woman this was. I do know, and I am telling you. If you had given me a kiss, you would only have coldly kissed my brow, but she has found it in her heart to honour me by kissing my feet. Since I came in, she has not ceased to kiss them, unwashed as they were; and she has not only kissed them, but she has also washed them with her tears.”

46. *My head with oil thou didst not anoint: —*

“Thou, the host, whose duty it was to anoint guest, didst not do it,” —

46. *But this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment.*

The best unguent she possessed or could procure.

47, 48. *Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven.*

“Not because she has done this, but this is an evidence that her sine are forgiven. This act of greater love is the proof that she must be conscious of the greater forgiveness: ‘she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.’” It is always like that; your converted Pharisees have to be made to feel like this woman before they will render love like hers; and if Simon is ever made to feel that his sin, in a certain light, is as great as the sin of this fallen woman, then he will love as much as she does, but not till then.

Jesus said unto her, “Thy sins are forgiven.” Oh, the marvellous music of that short sentence! If I had to choose from all language the choicest sentence that my ear could hear when under a sense of him, it would be these four words which the Master addressed to this woman who was a notable public sinner, “Thy sins are forgiven.”

49. *And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also?*

Now, you see, they begin to mutter and to cavil. What is this poor woman to do? Probably she felt ready to speak up for her Master; but, sometimes, it happens that the Lord Jesus Christ will not permit certain even of his forgiven ones to be very prominent.

50. *And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.*

She was best out of the way of all controversy; she would honour him most by going home, and there sweetly singing to his praise, and drinking deep draughts of his love. If any of you converts are meeting with those who cavil at you, do not stop where they are, but go about your business with these sweet words of your Master ringing in your ears: “Thy faith hath saved thee; go in piece.”

LUKE 7:36-48

36. *And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee’s house, and sat down to meat.*

They sat according to the Eastern custom of sitting, which was rather lying at length, with the feet far out upon the couch or sofa.

37. *And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner,*

In a particular sense, a sinner; one whose very trade was sin.

37, 38. *When she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment And stood at his feet behind him weeping.*

As she could do, you see, without coming into the room, except for a few yards, especially if the Saviour's feet were close against the door.

38. *And began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.*

For water she gives her tears, for a towel, her hair; to heal the blisters of his weary pilgrimage, there are her soft lips for liniment; and then for ointment comes this precious salve.

39. *Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him; for she is a sinner.*

She is a sinner, and does he let her touch him, and kiss his feet, and show such tokens of affection? What man must he be who allows a harlot's kiss, even though it be upon his feet? Ah! poor foolish Pharisee! He judged according to the sight of the eye, or else he might have known that the best of men would never be angry at a harlot's tears, for the tears of repentance, come from whatever heart they may, are always like diamonds in the esteem of thee who judges rightly.

40-42. *And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay,*

And were, therefore, likely to be cast into prison, and to be sold as slaves.

42-43. *He frankly forgave them both. Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him most. Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged.*

There were no bonds, no promises of what they would do in the future, but he frankly forgave them both.

44. *And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house,*

And it was, therefore, thy duty to attend to me.

44. *Thou gavest me no water for my feet:*

Though that was the common custom.

44, 45. *But he hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head Thou gavest me no kiss;*

Which was the customary welcome to every honoured guest — a kiss upon the cheek or upon the forehead.

45. *But this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet.*

She has done what thou oughtest to have done; she has done it better than thou couldest have done it; she has done it when there was no claim upon her to do it, except that she had been forgiven much, and, therefore, loved much.

46. *My head with oil thou didst not anoint;*

This, too, was the usual custom.

46-48. *But this woman, hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much; but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven.*

LUKE 7:36-50

36. *And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat.*

It was usually a suspicious circumstance when a Pharisee desired to be familiar with Christ; it might generally be suspected that he wished to entrap him. Yet, on this occasion, if there was no real friendliness to Christ, there was at least the appearance of it. We see what our Saviour did when the Pharisee gave him an invitation: "He went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat." The Lord saw there an opportunity for usefulness. He knew that he would have a good reason for speaking personally to this Pharisee, who, peradventure, was one of the other sort. At all events, our Lord felt that it was right for him to go into that house, even if they did watch him, and try to catch him in his talk. If there was hypocrisy there, there was the more need for his presence, as Jesus himself said concerning his eating with publicans and sinners, "They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick."

37, 38. *And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, and stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hair of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.*

She was not a sinner in the ordinary sense of the word, but she was “a sinner” by trade, “a sinner” by profession. It always seems to me that, in this description of her, every word is emphatic. There is much meaning in every separate action of the woman; and even in her little mannerisms there is something that is instructive to us. Our Lord was reclining at his meal, and his feet were turned towards the door, so that she had not to come far into the house before she reached his feet; and there she stood “at his feet.” Those are blessed words: “at his feet.” That is where we also would stand and weep. That is where we would sit and learn. That is where we would wait and serve. That is where we hope to live and reign for ever: “at his feet.” This woman “stood at his feet behind him,” — as if she were unworthy to be looked upon by him, but found it honour enough to be behind him, so long as she was but near him: “at his feet behind him weeping,” — with sorrow for her sin, with joy for her pardon, with delight in her Lord's presence, perhaps with grief at the prospect of what yet awaited him. And she “began to wash his feet with tears.” O sweet repentance, which fills the basin better than the purest streams of earth could ever do! Then she unbound her tresses, — those nets in which she had, mayhap, caught many a man when she had hunted for the precious life after her former sinful manner. But now she uses those tresses for something better, she makes a towel of her hair. That which was her pride shall now fill that humble office, and even be honoured thereby. “And kissed his feet.” Oh, the tenderness of her love, and the strength of her passion — a sacred one, not born of earth at all, — for that dear Lord of hers! she kissed his feet; and then she poured upon them the precious perfumed ointment which had cost so much.

39. *Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, —*

Well, what did he say? I think that, if some of us, taught of God, and let into the secret of eternal love, had been there, we should have whispered to one another, “What a change has been wrought in

that woman! There she is, weeping, and washing the Saviour's feet, when, but the other day, she was standing at the corners of the streets, in the attire of a harlot, plying her accursed trade." How greatly we should have rejoiced to see her! But it is only grace that teaches us to rejoice over even one sinner that repenteth, and Simon the Pharisee appeared to know little or nothing of grace. He had, however, the good manners not to say aloud what he thought, but "he spake within himself, saying," —

39. *This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner.*

Yet "this man" was a prophet, and he did know "who and what manner of woman" that was who touched him. More than that, he knew what manner of woman his grace had made her, and how true, how pure, was the love which she was then manifesting to him; and he knew how deep was her repentance, how changed her heart, how renewed her entire life was. He knew all about her, but poor Simon could not know "this woman" as Christ knew her.

40. *And Jesus, answering, said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on.*

Christ often answers people who do not speak audibly, he answers those who only speak in their hearts. So you, who are silently praying, may take comfort. If Jesus answers a Pharisee who speaks in his heart against him, much more readily will he answer his own people when they are speaking in their hearts to him. It was a hopeful sign that Simon used a respectful title in speaking to Christ, and that he was willing to listen.

41-43. *There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both.*

"Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most." Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged. Now, dear friends, I hope that those of us who have had much forgiven are proving, by the warmth of our love, how right was this judgment on the part of Simon. If thou hast had much forgiven, be well to the front in every struggle on behalf of the cause of Christ. Be well to the front also with thy gift for him; bring thy alabaster box, and break it for him. With not for anyone to ask thee, much less to press thee, to give to

him who gave his all for thee, but, spontaneously, out of the love thou bearest to trial who has loved thee so much as to die for thee, prove that thou lovest him most of all.

44. *And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman?*

Christ knew that Simon did see her, and that he had just been sneering at her in his heart: "Seest thou this woman?"

44. *I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and washed them with the hairs of her head.*

"I became thy guest; and, therefore, as my host, the first thing thou shouldst have done was to give the ordinary Oriental hospitality of washing my feet: 'Thou gavest me no water for my feet; but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head.'" What a changing of places there is now! The Lord has made the first to be last, and the last to be first. Simon thought himself far in advance of this woman; but now that Christ had explained their true positions, I should think he began to see that the woman was far ahead of him.

45. *Thou gavest me no kiss:*

Yet that was the Eastern custom in welcoming an honoured guest.

45. *But this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet.*

"At best, thou wouldst only have kissed me once, but this woman, since I came in, has never left off kissing my feet. With a sacred audacity of love, she has lifted my feet to her lips, and kissed them again and again." So, see here again how the first is last, and the last first.

46. *My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment.*

"That is a common custom in the case of a guest of honourable estate, but thou didst not observe it; yet this woman has poured upon my feet the most precious form of perfume that could be procured anywhere."

47, 48. *Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven.*

There I see the clear run of the argument, — that she is a woman who has had much forgiven by Christ, and that is the reason why she loves him so much. But, often, when an inference is very natural and plain, the Saviour leaves men to draw that one for themselves, while he draws another. He puts the same truth in another shape: “Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.” I am afraid that there are many professed Christians, who must have had very little forgiven them, for they love Christ very little. This seems to be the age of little love to Christ. There are some few who love the Master intensely, but, oh, how few they are! Some persons think they are only very little sincere; and we are told, nowadays, what a little thing sin is, and what a little place hell is, and what a very short time the punishment of sin will last. Everything is according to scale, and it must be so in religion; as you diminish the guilt of sin, and the punishment of sin, you also diminish the sense of obligation in being saved from sin. Consequently, you diminish our love to Christ, and we shall gradually get less and less, I fear, unto the old scale, the old balance, the old shekel of the sanctuary, shall once again be used by us.

49. *And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also?*

“Who is this who can thus absolve from guilt?”

50. *And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.*

“Go home, good woman, do not stop here and be bothered by these people.” And oftentimes, that is the best advice that we can give to new converts. There is a theological controversy raging, and the jargon of the different schools of thought is being used by one and another; but, do you go home, good soul. You need not trouble about controversial matters. Your sins are forgiven you; your faith has saved you; if you know that, you know as much as you need to know just now. Go home, and be quiet and happy: “Go in peace.”

LUKE 8:1-3

1-3. *And it came to pass afterward, that he went throughout every city and village, preaching and showing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God: and the twelve were with him, And certain women,*

which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils, and Joanna the wife of Chuza Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto him of their substance.

The previous chapter tells how the woman in Simon's house manifested her love to the Saviour. She showed her love in one way, and in a very special way; but there were others, who had similar affection for him, who showed it in other ways. What is right for one person to do might not be a wise or right thing for everybody to do. Christ did not want his feet washed with tears every minute in the day, nor to have them anointed with even precious ointment very often. There are some Christians who ought to do, and I trust will do, some extraordinary thing for Christ, ! something which shall need no apology from them, because they are extraordinary persons, who used to be extraordinary sinners; and it would not be right for them to run in the ruts made by others, but they ought to strike out a distinct pathway for themselves. Happy is the church that has any such members; happier still if it has many such. But there are others, who love Christ just as truly, yet who must be content to show their love to him in some other, and apparently more common, but, perhaps, in the long run, more useful way. These gracious women ministered to Christ of their substance. He was only a poor itinerant preacher who needed daily sustenance. Some people say that every preacher ought to earn his own bread by trade or profession, and preach freely, yet the Lord Jesus Christ, the Prince of preachers, did not do this. "Oh, but Paul did!" Yes, Paul attained to a very high honour; but we may be perfectly satisfied, as the servants of the Lord Jesus Christ, to attain to as high a degree of honour as our Master did; and, inasmuch as he never did any carpentering after he began to preach, but gave his whole soul and being up to the work of preaching, he was fed and cared for by the kindness of these godly women who were glad to minister unto him of their substance. "The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord." So, as ministers of Christ, we need not be ashamed to minister spiritual things to the people, and to receive of their carnal things in return. These women, though they did not wash Christ's feet with their tears, nor anoint them with precious

ointment, did well, for they “ministered unto him of their substance.” Let us all do for him all that we can.

This exposition consisted of readings from MARK 15:1-41, AND LUKE 8:1-3.

LUKE 8:1-21

1. And it came to pass afterward, that he went throughout every city and village, preaching and shewing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God: and the twelve were with him,

Our Lord’s display of forgiving grace to the woman who was a sinner seemed to whet his appetite for soul-saving, so that “he went throughout every city and village, preaching and showing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God.” Dear friends, whenever we win a soul for God, let it spur us on to a greater diligence in his service, let it make us insatiable for more of this best wine of the kingdom of heaven. It was so with our Divine Master. He went about preaching; and, as he preached, he was training others also to preach: “the twelve were with him.” I think that, whenever there is a successful ministry, there should be those round about who are being trained to continue it. Among the Waldensians, the pastors were always accompanied by young men who learnt to preach from their example, and who shared their toils when they went from valley to valley proclaiming the gospel.

2, 3. And certain women, which had been healed of evil spirit and infirmities, Mary, called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils and Joanna the wife of Chuza Herod’s steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto him of their substance.

If they could not be apostles, they could, at any rate, being women of property, contribute both to the sustenance of Christ and of the apostles who were with him. There is a place for everyone who is willing to be used by the great Master-builder who leaves no stone out of the wall if it is fit to be built into it. There is something for the twelve to do, and there is something for the holy women to do, and we cannot do without either of them, and in that last great day when the rewards are distributed, there will be as much for Joanna as for John, and as much for Mary Magdalene as for Simon Peter. Did they not each, according to their utility, serve the Lord Jesus Christ?

4, 6. *And when much people were gathered together, and were come to him out of every city, he spake by a parable: a sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture.*

Or, as Mark records it, “because it had no depth of earth.” There was just a little coating of earth, sufficient for the fructification and the early sprouting of the seed; it came up all the more quickly because it was so near the surface, and because the heat could get at it so easily, the hard pan of the rock speedily sending up the heat to it. But, for that very reason, “as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture.”

7, 8. *And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it. And other fell on good ground, and sprang up and bare fruit an hundredfold. And when he had said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear let him hear.*

There are many, who have ears, who do not hear to any real purpose. There is the physical act of hearing, but they do not hear in the heart and the mind. It is a very different thing to have an impression on the drum of the ear and to have an impression on the tablet of the heart. “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.”

9, 10. *And his disciples asked him, saying, What might this parable be? And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand.*

It was a time of judicial visitations. These people had for centuries refused to hear the voice of God and now they were to pay the penalty for that refusal. The reward of virtue is capacity for higher virtue, just as the effect of vice is a tendency to yet greater vice. When men will not hear the voice of God, it is a just judgment upon them that they cannot hear, their impotence being the result of their impudence. Since they would not hear, they shall not; who shall say that this is not a very just and natural way of allowing sin to punish itself? So these people heard the words of our Saviour’s parable. It was like a clock, a covering to the truth; but, to them, it hid the truth, they did not see it. To the disciples of Christ, it set forth truth in all its beauty; but, to the unbelieving people, it hid the truth, so that they did not discern it. Brethren and sisters, if you and

I understand heavenly mysteries let us not be proud that it is so, but let us hear our Saviour saying to us, "Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God." This is the gift of the free grace of God. Be very thankful for it, but give God all the glory of it. For if thou beginest to say to thyself, "I am a man of great understanding," and if thou shalt take to thyself a high place, God may leave thee to thy natural blindness; and, then, where wilt thou be?

11. *Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God.*

Not the word of man. Have we a word of God at all? Brethren, that is a question which we have to answer nowadays. Our fathers never questioned it, they believed in the infallibility of the Bible, as we do. But, now, all our wise men do not think so. They set to work to mend the Scriptures, to pick out of the Bible that which they imagine to be inspired. Let us not do so, my brethren.

12. *Those by the way side are they that hear, then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.*

He does not mind their merely hearing. What he is afraid of is their believing, for he knows that in believing lies the secret of their salvation.

13. *They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy;*

They are very hasty converts, like men who hurriedly take a bath. They are no sooner in than they are out; it is so speedy that there is more haste than real speed with some of them.

13. *And these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away.*

"These have no root," and they never had any root. If you give your child a little garden for himself, perhaps he will go and pluck the heads for some of your flowers, and put them in the ground, and say, "There, father, see what a nice garden of flowers I have got." But they have no root, and so they very soon wither away. These are like men's converts, of whom we read that so many scores came forward the whole of the people in the parish were said to be converted, but in six weeks you cannot find one of them. How often is this the case! We begin to be afraid of those statistics, because

there is so little truth in them; and yet, if there were but one saved out of a hundred, how grateful we should be!

14. *And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection.*

How many we have of that sort! They do continue somewhat longer than the others, yet they get choked after all.

15. *But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.*

Or, “with perseverance, with continuance.” “He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved.” He is not converted at all who is not converted eternally. The work of man is temporary; the work of God is everlasting.

16. *No man, when he hath lighted a candle, covereth it with a vessel, or putteth it under a bed; but setteth it on a candlestick, that they which enter in may see the light.*

A candlestick, or lamp-stand. True religion and true doctrine are not intended to be concealed, they are meant to be seen, and if any of you are hiding these blessed things away, I pray you to do so no longer. Bring out your candle, and put it on the candlestick, that they which enter in may see the light.

17. *For nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest; neither any thing hid, that shall not be known and come abroad.*

You cannot conceal anything from the eye of God, so do not try to do so. You are like bees in a glass hive, watched while you are working, and your every movement observed. God can read the secret emotions of our hidden nature. “All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.”

18. *Take heed therefore how ye hear:*

You think, and think very properly, that we ought to take heed how we preach. Yes, that is true; but you must take heed how you hear. There are a great many criticisms upon preaching, will you kindly make a few criticisms upon your own hearing? I like what a woman said to me some time ago, about a certain preacher. She said, “I heard him well last Sunday.” Ay, that is the thing, she did not tell me how he preached, she told me how she heard, and that is the main point. Good hearers will make good preachers, in due time,

I do not doubt. God grant that we may be all good hearers! “Take heed therefore how ye hear.”

18. *For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have.*

Preaching will enrich you or impoverish you according to how you hear. There are some hearers, who have nothing, and the preacher gives them nothing. Hens like to lay where there is a nest-egg, and preachers of the gospel like to preach to hearers who have received some truth, and want more. Where there is some love to God, and love to souls, there more will come. May all of you be among those who have, to whom more shall be given! But the gospel is also “a savor of death unto death” to some who hear it. It takes away from some men what they never had. You call that a paradox; so it is, but it is true. They think they have it, but the gospel reveals to them their mistake; and so it taketh from them that which they seem to have.

19. *Then came to him his mother and his brethren, and could not come at him for the press.*

I think that his mother and his brethren were under the delusion that he was mad, and they came to seize him, to restrain him, so little did even they understand him.

20, 21. *And it was told him by certain which said, Thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to see thee. And he answered and said unto them, my mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God, and do it.*

The spiritual relationship overtops the natural. But what a sweet and condescending word this is? Dear brothers and sisters, do you hear the Word of God, and do it? If so, Christ is at home with you. Christ calls you “Brother.” He knows that you will take care of his cause. He calls you “Brother.” He has deep sympathy with you. O blessed One, thou who callest us mother and brother, how he welcome those loving and familiar titles!

LUKE 8:26-56

26, 27. *And they arrived at the country of the Gadarenes, which is over against Galilee. And when he went forth to land, there met him out of the city a certain man, which had devils long time, and ware no clothes, neither abode in any house, but in the tombs.*

To what a frightful state of wretchedness this poor creature was reduced by Satanic power! Yet he is only a picture of the state of mind into which many are brought through sin. They seem as if they could not live with their fellowmen; they have grown so mad through sin, so utterly beyond restraint, that they can scarcely be endured in ordinary society. Yet, as Christ healed this man, so he is equal to the cure of the worst case of spiritual and moral disease that may be brought before him.

28. *When he saw Jesus, he cried out, and fell down before him, and with a loud voice said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God most high? I beseech thee, torment me not.*

See the devil can make men pray against themselves; and this is what they do in common profane swearing when they imprecate all manner of curses upon their eyes and limbs. Ah, me! To what mischief and folly and misery can Satan drive his willing dupes!

29. *(For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For oftentimes it had caught him: and he was kept bound with chains and in fetters; and he brake the bonds, and was driven of the devil into the wilderness.)*

Such cases have we often seen, — young men who have been rescued from a course of vice, and who have been for a season helped towards virtue; but they have broken loose again. There was no holding them in; they had not learned self-restraint, and no one else could restrain them

30, 31. *And Jesus asked him, saying, What is thy name? And he said, Legion: because many devils were entered into him. And they besought him that he would not command them to go out into the deep.*

So, you see, dear friends, that devils can pray: “They besought him that he would not command them to go out into the deep;” that is, to their place of torment in hell. They would sooner go to the bottom of the sea than go to their own dreadful home; and, if we are half as wise as devils are, we shall dread beyond all things to be driven there. May God grant that no soul among us may ever lift up his eyes in torment, and find himself in that awful deep!

32, 33. *And there was there an herd of many swine feeding on the mountain: and they besought him that he would suffer them to enter into them. And he suffered them. Then went the devils out of the*

man, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the lake, and were choked.

Our proverb says, "They run hard whom the devil drives;" and when once he begins to drive men or swine, there is no end to their running till they are choked in the deep. Woe unto that man, then, who yields himself up to the tyrant master! Oh, seek the grace that will enable you to fling him off, never to come under his dread sway again! Better still, pray the blessed Prince of Peace to cast out the black prince of hell, and himself to rule over your spirit, soul, and body.

34. *When they that fed them saw what was done, they fled, and went and told it in the city and in the country.*

Sometimes, Christ wrought cures which were scarcely mentioned; but here, — and I only remember a second miracle at all like to it, — that of the withering of the barren fig-tree, — he wrought a miracle of judgment, and it caused a great stir and much talk. I have heard of bells at sea that only ring out in the roughest storms. Here is one that was heard when softer tones would not have been heeded: "They fled, and went and told it in the city and in the country."

35. *Then they went out to see what was done and came to Jesus, and found the man, out of whom the devils were departed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid.*

There was some clothing work done that day. I know not who provided the garments; but here was some real practical Christianity exhibited, not only by the Master in healing the demoniac, but by the friends who found clothing for this poor man. You do well, my sisters, who set yourselves to help to clothe the poor. God grant that all of them may not only be clothed, but also be led to sit at the feet of Jesus!

36, 37. *They also which saw it told them by what means he that was possessed of the devils was healed. Then the whole multitude of the country of the Gadarenes round about besought him to depart from them;*

Surely, this legion of demons must have had the same effect on them as on the poor man when Christ first came to him. These foolish people took up the same cry as the poor demoniac: "The whole multitude besought him to depart from them? Christ

sometimes hears this kind of prayer. There is many a man who has entreated that his conscience might not be troubled any more, and it never has been troubled again. But what an awful prayer for any people to pray! “The whole multitude of the country of the Gadarenes round about besought him to depart from them.”

37-39. *For they were taken with great fear: and he went up into the ship, and returned back again. Now the man out of whom the devils were departed besought him that he might be with him: but Jesus sent him away, saying, Return to thine own house, and shew how great things God hath done unto thee. And he went his way, and published throughout the whole city how great things Jesus had done unto him.*

Sometimes, it is better to be spreading the good news of the gospel than to be sitting at Jesus’ feet. It is best when we can do both; but, sometimes, the practical duty of serving our fellowmen must take the first place. Happy are they who give themselves to this work, telling to others what God has done for them!

40-46. *And it came to pass, that, when Jesus was returned, the people gladly received him: for they were all waiting for him. And, behold, there came a man named Jairus, and he was a ruler of the synagogue: and he fell down at Jesus’ feet, and besought him that he would come into his house: for he had one only daughter, about twelve years of age, and she lay a dying. But as he went the people thronged him. And a woman having an issue of blood twelve years, which had spent all her living upon physicians, neither could be healed of any, came behind him, and touched the border of his garment: and immediately her issue of blood stanchèd. And Jesus said, Who touched me? When all denied, Peter and they that were with him said, Master, the multitude throng thee and press thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me? And Jesus said, Somebody hath touched me; for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me.*

Here are we tonight, dear friends, a great crowd; and what multitudes of professed worshippers of God there are in many places! They seem to throng the Saviour; but of all, how few do really touch him so as to derive healing virtue from him! This humble, simple touch of faith is something above and beyond all the pressure of professed zeal and ardor. This touch Christ recognizes at once, but all the pressing and the squeezing of the crowd goes for nothing.

47. *And when the woman saw that she was not hid, she came trembling, and falling down before him, she declared unto him before all the people for what cause she had touched him, and how she was healed immediately.*

Here is a second confessor. First, there was a man healed; now, here is a woman healed. Both sexes may now hear from them what Christ can do. If they will not believe, oh, then, their unbelief is sad indeed!

48, 49. *And he said unto her, Daughter, be of good comfort: thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace. While he yet spoke, there cometh one from the ruler of the synagogue's house, saying to him, Thy daughter is dead; trouble not the Master.*

As if such a suppliant really did trouble him! Still, if you have been praying long, and your case appears to be hopeless, despair will whisper, "Trouble not the Master." But Christ is never troubled by our prayer; it is our want of prayer that troubles him. Even after the worst has come to the worst, we shall never trouble him if we continue our prayers. But if, on any account, we cease from them, then indeed is his heart grieved.

50. *But when Jesus heard it, he answered him, saying, Fear not: believe only, and she shall be made whole.*

"If she is actually dead, she shall be raised to life again."

51. *And when he came into the house, he suffered no man to go in, save Peter, and James, and John, and the father and the mother of the maiden.*

For Christ does not make a parade of his miracles. He loves to do his work quietly; and they that make a great noise must mind that they do not get put out when Christ is about to work a cure.

52-55. *And all wept, and bewailed her: but he said, Weep not, she is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn, knowing that she was dead. And he put them all out, and took her by the hand, and called, saying, Maid, arise. And her spirit came again, and she arose straightway: and he commanded to give her meat.*

Young saints want feeding as soon as they are converted. The conversion may be by miracle, but they will need to be fed by ordinary means. Be ready, dear people of God, with your milk for those who are but newly born: "He commanded to give her meat."

56. *And her parents were astonished. ' but he charged them that they should tell no man what was done.*

For Jesus did not wish, at least at that time, to have the story of his miracles blazed abroad. Of him the prophet had long before written: "He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench."

LUKE 8:41-56

41, 42. *And, behold, there came a man named Jairus, and he was a ruler of the synagogue: and he fell down at Jesus' feet, and besought him that he would come into his house: For he had one only daughter, about twelve years of age, and she lay a dying. But as he went the people thronged him.*

Notice the word "behold," for this was a wonder that a man so high in position to come to Christ at all, especially one who was in an ecclesiastical position, for he "was a ruler of the synagogue." Usually those who had to do with the synagogue were great despisers of our Lord Jesus; God works great wonders, however, and sometimes the camel does go through the eye of the needle. This man's name was Jairus, a common Jewish name, and you will find it was the name of one of the judges recorded in the book of Judges. Note this man's humility, "He fell down at Jesus' feet." The greatest of men must humble themselves before they can obtain mercy. Jesus Christ is always ready to receive, to accept, and bless all those who fall down at his feet, but those who lift up themselves shall find him to be their sure and swift, enemy, and the day shall come when he shall abase them to the dust. "He besought him that he would come into his house, for he had one only daughter, about twelve years of age, and she lay a-dying." She seems to have been not only the darling of the house, but of all the neighbors too for we find that all the neighbors came together to weep and to lament her. You find Matthew says that this daughter was already dead. It seems that some delay arose, so that the child died, but the father, with triumphant faith, still besought him to come and raise her, even from the very jaws of death.

43, 44. *And a woman having an issue of blood twelve years, which had spent all her living upon physicians, neither could be healed of*

any, Came behind him, and touched the border of his garment: and immediately her issue of blood stanchèd.

This disease laughs at the physicians, and whenever a cure has been effected it has always been a slow one. Hence the supernatural character of this cure, “Immediately her issue of blood stanchèd.” This is the glory of our blessed religion, that it heals sin-sick souls at once and upon the spot. The moment a man believes in Jesus, his nature is changed; he becomes a new creature: in that moment all his sins are gone: in that same hour he becomes heir of God, and joint-heir with Christ. “Immediately.”

45. *And Jesus said, Who touched me? When all denied, Peter and they that were with him said, Master, the multitude throng thee and press thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me?*

What impudence on their part! Doubtless there are many things we say of our Lord, and even to him in prayer, that are very far from such words as he should have from his disciples. There were many who touched him out of curiosity, and doubtless some out of want of respect to his person came too close to him, but there was only one who touched him with the finger of faith, which was the only true touch.

46-48. *And Jesus said, Somebody hath touched me: for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me. And when the woman saw that she was not hid, she came trembling and falling down before him, she declared unto him before all the people for what cause she had touched him, and how she was healed immediately. And he said unto her, Daughter, be of good comfort: thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace.*

Faith crowns Christ, and, therefore, Christ takes the crown off his own head and puts it upon the head of faith. “Thy faith hath saved thee.” Christ’s virtue would not have saved her without her faith, and certainly her faith could not have saved her without Christ’s virtue. We ought to note how vital faith is to true salvation, and what a high degree of importance is attached to it. Let us, therefore, if we have some degree of faith, pray for more, “Lord, increase our faith, for if a little of it may heal, what may not a great faith do?”

49. *While he yet spake, there cometh one from the ruler of the synagogues, house, saying to him, Thy daughter is dead; trouble not the Master.*

Be resigned, and say, “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away,” and expect not the blessing back again. Do as David did, who, while the child was yet alive, fasted and played, saying, “Peradventure, God will spare him, but when he was dead, fasted no more. Thy daughter is dead; trouble not the Master.” Ah! but this man knew that he who can stay the soul at the gates of death can also Bring it back from the gates of death if he wills. He that can get it from the paw of the lion can get it from the jaw of the bear. He can deliver his people at all times and at all seasons, and even Death is a conquered foe.

50. *But when Jesus heard it, he answered him, saying, Fear not: believe only, and she shall be made whole.*

“Believe only.” What a depth lies in those two words! Believe only! Ah! Lord, it ought to be the easiest thing in the world to believe thee, for thou art so truthful; thou keepest every promise to us, and yet sometimes when we are in the dark, and when circumstances go contrary to us, it is hard to believe; but is not the hardness in our own hearts? Believe only! Christian, what is your trouble this morning, what is your trial? Believe only, and let your humble faith cast your burdens upon your God. “Believe only, and she shall be made whole.”

51, 52. *And when he came into the house, he suffered no man to go in, save Peter, and James, and John, and the father and the mother of the maiden. And all wept, and bewailed her: but he said, Weep not; she is not dead, but sleepeth.*

They were so sure she was dead that they had actually hired the minstrels for her funeral — so Mark tells us — and the pipers, and the women that made those strange, Oriental lamentations were there, ready to inter her.

53, 54. *And they laughed him to scorn, knowing that she was dead. And he put them out, and took her by the hand, and called saying, Maid, arise.*

But Christ put them all out. They laughed him to scorn, and, therefore, he would not work the miracle in their presence. It is not meet to cast pearls before swine.

55. *And her spirit came again, and she arose straightway: and he commanded to give her meat.*

Do note here the word “straightway.” Just now we had the word immediately, and now we have straightway. It is one of the distinguishing features of the gospel, both of Mark and of Luke, that both evangelists use the word “eutheos,” “straightway.” Christ’s miracles do not take a long time to do; they are done straightway. If there is a distressed soul here now, your salvation need not take months and years; it may be done today, and in a moment thou mayest be able to rejoice that thy sins are forgiven, and that thou art a child of God. “She arose straightway, and he commanded to give her meat.” There are no unnecessary miracles. It wanted a miracle to give her life, but meat could sustain it, and, therefore, there is no further miracle performed.

56. *And her parents were astonished: but he charged them that they should tell no man what was done.*

But we know from another evangelist that the fame thereof went abroad everywhere, and, indeed, the healing of a soul is not a thing to be kept secret, but when any are raised from the dead the world must know it.

LUKE 9:37-62

Our Lord had been on the mountain, and had been transfigured; and when he came down, the first person that he met was the devil, with whom he had to come in contact. Whenever you or I get up on the mountain-top, and have a very happy and delightful experience, we may expect to be in a battle before long. Our joy is, however, a preparation for the conflict; it nerves our spirit, and makes us strong to meet the great enemy of our souls.

37-40. *And it came to pass, that on the next day, when they were come down from the hill, much people met him. And, behold, a man of the company cried out saying, Master, I beseech thee, look upon my son: for he is mine only child. And, lo, a spirit taketh him, and he suddenly crieth out; and it teareth him that he foameth again, and bruising him hardly departeth from him. And I besought thy disciples to cast him out; and they could not.*

There they were, all baffled and defeated; and their enemies were looking at them with many a grin of contempt and scorn. Now

comes the conquering Captain. He will turn the tide of battle when his troops are flying before the enemy. He comes, and with a word he gathers them together again.

41. *And Jesus answering said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you, and suffer you. Bring thy son hither.*

If you have been praying for some dear one, and the devil is not cast out, but the one for whom you have pleaded seems to be worse rather than better, notwithstanding all your prayers and all your efforts, hear the Master himself saying to you tonight, as he said to the father of this child, "Bring thy son hither."

42. *And as he was yet a coming, the devil threw him down, and tare him.*

This is Satan's usual way. Whenever he is about to be cast out of anyone, he grows angry; and if he cannot destroy, he will worry, just as a bad tenant will do injury to the house if he cannot any longer keep possession of it. "As he was yet a-coming, the devil threw him down, and tare him." Perhaps I speak to some tonight who are coming to Christ, and yet have worse fears than ever. They are more troubled than ever they were before. Well, you are like this poor child: "As he was yet a coming, the devil threw him down, and tare him." It was, however, the devil's last throw.

42. *And Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, and healed the child, and delivered him again to his father.*

How well it is done, how perfectly it is done, how easily it is done, how quickly it is done when Christ comes on the scene! Let us pray distinctly tonight for those who have been our failures hitherto. They will not be Christ's failures if in prayer and by faith we bring them to him.

43. *And they were all amazed at the mighty power of God.*

But while they were amazed, many of them did not believe. It is one thing to be astonished, it is another thing to be humbled, and to be led to simple faith in Christ. Never be content with any emotion but that which leads you to believe in Jesus for yourself.

43, 44. *But while they wondered every one at all things which Jesus did, he said unto his disciples, Let these sayings sink down into your ears: for the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men.*

Just after the transfiguration, just after he had cast out the devil, he tells his disciples that "the Son of man shall be delivered into the

hands of men.” The shadow of the cross fell upon Christ long before the substance of the cross was on his shoulder. He never forgot that the day would come when he must lay down his life as a ransom for many, and he never started back from it, either.

“This was compassion like a God,
That when the Saviour knew
The price of pardon was his blood,
His pity ne’er withdrew.”

45. But they understood not this saying, and it was hid from them, that they perceived it not: and they feared to ask him of that saying.

They were not as yet spiritual enough to spy out his meaning; and when they had even a faint glimmering of it, it made them feel so sad, so cast down, that they did not dare to go and ask him fully to explain it. Do not you think that you and I may have tonight, something pressing upon us that would all vanish if we but took it to Jesus? And yet we fear to ask him. Let us drive away that fear, and be familiar with our Lord, and tell him everything that vexes our spirit.

46. Then there arose a reasoning among them, which of them should be greatest.

Sad, sad, sad, a hundred times sad! When he was talking of his death, and of his being delivered into the hands of wicked men, his disciples were disputing as to who should be the greatest. Ah, brethren, but we may be guilty of quite as great an inconsistency. If, after Christ’s death for us on the cross, and after he has given up everything for us, and has washed us in his hearts blood, if we begin to want to be great and famous in the eyes of men, what wretches we are! May God deliver us from all ambition, from every kind of self-seeking, and from any measure of pride! Otherwise, we are inconsistent in pretending to follow such a Master as the Lord Jesus.

47, 48. And Jesus, perceiving the thought of their heart, took a child, and set him by him, and said unto them, Whosoever shall receive this child in my name receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me receiveth him that sent me: for he that is least among you all, the same shall be great.

The way to rise in the ranks of Christ is to go down. Be willing to do the meanest thing, and you are growing in Christ’s esteem. When you are great, you are little. When you are nothing, then are

you great. The Lord take away from us the black drops of pride that make us stand up on our dignity, and think we must be somebody! Somebody? God will not use you as long as you are somebody; but when you are nobody, then will God greatly magnify you, and use you in his Church.

49. And John answered and said, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name; and we forbad him, because he followeth not with us.

This man who was casting out demons was a dissenter, he was not with the regular church. He was doing good; but still, what right had he to do it? John said, "He followeth not with us." He was outside the pale; and even John, with all his loving disposition, felt that he must blow that candle out. He had no right to shine in anything but the regular, orthodox candlestick. "We forbad him, because he followeth not with us."

50. And Jesus said unto him, Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us.

Jesus also said that no man could do a miracle in his name, and then lightly go and speak evil of him; so that it was for the good of the cause to let the irregular practitioner go on with this business. Besides, if anybody can cast a devil out, by all means let him do it; for there is none too much of the power of casting out devils; and, remember, that these gentlemen who found fault, could not cast the devil out themselves. They had been beaten in this very task; and yet, when somebody else did it in the power of God, they began to complain, and forbid them. That is surely being like the dog in the manger. God save us from falling into that spirit!

51. And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up,

Is not that a wonderful expression? Christ is to die, and to be buried. Ah! but this word comprehends everything, "that he should be received up." Think not of the gloom of death, specially concerning your dear friends who have lately fallen asleep. Think of their being received up. They did seem to go down; they went as low as the grave; but they could not go any lower. Thank God for his abounding mercy in receiving them up.

51. He steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem,

To go where he must he scourged, and spit upon, and crucified: “He steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem.”

52, 53. *And sent messengers before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him. And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem.*

He used to be welcomed in Samaria; but now the evil spirit has come to the front again: “They did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem,” and they wished nobody to go up to the feast at Jerusalem, but desired all to stop and worship God with them on Mount Gerizim. So they would not receive him.

54, 55. *And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did? But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.*

When you read the Old Testament, you will remember that the spirit of the Old Testament was in accordance with the law of Moses; but you are not under the law but under grace, and the spirit of Christ is another spirit, not the spirit of judgment, bringing down fire from heaven, but the spirit of mercy, bringing life and blessing from above.

56. *For the Son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them. And they went to another village.*

That was all Christ did by way of punishment of these Samaritans: he “went to another village.” Yet, gentle as was this treatment, it was really a very severe punishment, such a punishment as will fall on all of you who reject Christ. If you will not receive him, he will go to somebody else. If you will not hear him, somebody else will; and if, when you hear him, you will not accept him, it may be that you will not hear him many times more, the word may never again be spoken with any power to you, but Christ will go to somebody else.

57-62. *And it came to pass, that, as they went in the way, a certain man said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head. And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.*

Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God. And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house. And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.

LUKE 9:51-56

51. *And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem,*

It is a very remarkable expression that is here used: “when the time was come that he should be received up.” It does not say “that he should depart,” or “that he should die.” It overleaps that, and speaks only of his glorious ascension into heaven. When that time was drawing near,—and, of course, his death would come before it,—Christ “stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem,” where he knew that he should die upon the cross.

52, 53. *And sent messengers before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him. And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem.*

And, of course, Jerusalem was a sort of rival of Samaria; and if he was going there to worship, they did not want him to stay with them. Yet the Samaritans were believers in the first five Books of the Bible; they accepted the Pentateuch, and they ought therefore to have practiced hospitality, imitating Abraham’s noble example. They erred both against their own Scriptures and against the dictates of humanity when they refused to receive Christ because he was on his way to Jerusalem.

54. *And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?*

James and John, two of the most loving of Christ’s disciples, John the most loving of all, startle us all by failing in the matter of love, and so being as bad as the Samaritans themselves. I have often noticed that very “liberal minded” people, who denounce bigotry in general, do it with about seven times as much bigotry as those who are out-and-out bigots. In fact, it is a wonderfully easy thing to be a bigot against all bigotry, and to be illiberal towards everybody

except fellow-liberals. Well, that is a pity; it is better far to have the spirit of Christ, even when the Samaritans refuse to exercise hospitality. At any rate, let them live. You notice that John quotes the example of Elijah; and this should teach us that the best men mentioned in Scripture did things which we may not copy, and that they did some things rightly which it would be wrong for us to do. Under special inspiration of God, Elijah, the prophet of fire, may call down fire from heaven; but you and I must not do so; we are not sent for any such purpose. Let us, therefore, be cautious how we make even prophets our exemplars in everything,

55, 56. *But he turned and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.*

If that principle had been always remembered, and followed, there would have been no persecution. To cause a man to suffer in his person, or in his estate, because of his religious opinions, be they what they may, is a violation of Christianity. Consciences belong to God alone; and it is not for us to be calling for fire, the stake, the rack or imprisonment, for men because they do not believe as we do. "The Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them."

56. *And they went to another village.*

That was the easiest thing for them to do, and a great deal better than calling for fire from heaven upon anybody. If one village would not receive them, another would; and if you cannot get on with one person, get on with somebody else. Do not grow angry with people. That is not the way to make them better. To fight God's battles with the devil's weapons is generally, in the end, to fight the devil's battles on his behalf; let none of us make such a mistake as that.

LUKE 9:57-62

57. *And it came to pass, that, as they went in, the way, a certain man said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.*

He was a volunteer; but his zeal was too hot to hold out long. He had never fully known what following Christ meant, so he came forward without a thought.

58. *And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man, hath not where to lay his head.*

He did not reckon on such hard fare as that, to lie hard, and live hard; so we hear no more of him. That is would-be follower number one.

59. *And he said unto another, Follow me.*

Not a volunteer this time; but one actually called by Christ, and commanded to come, a conscript, as it were.

59. *But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.*

We do not even know that his father was dead. He would like to stop at home till the old man was ready to be buried.

60. *Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God.*

When Christ wants men to go upon his errands, they must make no excuses. The King's business requireth haste. The King's commands are peremptory. Other people could bury the dead; let them do it. They were not alive unto this holy ministry; they would therefore be doing right in stopping to bury the dead. When Christ says to a man, "Follow me," he must not let even the tenderest relationship detain him, or the most proper duties stand in the way of the highest duty. That is would-be follower number two. We hear no more of him.

61. *And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house.*

"Lord, I will follow thee; but I must have time. I want a little allowance, and a permit to leave home. I will follow thee; but let me first go and bid them farewell, which are at home at my house." It might be a long distance; and as it was now Christ's time to send out the seventy, they must go at once, or not at all. This man intends to wait till he has gone, perhaps, fifty miles home, and back again.

62. *And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.*

You must go at once when you have orders to go, and not even the courtesies of life, or the fondnesses of affection, may make you disobey the command of the Captain. It would be a pretty thing, in the day of battle, if the soldiers came to the general, and one said, "I must go back to bury my father," and another said, "I cannot fight, for I want to go and bid farewell to my mother." The country would

soon be in a desperate state for want of soldiers; and the great King, whose war is more important than any other, will not have for soldiers those who talk in this fashion. So, you see, there are three would-be followers gone; but there are at least seventy faithful followers left, as the next chapter shows. Our third reading will be at the end of the Gospel according to Matthew.

This exposition consisted of readings from LUKE 4:16-30, 9:57-62; AND MATTHEW 28:16-20.

LUKE 10:1-22

Our Lord was about to send out seventy disciples to preach the gospel. He had already chosen his twelve apostles; now there must be seventy disciples, something like Moses had seventy elders to serve under him. Some have fancifully likened these two sets of men to the twelve wells of water and seventy palm trees at Elim; and certainly they were for the refreshment of the people.

1. After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place, whither he himself would come.

They were to go before Christ, and be his heralds. What a mercy it is when the preacher knows that his Master is coming after him, when he can hear the sound of his Master's feet behind him! What courage it gives him! He knows that, though it is very little that he can do, he is the thin end of the wedge preparing the way for One who can do everything.

2. Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest.

The seventy were very few compared with the many that were needed. There were many loiterers about then as there are now; but the labourers were few. There were preachers of the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and they were not worth a penny a hundred; but the true labourers, who watched for souls, and preached Christ with all their hearts, were very few. It is the same today; and therefore we are to pray for more labourers. A good minister always desires to see more good ministers. In a trade, every tradesman would be glad if those of the same trade as himself would move to another parish; but in the profession of a Christian minister, the more the merrier.

“Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest.”

3. *Go your ways: behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves.*

“Defenseless, harmless, into the midst of those who would devour you if I did not send you. It would be foolhardiness to go on your own account; but I send you; and he who sends his lambs among wolves will take care of them.” As I have often reminded you, the lambs and the sheep are very defenseless; and yet, after all, there are more sheep in the world than there are wolves; and although it looked as if the wolves would soon devour the sheep, the wolves are extirpated in many a country, and the sheep are still prized; and it will be so till the end.

4. *Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes:*

This time, when Christ sent out the seventy, he bade them take no provision, for they might depend upon the kindness of the people. Afterwards, when he was about to leave his disciples, he bade them take both purse and scrip, for they were going among an unfriendly people; but on this first mission he knew that there was a kindly feeling towards them, so he said, “Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes.”

4. *And salute no man by the way.*

Eastern salutations by the way took up a very long time, the people saying a lot of fine nothings to one another. Christian ministers ought to be excused from many of the lengthy courtesies of life; and if they are not excused, if they are faithful, they will take French leave to be excused. We have not time for all those pretty things that some people attend to. If we are to win souls, we must go to work like the king’s couriers, who turn not aside to attend to anything else, but devote all their energies to the mission on which they are sent.

5, 6. *And into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house. And if the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it: if not, it shall turn to you again.*

So that it will not be wasted. Wish well, and your well-wishing will do you good, even if it does nobody else good. Our chickens come home to roost. If they be curses, they will come upon ourselves; if they be blessings, they will bless ourselves as well as others.

7, 8. *And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give: for the labourer is worthy of his hire. Go not from house to house. And into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you, cut such things as are set before you:*

The Jewish Rabbis, in their perambulations, were very particular about food; it is said to have been very difficult to find a dish to their taste. This might be unclean in one way, and that not up to the mark in another; but here the Master exempts his ambassadors from attention to these minor matters. They had something better to do than to be always careful about what they should eat or what they should drink, so he said to them, "Eat such things as are set before you."

9-11. *And heal the sick that are therein, and say unto them, The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you. But into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you not, go your ways out into the streets of the same, and say, Even the very dust of your city, which cleaveth on us, we do wipe off against you: notwithstanding be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you.*

We are not to stop and argue; that is no business of ours. We have to tell our message. If men will receive it, we are glad; if they will not hear it, with a heavy heart we turn aside, and go elsewhere. Our work is to proclaim the glorious message of mercy through a dying Saviour, salvation through the great atonement; it is our business to proclaim it and leave it, the responsibility of receiving or rejecting it rests with our hearers.

12-14. *But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable in that day for Sodom, than for that city. Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon, which have been done in you, they had a great while ago repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment, than for you.*

Hearing and rejecting the gospel is the crowning sin of all. Whatever else men are guilty of, if they have not rejected Christ, they have not yet reached the summit of iniquity.

15, 16. *And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shalt be thrust down to hell. He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me.*

If the messenger delivers his message correctly, and as his Master would have him deliver it, the rejection of it, when brought by him, has the same guilt in it as the rejection of Christ himself, and the rejection of Christ is the rejection of God; so Jesus tells us here.

17. *And the seventy returned again with joy,*

Not one of the lambs had been eaten by the wolves.

17. *Saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name.*

Christ had not mentioned that in the commission. He sent them to heal the sick. The casting out of devils was included, no doubt, but it was not specifically mentioned; and this being an extra beyond the words of their commission, they were especially delighted with it Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name.”

18-20. *And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven. Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.*

That is a higher privilege than to be master over demons, or to be able to tread on serpents. That day of miracles is past; but the power of the gospel is a spiritual power the same as before. We still cast out devils; still are men delivered from the dominion of Satan.

21, 22. *In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight. All things are delivered to me of my Father: and no man knoweth who the Son is, but the Father;*

You know that he is the Son of God; you know that he is Jesus of Nazareth; but you do not know him, you cannot know him, as his Father knows him. He is known in his fullness only to the Father.

22. *And who the Father is, but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him.*

“Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?” No, thou canst not. The Son of God must reveal his Father to thee, or thou wilt never know him.

LUKE 10:25-37

25, 26. *And, behold a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou?*

That was a most appropriate answer to a lawyer. “ You ask me what you should do; well, you profess to be a teacher of the law, you ought, therefore, to know what is written in the law.”

27, 28. *And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.*

This lawyer was one of those people who know the law, yet do it not. No doubt Jesus struck the nail on the head when he gave him that very pertinent answer, “This do, and thou shalt live.” This lawyer was trying to live by teaching the law, by his knowledge of it, but Christ insists that nothing will do but a practical carrying out of its precepts.

29. *But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?*

He probably meant to say, “I have not any neighbours; I have no near relations; my father and mother are dead and gone, I have no brothers and sisters, and therefore I may be excused from the duty of loving anyone else as I love myself.” Jesus did not answer the lawyer’s question, “ Who is my neighbour?” He did not turn the eyes of the man to the poor mendicants who needed charity, but he made him look at himself.

30, 31. *And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.*

This priest had been up to the temple to perform his part of the service; he was much too good, in his own opinion, to go and touch a man who was wounded, “he passed by on the other side.”

32. *And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, He did a little more than the priest, who would not even cross the road.*

32-34. And passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, ! Denying himself, therefore, because of course he had to walk-

34, 35. *And brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, !*

A much more valuable sum than two pence of our money!

35, 36. *And gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?*

He might have said, "The Samaritan," but he would not, for the Jews hated them.

37. *And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.*

Here was a dismissal, and here was a commission too. Jesus dismissed him. "I have nothing more to say to you; 'Go.'" Here was the commission:

"Do thou likewise." Alas! I am afraid that, after most sermons people get the dismissal: "Go;" but they forget the commission: "Go, and do thou likewise." It is your privilege as well as your duty, O Christians, to assist the needy; and whenever you discover distress, as far as lieth in you, to minister practically to its relief.

LUKE 10:25-42

25-28. *And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.*

Do any of you want to live by the law? There is the law. Does any man here pretend that he has kept it? Let me ask any man here who would justify himself by his own works, have you thought of God today? How much time have you spent with God? or yesterday, how much of your time did you give him ! how many minutes?

Would you venture to say that you spent a quarter of an hour in prayer? No, perhaps, if it comes to the truth, you did not spend five minutes. Now, if you loved God with all your heart, and all your soul, and all your strength, and all your mind, do you think that five minutes would satisfy such a love as that? Oh, no, sirs, you that are unconverted give God no love at all, and how can you think therefore, that you are keeping his law which puts it so strongly, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart? and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself”? Have you ever done that? Neither the first nor the second table have you kept intact.

29. *But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbor?*

The Saviour then related this incident, which I have no doubt was really a fact.

30. *And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.*

It was a very dangerous road, a very lonely part, and robberies were very frequent there.

31. *And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.*

He did not like the look of wounds and blood. It is a very convenient thing not to recollect the miseries of your fellow-men. Do not think about their poverty: it might spoil your digestion. Do not think about their drunkenness: you might have to become a teetotaler. Do not think about their sin: you might have to go and preach in the street to them. You can live so easily and pleasantly, and even be a priest and be called “His Reverence,” if you are very careful which side of the road you take. “He passed by on the other side.”

32. *And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him and passed by on the other side.*

There are some whose looks are evidently esteemed by themselves to be so very precious, that, when they have given them, they give nothing more. He may have meant, “I will see into it.” There are a great many who are very diligent in their promises to see into a case, but we do not see much come of what they say. They

also pass by on the other side. Neither the priest nor the Levite acted as a neighbor to the man who fell among thieves.

33. *But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was:*

He looked, approached, drew near, “came where he was.”

33. *And when he saw him, he had compassion on him,*

He did not ask him how he got there, or say to him, ‘Why, man, you must have been very foolish to travel alone. My dear friend, next time you come this way, you must come armed. Did you not know this was a very ugly part of the road? And I think you are ill-advised to have been traveling quite so late.’ Oh, we have many dear friends who always favor us with their rebukes when our wounds are bleeding! “He had compassion on him.”

34. *And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.*

Oil and wine—two very good things for external application, and he used them for that. Wondrous healers these were known to be. They were expensive things too. He had brought them for his own comfort, and he freely used them for this poor man. Then he set him on his own beast; so he had to walk himself. He took the inconvenience. He relinquished his own comfort for the sake of doing good. “And he brought him to an inn and took care of him,” perhaps sat up at night with him, he took care of him after he had got him into the inn. He did not immediately commend him to the care of some paid person, but at first he took care of him. But this good Samaritan had urgent business, and was obliged to go about it.

35. *And on the morrow when he departed he took out two pence and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.*

“This is my piece of work. I want to finish it, and as I cannot stop will you kindly supply the ready money, and when I come again, I will repay you?”

36, 37. *Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbor unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that shewed mercy on him.*

Oh, you lawyer, why did you not say “The Samaritan”? Of course, he did not like to use that word. Oh, no, we never mention

them—the “Samaritans.” “The Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans;” so he would not honestly say “The Samaritan”; but he made a roundabout of it and said, “He that shewed mercy on him.”

37. *Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.*

May we all be enabled to do so by exercising constant love to those who are in need!

38. *Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house.*

There were not so very many that kept open house for Christ. But Martha did. It was her house.

39. *And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus’ feet, and heard his word.*

She was free to do so. It was not her house. She need not attend to the hospitalities of it. Her sister was quite equal to it, and so Mary did well to avail herself of the opportunity of sitting at Jesus’ feet, and hearing his word.

40. *But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me.*

She wanted to get so much ready ! to have everything nice. So she came almost scolding the Master. She was out of temper, surely, that day. She had got to be troubled. Dear friends, it is not wrong to labour and to work and do all we can, but it is wrong to grow cumbered with it, ! to get fretful, anxious, worried about this thing and that. You will not do it any better. You will probably do less, and you will do it worse. She was “cumbered about much serving.”

41, 42. *And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: but one thing is needful:*

“Thou hast forgotten much. Looking after many things, thou hast failed to remember the chief, the only needful thing.”

42. *And Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.*

And so he let her still sit there, and hear his blessed words. “Oh, that I could for ever sit With Mary at the Master’s feet. Be this my happy choice!”

LUKE 10:38-42

38-40. *Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word. But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me.*

Agitated, distressed Martha was afraid that something would go wrong with the dinner. She had too much on her hands — too much on her brain. That led her to blame her sister Mary, and to try to get the Lord to blame her too. There is a strong tincture of self-righteousness in Martha's speech.

41, 42. *And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.*

I shall not tell her to leave my instruction said our Lord or to get up from the position which she occupies. No, you may go about your work, she is honouring me as much as you are, if not more. This did not mean that Mary was perfect, or that Martha was wholly to be condemned. Both needed to learn much from Jesus, and Mary was more in the way of it. Still Martha was doing good service. But you will see that Mary could do something for Christ too when the time came.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 63.; LUKE 10:38-42; AND JOHN 12:1-8.

LUKE 11:1-26

1. *And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.*

It seemed to this disciple as if he did not know how to pray after he had heard Christ pray. The prayer of Jesus was so infinitely above anything that he had ever reached that he said, "Lord, teach us to pray;" and, as if he felt that he needed a precedent for asking such hallowed instruction, he said, Teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples." We must all feel that if we are to pray aright, we must be taught of God, by his Holy Spirit. We are full of

infirmities, and if there is any time when our infirmities are felt most, it is when we engage in prayer, but “the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as are ought.” Let us, then, breathe this prayer to our great Teacher, “Lord, teach us to pray.”

2. And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth.

When we come to God in prayer, we are apt to think first of our own necessities, but if we came aright, in the spirit of sonship, truly saying, “Our Father who art in heaven,” we should begin our prayer like this, “‘Hallowed be thy name.’ May all men honour, reverence, and adore thy holy name. ‘Thy kingdom come.’ We are not satisfied that thou shouldst be anything less than king; our heart’s desire is, ‘Reign, gracious God over us and over all men.’ ‘Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth.’ ‘Thy will be done,’ rather than ours.” Now comes a prayer for ourselves: —

3. Give us day by day our daily bread.

“Give us, O Lord, what we really need; not that which would be a luxury, but that which is a necessity. ‘Give us,’ according as we shall need it day by day, what we shall then actually need, ‘our daily bread.’” We are not warranted in asking much more than this in temporal matters. They are all comprehended in this petition as far as they are necessary, but God has not given us *carte blanche* to ask for wealth, or honour, or any such dangerous things. There is no harm in asking for bread, and he will give us that.

4. And forgive us our sins;

We also need to pray this prayer; I do not think that our Saviour ever anticipated a time when his disciples on earth would not need to pray, “Forgive us our sins.”

4. For we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation;

“Lord, do not try us and test us more than is absolutely necessary, for we are so apt to fall: ‘Lead us not into temptation;’ but, if we must be tempted,” —

4. Deliver us from evil.

“If some good end is to be answered by our being thus tested, then let it be so, but, O Lord, ‘deliver us from evil,’ and especially

from the evil one; suffer us not to fall into his hands in the hour of temptation.”

5, 6. *And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him;*

This man was in a sad plight; his friend was faint and hungry, and he himself was willing enough to entertain him, but he had “nothing to set before him.” So he acts very wisely; he goes to a friend, and asks him to lend him three loaves.

7. *And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee.*

If the man outside keeps on knocking, if he will not go away without the bread he wants for his friend, what will happen?

8. *I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.*

See the power of importunate prayer; and you, beloved, can have all that you really need for yourselves or others if you will only ask for it in the right way. If, summoning every faculty of your being, you resolve to plead, and plead, and plead yet again and again, and never take “No” for an answer, your heart’s desire shall be granted.

9. *And I say unto you, ask, and it shall be given you;*

But if asking does not seem to prevail with God, —

9. *Seek, and ye shall find;*

And if, for a while, you do not find, come closer in; —

9. *Knock, and it shall be opened unto you.*

There are different methods of praying, and each one has its special adaptation to the state in which you may be; so use that method to which the Holy Spirit guides you, so use all methods until you prevail.

10, 11. *For every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone?*

There were many stones in those days that were in appearance wonderfully like the bread which they used in the East; but would

any father mock his son by giving him one of those stones to break his teeth on, instead of bread that he could eat? Never.

11-13. *Or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?*

If you have the Holy Spirit, you virtually have all good gifts, for the Spirit is the earnest of God's love, the pledge of joys to come; and he brings with him all things that are necessary and good for you.

14. *And he was casting out a devil, and it was dumb.*

So that this poor man could not obey the Saviour's teaching. He could not pray, for he was under the influence of a dumb devil. How many of that sort there are still in the world! They cannot speak with God, they have never learned to pray, for they are possessed by a dumb devil.

14. *And it came to pass, when the devil was gone out, the dumb spake; and the people wondered.*

When the devil is driven out of men by Christ, they soon begin to pray. The little sentence, "Behold, he prayeth," was the indication of a new birth in Saul of Tarsus. The Lord grant that some here, who have been possessed by a dumb spirit, may be graciously led to pray! Remember, dear friend, that God will hear your prayer the first time you call upon him; and there is a text which says, "Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear."

15. *But some of them said, He casteth out devils through Beelzebub the chief of the devils.*

They could not have uttered a fouler falsehood than this; and if people thus slandered the Lord Jesus Christ, we need not be surprised if they speak ill of us.

16. *And others, tempting him, sought of him a sign from heaven.*

Yet they had a very striking one in the dumb devil being cast out of the man; what clearer sign than that could they have?

17, 18. *But he, knowing their thoughts, said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and a house divided against a house falleth. If Satan also be divided against*

himself, how shall his kingdom stand? because ye say that I cast out devils through Beelzebub.

If Satan cast out Satan, his kingdom would soon come to an end. Note how calmly the Saviour met these mockers and cavillers. There is no trace of anger in his words; they said the worst thing they could say about him and his work, and yet, in the coolest manner possible, he closes their mouths in the silence of shame. God grant us grace to be calm and strong even when we are most furiously assailed! It is when we are in a hurry and fret that we grow weak.

19-23. *And, if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your sons, cast them out? therefore shall they be your judges. But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you. When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: but when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armor wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils. He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth.*

Christ had made no compact with the powers of darkness. He was not casting the demons out with the devil's aid, it was absurd to think that he was. He was fighting them and casting them out by his own divine, omnipotent energy. Now comes a very striking parable:

24. *When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, —*

Satan does sometimes go out of men entirely of his own accord without being turned out. He goes out for a walk, meaning to go back again. Many a man has left off being a drunkard, or left off being lascivious, — for a time: “when the unclean spirit is gone out of a man,” —

24. *He walketh through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he saith, I will return unto my house —*

You see that he still calls it his house. He has gone out for a walk, but he has taken the key of his house with him. Some people sign the pledge, and give up being drunkards for a time, but if the devil is still their master he has only gone away for a while, and he will come back again before long. If he goes out of his own accord, he will come back when he pleases: “I will return unto my house “

24, 26. *Whence I came out. And when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished.*

The man has become quite a decent sort of fellow. He has given up his bad ways, and is a respectable member of society. The house is swept and garnished, but it is the devil's house all the same.

26. *Then goeth he, and taketh to him even other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in, and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first.*

There are, alas! many who have only a sham conversion, a conversion which lasts but a very little while. The devil was not cast out of them, but he went out of his own accord. But where Christ has come — the One who is far stronger than the devil, — to cast him out of his house, he will never be allowed to come back again, Christ will take care of that. Having won the victory, and taken the house, he will keep it by force of arms; but beware, I pray you, of a “conversion” without Christ. Beware of a “reformation” in which the devil himself is a co-worker with you, for it will come to something worse in the end. Let me read the verse again: “Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in, and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first.” He becomes a worse man than ever because once he promised to be better, but only promised it in his own strength, which was utter weakness

LUKE 11:14-54

14, 15. *And he was casting out a devil, and it was dumb. And it came to pass, when the devil was gone out, the dumb spake and the people wondered. But some of them said, He casteth out devils through Beelzebub the chief of the devils.*

One would hardly have thought that they could have gone to such a length as that; but when men hate Christ, there is nothing they will not say against him. It is no subject of surprise when great heresies arise, for they are the natural outcome of human enmity against Christ and his truth. People in such a state of heart will say anything; they will give utterance to thoughts that you could not have imagined would have entered any human brain; it is the enmity of the heart to Christ that produces this blasphemy of the tongue.

16. *And others, tempting him, sought of him a sign from heaven.*

“You are working this work from beneath,” they said, “now do something that is really from above.” They must have known that the casting out of the devil was from heaven, for Satan would never cast out Satan.

17, 18. *But he, knowing their thought, said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and a house divided against a house falleth. If Satan also be divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand? because ye say that I cast out devils through Beelzebub.*

That was a very good and sufficient answer to these cavillers. It is a comfort to us to know that error is very vulnerable; there is always a weak point about it. In this case, Christ permitted it to turn its sting upon itself: —

19. *And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore shall they be your judges.*

For some of these men had sons, who either did really cast out devils, being disciples of Christ, or else professed to do so, being exorcists, pretending to a power they did not possess. In either case, the argument was good as against the objectors.

20-22. *But if I with the finger of God cast out devil, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you. When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: but when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him. We asketh from him all his armor wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils.*

This is how Christ drives out the devil, by sheer force of arms, he overcomes him, and drives him out. He does not cajole him, invite him, or persuade him to go; but he fights with him, puts forth his omnipotent power against him, overthrows him, takes away his armor, and divides the spoil. Were you ever conscious of Hugh's fight as that? If not, be afraid of your so-called reformation, for there is no true reformation, and no true conversion, in which there is no conflict between Christ and Satan.

23, 24. *He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth. When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, —*

This is the kind of “conversion” which is not genuine: “when the unclean spirit is gone out of a man,” — “gone out” of his own accord, — and he may do that; he may leave a man, for a while,

with the evil purpose of getting him more completely into his power afterwards: "When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man," —

24. *He walketh through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he saith, I will return unto my house whence I came out.*

It was his house all the while; he left it voluntarily, he was not driven out by force; he simply left it for a time in order that he might return to it, and retain it the more completely. Now he goes back to it.

25. *And when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished.*

There has been a reformation of a sort; the man has given up drunkenness, left off swearing, and become, in certain respects, a better man. The house is swept and garnished, but there is no new tenant of Mansoul, there is no Christ come to take possession of Heart Castle.

26. *Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirit more wicked than himself, and they enter in, and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first.*

It often happens that, when men make a profession of reformation, and then relapse into their former state, they become far worse than they were before. The so-called "reformation" is all of their own doing; or rather, the greater part of it is the devil's doing. The demon within the man voluntarily went away, and now that he comes back, he brings with him "seven other spirits more wicked than himself;" and so the man is more than eight times worse than he was before the demon left him for a while.

27, 28. *And it came to pass, as he spake these things, a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice and said unto him, Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked. But he said, Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.*

The enthusiastic woman was so carried away with admiration for Christ that she thought his mother was a highly-favored woman, and she called her "blessed." "Yes," said Christ, "she is blessed; but still more blessed are they who have the Word of God in their hearts, who regard it as their own, and keep it as a great prize."

29. *And when the people were gathered thick together, he began to say, There is an evil generation: they seek a sign;*

Look back to the 16th verse: “Others, tempting him, sought of him a sign from heaven.” Christ had answered those who imputed his miraculous works to Satanic agency, now he answers these others.

29, 30. *And there shall no sign be given it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet. For as Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation.*

Jonah rose, as it were, from the dead, for he was buried in the deep, in the belly of the whale; and Christ was buried in Joseph’s tomb, yet he came back from the grave on the third day.

31, 32. *The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation, and condemn them: for she came from the utmost part of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here. The men of Nineva shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.*

The resurrection would make Christ the most conspicuous sign of God’s presence among the people, it would be the testimony of God to his Son that he was indeed the Messiah.

33-35. *No man, when he hath lighted a candle, putteth it in a secret place, neither under a bushel, but on a candlestick, that they that come in may see the light. The light of the body is the eye: therefore when thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light, but when thine eye is evil, thy body also is full of darkness. Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness.*

If thy religion be irreligion, if thy hope be a false one, if thy highest aspirations are untrue, what is thy position in the sight of God? Where art thou?

36, 37. *May thy whole body therefore be full of light, having no part dark, the whole shall be full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle doth give thee light. And as he spake, a certain Pharisee besought him to dine with him: and he went in, and sat down to meat.*

It was often a master of marvel to the onlookers that Christ went among publicans and sinners; but is it not a greater wonder that he went among Pharisees? If they asked him to their houses, it was usually because they hoped to entangle him in his talk; yet the

condescension of our Master is so great that, again and again, “he went in, and sat down to meat.”

38. *And when the Pharisee saw it, he marvelled that he had not just washed before dinner.*

Not because Christ’s hands needed washing, but because it was the custom of the Pharisees to wash before eating, and our Lord broke through the customs as he was wont to do, for he cared nothing for their inventions.

39, 40. *And the Lord said unto him, Now do ye Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup and the platter; but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness. Ye fool, did not he that made that which is without make that which is within also?*

“One needs washing as much as the other. You are so careful of your hands; will you not be more careful of your hearts?”

41. *But rather give alms of such things as ye have; and, behold, all things are clean unto you.*

“When you are full of love to your fellow-men, and make a practice of helping them, you have cleansed your heart from selfishness, and have really washed yourself then.”

42. *But woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment and the love of God; these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.*

How many, in these days, are very particular about very little things, but very careless about great things! They would not violate the law of their sect or party for the world, but the law of God is of small account to them.

43. *Woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye love the uppermost seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets.*

They loved to be called Rabbi, learned Doctors of the law. Any title that made them appear great was very sweet to them.

44. *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are as graves which appear not, and the men that walk over them are not aware of them.*

Nobody but Christ knew how base they were. They were fair to look upon, but he knew that they were villainously hypocritical, and he therefore denounced them. Ah, dear friends, the great matter is to have grace in the heart, — to have the divine light within, in the soul; and if we have not this, vain is a fair profession, vain is

everything that comes from man. If we are to be saved, we must have the grace that comes from God alone.

45. *Then answered one of the lawyers, and said unto him, Master, thus saying thou reproachest us also.*

There was no great difference between the scribes and Pharisees and the lawyers, as this man evidently perceived, and as our Lord also soon confirmed by pronouncing upon them the same kind of “Woe” that he had pronounced upon the other false teachers.

46. *And he said, Woe unto you also, ye lawyers! for ye lade men with burdens grievous to be borne, and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers.*

Their regulations as to moral and ceremonial observances were like huge faggots or crushing burdens bound together, and made into a weight intolerable for any man to carry. Many of these rules by themselves were grievous enough; but altogether they formed a yoke that neither the people nor their fathers could bear. The scribes, and Pharisees, and lawyers piled the great load upon them; but neither helped them to sustain it, nor offered to relieve them of any portion of it. “Ye lade men with burdens grievous to be borne, and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers.”

47, 48. *Woe unto you! for ye build the sepulchres of the prophet, and your fathers killed them. Truly ye bear witness that ye allow the deeds of your fathers: for they indeed killed them, and ye build their sepulchres.*

They pretended to have such regard for the holy men of the past that, being unable to honour them in person, they would set up monuments to their memory, and adorn their resting places with tokens of respect. Out of their own mouth our Lord condemned these hypocrites: “Truly ye bear witness that ye allow the deeds of your fathers.” In effect, Jesus said to them, “You confess that you are the sons of the murderers of the prophets. That admission carries with it far more than you imagine. You are their sons, not only by birth, but also by resemblance; you are veritable children of those who killed the prophets. If you had lived in their day, you would have committed the crimes you pretend to condemn.”

49-61. *Therefore also said the wisdom of God, I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they shalt slay and persecute: that the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from*

the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation; from the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, which perished between the altar and the temple: verily I say unto you, it shall be required of this generation.

The destruction of Jerusalem was more terrible than anything that the world has ever witnessed, either before or since. Even Titus seemed to see in his cruel work the hand of an avenging God. Truly, the blood of the martyrs was amply avenged when the whole city became a veritable Aceldama, or field of blood. It was before that generation had passed away that Jerusalem was besieged and destroyed. There was a sufficient interval for the full proclamation of the gospel by the apostles and evangelists of the early Christian Church, and for the gathering out of those who recognized the crucified Christ as their true Messiah. Then came the awful ending, which the Saviour foresaw and foretold.

51. *Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered.*

This “Woe” is similar to that pronounced upon the hypocritical scribes and Pharisees, and it was a terrible charge to be brought against them by him who could read their hearts, and who could truthfully say to them, “Ye have taken away the key of knowledge; ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered.” They ought to have helped men into the kingdom; instead of doing so, they hindered those who were entering. Are there not false teachers, nowadays, who put stumbling stones instead of stepping-stones in the way of those who are entering the kingdom of heaven?

53, 54. *And as he said these tidings unto them, the scribe, and Pharisees began to urge him vehemently, and to provoke him to speak of many things: laying wait for him, and seeking to catch something out of his mouth, that they might accuse him.*

Thus they proved the truth of the accusations that he had brought against them; but all their plots and traps were in vain until the hour appointed for his great sacrifice to be offered on Calvary.

LUKE 12:1-32

The teaching of our Lord, in this chapter, has very much to do with Christianity in connection with this present life, and its cares and troubles. God has nowhere promised us exemption from affliction and trial. Indeed, it has been said, with much truth, that the Old Testament promise was one of prosperity, but that the New Testament promise is one of tribulation. You may rest assured that, if it had been best for us to be taken away to heaven directly we were converted, the Lord would have done it, and that, as he has not done so, there are wise reasons why he keeps his people here for a while. The gold must go through the fire ere it has its place in the king's crown, and the wheat must be exposed to the winnowing fan ere it can be taken into the heavenly garner.

1. *In the mean time, when there were gathered together an innumerable multitude of people, insomuch that they trode one upon another, he began to say unto his disciples first of all, Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.*

Hypocrisy, however, of a kind that was calculated to spread, like leaven. If you know that a man is a hypocrite, you do not feel inclined to imitate him; but the Pharisees were such well-made hypocrites, — such excellent counterfeits, — that many people were tempted to imitate them. Our Lord teaches us, however, that it is no use being a hypocrite, —

2. *For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known.*

For many a day, the hypocrite's true character may not be discovered but there is a day coming that will reveal all secrets; and woe unto the man whose sin is laid bare in that day!

3. *Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops.*

It would be well if we all lived in such a fashion that we should not be ashamed to have everything we did placarded on the very sky. I have heard of one who said that he would like to have a window in his heart, so that everybody might see what was going on. I think that, if I had such a window in my heart, I should like to have shutters to it; and I question whether any man really could wish to have his heart open to the gaze of all mankind. But, at least,

let our lives be such that we should not be ashamed for the universal eye to be fixed upon them. If thou art ashamed to have any one of thine actions known, be ashamed to do it. If thou wouldst be ashamed to hear again what thou was about to say, do not say it. Check thy tongue; be cautious and careful. Live ever as one who realizes God's omniscience. While one of the ancient orators was speaking, on one occasion, all his hearers went away with the exception of Plato; but he continued to speak as eloquently as ever, for he said that Plato was a sufficient audience for any man. So, if there be no one but the eye of God looking upon thee, be just as careful as if thou were in the street, surrounded by thy fellow-creatures; nay, be more careful because thou art in the presence of thy Creator.

4, 5. *And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him.*

And how brave we shall be if we fear God! It is well put in that psalm which we sometimes sing, — "Fear him, ye saints, and you will then Have nothing else to fear." This great filial fear will chase out all the little, mean, graven fears, for he who, in the scriptural sense, fears God, can never be a coward in dealing with men.

6, 7. *Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows.*

God does not forget the sparrows, but he regards you with far greater interest and care, for he counts the very hairs of your head. He not only knows that there is such a person, but he knows the minutest details of your life and being. It is always a great comfort to remember that our Heavenly Father knows us. A dying man, who had been for many years a believer, had a minister at his bedside who said to him, "Don't you know Jesus?" "Yes, Sir," he replied, "I do, but the ground of my comfort is that he knows me." And, surely, there is a great force in that truth. Your Heavenly Father knows you so completely that he has counted the hairs of your head: "Fear not therefore; ye are of more value than many sparrows."

8, 9. *Also I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God: but he that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God.*

What courage this ought to give us! In company where the very name of Christ is kicked about like a football, — where everything is respected except true religion, — it is not always an easy thing to come forward, and say, “I also am his disciple.” But if you will do this, you have Christ’s pledge that he will own you before the angels of God. If you do not do so, but practically deny him by a shameful silence, you may reasonably expect that he also will deny you before the angels.

10. *And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but unto him that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost it shall not be forgiven.*

This is one of the very difficult texts of Holy Scripture. We are told, in 1 John 5:16, that “there is a sin unto death,” and I would have you very chary of ever daring to trifle with the Spirit of God, since sin against him is guarded with such special warnings. The flaming sword of divine vengeance seems to hang before the very name of the Holy Ghost; so, whatever you do, never trench upon his royal dignity, or blaspheme him in heart or by lip.

11. *And when they bring you unto the synagogues, and unto magistrates, and powers, —*

That is to say, the persecutors, — “when they bring you there, to be tried for your lives, as many have been in past ages, and some still are,”

11, 12. *Take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say: for the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say.*

I have often been amazed and delighted with the remarkable answers which were given to bishops and priests by poor humble men and women who were on trial for their lives. Perhaps you remember that Anne Askew was asked, in order to entangle her in her speech, “What would become of a mouse if it ate the bread of the holy sacrament?” “She said that was too deep a question for a poor woman like her to answer, and she begged the learned bishop on the bench to tell her what would become of the mouse; to which

his lordship answered that it would be damned. Now, what reply could be given to that but the one Anne Askew gave, "Alack, poor mouse!" I do not know that anything better could have been said; and, on other occasions, there have been answers which have been deeply theological, and there have been some which have been wisely evasive and, also some full of weight, and others full of grace and truth, for the Holy Ghost has helped his saints, in time of persecution, to answer well those who have accused them.

13-17. *And one of the company said unto him, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me. And he said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you? And he said unto them, Take heed, beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of things which he possesseth. And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: and he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?*

There were empty cupboards in the houses of the poor, and there were hungry children to be filled; so this man need not have lacked room where he could bestow his fruits.

18-20. *And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I, will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, —*

Which was the last thing he thought, he imagined that he was a very wise man: "But God said unto him, Thou fool," —

20, 21. *This night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.*

Here our Saviour shows us the frail nature of the tenure upon which we hold all earthly goods, and how it is not worth while to make these the chief things of our life; for, while they may leave us, we are quite sure by-and- by, to have to leave them.

22. *And he said unto his disciples, Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought —*

No undue, anxious thought, for such is the meaning of the word used here:

“Take no thought” —

22-30. *For your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on. The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment. Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn, and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls? And which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit? If ye then be not able to do that thing which is least, why take ye thought for the rest? Consider the like how they grow: they toil not, they spin not, and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If then God so clothe the grass, which is today in the field, and tomorrow is cast into the oven; how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith? And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things.”*

So that, with the knowledge of his guarantees to you that you shall always have enough, what need have you to be careworn and anxious? I have often looked at birds in a cage, and thought of the happiness and carelessness of heart which they seem to exhibit; and yet, if you were to forget to give them water, or if you were to fail to give them seed, how soon they would die! Perhaps the little creature has not enough to last it more than one day, but it goes on singing its tune, and leaves; all anxiety about the morrow to those whose business it is to care for it. You would be ashamed to let your bird starve; and will your Heavenly Father let you, who are not his birds, but his children, starve? Oh, no! “Your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things.”

31, 32. *But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you. Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.*

He does not give you all that you would like to have, but he is going “to give you the kingdom.” He gives the lesser gifts to others, but he is saving up the kingdom for you. Luther once said, “All the empires of the earth are only so much meal for God’s swine; but the treasure is for his children. They may have less meal, but they shall have the eternal kingdom.” Oh, how blessed are we if, by faith, we know that this is true concerning us: “It is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom”!

LUKE 12:1-44

In this chapter, our Saviour dispels the fears of his disciples concerning temporal things, and especially their fear of persecution and their fear of want.

1, 2. *In the mean time, when there were gathered together an innumerable multitude of people, insomuch that they trode one upon another, he began to say unto his disciples first of all, Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid; that shall not be known.*

What, therefore, can be the use of hypocrisy? Hypocrisy leads a man to pretend to be what he is not. His only hope lies in not being discovered; but, as Christ declares that “there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known;” hypocrisy becomes insanity as well as iniquity. Therefore, keep clear of it in every shape and form.

3-5. *Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops. And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him.*

There is nothing, comparatively, to fear in death considered by itself. If that were the end of man, he need have little or no fear even of God himself. But inasmuch as after death, there is another state which is everlasting and unchangeable, there is grave cause for the ungodly to fear him who, “after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell.”

6, 7. *Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered.*

So particular is the care of divine providence.

7. *Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows.*

And if he counts the sparrows, and cares for them, he certainly will not forget you.

8, 9. *Also I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God: but he that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God.*

Mind what you are at, then, you who never confess Christ before men; because, according to the connection of this passage, you are set down as having denied him. Christ first speaks of those who confess him, and then of those who do not confess him, and he describes them as virtually denying him. On another occasion, Christ said, "he that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad." Examine that attitude of yours, which you suppose to be neutral, and see how Christ regards it, and then ask yourself whether you can be satisfied to remain in it any longer.

10. *And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but unto him that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost it shall not be forgiven.*

What is the sin against the Holy Ghost? We do not know, and I think it is a great mercy that we do not know. I will tell you one reason why I think it is a great mercy, and that is, because the devil is continually tempting poor distracted souls to commit that sin. I have, within the past week, seen several persons who have been frequently tempted to commit it; only, happily, they did not know what the sin against the Holy Ghost was; and, therefore, they could not persuade themselves into the belief that they had committed it. I have seen many people who have told me that they have committed the unpardonable sin, and I have asked them to sit down, and tell me what that sin was; for if they could do so, I should find out something that I did not know. In every instance, I have very soon been able to say to them, "Though I do not know what the unpardonable sin is, I am quite certain that what you mention is not that sin, for such sin as yours has frequently been forgiven." It is a blessing that we are left in the dark concerning that matter; only as I have often said to you, do not presume upon your ignorance. This warning is something like the notice you see put up on certain great men's estates, "Man-traps and spring guns set here." If you go round the mansion, and say to the owner, "If you please, sir, will you tell me where the man-traps and spring guns are?" he will say, "No; why should you want to know where they are? You keep from

trespassing, and then it will not matter to you where they are.” That very indistinctness about the warning is a part of the preventive power which surrounds it. You have no right to go trespassing there at all, so keep away from the place; and you are not told what the unpardonable sin is, though there is a sin which is unto death; and there is a blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, which shall not be forgiven.

11, 12. *And when they bring you unto the synagogues, and unto magistrates, and powers, take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say: for the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say.*

He has often done this. If you will read, in Foxe’s Book of Martyrs, the answers given even by unlearned, illiterate men and women, who were taken quite at unawares, and assailed by subtle questions, you will see that they often answered in a remarkably wise way. They could not have answered better if the questions had been before them for months. They frequently burned their cunning adversaries by their wisdom and sometimes by their wit, for the Holy Ghost taught them in the same hour what they ought to speak.

13. *And one of the company said unto him, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me.*

He rudely broke in upon Christ’s discourse when he was preaching upon these important matters, because he wanted the Saviour to act the part of a judge in his dispute with his brother.

14. *And he said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you.*

Some present-day minister, if this request had been made to him, would probably have said, “Well, I may save some litigation, perhaps, if I attend to this matter.” As a general rule, brother, you had better mind your own business. Your Master, who was far wiser than you are, would not entangle himself with the affairs of this life; and, usually, true wisdom suggests that we also should keep ourselves apart from them.

15-17. *And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully:*

and he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?

This was his dialogue within himself. He might have answered at once, "As I have more than I can use, I will give some away to the poor; why should I want to lay up my fruits, to let them get moldy and corrupt? There are many poor people starving at my very gates; I will let them share in what God has so bountifully given to me." This might have been his answer to the question, "What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?" His reply, however, was a very different one.

18, 19. *And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, —*

It is "my" all through, — my fruits, my barns, my goods. The man was eaten up with selfishness, and did not recognize the fact of his stewardship. He did not know that even his own soul did not belong to him; he thought it did: "I will say to my soul," —

19, 20. *Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?*

"Thou fool." That is God's opinion of the man who means to build bigger barns in order that he may himself enjoy what is about to be taken away from him. He was a fool to be laying up in store for others to scatter. Many a miser's heirs have lived to ridicule him. He was the rake that gathered up a heap of gold, and they are the shovel and fork that scatter it. They drink the old man's health, and are much obliged to him for stinting himself that they may drink so deeply.

21, 22. *So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God. And he said unto his disciples, Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought —*

It really means, "Make it not a matter of anxious care. Take no inordinate thought" —

22, 23. *For your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on. The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment.*

Everybody admits the truth of this saying of the Saviour, though all do not see everything that is involved in it. Therefore, as the soul is more important than all else, look well to your soul, look more to your life than to your meat.

24. *Consider the ravens:*

It is quite possible that some of them were flying overhead just at that time, and that Christ pointed to them, and said, "Consider the ravens;" —

24, 25. *For they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls? And which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit?*

"You cannot lengthen your body;" or perhaps the Saviour meant, "You cannot lengthen out your life."

26. *If ye then be not able to do that thing which is least,*

It really is a matter of very slight consequence whether you are a little shorter or taller.

26-29. *Why take ye thought for the rest? Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If then God so clothe the grass, which is today in the field, and tomorrow is cast into the oven; how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith? And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind.*

Full of carking care and wearing anxiety about little things; or, indeed, about anything.

30. *For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things.*

Therefore he would have you so live — industriously, prudently, thriftily, — that you shall get these things, and shall not waste them when you have them; but he would not have you live in an anxious, worrying, depressed spirit, as if you had no God, no Heavenly Father, no all-sufficient Friend; and as if there were no all-wise providence, and you were left to drift about uncared for and alone. It is not so. O thou God of the lilies and God of the ravens, thou wilt be the God of thy people too!

31, 32. *But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you. Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.*

He may not give you much here; but, in due time, he will give you the kingdom. He may give to worldlings more of these secondary things —these husks, these mere illusions, these mirages of the desert — than he gives to you; but for you there is prepared a city that hath foundations, and a kingdom that shall never pass away. Therefore patiently wait until the appointed time; and fear not; “for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

33, 34. *Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which was not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*

It is not only important to lay up that which can truly be called treasure, but also to lay it up in the right place: “a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth.” Such treasure as that will not harm us if we set our heart upon it, and, by-and-by, in God's good time, we and our treasure shall both be in heaven.

35-37. *Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them.*

This always seems to me to be one of the most remarkable of our Lord's utterances while he was here upon the earth. His whole life was one of condescension, which was never more clearly manifested than it was when he, the Lord and Master of all, took the position of servant of all, and washed his disciples' feet; yet he here tells us that, if he finds us watching when he comes again, he will once more take his place as our servitor.

38-44. *And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants. And this know, that if the goodman of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his*

house to be broken through. Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not. Then Peter said unto him, Lord, speakest thou this parable unto us, or even to all! And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath.

LUKE 12:13-44

13, 14. *And one of the company said unto him, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me, And he said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?*

Our Lord was a Judge and a Divider, but his sphere of action was spiritual; he did not interfere in the personal disputes of those who gathered round him.

15. *And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.*

Christ took advantage of this man's request, and made it the text for a sermon against covetousness.

16-19. *And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: and he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.*

Notice how fond the rich man was of the little pronouns "I" and "my." He lived only for himself, and was an embodiment of that covetousness which our Lord abhorred and denounced. What a vivid contrast there is between what the man said to himself and the Lord's message to him!

20. *But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?*

This may also be said to any one of you; where would you be if the Lord did say to you, "This night thy soul shall he required of thee"?

21-23. *So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God. And he said unto his disciples, Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on. The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment.*

Do not spend your care on the lower things; care most for that which is most worth caring for! more for the body than for raiment, more for life than for meat, and consequently, more for the immortal spirit than for aught besides, and more for God even than for your own soul. Let your cares be rated according to their objects; to set a caring, anxious care upon the lesser things, will be folly indeed.

24. *Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls?*

It seems, then, that those that are fed by God are much better fed than those that are fed by men. The ravens know no care whatever, for God cares for them; and, if we could ever bring our hearts into such a condition that we felt that everything to do with us was in God's hand, we should enter into a blessed, hallowed freedom from care in which we should find a sweet repose of spirit.

"Beneath the spreading heavens,
No creature but is fed;
And He who feeds the ravens,
Will give his children bread."

25, 26. *And which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit? If ye then be not able to do that thing which is least, why take ye thought for the rest?*

It would be a very small matter to you if you were a foot taller, or if you were a foot shorter. It is not that the making of yourself a cubit taller or shorter would be a small thing to do, but it is a small thing in its result; it is an inconsiderable matter whether a man is tall or short. If ye, then, be not able even to reduce your stature, or to increase it, take no anxious thought about other things.

27. Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

So that God cares not only for things that have necessities, as ravens have, but for things that have luxuries, as lilies have. When God does anything, he does it well. He is a grand Housekeeper; he does not measure out so many ounces of bread per diem, as if we were in a workhouse, but “they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing.” “No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.” The lilies might do as well without their golden hues, they might ripen their seed without the lengthened stems that lift them where they can be observed; but God takes more care of them even than Solomon did of himself, for “Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.” Now, dear children of God, if you trust your Heavenly Father, he will see that you have no cause for care. If you trust him with your souls, he will not give you a bare salvation, but a rich robe of righteousness to cover all your nakedness. When he does any work, he does it after a better fashion than the wisest of men could do it; and nature herself, working as she does for the lilies, is only God working in another way. But when God himself, without the intervention of the laws of nature, works in the kingdom of his grace, he does it perfectly; he does it gloriously.

28. If then God so clothe the grass, which is today in the field, and tomorrow is cast into the oven; how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith?

Your life is not like that of the grass, or the flower of the field, that fades on a summer’s day. God will take care of you, and the everlasting things shall have from him a care even greater than he gives to the temporal. Yet how much God really does for flowers ! flowers that only open their cups in the morning, and shut them in death at night! How much of skill and wisdom there is even about them! Shall there not be greater skill and wisdom employed upon you who, when you have once begun to bloom in the light of God, shall go on blooming, and flowering, and shedding your perfume throughout the endless ages?

29, 30. And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. For all these things in the nations of

the world seek after and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things.

For you, the immortal, the twice-born, the very body-guard of Christ, to live for such things as the men of the world live for, is to degrade the peerage of heaven, to bring those who are of the blood royal of the skies down to a gross pursuit. No; let your whole thought, and heart, and life, be spent for something higher and better than these things; and leave the lower cares with your Father.

31, 32. *But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you. Fear not little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.*

When Abraham had many sons, he gave to each one of them a portion and sent them away; but Isaac had the family heritage. It is the same with you. The Lord may give to others more than he bestows upon you in this life, but for you he reserves the kingdom. Are you not content with that, whatever else your Father gives you or withholds from you?

33. *Sell that ye have, and give alms;*

That is to say, do not merely give a little, which you can readily spare; but sometimes even pinch yourselves to relieve the poor.

33, 34. *Provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*

You are sure to live for that which is the choicest object of your love. Whatever you think to be first, will be first; and what you love in your heart, you will be sure to follow in your life.

35, 36. *Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately.*

Many people are thinking just now of Christ's first advent, but this passage bids us watch for his glorious second coming.

37. *Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them.*

I never read this verse without wondering at the marvelous condescension of our Lord. Even in the day of his appearing in

glory, his thoughts will be more about his people than about himself: "He shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them."

33. *And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants.*

We cannot tell when he will come, but "Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching."

39-44. *And this know, that if the goodman of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broke through. Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not. Then Peter said unto him, Lord, speakest thou this parable unto us, or even to all? And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath.*

Wonderful words! We cannot at present tell all that they mean; but, by God's grace, may they be fulfilled to us when our Lord comes to take us to himself!

LUKE 12:13-48

13, 14. *And one of the company said unto him, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me. And he said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?*

Our Lord kept to his proper business, which was the preaching of the gospel and the healing of the sick. We find, in these days, that the minister of the gospel is asked to do almost everything. He must be a politician; he must be a social reformer; he must be I know not what. For my part, I often feel as if I could answer, "Who made me to do anything of the kind? If I can preach the gospel, I shall have done well if I do that to the glory of God, and to the salvation of men. Surely there are enough people to be judges and dividers, there are quite sufficient politicians to attend to politics, and plenty of men who feel themselves qualified to direct social reforms. Some of us may be spared to attend to spiritual affairs."

15. *And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.*

Jesus gave his hearers a good moral and spiritual lesson from the occurrence which they had witnessed, and then passed on to speak of the matter which always occupied his thoughts.

16, 17. *And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth, plentifully: and he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?*

He did not enquire, "Where can I find a needy case in which I may use my superfluity for charity?" Oh, no! "How can I hoard it? How can I keep it all to myself?" This was a selfish, worldly man.

18-20. *And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool,*

Other men said of him, "This is a wise man; he minds the main chance; he is a fellow plentifully endowed with good sense and prudence;" but God said unto him, "Thou fool, "

20. *This night thy soul shall be required of thee:*

I should like you to set that up as the counter picture to the one that we had this morning, "Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise." That was said by Christ to the penitent thief, but to this impenitent rich man, God said, "This night thy soul shall be required of thee."

20, 21. *Then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.*

"He that layeth up treasure for himself." That was the chief point of this man's wrong-doing, his selfishness. His charity began at home, and ended there; he lived only for himself.

22, 23. *And he said unto his disciples, Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on. The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment.*

Have no anxious, carking care. Do not be looking after the inferior things, and neglecting your soul. Take care of your soul; your body will take care of itself better than your soul can. The raiment for the body will come in due time; but the clothing for the soul is the all-important matter. Therefore, see to that.

24-27. *Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls? And which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit? If ye then be not able to do that thing which is least, why take ye thought for the rest? Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.*

The lilies simply stand still in the sunlight, and silently say to us, "See how beautiful are the thoughts of God." If we could just drink in God's love, and then, almost without speech, show it in our lives, how we should glorify his name!

28. *If then God so clothe the grass, which is today in the field, and tomorrow is cast into the oven; how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith!*

But you have some faith, else the Saviour would not have said to you, "O ye of little faith!" The man who has no faith may well go on fretting, toiling, spinning; but he that hath faith, as he goes forth to his daily labour, looks beyond that to the God of providence, and thus God keeps him without care, and provides for him.

29, 30. *And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things.*

He knows that you must go and work for these things; but he would not have you fret and fume about them. "Your Father knows." He will provide. It is enough for him to know his children's wants, and he will be sure to provide for them.

31. *But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you.*

Thrown in as a kind of make-weight. You get the spiritual, and then the common blessings of life shall be added unto you.

32. *Fear not, little flock; for it is your Fathers good pleasure to give you the kingdom.*

That is your share. Others may have inferior joys; but you are to have the kingdom. The Lord could not give you more than that; and he will not give you less.

33. *Sell that ye have, and give alms;*

Do not merely give away what you can spare; but even pinch yourself sometimes, and sell what you can that you may have the more to give.

33. *Provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth.*

Put some of your estate where it cannot be lost. Take care that you invest some of it for God's poor, and God's work, where the interest will be sure, and the investment will be safe.

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

Make sure of that. Your heart will go after your treasure; and if none of your treasure has gone to heaven, none of your heart will go there.

35, 36. *Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. Our Lord constantly reminded his disciples that the time would come when he must leave them for a season; but he always kept before them the thought of his return, and bade them watch for him as those that wait for their lord.*

37-39. *Blessed are those Servants, whom the lord when he cometh, shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them. And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants. And this know, that if the good man of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken through.*

As he does not know when the thief will come, he is always watching.

40, 41. *Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not. Then Peter said unto him, Lord, speakest thou this parable unto us, or even to all?*

And the Lord told him that, while it was spoken to all, it had a very special bearing upon apostolic men, upon preachers of the gospel, ministers of Christ.

42-44. *And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath.*

Just as Pharaoh made Joseph ruler over all Egypt, so, when men have done well in the ministry of Christ, he will promote them, and they shall do still more for him.

45, 46. *But and if that servant say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming, and shall begin to beat the menservants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken; the lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder.*

This is a truly terrible expression. We are sometimes charged with using too strong expressions with regard to the wrath to come. It is quite impossible that we should do so, even if we tried, for the expressions of the Lord Jesus are more profoundly terrible than any which even mediaeval writers have ever been known to invent.

46. *And will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers.*

The worst portion that any man can get is with the unbelievers. Are there not some here who may, in this verse, see what a dark doom theirs will be if they are among those who are described as being out in sunder, and having their portion with the unbelievers?

47. *And that servant, which knew his lords will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.*

So that there are different measures of responsibility; there are degrees in guilt, and degrees in punishment.

48. *But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall he beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.*

O my brethren! Let those of us who are privileged with the possession of the gospel, and privileged with any amount of ability to spread it, enquire whether we could give in a good account if the Lord were to come tonight, and summon us, as stewards, to give an account of our stewardship. God bless to us all the reading of his Word! Amen.

LUKE 12:22-48

22-23. *And he said unto his disciples, Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on. The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment.*

If you are God's servants, he will clothe you. There is no servitor of the Lord of hosts who will have to go without his livery, and not one who belongs to his vast household, even though he is but a menial in God's kitchen, who will ever be permitted to starve.

24-26. *Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls? And which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit? If ye then be able to do that thing which is least, why take ye thought for the rest?*

How little you can do for yourself after all! Therefore, leave the whole with God.

“Make you his service your delight,
He'll make your wants his care.”

The best cure for the cares of this life is to care much to please God. If we loved him better, we should love the world far less, and be less troubled about our portion in it.

27, 28. *Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of those. If then God so clothe the grass, which is today in the field, and tomorrow is cast into the oven; how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith?*

What a title to address to us, — “O ye of little faith!” — but, depend upon it, we deserve it when we are full of anxious care. Much care argues little faith. When faith is strong, she casts all her care on him who careth for us. Oh, that we could but be rid of that which, after all, is not our business, and give our whole mind, and

heart, and soul, to what is our business, namely, to please our Creator, our Redeemer, our Friend!

29, 30. *And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. For all those things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things.*

Is not that a sweet word? “Your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things.” There used to be a hymn which was sung a good deal at revival meetings, it had a very sweet refrain, “This my Father knows.” If you cannot yourselves understand your ease, your Father knows all about it. If you cannot make other people comprehend it, yet your Father knows all that needs to be known. Whatever you really require, even for the present life, need not be any cause of anxiety to you, believers, for “your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things.” There is no need, therefore, for you to seek “what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink.”

31, 32. *But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all those things shall be added unto you. Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.*

He gives others a good many things, but he will give you the kingdom. Just as Abraham gave portions to the sons of Keturah, and sent them away; but Isaac had the covenant blessing; so, “it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

33. *Sell that ye have, and give alms;*

Not only give to the poor till you pinch yourself, but even pinch yourself to do it.

33-35. *Provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning;*

Never be undressed, as it were, in a moral or spiritual sense: “Let your loins be girded about.” Never be in the dark spiritually. Keep in the light; let your lamp be ever burning. Not only walk in the light of God but let your light shine before men.

36. *And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately.*

Brethren, whatever theory we hold about the future, may God grant that it may never prevent our looking for the coming of Christ as an event which may happen at any moment, and being on the watch for it as a matter the date of which we do not know! The practical essence of all Scriptural teaching upon that subject is just this, "Ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord, when he will return from the wedding."

37. *Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them.*

I will not attempt fully to explain this passage of Scripture in the few moments which I can give to it, but it is very wonderful. Our Lord has been here once, and girded himself to serve us; but is it not extraordinary that here is an intimation of a second girding of himself that he may serve us? Oh, how fond is Christ of being the servant of servants, ministering unto those who delight to minister unto him! What an honour does the Captain of our salvation put upon the meanest soldiers in this war when he declares that, if we be found faithful, he will gird himself, and come forth and serve us!

38-40. *And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants. And this know, that if the good-man of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken through. Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not.*

Peradventure he will not come when the modern prophetic say that he will appear, but he will come when least of all he is expected. Therefore, expect the unexpected; look for your Lord to come when the many go to sleep. Perhaps, while yet I am speaking, ere this gathered assembly shall disperse, there may be heard the cry, "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him." Are our loins girded? Are our lamps burning? God bless his own truth to the effecting of both those ends!

41-43. *Then Peter said unto him, Lord, speakest thou this parable unto us, or even to all? And the lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season?*

Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing.

Distributing the bread of life, giving milk to babes and meat to strong men; not behaving as if he were master, but acting only as a steward who serves out, not his own, but his master's stores. Oh, that we who are ministers of Christ may be always doing this! So shall we obtain the blessing promised to "that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing."

44, 45. *Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all the he hath. But and if that servant say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to beat the menservants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken;*

First, he becomes lordly, he acts as if he were master, beats his fellowservants, he is harsh and ungenerous, and assumes great dignity and gives himself airs. Let him mind what he is at, for his Master will come, and catch him usurping his place. The next danger is that he begins to enjoy himself, to be voluptuous, self-indulgent: "To eat and drink, and to be drunken." He becomes intoxicated with pride, he is carried away with divers errors; in making much of himself he loses his head, and acts like a fool.

46. *The Lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers.*

Truly, our Lord uses very strong words; the Saviour is not one of your effeminate preachers like those of modern times, who seem as if the very word "hell" would burn their lips, and who will not warn men to flee from the wrath to come. It is an unkind and heartless want of humanity which prevents their being faithful to the souls of men. The great Lord, who is full of tenderness, does not hesitate to use the sternest figure, and the most terrible language, simply because he does not consult his own feelings but aims at the highest good of those with whom he deals. This is a terrible word for us if we are unfaithful at the last: "He will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers." It is an awful thing that the unfaithful servant gets his portion with those who do not believe in Christ. The Lord preserve all of us from such a doom!

47, 48. *And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with*

many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with a few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.

Under the shadow of such solemn texts as these, let us draw near to God in earnest prayer.

LUKE 12:35-48

35-37. *Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them.*

This is a wonderful passage. Christ has already had one turn as a servitor. He was Master and Lord, yet he washed his disciples' feet; but he says that, if we are watchful and faithful, if we truly serve him, the day shall come when, in all his robes of glory, he shall gird himself, and serve us.

38-40. *And if he shalt come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants. And this know, that if the goodman of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken through. Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not.*

This is a warning to Christ's own people; but it is still more a warning to those who do not know him. Suppose he were to come tonight; where would you be, you who have hitherto lived as if you were your own masters, and were by no means the servants of Christ? Take heed unto yourselves, for ye know not when your Lord shall come.

41-44. *Then Peter said unto him Lord, speakest then this parable unto us, or even to all. And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his Lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so*

doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath.

What rewards Christ has in store for his people. If we will but be his servants now, and the servants of our brethren, he will make us rulers over all that he has. I cannot attempt to explain all that these words mean, but I bless the Lord that they are absolutely true.

45, 46. *But and if that servant say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shalt begin to beat the menservants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken; the lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers.*

Again let me say that I cannot attempt to explain all that these words mean; but, oh! what will be the horror, the terror, of the punishment which will fall upon the unfaithful steward, the minister who is untrue to his holy calling, the professor who says that he is a child of God, and a steward of Christ, and yet is unfaithful to his trust? I will read our Lord's words again. You know how we are sometimes accused of saying things too dreadful about the wrath of God in the world to come; but, beloved, we never say anything dreadful enough. If you will carefully examine the Word of God, you will find there expressions such as even Dante or the mediaeval preachers, with all the horrors they depicted, never; surpassed. We cannot exaggerate the awful depth of meaning which we find in the words of the loving Christ himself; let me read this verse again: "The lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers."

47, 48. *And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.*

Judge ye, then, brethren and sisters, how much of ability and talent your lord has entrusted to you, and be not content to have rendered him some service; but look for proportionate service, and humble yourselves in his presence if your service is not in

proportion to the opportunities entrusted to you. Who among us can refrain from humbling himself before God when he thinks of this?

LUKE 13:1-13

1. *There were present at that season some that told him of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.*

This was a matter of common town talk, so of course they brought the news to Jesus. Notice how wisely he used this shameful incident. You and I too often hear the news of what is happening, but we learn nothing from it; our Saviour's gracious mind turned everything to good account; he was like the bee that gathers honey from every flower.

2. *And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things?*

“Do you imagine that there was some extraordinary guilt which brought this judgment upon them, and that those who were spared may be supposed to have been more innocent than they were?”

3. *I tell you, Nay; but, except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish.*

There would come upon them also, because of their sin, a sudden and overwhelming calamity. When we read of the most dreadful things happening to you we may conclude that something similar will happen to us if we are impenitent; if not in this world, yet in that which is to come.

4, 5. *Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay; but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*

This was a foreshadowing of the overthrow of Jerusalem, and the razing of its walls and towers to the ground, which happened not long after; and even that overthrow of Jerusalem was but a rehearsal of the tremendous doom that shall come upon all who remain impenitent.

6. *He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none.*

He had a right to seek fruit upon the tree, for it was planted where fruit-bearing trees were growing, and where it shared in the general culture that was bestowed upon all the trees in the vineyard.

7. Then he said unto the dresser of the vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?

This was sound reasoning. "It yields nothing, though it draws the goodness out of the ground, and so injures those trees that are producing fruit; 'cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?'"

8-9. And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: and if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.

He asks a respite, but only a limited one. "After that, thou shalt cut it down." If, after the trial of another year, it shall still be fruitless, then even the pleader will not ask for any further respite.

10, 11. And he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. And, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself.

If she was there when Christ was speaking about the fruitless fig tree I feel pretty certain that she said "That must mean me; I am the fruitless fig tree," but the Master did not mean her, he had other words and more cheering tidings for her.

12. And when Jesus saw her, he called her to him, and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity.

Oh, what glad news this must have been to her! How it must have thrilled her whole body! As she learned that she was to be restored to an upright position, what delight must have filled her heart!

13. And he laid his hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.

What expressions of fervent gratitude, what notes of glad exultation came from that woman's joyful lips! Surely, even cherubim and seraphim could not more heartily and earnestly praise God than she did when "she was made straight and glorified God."

LUKE 13:6-9

6. *He spake also this parable, A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none.*

Let us, every one, read this parable as if our Lord Jesus Christ were now speaking it for the first time to each of us. There is a lesson here which we shall do well to heed.

7-9. *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.*

“In that case, I will plead for it no longer, for it will have had its full time of testing, and every opportunity of bearing fruit: ‘After that thou shalt cut it down.’” The parable is so simple that it needs no explanation, and therefore our Lord Jesus has not given any. May we all make a personal application of its solemn teaching! Amen.

This exposition consisted of readings from SOLOMON’S SONG 8:11-14; ISAIAH 5:1-7; AND LUKE 13:6-9.

LUKE 13:6-30

6. *He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none.*

It was a fig tree, a fruit-bearing tree by profession, so it ought to have borne fruit. It was planted; it was not a wild tree, it was planted in a vineyard, in the proper place for fig trees to grow, in good soil; and therefore the owner of it had a right to come and look for fruit on it; but he found none. Have we not here, tonight, some who are planted in the Church of God who ought, by their profession, to be bearing fruit, but they are not? Christ has come, and he has looked for fruit; but he has found none.

7. *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?*

The owner seems to say, “If I had not found fruit the first year, I should have thought that the season was unfavourable; if I had

found no fruit the second year, I might have thought that peradventure the tree was a little out of condition, and would come round again; but when I come for three years, and three years consecutively I find no fruit, then it is clear that the fig tree is a barren one. Why should it stay here, and spoil the soil, occupy the place that a good fig tree might have occupied, and take away the nutriment from other trees?" So if, after many years, some of you have brought forth no fruit, God may well complain about you. You are eating the bread that might have nourished a saint. You are occupying a place in which your influence is injurious to others. Others do less because you do nothing. I pray the Holy Spirit to bring this home to the conscience of any barren professor whom it may concern, lest the command should go forth, "Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?"

8, 9. *And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: and if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.*

Even the vinedresser's pleading has a limit: "Give it one more year." He admits that the time must come for the axe to cut down the tree that is fruitless. The cumber-ground tree cannot stand for ever; it is unreasonable that it should. And you cannot be permitted to live for ever in sin; you cannot be allowed to taint the air with blasphemy for another fifty years. There must come an end to such a life as yours, and that end may come very soon. The edge of the axe is sharp, and the hand that wields it is strong. Beware, O barren tree!

10. *And he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath.*

When there happened a very remarkable miracle. The parable that preceded it was a parable of judgment; the miracle that followed was a miracle of mercy and grace.

11, 12. *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,*

You can see her slowly moving along, bent double. Hers was a painful walk, but she came at Christ's call.

12, 13. *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.*

See what Christ can do. After I had preached this morning, I had to speak with just such a woman as this, one who has been, for many years, the victim of deep despondency. How I wished that I could lay my hands on her, and say, "Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity"! But we cannot work such a miracle as that. It is Christ who must do it all; and blessed be his name, he is always great at a pinch! Christ loves to come in at a dead lift. When we are all beaten, and we have reached man's extremity, then it is Christ's opportunity. Oh, you poor despairing woman, bent double by your sadness, the Lord's hand can restore you: and we pray for you tonight, even the thousands of Israel pray for you at this moment! Lord, lay thine hand upon that poor child of infirmity!

14. *And the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation,*

Wretched creature, to be indignant at Christ's doing good! There is no reckoning with self-righteous people. They are mad themselves, and they think others so.

14, 15. *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, —*

It served him right. This is just the word that would naturally come to the lips of the Saviour. Because he was loving and tender, he could not endure this hypocritical indignation: "The Lord then answered him, and said, Thou hypocrite,"

15, 16. *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 front this bond on the sabbath day?*

A very conclusive argument. You may do deeds like this on the Sabbath; and you may come and be healed on the Sabbath, even though it should involve you in a journey. It is so needful that you should get the bread of heaven, so needful that you should get the blessing of Christ, that on this day you may come and be healed.

17-19. *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. 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.

You get a little grace tonight; let that Divine Man take but a grain of the mustard seed of his grace, and drop it into your heart, which he will have prepared like a garden, and there is no telling what will come of it. That sigh, that tear, that wish, will grow into holiness of life and zeal of conduct. It may be but very little in its beginning, but it will grow. Both good and evil begin with very small eggs, but they grow into great things.

20. *And again he said, Whereunto shall I liken the kingdom of God?*

Now take the bad side, and see how the kingdom of God may be perverted and injured by evil influences.

21. *It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.*

That woman of Rome has hidden her leaven in the church, and it has leavened the whole; and now the woman of intellect has put her leaven into the church. Conceited self-invention of new doctrines, perversion of the simplicity of the gospel, that kind of leaven has been hidden in the meal of the church, and it is leavening the whole. God help us to keep out the leaven both of Romanism and of Rationalism!

22. *And he went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem.*

His face was toward the cross, he was working his passage to his sacrifice, and preaching his way to that place where he should complete our redemption. This is a wonderful picture of Christ: "teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem."

23. *Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved?*

What business is that of ours? Our business is far more practical, to be saved ourselves, and to endeavor to be the means of saving others. Jesus did not answer the question; but he did what was better.

23, 24. *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.*

You can get into the broad road without striving; but you must "strive to enter in at the strait gate." Strive for that which requires self-denial, that which humbles you, that which goes against the

grain, that which is not according to human nature. Do not imagine that grace is to be had while you are half asleep, and that heaven is to be gained on a feather bed. Strive, strive, for many will seek in vain to enter. Seeking is not enough; it must come to a holy violence: "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 will that be? That will be when you are in another state.

25. *When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath, shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us;*

They will be very respectful; they will call him, "Lord." They will be very earnest; they will pray, "Lord, Lord." They will be very simple and very honest in their request: "Open unto us." They will be very personal: "Open unto us." Such will the prayers of the ungodly be when they wake up to the fact that they are shut out of heaven.

25-26. *And he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets.*

They came to the communion-table. They used to hear sermons indoors and out of doors. "Thou hast taught in our streets."

27. *But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity.*

They shall be judged by their works. If they were workers of iniquity, it proved that they were unrenewed and unsaved. Christ will not endure their company, but will say to them, "Depart from me."

28. *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.*

You who thought that you had a share in the kingdom of God, and were, by birth, the natural heirs of it: "You yourselves thrust out."

29, 30. *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.*

The least likely to be saved shall be saved; the blackest sinners, the vilest outcasts, the grossest unbelievers, shall be brought to repentance and faith, and shall be saved; while those who were first in privileges, children of godly parents, professors of religion, those who appeared in every way likely to be saved first, will be left to the last, and be shut out of the kingdom of God, never to enter. God grant, in his infinite mercy, that nobody in the Tabernacle tonight may be of that unhappy number! Amen.

LUKE 13:10-17

10-17. *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.*

His adversaries might well be ashamed, and the people might well rejoice at such a display of his power and mercy; but the point I want you to notice is that the poor woman was set at liberty by the Lord Jesus on the Sabbath-day. There is another Sabbath miracle recorded in the next chapter. (See Luke 14:1-6)

This exposition consisted of readings from LUKE 4:33-36; 6:6-11; 13:10-17; 14:1-6; JOHN 5:1-9; ND 9:1-14.

LUKE 13:10-23

10-12. *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,*

With that quick eye of his which was always in sympathy with his audience.

12-14. *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,*

In what a cold-blooded, heartless manner he must have said it, you may well imagine. For a man not to rejoice when he saw his poor fellow-creature thus healed, shows that he must have been destitute of much milk of human kindness, and that bigotry had dried up his soul.

14. *There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the sabbath day.*

He did not dare to speak to Christ. I suppose the majesty of Christ's manner overawed him, so he struck at the people directly, and at Christ through them. Now our Lord did not go sideways to work when he replied to him.

15-17. *The Lord then answered him, and said, Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering? And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day? And when he had said these things, all his adversaries were ashamed: and all the people rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by him.*

The Jews had reduced the Sabbath to a day of idleness and luxury. The only thing they forbade themselves was the doing of anything. Now the Sabbath was never intended to be spent in idleness and luxury. It should be spent in the worship of God; and works of mercy and works of piety make the Sabbath Day holy, instead of being contrary to its demands. And our Saviour, by giving

rest to that poor burdened woman, was in truth, making Sabbath in her body and in her soul.

18, 19. *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.*

A little grace grows and becomes great grace. If thou hast at present but little faith, be thankful for that little. Bring it to Christ; let it feed upon him; and thy mustard seed will grow till it becomes a tree. The same is true of the gospel throughout the world. We need never be afraid because we happen to be few in number. If we have got the truth, the truth will live; and if the truth be small as the mustard seed, there is life in it — vitality in it, and it is sure to grow ere long. We must not be afraid to be in the minority. Majorities are not always right. Are they ever? Perhaps sometimes.

20, 21. *And again he said, Whereunto shall I liken the kingdom of God? It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.*

Some read this as a parable to set forth the power of evil, and I do not doubt that it does set it forth. At the same time it sets forth the power of good, too, for it is put side by side with the other as the likeness of the kingdom of God. And truth in the soul does work, and ferment, and permeate the entire nature, if it be placed there.

22, 23. *And he went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem. Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved?*

That is a question that I have heard a great many times. What is the fascination that makes men so fond of asking it? I do think that some ask it as if they almost hoped that there would be few. If they do not go to our Ebenezer or Rehoboth, what can become of them? Surely you cannot expect that there should be any good come to those that do not frequent Salem and Enod. What must they hope? In that spirit the question is often asked; but, brethren, may God lift us up above that spirit, and make us desire that there should be multitudes saved. I suppose that one of the surprises of heaven will be to see vastly many more there than we ever dreamt would reach that place. Jesus Christ gave a very practical answer. It was no answer, and yet was the best of answers.

23. *And he said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, wilt seek to enter in, and shall not be able.*

Make a push for it; agonize for it; for many will seek — not strive, but merely seek. Or, to put another meaning into it, strive now to enter in at the strait gate, for many will be unable, when it is too late; and that, doubtless, is the sense of the passage.

LUKE 13:11-35

11, 12. *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.*

Observe the word “Behold” here. Sometimes, in old books, they used to put a hand in the margin to call attention to something special in the text, so, this word seems as though nobody in the synagogue was worthy of such special notice as the most forlorn and desolate individual there: “a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and who bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself.” It was to be a happy sabbath for her, though she did not know it. She used to go to the synagogue, though it must have been painful for her to be present; possibly, she could not even see the minister, she was so “bowed together.” It must have been a great surprise to her when the Saviour called her to him, and said to her, “Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity.”

13. *And he laid his hands on her: and immediately he was made straight, and glorified God.*

I should think she did. We have no record of what she said; she may have merely cried out, “Hallelujah”; but the very look of her, her streaming eyes filled with gratitude, her face beaming with delight, all tended to glorify God. Even if she had said nothing, her being made straight would of itself have glorified God; and, just as that once crooked woman could glorify God, so can a guilty sinner, crushed and helpless, glorify God. It was when Christ’s hands were laid upon her that she was made straight. Oh, that he would lay his hands on some of you! May this be to you the saving Sabbath of the year, that God may be glorified in you.

14. *And the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation,*

Poor soul! Surely he was more crooked than the infirm woman was: but, alas! he did not get healed.

14. *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 what an answer it was!

15-17. *The Lord thou 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.*

His reply was unanswerable.

18. *Then said he,*

They were in a right frame for hearing, having been rendered attentive by their admiration for his miraculous work and his wondrous word.

18-22. *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. And he went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem.*

Practically, that is what he was always doing, “journeying toward Jerusalem,” toward that great climax of his life, his substitutionary death upon the cross of Calvary.

23. *Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved?*

That is a question that many have asked, and some have vainly tried to answer. What did Jesus reply?

23, 24. *And he said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate:*

Instead of gratifying idle curiosity, he excites to diligence in seeking entrance into the narrow way.

24. *For many, say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.*

They will only seek, not strive, to enter in. There will also come, in the future, a time when they may seek as they will, and strive as they will, to enter in but it will be too late then. Once having passed into another world, there will be no hope for any seeker or striver.

25. *When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, —*

They do not like to go away, they are reluctant to meet their final doom. Oh, that they had been wise enough to cry for mercy when it was to be had! Now they stand, and begin to knock; and more than that, they begin to plead.

25. *Saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us;*

All this earnestness, all this deference, all this reverence have come too late.

25, 26. *And he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets.*

“We were regular hearers of the Word; we observed all the usual forms of religion, we even went to the communion table.”

27, 28. *But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out.*

Driven away, yet they could see the saintly ones there, and see their own kith and kin there, for they were Jews, and they could see. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets” there, but they themselves were cast out; and what was worse for them:

29. *And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God.*

Rank outsiders, far off heathen, outrageous sinners, harlots; “they shall come,” and repent, and “sit down in the kingdom of God,” and this shall cut to the quick those who were hearers of the Word, but who perished because they were workers of iniquity.

30. *And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last.*

Many who, today, seem to be unlikely to be converted, those who are “last” in character, will yet be “first” in repentance; and

there who are “first” in privileges, and even in hopefulness, who will be “last” in the great day of account. May we take home to our hearts this solemn warning!

31. *The same day there came certain of the Pharisees, saying unto him, get thee out, and depart hence: for Herod will kill thee.*

Think of the Pharisees being concerned about Christ’s life! What an affectation of regard! Yet it was only affectation. We must always be on our guard against the foes of God even when they speak most fairly; indeed, it is their agreeable, affectionate words that we have most cause to dread.

32. *And he said unto them, Go ye, and tell that fox,*

Jesus called Herod a fox because he wanted to get Christ out of his territory without having the opprobrium of driving him away. So he sent this roundabout message to try to make a coward of the Lord, and to get him to go off on his own account.

32. *Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be perfected.*

That is, “I shall stay my full time here, while I have work to do, I shall do it, and I am not going away until it is finished. I am not afraid of Herod threatening to kill me, for I am immortal till my work is done.” He is not even flurried, or put about by such a message as that. Besides when men mean to bite, they do not usually bark; and if Herod had meant to kill Christ just then, he would not have told him what he was going to do.

33. *Nevertheless I must walk today, and tomorrow, and the day following for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem.*

What a sad thing for Christ to have to say! So many holy men had been murdered in Jerusalem that he roughly put it as being true, in the main, that all the prophets were martyred there, the exceptions only proving the rule.

34. *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killed the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!*

There was their weakness, they were like a brood of chickens; there was his power to protect them, like a hen gathers her brood under her wings; yet there was their infatuation, that they would

rather perish than come and be sheltered beneath his almighty wings: “and ye would not.”

35. *Behold, your house is left unto you desolate: and verily I say unto you, Ye shall not see me, until the time come when ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.*

There will be no true glory for Jerusalem until the Jews are converted; there will be no return of Christ to that royal city until they shall welcome him with louder hosannas than they gave when he rode in triumph through the streets, and entered into the temple. The Lord grant that we may never reject Christ! Let us run, even now, like little chicks, and hide beneath the wings of the Eternal.

LUKE 13:18-34

18. *Then said he, Unto what is the kingdom of God like? and whereunto shall I resemble it?*

For men learn much by resemblances, and the things which are seen are frequently helpful to us in seeking to set forth the things which are not seen. Knowing that God is one in all that he has done, we are often able to learn from one part of his works to understand another. What, then, is God’s kingdom like? Is it like a mighty army marching with banners and trumpets? No. Is it like the raging sea, rolling onwards and sweeping everything before it? Not so; at all events, it is not so visibly.

19. *It is like a grain of mustard seed,—*

You can hardly see it; you can, however, taste it. Try it, and you shall find it pungent enough; but it is so small that you may easily pass it by: “It is like a grain of mustard seed,”

19. *Which a man took, and cast into his garden;*

It must be sown in prepared soil; and there is “a man” who knows how to cast it so that it shall fall where it will live, and where it will grow.

19. *And it grew, and waxed a great tree; and the fowls of the air lodged in the branches of it.*

“The fowls of the air,” that might once have eaten it, “lodged in the branches of it.” See, in this emblem, an illustration of the growth of the kingdom of God, the vitality of the truth of God, the energy with which, from a small beginning, God’s kingdom advances to a great ending. Have you this mustard seed in your heart? It may seem

a very little thing even to yourself; others may scarcely perceive it yet; but let it alone, and it will grow. Yet it will not grow without watering. Seeds may lie long in the ground, but they will not sprout until the rain has fallen to moisten the earth. Pray God to send showers of blessing upon your soul tonight, so that, even if you have no more than a grain of mustard seed in your heart, it may begin to grow. Is the grain of mustard seed sending up its shoot above the ground? Then pray God that it may grow yet more till it shall not only be just visible, but shall be so prominent that it must be seen, that those who once hated it will be compelled to see it, and to wonder at it as they behold the birds of the air coming and lodging in its branches. I pray that, in many hearts here, the grace of God may not long continue to be a small thing, but that it may advance to tree-like stature, till you shall yield comfort to fifties and hundreds, and many of you shall be like some of the trees in this great city and its suburbs. Did you ever notice them, at nightfall, when all the sparrows of the street come and lodge in the branches, and merrily twitter ere they go to their rest? There are some Christians like those trees; they have hearts so big, and they do for Christ's service so much, that they harbour hundreds of poor little birds of the air that else would hardly know where to go for shelter. God make us such Christians that we shall be a blessing to multitudes all around us!

20, 21. *And again he said, Whereunto shall I liken the kingdom of God? It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.*

Some expositors think that this is a picture of the kingdom of the devil, but it does not say so. If our Lord had meant to represent the power of evil, he would have given us some intimation of that kind, but he has given us none. He means to describe exactly what he had described before, for he says, "Whereunto shall I liken the kingdom of God?" The leaven is buried, as it were: "hid in three measures of meal;" it is lost, covered up. Let it alone; by the force that is within itself it begins to work its way in the meal, and it leavens all around it until, at last, the whole three measures of meal are permeated by it, and made to feel and own its power. So is it with the grace of God where it is placed within a human heart, and so is it with the kingdom of God wherever its influence is exerted among the sons of men.

22, 23. *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?*

Oh, that question! Have you never asked it yourself? Have you never heard it asked? And there are some people who are very pleased when the answer is, “Yes, very few indeed will be saved; and they all go to Salem, or Zoar, or Rehoboth, or little Bethel.” There are some who are not quite certain whether all who go even there will be saved; they seem to delight to cut and pare down to the very lowest the number of those who will be saved. With such a spirit as that, I trust we do not sympathize for a moment. Certainly, our Lord does not; listen to his reply to the question, “Lord, are there few that be saved?”

23; 24. *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.*

For your own part, take it for granted that there will be so few that ever will enter at all that you will have to push for it to get through the gate: “Strive to enter in at the narrow gate.” If you are not narrow in your own mind,— and it is a pity that you should be, — yet still recollect that the gate into heaven is narrow, and make up your mind that there is no getting through it except with many a push and many a squeeze.

25, 26. *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.*

See; there are some men who will not think of going to heaven till it is too late; and then, when they get to heaven’s gate, and find it shut, they will begin to plead for admittance though they pleaded not for it before. When they might have had the blessing, they would not have it; and when they cannot have it, then they grow earnest in crying for it.

27, 28. *But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and*

Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out.

Ejected, violently driven away, as those who are abhorrent in God's sight because you despised his mercy.

29-34. *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. 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 today and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be perfected. Nevertheless I must walk today, and tomorrow, 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!*

What a terrible contrast! "I would,.... and ye would not." May the Lord Jesus never have to say that to any of us!

LUKE 14:1-6

14:1-6. *And it came to pass, as he went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees to eat bread on the sabbath day, that they watched him. And, behold, there was a certain man before him which had the dropsy. And Jesus answering spake unto the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day? And they held their peace. And he took him, and healed him, and let him go; and answered them, saying, Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the sabbath day? And they could not answer him again to these things.*

Christ's question was unanswerable unless they wished to condemn themselves. Now I want you kindly to turn to the next evangelist, in whose Gospel you will find the record of the fifth miracle which our Saviour wrought on the Sabbath-day. (See John 5:1-9)

This exposition consisted of readings from LUKE 4:33-36; 6:6-11; 13:10-17; 14:1-6; JOHN 5:1-9; ND 9:1-14.

LUKE 14:7-24

7. *And he put forth a parable to those which were bidden, when he marked how they chose out the chief rooms; —*

This parable was by far the best part of the entertainment of the day: —

7-9. *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 hidden of him; and he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room.*

For, of course, the next room is full, and the next, and the only vacant seat, when the feast has begun, will probably be in the very lowest room of the house.

10. *But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room, that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee.*

Note that our Saviour was not just then talking to his disciples, or else he would have given more spiritual reasons for his advice; but, speaking to the people who were gathered as guests at the Pharisee's house, he appealed to them with an argument suitable to themselves. We may, however, extract the marrow from this bone. Let us not covet the highest place; let us not desire honour among men. In the Church of God the way upward is downward. He that will do the lowest work shall have the highest honour. Our Master washed his disciples' feet, and we are never more honoured than when we are permitted to imitate his example.

11. *For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.*

There is a conspiracy of heaven and earth and hell to put down proud men, neither good nor bad, the highest nor the lowest, can endure those who are self-exalted; but if you are willing to take your right place, which is probably the lowest, you shall soon find honour in the midst of your brethren.

12. *Then said he also to him that bade him, When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbor; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompence be made thee.*

Our Saviour, you see, keeps to one line of instruction. It was a feast, so he used the feast to teach another lesson. It is always well, when men's minds are running in a certain direction, to make use of that particular current. When a feast is uppermost in the minds of men, it is no use starting another subject. So the Saviour rides upon the back of the banquet, making it to be his steed. Note his advice to his host: "Try to avoid doing that for which you will be recompensed. If you are rewarded for it the transaction is over; but if not, then it stands recorded in the book of God, and it will be recompensed to you in the great day of account."

13, 14. *But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: and thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.*

It should be your ambition to have something set down to your credit "at the resurrection of the just." If you do someone a kindness with a view to gaining gratitude, you will probably be disappointed; and even if you should succeed, what is the gratitude worth? You have burned your firework, you have seen the brief blaze, and there is an end of it. But if you get no present return for your holy charity, so much the better for you.

15, 16. *And when one of them that sat at meat with him heard these things, he said unto him, Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God. Then said he unto him, —*

As if to prove what a privilege it is to be permitted to "eat bread" there, and that the persons who appear most likely to do so will never taste of it and that the most unlikely persons will be brought into it, Jesus "said unto him," —

16, 17. *A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: and sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready.*

They had accepted the invitation, so they were pledged to be present but, in the meantime, they had changed their minds with regard to their intended host, and they were unwilling to grace his feast.

18. *And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused.*

Yet it was supper time, and people do not generally go to see pieces of ground at night; and if the man had bought the land he ought to have seen it before he bought it. People do not generally buy land without looking at it. A bad excuse is worse than none; and this is one of those excuses which will not hold water for a minute.

19. *And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused.*

He pretended that he had bought five yoke of oxen without proving them, and that he wanted to prove them after he had bought them, when, of course, he could not cancel the bargain: a likely story! But, when men want to make an excuse, and they have no truth to raw as the raw material, they can always make one out of a lie.

20. *And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.*

This man did not ask to be excused; he had married a wife, so that settled the matter, of course he could not go to the feast.

21. *So that servant came, and shewed his lord these things.*

Every true servant of Christ should go to his Lord, and tell him what reception his Master's message has had. After service, we sometimes have an enquirers' meeting; but after every sermon there ought to be a meeting of the servant with his Lord to tell the result of the errand on which he has been sent. Sometimes, as in this case, it will be a very painful meeting, as the servant tells how his Master's message has been despised, and his invitation rejected.

21. *When the master of the house being angry —*

Notice what the Lord does even when he is angry, he just invents some new way of showing mercy to men: "The master of the house being angry" —

21. *Said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind.*

Happy anger that explodes in blessing! The justly angry master turns away from the bidden ones who had insulted him, and sends for those who had not hitherto been bidden, that they might come to the feast.

22. *And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room.*

They fetched in all the poor people, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind whom they could find, it was a great gathering, and a strange gathering, yet there was still room for more guests at the banquet.

23. *And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.*

“Bring in highway-men and hedge-birds, those that have no place whereon to lay their heads; fetch them in by force if necessary, “that my house may be filled.””

24. *For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.*

They were invited, yet they would not come; but others shall come, and fill the tables, and the great feast shall be furnished with guests. No provisions of mercy will ever be wasted. If you who are the sons and daughters of godly parents, or you who are the regular hearers of the Word, will not have Christ, then others shall. If you hear, but hear in vain, then the rank outsiders shall be brought in, and they shall feed upon the blessed provisions of the infinite mercy of God, and God shall be glorified; but terrible will be your doom when the great Giver of the gospel feast says concerning you and those like you, “None of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.”

LUKE 14:25-35

25. *And there went great multitudes with him:*

During at least a part of his earthly ministry, Christ was very popular. The people crowded to his feet, and they were willing to make him a king; but you must have observed that he was always faithful in speaking to the populace, he did not flatter them. He dealt in the same fashion also with those who professed to be his followers. He winnowed the heap that was laid upon the floor, and drove away the chaff from the midst of the wheat.

25, 26. *And he turned, and said unto them, If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.*

Do not misunderstand this passage. Our Lord does not use the word “hate” in our common acceptation of the term, for no man

would hate his own life; but he means that the love of all these must be secondary to the love we bear to him. Compared with our love to our Lord, all lower love must be more like hate. We must be willing to give up everything — to give up even ourselves — our entire selves — to him, for Christ will have all or nothing. He will never divide the human heart with any rival. If we profess to serve him, we must have him for our only Master, and not attempt to serve two masters. I fear that this truth greatly needs to be enforced nowadays, for we have numbers of so-called Christians, who are worldlings first, and then Christians afterwards. We have a great many professors who might be accurately described by the words of a little girl concerning her father. When someone asked her, “Is your father a Christian?” she replied, “Yes, but he has not worked much at it lately.” There are plenty of that sort. Christianity is their trade, their business, their profession; but they have not worked much at it lately, they carry it on very slightly indeed. Let it not be so with us; if we would be followers of Christ, our whole hearts must be his.

27. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.

If there is any cross-bearing involved in Christianity, — such as the cross of holy living, or the cross of believing old-fashioned doctrines, and not being “abreast of the times,” — if there is any sort of cross which is involved in the conscientious discharge of our duty as followers of Christ, we must bear it, or else we cannot be his disciples. Our Lord’s words are very clear and explicit: “ ‘And whosoever doth not bear his cross,’ — be he who he may, whatever pretensions or professions he may make, — if he does not bear his cross, ‘and come after me, cannot be my disciple.’ “

28-30. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish.

Do you not think that there are a great many towers of that kind about in our day? I mean, unfinished Christian characters, persons who profess to be followers of Christ, but are not. They just exhibit to you their own shortcomings; they are people with good intentions, who did make some attempt to follow Jesus; but, since it involved too much self-denial, they were not able to go that length,

so they turned back, and walked no more with him. They began to build a tower, but never finished it. May God, in his mercy, prevent you and me becoming a laughing-stock to all eternity! I believe that, in the last great day, and forever, those persons, who knew enough about the gospel to wish to be Christians, and who were somewhat actuated by right motives, but yet who never went so far as to give up their hearts to Christ, will stand forth as monuments of their own folly and even the demons in hell will point at them, and say, "These men began to build, and were not able to finish." Such persons will be unable to answer that contemptuous sneer. If you have conscience enough to begin to follow Christ, even reason itself requires you to go the whole length. If you know that it is right for you to do so, why do you not go through with it? If you are sufficiently convinced of its rightness to go as far as you do, why not go still farther? God grant that you may! Better never begin to build than to commence without having counted the cost, and then to find that you have not sufficient to finish.

31, 32. *Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace.*

If you cannot fight the world, the flesh, and the devil, — if there is no power that can help you to do it, or if you are not willing to be helped by the only power that can help you, — if you will not surrender yourself to Christ that he may baffle all the hosts of the adversary, then it is of no use for you to begin the war.

33. *So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.*

In Christ's days, and afterwards, discipleship usually involved the absolute giving up of everything that his followers had, for those were times of persecution; and if such seasons should come to us, we must have such love to Christ that, for his sake, we could forsake all that we have; otherwise we cannot be his disciples.

34. *Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be seasoned?*

Christianity is good; but if the very life has gone out of it, what can you do with it? A dead professor is the most corrupt thing under

heaven. Some there are who think that God's salt can lose its savor, and yet get it back again. I remember one who told me that he knew a person who had been born again four times. That doctrine of re-re-regeneration is one that I have never found in the Word of God. I believe that true regeneration never fails to take effect, and that it never loses that effect. It begets within the soul a life that cannot die; but, if that life could die, it could never be brought back again. The apostle Paul puts this matter beyond dispute in Hebrews 6:4-6: "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame."

35. *It is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill; but men cast it out.*

A dead profession of religion is utterly useless; and if it could be possible that a man should be really quickened by the Spirit of God, and yet that the new life should depart from him, he would be in a hopeless case indeed.

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

Let all of us give good heed to this injunction, for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

LUKE 15

This is a chapter that needs no explanation; it carries its key within itself, and the experience of every child of God is the best exposition of it. The three parables recorded here set forth the work of saving grace in different aspects.

1, 2. *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.*

The Pharisees and scribes formed the outside ring of Christ's hearers, but the inner circle consisted of the guilty, the heavy-laden, and the lowly. They pressed as near to Christ as they could, that they might catch his every word; and besides, there was an attractiveness about his manner that drew them towards him. His mercy attracted their misery. They wanted him, and he desired them; they were thus

well met. There will be an inner circle tonight when the gospel is preached, and it will not consist of the self-righteous. They that are full will not press to the table on which the gospel feast is spread, the hungry will be found nearest to the heavenly provision.

3. *And he spake this parable unto them, saying,*

There are three parables here; but, inasmuch as it is called “this parable”, it is really only one. It is a picture in three panels, representing the same scene from different points of view.

4. *What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?*

It has a new importance in his eyes, for it is lost. Before, it was only one of a hundred in the fold; but now it is one distinct and separate from all the rest, and the shepherd’s thought is fixed upon it.

5, 6. *And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.*

No doubt he was glad that the other sheep were not lost; but that joy was, for a while, quite eclipsed in the more striking and vivid joy over the one which had been lost.

7. *I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.*

If such there be,! and there are many who think that they belong to this class,! they bring no joy to the great Shepherd; but you who have had to mourn over your lost estate set the bells of heaven ringing with a new melody when you are recovered by the great Redeemer. The first of these three parables may he said to represent salvation in reference to the work of the Son of God as the great Seeker and Saver of the souls of men. In the second, we have a representation of the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church of God.

8. *Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it?*

Her thoughts were all concerning that one lost piece. It had not more intrinsic value than the rest, but being lost it called off her

attention from the other nine. She valued it, and for the hope of finding it she lighted a candle, swept the house, and sought diligently till she found it. This is a picture of the Holy Spirit's work in seeking for lost souls. They bear the King's impress, they are coins of the realm. This woman knew that the silver coin was not far away, so she swept the house, and sought diligently, using all her eyes, devoting all her time to this one object, quitting all other avocations until she found it.

9. *And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbors together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost.*

She might never have called them together to rejoice that she had ten pieces of silver, she might even have hidden them away; and the joy she had in them might have been only her own, a solitary joy; but now that one piece had been lost, and had been found again, she says, "Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost."

10. *Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.*

Not joy among the angels, as some read it, though no doubt that is a truth; but "joy in the presence of the angels of God;" and what can that mean but that God himself rejoices, and rejoices so that angels perceive it; and no doubt they then join in the delight? But all this points out that it is the lost one that is the great object of consideration, that out of any congregation where the gospel is preached, it is the lost one who is the most important person in the whole place. In the next verses, we get the Father's part in the work of the recovery of the wanderer.

11-13. *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. His heart was far away when he asked his father to give him his portion; and now his body is far away as he goes into the outward wandering which follows after the inner wandering.

14. *And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land;*

There generally does arise” a mighty famine” in such cases. Famines and other miseries are God’s messengers, which he sends after his wandering children.

14. *And he began to be in want.*

This was a new sensation to him; he had never known it when he was at home. He did not know it in his first boisterous days away from his father’s house, but now “he began to be in want.”

16. *And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.*

Perhaps he did not want to employ him, but said that he would give him that occupation if he cared to accept it. It was small pay, very dishonouring work to a Jew, not fit employment for the son of a nobleman; yet “half a loaf is better than no bread,” so he took it, though even the half loaf must have been a very small one.

16. *And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.*

Such a thing as generosity was not known in that country. His companions could share his riches when he was living riotously, but they will not share their riches now that he is in his poverty.

17. *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!*

“My father’s day-labourers have bread enough and to spare, yet I, his child, perish with hunger.”

18, 19. *I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.*

You notice that this last part of the prayer he never did pray; for it was stopped by his father’s love. There was a legalism about it naturally suggested by his own despair, but it was not such as his father would tolerate.

20, 21. *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.

There comes an interruption there; the kiss upon his lips stops the rest of the prayer, which he had prepared, and now the father declares his will concerning the wanderer.

22-24. *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.*

I have never read that they left off being merry, for the conversion of a soul is enough to make eternal joy in the hearts of the righteous.

26, 26. *Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant.*

This was a new thing, and apparently a thing that he did not care much about. How had it come to pass that there was such noise, such joy?

27, 28. *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 treated him.*

I hardly know which to admire most, the love of the father when he fell upon the neck of the prodigal, or the love of the father when he went out to talk with his elder son: “Therefore came his father out, and treated him.” Oh, our God is very good to us when we give way to naughty tempers! If we begin to think that we are very holy people, that we have been long the servants of God, and that there ought to be some little fuss made over us as well as over great sinners that come into the church, then our Father is very gentle, and he comes out and entreats us.

29. *And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends:*

“I have had no banquets. I have kept at home, a patient worker, and have had no extraordinary joys.” I know some Christian

workers who are very much in this condition. They keep on and on and on in holy service, and they do well; but they seldom have great entertainment's of high joy and unspeakable delight. It is their own fault, and it is a thousand pities that they do not have them, for they might have them if they would. There is a tendency to grow so absorbed in service, like Martha, that we are cumbered by it; and we do not have the joy of Mary in communion at the Master's feet. I am sure that this elder son was out of fellowship with his father, or else he would not have talked as he did. We are all apt to get into such a condition. See to it, ye who work for Jesus, that it is not so with you. Then the elder brother went on to say,!

30. *But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf.*

I do not read that the prodigal had devoured his father's living with harlots; that is the elder brother's version of it. I dare say that it was true, but it is always a pity to give the roughest interpretation to things. He had spent his substance "in riotous living." When we are cross, we generally use the ugliest words we can; we may think that we are speaking forcibly, but indeed we are speaking naughtily, and not as our Father would have us speak.

31. *And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.*

Oh, what a word was that! How it reminds Christians of their privileges, if they would but appropriate them! It is yours, beloved, to live always with your God, and to know that all that he has is yours. You ought to live in a perpetual festival; for you there should be one joyful Christmastide that lasts from the beginning of the year to the end of it: "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine."

32. *It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.*

It was the fit thing, and the proper thing, and the right thing, that there should be extraordinary joy over a returning sinner. There ought to be, there must be, there shall be, special music and dancing over sinners saved by the grace of God. The Lord give us some such tonight, and make us glad over them! Amen.

LUKE 15

1. *Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him.*

However sunken they might be, they knew their best Friend; they recognized their Benefactor, so they gathered around him. They knew who it was that smiled upon them, and who would fain uplift them; so they came clustering around him, like bees fly to the flowers: “Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him.”

2. *And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.*

Where bees come, wasps often come, too. This murmuring of the Pharisees and scribes was after their nature; they were so proud, so wrapped up in themselves, they thought so contemptuously of everybody else, that they dared even to despise him whose shoe’s latchet they were not worthy to unloose. “This man,” said they, “receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.”

3. *And he spake this parable unto them, saying,*

This is really a picture in three panels,! a parable with three variations.

4-7. *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, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. 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.*

There, no doubt, the Saviour looked at the Pharisees, who, though they did need repentance, yet thought they did not. Little or no joy did they ever bring to him; his heart never leaped with delight over them. Good as they thought themselves to be, they did not yield him so much joy as these poor publicans and sinners would when he had found them; and he was bent on doing that. Now, beloved, how much is a man better than a sheep? And if a shepherd will leave all his ease and comfort, to hunt after one stray sheep, how ought you and I, after the example of the Son of man, to be

ready for any service, or any self-denial, by which we, too, in our poor measure may seek and save the lost! Now we have the second panel of the picture

8-10. *Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and search diligently till she find it And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbors together, Saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost. Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.*

Did the woman rejoice at finding her piece of silver, that she had lost, and shall not God much more rejoice over an inestimably precious human soul, which had been lost, but which, through grace, is found again? Ah, yes! there is joy in heaven, there is joy in all heavenly hearts, there is joy in all who are the friends of Christ, when lost ones are found! There was another quiet stroke at the Pharisees and scribes, who were proved not to be the friends of the soul-seeking Saviour, because they did not rejoice with him over those whom he had found. If they had been at all like the angels in heaven, as they thought they were, they would have been glad that the Lord Jesus Christ had come to seek and to find the lost. Then came the third most touching panel of the picture,! perhaps the best beloved of all the parables,! one which, like a key, fits the wards of the human heart, and many a time has opened the heart

11-13. *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 faileth 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.*

It is clear that his heart had gone away from his father before he went away himself. He would not have wished to take from his father his portion of goods, or to be independent of his father, if he had not felt a spirit of alienation; and, therefore, what his father did developed the latent evil; just as, oftentimes, the loving mercy of God brings to the surface the concealed sin which is in man all the while; and then he sins the more openly. It is a grievous thing that even divine love should lead us to sin;! not of itself, but because of our evil nature, just as the sun shines, not that he may make the

weeds to grow, or that he may help to lift into the air noxious effluvia. With goodwill itself as its only motive, ill may come even of the pure sunlight.

14, 15. *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.*

A very degrading employment for him as a Jew;! perhaps, however, the best that the citizen of that country could do for him, for there was a famine in the land; and when men are all pinched with hunger, it is not much that one can do for another. And what can one poor sinner do for another? Even though he be called a priest, and puts on flue apparel, yet what can he do for his fellow-sinner?

16, 17. *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, his son, perish with hunger, when there is not only enough in my father’s house for his children, but for his hirelings, too; ay, and some to spare after that.” “Bread enough and to spare.” This was the thought, which drew the prodigal home, and it ought to draw sinners to Christ. There is, in the gospel, “bread enough’ and to spare.” You know how some would, if they could, contract the provisions of grace; and make it out that there is bread enough, but they say that if there is anything to spare, it will be a waste. Why, it is that “spare” bread that is God’s bait to catch poor souls with when they are cast down; “for,” say they, “if it is to spare, then, even if my father be angry with me, he will not deny me the spare bread for which there is no use, so I may well go, and ask for a portion of it.”

18-20. *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.*

Oh, the speed of divine love! There were delays with the son, but there were no delays with the father. At the first glance, the

father's heart is made up, and he runs to meet his returning child. And what a welcome he gives him! He "kissed him much," is the right rendering. Truly, this was prodigal love for the prodigal son.

21 22. *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-Stopping him short, and for ever obliterating the rest of the prayer, so that he never had time to utter it, seeing that it was too legal to be permitted by his father's love: "But the father"!

22-25. *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. Now his elder son was in the field:*

At work, like the good son that he was.

25. *And as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing.*

Which he did not often hear, for he was of a gloomy spirit, and there had not been cause for much rejoicing lately.

26. *And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant.*

"What are you all up to in making such a noise? What new thing has happened to our orderly household to make it thus full of roistering and noisy gladness?"

27, 28. *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,*

It did not seem to him right that one, who had acted so badly, should be thus honoured: "He was angry,"!

28. *And would not go in:*

He did not believe in revivals, so he would not attend them; he did not believe in many being converted, especially if they had been great sinners; he would have nothing to do with them.

28. *Therefore came his father out, and intreated him.*

Oh, the goodness of the father, not only in receiving the returning prodigal, but in entreating this indignant and erring son,

for he was greatly erring in this matter, and was not showing the true spirit of a son.

29, 30. *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/or him the fatted calf.*

“I am a consistent Christian; I have maintained the excellence of my moral character. I have tried to be orthodox, and attentive to all religious duties. Thou knowest that it is so; yet I seldom have any joy in my religion. ‘Thou never gavest me a kid.’ I go trembling and mourning all my days. I get very little delight out of my religion; yet here is one just converted, and all this fuss is made over him; and he is rejoicing, too. Thou featest him with the best fatted calf. He is as glad as glad can be, and everybody is glad about him; and nobody seems to take much notice of me. I go on my steady quiet course, and I have never caused thee such grief as this thy son has done.”

31. *And he said unto him,!*

So beautifully,

31. *Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.*

And that is what the Lord seems to say to the believer, when he gets into that naughty spirit of the elder brother, and does not like to hear of sinners of the deepest dye being brought to Christ, and who disapproves of the jubilation and excitement at revival times. The Lord says to him, “Suppose you have not had such enjoyments; you may have them if you like, for you are ever with me. There is joy enough in that fact; and all that I have is yours. You are joint-heir with me. I have given you everything; what more do you want?”

32. *And it was meet!*

It was fitting, it was proper,!

32. *That we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother!*

“For he is thy brother. Notwithstanding thy richer experience, and thy deeper Christian knowledge, and thy high standing in the church, this poor prodigal, who is just saved, is thy brother; so it is meet that we should make merry, and be glad, for this thy brother”!

32. *Was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.*

LUKE 15

We have read this chapter together many times; possibly some of us have read it hundreds of times; yet whenever we read it, we always find something fresh in it. It is ever bright and sparkling, full of diamonds and other precious gems of truth.

1-3. Then drew near unto him and the publicans and sinner, 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,

The deepest feelings of our Saviour's heart seem to have been brought out by the two classes of persons here mentioned, his pity and compassion towards the sinful, and his righteous anger at the perpetual objections of the hypocritical Pharisees and scribes. The one class caused his heart to overflow with love, the other excited his burning indignation, yet, even then, his soul was moved with pity and tenderness toward the wandering and erring. We ought to be grateful to the Pharisees for having led our Lord to utter the three wondering parables which we are about to read. Luke says, "He spake this parable unto them," implying that the three are really one, a picture in three panels. The whole plan of salvation is not to be found in either of the parables by itself, but in all three combined. Some points omitted in any one of them will be found in one of the others. "He spake this parable unto them, saying," —

3-7. Saying, what man of you, having a 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, rejoicing: And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friend and neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for 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.

The shepherd had an extraordinary joy in his flock through the wandering and recovery of that one sheep. If they had all kept in the fold, and none of them had strayed away, he would have been glad, but there would have been a sort of tameness and sameness about his constant satisfaction with them; but that wandering sheep stirred up other emotions in his heart, and when he had found it, he experienced a new joy, a higher joy than he would otherwise have

known. So, though sin is a great evil, yet it has been overruled by God in such a way as to introduce a new joy into the universe. Songs of praise, that would never have made the angels' harps to ring, are now heard in Paradise. There would never have been any repentance if there had never been any sin, and the love of the great and good Shepherd towards wandering sheep would never have been revealed if no sheep had ever wandered from the fold. I suppose it was some such feeling as this that caused Augustine somewhat rashly to exclaim, concerning the fall, "O beata culpa!" — O happy fault, which has thus made manifest the abounding mercy of God! Looked at in one aspect all sin is an unutterable calamity; but as it has had the effect of displaying still more of the matchless mercy of God in the person of Jesus Christ, we see how God brings forth good out of evil. The chief point of the parable is the shepherd's joy derived from the finding of the lost sheep. Our Saviour needed no other reason for looking after publicans and sinners than the fact that he would get far more joy out of them than he would out of the Pharisees and scribes, even if they were what they professed to be, "just persons, which need no repentance." This first panel of the picture specially sets forth the work of the Son of God. Why was not the Father's work put first, as the Trinity is "the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost"? Why is it also that, in the Benediction, Paul writes, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost be with you all." Why, because the love of Christ is the first thing that the sinner apprehends. Our first Christian experience is not, as a rule, a knowledge of the Holy Spirit or the Father; but, to our consciousness, it is Jesus Christ who is first revealed to us. I think it is for this reason that the work of the Son of God is here first set forth.

8-10. *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 neighbors 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.*

As I have already said concerning the lost sheep, there was a new joy over the recovery of the lost silver. The woman always

rejoiced over the pieces of silver, but that one particular piece had been the cause of new joy, the joy which is experienced whenever the sorrow of loss is outweighed by the joy of finding again that which was lost. Is this woman intended to represent the Church of Christ, and is she thus set before us because the Church is the great agent under the control of the Divine Spirit, in seeking the lost, carrying the lighted candle of the Word, sweeping with the besom of earnest, faithful preaching, applying the law of the Lord to the conscience of man, and turning everything upside down until, at last, the lost piece of silver is found? If so, this second panel of the picture sets forth the work of the Holy Spirit as wrought through the Church of Christ.

11-13. *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 —*

For sin is very rapid in its development, and sinners are often in great haste to get away from God. The young man's heart was wrong already, or he would not have wanted to be his own master. He was already away in the far country so far as his heart was concerned, and it was not long before his body followed: "Not many days after" —

13-15. *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.*

Probably, that was the best thing he could do for him; and, usually, when the world does the best it can for a sinner, it sets him feeding swine. It was the most degrading employment to which a Hebrew could be put; and, in like manner, sin, before it is finished, bringeth forth degradation on the way to bringing forth death.

16. *And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.*

"He would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat," but he could not, for he was a man, and not one of the swine. Worldlings are happy in their own poor way, and I, for

one, never grudge them their husks. One never craves the wash that is given to the pigs, we let them have their trough as full as they please, and never want so much as a taste of it; so, when sinners are full of worldly joys, we may not envy them, and we may scarcely blame them. Let the swine have their husks. Once, we too would fain have filled our belly with them; and if we did not, it was not because we would not, but because we could not.

17. *And when he came to himself, —*

For sin is insanity. He was out of his mind while he was acting so foolishly:

“When he came to himself,”

17-19. *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.*

It was the knowledge that there was plenty in his father’s house that led him back; and you may depend upon it that the preaching of full salvation rich in blessing, is a strong inducement to a sinner to cry, “I will arise and go to my Father.” This prodigal son might never have gone back if his father had kept a miserly house with a scanty table; but he knew that even the servants in the kitchen had “bread enough and to spare,” his father never stinted them, they had what they needed, and there was always more than they could eat, so there was no need for his son to “perish with hunger.” In like manner, the extraordinary bounty of God in Christ Jesus the richness of his free redemption is, I doubt not, the means of bringing many a starving soul to Christ. The prodigal said that the servants had “bread enough and to spare.” There are some who seem to think that, in Christ, there is only just bread enough, but we believe that the largest possible idea of the value of his redemption may be indulged, and, oftentimes, the thought that first enters the sinner’s ear and heart is that there is “bread enough and to spare, so why should not he have some of the spare bread, at any rate? That was the way that the prodigal argued; he felt sure that his father could feed another hired servant, so he resolved that he would ask to be engaged in that capacity; yet you know that he never did ask that, his father stopped him before he could make that request.

20. *And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him,*

Perhaps, before he saw his father: "his father saw him,"

20. *And had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.*

Matthew Henry's comment on this verse is excellent: "His father saw him.' Here were eyes of mercy. 'And had compassion.' Here were bowels of mercy. 'And ran.' Here were feet of mercy. 'And fell on his neck.' Here were arms of mercy. 'And kissed him.' Here were lips of mercy." It was all mercy from first to last.

21. *And the son said unto him,*

The father kissed his son before he had time to say anything; and divine compassion is swifter even than our prayers.

21, 22. *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;*

He did not let him finish his prayer with the request that he might be taken on as a hired servant; that part which was legal he stopped with a kiss on his mouth, and then he said to his servants, "Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him;"

22-24. *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.*

This, again, was a new joy in that family circle. There was joy when the elder brother was born, and joy when the younger son came into the household; but this joy over his return was one that they never would have known if he had not gone away. So, there is joy to be got even out of sinners. Christ's object was to show that, bad as the publicans and other gross sinners were, and despised as they were by the Pharisees and scribes, yet there was joy to be got out of them. By their salvation, the very heart of the great Father is rejoiced.

25. *Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing.*

The elder brother in our day says, "I do not believe in these revival services. I like regular, orderly proceedings, and I do not approve of these crowds of people coming to hear the Word under

such undue excitement as is sure to result.” That elder brother thought he knew a great many things. He did not get carried away by excitement, as other people did, he was too old for that, he was a man of very proper habits, and he liked everything done in a cold orthodox style.

26. *And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant.*

“What are you all at? Have you gone out of your minds? Why are you all dancing? Who is to pay for that music? You had better have been along with me out in the fields at work. What is the meaning of all this merriment?”

27. *And he said unto him, Thy brother is come: and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound.*

These servants spoke as some of us have told to others what the Lord has done when souls have been saved, the unregenerate quickened, and those that were far off from God, by wicked works, have come back to him. We have told it all out, in the simplicity of our hearts, and have been so glad to tell the good tidings that we felt as if we could keep on dancing to the music while we were telling the story.

28. *And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and entreated him.*

I never know which to admire the more, — the love of the father in going to meet the returning prodigal, or in going out to talk with this coldhearted elder brother. He was a son, but he had not the true spirit of his father, he had fallen into a very wrong state of mind, just like certain Christians that I know, who have always been very proper, and who have little sympathy with those who have been great sinners. They seem as if they do not want to see such people as these brought to the Saviour. “Why!” they exclaim, “there are girls from the street, and men that have been burglars, and all sorts of rabble being brought into the church.” I have heard such remarks, and I have seen the same sort of spirit displayed in the looks of others who have not liked to say what they thought. Yet they themselves were no better than others by nature, though grace has done much in restraining them from the sin into which others have fallen; and it was wrong for them to talk as if they were sheer legalists, as this Pharisaic elder brother did.

29. *And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends:*

A Christian of this stamp seems to say to the Lord, "I have been thy child all these years, yet I am still full of doubts and fears. I have none of the high joys that I see these other people have. 'Thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends.' I am chastened every morning, and I go sighing all the day long. I seem to get but little comfort; yet here are these young folk, who have not been saved a week, and they seem to be full of assurance, and they are as happy as ever they can be. Surely, they cannot belong to the tried family of God; how can they be sincere with all that music and dancing? I cannot endure it, for I never had such an experience."

30, 31. *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.*

Think of that, you who are the Lord's people, but who have fallen into a grumbling state of heart. Are you not ever with your Lord, and is not all that he has yours? If you have never had a kid to make merry with your friends, whose fault is that? Your Father never denied it to you. All in his house is yours, so take the good that he provides for you, and rejoice over it, for then you will be in a fit state to go to meet your poor returning prodigal brother, and to welcome him with a smiling face and a gladsome heart.

32. *It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost and is found.*

After that reply, there was nothing more that could be said, even by the grumbling elder brother.

LUKE 15:11-32

11-13. *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.*

It was an act of ingratitude to leave his father at all, an act of extreme folly to turn his father's goods to ill-account.

14. *And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want.*

And the sinner's greatest all will be spent one day; the pleasures of sin are but for a season; the strongest sinew in an arm of flesh will one day crack; the flowers that grow in man's garden will one day fade; man may think he has an eternity of pleasure before him, but if he is looking to the flesh for it, it shall be but for an hour.

15. *And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; And he sent him into his fields to feed swine.*

At the very best the comforts of this world are ignominious to a man; they degrade him; as it was a very degrading employment for a Jew to feed swine so the comfort the world can give to a man does but degrade his noble spirit.

16. *And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat and no man gave unto him.*

The prodigal cannot be brought any lower; he is made to herd with the swine, and he envies even them, because they are satisfied with the husks; he cannot eat of the same, and, therefore, he envies even the brutes. Surely, when a sinner becomes fully convinced of sin, he may well envy even the sparrows or the serpents because they have not sinned.

17-20. *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.*

Remember Matthew Henry's paraphrase — here were eyes of mercy.

20. *And had compassion,*
Here was a heart of mercy

20. *And ran,*
Here were legs of mercy.

20. *And fell on his neck,*
Here were deeds of mercy.

20. *And kissed him.*

And here were lips of mercy.

21-22. *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,*

Here were words of mercy, wonders of mercy, and, indeed, it is all mercy throughout.

22-25. *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. Now his elder son was in the field:*

That is where these over-good elder sons always are; they are out at work, they are not at home in communion with God; they are in the field. Do not ask who the elder brother was; he is here tonight there is many an envious moralist ay, and an envious professor, too, who feels it hard that profligate offenders should be pardoned.

25-27. *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,*

He did not want the fatted calf killed, if this reprobate brother were allowed to come in at the back door, and to eat with the servants, he thought that quite good enough, but for this rebel to be put upon an equality with himself — he could not bear that!

28. *And would not go in: therefore came his father out, and entreated him.*

See the tenderness of this father; the same arms which embraced the sinning one were also ready to clasp the self-righteous one. I always feel great pity and great admiration for this dear, dear father. What with a bad son and a good son he had two bad sons, for this good son, you see, had got in a pet just as I have seen some real Christians get into a very un-Christian frame of mind. Well, they do not like somehow receiving into their company the women that have gone astray — the men that have lost their reputation. He was angry, and would not go in, and now his father crowned his love. He ran to

meet one son and now he comes out to reason with another who is unnaturally and ungraciously angry with his father.

29. And he answering said, to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends:

I know the brother. He says, "I have been a consistent Christian: I have been diligent in the service of God: I have abounded in prayer, and yet all the day long have I been plagued and chastened every morning. I do not get much joy: I have such a sight and sense of temptation and sin that I am generally low spirited. I seldom get a drop of full assurance. I never get a kid given me, that I might make merry with my friends. Those who are under the law never do make merry. You never knew a man yet that was trying to save himself by keeping the commandments of God that could dare to make merry. No, they have to draw long faces, and well they may, for they have a long task before them; they put on a garb of sadness, being of a sad countenance, as the hypocrites are.

30-32 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.

And so, dear friends, there is more joy over the prodigal when he returns than over the man who thinks he never has been astray.

LUKE 15:25-32

Most of us recognize the beauty of this parable as it concerns the prodigal, and his boundless forgiveness by the father, but few of us probably have seen how the elder brother has his portrait painted also by our Lord, and how he sets forth the self-righteous professor who hates to have prodigals made much of.

25. Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing.

This was the better one of the two. I have heard him often greatly blamed, and so he deserves to be; but, for all that, he was a true son. He was not at home. He was out at work. There are some Christians that are all for work, and never seem to have any

fellowship and communion. They are always active, but they are not always contemplative. He was in the field.

26. *And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant.*

He was a gloomy spirit, good, solid, regular, constant, but not very joyful. He took things rather severely, so he did not understand what this amusement could mean. "Some of the Salvation Army got in here," he said, "some of those boisterous Methodist people got her, and I do not like it. I am more regular than that. I do not like these rows and uproars. He asked of the servant what these things meant.

27, 28. *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:*

No, I dare say he was glad his brother was back, but he did not like such a fuss made over him, glad to see a wandering one restored, but why, why, why should there be all this extravagance of joy concerning this wandering young fellow, who had been no better than he should be? Why all this delight? And there are some kinds of Christians who always feel that when there is a sinner introduced into the church, "Well, I hope that it will turn out a genuine case," and always that is the first thought. They are afraid that it cannot be. They have never sinned in that way, They have been kept, by the grace of God, from outward transgression, and they are half afraid to hear of these outrageous sinners being brought in, and so much joy made over them. "He was angry, and would not go in."

28. *Therefore came his father out, and intreated him.*

He was worth fetching in. There was a good deal of solid worth in his character, and his father kindly came to ask him to come in and share the joy.

29. *And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee*

You may read it "slave for thee."

29. *neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends:*

Here have I been constant in the house of prayer, regular at my Sunday School class, and yet I get little or no joy of it. I go on just

in the regular path of duty but I have no music and dancing. I have a great many doubts and fears, very little exhilaration, very little delight.

30. *But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf.*

He has been a great sinner, and he is newly converted, and he has got all the joy. He has been running anyhow, and yet he is full of assurance full of delight, full of confidence. How can this be? I am a staid Christian having but slight joy, and he is but newly converted, and confident and full of delight. Thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. Even one of the little kid goats thou hast not give me. Thou has given him the fatted calf.

31. *And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.*

Why did not this son wake up to his privileges? Instead of not having a kid, he might have had whatever he liked. "All that I have is thine." He had been put into such a position as that, instead of being badly treated, as he, perhaps, would half accuse his father of treating him. "Son, thou art ever with me; thou livest at my table. My house is thy house. I love thee and delight in thee. All that I have is thine."

32. *It was meet*

It was right, it was proper, it Was fitting —

32. *That we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother.*

"You call him my son, but he is your brother, and I remind you of it — this thy brother."

32. *Was dead, and is alive again: and was lost, and is found.*

So if there be any here that do not take the joy which they ought in the conversion of great sinners, let them hear the gentle persuasive voice of God. You, as believers, have everything. Christ is yours. Heaven is yours. You are always with God, and all that he has belongs to you. But it is proper and fit that, when a sinner returns from the error of his ways, they should ring the bells of heaven and make a fuss over him, for he was dead and is alive again. I hope that you and I will never catch the spirit of the elder brother. Yet I remember that Krummacher says that he found that same spirit in himself sometimes. There was a man in the village where Krummacher lived, who was a great drunkard and everything

that was bad; and on a sudden he came into a very large sum of money and became a wealthy man. Krummacher felt, "Well, this hardly looks like the right thing — so many good, honest, hard-working people in the parish still remaining poor, and this worthless man has suddenly become wealthy and well-to-do." It seemed a strange way in the order of providence. Oh! we ought to rejoice and be glad when another person prospers, and wish that his prosperity may be blessed to him. I remember a minister years ago, when first Mr. Moody came, saying that he did not believe that Mr. Moody was sent of God "because," said he, "I find that many of the people who are converted under him never went to a place of worship before. It is only the riff-raff that are brought in." There is a nasty elder brother spirit. The riff-raff were just the people that we wanted to bring in, and if they had never been to a place of worship before, it was time that they should go. It was a mercy that they were brought in. Oh! instead of ever sniffing at sinners as if we were better than they, let us welcome them with all our heart and praise the heavenly Father that he so lovingly takes them in.

LUKE 17:1-10

1. Then said he unto the disciples, It is impossible but that offences will come:

We are so strangely made that even good men do not always agree, and there are so many bad men about that they will cast a stumbling-block in our way if they can.

1, 2. 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.

To do grievous damage to the soul of the very least of Christ's people, is a great and ruinous sin; nothing can be worse. God grant that we may not do this even inadvertently! Let not the strong indulge in that which would be unsafe for the weak, lest the weak be led into sin through that which the strong brother might find lawful, but which certainly would not be expedient. May none of us ever willfully grieve any child of God!

3. Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent,

Thou shalt not believe in his penitence No, surely,” say you, “that is incorrect.” Yes, it is incorrect; but that is what many of you do. I was only reading as things generally are; but that is not Christ’s direction.

3, 4. *Forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day,*

That is seven times too often.

4. *And seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.*

Do you say, “That is too many times in a day to forgive him”? Let me ask,-“ How many times in a day have you sinned? How many times in a day does God forgive you?” Ah! the seven times a day that you have to forgive your brother are but a small number compared with the innumerable forgivenesses granted to you by our ever-gracious God.

5. *And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith.*

For this kind of patient forgiving seemed too much for them, unless they had a larger stock of faith; and therein they were right. Strength of faith gives strength of love, and strength of love makes forgiveness easy.

6. *And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you.*

Now, if faith as a grain of mustard seed can do this, what cannot strong faith do? What a mercy it is for us that there is so much power in such little faith! A very small piece of dynamite can work great wonders; and within the tiniest morsel of faith, if it be no bigger than a grain of mustard seed, there lies concealed almost omnipotent force. Why do we not exercise that faith more? Nothing is impossible to him that believeth. We could blast the very strongholds of Satan with this powerful powder if we would but try it.

7, 8. *But which of you, having a servant plowing 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?*

See, brethren, our position as believers; we are here as servants. It is not the time for feasting yet. Whatever work we have done, even if it is getting towards the evening of our life's day, we must not think of sitting down yet, and expecting our Master to wait upon us. No, we must go on with our service, and reckon it to be our highest privilege still to gird ourselves, and wait on him. This is not the place of resting or of feasting; this is the day of our holy servitude. Let us work on, ploughing while we have strength for it; and when the sun goes down at eventide, then waiting like servants at the table of their Lord.

9. *Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not.*

Do you take off your hat to your servants, and say, "I am very grateful to you for doing your duty"? Not so. And even he who serves God best, may he expect honour as his due? Ah! no; he shall have honour because of the grace of his Master; but it is not his place to look for it, much less is it right for him to expect it as his due.

10. *So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.*

And who shall praise us for that? The most self-denying servant of the Saviour, the most ardent labourer for the Lord, will expect nothing of God except to be blessed by his abounding grace. What can we deserve of the dear hands of him who bought us with his blood? Are we not the bondservants of Christ? "Ye are not your own; ye are bought with a price." Therefore, whatever service you can render is due to him; and unto him let it be freely given without one thought of self-praise or pride because it is given without one thought of self-praise or pride because it is done so well.

LUKE 17:1-10

1. *Then said he unto the disciples, It is impossible but that offences will come: but woe unto him, through whom they come!*

Since the fall, we are so constituted that there are sure to be differences and disputes. It is a great mercy when men dwell together in unity. "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is." It is a work of grace; but nature has its lustings, and lustings lead to

strivings; And so, as long as the world is as it now is, “it is impossible but that offences will come: but woe unto him, through whom they come.” Let us not, therefore, be either offence givers or offence takers. When anyone offends us, let us say, “It is impossible but that offences will come,” and let us make light of it; and let us be very careful that we do not cause others to offend. As for him through whom the offence comes, —

2. It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend —

Or cause to offend —

2-4. 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.

Perhaps someone remarks, “It looks as if he would do nothing else but keep on sinning and repenting.” Well, suppose he does so, that is precisely what you are doing, except that you do not go often repent when you sin. So, possibly, the offender is rather better than you are, after all, and if God is gentle in his dealings with you, you may well be gentle in your dealings with your neighbor.

5. And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith.

They seemed so struck with the severity of this command that they asked for more faith that they might be able to obey it. And, dear friends, that is always the best thing to do. Do not refuse obedience to the Lord’s precept, but say, “Lord, increase my faith that I may be able to obey it. It can be done, or else thou wouldst not have given me the command. I cannot do it as I am without an increase of strength, therefore, as faith is the medium by which strength is received, Lord, increase my faith.”

6. And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you.

Meaning that anything and everything should be possible to our faith; but we need much more of it than the most of us have. Remember how holy Bernard says, “If thou hast a hard task, ask God to give thee a hard resolution.” The diamond is difficult to cut, but it can be cut if you can find something harder. So, if there be a very difficult task set us, if we get faith that is more than equal to it,

it will be accomplished. "With God all things are possible," which means not only that God can do all things, but that we also can do all things when God is with us.

7, 8. *But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, 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?*

This world is the place of service; we are not to be expecting to have the festival here. The great supper comes at the end of the day. This is the time for us to serve, even as Jesus did when he was here; and we are to serve right on till the close of the day, even as Jesus did.

9. *Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not.*

When the serving-man has done his day's work, his master does not say, "I am very grateful to you, John, for what you have done for me." He will have his wages, they will be his master's thanks.

10. *So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.*

"When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you." Ah! but we have not come anywhere near that yet; even if we had, we should still be "unprofitable servants." In our mind we should expect no thanks from our Master; but we should sorrow that we had not served him better.

LUKE 17:11-19

11,12. *And it came to pass, as he went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off:*

Lepers were allowed to enter villages, but not to go into the large walled towns. They were, however, commanded to stand at a certain distance from other people; and these men did so. This must have been a terrible sight, ten men afflicted with such a horrible disease all in one group. It shows how prevalent at that time was this disease, now happily so rare, at least among us: "Ten men that were

lepers.” It seemed as if the effect of sin in men became more conspicuous in the day when the Great Healer of men was here in person. Then Satan’s chain was lengthened that he might have greater power over the bodies of men, that his Master might subdue him, and that Christ Jesus the Lord might have the greater victory over the prince of darkness.

13, 14. *And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. And when he saw them, he said unto them, go show yourselves unto the priests.*

There was a tacit promise in that they should be healed, for, of course, the showing themselves to the priests was not that they might be pronounced unclean, for they were so pronounced already by their own confession, but that they might be pronounced clean. They were to go to the priests, and there was an implied promise that, if they so went, when the priests looked upon them they would be healed.

14-16. *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.*

He was probably the only one out of the ten that was a Samaritan. Though Jews and Samaritans did not usually agree, yet, as sorrow brings a man strange bedfellows, so in this case, these partners in a general sorrow forgot their sectarianism, and were blended into one sad company. Now that they were all healed, only one felt true gratitude to God, and to his Benefactor: “and he was a Samaritan.” It is very singular to notice that Luke tells us that this man glorified God “with a loud voice.” We have sometimes heard complaints that, at certain revival meetings, the singing was very loud and there was even shouting. Let the converts shout, brother, let them stout! They have good reason to shout, for Christ has made them whole. We have a great deal too much of respectable death about us, let us have a little even noisy life. I would sooner by half hear the praises of God shouted with a loud voice, than hear the mockery of praise in a tone that is scarcely to be heard, while some machine grinds out music to God’s glory, and men forget to sing or are drowned in loud bursts of wind from the instrument. Do not be ashamed to let it be known that you are saved. Praise the Lord with all your might; and, if they say that you are excited, tell them that

you are, and that you wonder if anybody could help being excited if he had been healed of leprosy or had his sins forgiven. But, at the same time, note the humility as well as the zeal of this man: he “fell down on his face at his feet.” I would like to see more of this action. In some revivals, there is plenty of shouting, but very little falling down on the face at Christ’s feet. Oh, for deep prostration of spirit, a humble waiting upon God, a gracious, tender confession of thanks to him for all that he has done for poor leprous sinners!

17, 18. *And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save the stranger.*

Often those who are thought to be the worst of people turn out the best. Many of the most precious pearls have been found in the deepest sea; and some of the most grateful hearts have been discovered among those who were most immersed in sin and error.

19. *And he said unto him, arise, go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole.*

Christ uses the word “whole” in an emphatic sense: “Not only thy body, but thy soul also is made whole, and thou art holy from this day.” There is a wonderful connection between these two words “whole” and “holy.” A holy man is a whole man, and he who is not holy is unsound, and not whole in the sight of God. The Lord make us wholly holy for Christ’s sake! Amen.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 146, and LUKE 17:11-19

LUKE 17:11-19

11. *And it came to pass, as he went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee.*

There is but One of whom we will think tonight, our divine Lord, who was on his way to Jerusalem. Passing along the frontiers of Samaria and Galilee, he had the Jews on one side of him, and the Samaritans on the other. He took a middle course, as if to show how he was going up to the New Jerusalem, loaded with blessings for the Jews on one side, and Gentiles on the other.

12. *And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers,*

Oh, the abundance of human misery that met the Saviour’s eye: “ten men that were lepers”! I was reading only yesterday of what

happened in Westminster, many years ago. When the king went along the highway, there were crowds of poor lepers on either side of the road, a shocking sight to see in this dear land of ours; and the king, in his tender mercy, simply passed a law that the lepers should not come near the road again to hook his gracious majesty with their misery. That is all he had to do for them; but our glorious King treated lepers very differently: "There met him ten men that were lepers."

12. *Which stood afar off:*

The rule was that they should never come upon the public road, or near the highway, lest the disease should be taken by others who might come near them.

13. *And they lifted up their voices,*

Not much of voices were they likely to have, for the leprosy dries the throat, and the voice is low and husky, and when lepers cry, "Unclean, unclean," it is an awfully sad sound, but very weak. These ten lepers lifted up their poor voices.

13. *And said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.*

They raised a plain cry, and the whole ten of them had to lift up their voices before they could be well heard.

14. *And when he saw them,*

Even before he heard them, he saw their pitiable condition.

14. *He said unto them, Go shew yourselves unto the priests.*

That is all Jesus said to the lepers: "Go shew yourselves unto the priests." They were not to go to the priests till they were clean, for the priests could not heal them. It was the healed man who went to the priests to get a certificate that he was healed, and so might mingle in society again. It was a strange message, then, that the Saviour gave to these lepers: "Go shew yourselves unto the priests." And oh, the faith of these men! With only this shell of a promise, as it were, they cracked it, and found a promise inside it, for they said to themselves, "He would not send us to the priests for nothing; he would not mock our misery; he must mean to heal us:" and therefore away they went. A grand faith this! You are to come to Christ before you feel any grace in you; you are not to wait until you feel you are healed, and then come to him. Come just as you are, without any sense of grace, or any kind of feeling within you that is worth the having. Come just as you are.

14. *And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed.*

As the sinner believes, he is saved. As a man begins to go towards the Saviour, the Saviour's grace meets him.

15. *And one of them, when he saw that he was healed,*

They all saw that they were healed, and they all must have felt extremely glad. Oh, the happiness of feeling the hot blood cooled, and full health taking the place of languor and disease!

15. *Turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God.*

This was a sure sign that he was healed, that he had his voice back; the disease had so thoroughly gone that the sound, which seemed to hide away in his husky throat, now came out clear and loud, like the stroke of a bell.

16. *And fell down, on his face at his feet, giving him thanks*

When I read these words just now, I thought, that is where I would like to be, and that is what I would like to do, all my life, to fall down, "at his feet, giving him thanks."

16. *And he was a Samaritan.*

Ah, me! nine of the seed of Israel were ungrateful, and only one poor outcast Gentile was grateful to the Lord for the miracle of healing that had been wrought.

17-19. *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.*

May the Lord Jesus thus speak to many a poor, leprous sinner here tonight! "Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole."

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 113, AND LUKE 17:11-19.

LUKE 17:11-32

11, 12. *And it came to pass, as he went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers which stood afar off:*

Leprosy was very common in Palestine in Christ's day. How thankful we ought to be that, in this country, at any rate, it has almost entirely died out! There used to be, in almost every town, a leper-house provided for lepers, so common was leprosy in this country. Certain diseases seem to die out by degrees, and we should

be very grateful that some of the worst forms of disease, by which men have been afflicted, have passed away. In this case, there were no less than ten in one village. They “stood afar off,” as was most proper, lest they should communicate the contagion to others. They had to cry out, and warn men not to come too near them, saying, with covered lip, “Unclean! unclean! unclean!” The muffled sound that they made, if the word could not be distinguished, helped to warn the passers-by to give them a wide berth.

13, 14. *And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go shew yourselves unto the priests.*

For no man could be pronounced clean even if he were healed, until he had undergone the ceremony prescribed in the Mosaic law. These lepers were to go to the priests just as they were, so their going was an act of faith.

14. *And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed.*

What a wonderful thing that must have been!

15, 16. *And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan.*

One of those off-casts and out-casts that the Jews would not own, — one of the men that they said were of a mongrel breed, — only half Israelite and half idolater. “O grace, it is thy want, Into unlikeliest hearts to come!”

17-25. *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. And when he who 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.

Though our Lord purposely left much with regard to his coming indefinite, he gave his disciples two instances, from the early history of the world, of the condition in which many would be found at his appearing.

26-32. *And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. 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.

LUKE 18:1-14

1. *And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;*

“Not to faint” in their expectation of answers to their supplications, and therefore give up prayer; but to persevere in presenting their petitions at the throne of grace, because prayer is never lost labour. There may be a time during which God does not appear to answer prayer, but he will ultimately answer it; therefore, “men ought always to pray, and not to faint” in prayer. If they do not pray, they will faint in many ways. Their courage will faint. All their hope as to the future will faint, and fall into a dead swoon as it were. So, dear friends, you have your choice between praying and fainting. The doctrine our Saviour laid down was “that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;” and this is the parable which he related in illustration of that truth: —

2. *Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man:*

He was a most unfit person to be a judge, as many in Eastern cities still are. They are ready enough to take bribes, but they are not

so prompt in giving just judgments. They generally attend to the business of the rich and the powerful, but neglect the poor and needy. So was it with this judge, who “feared not God, neither regarded man.”

3. *And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary.*

Probably someone had come, and taken away from her the little bit of land that her husband had left her, upon the produce of which she and the children might have lived; and she could not get it back again. So she comes to the judge, and cries, “Avenge me of mine adversary.”

4. *And he would not for a while —*

He had plenty of applicants who could pay him better than this poor woman could, so he disregarded her petition; but he little knew that, in her, he had to deal with a woman who meant to be heard, and who intended to press her suit until she won it. She was evidently a very determined character. Though a broken-hearted widow, yet she was not broken-spirited even though the judge refused for a while to attend to her plea.

4, 5. *But afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.*

She came again, and again, and again, and again; she would not leave off coming, for she meant to have the justice she sought, and she did get it. Now that is the way to pray, as if we would even weary God with our supplications, though we never can do so. It is impossible to weary him with earnest believing entreaties, yet we must show the same determination in prayer which this importunate widow manifested while pleading with the unjust judge.

6. *And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith.*

He is unjust, but he is obliged to be just now. He is hard-hearted, but he is compelled to yield. The widow has conquered him, not by her money, but by her importunity. She is there so often that she troubles him, and he says he must give in, and grant her request.

7. *And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?*

He may seem to be slow about it; but when his people cry to him, he will hear them ultimately if he does not at once. Do not

imagine that the children of God will always be laughed at, and downtrodden. God will yet arise, and take their side. They may be pushed into a comer for awhile, but they shall come out into a large room in due season, for God will certainly avenge his own elect.

8. *I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?*

If anybody could find it, he would, for he creates it all, and he knows where to look for it; yet there is so little of it that even he, whose eyes can detect the faith that is as small as a grain of mustard seed, can scarcely find it. There is all too little real faith in the world; and those who think they have most of it, when they get into troubled waters, soon find they have not any to spare, and much that they thought was faith does not turn out to be so. O men, brethren, fathers, how little do we trust our God compared with what he deserves!

9, 10. *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;*

They were both alike in going up to the temple, but they were very different in coming back from the temple. It is a very important thing to come to the house of God in a right state of heart; and it is a still better thing to go away from the Lord's house really benefited and improved. These two men went up to the temple with the same object; each of them went there "to pray." Both intended to pray, though they did not both do so; yet that was their ostensible object.

10. *The one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.*

A tax-gatherer, one of the most hated people in Christ's day, because none but the lowest class of Jews would collect taxes for the Romans; and as a general rule, they farmed the taxes, and greatly increased them by demanding of the people much more than was due. They were therefore held in the worst possible repute. I am not sure that tax-gatherers are the objects of much love anywhere; but, among the Jews, they were detested because they were collecting tribute for the Romans whom the conquered nation abhorred.

11. *The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.*

So it is evident that he noticed one person who was there, though I do not find that the publican took any notice of him. We can tell by this remark that the mind of the Pharisee was wandering from his supposed devotions. It is a bad sign in a so-called worshipper when he knows a great deal about other people who are in the Lord's house. I have known many people, whose recollection, after a sermon, has been quite as much about who was there, and who was not there, as it has been about what was in the sermon, and what was not in it. So this Pharisee's eyes went gadding about, and he spied out the poor publican; but, after a contemptuous reference to him, he returned to the catalogue of his own virtues and excellences: —

12. *I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.*

There his prayer ended, and he stood in a most enviable state of contentment, delighted with himself, lost in the contemplation of his own ineffable purity. I think I see him in all his glory, yet I quickly turn to the other part of the temple, further away from the most sacred place, for there I behold the true worshipper.

13. *And the publican, standing afar off, —*

Not afar off from the Pharisee only, but afar off from the sacred shrine, the innermost temple, as if unworthy to be there at all: “the publican, standing afar off,” —

13. *Would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, —*

That throne of the Highest, — as if even a glance from his unholy eyes might defile that sacred place. He bowed his eyes downward, as if to read in the earth the record of his sin; he did not dare to look up; —

13. *But smote upon his breast, —*

His heart smote him, and he smote upon his heart, —

13, 14. *Saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. 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 great Lord and Master acts as he would have his true servants do. It was said of some of them that they turned the world upside down, and that is exactly what he does. He abases those who exalt themselves, and he exalts those who abase themselves; he lifts up the lowly, and casts down them of high degree in their own estimation; and so shall it be to the end of the world.

LUKE 18:1-14

1. *And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;*

An old writer says that many of Christ's parables need a key to unlock them. Here, the key hangs outside the door; for, at the very beginning of the parable we are told what Christ meant to teach by it: "that men ought always to pray, and not to faint." And this is the parable: —

2. *Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man:*

It is a great pity for any city and for any country where the judges do not fear God, where they feel that they have been put into a high office in which they may do just as they please. There were such judges in the olden times even in this land; God grant that we may not see any more like them!

3. *And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary.*

She had no friend to plead for her, she had nobody to help her; and, therefore, when she was robbed of her little patrimony, she went to the court, and asked the judge for justice.

4. *And he would not for a while:*

He preferred to be unjust; as he could do as he liked, he liked to do as he should not.

4, 5. *But afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.*

She seems to have gone to him so often that he grew quite fatigued and pained by her persistence; the Greek words are very expressive, as though she had beaten him in the eye, and so bruised him that he could not endure it any longer. Of course, the poor woman had not done anything of the kind; but the judge thus describes her continual importunity as a wounding of him, as an attacking of him, an assault upon him, for he had perhaps a little conscience left. He had, at least, enough honesty to confess that he did not fear God, nor regard man, and there are some, of whom that is true, who will not own to it; but this judge admitted it, and though he was but little troubled about it, he said, "that I may not be

worried to death by this woman's continual coming, I will grant her request, and avenge her of her adversary."

6, 7. *And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which I cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?*

He is no unjust judge; he is One who is perfectly holy, and just, and true, and who appears in a nearer and dearer character than that of judge, even as the One who chose his people from eternity. "Shall not God avenge his own elect?" Ay, that he will; only let them persevere in prayer, and "cry day and night unto him."

8. *I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?*

If anybody can find it, he can, for he is the Creator of it; yet, when he comes, there will be so little of it in proportion to what he deserves, and so little in proportion to the lovingkindness of the Lord, that it will seem as if even he could not find it, although, if there were only as much faith as a grain of mustard seed, he would be the first to spy it out.

9 *And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:*

It seems as if these two things went together, and that, as our esteem of ourselves goes up, our esteem of others goes down; the scales seem to work that way.

10. *Two men went up into the temple to pray;*

It was the place that was specially dedicated for prayer; it was the place where God had promised to meet with suppliants. They did well, in those days, to go up into the temple to pray to God, though, in these days, —

"Where'er we seek him he is found,
And every place is hallowed ground."

It is sheer superstition which imagines that one place is better for prayer than another. So long as we can be quiet and still, let us pray wherever we may be.

10, 11. *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.*

It is possible that this was all true; we have no indication that he was a hypocrite, and if what he said was true, there was something in it for which he might well thank God. It was a great mercy not to be an extortioner, nor unjust, nor an adulterer, but what spoilt his expression of thankfulness was that back-handed blow at the other man who was praying in the same temple: “or even as this publican.” What had the Pharisee to do with him? He had quite enough to occupy his thoughts if he could only see himself as he really was in God’s sight.

12. *I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.*

Observe that there is no prayer in all that the Pharisee said. There was a great deal of self-righteousness and self-congratulation; but nothing else. There was certainly no prayer at all in it.

13. *And the publican, standing afar off, —*

Just on the edge of the crowd, keeping as far away as he could from the most holy place, —

13. *Would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.*

That was all prayer; it was a prayer for mercy, it was a prayer in which the suppliant took his right place, for he was, as he said, “a sinner.” He does not describe himself as a penitent sinner, or as a praying sinner, but simply as a sinner, and as a sinner he goes to God asking for mercy. Our English version does not give the full meaning of the publican’s prayer, it is, “God be propitious to me,” that is, “be gracious to me through the ordained sacrifice;” and that is one of the points of the prayer that made it so acceptable to God. There is a mention of the atonement in it, there is a pleading of the sacrificial blood. It was a real prayer, and an acceptable prayer, while the Pharisee’s boasting was not a prayer at all.

14. *I tell you, this man —*

This publican, sinner as he had been, though he had no broad phylacteries like the Pharisee had, though he may not have washed his hands before he came into the temple, as no doubt the Pharisee did, — this man, who could not congratulate himself upon his own excellence, “this man” —

14. *Went down to his house justified rather than the other:*

He obtained both justification and the peace of mind that comes from it. God smiled upon him, and set him at ease concerning his

sin. The other man received no justification, he had not sought it, and he did not get it. He had a kind of spurious ease of mind when he went into the temple, and he probably carried it away with him, but he certainly was not justified in the sight of God.

14. For every one that exalted himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

God turns things upside down. If we think much of ourselves, he makes little of us, and if we make little of ourselves, we shall find that a humble and contrite heart he will not despise. May he teach us so to pray that we may go down to our house justified, as the publican was!

LUKE 18:1-14

1-7. 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?

He hears their prayer a long time because it does not weary him. It pleases him, he loves to hear their sighs and cries, but will he not yield to their entreaties? What think you? Shall not the good, gracious, loving God yield at length?

8. I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?

Faith enough to make such prayers as this; faith enough to pray with importunity? Oh, if we had faith enough to resolve to have a blessing, and determined never to cease crying to God until we had it, we should have far more favors than we have hitherto gained from our God.

9-12. 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.

A fine peacock, truly! See how he spreads out his feathers, and struts before God, glorifying himself.

13. *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.*

“The sinner,” it should be; it is so emphatically in the Greek. There is a Pharisee, the righteous man according to his own estimate, and all the rest were sinners. Here is the publican, he is the sinner, and he thinks everybody else is righteous. These were two very conspicuous individuals, the self-righteous man and the sinner; and they are both here tonight. I will not ask them to stand up; but no doubt they are both of them present. Now what became of them?

14. *I tell you, this man —*

The sinner —

14. *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.*

It is God’s usual method to reverse what man does, and to turn things the other way upwards: “Everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” You remember how the Virgin Mary, in her song, praised the Lord for this very habit of his: “He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away.” That is his regular way of working, and he will continue so to do.

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 122 and LUKE 18:1-14.

LUKE 18:1-27

1. *And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;*

Especially, not to faint in prayer, not to become disheartened, or weary, even if their prayers should, for a long time, remain unanswered.

2, 3. *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.*

He would not have interested himself in her case simply because she was a poor widow, he had no bowels of compassion for her; nor would it have concerned him at all that her adversary had wronged her. He did not trouble to discharge the duties appertaining to his office. No fear of God and no respect for public opinion, affected him at all.

4. *And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man;*

He even boasted of the very thing of which he ought to have been ashamed: "I fear not God, nor regard man; I care for nobody, and defy everyone."

5. *Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.*

He cared for nobody but himself. He was concerned about his own peace of mind. The poor woman could win, through his selfishness, what she could not get from his sense of justice, since that had no weight with him. Her importunity won for her what nothing else could procure.

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. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth.*

God will hear the earnest, united, persistent cries of his people. His Church, today, is like a widow left forlorn. Her cries go up to God, pleading that he will vindicate her cause; and he will do so. He may wait a while; but the prayers of his people are not lost. By-and-by, he will avenge his own elect. So is it with regard to all true prayer. Though, for wise reasons, God may delay to reply, yet he files our petitions, they are registered in heaven. Their power is accumulating, it is all adding to the great pile of supplication which is the real strength of the Church of Christ. What a question that is, "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" He can find it if anybody can, for he knows what faith is, and where faith is, but will he find any? Well, he will find so little, even

amongst the best of his people, that the question may well be put; and amongst a great many who profess to have faith, he will find none at all. Brethren, we pray so feebly, we expect so little, we ask with such diffidence, we have such slight courage in prayer, that, if the Son of man himself came among us to search us, how little faith he would discover!

9-12. *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.*

He could not even magnify his own excellencies without sneering at the poor publican who had said nothing against him, or about him. That is a poor kind of religion which has to look down upon all others before it can look up to itself. What, O Pharisee, if others are not, apparently, so good as thou art in some things. Yet, in other things, they probably excel thee; and if thou thinkest thyself worthy of praise, thou hast never really seen thyself as thou art in God's sight! A correct knowledge of thine own heart would have led thee to a very different conclusion. It is a good thing that the Pharisee appeared to be thankful for something; but, probably, that was merely a complimentary speech, which meant very little. He did not thank God half as much as he praised himself.

13. *And the publican, standing afar off, —*

Away in some distant corner,

13. *Would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.*

He makes no reflection upon others; but confesses his own sin, and appeals to the great Propitiation, for the word he used means, "God be propitious to me, a sinner."

14, 15. *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. And they brought unto him also infants, that he would touch them: but when his disciples saw it, they rebuked them.*

Were not these children too little, and too unimportant for Christ to notice? Their understanding was not sufficiently developed to know anything that he might say; what was the use of bringing them for his blessing?

16. *But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.*

The kingdom of God consists of child-like spirits, persons like these children. Instead of needing to grow bigger in order to be fit to be Christians, we need to grow smaller. It is not the supposed wisdom of manhood, but the simplicity of childhood, that will fit us for the reception of divine truth. Alas! we are often too much like men, if we were more like children, we should receive the kingdom of God far more readily.

17-19. *Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein. 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.*

Yet the ruler was right. He knew not that he was speaking to One who is, assuredly, God, and; in the highest sense, good; but, since he had asked, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Christ answered his enquiry.

20, 21. *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.*

All which appears to be simple enough, if you only look on the surface but when you come to recollect that there is an inward, spiritual meaning to all this, that a licentious look breaks the command about adultery, that a covetous desire is stealing, that the utterance of a slander is bearing false witness, and so on, who is he that shall enter into life upon such terms as these? Yet they cannot be lowered, for they are, spiritually, just and right.

22. *Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, Yet lackest thou one thing:*

Christ gives him a test. If he is what he thinks he is, he will be ready to obey whatever command God lays upon him. Christ is about to lay one upon him; let us see whether he will obey that.

22. *Sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me.*

Now, which will he love the more, the Son of God, or his wealth?

23-27. *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.*

Yet some men spend all their lives in the earnest endeavor to make it hard for them to be saved. They are trying, as much as ever they can, to block up the road to eternal life, hoarding up that which will be a grievous burden to them, even if God shall lead them in the way to heaven. How much better is it to live wholly unto God, and then, be we rich or be we poor, consecrate all to him, and live to his praise and glory!

LUKE 18:31-43

31-34. *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 he accomplished. For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spirited 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.*

It would be hard to imagine our Lord speaking more plainly. He tells them of his sufferings in detail — describes exactly what happened. But their thoughts did not run that way; and when you are not expecting a thing, it little matters how very plainly you may be told of it. You are doating upon something else, and, therefore, you do not readily perceive the meaning. You know how; when you are expecting to hear a thing said, you can hear it even at a great

distance, or think you hear it, from the very motion of the man's lips. But if he should say something clean contrary to what you expect, then you do not so readily hear. And these disciples of our Lord were looking to see him made a king, and they could not comprehend that the only crown he was to have would be one of thorns, and that the homage paid to him would be to be scourged and to be spat upon. They did not understand. And do not you think that the run of our thoughts sometimes may be so contrary to divine truth that we may not be able to understand some very plain things in the Bible, which are only difficult to us because our thoughts are not yet running that way? And when one day we shall be more completely cleansed from the grossness of this world, many a riddle will become plain enough to us.

35-39. *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.*

Only to think that there should be some who think that when results are to be seen they can ever be regarded as hindrances. For is it not a result of ministry — a result of Jesus passing by — that men cry out, “Thou Son of David, have mercy on me”? And yet, when the wave-sheaf is before them, they seem to put it aside as though it were an impediment in the Saviour's way. “Let him go on sowing.” Well, but, sir, it will not hinder him to let him also reap a little, for evidently there has been good seed shown in this heart, and here is the outcome of it, for the man is crying, “Thou Son of David, have mercy on me.” We do not get our sermons interrupted in this way, but what a mercy it will be when they are! And I suppose that in some better times when God's Spirit more mightily blesses the word, we shall have to stop in our sermons every now and then to deal with anxious souls, or get them to step aside where those that are skillful in heaven's surgery may bind up their wounds. They will be crying ever and anon, “Sirs, what must we do to be saved? Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me.”

40, 41. *And Jesus stood, and commanded him to be brought unto him: and when he was come near, he asked him, Saying, What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?*

If Christ were to come near to every unconverted person here, and say to him, “What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?” do you know what it is you want? No. The unhappy circumstance is that the mass of mankind do not know what mercy they should ask for, even if they believed that they had only to ask and have. But, dear friend, you want deliverance from the power of sin. You want a new heart and a right spirit. You want to give up the sins you love, and to follow after the virtues which now you despise. May God give you grace to know that you want this. But this blind man knew what he wanted.

41-43. *And he said, Lord that I may receive my sight. And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight: thy faith have 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 18:31-43

31-33. *Then he took unto him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the 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.*

Our Lord Jesus Christ often talked to his disciples about his death. Before the time for it came, he foresaw it, he thought and spoke much of it, he even dwelt upon the terrible details of it very minutely: “He shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: and they shall scourge him, and put him to death.” Ah! dear friends, when our Lord Jesus died for us, he knew what he was doing. There are some men who, without a moment’s consideration, could do a brave notion, but they could not sit down and coolly calculate all the consequences of doing it. They find themselves unexpectedly in the face of imminent danger, they see a person needing to be saved from peril and they make a rush for it, and the daring deed is done. But here our Saviour deliberately thinks and talks about his death, yet he

never flinches, or looks back, but he prepares his heart for the solemn event, and sets his face like a flint to go through it all that he may save the souls of his people. We also ought to think and talk much of our Lord's death, since he thought and spake so much of it.

34. *And they understood none of these things:*

They could not make out what he meant, it was plain enough, but they could not believe that it should be so.

34-36. *And this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken. 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.*

The blind man asked, as the familiar hymn puts it, —

“What means this eager, anxious throng,
Which moves with busy haste along?”

37, 38. *And they told him, that Jesus of Nazareth passeth by. And he cried, saying Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me.*

If he could not see, he could hear. So, dear friends, like this blind man, use what senses you have. “Faith cometh by hearing;” so it came to this man, and as soon as he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth who was passing by, he began to pray to him. Oh, that some of you would also pray to him as soon as you hear that he is nigh! Deep down, from your very soul, let this cry go up, “Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me.”

39. *And they which went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace:*

I think I hear them saying, “Do not make such a disturbance. The Master is preaching, and we are losing his words through your noise. What is all that clamor about? Can you not have more respect to the Son of David than to cry in that fashion?”

39. *But he cried so much the more, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me.*

That is a good thing for you also to do, not only to keep on crying to the Lord Jesus, but to grow more importunate when others rebuke you. If you are seeking the Saviour, do not be put back, and if others would hinder you, be the more resolute, the more determined, to be heard by him.

40. *And Jesus stood, and commanded him to be brought unto him:*

Jesus had been walking along, the crowd making way for him, but he was arrested by the cry of a blind beggar: "Jesus stood, and commanded him to be brought unto him:" —

40, 41. *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.*

A plain question and a very distinct answer. What is it that you, dear friends, want of Jesus? Could you all tell if the question were put to you? What is it that you would have the Lord do for you? Do you know? This man did know; and when we know, as he did, what we want from Christ, we shall soon get it. The sad fact concerning many people is that, though they are not blind with their natural eyes, they are so blind in heart that they cannot see their own needs.

42, 43. *And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee. And immediately he received his sight, and followed him, glorifying God:*

Christ his only to speak, and the great work is done at once. The salvation of a soul from the power of sin is not the work of weeks; it can be done in a single moment. "Immediately he received his sight, and followed him." That is beautiful; as soon as he could see, he looked for Christ, and then followed him, "glorifying God." He clapped his hands, and followed Jesus, shouting and crying, "Blessed be God, I have found my sight! The darkness is over, and the light has broken in upon my soul."

43. *And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God.*

This exposition consisted of readings from LUKE 18:31-43, 19:1-10.

LUKE 18:35-43

35, 36. *And it came to pass, that as he was come nigh unto Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the way side begging: And hearing the multitude pass by, he asked what it meant.*

If he could not see, he could hear, and he could speak. Use all the ability that you have, and God will give you more.

37-39. *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:*

They told him that he was spoiling the Preacher's sermon. They had lost his last sentence; they could not catch the Saviour's

meaning, so they cried out to the blind man, “Hold your tongue, sir.”

39, 40. *But he cried so much the more, Thou son of David, have mercy on me. And Jesus stood,*

I can see him stop. He had been walking on before, and talking as we went; but prayer can cause the Saviour to be spell-bound. Here Jesus stood,

40, 41. *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?*

Our Lord likes us to know what it is that we want. He would have us feel our need, that we may have a distinct perception of the blessing when it comes, and know just what it is.

41. *And he said, Lord, that I may receive my sight.*

He wanted nothing else; but oh, how badly he wanted that boon!

42. *And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight*

Notice the echo. ‘The blind man said, “Lord, that I may receive my sight.” Jesus said, “Receive thy sight.” With a little turn in the expression, Christ’s answer is the echo of our prayer.

42. *Thy faith hath saved thee.*

No, surely it was Christ who saved him. Yes, but Christ delights to put his crown on faith’s head, for faith always puts the crown back on Christ’s head: “Thy faith hath saved thee.”

43. *And immediately he received his sight, and followed him,*

What should we do when our eyes are opened by Christ but follow him? The moment that we can see him, we should begin to follow him.

43. *Glorifying God: and all the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God.*

May we have cause to praise the Lord tonight for many blind eyes opened!

This exposition consisted of readings from ISAIAH 6; MATTHEW 13:10-17; AND LUKE 18:35-3.

LUKE 18:35-43

35-38. *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.

He did not need to be told twice who was passing by, nor did he need any exhortation to seek Christ's help. It was enough for him that Jesus of Nazareth was near him; so he would cry to him for the help he alone could give. Oh, that we were half as sensible, Oh, that the blindness did not get into men's hearts! If it were not so, every blind soul would at once begin to cry to God for mercy; there is not one poor sinner here, who knows that, Jesus often passes this way, who would not begin at once to cry, "Thou Son of David, have mercy on me."

39. *And they which went before rebuked him,*
"Be quiet," they cried.

39. *That he should hold his peace:*

"Do not interrupt the flow of those marvellous words, or break the thread of that matchless discourse."

39. *But he cried so much the more, Thou son of David, have mercy on me.*

They could not quench the fire that burned within his breast; they did but increase its intensity by all their efforts to put it out. The blind man was so earnest to get his eyes opened that his voice could not be silenced. This was a proof of his common sense and true wisdom. It is remarkable how clearly the blind people mentioned in the Scriptures could see. Oh, that those who think they can see could really see as plainly as this blind man could, and would act as wisely as he did! "He cried so much the more, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me." This was his only hope;—perhaps, his last opportunity; so he availed himself of it to the full.

40, 41. *And Jesus stood, and commanded him to be brought unto him: and when he was come near, he asked him, saying, What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee! And he said, Lord, that I may receive my sight.*

There was no waste of words. He said what he meant, and he meant what he said, and he knew what he wanted. It is a great thing, in prayer, to know what we really need,—a very important thing to be sensible enough not to multiply words, but to cry to the Lord

with a definite object, as this blind man said, "Lord, that I may receive my sight."

42, 43. *And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight; 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.*

That was a blessed praise-meeting, brought about by the healing of that one man. Now that his eyes were opened, he showed that his mouth was not closed. He proved that he could pray well; now he proves that he can also praise well. He prayed when they tried to stop him, and now nobody shall stop him from praise; and he so praised the great Physician that, with the flaming firebrand of his gratitude he set all other hearts in a blaze: "All the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God."

This exposition consisted of readings from LUKE 18:35-43; AND 19:1-10.

LUKE 18:35-43

35-39. *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:*

"Hush!" they cried; "how can you disturb the blessed Master's discourse? Be quiet."

39, 40. *But he cried so much the more, Thou son of David, have mercy on me. And Jesus stood,—*

Prayer held him fast. Here is a stationary Saviour, held in his place by the cries of a blind man. Oh, the power of prayer! It stays the onward march of the Son of God: "Jesus stood,"

40, 41. *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.*

It is a great thing to know what you really do want. There are some persons who are so blind that they do not know that they are blind; and because they say, "We see," therefore is their blindness the more intense. I fear that there is many a person, who professes to pray, yet who, if Christ should come into the room, and say, "What

wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?” would not know how to answer the question. This man did; and he said, very briefly, and very clearly, but in a very full way, “Lord, that I may receive my sight.”

42. *And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight:*

Often, the blessing from Christ’s lip is the echo of the prayer which fell from ours. The blind man said, “Lord, that I may receive my sight.” Echo answered, “Receive thy sight.”

42, 43. *Thy faith hath saved thee. And immediately he received his sight,—*

See, how the prayer, the word of Christ, and the immediate effect of it, all tally. “That I might receive my sight.” “Receive thy sight.” “He received his sight.”

43. *And followed him,—*

Christ likes not blind followers: “and followed him,”—

43. *Glorifying God: and all the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God.*

They seemed to be greatly impressed, but we shall see that some of them soon spoke in another fashion.

This exposition consisted of readings from LUKE 18:35-43; AND 19:1-10.

LUKE 19

1-5. *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 today I must abide at thy house.*

Remember that the Lord Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem, to suffer and to die; and there he was the patient, suffering Lamb of God; but here he speaks in that commanding tone which well became the Prince of the House of David: “Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for today I must abide at thy house.”

6. *And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully.*

Solomon said, “Where the word of a king is, there is power;” omnipotence went with the word of this King of kings, so Zacchaeus was bound to obey it.

7-11. *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 anything 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. And as they heard these things, he added and spake a parable, because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear.*

Their minds were full of thoughts concerning Christ's coming as a King, and they had very mistaken notions concerning his kingdom, so he indicates to them that, for the present, the practical matter to be remembered was that he had come "to seek and to save that which was lost." If they had not been so full of their idle dreams of a temporal sovereignty, they would have perceived that, in the calling of Zacchaeus, Christ had manifested his Kingship in the realm of mercy, and had there exercised the sovereignty of his grace. In order that they might be able the better to understand the meaning of his spiritual kingdom, and not have their eyes so dazzled by the illusions which had so long deceived the Jews, our Lord pointed out to them, in the parable of the pounds, the practical way of preparing for his second coming.

12-15. *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.*

It would have been well if our translators, instead of using that ugly Latin word, "occupy," had kept to the expression, "trade with it," for here we get the same words again: "that he might know how much every man had gained by trading."

16. *Then came the first, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds.*

The genuine servant, with due humility, puts himself in the background. It is not he who has “gained ten pounds;” it is his Lord’s pound that has done it. He is pleased to bring the ten pounds; yet he claims no credit for himself, but says, “Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds.”

17. *And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities.*

There is no comparison between the servant’s work and the reward for its faithful performance. That ten pounds, if his Lord had given it all to him, would not have bought a house in a village, unless it had been a very tiny one, — “a cottage in a vineyard,” or “a lodge in a garden of cucumbers;” yet his Lord gives him “authority over ten cities.”

18, 19. *And the second came, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds. And he said likewise to him, Be thou also over five cities.*

How he must have opened his eyes, when he received authority over five cities!

20. *And another came, saying, Lord, behold, here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin:*

The napkin, with which he ought to have wiped away the sweat from his brow, he had used merely as a wrapper for the pound that his lord had entrusted to him for the purpose of trading with it. He had done nothing with the pound; he thought he was all right because he had not done any harm with his lord’s money. He had not joined the revolting citizens, who said, “We will not have this man to reign over us;” he had not spent the pound, nor embezzled his master’s money; in fact, he had been very careful to keep intact the treasure that had been entrusted to him, and he felt proud of his own prudence, and said, “Lord, behold, here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin.”

21. *For I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that thou layedst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow.*

This was impudence indeed; but his master took him on his own ground, and showed that, even if his statement had been true, he ought to have been the more diligent in obeying his lord’s command.

22, 23. *And he saith unto him, Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant. Thou knewest that I was an austere man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not sow: Wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury?*

“Thou mightest have done that, at any rate, even if thou wast afraid to trade with it, as I bade thee.” God often deals with men on their own ground, and condemns them out of their own mouth. They say that God is very severe in threatening them with “the wrath to come.” Well, if you so believe, and so speak, there is the more reason why you should fear to disobey him, and so to incur his just displeasure. If, in spite of such terrible threatenings, you still defy him, it only brings out the more clearly the greatness of your guilt.

24, 25. *And he said unto them that stood by, Take from him the pound, and give it to him that hath ten pounds. (And they said unto him, Lord, he hath ten pounds.)*

They were quite astonished. “What! give more to the man who has so much already?” “Yes,” says the master, “that is my command.”

26. *For I say unto you, That unto everyone which hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him.*

Hear again the note of sovereignty. Christ will do as he wills; and his mode of action shall sometimes be so singular that even his own attendants will wonder at the strangeness of his procedure, and will begin to ask, “How is this?” But, as Elihu said to Job, “He giveth not account of any of his matters.”

27-31. *But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me. And when he had thus spoken, he went before, ascending up to Jerusalem. And it came to pass, when he was come nigh to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount called the mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, Saying, Go ye into the village over against you; in the which at your entering ye shall find a colt tied, whereon yet never man sat: loose him, and bring him hither. And if any man ask you, Why do ye loose him? thus shall ye say unto him, Because the Lord hath need of him.*

Here we see Christ’s true royalty again flashing out from beneath the humiliation of his humanity. He lets us know that,

although he is going up to Jerusalem to die, it is not because he is not Lord of all; but that, being Lord of all, he makes himself of no reputation, takes upon himself the form of a servant, is made in the likeness of men, and being found in fashion as a man, he humbles himself, and becomes “obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”

32-34. *And they that were sent went their way, and found even as he had said unto them. And as they were loosing the colt, the owners thereof said unto them, Why loose ye the colt? And they said, The Lord hath need of him.*

The word of the King was again with power, and the owners of the colt were willing to let the animal go since the King had “need of him.” They may have been secret disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, but we have no information upon that point. Our King’s warrant runs anywhere; and even when his personal presence is not consciously realized, his royal and divine word still rules the minds and hearts of men.

35-38. *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.*

They were so jubilant that they seemed to have caught some notes from the song that the angels sang at the Saviour’s birth: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” There had been war in heaven, but these disciples of Christ sang, “Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest.”

39-41. *And some of the Pharisees from among the multitude said unto him, Master, rebuke thy disciples. And he answered and said unto them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out. And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it,*

What a contrast! The King’s courtiers shouting for joy, and the King himself weeping over the guilty city where the greatest tragedy in the history of the whole universe was about to take place. The

King saw, in the near and more remote future, what no one else could see, so, “when he was come near, and beheld the city, he wept over it.”

42-48. *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. 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. There was a popular wave of enthusiasm in his favor; but, alas! it soon ebbed away, and then the multitudes that had cried, “Hosanna!” were just as loud in their shouts of “Crucify him! Crucify him!”

LUKE 19:1-10

1 *And Jesus entered and passed through Jericho.*

There was to be a miracle at each end of Jericho. Long before, it had been cursed; now it was to have a double blessing.

2. *And, behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus, which was the chief among the publicans,—*

That is, tax-gatherers—

2. *And he was rich.*

As they often were, for they farmed the taxes, and then squeezed every farthing they could out of the people.

3. *And he sought to see Jesus who he was; and could not for the press, because he was little of stature.*

That was a fortunate thing for him. We need not all wish to be so tall as some people are. Perhaps Zacchaeus would not have gone up the sycamore tree if he had been a tall man; but the whole story

turns upon something which many regard as a disadvantage: "he was little of stature."

4-7. 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 today 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,—

There is a great contrast between this verse and the last one in the previous chapter: "All the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God." Here it is, "When they saw it, they murmured." Yet, very likely, many of them were the same people; certainly, they were the same sort of people that we hear of every now and then: "When they saw it, they all murmured." There are far too many of that kind about still; we do not quite know who they are, nor where they are, they have a sort of nondescript, mysterious existence that finds expression in the words, "They say so-and-so and so-and-so." They have been saying something about the minister, something about the Sunday-school, something about the Bible-class, something about your work and mine. You see, there always were such people about, and they always would talk, and their talk often took the form of complaining: "When they saw it, they all murmured,"

7. Saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner.

If he had not done so, he could not have gone anywhere, for all men are sinners. "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." But this man was a sinner above others, for he had sold himself to the hated Roman power, and was authorized to collect the conqueror's taxes from his own people; so, of course, in the estimation of the Jews, he was the worst kind of sinner that could be found anywhere.

8. And Zacchaeus stood,—

And he did not talk at all like a sinner,—

8. And said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor;—

Some of those saints, as they reckoned themselves, had not done anything like as much as that: "The half of my goods I give to the poor;"—

8. *And if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.*

Which restitution was an act of justice; and when charity and justice go hand in hand, what more can we expect of men?

9, 10. *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.*

And that day he had both sought and saved one of the lost ones, for he had found Zacchaeus up in the sycomore tree, and he had brought salvation to the tax-gatherer's house. May he do the same for many who are here!

This exposition consisted of readings from LUKE 18:35-43; AND 19:1-10.

LUKE 19:1-10

1. *And Jesus entered—*

That is, he entered at one end of the town,—

1. *And passed through Jericho.*

And so came out at the other end of it.

2. *And, behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich.*

It was an important station for the collection of customs; there was a good deal of produce at Jericho upon which there was a tax, so Zacchaeus had a good post: he was rich.

3-7. *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 today 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,*

Some of the very people, I suppose, who had just before given praise to God. So fickle are the judgments of men that we need not be elated when all of them speak well of us. It only needs that the wind should veer just half a point, and they will all speak ill of us. The cry of men, even when it is most clear and strong, is not to be depended on. They shout "Hosanna," today; but, before the week is

out, they cry, “Crucify him; crucify him.” So, here, “They murmured,”—

7. Saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner.

I do not know where else he could have gone, for they were all sinners; but they meant that this tax-gatherer was “a sinner” by public reputation, he was an excommunicated person, who was regarded by everybody as “a sinner” in a very special sense.

8. And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor;—

“Henceforth, one half of my income shall go in almsgiving; “—

8. And if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.

“I will not give to the poor or to God that which is not lawfully mine. I will not steal a sheep, and give the feet to the poor; but I will give back, four times over, anything that I may have taken wrongfully, and still the half of my future income shall go to the poor.”

9, 10. 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.

This exposition consisted of readings from LUKE 18:36-43; AND 19:1-10.

LUKE 19:1-10

1, 2. 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.

Jesus Christ had just blessed a blind man who was poor, so poor that he was a common wayside beggar; will he bless the rich man, too? Oh, yes! he knows no distinction of persons, he is ready to bless all classes; whether they be rich or poor is nothing to him.

3. And he sought to see Jesus who he was;

Possibly he had not much respect, but he had great curiosity; he would like to see the man about whom everybody was talking: “He sought to see Jesus who he was.”

3. And could not for the press, because he was little of stature.

The crowd round about him was so thick that the little short man could not see over the heads of the tall people. Though he pushed,

and tried to get in front, there was always some bigger body before him, so that he could not see the great Teacher.

4. And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycamore tree —

Do you not see the little short man running in front of the throng, and climbing up a tree that stood in the way? Rich men do not generally climb trees, but here was a man whose curiosity overcame his dignity, so he “climbed up into a sycamore tree” —

4, 5. To see him: for he was to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him,

Cannot you imagine that you see the blessed Master stopping, and looking up at that tree? Somehow, he always made himself one with those whom he meant to bless. When he spoke to the blind man, he stood as if he were himself blind, and asked him, “What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?” And now he stops under this sycamore, and looks up at curious Zacchaeus as if he, too, were taken with a fit of curiosity, and asks, “Who is that up in this tree?” “He looked up and saw him,”-spied him out, —

5. And said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for today I must abide at thy house.

Oh, how astonished must the little Jew have been when he heard Christ’s words! Never was a man so taken with surprise before, but with the word there came a divine softness into the heart of the chief of the publicans, and he yielded to that singularly condescending invitation, that strangely unexpected command.

6. And he made haste, and came down; and received him joyfully.

A great change had been suddenly wrought in him; the opening of the blind man’s eyes was not at all more remarkable than the renewing of the heart of Zacchaeus: “He made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully.”

7. And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner.

I wonder where he could have gone and not been guest with a man that was a sinner; but Zacchaeus was thought to be a sinner beyond ordinary sinners. Our Lord still loves to be the guest of a man that is a sinner, he still wants a place where he can stay. O man, thou who art a sinner, ask him home with thee! O woman, thou who art in thy very trade a sinner, ask him home with thee, and we will

say again, not murmuringly, but joyfully, "He has gone to be guest with one who is a sinner."

8. *And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor;*

That was a grand proof that the conversion of Zacchaeus was genuine; I should like to see the same kind of proof in many professors whom I know: "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor." I remember one who was converted in this place, and he at once gave £50 to some good object, and I said to his brother, "I think your brother I converted." He answered, "I hope he is, but he is a dreadful skin-flint." "But," I replied, "only yesterday, he gave £50 to such-and-such a work." "Ah, then!" said the brother, "I am sure he is converted, for nothing but the grace of God would make him do such a thing as that." Now Zacchaeus was, no doubt, a man of that kind, one who loved his money, and kept it to himself as long as ever he could; but now that he is converted, he says, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor;" —

8. *And if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.*

He acts in charity and justice, for he is determined to do the right thing with his substance. You see, he was a rich man, so his money was a source of trouble. The blind beggar had no such difficulty, for he had not any money that he must distribute when he was converted; but this rich man — this camel, as our Saviour called such men, went through the eye of a needle by the grace of God, and thus the Lord proved the reality of his conversion.

9. *And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham.*

"He does not look like it, he has become a tax-gatherer for the Romans, he has oppressed his own countrymen. But he is a son of Abraham, and salvation has come to him."

10. *For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.*

If, at this time, we ask our Lord Jesus, "Whither goest thou, Divine Master?" his answer still is, "I am come to seek and to save that which was lost." "Art thou come after those who think themselves good enough without thee?" He shakes his head and says, "I am a Physician, and the whole have no need of a Physician,

but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” The gospel of the grace of God is for the guilty; if you are not guilty, there is no gospel for you; but if you are guilty, and confess it, to you is the word of this salvation sent.

This exposition consisted of readings from LUKE 18:31-43, 19:1-10.

LUKE 19:1-27

1, 2. *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.*

Many of those tax-gatherers were rich; they usually farmed the taxes, and took care to extort all that they possibly could out of the poverty of the people.

3. *And he sought to see Jesus who he was;*

He did not seek to hear him; his curiosity lay in another direction, — he desired to see him. Who could this man be who created such a stir? What kind of man was he?

3-5. *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, —*

Zacchaeus went up into the sycamore tree that he might see Jesus, but he was himself seen there by Jesus; and that, dear friends, is the first act in the process of salvation. Jesus looks at us, and then we look at him. So, here, the Lord spied out Zacchaeus up among the branches of the tree; “he looked up, and saw him,” —

5. *And said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for today I must abide at thy house.*

His surprise at receiving such a message must have been overwhelming, yet he did not suffer that surprise to delay his obedience to Christ’s command.

6, 7. *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.*

“This professedly superior teacher, this purist, this teacher of the highest morality, has gone to be guest with this tax gatherer, — a man who is a sort of outlaw, a disreputable person altogether.” Ah! how does the legal spirit, in self-righteous men, cry out against the

sweet benevolence of our blessed Master, who comes into the world for this very purpose, — to be the Guest of sinners, that he may be the Physician of sinners!

8. *And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor;*

There was not one among those self-righteous people who would have done a tenth as much as Zacchaeus declared that he would do.

8. *And if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.*

There was not one among the murmurers who would have dared to say as much as that. There are a great many people who are quick to condemn those who are a hundred times better than themselves. I wonder whether there are any people of that sort here; I should not wonder if there are.

9. *And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham.*

When our Lord was here, his personal mission as a soul-winner was to the Jews, to those who were of the house of Abraham; so he shows that however much despised this man might be, he came within the compass of the Christ's immediate mission: "forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham."

10, 11. *For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost. 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.*

Some of them dreamt of a temporal sovereignty with Christ at its head, so he taught them that his kingdom was something very different from that.

12, 13. *He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come.*

"Use these pounds on my account; be stewards of them for me until I return."

14-16. *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.

He was a modest man; he did not say, “I have gained ten pounds;” but, “Thy pound hath gained ten pounds.” And if God has blessed anyone so as to enable him to bring in a large result from the talent entrusted to him, he must ascribe it all to God, and not to himself: “Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds.”

17-19. *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.*

Observe that, whatever the triumph of Christ is to be, his faithful servants are to share in it. He is to be the King of the many cities in the rich provinces of his Father’s domain; but he will give to one of his servants ten cities, and to another five cities. But what a vast dominion that must be out of which he can afford to give such rewards as this! Ten Cities, — can any earthly king give in this fashion? There are royal rewards at the last for those who are faithful now. No pitiful pence shall fall to the lot of those who diligently serve the Lord Christ; they shall have a rich reward, not of debt, but of grace; and, therefore, all the larger.

20. *And another came, saying, Lord, behold, here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin:*

He had not lost it, he had not spent it, he had not even dug a hole in the earth and hidden it; but he had used a nice piece of linen to wrap it in, and had taken great care of it; and there it was just as when he received it. It had not diminished, neither had it grown at all.

21. *For I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that thou layedst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow.*

So there is a slavish kind of fear, a dread, a horror of God, which will even keep men out of his service. It ought not legitimately to do so, but, undoubtedly, there are some persons who, out of an evil timidity, are afraid to attempt anything for God or man, and hence their life is useless. Their talent cankers and rusts in the napkin in which they have wrapped it.

22. *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, —*

“That was thine opinion; according to thine own confession, that was thine idea concerning me: ‘Thou knewest that I was an austere man,’ —

22, 23. *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?*

”With proper interest.” God does not trouble about clearing his character with ungodly men. You and I are very particular and punctilious in defending ourselves against false accusations; but God’s character needs no clearing. It is so transparent that, if ungodly men choose to besmear it, he argues with them on their own ground, and does not stay to answer their slanders. When I have heard people say of God that he is unjust or too severe, all I have felt inclined to say in reply was just this, “Whatever he may be, he is the God who will judge you at the last; and if you think thus of him, so much the more ought you to yield yourself to him, and submit to his infinite majesty, for he is King of kings, and Lord of lords. It is an ill day when we attempt to be the judge of our Judge, and pretend to be the god of God. He is infinitely glorious, so let us bow before him.’

24-26. *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.*

They who have some already shall have more, especially in the matter of grace. If you serve God well, he will give you more to do. If you love him ardently, he will reward you by enabling you to have more love to him; and if you exercise great faith, he will give you yet more faith. The way to be truly enriched, spiritually, is to be faithful to God in what we have.

27. *But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me.*

Whatever these words mean, it is certain that there is a terrible doom in store for all who are God’s enemies, May none of us be found among them!

LUKE 20:9-16

9. *Then began he to speak to the people this parable, A certain man planted a vineyard, and let it forth to husbandmen, and went into a far country for a long time.*

It is a long time since Jesus left us, and he has not yet returned. Many say that he is coming back very soon; others say, "The Lord delayeth his coming."

10-11. *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.*

They grow bolder, and more wicked, you see; first beating, and then adding shameful treatment to their former cruelty. Men do not come to ridicule religion, and persecute its advocates, all at once; this is an art which Satan teaches by degrees.

12. *And again he sent a third: and they wounded him also, and cast him out.*

They are more violent this time; it comes to actual wounding, and to casting out the servant.

13. *Then said the lord of the vineyard, What shall I do?*

A strange thing happens when the Lord himself comes to pass, and says, "What shall I do?" Here is infinite wisdom, as it were, at a non-plus; and in that extremity this is the Lord's last expedient: —

13-15. *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 our's. So they cast him out of the vineyard, and killed him.*

You know the story how this beloved Son of the Highest was all love and pity; and yet, with cruel hands, men cast him out of God's ancient vineyard, and crucified him, hoping that they should be allowed to remain lords of God's heritage.

15. *What therefore shall the lord of the vineyard do unto them?*

What punishment can be sufficient to expiate such a crime? What vengeance will be poured out upon those who have killed him who came to do them good?

16. *He shall come and destroy these husbandmen, and shall give the vineyard to others.*

And he did so; he scattered abroad the Jews, and gave the kingdom, for a while at least, unto the Gentiles, and they hear the gospel which the Jesus refused.

16. *And when they heard it, they said, God forbid.*

That is exactly what you and I would say, for we, too, have ill-treated the blessed Lord of the vineyard and his beloved Son. Lest we should have the heritage taken from us, let us yield up the fruit to him who has the best right to it all.

LUKE 21

1-6. *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 like 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.*

This was literally true of the temple at Jerusalem; and today there remains nothing of it. It is also true of all earthly buildings and of all earthly things. However firm they appear to be, as though they might outlast the centuries themselves, yet the things which are seen are temporal, and like the baseless fabric of a vision, they shall all melt into thin air, and pass away. "The things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."

7. *And they asked him, saying, Master, but when shall these things be? and what sign will there be when these things shall come to pass?*

Those questions are always being asked, they are being asked at this very day about Christ's second coming. They shall have no answer, for Christ himself assures us that, as the Son of man, he

knew not the day nor the hour of his own coming. As the Son of God he knew all things; but as a man like ourselves, he was willing to be a know-nothing upon that point.

8. *And he said, Take heed that ye be not deceived: for many shall come in my name, saying I am Christ; and the time draweth near: go ye not therefore after them.*

This passage refers, in the first place, to the siege of Jerusalem and in its second and yet fuller meaning, to the coming of the Lord. It looks to me that our Lord regarded the destruction of Jerusalem as “the beginning of the end,” the great type and anticipation of all that will take place when he himself shall stand in the latter day upon the earth. And, as before the destruction of Jerusalem there were many false christs, so will there be the more of them the nearer the end of the world shall be. This shall be to us one of the tokens of our Lord’s speedy appearing, but we shall not be deceived thereby. “Take heed that ye be not deceived: for many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and the time draweth near: go ye not therefore after them.”

9. *But when ye shall hear of wars and commotions, be not terrified; for these things must first come to pass; but the end is not by and by.*

Everywhere throughout the Scriptures there is this double message of our Lord, — “Watch, for I may come at any moment. Expect me to come, and to come soon; yet never be terrified as though the time were immediately at hand, for there are certain events which must occur before my advent.” How to reconcile these two thoughts, I do not know, and I do not care to know. I would like to be found in that condition which consists in part of watching and in the other part of patiently waiting and working till Christ appears.

10, 11. *Then said he unto them, Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: And great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences; and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven.*

Someone says, perhaps, “All this we have had, times without number; yet Christ has not come.” Just so, for these signs are not sent to minister to our curiosity, but to keep us always on the watch; and whenever we mark these earthquakes, and wars, and famines, and pestilences, then are we to think, “Behold, he cometh,” and watch the more earnestly. You know how it is often with the man

who is very sick. It is reported that he cannot last long; you call many times, yet he is still living, do you therefore conclude that he will not die? No, but you the more certainly expect that he will soon be gone. So is it with Christ's second advent. He bids us note the signs of his coming, and yet, when some of those signs appear, he does not come, all this is to keep us still on the alert watching for him. Even in his own day, when he so spoke that his servants expected him to come at once, yet he also added words from which they might fairly judge that he would not come directly.

12-16. *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.*

Nowadays, the fashion is always to meditate, and think, and excogitate a gospel for yourself. To be a thinker, — that is the very crown of perfection to some minds, but it is not so according to our Master's mind. His servants are to speak, not their own thoughts, but his thoughts. If they will keep to his gospel, he will give them a mouth and wisdom, which all their adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist. We are to be the repeaters of a message which is given to us, not the manufacturers of tidings. There is to be an exhibitions of inventions very soon, and it is quite right and proper that there should be; but I pray that none of us may ever be the inventors of a new gospel, or of new doctrines, or of new systems of theology, but, on the contrary, let us settle it in our hearts that we will speak Christ's Word all our days; and if thereby we are brought into trouble, we will depend upon him to give us a mouth and wisdom, which all our adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist.

16. *And ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolks, and friends; and some of you shall they cause to be put to death.*

How true that has been many a time! For how long a period the saints were martyred! And the days of martyrdom are not yet over.

17, 18. *And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake. But there shall not an hair of your head perish.*

During all the terrible siege of Jerusalem, it is believed that not one Christian perished, for God took special care of the followers of his Son. They were the most hated of all men, yet nobody could touch them. None of them took up arms, for it was contrary to their religion; as, indeed, if we are Christians, it is contrary to our religion to resist evil, but we are to bear and endure. The early Christians did so; and because of their very defenselessness, they were safe under the guardian care of the Lord their God.

19-24. *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.*

And it is so even to this day. Here is another instance in which the Lord bade his people expect his coming, and yet at the same time told them that he would not come so long as Jerusalem should be trodden down of the Gentiles. "Until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled" means the time when the Messiah shall gather in those Gentiles unto himself; for, when he shall appear, they shall look on him whom they have despised, and turn to him whom they have so long rejected.

25. *And there shall be signs in the sun —*

As there were at the destruction of Jerusalem, and as there will be at the second coming of Christ. We have had a rehearsal of that coming in the destruction of the favored city; but the grand event itself, who shall rightly speak of it?

25-27. *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 —

Whether they wish to see him or not, “then shall they see” —

27-32. *The Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh. And he spake to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; when they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled.*

As I understand it, for the first time; and afterwards it shall be fulfilled again. It is a prophecy that bears two meanings, an outer and an inner; it has been fulfilled once, and it shall soon be fulfilled again.

33, 34. *Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away. And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, —*

Please notice that “cares of this life” are put down with over-eating and over-drinking, for men can be intoxicated and surfeited with care, either the care of getting, or the care of keeping, or the care of spending, or the care of losing. Any of these cares may cause a surfeit and a drunkenness wherefore, “take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life,” —

34. *And so that day come upon you unawares.*

All that you can see in this world, you are to regard as being doomed to destruction; that destruction commenced, so to speak, when Jerusalem fell beneath the Roman sword. Everything earthly is doomed. You are living, not in your eternal mansions but you are living a makeshift life; you are passing through a wilderness, you are pilgrims, you are sojourners; this is not your rest. Do not get to love this world, or to be taken up with it. Do not strike your roots into it; you are not to dwell here, and to live here always. You are walking among shadows; regard them as such. Hug them not to your bosom; feed not your souls upon them, lest, when that day comes,

before whose coming all of them shall melt away, you shall be filled with amazement and shame.

35-37. *For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man. And in the day time he was teaching in the temple; and at night he went out, and abode in the mount that is called the mount of Olives.*

You know what he did there, for —

“Cold mountains and the midnight air,
Witnessed the fervor of his prayer.”

Jesus ever practiced what he preached. He said to his disciples, “Watch ye therefore, and pray always,” so he himself both watched and prayed.

38. *And all the people came early in the morning to him in the temple, for to hear him.*

May we all be willing, not only to hear him, but also to heed what he says! Amen.

LUKE 22:1-39

1, 2. *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.*

Dastardly fear often drives men to the greatest crimes. He who is not brave enough to be master of his own spirit, and to follow the dictates of his own conscience, may do, before long, he little knows what. Because of the fear of the people, the chief priests and scribes were driven to compass the death of Christ by craft, and to bring him to his death by the cruel betrayal of Judas, one of his own apostles.

3-6. *Then entered Satan into Judas surnamed Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve. And he went his way, and communed with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray him unto them. And they were glad, and covenanted to give him money. And he promised, and sought opportunity to betray him unto them in the absence of the multitude.*

Was it not a sad thing that the betrayer of Christ should be one of the twelve? Yet deeply trying as it must have been to the heart of

Christ, there is something useful about even that horrible transaction. It says to all the professing Church of Christ, and it says to us who claim to be Christ's followers, "Do not think yourselves safe because you are in the visible church; do not imagine that even holding the highest office in the church can prevent you from committing the basest crime. Nay, for here is one of the twelve apostles, yet he betrays his Master. Sometimes, we have found this betrayal to be a source of comfort. I have myself desired, in receiving members into the church, to be very careful if possible only to receive good men and true; yet, though pastors and elders of the church may exercise the strictest watch, some of the worst of men will manage to get in. When that is the case, we say to ourselves, "No new thing has happened to us, for such a sinner as this marred the Church from the very beginning." Here is Judas, when Christ himself is the Pastor, when the twelve apostles make up the main body of the Church, here is Judas, one of the twelve, ready to betray his Master for the paltry bribe of thirty pieces of silver, just the price of a slave. Yes, we might have been put out of heart in building up the Church of God if it had not been for this sad but truthful narrative concerning Judas and his betrayal of our Lord.

7, 8. Then came the day of unleavened bread, when the passover must be killed. And he sent Peter and John, saying, Go and prepare us the passover, that we may eat.

Notice how carefully our Lord respected the ordinances of that dispensation so long as it lasted. The passover was an essential rite of the Jewish faith, and our Lord therefore duly observed it. Learn hence, dear brethren, to esteem very highly the ordinances of God's house; let baptism and the Lord's supper keep their proper places. You do them serious injury if you lift them out of their right places, and try to make saving ordinances of them; but, in avoiding that evil, do not fall into the opposite error of neglecting them. What Christ has ordained, it is for his people to maintain with care until he comes again; and if he kept up the passover even when, in himself, it was already on the point of being fulfilled, let us keep up the ordinances which he has enjoined upon us. If any of you have neglected either of them, let me remind you of his gracious words, "Thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness," and "This do ye, in remembrance of me."

9-13. *And they said unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare? And he said unto them, Behold, when ye are entered into the city, there shall a man meet you, bearing a pitcher of water; follow him into the house where he entereth in. And ye shall say unto the goodman of the house, The Master saith unto thee, Where is the 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.*

Observe in this passage a singular blending of the human and the Divine; no mention is made of either as a matter of doctrine, but incidentally our Lord's Divinity and humanity are most fully taught. Here is Christ so poor that he has not a room in which to celebrate the most necessary feast of his religion; he has made himself of no reputation, and he has no chamber which he can call his own; yet see the Godhead in him. He sends his messengers to a certain house, and tells them to say to the goodman of the house, "Where is the guestchamber?" It all turns out just as he said it would be, and he is welcomed to this man's best room, and to the furniture thereof. Jesus speaks here as did his Father when he said to Israel in the olden time, "Every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills." All the guestchambers in Jerusalem were really at Christ's disposal; he had but to ask for them, and there they were all ready for him. Here we see the majesty of his Deity; but, inasmuch as he had no room that he could call his own, we see also the humility of his manhood.

14-16. *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.*

This was to be his last meal with his disciples before he died, and he had looked forward to it with great desire. It was a most solemn occasion, and yet to him a most desirable one. May something of the Master's desire overflow into your hearts, beloved, whenever you are about to partake of the sacred feast which he instituted that night!

17-20. *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.

Do you see how this new memorial was blended with the passover, how it melted into that social meal which formed part of the paschal celebration? There was a cup, then bread, and then the cup after supper; so there was a gracious melting of the one dispensation into the other. We see our Lord's wisdom in thus leading his children on from step to step, without a break, conducting them from one line of service to another and a still higher one.

21. *But, behold, the hand of him that betrayeth me is with me on the table.*

This was a sad and solemn fact; yet it has often been so since that night. The nearer to Christ, the farther from him, — so has it sometimes happened since. He who was in some respects the highest in the College of the Apostles became the lowest in the ranks of the children of perdition.

22, 23. *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 inquire among themselves, which of them it was that should do this thing.*

Let us also pass that question round among ourselves.

“When any turn from Zion's way,
(Alas, what numbers do!)

Methinks I hear my Saviour say,
‘Wilt thou forsake me, too?’

“Ah, Lord, with such a heart as mine,
Unless thou hold me fast,
I feel I must, I shall decline,
And prove like them at last.

“The help of men and angels join'd Could never reach my case;
Nor can I hope relief to find But in thy boundless grace.

“What anguish has that question stirr'd,

If I will also go;
Yet, Lord, relying on thy Word,
I humbly answer, No.”

God grant us more grace, that we may be held fast by the records of love!

24. *And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest.*

Let me read you these two verses together; they strike me as being very remarkable. Here are two questions: "They began to enquire among themselves, which of them it was that should do this thing," that is, betray their Lord. "And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest." What poor creatures we are! How we are tossed with contrary winds! The new question comes up; and yet the old question, which ought to have been smothered by it, still remains there. It is possible that Luke is here alluding to some dispute which the apostles had previously had; and now the Lord, remembering that even in the ashes of contention lived the wonted fires of ambition, would quench the last sparks of the evil fire.

25. *And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors.*

The people are compelled to use sweet terms to express a very bitter bondage; so they call their tyrants "benefactors."

26, 27. *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?*

The guest, or the waiter at the table?

27-31. *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. And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat:*

As our Lord Jesus looked upon his eleven apostles, he felt that their time of greatest trial was fast approaching. Beyond anything they had ever endured before, they were now to be put into the devil's sieve, and Satan would toss them to and fro, and seek, if possible, to destroy them.

32. *But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: —*

“I have made thee, Simon, a special object of thy prayer. All the brotherhood will be tried, but for thee I have especially prayed, for thou, who seemest to be the strongest, art the weakest of them all, so I have prayed specially for thee, that thy faith fail not.”

32. *And when thou art converted,* —

“When thou art restored,” —

32-39. *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 anything? 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. And he came out, and went, as he was wont, to the mount of Olives; and his disciples also followed him.

LUKE 22:7-34; AND 54-62

7-20. *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 good man 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. 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 —

(Or, covenant —)

20, 21. *In my blood, which is shed for you. But, behold, the hand of him that betrayeth me is with me on the table.*

What a shadow this revelation must have cast over that solemn feast over the Saviour's heart, and over the minds of all his attached disciples! We can scarcely imagine what pangs tore his loving spirit. He could have used the language of David, with even deeper emphasis, and said, "It was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it: neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me; then I would have hid myself from him: but it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance." "The hand of him that betrayeth me is with me on the table." O beloved, I pray that you and I may never betray our Master; if ever we should so fail as to deny him, may the Lord stop us where Peter fell, and never suffer us to betray him as Judas did!

22. *And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined: but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed!*

The decree of God does not lessen the responsibility of man for his action. Even though it is predetermined of God, the man does it of his own free will, and on him falls the full guilt of it.

23, 24. *And they began to enquire among themselves, which of them it was that should do this thing. And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest.*

Be astonished, dear friends, as you read, in such a connection as this, "There was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest." What! while yet the anxious question as to which of them was the traitor was being passed round, "Lord, is it I?" Is it so closely followed by another question, "Which of us shall be highest in the kingdom?" Oh, the awful intrusiveness of pride sad ambition! How it will come in, and defile the very holy of holies! Nay God prevent our falling victims to it! The last question for a Christian ever to ask is, "How may I win honour among men?" The

one question for a believer should be, “How can I glorify my Master ?” Very often, that can best be done by taking the very lowest place in his church.

25, 26. *And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve.*

Let every respect be given to the elder, and let such as God honours be honoured among us; but let no man honour himself, or seek honour for himself. After all, in Christ’s kingdom, the way to ascend is to descend. Did not the Master act thus? He descended, that he might ascend, and fill all things; and so must his disciples do. Less, and less, and less, and less, must we become; and so we shall really be, in his sight, more, and more, and more, and more.

27. *For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth.*

For he had just then taken a towel, and girded himself, and washed their feet, so becoming *Servus servorum*, the Servant of servants, though he was in very truth the King of kings.

28. *Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations.*

There is a reward to the righteous, though they serve not for reward, for the Lord says: —

29, 30. *And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; that ye may eat and drink; at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*

Ah, but see what follows! No sooner, in this chapter, does the thought seem to rise than it is dashed down again; the brightness ever has a shadow cast across it,

31, 32. *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.*

We are thinking about thrones, and about which of us shall have the loftiest throne, but see how the Master is thinking about the necessary while we are doting upon the superfluous. He thinks of our needs while we are dreaming of something great. What a

blessing it is that we have our Saviour praying for us when we ourselves may be fancying that we need not pray! Our hands are ready for the scepter, and we are anxious to sit down on the throne, when the Lord knows that our proper place is at the footstool, pleading for mercy still.

33. *And he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death.*

That is bravely spoken, Peter; and yet it is very foolishly said, too. He spoke out of his very heart, and he meant what he said; but Peter did not know what a poor weak body Peter really was. His Master understood him far better.

34. *And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me.*

And so it came to pass. Let us read a part of the sad story, beginning at the fifty-fourth verse.

54. *Then took they him, and led him, and brought him into the high priests house. And Peter followed afar off.*

I do not think that he was to be blamed for that; I do not see how he could very well have followed any nearer, for he was already a marked man. That sword-cut of his upon the ear of Malchus had made him specially prominent amongst the apostles, even if he had not been well known before. He got into the crowd, and came after his Master at such a distance as seemed safe for him.

55. *And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them.*

I do think that he was to be blamed for that action, for it brought him into dangerous company. Better be cold, than go and warm your hands in ungodly society.

56. *But a certain maid beheld him as he eat by the fire, and earnestly looked upon him,—*

As the flame came flashing up every now and then, she looked at him, and Peter was troubled by her gaze: she “earnestly looked upon him,”

56-59. *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.

For he got talking to this ill company, and his speech had betrayed him.

60. *And Peter said, Man, I know not what thou sayest.*

Another Evangelist tells us that he began to curse and to swear, as if that was the surest proof that he could possibly give that he did not know Jesus; for, when you hear a man swear, you know at once that he is no Christian, you may conclude that safely enough. So Peter thought that, to prove that he was no follower of Christ, he would use such ill language as the ungodly speak.

60, 61. *And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew. And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter.*

God has all things in his hands, he has servants everywhere, and the cock shall crow, by the secret movement of his providence, just when God wills; and there is, perhaps, as much of divine ordination about the crowing of a cock as about the ascending of an emperor to his throne. Things are only little and great according to their bearings; and God reckoned not the crowing bird to be a small thing, since it was to bring a wanderer back to his Saviour, for, just as the cock crew, “the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter.” That was a different look from the one which the girl had given him, but that look broke his heart.

61. *And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.*

How many there are, who sin with Peter, but who never weep with Peter! Oh, if we have ever transgressed in such a way as he did, let us never cease to weep! Above all, let us begin at once to lament it, and rest not till the Master looks again, and says by that look, “I have blotted out all thy transgressions; return unto me.”

LUKE 22:7-54

7-13. *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 good-man of the house, the Master saith unto thee, Where is the guest-chamber, where I shall eat the passover with my disciples? And he shall 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.

The hour of Christ's humiliation was drawing nigh, but he was still "The Master." He had but to send his servants, and his request was at once obeyed, just as he might have asked for more than twelve legions of angels and they would have been immediately placed at his disposal.

14-22. *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. 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!*

What consternation those sentences must have caused in that little company! Christ and his twelve apostles alone present, yet one of them was about to betray his Lord!

23, 24. *And they began to enquire among themselves, which of them it was that should do this thing. And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest.*

How strange that such a quarrel should be going on just then! Their Master was going out to betrayal and crucifixion for them, yet they were disputing about which of them "should be accounted the greatest."

25-30 *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.

What folly and sin to quarrel about earthly precedence when such heavenly honours were awaiting them!

31, 32. *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.*

Trial would be general to all the apostles: Satan hath desired to have you;” but the danger would be special to Peter on account of his tendency to presumptuous zeal: “I have prayed for thee.’ Thy danger will be that, after having transgressed, thy faith will fail, so I have specially prayed about that. Where thy greatest danger lies, there have I planted my batteries of prayer: ‘I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.’”

33. *And he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death.*

And I have no doubt that he thought he was ready to do all this; he spoke out of the fullness of his heart, but he did not know the weakness of his flesh. We are all too apt to promise great things, and to fail in the fulfillment of them.

34-36. *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.*

At first, our Saviour had great popularity amongst the people; and, under the cover of this, his disciples were received with respect and kindness so that, though they went forth without purse or scrip, they lacked nothing. But, now, Christ warns them that there is to be a very different state of things. Jesus is about to die, and people will

not be ready to entertain them; they will need to have a purse and scrip of their own. They will constantly be in peril of their lives, and they will need the sword now, and the scrip. This is all that the Saviour meant.

37. *For I say unto you, that this that is written must yet be accomplished in me, And he was reckoned among the transgressors: for the things concerning me have an end.*

“They are drawing to their close. I am about to be put to death as a transgressor, and you will be treated as though you were the off-scouring of all things, and were not fit to live, because you are my followers.”

38. *And they said, Lord, behold, here are two swords. And he said unto them, It is enough.*

A smile must have passed over the Saviour’s face as he saw how egregiously they had misunderstood him. He did not mean that they should literally carry swords, but that they should now have to go through an alien world, and to meet with no friends or helpers. He evidently did not mean that they were to defend him with the sword, for two such weapons would not have been “enough” against the Roman legionaries who were sent to seize him. How apt they were to misconstrue, and take literally that which he was accustomed to speak in figures, just as, to this day, some will have it that the bread on the communion table is Christ’s body and the juice of the vine is his blood.

39, 40. *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.*

“There is a peculiar temptation coming upon you. I have taught you to pray every day, ‘Lead us not into temptation;’ but, tonight, make very special use of that petition: ‘Pray that ye enter not into temptation.’”

41-44. *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.*

Was he heard? Ah, my brethren he was indeed heard, but especially in that part of his prayer, “nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done;” and that was the most vital part of his prayer; for, much as he shrank from that bitter cup, still more did he shrink from any thought of going contrary to the will of his Father. That ought to be the heart of all our prayers; whatever we are asking for, chiefly and above all else this should be our cry, “nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.”

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.*

There must have been some very peculiar temptation about that night, that Christ’s disciples should have needed to be again and again commanded to pray this prayer.

47-50. *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.*

No doubt he meant to cut his head in twain, but the sword slipped, and merely took away his right ear.

51. *And Jesus answered and said, Suffer ye thus far. And he touched his ear and healed him.*

There was no lasting mischief done; but, on the contrary, another instance given of the divine power of Christ. No other miracle of this kind is mentioned in Scripture; I mean, the healing of a wound received by violence, the restoration of a member which had been cut off: and Luke is the only Evangelist who mentions it:—it has been thought that, because he was a physician, and had a quick eye for acts of healing, that he mentions that Christ touched the ear of Malchus, and healed him.

52-54. *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. And Peter followed afar off.

LUKE 22:14-24

14-16 *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 the 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.*

This was to be the last occasion on which our Lord and his disciples would thus meet.

17, 18. *And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves: for I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come.*

That was the passover cup. Now the passover melts into the Lord's supper; and, henceforth, the Lord's supper remains, and the passover has passed away.

19-21. *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. But, behold, the hand of him that betrayeth me is with me on the table.*

What a sobering, saddening effect this must have had upon those who were at that festival! We have reason to fear that it will be true of our gathering also. There were only twelve apostles, yet there was a Judas among them; we shall have many hundreds at our observance of the ordinance, may we not fear that there will be many a Judas, too! Can we expect that we shall have a better selection of professed followers of Christ than the Lord had made for his apostles?

22-24. *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.*

That had been their question among themselves, but now they have another enquiry, of quite a different sort, to answer. It was wise of the Master to give them a heart-searching question, to drive out

that question of ambition which had filled them with pride and contention. Oh! if any of us ever had such a thought as that in our bosom,— which of us is greatest? — who can speak the best? — who can serve God the most? — who can take the lead?

— let all such questions be set aside while we sorrowfully enter in the other sad enquiry,— which of us will betray our Lord? God grant that none of us ever may do so!

This exposition consisted of readings from 1 CORINTHIANS 11:17-34; AND LUKE 22:14-24.

LUKE 22:14-46

14-16. *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 it is fulfilled, for Christ himself is the Lamb of our Passover. His blood has been shed and sprinkled; his people have been brought up out of their Egyptian bondage; and, by faith, they feed upon him, and are glad. How sweetly the passover melted away into the Lord's supper, and how graciously did our Saviour thus teach us that, as a rule, he does not make violent changes in the development of his people's spiritual life, but he leads them on gradually from one stage to another! There may be, sometimes, very sudden elevations; but, as a general rule, we go from strength to strength, a step at a time; and the truth is revealed to us little by little.

17,18. *And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves for I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come.*

This was the passover cup,—the cup with which they concluded the paschal supper. At such times, they also usually began to chant a Psalm in happy unison. Just at that point, Christ interjected the first part of the celebration of the new ordinance,—the Lord's supper, into which the paschal supper was to melt.

19. *And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body, which is given for you this do in remembrance of me.*

It was clearly impossible that he could have meant that bread to be literally his body, because his body was there at the table. Therefore, the misunderstanding, or misrepresentation, of the Church of Rome is altogether without excuse. Our Saviour plainly intended to say, "This bread represents my body; it is an emblem, a symbol, of my body." If this had been spoken concerning the bread after Christ had been dead and gone, and not before, there might have been some warrant for the teaching of the Papists; but there cannot be any such warrant, as he used the words while he was sitting there with his apostles. Let us be careful not to lose the true meaning of Christ's words, while we combat the false interpretation that has been given to them.

20. *Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.*

He could not have meant that, literally, that cup was the new covenant; I never heard of anybody who thought he did. Why, then, take one part of the ordinance literally, if not the other? But our Lord did mean that the contents of that cup represented the blood, which seals and ratifies the eternal covenant on which our hopes are built.

21. *But, behold, the hand of him that betrayeth me is with me on the table.*

Lamentable circumstance,-sad index of what often still occurs! The worst traitors to Christ are not outside, but inside the visible church; there they have the best opportunity for doing mischief; there they can give the unkindest cut of all. God grant that none of us may be among that miserable number!

22. *And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined; but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed!*

The fact that it was determined, in the eternal decrees of God, that Christ should die, did not at all diminish the responsibility of all had a share in bringing about that death. Learn, beloved, to believe firmly in Divine predestination without doubting human responsibility. Even though you may not be able to show how these two things agree, do not be anxious about that matter; be satisfied to believe what you cannot understand. Both these things are true, and they are both of them in this verse.

23, 24. *And they began to enquire among themselves, which of them it was that should do this thing. And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest.*

What a strange thing that it should have been so! Is there any such strife among us here? If so, how utterly unworthy are we to be the disciples of such a Master as our Lord Jesus Christ!

25, 26. *And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve.*

You know, brethren, that it always will be so. If a man tries to be great in the church, somehow or other his brethren generally think very little of him; but he who is willing to serve,-whose one ambition it is to lay himself out for the glory of his Master, and for the general good,-that man usually has a great deal more honour than he would have expected to receive. The way to be great in the church is to be serviceable to all around us, to be meek and lowly, to be willing to wait upon others. We have good reason for being the servants of our brethren when we remember the humble position that our Lord himself assumed.

27. *For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth.*

He served in the very humblest capacity, for did he not even wash the disciples' feet? And if he, who was the greatest of all, thus condescended to perform the lowliest service, who among us shall be so lifted up as to suppose that no common work is good enough for him? Brethren, we must be humble, or else we shall be humbled. And let me remark that the latter experience is by no means a pleasant one, while the former experience is most sweet and gracious. God give us the grace to be humble!

28-30. *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.*

Yes, there are thrones and a kingdom for those who are faithful to the King of kings; but there is something else to think of beside that kind of glory, for notice our Saviours next words,

31. *And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat:*

And between us and the kingdom there will be struggles and dangers; and watchfulness and wrestling prayer will be required of us. And here is our only hope of escape from the perils of the way, as it was with poor Peter

32-34. *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.*

Though Peter did not really know himself, Christ knew him. That is one of our comforts,-that the Lord Jesus Christ foresees all future ill, and so provides against it; he looks down into our nature, and deals with us as we need to be dealt with. It is well for us that we are in his hands.

35-40. *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. 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.*

Or, "into trial." We do not often enough present that petition, "Lead us not into temptation." We are not able to bear temptation if it goes beyond a certain point; and it is a greater mercy to escape temptation than it is to pass through it, and to overcome it. I mean, of course, only in some respects. We may ask to be delivered from the evil one if we must be tempted by him; but our first prayer should be that we may not enter into temptation.

41, 42. *And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.*

We can read these words in a calm, quiet tone; but they were uttered by our Lord with an intensity of agony which we can scarcely call up before our mind's eye. So terrible was that agony, that our Saviour became utterly weak and faint through the intensity of his pleading.

43, 44. *And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly:*

More and more intense was that brief prayer as his supplication was continued.

44. *And his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.*

Luke was a physician, you know, so he was the most likely one to record this phenomenon. It has happened—so we have been told,—to some other persons in intense fright or agony, that their sweat has been tinged with blood; but we never remember reading or hearing of anyone but our Lord of whom it could be said, “His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.”

45. *And when he rose up from prayer, and was come to his disciples, he found them sleeping for sorrow,*

Great sorrow may have quite opposite effects upon different men. You have, perhaps, sometimes noticed that intoxication produces upon some men exactly the opposite effect to that which it produces upon others; some become irritable and noisy, while others become taciturn and quiet. It is also quite a matter of fact that great sorrow has various effects upon different minds. In the Saviour's case, it aroused him to an awful agony of earnestness in prayer. In the disciples case, it sent them to sleep.

46. *And said unto them, Why sleep ye! rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.*

The great trial for them, as well as for their Lord, was close at hand then. It was late at night, and they were drowsy and sleepy; yet no time is amiss for supplication. Prayer is never out of season, and never unnecessary. We never know when temptation is near, so let

us pray without ceasing to him who is able to preserve us from temptation, or to deliver us out of it.

LUKE 22:39-65

In anticipation of the communion that is to follow this service, let us read once more the story of our Lord's agony and arrest, as recorded in the twenty-second chapter of the Gospel according to Luke. Probably we are all familiar with the narrative of the event which happened on that dreadful night; may the Holy Spirit teach us what they meant!

39. *And Jesus came out, and went, as he was wont, to the mount of Olives; and his disciples also followed him.*

The garden of Gethsemane had often been the place of our Lord's private prayer, and it was therefore well selected as the scene of his fierce struggle with the foe. Where we get strength from God in private, it may often happen that we shall have to endure our greatest conflicts. Singularly enough, it is said that the Jews had a custom of taking the red heifer to the Mount of Olives before it was sacrificed, as if they set forth in that very act the leading of Christ Jesus into Gethsemane, and the bringing him back again with his raiment all red with his own blood. We might alter the prophet's words a little, and ask "Who is this that cometh from Olivet, with dyed garments from Gethsemane?" and the Divine Sufferer himself might answer, "I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save."

40. *And when he was at the place, he said unto them, Pray that ye enter not into temptation.*

He knew what sore temptation meant, and he was about to feel it at its utmost, and he therefore exhorted his disciples to pray even as he had formerly taught them in the model prayer, "Lead us not into temptation."

41-43. *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.*

This is so plain a proof of Christ's condescension as a man that it has overwhelmed some persons; they could hardly understand how it could be true. Hence, I believe this forty-third verse is

omitted in some versions of the Scriptures, and there have been several learned men who, while they could not disprove the existence of the verse in the most ancient manuscripts, have yet laboured hard to cut it out, since they thought it too great a stoop for Christ to take. But, my dear friends, in this condescension of our Lord we learn how truly he was bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. Doubtless, we receive much strengthening from angels: "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" And why should not Christ, who was in all things made like unto his brethren, also be strengthened by an angel?

44. *And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.*

The Greek has the idea of the stretching of the sinews; Christ prayed to the very stretching of his nerves and sinews. As when men wrestle for their lives, so did Christ in prayer strain every power of mind and body that he might prevail. Luke alone describes this dread scene of Christ's agonizing even unto blood; but there is no doubt whatever, from this passage, that our Lord Jesus did actually sweat blood, — not something like blood, but blood itself, — and that in great drops and in such quantities that it did not only adhere to his flesh, and dye all his garments, but there was such an abundance of it that in great drops it fell down to the ground.

45, 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.*

Our Lord was himself so smarting under the pain of fierce temptation that he would have his disciples pray even unto an agony, that they might not be led into it. And oh! if you and I have to pray that we be not led into temptation, how much more should we be instant in supplication when we are in the furnace of temptation! Then, indeed, if we restrain prayer before God, we shall be in an evil case.

47. *And while he yet spake, behold a multitude, and he that was called Judas, one of the twelve, went before them, and drew near unto Jesus to kiss him.*

It is a remarkable fact that we do not read in Scripture that any other of our Lord's apostles — not even John, — ever kissed the

Saviour. It seems as if the most impudent familiarity was very near akin to dastardly treachery. The eleven would have thought it a high honour to be allowed even to kiss Christ's feet; but Judas, having lost his respect for his Master, it was no very great descent for him first to sell his Lord, and then to betray him with a kiss. Mark you, brethren, our Lord Jesus Christ is generally betrayed thus. How, for instance, do men usually begin their books when they mean to undermine the inspiration of Scripture? Why, with a declaration that they wish to promote the truth of Christ! There is the Judas-kiss, and the betrayal comes quickly afterwards. How is it that Christ's name is often most grossly slandered among men? Why, by those who make a loud profession of love to him, and then sin foully as the chief of transgressors!

48. *But Jesus said unto him, Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?*

Christ might put that question to many of his nominal followers in the present day: "Betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?"

49. *When they which were about him saw what would follow, they said unto him, lord, shall we smite with the sword?*

There is always that tendency, even among Christian people, to get their hands on the sword-hilt, and a good man's hand is never more out of place than there. When he has his hands clasped in prayer, or placed upon the promises of God, then it is well; but a Christian with his hand upon his sword is something like an angel putting forth his hand unto iniquity.

50-53. *And one of them smote the servant of the high priest, and cut of 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.*

"This is the time when I am given up, on the one hand to the temptations of Satan, — the power of darkness, — and, on the other hand, to you: 'This is your hour.'" And, as beasts that prowl in the darkness are generally the most ravenous and fierce, so were these chief priests and captains and elders most determined in seeking the

blood of Christ. Paul afterwards wrote that none of the princes of this world knew the hidden wisdom, "for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." It was just the darkness of their minds that led them thus to hunt the only Saviour of sinners to his death. Satan himself would scarcely have had a hand in crucifying Christ had he understood that, by that very crucifixion, Christ would break the old serpent's head for ever.

54. *Then took they him, and led him, and brought him into the high priest's house. And Peter followed afar off.*

For which he is not to be altogether blamed. I do not find that any other disciple followed Christ so near as Peter did, John was, probably, even farther off at first. Yet, dear friends, you and I may rest assured that, if we follow Christ afar off, it will not be long before we deny him. Those disciples who are ashamed of their Master, who never come out and openly confess their faith in him, have the seeds of treachery already sown within them. O brethren and sisters, be bold, and cleave close to Christ, for this is the way to walk securely!

55. *And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them.*

"Evil communications corrupt good manners." Get up, Peter and run away; what business have you sitting there? Better be in the cold, far off from in company, than in the warm in the midst of sinners.

56, 57. *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.*

See how the most courageous are often cast down by the very slightest means. The tongue of a poor feeble woman is too much for this valiant Peter, who said that he never would deny his Master, even though he should die with him.

58-60. *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.*

Matthew and Mark tell us that, to prove this statement, and to make it quite clear that he was not a follower of Christ, he began to

curse and to swear, as if the best evidence that he was not a Christian would be afforded by his cursing and swearing.

60, 61. *And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew. And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter.*

How that look must have pierced Peter through and through!

61-64. *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. 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, Prophecy, who is it that smote thee?*

Upon this passage, a good man well observes that, one of these days, Christ will answer this taunt. With his unerring finger, the Judge of all shall point them out, and say to each one, "Thou art the man." There are many of you, perhaps, who are committing sin in private, and you think it is not known. You are almost ready to ask the question of him whom you look upon as a blindfolded God, "Who is it that smote thee?" Ah! but he sees you all the while, he reads the secret the thoughts of your hearts, and the day will come when he will let you know that nothing has escaped his all-seeing eye.

65. *And many other things blasphemously spake they against him.*

The Lord bless to us all the reading of this sad, sad story! Amen.

LUKE 22:54-62

54-56. *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,-The flickering light helped to reveal his features to this maid "as he sat by the fire,"

56-58. *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.*

Both Matthew and Mark say that it was a maid, and another maid who spoke to Peter; and now Luke mentions a man; but there

is no reason why all three of them should not have united in bringing this charge. One maid began the accusation, and the others joined with her.

59-61. *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 Galilaeen. 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.*

The Saviour had been standing in the upper part of the room, which was probably roofed over, while Peter and the rest were down below in the courtyard, which was open to the sky, and therefore they needed a fire to warm them. Jesus had been standing before his judge; but on a sudden, as the cock crew, he “turned, and looked upon Peter.”

61. *And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.*

That cock crowing had come at the very moment Christ had foretold, for Peter had already denied his Master thrice.

62. *And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.*

Now hear what John has to say about this matter. He wrote after the other three Evangelists, and he generally supplies their deficiencies. He it is who tells us how Simon Peter got into the hall. (See JOHN 18 15-18, 25-27)

This exposition consisted of readings from MATTHEW 26:31-35, 57, 58, 69-75 MARK 14:53, 54, 66-72 LUKE 22:54-62; AND JOHN 18:15-18, 25-27.

LUKE 22:63-71; 23:1

63-71. *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, Prophecy, 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. Thereafter 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.

23:1. *And the whole multitude of them arose, and led him unto Pilate.*

This exposition consisted of readings from JOHN 18:12-14,19-26; MARK 14:53-65; and LUKE 22:63-71; 23:1.

LUKE 23

1, 2, *And the whole multitude of them arose, and led him unto Pilate. And they began to accuse him saying, We found this —*

Put in what word you like — villains — scoundrel — our translators could not find a better word than that inexpressive-expressive word “fellow.” “We found Eats fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself is Christ, a King.” They shift the charge, you see, now; before, it was blasphemy, now it is sedition.

2, 3. *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.*

Another of the evangelists tells us that he first asked Pilate what he meant by the question, explaining that he only claimed the kingdom in a spiritual sense.

4, 5. *Then said Pilate to the chief priests and to the people, I find no fault in this man. And they were the more fierce, saying. He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place.*

When Pilate heard them say Galilee, he caught at that; ‘he did not wish to displease the multitude.

6, 7. *When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked whether the man were a Galilean. And as soon as he knew that he belonged unto Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who himself also was at Jerusalem at that time.*

So away the Master goes; he must be dragged through the streets again to a third tribunal. Oh! thou blessed Lamb of God! Never were sheep driven to the shambles as thou wert driven to death!

8. *And when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad; for he was desirous to see him of a long season, because he had heard many things of him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by him.*

But the Lord never worked miracles yet, to gratify idle curiosity. He who would have worked a miracle to heal the poorest beggar in the street would not work a wonder to please the king in whose power he was.

9. *Then he questioned with him in many words: but he answered him nothing.*

“No,” says good Christopher Ness — “John Baptist was Christ’s voice, and Herod had stopped him; there Christ would not speak; as if he would say, ‘No, no’; thou didst cut off John Baptist’s head, who was my messenger, and since thou hast ill-treated my emir, I, the King of kings, will have nothing to say to thee.”

10. *And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused him.*

The original word is made nought of him — made him ads nothing.

11, 12. *And Herod with his men of war set him at nought, and mocked him, and arrayed him in a gorgeous robe, and sent him again to Pilate. And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together; for before they were at enmity between themselves.*

Two dogs could well agree to hunt the same prey, and sinners who quarrel on other things will often be quite agreed to persecute the gospel.

13-16. *And Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, Said unto them, Ye have brought this man unto me, as one that perverteth the people; and, behold, I, having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse him: No, nor yet Herod; for I sent you to him; and, lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto him. I will therefore chastise him, and release him.*

Ah! that word “chastise” shim so glibly over the tongue, but you know what it meant, when the Roman lectors laid bare the back and used the terrific scourge? “I will scourge him,” said Pilate. Perhaps he thought that if he scourged him, his suffering would induce the Jews to spare his life.

17-20. *(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: (Who for a certain sedition made in the city, and for murder, was cast into prison). Pilate, therefore, willing to release Jesus, spake again to them.*

He seems to have gone backward and forward many times, desiring to save the life of Christ, but not having the moral courage to do it.

21-26. *But they cried, saying, Crucify him, crucify him. And he said unto them the third time, Why, what evil hath he done? I have found no cause of death in him: I will therefore chastise him, and let him go. And they were instant with loud voices, requiring that he might be crucified. And the voices of them and of the chief priests prevailed. 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 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.*

This exposition consisted of readings from MATTHEW 26:59-68; LUKE 23.

LUKE 23:1-16

1. *And the whole multitude of them arose, and led him unto Pilate.*

Our Lord had been taken to the tribunal of Annas and of Caiaphas, and so the whole multitude of them arose and led him unto Pilate. The first two tribunals were ecclesiastical and religious. There they charged him with crimes against the law. Now they take him to Pilate, and bring accusations against him, concerning Caesar and the Roman Government. “The whole multitude of them arose and led him unto Pilate.”

2. *And they began to accuse him, saying, We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself is Christ a King.*

A wily charge. It was the duty of the ruler of the province to protect the province from any rebellion against Caesar; so they put in the, “He perverts the nation, forbids to give tribute to Caesar.”

3. *And Pilate asked him, saying, Art thou the King of the Jews?*

It must have seemed a strange question to himself, as he saw the poor emaciated form of Jesus of Nazareth standing before him. "Art thou the King of the Jews?"

3. *And he angered him and said, Thou sayest*

"It is even so."

4. *Then said Pilate to the chief priests and to the people, I find no fault in this man.*

He took him aside and conversed with him, and perceived that his kingdom was not of a kind that would interfere with Caesar. As he looked at him, he found that it was not a matter which really could concern the great Roman Empire. It was in no danger from him. Pilate said to the chief priests and the people, "I find no fault in this man."

5. *And they were the more fierce, saying, He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place.*

He caught at that.

6, 7. *When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked whether the man were a Galilaean. And as soon as he knew that he belonged unto Herod's jurisdiction,*

For Herod was ruler of Galilee.

7. *He sent him to Herod, who himself also was at Jerusalem at that time.*

By which he answered two purposes. First, he would get out of the scrape himself; and secondly, he would compliment Herod by acknowledging that, as the man was a Galilean, he was under Herod's jurisdiction. What devices men have to escape from responsibility! This vacillating Pilate knew the right, and did it not. He would be very glad to avoid coming to any decision about it at all.

8, 9. *And when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad: for he was desirous to see him of a long season, because he had heard many things of him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by him. Then he questioned with him in many words; but he answered him nothing.*

Now was Christ the Lamb — the sheep before her shearers who is dumb. He did answer Pilate a little, There was a little that was good about Pirate, vacillating as he was; but Herod had not a trace

of anything upon him upon which the good seed could possibly take root; so he answered him nothing.

10, 11. *And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused him. And Herod with his men of war set him at nought, and mocked him, and arrayed him in a gorgeous robe, and sent him again to Pilate.*

This robe was probably white, sparkling, splendid. It tended to mock him. It set the example to Pilate and his men to clothe him in a scarlet robe, and mock him yet again. There is a contagiousness about an evil example.

12. *And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together: for before they were at enmity between themselves.*

Behold how sinners will agree when Christ is to be slaughtered. They shake hands together when he is to die.

13-16. *And Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people. Said unto them, Ye have brought this man unto me, as one that perverteth the people: and, behold, I, having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse him: No, nor yet Herod: for I sent you to him; and, lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto him. I will therefore chastise him, and release him.*

But what duplicity! If he is innocent, release him, but do not scourge him. If he is guilty, crucify him, but do not balk about releasing him. When men are wrong at heart, when they come to a resolution, it is self-contradictory. There is nothing more inconsistent than sin. It is an image whose head may be of gold, but the feet are always of clay. You cannot make sin hang together, and the verdict of one who is undecided and has two minds is always a very vicious one. "I will chastise him and release him."

LUKE 23:13-28

13-15, *And Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, Said unto them, Ye have brought this man unto me, as one that perverteth the people: and, behold, I, having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse him: No, nor yet Herod: for I sent you to him: and, lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto him.*

They were judges not at all inclined to favor him; but yet, though his accusers were mad again him, nothing could be brought before these two judgment-seats which would hold water for a single moment. Holy and harmless was Christ, and, therefore, his accusers knew not what to say against him.

16-23. *I will therefore chastise him, and release him. (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: (Who for certain sedition made in the city, and for murder, was cast into prison). Pilate therefore, willing to release Jesus, spake again to them. But they cried, saying, Crucify him, crucify him. And he said unto them the third time, Why, what evil hath he done? I have found no cause of death in him: I will therefore chastise him, and let him go. And they were instant with loud voices, requiring that he might be crucified.*

Never did man's enmity to God become more clear than when God, in human flesh, descending upon an errand of mercy, must, nevertheless, be hunted down by these cruel cries of "Crucify him, crucify him." Man would be a Decide if he could. "The fool hath said in his heart, "No God." To get rid of God — to get rid of God, even in human form, is the enmity of man's heart. He will have it if he can.

23-26. *And the voices of them and of the chief priests prevailed. 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 as they led him away, they laid hold upon one Simon, a Cyrenian, coming out of the country, and on him they laid the cross, that he might bear it after Jesus.*

Fit type of all Christ's followers, who must expect to carry Christ's cross, and who should be happy and honoured in carrying it after Jesus.

27, 28. *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.*

He had the siege of Jerusalem before his mind, and, therefore, in tender pity he bade them save their tears for other sorrows.

LUKE 23:18-25; 32-34

Our Lord's last days gave tragic proof of the hate and cruel mockery of his foes; yet how marvelously he endured!

18, 19. *And they cried out all at once, saying, Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas: Who for a certain sedition made in the city, and for murder, was cast into prison.)*

Do you not see how they refuted their own accusation? If Christ was really the leader of sedition, would they have asked that he should be put to death? Would they have preferred a murderer to him? There can be no danger of a man leading people astray when those very people were crying, "Let him be put to death." It must have been a transparent fraud. Pilate must have loathed them. Mean as he was, he must have seen through their meanness.

20-22. *Pilate therefore, willing to release Jesus, spake again to them. But they cried, saying, Crucify him, crucify him. And he said unto them the third time, Why, what evil hath he done? I have found no cause of death in him: I will therefore chastise him, and let him go.*

He thinks a great deal of his own inconsistent conclusion, and so many men do. When they came to a conclusion, bad as it is, contradictory, they will stick to it. Adhesive to nothing but to wrong, like a pendulum swinging between right and wrong, was this Pilate. Yet he will keep on the swing. He is only steady in that, — "I will, therefore, chastise him and release him." Oh! dear friends, it would be better for you to come to thorough decision one way or the other — Christ, or no Christ; true religion, or no religion; but to halt between the two is a lame business that will be ruinous to you.

23. *And they were instant with loud voices, requiring that he might be crucified. And the voices of them and of the chief priests prevailed.*

These men were bribed. The popular feeling was with our Lord to a very large extent, but, under the influence of threats and bribes, they found a mob to cry, "Crucify him." You know the old saying, *Vox populi vox Dei*," There is no truth in it. The voice of the people is not the voice of God, for they said, "Crucify him, crucify him."

24. *And Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required.*

Again attempting to evade the responsibility by saying that they should be both accusers and judges.

25. *And he released unto them him that for sedition and murder was cast into prison, whom they had desired; but he delivered Jesus to their will.*

Sad scene. May our hearts be broken, and made tender, and sanctified by meditation upon it.

Let us turn now to the later events.

32, 33. *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,*

The margin reads, or the place of a skull, when they were come to the place which is called a skull.

33. *There they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left.*

Come hither, soul. Thou who readest this chapter, come to this place of a skull. It is the first resting-place of every weary soul. There is no rest for the sole of your foot till first you come to Calvary, and see your Saviour die.

34. *Then said Jesus,*
As they crucify him.

34. *Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.*

LUKE 23:26-33

Now, Luke supplies some particulars which Mark has left out. Turn, therefore, to the 23rd chapter of Luke and the 26th verse. Luke, also, tells us of Simon.

26. *And as they led him away, they laid hold upon one Simon, a Cyrenian, coming out of the country, and on him they laid the cross, that he might bear it after Jesus.*

Now these are the things which Mark has not put in.

27, 29. *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 which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck.

This was accounted a curse, but their curses should seem blessings unto them when compared with the curse of the dreadful slaughter at Jerusalem.

30, 31. *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?*

If they do these things while yet the Jewish State is standing, what will they do when that State is broken up? If they do these things to innocent persons, a green tree, what will they do to the unhallowed person, the ungodly and the rebellions, who are like dry, rotten trees? How will the flame lay hold on those branches out of which the sap of virtue has long ago been dried?

32. *And there were also two other malefactors,*

It should be others—there should be an “s” there.

32, 33. *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.*

Shall we refuse to take up our cross and follow the Lord Jesus Christ? I think not. If any ask us whether we will leave him because of the fears which may be excited by the world’s frowns, this shall be our answer—let us sing it—with regard to the world and all its temptations:—

“No, facing all its frowns or smiles,
Counting its gain but loss;
Without the camp we take our place,
With Jesus bear the cross.”

This exposition consisted of readings from PSALM 69:1-21. MARK 15:15-23. LUKE 23:26-33.

LUKE 23:27-49

27. *And there followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him.*

Their best Friend, the Healer of their sick, the Lover of their children, was about to be put to death, so they might well bewail and lament.

28-30. *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 sack. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us.*

Our Saviour looked forward to the terrible siege of Jerusalem, the most tragical of all human transactions. I think I do not exaggerate when I say that history contains nothing equal to it. It stands alone in the unutterable agony of men, women, and children in that dreadful time of suffering.

31. *For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?*

If the Christ of God is put to death even while the Jewish capital seems vigorous and flourishing, what shall be done when it is all dry and dead, and the Roman legions are round about the doomed city?

32. *And there were also two other, malefactors, led with him to be put to death.*

Every item of scorn was added to our Saviour's death; and yet the Scriptures were thus literally fulfilled, for "He was numbered with the transgressors."

33, 34. *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.*

Do you hear the hammer fall? "Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Do you see the bleeding hands and feet of Jesus? This is all that is extracted by that fearful pressure, nothing but words of pardoning love, a prayer for those who are killing him: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

35. *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.*

You know how mockery puts salt and vinegar into a wound. A man does not at any time like to be reviled; but when he is full of

physical and mental anguish, and his heart is heavy within him, then ridicule is peculiarly full of acid to him.

36, 37. *And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar, and saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself.*

These rough legionaries knew how to put their jests in the most cruel shape, and to press home their scoffs upon their suffering victim.

38. *And a superscription also was written over him in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew,*

These were the three languages that could be understood by all the people round about.

38. *THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.*

And so be is, and so he shall be. He has never quitted the throne. The Son of David is still King of the Jews, though they continue to reject him; but the day shall come when they shall recognize and receive the Messiah. "Then shall they look upon him whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn."

39. *And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.*

Matthew and Mark speak of both the thieves as railing at Jesus. We must take their expressions as being literally correct; and if so, both the malefactors at first cast reproaches in Christ's teeth.

40, 41. *But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath, done nothing amiss.*

Not only has he done nothing worthy of death, but he has done nothing improper, nothing out of place: "This man hath done nothing amiss." The thief bears testimony to the perfect character of this wondrous Man, whom he nevertheless recognized to be divine, as we shall see in the next verse.

42-47. *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. Now when the centurion, saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man.

He was set there at the head of the guard, to watch the execution; and he could not help saying, as he observed the wonderful signs in heaven and earth, "Certainly this was a righteous man."

48. *And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned.*

What a change must have come over that ribald crowd! They had shouted, "Crucify him;" they had stood there, and mocked him; and now they are overcome with the sight, and they smite their breasts. Ah, dear friends, their grief did not come to much! Men may smite their breasts; but unless God smites their hearts, all the outward signs of a gracious work will come to nothing at all.

49. *And all his acquaintance, and the women that followed him from Galilee, stood afar off, beholding these things.*

Let "these things" be before your mind's eye this evening, and think much of your crucified Lord, all you who are of his acquaintance, and who are numbered amongst his followers.

This exposition consisted of readings from LUKE 23:27-49, AND MATTHEW 27:50-54.

LUKE 23:27-49

27-31. *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?*

Our Saviour, even amidst the greatest sufferings, seemed almost to forget them in the deep sympathy that he had for the people around him. He pictured in his mind's eye that awful siege of

Jerusalem. Who can read it, as Josephus describes it, without feeling the deepest horror? Oh, the misery of the women and of the children in that dreadful day when the zealots turned against each other within the city, and fought to the death, and when the Roman soldiery, pitiless as wolves, at last stormed the place! Truly did the Saviour say of it that there should be no day like to it; neither was there it was the concentration of human misery; and our Lord wept because he foresaw what it would be, and he bade these poor women reserve their tears for those awful sorrows.

32, 33 *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.*

O blessed Master they did not spare thee any scorn! There was no mode of expressing their contempt, which their malignity did not invent. Truly, "he was cumbered with the transgressors." You could not count the three sufferers on Calvary without counting him; he was so completely numbered with the others that he must be reckoned as one of them.

34. *Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.*

It was all that he could say in their favor, and he did say that. If there is anything to be said in thy favor, O my fellow-sinner, Christ will say it; and if there is nothing good in thee that his eyes can light upon, he will pray for his own account, "Father, forgive them for my sake."

34. *And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.*

His garments were the executioners' perquisites; pitilessly they took them from him, and left him naked in his shameful sorrow.

35. *And the people stood beholding.*

There was no pity in their eyes. No one of them turned away his face because he could not look upon so disgraceful a deed.

35. *And the rulers also with them derided him, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God.*

I have already reminded you that there was a deep truth hidden away in what these cruel mockers said, for Jesus must give himself up as a ransom if we were to be redeemed.

36-38. *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,*

For these were the three languages known to the throng, and Pilate invited them all to read in “Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew,”-

38, 39. *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.*

Poor man; even though he is dying a felon’s death, he must be in the swim with the multitude, he must keep in with the fashion, so strong, so powerful, is the popular current with all mankind.

40-42. *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.*

It was strange that Christ should find a friend dying on the cross by his side. Nobody else spoke to him about a kingdom. I am afraid that even his former followers began to think that it was all a delusion; but this dying thief cheers the heart of Jesus by the mention of a kingdom, and by making a request to him concerning that kingdom even when the King was in his death agony.

43. *And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.*

The Master, you see, uses his old phraseology. In his preaching, he had been accustomed to say, “Verily, verily,” and here he is, even on the cross, the same Preacher still, for there was such assurance, such confidence, such verity, in all his words, that he never had to alter his style of speaking. “Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.” Well does our poet put it,-“

He that distributes crowns and thrones,
Hangs on a tree, and bleeds and groans.”

He was distributing these crowns and thrones even while hanging on the tree. “Tell it out among the nations that the Lord reigneth from the tree,” may not be an exact translation of the Psalm, but it is true, Psalm or no Psalm.

44. *And it was about the sixth hour,*

About noon, when the sun was at its height.

44. *And there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour.*

Three o'clock in the afternoon.

45. *And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst.*

As if the great light of heaven and the pattern of heavenly things were both disturbed. The sun puts on mourning, and the temple rends her veil in horror at the awful deed enacted on the cross.

46. *And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father,*

Is it not sweet to see how Jesus begins and ends his prayers on the cross with "Father"?

46-48. *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.*

A strange ending to that day, was it not? The three hours' darkness and the death-cry of the Christ had not converted them, but it had convicted them of sin. They felt that a great and heinous crime had been committed; and, though they had come together as to a mere show or sight, they went away from the spectacle impressed as they had never been before: "All the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned."

49. *And all his acquaintance, and the women that followed him from Galilee, stood afar off, beholding these things.*

In these doings on Calvary you and I have a share,-in their guilt, or else in their merit. Oh, that we may not be condemned with those who were guilty of his death, but may we be cleansed by that precious blood which puts away the sin of all who believe on him!

This exposition consisted of readings from MARK 15:15-39; AND LUKE 23:27-49.

LUKE 23:33-46

We have often read the story of our Saviour's sufferings; but we cannot read it too often. Let us, therefore, once again repair to "the place which is called Calvary." As we just now sang, —

"Come, let us stand beneath the cross;

So may the blood from out his side Fall gently on us drop by drop;

Jesus, our Lord is crucified.”

We will read, first, Luke’s account of our Lord’s crucifixion and death.

33. *And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one of the right hand, and the other on the left.*

They gave Jesus the place of dishonour. Reckoning him to be the worst criminal of the three, they put him between the other two. They heaped upon him the utmost scorn which they could give to a malefactor; and in so doing they unconsciously honoured him. Jesus always deserves the chief place wherever he is. In all things he must have the pre-eminence. He is King of sufferers as well as King of saints.

34. *Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.*

How startled they must have been to hear such words from one who was about to be put to death for a supposed crime! The men that drove the nails, the men that lifted up the tree, must have been started back with amazement when they heard Jesus talk to God as his Father, and pray for them: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” Did ever Roman legionary hear such words before? I should say not. They were so distinctly and diametrically opposed to the whole spirit of Rome. There is was blow for blow; only in the case of Jesus they gave blows where none had been received. The crushing cruelty of the Roman must have been startled indeed at such words as these, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”

34. *And they parted his raiment, and cast lots. And the people stood beholding.*

The gambling soldiers little dreamed that they were fulfilling Scriptures while they were raffling for the raiment of the illustrious Sufferer on the cross; yet so it was. In the twenty-second Psalm, which so fully sets forth our Saviour’s sufferings, and which he probably repeated while he hung on the tree, David wrote, “They parted my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.” “And the people stood beholding,” gazing, looking on the cruel

spectacle. You and I would not have done that; there is a public sentiment which has trained us to hate the sight of cruelty, especially of deadly cruelty to one of our own race; but these people thought that they did no harm when they “stood beholding.” They also were thus fulfilling the Scriptures; for the seventeenth verse of the twenty-second Psalm says, “They look and stare upon me.”

35. *And the rulers also with them derided him,*

Laughed at him, made him the object of course jests.

35. *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.*

In mockery, not giving it to him, as they did later in mercy; but in mockery, pretending to present him with weak wine, such as they drank.

37. *And saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself.*

I fancy the scorn that they threw into their taunt: “If thou be the king of the Jews;” that was a bit of their own. “Save thyself;” that they borrowed from the rulers. Sometimes a scoffer or a mocker cannot exhibit all the bitterness that is in his heart except by using borrowed terms, as these soldiers did.

38. *And a superscription also was written over him in the letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.*

John tells us that Pilate wrote this title, and that the chief priests tried in vain to get him to alter it. It was written in the three current languages of the time, so that the Greek, the Roman, and the Jew might alike understand who he was who was thus put to death. Pilate did not know as much about Christ as we do, or he might have written, THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS, AND OF THE GENTILES, TOO.

39. *And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.*

He, too, borrows this speech from the rulers who derided Christ, only putting the words “and us” as a bit of originality. “If thou be the Christ, save thyself and us.”

40. *But the other answering rebuked him saying, Dost thou not fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss.*

A fine testimony to Christ: “This man hath done nothing amiss;” nothing unbecoming, nothing out of order, nothing criminal, certainly; but nothing even “amiss.” This testimony was well spoken by this dying thief.

42. 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 his ghost.

He yielded his life. He did not die, as we have to do, because our appointed time has come, but willingly the great Sacrifice parted with his life: “He gave up the ghost.” He was a willing sacrifice for guilty men. Now let us see what John says concerning these hours of agony, these hours of triumph.

This exposition consisted of readings from LUKE 23:33-46; JOHN 19:25-30

LUKE 24

1-4. Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulcher, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them. And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulcher. And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus. And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments:

Brethren, they might have been much more perplexed if they had found the body of Jesus there, for then his promises would not have been fulfilled, and all their hopes would have been blighted forever. Unbelief is often the mother of needless perplexity. The resurrection of Christ is plain enough to us now; but to those who had seen him die, and whose faith was so very weak, it was a cause for perplexity that they could not find his dead body. They meant to embalm it, they had brought sweet spices with them for that purpose. It was well that it was in their heart, although it was an unwise and needless project. Yet I doubt not that the Lord thought those spices were very sweet, and that he accepted them because of the love they represented; and, sometimes, you and I, in our

ignorance, have tried to do for Christ what he would not wish to have us do, but he has understood our motive, and accepted our intention, albeit that there was a mistake lurking behind it.

5-8. *And as they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again. And they remembered his words, —*

It is well to know Christ's words, even though we often forget them; because we could not remember them if we had not once known them. Even though our leaky memory lets so much run through, there will be enough remaining in the soul to come back with great sweetness, by-and- by, in sometime of special need. Thus, those holy women, who had often ministered to Christ, "remembered his words," —

9-12. *And returned from the sepulcher, and told all these things unto the eleven, and to all the rest. It was Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women that were with them, which told these things unto the apostles. And their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not. Then arose Peter, and ran unto the sepulcher; —*

He must needs go and see for himself, impetuous spirit that he was; so he "ran unto the sepulcher;" —

12. *And stooping down, he beheld the linen clothes laid by themselves, and departed, wondering in himself at that which was come to pass.*

Thus that notable day wore on. Christ had risen, but his people had not risen to full belief in him; they were still in the grave of distress and doubt, though their Master had left the grave of death.

13-15. *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.*

Where two, whose hearts are right, and whose talk is heavenly, keep company with one another, Christ is very likely to make a third.

Sometimes, when he does not come to one, he reveals himself to two; as he said to his disciples, "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." And often, when two believers agree in communion, there is a sweet magnetic force about their fellowship which brings the Saviour to them, and retains him in their company.

16. *But their eyes were holden that they should not know him.*

Oh, these eyes of ours! They let us see a great deal that we had better not see; and there are some things, which we might almost die to see, which we see not. I doubt not that, often, spiritual beings are about us, but we do not discern them; and, certainly, the Master himself oftentimes draws near, yet our eyes are holden, and we do not see him. This may even happen at the communion table; we may see the signs and symbols, but see not Christ, the signified and symbolized One. It is ill when it is so.

17-25. *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, today is the third day since these things were done. Yea, and certain women also of our company made us astonished, which were early at the sepulcher; and when they found not his body, they came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that he was alive. And certain of them which were with us went to the sepulcher, and found it even so as the women had said: but him they saw not. Then he said unto them, O fools, —*

I feel sure that he said that word very gently; — not as you and I might say it, in a pet. Yet, truly, as we read the story, we cannot help feeling that they were very foolish and stupid. Their own tale convicts them. So no wonder Christ said unto them, "O fools," —

25-27. *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 —*

At the very Pentateuch, —

27. *And all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.*

We may well wish that we might have been there. What a privilege it was for those two disciples, — a walk and a talk combined! But what heavenly talk, all concerning himself! I know that you, dear friends, never relish a discourse unless Christ is foremost in it; but when Christ is the sole subject, and even Scripture itself is made subordinate to the display of Christ, then are you well content.

28. *And they drew nigh unto the village, whither they went:*

And sorry, I have no doubt, they were to do so. One would like to walk on to all eternity with Christ thus talking by the way.

28-30. *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.*

That was the old sign, well known to them and to him, — that blessing and breaking of the bread.

31. *And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight.*

It is sometimes so with us; we have just recognized our Lord, and, lo! he has gone.

32. *And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us,*
—

Oh, blessed heart-burn!

32, 33. *While he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures? And they rose up the same hour, —*

They could not stop away from their fellow-disciples; they must tell such glorious tidings as they had, so “they rose up the same hour,” —

33-36. *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. And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, —

That is usually his way; while we are talking about manifestations of Christ in the past, he often comes again among us, and gives us a new revelation of himself.

36-41. *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 —*

That is a singular combination. At first, they believed not for grief; and now the pendulum swings the other way, and they believe not for joy. There is a kind of unbelief that is begotten of excessive delight. We know something to be true, and yet there comes the recoil, and the doubt, "Surely it is too good to be true; can it really be so?" See how Jesus convinced them that he was not a spirit: "while they yet believed not for joy," —

41. *And wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat?*
"Anything to eat?"

42, 43. *And they gave him a piece of broiled fish, and of an honeycomb. And he took it, and did eat before them.*

That was proof positive that he was still composed of flesh and bones, a real person, and no phantom.

44-51. *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.

He went away in the act of blessing, and he has never left off blessing his people from that day to this.

52, 53. *And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen.*

LUKE 24

1-11. *Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulcher, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them. And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulcher. And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus. And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments: and as they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again. And they remembered his words, and returned to the sepulcher, and told all these things unto the eleven, and to all the rest. It was Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women that were with them, which told these things unto the apostles. And their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not.*

What an emptying power unbelief has! No news could ever be more full of solace than the news of a risen Saviour; but to the ears of unbelief this news, which made all heaven glad, seemed to the apostles but as idle tales. Unbelief tied the hands of Jesus once when he was at Nazareth, for “he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief:” and unbelief seems often to tie our heart-strings too, so that they can give forth no sweet music. O Lord, help us to overcome our unbelief, and enable us ever confidently to believe the truth that comes to us supported by such testimony as these good women gave to the apostles!

12-14. *Then arose Peter, and ran unto the sepulcher; and stooping down, he beheld the linen clothes laid by themselves, and departed,*

wondering in himself at that which was come to pass. And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about three score furlongs. And they talked together of all these things which had happened.

As was most proper, they that feared the Lord spake often one to another. Just as Elijah and Elisha talked with each other as they went towards the Jordan where Elijah was to be translated, so these two disciples were talking together of the great events that had recently happened; and especially talking of the death and the reported resurrection of Christ. This was most natural, for what is uppermost in the heart will soon be uppermost upon the tongue. They had had their minds greatly exercised concerning the departure of their Lord, and it was only natural that they should speak of it. If we never talk of Christ, we have great reason to suspect whether he is really in our hearts at all. Christ's declaration to his disciples, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them," was literally fulfilled in the case of these two disciples going to Emmaus.

15. *And it came to pass that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them.*

And, beloved, if you would have communion with Christ, have communion with one another. If my Lord will not reveal himself to me, perhaps he will reveal himself to others, therefore let me get into the company of his chosen, and then, surely, when he appears in the midst of their assembly, I shall have a share of the fellowship that they will enjoy.

16-19. *But their eyes were holden that they should not know him. And he said unto them, What manner of communication 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 in these days? And he said unto them, What things? And they said unto him, Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people: —*

What a little advance these disciples had made in the knowledge of Christ! He had been their Teacher, they had seen his miracles, and yet, though they had been constantly under his superintendence, they had not learned enough to know that he was divine. The Holy

Ghost had not yet been given; and, without the Holy Spirit's divine instruction, these disciples could only say that Christ "was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people:" —

20-25. *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, today is the third day since these things were done. Yea, and certain woman also of our company made us astonished, which were early at the sepulcher; and when they found not his body, they came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that he was alive. And certain of them which were with us went to the sepulcher, and found it even so as the women had said: but him they saw not. Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken.*

Supposing him to be a stranger in Jerusalem, yet one who was well acquainted with Jewish prophecy, they had told him exactly what the prophecies had foretold concerning the Messiah. If they had meant to refer to the various prophecies concerning Christ, they could not have detailed facts which would have more accurately fulfilled them, and therefore Christ said to them "O you foolish men, how slow of heart you are to believe all that the prophets have spoken!"

26. *Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, —*

"Are not those just the very things which the prophets say that the Christ, the Anointed, must suffer? 'Ought not Christ to have suffered these things,'" —

26-28. *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.*

For Christ never forces his company upon anyone; and if we are willing to let him go, he will go, nor will he return until we are heartily sick of having treated him coldly. When we can no longer bear the absence of Christ, then he will speedily return to us. There is an instance of this in the life of Christmas Evans, which impressed me very much when I read it. Sandemanianism had spread very much through Wales, and he had been very busy

attacking it; but it seemed as if, in doing so, his sermons had lost all their former power and unction, and his own soul also grew very dry and barren, and he had little or no fellowship with Christ. He said that, at last, his soul grew utterly weary of being absent from his Lord and he could not endure it any longer, but felt that he must once again enjoy communion with his Lord, and experience the power of the Holy Spirit in his preaching. So he stopped at the foot of Cader Idris and spent some three hours in an intense agony of prayer; and the result was that, when he next preached, he did so with all the unction and power which had formerly rested upon him. He had grown weary of the absence of Christ and therefore Christ returned to him. O brethren, if Christ makes as though he would go further, do not let him go, but hold him fast!

29-33. *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, —*

This shows their zeal and also their courage; this news was too good to be kept to themselves, and although it was nearly night, and they had a good distance to go, in a country that was far from safe for travelers, they “returned to Jerusalem,” —

33-36. *And found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them, saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon. And they told what things were done in the way, and how he was known of them in breaking of bread. And as they spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.*

No more appropriate greeting could have been given to the troubled disciples.

37-45. *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 he 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 the name of all nations, beginning in 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 24:13-35

13-15. *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.*

Where two talk of heavenly things they shall not be long without a third. Jesus loves holy company, and he will join himself to those who in their conversation join themselves to him.

16, 17. *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?*

The first part of that question some professors might be ashamed to answer, "What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another as ye walk?" It is not always that all Sunday talk is

Sabbath talk —not always that we converse as we should upon the things of God. We are, many of us, blameworthy here.

18, 19. *And 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 in word before God and all the people:*

Just as a schoolmaster, though he knows more than the children, yet asks them questions to see what they know. So did the Saviour, “What things?... And they said to him, Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in word and deed.” I ought to have said, “in deed and word.” You see my mistake. That is how we put it, “word and deed,” for our words go first, but, with Christ, the practical comes first, and then commences the doctrinal.

20-24. *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, today is the third day since these things were done. Yea, and certain women also of our company made us astonished, which were early at the sepulcher; and when they found not his body, they came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that he was alive. And certain of them which were with us went to the sepulcher, and found it even so as the women had said: but him they saw not.*

They made out a very clear case against their own unbelief here. They had the evidence of the women, and they had the evidence of the men of their own company; the women, they knew were honest. About their own company they could have no doubt, but yet they did not draw the inference which was clear enough, namely, that Jesus had risen, and that what he said he was he had proved himself to be.

25, 26. *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?*

Is not this just what he said he would do?

27, 28. *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.

Never had they had a shorter walk in their lives; his holy talk had made the journey seem as nothing, and sorry they were to see the village, and especially when they found, that their companion had an idea of going further.

29. *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.*

O wise disciple, when thou hast thy Master to hold him. "I held him," says the spouse; "I held him, and I would not let him go." So may it be with us.

30, 31. *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.*

Sometimes when you do not remember a friend who has greatly changed, or from whom you have been long apart, some old familiar sign will bring it all back as with a rush of memory; you know him at once. Now if this were an ordinary meal, as perhaps it was, Jesus was so in the habit of giving thanks that they knew him by that. I wish we knew every Christian by the same sign. Or if this were, indeed, a celebration of his own sacred festival, then again they knew, for is not this the sign between Christ and his people, and is not this table the place where Jesus meets his beloved? "And their eyes were opened, and they knew him." But they knew him to see him no more that night.

32-35. *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.*

Did they go to their beds? The day was far spent; late traveling was dangerous in Israel. Ah! dangerous or not, they are so overwhelmed with joy that they must go and communicate what they had seen.

LUKE 24:13-48

13-15. *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.*

When two saints are talking together, Jesus is very likely to come and make the third one in the company. Talk of him, and you will soon talk with him. I would that believers more often spoke the one to the other about the things of God. It has been said that, in the olden time, God's people spake often one to another; and now we have altered that, and God's people speak often one against another. It is an alteration; but it certainly is not an improvement. May we get together again, and, like these two disciples, talk of all the things that happened in Jerusalem eighteen centuries ago! If we have less of reasoning than they had, let us have more of communion.

16. *But their eyes were holden that they should not know him.*

Christ was there; but they did not perceive him. Our eyes may be very easily shut so that we do not see Christ even when he is close to us; we see a thousand things; but we miss the Master.

17. *And he said unto them, What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad?*

Christian people, why are you sad? It should not be so. And when you talk, why do you increase each other's sadness? Is that wisdom? Surely, the Master might say to some here present, "Why are ye sad?" I hope that he will enable you to shake off the sadness, and to rejoice in him.

18-20. *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.*

These were sad things to talk about. They thought that they had lost all when they had lost Christ; and yet there is no theme in all the world that is more full of joy than talk about the crucified Christ.

This is strange, is it not? If we look beneath the surface, we shall see that the darkest deed that was ever perpetrated has turned out to be the greatest blessing to mankind; and that the cruelest crime ever committed by mortal man has been made the channel of the divinest benediction of God.

21-23. *But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, today is the third day since these things were done. Yea, and certain women also of our company made us astonished, which were early at the sepulcher; and when they found not his body, they came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that he was alive.*

How innocently they tell the story! How they convict themselves of stark unbelief! And the Master hears it all patiently and quietly. What a strange sensation it must have been for him to hear them talking about him in this singular way when, all the while, they did not know who the “stranger” was to whom they were speaking! Have you ever thought of what the Saviour must think of many things that we say? We think them wise; but they must be very foolish to the eye of his infinite wisdom, and very shallow to him who sees everything to the bottom.

24, 25. *And certain of them which were with us went to the sepulcher, and found it even so as the women had said: but him they saw not. Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken:*

He loved them tenderly, but he rebuked them strongly, I had almost said sternly: “O fools, and slow of heart!” I am afraid that is our name: “fools.” I am afraid that it may be said of us that we are “slow of heart to believe.” We want so many proofs. We very readily disbelieve, but we very slowly believe. If you had a piano in your house, and you left it for months; and when you came back, you found it all in beautiful tune, you would be sure that somebody must have been there to put it in tune; but if, on the other hand, you left it to itself, and it got out of tune, you would say that such a condition was only what was to be expected. So it is natural for us to get out of tune. Sometimes we ring out glad music on the high sounding cymbals, and we lift up the loud hallelujahs of exultant joy; but soon we are down again in the deeps, and strike a minor key. Grace alone can raise us; nature, alas! sinks if left to itself.

26, 27. *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.*

The best Book, with the best Teacher, descanting upon the best of subjects. Everywhere this Book speaks about Christ; and when Christ explains it, he only brings himself more clearly before our minds.

28. *And they drew nigh unto the village, whither they went:*

They were sorry to be nearing their destination. They would have liked to walk to the ends of the earth in such company, and listening to such conversation.

28. *And he made as though he would have gone further.*

Christ intended to go further unless the two disciples constrained him to tarry with them.

29. *But they constrained him, saying, Abide with us: for 'it is toward evening, and the day is far spent.*

That is our prayer to the Lord Jesus tonight, "Abide with us, dear Master; we had thy blessed company this morning; and now the sun is almost down, abide with us!" Let each one of us pray the prayer that we often sing, for, morning, noon, and night, this is a suitable supplication:-"

Abide with me from morn till eve,
For without thee I cannot live;
Abide with me when night is nigh,
For without thee I dare not die."

29-31. *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;*

In the breaking of bread Christ is often known. It is a wonderful emblem. Even if this breaking of bread were not the observance of the Lord's Supper, it was something very like it. Christ's blessing and breaking of bread anywhere are the true token of himself.

31-33. *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,*

It was getting late; but it is never too late to tell of Christ's appearing, and never too early. Such a secret ought not to be kept an hour, and therefore "they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem."

33-36. *And found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them, saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon. And they told what things were done in the way, and how he was known of them in breaking of bread. And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them,*

You see that, while they were talking about Christ, he came, and stood in their midst. Speak of your Master, and he will appear. Oh, happy people! who have but to talk of Jesus, and lo! he comes to them.

37-40. *But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit. And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have. And when he had thus spoken, he shewed them his hands and his feet.*

They knew those signs, the marks of his crucifixion. They ought to have been convinced at once that it was even he.

41. *And while they yet believed not for joy,*

Does joy stop faith? Beloved, anything stops faith if we will let it. Faith is a divine miracle. Wherever it exists, God creates it, and God sustains it; but without God, anything can hinder it: "while they yet believed not for joy,"-

41. *And wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat?*
That is, "anything eatable."

42. *And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish,*

Which, as fishermen, they were pretty sure always to have.

42. *And of an honeycomb.*

As a second course, to complete the meal.

43. *And he took it, and did eat before them.*

Some of the old versions add, "and gave the rest to them," which I think is very likely to have been the case. It would be all the more convincing to them if he really ate before them, and then that they also partook of the same food of which he had taken part.

44, 45. *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,*

Good Master, do the same with us tonight!

46, 47. *And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.*

This gospel message was to be proclaimed among all nations, “beginning at Jerusalem”, but not ending there. It has been preached to us; let us see to it that we pass it on to those who have never heard it yet.

48. *And ye are witnesses of these things.*

We also are called to be “witnesses of these things.” May the Lord make us to be faithful and true witnesses, for his name’s sake! Amen.

LUKE 24:32-44

32-35. *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.*

These were the two disciples who had recognized their Lord in the breaking of bread, though they did not know him during their walk with him to Emmaus.

36. *And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in time midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.*

This was the common Jewish salutation; but, henceforth, it would be sanctified most divinely, and it would be a Christian greeting to say, “Peace be unto you.”

37-44. *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 spoke unto on, while I was yet with you, that all things 'must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.

Notice the seals which our Lord continually set upon the Old Testament, the manner in which he always treated the Scripture, the reverent way in which he confessed its infallibility, and his determination that, in every item, every jot and tittle, it should be fulfilled by himself. This was often manifested before his death; and, on his return from the grave, he had not changed his mind. He here speaks of the three great parts into which the Old Testament was divided by the Jews, and he expressly sets the seal of his royal assent upon "the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms." May we, in like manner, prize the whole-inspired Word!

This exposition consisted of readings from MARK 16:1-14; LUKE 24:32-44.

LUKE 24:49-53

This Exposition belongs to last week's Sermon, but there was no space available for its insertion there, and no Exposition appears to have been given before the preceding discourse.

49. *And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.*

The promise of the Father was, as you know, the gift of the Holy Spirit. By this gift our Lord's rising again into glory was celebrated. The Holy Spirit was the heavenly largess of the great King by which he did honour to the return of his Son to his ancient throne. The apostles and the other disciples were to wait for this gift. They might have to wait for some days, but it is better to wait for divine equipment than to go out to holy service in our own strength. All that you do will have to be undone unless it is done in the power of the Holy Ghost. "But tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high." Has that command ever struck some people who profess to be serving the Lord? Are there not men

who preach whom God never sent to preach? The best advice we could give them would be, “Tarry ye.” Are there not some who teach, and some who take office in the church, whom God has never endowed with gifts or graces for such work? Powerless workers stand in the way of true workers, they block up the path of those whom God sends to serve him.

50. *And he led them out as far as to Bethany,*” —

The ruling passion was strong in the hour of his departure. Well did he know that place, Bethany, — the place of love, where he had received a welcome such as he had experienced nowhere else on earth, — where lived Mary, and Martha, and Lazarus; — there did he bid “Good-bye” to his disciples.

50. *And he lifted up his hands, and blessed them.*

He never had lifted up his hands to strike them, or to invoke curses upon them. Those hands were filled with blessings, and the last thing that was seen of Jesus by human eyes was his hands uplifted in the act of blessing.

51, 52. *And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him,*

—
Then they were not Unitarians — “They worshipped him,” — and there were angels present at the time who would have been sure to have rebuked them if it had been a wrong thing for them to worship him. Indeed, they themselves, both as Jews and as Christians, would have felt, in their inmost soul, that they could not worship anyone but God; but Christ is God, so they did well to worship him.

52. *And returned to Jerusalem with great joy:*

Back to the place of his murder, — back to the place where they were likely to be themselves murdered.

53. *And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen.*

So bold were they that the very central spot for the worship of Jehovah we made the place where Christ’s divine sovereignty was proclaimed.

This exposition consisted of readings from LUKE 24:49-53; AND ACTS 1:1-12

