EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS

J.C. RYLE

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by J. C. Ryle

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The Gospel of Matthew

Preface – Expository Thoughts on Matthew

IN sending forth the first volume of a new Expository work upon the Gospels, I feel it necessary, in order to prevent misapprehension, to offer some explanation of the character and design of the work.

The “EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS,” which are now before the reader, are not a learned critical commentary. I do not profess to expound every verse of the Gospels, to grapple with every difficulty, to attempt the solution of every hard text, and to examine every disputed reading or translation.

The “EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS” are not a continuous and homiletic exposition, containing practical remarks on every verse, like the commentaries of Brentius and Gaulter.

The plan I have adopted in drawing up the “Expository Thoughts” is as follows: I have divided the sacred text into sections or passages, averaging about twelve verses in each. I have then supplied a continuous series of short, plain “Expositions” of each of these passages. In each Exposition I have generally begun by stating as

briefly as possible the main scope and purpose of the passage under consideration. I have then selected two, three, or four prominent points in the passage, singled them out from the rest, dwelt exclusively on them, and endeavored to enforce them plainly and vigorously on the reader's attention. The points selected will be found to be sometimes doctrinal, and sometimes practical. The only rule in selection has been to seize on the really leading points of the passage.

In style and composition I frankly avow that I have studied, as far as possible, to be plain and pointed, and to choose what an old divine calls "picked and packed" words. I have tried to place myself in the position of one who is reading aloud to others, and must arrest their attention, if he can. I have said to myself in writing each Exposition, "I am addressing a mixed company, and I have but a short time."—Keeping this in view, I have constantly left unsaid many things that might have been said, and have endeavored to dwell chiefly on the things needful to salvation. I have deliberately passed over many subjects of secondary importance, in order to say something that might strike and stick in consciences. I have felt that a few points, well remembered and fastened down, are better then a quantity of truth lying loosely, and thinly scattered over the mind.

A few notes, explaining difficult passages, have occasionally been added to the Exposition. I have thought it good to add these notes for the information of readers who may feel a wish to know what can be

said about the “deep things” of Scripture, and may have no Commentary of their own.

Commentaries and Expositions of Scripture are so numerous in the present day, that I feel it necessary to say something about the class of readers whom I have specially had in view in putting forth these EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS.

In the first place, I indulge the hope that the work may be found suitable for use at family prayers. The supply of works adapted for this purpose has never yet been equal to the demand.

In the next place, I cannot help hoping that the work may prove an aid to those who visit the sick and the poor. The number of persons who visit hospitals, sick-rooms, and cottages, with an earnest desire to do spiritual good, is now very great. There is reason to believe that proper books for reading on such occasions are much wanted.

Last, but not least, I trust that the work may not be found unprofitable for private reading, as a companion to the Gospels. There are not a few whose callings and engagements make it impossible for them to read large commentaries and expositions of God’s Word. I have thought that such may find it helpful to their memories to have a few leading points set before their minds in connection with what they read.

I now send forth the volume, with an earnest prayer that it may tend to the promotion of pure and undefiled religion, help to extend the knowledge of Christ, and be a humble instrument in aid of the glorious work of converting and edifying immortal souls.

Matthew – Chap. 1

MATTHEW 1:1-17

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham became the father of Isaac. Isaac became the father of Jacob. Jacob became the father of Judah and his brothers. Judah became the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar. Perez became the father of Hezron. Hezron became the father of Ram. Ram became the father of Amminadab. Amminadab became the father of Nahshon. Nahshon became the father of Salmon. Salmon became the father of Boaz by Rahab. Boaz became the father of Obed by Ruth. Obed became the father of Jesse. Jesse became the father of David the king. David became the father of Solomon by her who had been the wife of Uriah. Solomon became the father of Rehoboam. Rehoboam became the father of Abijah. Abijah became the father of Asa. Asa became the father of Jehoshaphat. Jehoshaphat became the father of Joram. Joram became the father of Uzziah. Uzziah became the father of Jotham. Jotham became the father of Ahaz. Ahaz became the father of Hezekiah. Hezekiah became the father of Manasseh. Manasseh

became the father of Amon. Amon became the father of Josiah. Josiah became the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the exile to Babylon. After the exile to Babylon, Jechoniah became the father of Shealtiel. Shealtiel became the father of Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel became the father of Abiud. Abiud became the father of Eliakim. Eliakim became the father of Azor. Azor became the father of Sadoc. Sadoc became the father of Achim. Achim became the father of Eliud. Eliud became the father of Eleazar. Eleazar became the father of Matthan. Matthan became the father of Jacob. Jacob became the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, from whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ. So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; from David to the exile to Babylon fourteen generations; and from the carrying away to Babylon to the Christ, fourteen generations.

These verses begin the New Testament. Let us always read them with serious and solemn feelings. The book before us contains not the word of men, but of God. Every verse in it was written by inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Let us thank God daily for giving us the Scriptures. The poorest Englishman who understands his Bible, knows more about religion than the wisest philosophers of Greece and Rome.

Let us remember our deep responsibility. We shall all be judged at the last day according to our light. To whomsoever much is given, of them much will be required.

Let us read our Bibles reverently and diligently, with an honest determination to believe and practice all we find in them. It is no light matter how we use this book. Eternal life or death depends on the spirit in which it is used.

Above all let us humbly pray for the teaching of the Holy Spirit. He alone can apply truth to our hearts, and make us profit by what we read.

The New Testament begins with the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. No part of the Bible is so important as this, and no part is so full and complete. Four distinct Gospels tell us the story of Christ's doing and dying. Four times over we read the precious account of His works and words. How thankful we ought to be for this! To know Christ is life eternal. To believe in Christ is to have peace with God. To follow Christ is to be a true Christian. To be with Christ will be heaven itself. We can never hear too much about Jesus Christ.

The Gospel of Matthew begins with a long list of names. Sixteen verses are taken up with tracing a pedigree from Abraham to David, and from David to the family in which Jesus was born. Let no one think that these verses are useless. Nothing is useless in creation. The least mosses, and the smallest insects, serve some good end. Nothing is useless in the Bible. Every word of it is inspired. The chapters and verses which seem at first sight unprofitable, are all given for some good purpose. Look again at these sixteen verses, and you will see in them useful and instructive lessons.

Learn from this list of names, that ***God always keeps His word.*** He had promised, that in Abraham's seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed. He had promised to raise up a Savior of the family of David. (Gen. 12:3; Isaiah 11:1.) These sixteen verses prove, that Jesus was the son of David and the son of Abraham, and that God's promise was fulfilled. Thoughtless and ungodly people should remember this lesson, and be afraid. Whatever they may think, God will keep His word. If they repent not, they will surely perish. True Christians should remember this lesson, and take comfort. Their Father in heaven will be true to all His engagements. He has said, that He will save all believers in Christ. If He has said it, He will certainly do it. "He is not a man that He should lie." "He remains faithful—He cannot deny Himself." (2 Tim. 2:13.)

Learn next from this list of names, ***the sinfulness and corruption of human nature.*** Observe how many godly parents in this catalogue had wicked and ungodly sons. The names of Rehoboam, and Joram, and Amon, and Jechoniah, should teach us humbling lessons. They had all pious fathers. But they were all wicked men. Grace does not run in families. It needs something more than good examples and good advice to make us children of God. Those who are born again are not born of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God, (John 1:13.) Praying parents should pray night and day, that their children may be born of the Spirit.

Learn lastly from this list of names, ***how great is the mercy and compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ.*** Think how defiled and unclean our nature is; and then think what a condescension it was in Him to be born of a woman, and "made in the likeness of men." Some of the names we read in this catalogue remind us of shameful and sad histories. Some of the names are those of people never mentioned elsewhere in the Bible. But at the end of all comes the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Though He is the eternal God, He humbled Himself to become man, in order to provide salvation for sinners. "Though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor."

We should always read this catalogue with thankful feelings. We see here that no one who partakes of human nature can be beyond the reach of Christ's sympathy and compassion. Our sins may have been as black and great as those of any whom Matthew names. But they can not shut us out of heaven, if we repent and believe the gospel. If Jesus was not ashamed to be born of a woman, whose pedigree contained such names as those we have read today, we need not think that He will be ashamed to call us brethren, and to give us eternal life.

MATTHEW 1:18-25

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was like this; for after his mother, Mary, was engaged to Joseph, before they came together, she was found pregnant by the Holy Spirit. Joseph, her husband, being a righteous man, and not willing to make her a public example, intended to put her away secretly. But when he thought about these

things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, don't be afraid to take to yourself Mary, your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She shall bring forth a son. You shall call his name Jesus, for it is he who shall save his people from their sins."

Now all this has happened, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son. They shall call his name Immanuel;" which is, being interpreted, "God with us."

Joseph arose from his sleep, and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took his wife to himself; and didn't know her sexually until she had brought forth her firstborn son. He named him Jesus.

These verses begin by telling us two great truths. They tell us how the Lord Jesus Christ took our nature upon Him, and became man. They tell us also that His birth was miraculous. His mother Mary was a virgin.

These are *very mysterious subjects*. They are depths, which we have no line to fathom. They are truths, which we have not mind enough to comprehend. *Let us not attempt to explain things which are above our feeble reason. Let us be content to believe with reverence, and not speculate about matters which we cannot understand. Enough for us to know, that with Him who made the world nothing is impossible.* Let us rest in the words of the Apostles'

Creed: “Jesus Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and born of the Virgin Mary.”

Let us observe ***the conduct of Joseph*** described in these verses. It is a beautiful example of godly wisdom, and tender consideration for others. He saw the “appearance of evil” in her who was his espoused wife. But he did nothing rashly. He waited patiently to have the line of duty made clear. In all probability he laid the matter before God in prayer. “He who believes shall not be in haste.” (Isaiah 28:16.)

The patience of Joseph was graciously rewarded. He received a direct message from God upon the subject of his anxiety, and was at once relieved from all his fears. How good it is to wait upon God! Who ever cast his cares upon God in hearty prayer, and found him fail? “In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.” (Prov. 3:6.)

Let us observe *the* ***two names*** given to our Lord in these verses. One is JESUS: the other EMMANUEL. One describes His office; the other His nature. Both are deeply interesting.

The name **JESUS** means “Savior.” It is the same name as Joshua in the Old Testament. It is given to our Lord because “He saves His people from their sins.” *This is His special office.* He saves them from the guilt of sin, by washing them in His own atoning blood. He saves them from the dominion of sin, by putting in their hearts the sanctifying Spirit. He saves them from the presence of sin, when He

takes them out of this world to rest with Him. He will save them from all the consequences of sin, when He shall give them a glorious body at the last day. Blessed and holy are Christ's people! From sorrow, cross, and conflict they are not saved. But they are saved from sin for evermore. They are cleansed from guilt by Christ's blood. They are made fit for heaven by Christ's Spirit. This is salvation. *He who cleaves to sin is not yet saved.*

Jesus is a *very encouraging name to heavy-laden sinners*. He who is King of kings and Lord of lords might lawfully have taken some more high-sounding title. But He does not do so. The rulers of this world have often called themselves Great, Conquerors, Bold, Magnificent, and the like. The Son of God is content to call Himself Savior. The souls which desire salvation may draw near to the Father with boldness, and have access with confidence through Christ. It is His office and His delight to show mercy. "For God didn't send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through him." (John 3:17.)

Jesus is a name, *which is peculiarly sweet and precious to believers*. It has often done them good, when the favor of kings and princes would have been heard of with unconcern. It has given them what money cannot buy, even inward peace. It has eased their wearied consciences, and given rest to their heavy hearts. The Song of Solomon speaks the experience of many, when it says, "your name is oil poured forth." (Cant. 1:3.) Happy is that person, who trusts not merely in vague notions of God's mercy and goodness, but in "Jesus."

The other name in these verses is scarcely less interesting than that just referred to. It is the name which is given to our Lord from his nature, as "God manifest in the flesh." He is called **EMMANUEL**, "God with us."

Let us take care that we have clear views of our Lord Jesus Christ's *nature and person*. It is a point of the deepest importance. We should settle it firmly in our minds, that our Savior is perfect man as well as perfect God, and perfect God as well as perfect man. If we once lose sight of this great foundation truth, we may run into fearful heresies. The name Emmanuel takes in the whole mystery. Jesus is "God with us." He had a nature like our own in all things, sin only excepted. But though Jesus was "with us" in human flesh and blood, He was at the same time very God.

We shall often find, as we read the Gospels, that our Savior could be weary, and hungry, and thirsty—could weep, and groan, and feel pain like one of ourselves. In all this we see *"the man"* Christ Jesus. We see the nature He took on Him, when He was born of the Virgin Mary.

But we shall also find in the same Gospels that our Savior knew men's hearts and thoughts—that He had power over devils—that He could work the mightiest of miracles with a word—that He was ministered to by angels—that He allowed a disciple to call Him "my God,"—and that he said, "Before Abraham was I am," and "I and my Father are one." In all this we see *"the eternal God."* We see Him "who is over all, God, blessed forever. Amen." (Rom. 9:5.)

Would you have a strong foundation for your faith and hope? Then keep in constant view your Savior's *divinity*. He in whose blood you are taught to trust is the Almighty God. All power is His in heaven and earth. None can pluck you out of His hand. If you are a true believer in Jesus, let not your heart be troubled or afraid.

Would you have sweet comfort in suffering and trial? Then keep in constant view your Savior's *humanity*. He is the man Christ Jesus, who lay on the bosom of the Virgin Mary, as a little infant, and knows the heart of a man. He can be touched with the feeling of your infirmities. He has Himself experienced Satan's temptations. He has endured hunger. He has shed tears. He has felt pain. Trust Him at all times with all your sorrows. He will not despise you. Pour out all your heart before Him in prayer, and keep nothing back. He can sympathize with His people.

Let these thoughts sink down into our minds. Let us bless God for the encouraging truths which the first chapter of the New Testament contains. It tells us of One who "saves His people from their sins." But this is not all. It tells us that this Savior is "Emmanuel," God Himself, and yet God *with us,* God manifest in human flesh like our own. This is glad tidings. This is indeed good news. Let us feed on these truths in our hearts by faith with thanksgiving.

Matthew – Chap. 2

MATTHEW 2:1-12

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who is born King of the Jews? For we saw his star in the east, and have come to worship him." When Herod the king heard it, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he asked them where the Christ would be born. They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written through the prophet, 'You Bethlehem, land of Judah, are in no way least among the princes of Judah: for out of you shall come forth a governor, who shall shepherd my people, Israel.'"

Then Herod secretly called the wise men, and learned from them exactly what time the star appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem, and said, "Go and search diligently for the young child. When you have found him, bring me word, so that I also may come and worship him."

They, having heard the king, went their way; and behold, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, until it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. They came into the house and saw the young child with Mary, his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Opening their treasures, they offered to him gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Being warned in a dream that they

shouldn't return to Herod, they went back to their own country another way.

It is not known who these wise men were. Their names and dwelling-place are alike kept back from us. We are only told that they came "from the East." Whether they were Chaldeans or Arabians we cannot say. Whether they learned to expect Christ from the ten tribes who went into captivity, or from the prophecies of Daniel, we do not know. It matters little who they were. The point which concerns us most is the rich instruction which their history conveys.

These verses show us, that ***there may be true servants of God in places where we should not expect to find them.*** The Lord Jesus has many "hidden ones" like these wise men. Their history on earth may be as little known as that of Melchizedek, and Jethro, and Job. But their names are in the book of life, and they will be found with Christ in the day of His appearing. It is well to remember this. We must not look round the earth and say hastily, "all is barren." The grace of God is not tied to places and families. The Holy Spirit can lead souls to Christ without the help of many outward means. Men may be born in dark places of the earth, like these wise men, and yet like them be made "wise unto salvation." There are some traveling to heaven at this moment, of whom the church and the world know nothing. They flourish in secret places like the lily among thorns, and "waste their sweetness on the desert air." But Christ loves them, and they love Christ.

These verses teach us, that ***it is not always those who have most religious privileges, who give Christ most honor.*** We might have thought that the Scribes and Pharisees would have been the first to hasten to Bethlehem, on the lightest rumor that the Savior was born. But it was not so. A few unknown strangers from a distant land were the first, except the shepherds mentioned by Luke, to rejoice at His birth. “He came unto his own, and his own received him not.” What a mournful picture this is of human nature! How often the same kind of thing may be seen among ourselves! How often the very people who live nearest to the means of grace are those who neglect them most! There is only too much truth in the old proverb, “The nearer the church the further from God.” Familiarity with sacred things has a dreadful tendency to make men despise them. There are many, who from residence and convenience ought to be first and foremost in the worship of God, and yet are always last. There are many, who might well be expected to be last, who are always first.

These verses teach us, ***that there may be knowledge of Scripture in the head, while there is no grace in the heart.*** Mark how king Herod sends to inquire of the priests and elders “where the Christ would be born.” Mark what a ready answer they return him, and what an acquaintance with the letter of Scripture they show. But they never went to Bethlehem to seek for the coming Savior. They would not believe in Him, when He ministered among them. Their heads were better than their hearts. Let us all beware of resting satisfied with head-knowledge. It is an excellent thing, when

rightly used. But a man may have much of it, and yet perish everlastingly. What is the state of our hearts? This is the great question. A little grace is better than many gifts. Gifts alone save no one. But grace leads on to glory.

The conduct of the wise men described in this chapter is ***a splendid example of spiritual diligence.*** What trouble it must have cost them to travel from their homes to the place where Jesus was born! How many weary miles they must have journeyed! The fatigues of an Eastern traveler are far greater than we in England can at all understand. The time that such a journey would occupy must necessarily have been very great. The dangers to be encountered were neither few nor small. But none of these things moved them. They had set their hearts on seeing Him "who was born King of the Jews;" and they never rested until they saw Him. They prove to us the truth of the old saying, "Where there is a will there is a way."

It would be well for all professing Christians if they were more ready to follow the wise men's example. Where is our self-denial? What pains do we take about our souls? What diligence do we show about following Christ? What does our religion cost us? These are serious questions. They deserve serious consideration.

Last, but not least, the conduct of the wise men is ***a striking example of faith.*** They believed in Christ when they had never seen Him—but that was not all. They believed in Him when the Scribes and Pharisees were unbelieving—but that again was not all. They believed in Him when they saw Him a little infant on Mary's

knee, and worshiped Him as a king. This was the crowning point of their faith. They saw no miracles to convince them. They heard no teaching to persuade them. They beheld no signs of divinity and greatness to overawe them. They saw nothing but a new-born infant, helpless and weak, and needing a mother's care like any one of ourselves. And yet when they saw that infant, they believed that they saw the divine Savior of the world. "They fell down and worshiped Him."

We read of no greater faith than this in the whole volume of the Bible. It is a faith that deserves to be placed side by side with that of the penitent thief. The thief saw one dying the death of a malefactor, and yet prayed to Him, and "called Him Lord." The wise men saw a new-born babe on the lap of a poor woman, and yet worshiped Him and confessed that He was Christ. Blessed indeed are those that can believe in this fashion!

This is the kind of faith, let us remember, that *God delights to honor*. We see the proof of that at this very day. Wherever the Bible is read the conduct of these wise men is known, and told as a memorial of them. Let us walk in the steps of their faith. Let us not be ashamed to believe in Jesus and confess Him, though all around us remain careless and unbelieving. Have we not a thousand-fold more evidence than the wise men had, to make us believe that Jesus is the Christ? Beyond doubt we have. Yet where is our faith?

MATTHEW 2:13-23

Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Arise and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and stay there until I tell you, for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him."

He arose and took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod; that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, "Out of Egypt I called my son."

Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked by the wise men, was exceedingly angry, and sent out, and killed all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all the surrounding countryside, from two years old and under, according to the exact time which he had learned from the wise men. Then that which was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled, saying, "A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children; she wouldn't be comforted, because they are no more."

But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, "Arise and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel, for those who sought the young child's life are dead."

He arose and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in the place of his father, Herod, he was afraid

to go there. Being warned in a dream, he withdrew into the region of Galilee, and came and lived in a city called Nazareth; that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophets: "He will be called a Nazarene."

Observe in this passage, how true it is that ***the rulers of this world are seldom friendly to the cause of God.*** The Lord Jesus comes down from heaven to save sinners, and at once we are told that Herod the king "sought to destroy him."

Greatness and riches are a perilous possession for the soul. They know not what they seek who seek to have them. They lead men into many temptations. They are likely to fill the heart with pride, and to chain the affections down to things below. "Not many mighty, not many noble are called." "A rich man will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven with difficulty."

Do you envy the rich and great? Does your heart say, "Oh I that I had their place, and rank, and substance?" Beware of giving way to the feeling. The very wealth which you admire may be gradually sinking its possessor down into hell. A little more money might be your ruin. Like Herod you might run into every excess of wickedness and cruelty. "Take heed, and beware of covetousness." "Be content with such things as you have."

Do you think that Christ's cause depends on the power and patronage of princes? You are mistaken. They have seldom done much for the advancement of true religion. They have far more

frequently been the enemies of the truth. “Put not your trust in princes.” Those who are like Herod are many. Those who are like Josiah and Edward the Sixth of England are few.

Observe how ***the Lord Jesus was “a man of sorrows” even from His infancy***. Trouble awaits Him as soon as He enters into the world. His life is in danger from Herod’s hatred. His mother and Joseph are obliged to take Him away by night, and “flee into Egypt.” It was only a type and figure of all His experience upon earth. The waves of humiliation began to beat over Him, even when He was a nursing child.

The Lord Jesus is just the Savior that the suffering and sorrowful need. He knows well what we mean, when we tell Him in prayer of our troubles. He can sympathize with us, when we cry to Him under cruel persecution. Let us keep nothing back from Him. Let us make Him our bosom friend. Let us pour out our hearts before Him. He has had great experience of affliction.

Observe how ***death can remove the kings of this world like other men.*** The rulers of millions have no power to retain life, when the hour of their departure comes. The murderer of helpless infants must himself die. Joseph and Mary hear the tidings that “Herod is dead;” and at once they return in safety to their own land.

True Christians should never be greatly moved by the persecution of man. Their enemies may be strong, and they may be weak; but still they ought not to be afraid. They should remember that “the

triumphing of the wicked is but short." What has become of the Pharaohs and Neros and Diocletians, who at one time fiercely persecuted the people of God? Where is the enmity of Charles the Ninth of France, and Bloody Mary of England? They did their utmost to cast the truth down to the ground. But the truth rose again from the earth, and still lives; and they are dead, and moldering in the grave. Let not the heart of any believer fail. *Death is a mighty leveler*, and can take any mountain out of the way of Christ's church. "The Lord lives" forever. His enemies are only men. The truth shall always prevail.

Observe, in the last place, ***what a lesson of humility is taught us by the dwelling place of the Son of God***, when He was on earth. He dwelt with His mother and Joseph "in a city called Nazareth." Nazareth was a small town in Galilee. It was an obscure, retired place, not so much as once mentioned in the Old Testament. Hebron, and Shiloh, and Gibeon, and Bethel, were far more important places. But the Lord Jesus passed by them all, and chose Nazareth. This was humility.

In Nazareth the Lord Jesus lived thirty years. It was there He grew up from infancy to childhood, and from childhood to boyhood, and from boyhood to youth, and from youth to man's estate. We know little of the manner in which those thirty years were spent. That He was "subject to Mary and Joseph," we are expressly told. That He worked in the carpenter's shop with Joseph, is highly probable. We only know, that almost five sixths of the time that the

Savior of the world was on earth was passed among the poor of this world, and passed in complete retirement. Truly this was humility.

Let us learn wisdom from our Savior's example. We are far too ready to "seek great things" in this world. Let us seek them not. To have a place, and a title, and a position in society, is not nearly so important as people think. It is a great sin to be covetous, and worldly, and proud, and carnal-minded. But it is no sin to be poor. It matters not so much where we live, as what we are in the sight of God. Where are we going when we die? Shall we live forever in heaven? These are the main things to which we should attend.

Above all, let us daily strive to copy our Savior's humility. Pride is the oldest and commonest of sins. Humility is the rarest and most beautiful of graces. For humility let us labor. For humility let us pray. Our knowledge may be scanty. Our faith may be weak. Our strength may be small. But if we are disciples of Him who "lived in Nazareth," let us at any rate be humble.

Matthew – Chap. 3

MATTHEW 3:1-12

In those days, John the Baptizer came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!" For this is he who was spoken of by Isaiah the prophet,

saying, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness, make ready the way of the Lord. Make his paths straight."

Now John himself wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. Then people from Jerusalem, all of Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him. They were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for his baptism, he said to them, "You offspring of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bring forth fruit worthy of repentance! Don't think to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father,' for I tell you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones." "Even now the axe lies at the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree that doesn't bring forth good fruit is cut down, and cast into the fire. I indeed baptize you in water for repentance, but he who comes after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you in the Holy Spirit. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will thoroughly cleanse his threshing floor. He will gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn up with unquenchable fire."

These verses describe the ministry of John the Baptist, the forerunner of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a ministry that deserves close attention. Few preachers ever produced such effects. "There went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan." None ever received such praise from the great Head

of the Church. Jesus calls him “a burning and a shining light.” The great Bishop of souls Himself declares, that “among those who are born of women there has not arisen one greater than John the Baptist.” Let us then study the leading features of his ministry.

John the Baptist ***spoke plainly about sin***. He taught the absolute necessity of “repentance,” before anyone can be saved. He preached that repentance must be proved by its “fruits.” He warned men not to rest on outward privileges, or outward union with the church.

This is just the teaching that we all need. We are naturally dead, and blind, and asleep in spiritual things. We are ready to content ourselves with a mere formal religion, and to flatter ourselves, that if we go to church we shall be saved. We need to be told, that except we “repent and are converted” we shall all perish.

John the Baptist ***spoke plainly about our Lord Jesus Christ.*** He taught people that one far “mightier than himself” was coming among them. He was nothing more than a servant—the Coming One was the King. He himself could only “baptize with water”—the Coming One could “baptize with the Holy Spirit,” take away sins, and would one day judge the world.

This again is the very teaching that human nature requires. We need to be sent direct to Christ. We are all ready to stop short of this. We want to rest in our union with the church, regular use of the sacraments, and diligent attendance on an established ministry. We

ought to be told the absolute necessity of union with Christ Himself by faith. He is the appointed fountain of mercy, grace, life, and peace. We must each have personal dealings with Him about our souls. What do we know of the Lord Jesus? What have we got from Him? These are the questions on which our salvation hinges.

John the Baptist ***spoke plainly about the Holy Spirit.*** He preached that there was such a thing as the baptism of the Holy Spirit. He taught that it was the special office of the Lord Jesus to give it to men.

This again is a teaching which we greatly require. We need to be told that forgiveness of sin is not the only thing necessary to salvation. There is another thing yet; and that is the baptizing of our hearts by the Holy Spirit. There must not only be *the work of Christ FOR us*, but *the work of the Holy Spirit IN us*. There must not only be a title to heaven by the blood of Christ, but a preparedness for heaven wrought in us by the Spirit of Christ. Let us never rest until we know something by experience of the baptism of the Spirit. The baptism of water is a great privilege. But let us see to it that we have also the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

John the Baptist ***spoke plainly about the dreadful danger of the impenitent and unbelieving.*** He told his hearers that there was a "wrath to come." He preached of an "unquenchable fire," in which the chaff would one day be burned.

This again is a teaching which is deeply important. We need to be straitly warned, that it is no light matter whether we repent or not. We need to be reminded, that there is a hell as well as a heaven, and an everlasting punishment for the wicked, as well as everlasting life for the godly. We are fearfully apt to forget this. We talk of the love and mercy of God, and we do not remember sufficiently His justness and holiness. Let us be very careful on this point. It is no real kindness to keep back the terrors of the Lord. It is good for us all to be taught that it is possible to be lost forever, and that all unconverted people are hanging over the brink of the pit.

In the last place, John the Baptist **spoke plainly *about the safety of true believers.*** He taught, that there was "a barn" for all who are Christ's wheat, and that they would be gathered together there in the day of his appearing.

This again is a teaching which human nature greatly requires. The best of believers need much encouragement. They are yet in the body. They live in a wicked world. They are often tempted by the devil. They ought to be often reminded, that Jesus will never leave them nor forsake them. He will guide them safely through this life, and at length give them eternal glory. They shall be hidden in the day of wrath. They shall be safe as Noah in the ark.

Let these things sink down deeply into our hearts. We live in a day of much false teaching. Let us never forget the leading features of a faithful ministry. Happy would it have been for the Church of Christ, if all its ministers had been more like John the Baptist!

MATTHEW 3:13-17

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. But John would have hindered him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and you come to me?"

But Jesus, answering, said to him, "Allow it now, for this is the fitting way for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed him. Jesus, when he was baptized, went up directly from the water: and behold, the heavens were opened to him. He saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming on him. Behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

You have here the account of our Lord Jesus Christ's baptism. This was His first step, when He entered on His ministry. When the Jewish priests took up their office at the age of thirty, they were washed with water. When our great High Priest begins the great work He came into the world to accomplish, He is publicly baptized.

Let us learn from these verses ***to regard the sacrament of baptism with reverence. A***n ordinance of which the Lord Jesus Himself partook, is not to be lightly esteemed. An ordinance to which the great Head of the Church submitted, ought to be ever honorable in the eyes of professing Christians.

There are few subjects in religion on which greater mistakes have arisen than baptism. There are few which require so much fencing and guarding. Let us arm our minds with two general cautions.

Let us beware on the one hand, *that we* ***do not attach a SUPERSTITIOUS importance to the water of baptism.*** We must not expect that water to act as a charm. We must not suppose that all baptized people as a matter of course receive the grace of God, in the moment that they are baptized. To say that all who come to baptism obtain like and equal benefit—and that it matters not a jot whether they come with faith and prayer, or in utter carelessness, to say such things appears to contradict the plainest lessons of Scripture.

Let us beware on the other hand, *that we* ***do not DISHONOR the sacrament of baptism.*** It is dishonored when it is thrust out of sight, and never publicly noticed in the congregation. A sacrament ordained by Christ Himself ought not to be treated in this way. The admission of every new member into the ranks of the visible church, whether young or grown up, is an event which ought to excite a lively interest in a Christian assembly. It is an event that ought to call forth the fervent prayers of all praying people. The more deeply we are convinced that baptism and grace are not inseparably tied together, the more we ought to feel bound to join in prayer for a blessing, whenever any one is baptized.

The baptism of our Lord Jesus Christ was attended by circumstances of peculiar solemnity. Such a baptism never will be

again, so long as the world stands.

We are told of ***the presence of all three people of the blessed Trinity.*** God the Son, manifest in the flesh, is baptized. God the Spirit descends like a dove, and lights upon Him. God the Father speaks from heaven with a voice. In a word we have the manifested presence of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Surely we may regard this as a public announcement, that the work of Christ was the result of the eternal counsels of all the Three. It was the whole Trinity, which at the beginning of creation said, "let us *make* man." It was the whole Trinity again, which at the beginning of the Gospel seemed to say, "let us *save* man."

We are told of ***"a voice from heaven"*** at our Lord's baptism. This was a circumstance of singular solemnity. We read of no voice from heaven before this, except at the giving of the law on Sinai. Both occasions were of peculiar importance. It therefore seemed good to our Father in heaven to mark both with peculiar honor. At the introduction both of the law and Gospel, He Himself speaks.

How striking and deeply instructive are the Father's words! "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." He declares, in these words, that Jesus is the divine Savior sealed and appointed from all eternity to carry out the work of redemption. He proclaims, that He accepts Him as the Mediator between God and man. He seems to publish to the world, that He is satisfied with Him as the propitiation, the substitute, the ransom-payer for the lost family of Adam, and the Head of a redeemed people. In Him He sees His holy

“law magnified and made honorable.” Through Him He can “be just, and yet the justifier of the ungodly.” (Rom. 3:26.)

May we ponder these words well! They are full of rich food for thought. They are full of peace, joy, comfort and consolation, for all who have fled for refuge to the Lord Jesus Christ, and committed their souls to Him for salvation. Such may rejoice in the thought, that though in themselves sinful, yet in God’s sight they are counted righteous. The Father regards them as members of His beloved Son. He sees in them no spot, and for His son’s sake is “well pleased.” (Ephes. 1:6.)

Matthew – Chap. 4

MATTHEW 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. When he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was hungry afterward. The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.”

But he answered, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.’”

Then the devil took him into the holy city. He set him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, 'He will give his angels charge concerning you.' and, 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you don't dash your foot against a stone.'"

Jesus said to him, "Again, it is written, 'You shall not test the Lord, your God.'"

Again, the devil took him to an exceedingly high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world, and their glory. He said to him, "I will give you all of these things, if you will fall down and worship me."

Then Jesus said to him, "Get behind me, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.'"

Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and served him.

The first event in our Lord's ministry which Matthew records after His baptism, is His temptation. This is a deep and mysterious subject. There is much in the history of it which we cannot explain. But there lie on the face of the history plain practical lessons, to which we shall do well to take heed.

Let us learn in the first place, ***what a real and mighty enemy we have in the devil.*** He is not afraid to assault even the Lord Jesus Himself. Three times over he attacks God's own Son. Our

Savior was “tempted by the devil.” It was the devil who brought sin into the world at the beginning. This is he, who vexed Job, deceived David, and gave Peter a heavy fall. This is he, whom the Bible calls a “murderer,” a “liar,” and a “roaring lion.” This is he, whose enmity to our souls never slumbers and never sleeps. This is he, who for nearly 6000 years has been working at one work—to ruin men and women, and draw them to hell. This is he, whose cunning and subtlety pass man’s understanding, and who often appears as “an angel of light.”

Let us all watch and pray daily against his devices. There is no enemy worse than an enemy who is never seen and never dies, who is near to us wherever we live, and goes with us wherever we go. Not least let us beware of that levity and jesting about the devil, which is so unhappily common. Let us remember every day, that if we would be saved, we must not only crucify the flesh, and overcome the world, but also “resist the devil.”

Let us learn in the next place, *that* ***we must not count temptation a strange thing.*** “The disciple is not greater than his master, nor the servant than his lord.” If Satan came to Christ, he will also come to Christians.

It would be well for all believers, if they would remember this. They are too apt to forget it. They often find evil thoughts arising within their minds, which they can truly say they hate. Doubts, questions, and sinful imaginings are suggested to them, against which their whole inward man revolts. But let not these things destroy their peace, and rob them of their comforts. Let them

remember there is a devil, and not be surprised to find him near them. To be tempted is in itself no sin. It is the yielding to the temptation, and giving it a place in our hearts, which we must fear.

Let us learn in the next place, *that* ***the chief weapon we ought to use in resisting Satan is the Bible.*** Three times the great enemy offered temptations to our Lord. Three times his offer was refused, with a text of Scripture as the reason, "it is written."

Here is one among many reasons, why we ought to be diligent readers of our Bibles. The Word is the sword of the Spirit. We shall never fight a good fight, if we do not use it as our principal weapon. The Word is the lamp for our feet. We shall never keep the king's highway to heaven, if we do not journey by its light. It may well be feared, that there is not enough Bible-reading among us. It is not sufficient to have the Book. We must actually read it, and pray over it ourselves. It will do us no good, if it only lies still in our houses. We must be actually familiar with its contents, and have its texts stored in our memories and minds. Knowledge of the Bible never comes by intuition. It can only be obtained by diligent, regular, daily, attentive, wakeful reading. Do we grudge the time and trouble this will cost us? If we do, we are not yet fit for the kingdom of God.

Let us learn in the last place, ***what a sympathizing Savior the Lord Jesus Christ is.***" In that he himself has suffered being tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted." (Heb. 2:18.)

The sympathy of Jesus is a truth which ought to be peculiarly dear to all believers. They will find in it a mine of strong consolation. They should never forget, that they have a mighty Friend in heaven, who feels for them in all their temptations, and can enter into all their spiritual anxieties. Are they ever tempted by Satan to distrust God's care and goodness? So was Jesus. Are they ever tempted to presume on God's mercy, and run into danger without warrant? So also was Jesus. Are they ever tempted to commit some one great private sin for the sake of some great seeming advantage? So also was Jesus. Are they ever tempted to listen to some misapplication of Scripture, as an excuse for doing wrong? So also was Jesus. He is just the Savior that a tempted people require. Let them flee to Him for help, and spread before Him all their troubles. They will find His ear ever ready to hear, and His heart ever ready to feel He can understand their sorrows.

May we all know the value of a sympathizing Savior by experience! There is nothing to be compared to it in this cold and deceitful world. Those who seek their happiness in this life only, and despise the religion of the Bible, have no idea what true comfort they are missing.

MATTHEW 4:12-25

Now when Jesus heard that John was delivered up, he withdrew into Galilee. Leaving Nazareth, he came and lived in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet,

saying, "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, toward the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, the people who sat in darkness saw a great light, to those who sat in the region and shadow of death, to them light has dawned."

From that time, Jesus began to preach, and to say, "Repent! For the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand."

Walking by the sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers: Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew, his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. He said to them, "Come after me, and I will make you fishers for men."

They immediately left their nets and followed him. Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. He called them. They immediately left the boat and their father, and followed him.

Jesus went about in all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the Good News of the Kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness among the people. The report about him went out into all Syria. They brought to him all who were sick, afflicted with various diseases and torments, possessed with demons, epileptics, and paralytics; and he healed them. Great multitudes from Galilee, Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and from beyond the Jordan followed him.

We have in these verses the beginning of our Lord's ministry among men. He enters on His labors among a dark and ignorant people. He chooses men to be His companions and disciples. He confirms His ministry by miracles, which rouse the attention of "all Syria," and draw multitudes to hear Him.

Let us notice ***the way in which our Lord commenced His mighty work.***" He began to preach." There is no office so honorable as that of the preacher. There is no work so important to the souls of men. It is an office which the Son of God was not ashamed to take up. It is an office to which He appointed His twelve apostles. It is an office to which Paul in his old age specially directs Timothy's attention. He charges him with almost his last breath to "preach the word." It is the means which God has always been pleased to use above any other, for the conversion and edification of souls. The brightest days of the Church have been those when preaching has been honored. The darkest days of the Church have been those when it has been lightly esteemed. Let us honor the sacraments and public prayers of the Church, and reverently use them. But let us beware that we do not place them above preaching.

Let us notice ***the first doctrine which the Lord Jesus proclaimed to the world.*** He began to say "repent!" The necessity of repentance is one of the great foundations, which lie at the very bottom of Christianity. It needs to be pressed on all mankind without exception. High or low, rich or poor, all have sinned and are guilty before God; and all must repent and be

converted, if they would be saved. And true repentance is no light matter. It is a thorough change of heart about sin, a change showing itself in godly sorrow and humiliation—in heartfelt confession before the throne of grace—in a complete breaking off from sinful habits, and an abiding hatred of all sin. Such repentance is the inseparable companion of saving faith in Christ. Let us prize the doctrine highly. It is of the highest importance. No Christian teaching can be called sound, which does not constantly bring forward "repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." (Acts 20:21.)

Let us notice ***the class of men whom the Lord Jesus chose to be His disciples.*** They were of the poorest and humblest rank in life. Peter, and Andrew, and James, and John, were all "fishermen."

The religion of our Lord Jesus Christ was not intended for the rich and learned alone. It was intended for all the world—and the majority of all the world will always be the poor. Poverty and ignorance of books excluded thousands from the notice of the boastful philosophers of the heathen world. They exclude no one from the highest place in the service of Christ. Is a man humble? Does he feel his sins? Is he willing to hear Christ's voice and follow Him? If this be so, he may be the poorest of the poor, but he shall be found as high as any in the kingdom of heaven. Intellect and money are worth nothing without grace.

The religion of Christ must have been from heaven, or it never could have prospered and overspread the earth as it has done. It is vain for infidels to attempt to answer this argument. It cannot be

answered. A religion which did not flatter the rich, the great, and the learned—a religion which offered no license to the carnal inclinations of man's heart—a religion whose first teachers were poor fishermen, without wealth, rank, or power—such a religion could never have turned the world upside down, if it had not been of God. Look at the Roman emperors and the heathen priests with their splendid temples on the one side! Look at a few unlearned working men with the Gospel on the other! Were there ever two parties so unequally matched? Yet the weak proved strong, and the strong proved weak. Heathenism fell, and Christianity took its place. Christianity must be of God.

Let us notice in the last place ***the general character of the miracles by which our Lord confirmed His mission.*** Here we are told of them in the mass. Hereafter we shall read many of them described particularly. And what is their character? They were miracles of mercy and kindness. Our Lord "went about doing good."

These miracles are meant to teach us our Lord's power. He that could heal sick people with a touch, and cast out devils with a word, is "able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him." He is almighty.

These miracles are meant to be *types and emblems* of our Lord's skill as a spiritual physician. He before whom no bodily disease proved incurable, is mighty to cure every ailment of our souls. There is no broken heart that He cannot heal. There is no wound of conscience that He cannot cure. Fallen, crushed, bruised, plague-

stricken as we all are by sin, Jesus by His blood and Spirit can make us whole. Only let us go to Him.

These miracles not least are intended *to show us Christ's heart*. He is a most compassionate Savior. He rejected no one who came to Him. He refused no one, however loathsome and diseased. He had an ear to hear all, and a hand to help all, and a heart to feel for all. There is no kindness like His. His compassions fail not.

May we all remember that Jesus is "the same yesterday, today, and forever!" High in heaven at God's right hand, He is not in the least altered. He is just as able to save, just as willing to receive, just as ready to help, as He was 1800 years ago. Would we have spread out our needs before Him then? Let us do the same now. He can "heal every disease and every sickness."

Matthew – Chap. 5

MATTHEW 5:1-12

Seeing the multitudes, he went up onto the mountain. When he had sat down, his disciples came to him. He opened his mouth and taught them, saying,

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God. Blessed are those who have been persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."

"Blessed are you when people reproach you, persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven. For that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

The three chapters which begin with these verses deserve the special attention of all readers of the Bible. They contain what is commonly called the "sermon on the mount."

Every word of the Lord Jesus ought to be most precious to professing Christians. It is the voice of the chief Shepherd. It is the charge of the great Bishop and Head of the Church. It is the Master speaking. It is the word of Him who "spoke as never man spoke," and by whom we shall all be judged at the last day.

Would we know what kind of people Christians ought to be? Would we know the character at which Christians ought to aim? Would we know the outward walk and inward habit of mind which become a follower of Jesus? Then let us often study the sermon on the mount. Let us often ponder each sentence, and prove ourselves

by it. Not least let us often consider who they are that are called BLESSED at the beginning of the sermon. Those whom the great High Priest blesses are blessed indeed.

The Lord Jesus calls those blessed, who are ***poor in spirit***. He means the humble, and lowly-minded, and self-abased. He means those who are deeply convinced of their own sinfulness in God's sight. These are they who are not "wise in their own eyes and holy in their own sight." They are not "rich and increased with goods." They do not imagine that they need nothing. They regard themselves as "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." Blessed are all such! Humility is the very first letter in the alphabet of Christianity. We must begin low, if we would build high.

The Lord Jesus calls those blessed, who ***mourn***. He means those who sorrow for sin, and grieve daily over their own short-comings. These are they who trouble themselves more about sin than about anything on earth. The remembrance of it is grievous to them. The burden of it is intolerable. Blessed are all such! "The sacrifices of God are a broken and contrite spirit." One day they shall weep no more. "They shall be comforted."

The Lord Jesus calls those blessed, who are ***meek***. He means those who are of a patient and contented spirit. They are willing to put up with little honor here below. They can bear injuries without resentment. They are not ready to take offence. Like Lazarus in the parable, they are content to wait for their good things. Blessed are all

such! They are never losers in the long run. One day they shall “reign on the earth.” (Rev. 5:10.)

The Lord Jesus calls those blessed, who ***hunger and thirst after righteousness.*** He means those who desire above all things to be entirely conformed to the mind of God. They long not so much to be rich, or wealthy, or learned, as to be holy. Blessed are all such! They shall have enough one day. They shall “awake up after God’s likeness and be satisfied.” (Psalm. 17:15.)

The Lord Jesus calls those blessed, who are ***merciful***. He means those who are full of compassion towards others. They pity all who are suffering either from sin or sorrow, and are tenderly desirous to make their sufferings less. They are full of good works, and endeavors to do good. Blessed are all such! Both in this life and that to come they shall reap a rich reward.

The Lord Jesus calls those blessed, who are ***pure in heart***. He means those who do not aim merely at outward correctness, but at inward holiness. They are not satisfied with a mere external show of religion. They strive to keep a heart and conscience void of offence, and to serve God with the spirit and the inner man. Blessed are all such! The heart is the man. “Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” (1 Sam. 16:7.) He that is most spiritual-minded will have most communion with God.

The Lord Jesus calls those blessed, who are ***peacemakers***. He means those who use all their influence to promote peace and charity

on earth, in private and in public, at home and abroad. He means those who strive to make all men love one another, by teaching that Gospel which says, “love is the fulfilling of the law.” Blessed are all such! They are doing the very work which the Son of God began, when he came to earth the first time, and which He will finish when He returns the second time.

Lastly, the Lord Jesus calls those blessed, who are ***persecuted for righteousness sake***. He means those who are laughed at, mocked, despised, and ill-used, because they endeavor to live as true Christians. Blessed are all such! They drink of the same cup which their Master drank. They are now confessing Him before men, and He will confess them before His Father and the angels at the last day. “Great is their reward.”

Such are the eight foundation-stones, which the Lord lays down at the beginning of the sermon on the mount. Eight great testing truths are placed before us. May we mark well each one of them, and learn wisdom!

Let us learn how entirely contrary are the principles of Christ to the principles of the world. It is vain to deny it. They are almost diametrically opposed. The very characters which the Lord Jesus praises, the world despises. The very pride, and thoughtlessness, and high tempers, and worldliness, and selfishness, and formality, and unlovingness, which abound everywhere, the Lord Jesus condemns.

Let us learn how unhappily different is the teaching of Christ from the practice of many professing Christians. Where shall we find men and women among those who go to churches and chapels, who are striving to live up to the pattern we have read of today? Alas! there is much reason to fear, that many baptized people are utterly ignorant of what the New Testament contains.

Above all let us learn how holy and spiritual-minded all believers should be. They should never aim at any standard lower than that of the sermon on the mount. Christianity is eminently a practical religion. Sound doctrine is its root and foundation, but holy living should always be its fruit. And if we would know what holy living is, let us often bethink ourselves who they are that Jesus calls "blessed."

MATTHEW 5:13-20

"You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt has lost its flavor, with what will it be salted? It is then good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under the feet of men. You are the light of the world. A city located on a hill can't be hidden. Neither do you light a lamp, and put it under a measuring basket, but on a stand; and it shines to all who are in the house. Even so, let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

"Don't think that I came to destroy the law or the prophets. I didn't come to destroy, but to fulfill. For most certainly, I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not even one smallest letter or

one tiny pen stroke shall in any way pass away from the law, until all things are accomplished. Whoever, therefore, shall break one of these least commandments, and teach others to do so, shall be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven; but whoever shall do and teach them shall be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, there is no way you will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven."

In these verses the Lord Jesus treats of two subjects. One is the character which true Christians must support and maintain in the world. The other is the relation between His doctrines and those of the Old Testament. It is of great importance to have clear views on both these subjects.

True Christians are to be in the world like SALT. Now salt has a peculiar taste of its own, utterly unlike anything else. When mingled with other substances, it preserves them from corruption. It imparts a portion of its taste to everything it is mixed with. It is useful so long as it preserves its savor, but no longer. Are we true Christians? Then behold here our place and its duties!

True Christians are to be in the world like LIGHT. Now it is the property of light to be utterly *distinct* from darkness. The least spark in a dark room can be seen at once. Of all things created light is the most *useful*. It fertilizes. It guides. It cheers. It was the first thing called into being. Without it the world would be a gloomy

blank. Are we true Christians? Then behold again our position and its responsibilities!

Surely, if words mean anything, we are meant to learn from these two figures, that there must be something marked, distinct, and peculiar about our character, if we are true Christians. It will never do to idle through life, thinking and living like others, if we mean to be owned by Christ as His people. Have we grace? Then it must be *seen*. Have we the Spirit? Then there must be *fruit*. Have we any saving religion? Then there must be a difference of habits, tastes, and turn of mind, between us and those who think only of the world. It is perfectly clear that true Christianity is something more than being baptized and going to church. "Salt" and "light" evidently imply *peculiarity* both of heart and life, of faith and practice. We must dare to be singular and unlike the world, if we mean to be saved.

The relation between our Lord's teaching and that of the Old Testament, is cleared up by our Lord in one striking sentence. He says, "Don't think that I came to destroy the law, or the prophets. I didn't come to destroy, but to fulfill." These are remarkable words. They were deeply important when spoken, as satisfying the natural anxiety of the Jews on the point. They will be deeply important as long as the world stands, as a testimony that the religion of the Old and New Testament is one harmonious whole.

The Lord Jesus came to fulfill *the predictions of the prophets,* who had long foretold that a Savior would one day appear. He came to fulfill *the ceremonial law,* by becoming the great sacrifice for sin,

to which all the Mosaic offerings had ever pointed. He came to fulfill *the moral law*, by yielding to it a perfect obedience, which we could never have yielded—and by paying the penalty for our breach of it with His atoning blood, which we could never have paid. In all these ways He exalted the law of God, and made its importance more evident even than it had been before. In a word, "He magnified the law and made it honorable." (Isaiah 42:21.)

There are deep lessons of wisdom to be learned from these words of our Lord. Let us consider them well, and lay them up in our hearts.

Let us ***beware of despising the Old Testament*** under any pretense whatever. Let us never listen to those who bid us throw it aside as an obsolete, antiquated, useless book. The religion of the Old Testament is the embryo of Christianity. The Old Testament is the Gospel in the bud. The New Testament is the Gospel in full flower. The Old Testament is the Gospel in the blade. The New Testament is the Gospel in full ear. The saints in the Old Testament saw many things through a glass darkly. But they all looked by faith to the same Savior, and were led by the same Spirit as ourselves. These are no light matters. Much infidelity begins with an ignorant contempt of the Old Testament.

Let us, for another thing, ***beware of despising the law of the Ten Commandments.*** Let us not suppose for a moment that it is set aside by the Gospel, or that Christians have nothing to do with it. The coming of Christ did not alter the position of the Ten

Commandments one hair's breadth. If anything, it exalted and raised their authority. (Rom. 3:31.) The law of the Ten Commandments is God's eternal measure of right and wrong. By it, is the knowledge of sin. By it, the Spirit shows men their need of Christ, and drives them to Him. To it, Christ refers His people as their rule and guide for holy living. In its right place it is just as important as "the glorious Gospel." It cannot save us. We cannot be justified by it. But never, never let us despise it. It is a symptom of an ignorant and unhealthy state of religion, when the law is lightly esteemed. The true Christian "delights in God's law." (Rom. 7:22.)

In the last place, let us ***beware of supposing that the Gospel has lowered the standard of personal holiness***, and that the Christian is not intended to be as strict and particular about his daily life as the Jew. This is an immense mistake, but one that is unhappily very common. So far from this being the case, the sanctification of the New Testament saint ought to exceed that of him who has nothing but the Old Testament for his guide. The more light we have, the more we ought to love God. The more clearly we see our own complete and full forgiveness in Christ, the more heartily ought we to work for His glory. We know what it cost to redeem us far better than the Old Testament saints did. We have read what happened in Gethsemane and on Calvary, and they only saw it dimly and indistinctly as a thing yet to come. May we never forget our obligations! The Christian who is content with a low standard of personal holiness has got much to learn.

MATTHEW 5:21-37

"You have heard that it was said to the ancient ones, 'You shall not murder;' and 'Whoever shall murder shall be in danger of the judgment.' But I tell you, that everyone who is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment; and whoever shall say to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council; and whoever shall say, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of the fire of Gehenna."

"If therefore you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are with him in the way; lest perhaps the prosecutor deliver you to the judge, and the judge deliver you to the officer, and you be cast into prison. Most certainly I tell you, you shall by no means get out of there, until you have paid the last penny."

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery;' but I tell you that everyone who gazes at a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her already in his heart. If your right eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it away from you. For it is more profitable for you that one of your members should perish, than for your whole body to be cast into Gehenna. If your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off, and throw it away from you. For it is more profitable for you that one of

your members should perish, than for your whole body to be cast into Gehenna."

"It was also said, 'Whoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorce,' but I tell you that whoever puts away his wife, except for the cause of sexual immorality, makes her an adulteress; and whoever marries her when she is put away commits adultery."

"Again you have heard that it was said to them of old time, 'You shall not make false vows, but shall perform to the Lord your vows,' but I tell you, don't swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is the throne of God; nor by the earth, for it is the footstool of his feet; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Neither shall you swear by your head, for you can't make one hair white or black. But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes' and your 'No' be 'No.' Whatever is more than these is of the evil one."

These verses deserve the closest attention of all readers of the Bible. A right understanding of the doctrines they contain lies at the very root of Christianity. The Lord Jesus here explains more fully the meaning of His words, "I came not to destroy the law, but to fulfill." He teaches us that His Gospel magnifies the law, and exalts its authority. He shows us that the law, as expounded by Him, was a far more spiritual and heart-searching rule than most of the Jews supposed. And He proves this by selecting three commandments out of the ten as examples of what He means.

He expounds the ***sixth commandment***. Many thought that they kept this part of God's law, so long as they did not commit actual MURDER. The Lord Jesus shows, that its requirements go much further than this. It condemns all angry and passionate language, and especially when used without a cause. Let us mark this well. We may be perfectly innocent of taking life away, and yet be guilty of breaking the sixth commandment.

He expounds the ***seventh commandment***. Many supposed that they kept this part of God's law, if they did not actually commit ADULTERY. The Lord Jesus teaches, that we may break it in our thoughts, hearts, and imaginations, even when our outward conduct is moral and correct. The God with whom we have to do looks far beyond actions. With him even a glance of the eye may be a sin.

He expounds the ***third commandment***. Many fancied that they kept this part of God's law, so long as they did not swear falsely, and performed their OATHS. The Lord Jesus forbids all vain and light swearing altogether. All swearing by created things, even when God's name is not brought forward—all calling upon God to witness, excepting on the most solemn occasions, is a great sin.

Now all this is very instructive. It ought to raise very serious reflections in our minds. It calls us loudly to use great searching of heart. And what does it teach?

It teaches us ***the exceeding holiness of God***. He is a most pure and perfect Being, who sees faults and imperfections, where

man's eyes often see none. He reads our inward motives. He notes our words and thoughts, as well as our actions. "He requires truth in the inward parts." Oh! that men would consider this part of God's character more than they do! There would be no room for pride, and self-righteousness, and carelessness, if they only saw God "as He is."

It teaches us ***the exceeding ignorance of man in spiritual things***. There are thousands and ten thousands of professing Christians, it may be feared, who know no more of the requirements of God's law than the most ignorant Jews. They know the letter of the ten commandments well enough. They fancy, like the young ruler, "all these have I kept from my youth up." They never dream that it is possible to break the sixth and seventh commandments, if they do not break them by outward act or deed. And so they live on satisfied with themselves, and quite content with their little bit of religion. Happy indeed are they who really understand God's law!

It teaches us ***our exceeding need of the Lord Jesus Christ's atoning blood to save us.*** What man or woman upon earth can ever stand before such a God as this, and plead "not guilty?" Who is there that has ever grown to years of discretion, and not broken the commandments thousands of times? "There is none righteous, no! not one." Without a mighty Mediator, every one would be condemned in the judgment. Ignorance of the real meaning of the law is one plain reason why so many do not value the Gospel, and content themselves with a little formal Christianity. They do not see

the strictness and holiness of God's Ten commandments. If they did, they would never rest until they were safe in Christ.

In the last place, this passage teaches us ***the exceeding importance of avoiding all occasions of sin.*** If we really desire to be holy, we must "take heed to our ways, that we offend not in our tongues." We must be ready to make up quarrels and disagreements, lest they gradually lead on to greater evils. "The beginning of strife is like breaching a dam." We must labor to crucify our flesh and mortify our members, to make any sacrifice and endure any bodily inconvenience rather than sin. We must keep our lips as it were with a bridle, and exercise an hourly strictness over our words. Let men call us precise, if they will, for so doing. Let them say, if they please, that we are "too particular." We need not be moved. We are merely doing as our Lord Jesus Christ bids us, and, if this is the case, we have no cause to be ashamed.

MATTHEW 5:38-48

"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you, don't resist him who is evil; but whoever strikes you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also. If anyone sues you to take away your coat, let him have your cloak also. Whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks you, and don't turn away him who desires to borrow from you."

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who mistreat you and persecute you, that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Don't even the tax collectors do the same? If you only greet your friends, what more do you do than others? Don't even the tax collectors do the same? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect."

You have here our Lord Jesus Christ's rules for our conduct one towards another. He that would know how He ought to feel and act towards his fellow men, should often study these verses. They deserve to be written in letters of gold. They have extorted praise even from the enemies of Christianity. Let us mark well what they contain.

The Lord Jesus forbids everything like an unforgiving and revengeful spirit. A readiness to resent injuries—a quickness in taking offence—a quarrelsome and contentious disposition—a keenness in asserting our rights—all, all are contrary to the mind of Christ. The world may see no harm in these habits of mind. But they do not correspond to the character of the Christian. Our Master says, "Don't resist him who is evil."

The Lord Jesus enjoins on us a spirit of universal love and charity. We ought to put away all malice. We ought to return good for evil, and blessing for cursing. We ought to "love even our enemies." Moreover we are not to love in word only, but in deed. We are to deny ourselves, and take trouble, in order to be kind and courteous. If any man "compels you to go one mile, go with him two." We are to put up with much and bear much, rather than hurt another, or give offence. In all things we are to be unselfish. Our thought must never be, "how do others behave to me?" but "what would Christ have me to do?"

A standard of conduct like this may seem, at first sight, extravagantly high. But we must never content ourselves with aiming at one lower. We must observe the two weighty arguments by which our Lord backs up this part of His instruction. They deserve serious attention.

For one thing, ***if we do not aim at the spirit and temper which are here recommended, we are not yet children of God.*** Our "Father in heaven" is kind to all. He sends rain on good and on evil alike. He causes "His sun" to shine on all without distinction. A son should be like his father. But where is our likeness to our Father in heaven, if we cannot show mercy and kindness to everybody? Where is the evidence that we are new creatures, if we lack charity? It is altogether lacking. We must yet be "born again." (John 3:7.)

For another thing, ***if we do not aim at the spirit and temper here recommended, we are manifestly yet of the world.*** Even those who have no religion can "love those who love them." They can do good and show kindness, when their affection or interest moves them. But a Christian ought to be influenced by higher principles than these. Do we flinch from the test? Do we find it impossible to do good to our enemies? If that be the case, we may be sure we have yet to be converted. As yet we have not "received the Spirit of God." (1 Cor. 2:12.)

There is much in all this which calls loudly for solemn reflection. There are few passages of Scripture so calculated to raise in our minds humbling thoughts. *We have here a lovely picture of the Christian as he ought to be.* We cannot look at it without painful feelings. We must all allow that it differs widely from the Christian as he is. Let us carry away from it two general lessons.

In the first place *if the spirit of these ten verses were more continually remembered by true believers,* ***they would recommend Christianity to the world far more than they do.*** We must not allow ourselves to suppose that the least words in this passage are trifling and of small moment. They are not so. It is attention to the spirit of this passage which makes our religion beautiful. It is the neglect of the things which it contains by which our religion is deformed. Unfailing courtesy, kindness, tenderness, and consideration for others, are some of the greatest ornaments to the character of the child of God. The world can understand these

things, if it cannot understand doctrine. There is no religion in rudeness, roughness, bluntness, and incivility. The perfection of practical Christianity consists in attending to the little duties of holiness as well as to the great.

In the second place, *if the spirit of these ten verses had more dominion and power in the world,* ***how much happier the world would be than it is.*** Who does not know that quarrelling's, strife's, selfishness, and unkindness cause half the miseries by which mankind is visited? Who can fail to see that nothing would so much tend to increase happiness as the spread of Christian love, such as is here recommended by our Lord? Let us all remember this. Those who fancy that true religion has any tendency to make men unhappy, are greatly mistaken. It is the absence of it that does this, and not the presence. True religion has the directly contrary effect. It tends to promote peace, and charity, and kindness, and goodwill among men. The more men are brought under the teaching of the Holy Spirit, the more they will love one another, and the more happy they will be.

Matthew – Chap. 6

MATTHEW 6:1-8

"Be careful that you don't do your charitable giving before men, to be seen by them, or else you have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. Therefore when you do merciful deeds, don't sound a trumpet before yourself, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may get glory from men. Most certainly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you do merciful deeds, don't let your left hand know what your right hand does, so that your merciful deeds may be in secret, then your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly."

"When you pray, you shall not be as the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Most certainly, I tell you, they have received their reward. But you, when you pray, enter into your inner chamber, and having shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. In praying, don't use vain repetitions, as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their much speaking. Therefore don't be like them, for your Father knows what things you need, before you ask him."

In this part of the sermon on the mount the Lord Jesus gives us instruction on two subjects. One is that of giving alms. The other is that of prayer. Both were subjects to which the Jews attached great importance. Both in themselves deserve the serious attention of all professing Christians.

Observe that our Lord takes it for granted, *that* ***all who call themselves His disciples will GIVE ALMS.*** He assumes as a matter of course, that they will think it a solemn duty to give, according to their means, to relieve the needs of others. The only point He handles is the *manner* in which the duty should be done. This is a weighty lesson. It condemns the selfish stinginess of many in the matter of giving money. How many are "rich towards themselves," but poor towards God! How many never give a farthing to do good to the bodies and souls of men! And have such people any right to be called Christians, in their present state of mind? It may be well doubted. A giving Savior should have giving disciples.

Observe again that our Lord takes it for granted, *that* ***all who call themselves His disciples will PRAY.*** He assumes this also as a matter of course. He only gives directions as to the best way of praying. This is another lesson which deserves to be continually remembered. It teaches plainly that prayerless people are not genuine Christians. It is not enough to join in the prayers of the congregation on Sundays, or attend the prayer of a family on week-days. There must be private prayer also. Without this we may be

outward members of Christ's church, but we are not living members of Christ.

But what are the rules laid down for our guidance about almsgiving and praying? They are few and simple. But they contain much matter for thought.

In GIVING, ***everything like ostentation is to be abhorred and avoided.*** We are not to give as if we wished everybody to see how liberal and charitable we are, and desired the praise of our fellow men. We are to shun everything like *display*. We are to give quietly, and make as little noise as possible about our charities. We are to aim at the spirit of the proverbial saying, "Don't let your left hand know what your right hand does."

In PRAYING, *the principal object to be sought, is to be alone with God*. We should endeavor to find some place where no mortal eye sees us, and where we can pour out our hearts with the feeling that no one is looking at us but God. This is a rule which many find it very difficult to follow. The poor man and the servant often find it almost impossible to be really alone. But it is a rule which we must all make great efforts to obey. Necessity, in such cases, is often the mother of invention. When a person has a real desire to find some place, where he can be in secret with his God, he will generally find a way.

In all our duties, whether giving, or praying, the great thing to be kept in mind is, *that* ***we have to do with a heart-searching***

and all-knowing God. Everything like formality, affectation, or mere bodily service, is abominable and worthless in God's sight. He takes no account of the quantity of money we give, or the quantity of words we use. The one thing at which His all-seeing eye looks is the nature of our motives, and the state of our hearts. "Our Father sees in secret."

May we all remember these things. Here lies a rock, on which many are continually making spiritual shipwreck. They flatter themselves that all must be right with their souls, if they only perform a certain amount of "religious duties." They forget that God does not regard the quantity, but the quality of our service. His favor is not to be bought, as many seem to suppose, by the formal repetition of a number of words, or the self-righteous payment of a sum of money to a charitable institution. Where are our hearts? Are we doing all, whether we give or pray, "as to the Lord, and not to men?" Do we realize the eye of God? Do we simply and solely desire to please Him, who "sees in secret," and by whom "actions are weighed?" (1 Sam. 2:3.) Are we sincere? These are the sort of questions, with which we should daily ply our souls.

MATTHEW 6:9-15

"Pray like this: 'Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. Let your Kingdom come. Let your will be done, as in heaven, so on earth. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors. Bring us not into temptation, but

deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen.'"

"For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you don't forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

Perhaps no part of Scripture is so well known as this. Its words are familiar, wherever Christianity is found. Thousands, and tens of thousands, who never saw a Bible, or heard the pure Gospel, are acquainted with "Our Father," and "Paternoster." Happy would it be for the world, if this prayer was as well known in the spirit, as it is in the letter!

Perhaps no part of Scripture is so *full*, and so *simple* at the same time, as this. It is the first prayer which we learn to offer up, when we are little children. Here is its simplicity. It contains the germ of everything which the most advanced saint can desire. Here is its fullness. The more we ponder every word it contains, the more we shall feel, "this prayer is of God."

The Lord's prayer consists of ten parts or sentences. There is one declaration of the Being to whom we pray. There are three prayers respecting His name, His kingdom, and His will. There are four prayers respecting our daily needs, our sins, our weakness, and our dangers. There is one profession of our feeling towards others. There is one concluding ascription of praise. In all these parts we are taught to say "we," and "our." We are to remember others, as well as

ourselves. On each of these parts a volume might be written. We must content ourselves at present with taking up sentence by sentence, and marking out the direction in which each sentence points.

The first sentence declares ***to whom we are to pray***— "Our *Father* who is in heaven." We are not to cry to saints and angels, but to the everlasting Father, the Father of spirits, the Lord of heaven and earth. We call Him Father, in the lowest sense, as our Creator; as Paul told the Athenians, "in him we live, and move, and have our being—we are also his offspring." (Acts 17:28.) We call Him Father in the highest sense, as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, reconciling us to Himself, through the death of His Son. (Col. 1:20-22.) We profess that which the Old Testament saints only saw dimly, if at all —we profess to be His children by faith in Christ, and to have "the Spirit of adoption whereby we cry, Abba, Father." (Rom. 8:15.) This, we must never forget, is the sonship that we must desire, if we would be saved. Without faith in Christ's blood, and union with Him, it is vain to talk of trusting in the Fatherhood of God.

The second sentence is ***a petition respecting God's name*** —"May your name be kept holy." By the "name" of God we mean all those attributes under which He is revealed to us—His power, wisdom, holiness, justice, mercy, and truth. By asking that they may be "holy," we mean that they may be made known and glorified. The glory of God is the first thing that God's children should desire. It is the object of one of our Lord's own prayers—"Father, glorify your

name." (John 12:28.) It is the purpose for which the world was created. It is the end for which the saints are called and converted. It is the chief thing we should seek, that "in all things God may be glorified." (1 Peter 4:11.)

The third sentence is ***a petition concerning God's kingdom*** —"May your kingdom come." By His kingdom we mean first, the kingdom of *grace* which God sets up and maintains in the hearts of all living members of Christ, by His Spirit and word. But we mean chiefly, the kingdom of *glory* which shall one day be set up, when Jesus shall come the second time, and "all men shall know Him from the least to the greatest." This is the time when sin, and sorrow, and Satan shall be cast out of the world. It is the time when the Jews shall be converted, and the fullness of the Gentiles shall come in, (Rom. 11:25,) and a time that is above all things to be desired. It therefore fills a foremost place in the Lord's prayer. We ask that which is expressed in the words of the Burial service, "that it may please you to hasten your kingdom."

The fourth sentence is ***a petition concerning God's will*** —"May your will be done, as in heaven, so on earth." We here pray that God's laws may be obeyed by men as perfectly, readily, and unceasingly, as they are by angels in heaven. We ask that those who now obey not His laws, may be taught to obey them, and that those who do obey them, may obey them better. Our truest happiness is perfect submission to God's will, and it is the highest charity to pray that all mankind may know it, obey it, and submit to it.

The fifth sentence is ***a petition respecting our own daily needs***—"give us this day our daily bread." We are here taught to acknowledge our entire dependence on God, for the supply of our daily necessities. As Israel required daily manna, so we require daily "bread." We confess that we are poor, weak, needy creatures, and beseech Him who is our Maker to take care of us. We ask for "bread," as the simplest of our needs, and in that word we include all that our bodies require.

The sixth sentence is ***a petition respecting our sins*** —"Forgive us our debts." We confess that we are sinners, and need daily grants of pardon and forgiveness. This is a part of the Lord's prayer which deserves especially to be remembered. It condemns all self-righteousness and self-justifying. We are instructed here to keep up a continual habit of confession at the throne of grace, and a continual habit of seeking mercy and remission. Let this never be forgotten. We need daily to "wash our feet." (John 13:10.)

The seventh sentence is ***a profession respecting our own feelings towards others***—we ask our Father to "forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors." This is the only profession in the whole prayer, and the only part on which our Lord comments and dwells, when He has concluded the prayer. The plain object of it is, to remind us that we must not expect our prayers for forgiveness to be heard, if we pray with malice and spite in our hearts towards others. To pray in such a frame of mind is mere formality and hypocrisy. It is even worse than hypocrisy. It is as much as saying,

“Do not forgive me at all.” Our prayer is nothing without charity. We must not expect to be forgiven, if we cannot forgive.

The eighth sentence is ***a petition respecting our weakness*** —”Bring us not into temptation.” It teaches us that we are liable, at all times, to be led astray, and fall. It instructs us to confess our infirmity, and beseech God to hold us up, and not allow us to run into sin. We ask Him, who orders all things in heaven and earth, to restrain us from going into that which would injure our souls, and never to allow us to be tempted above that which we are able to bear. (1 Cor. 10:13.)

The ninth sentence is ***a petition respecting our dangers*** —”deliver us from evil.” We are here taught to ask God to deliver us from the evil that is in the world, the evil that is within our own hearts, and not least from that evil one, the devil. We confess that, so long as we are in the body, we are constantly seeing, hearing, and feeling the presence of evil. It is about us, and within us, and around us on every side. And we entreat Him, who alone can preserve us, to be continually delivering as from its power. (John 17:15.)

The last sentence is ***an ascription of praise***—”yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory.” We declare in these words our belief, that the kingdoms of this world are the rightful property of our Father—that to Him alone belongs all “power,”—and that He alone deserves to receive all “glory.” And we conclude by offering to Him the profession of our hearts, that we give Him all honor and praise, and rejoice that He is King of kings, and Lord of lords.

And now let us all examine ourselves, and see whether we really desire to have the things which we are taught to ask for in the Lord's Prayer. Thousands, it may be feared, repeat these words daily as a form, but never consider what they are saying. They care nothing for the "glory," the "kingdom," or the "will" of God. They have no sense of dependence, sinfulness, weakness, or danger. They have no love or charity towards their enemies. And yet they repeat the Lord's Prayer! These things ought not to be so. May we resolve that, by God's help, our hearts shall go together with our lips! Happy is he who can really call God his Father through Jesus Christ his Savior, and can therefore say a heartfelt "Amen" to all that the Lord's Prayer contains.

MATTHEW 6:16-24

"Moreover when you fast, don't be like the hypocrites, with sad faces. For they disfigure their faces, that they may be seen by men to be fasting. Most certainly I tell you, they have received their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head, and wash your face; so that you are not seen by men to be fasting, but by your Father who is in secret, and your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you."

"Don't lay up treasures for yourselves on the earth, where moth and rust consume, and where thieves break through and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consume, and where thieves don't break through and steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

"The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is evil, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!"

"No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You can't serve both God and Mammon."

There are three subjects brought before us in this part of our Lord's sermon on the mount. These three are fasting, worldliness, and singleness of purpose in religion.

Fasting, or occasional abstinence from food, in order to bring the body into subjection to the spirit, is a practice frequently mentioned in the Bible, and generally in connection with prayer. David fasted, when his child was sick. Daniel fasted, when he sought special light from God. Paul and Barnabas fasted, when they appointed elders. Esther fasted, before going in to Ahasuerus. It is a subject about which we find no direct command it the New Testament. It seems to be left to every one's discretion, whether he will fast or not. There is great wisdom in this. Many a poor man never has enough to eat, and it would be an insult to tell him to fast. Many a sickly person can hardly be kept well with the closest attention to diet, and could not fast without bringing on illness. It is a matter in which everyone must be persuaded in his own mind, and not be hasty to condemn others, who do not agree with him. One thing only must never be forgotten. Those who fast should do it

quietly, secretly, and without ostentation. Let them not "appear to men" to fast. Let them not fast to man, but to God.

Worldliness is one of the greatest dangers that beset man's soul. It is no wonder that we find our Lord speaking strongly about it. It is a treacherous, harmful, enticing, and powerful enemy. It seems so innocent to pay close attention to our business! It seems so harmless to seek our happiness in this world, so long as we keep clear of open sins! Yet here is a rock on which many make shipwreck to all eternity. They "lay up treasure on earth," and forget to "lay up treasure in heaven." May we all remember this! Where are our hearts? What do we love best? Are our chief affections on things in earth, or things in heaven? Life or death depends on the answer we can give to these questions. If our treasure is earthly, our hearts will be earthly also. "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be."

Singleness of purpose is one great secret of spiritual prosperity. If our eyes do not see distinctly, we cannot walk without stumbling and falling. If we attempt to work for two different masters, we are sure to give satisfaction to neither. It is just the same with respect to our souls. We cannot serve Christ and the world at the same time. It is vain to attempt it. The thing cannot be done. The ark and Dagon will never stand together. God must be king over our hearts. His law, His will, His precepts must receive our first attention. Then, and not until then, everything in our inward man will fall into its right place. Unless our hearts are so ordered,

everything will be in confusion. “Your whole body will be full of darkness.”

Let us learn from our Lord’s instruction about fasting, ***the great importance of cheerfulness in our religion.*** Those words, “anoint your head, and wash your face,” are full of deep meaning. They should teach us to aim at letting men see, that we find Christianity makes us happy. Never let us forget that there is no religion in looking melancholy and gloomy. Are we dissatisfied with Christ’s wages, and Christ’s service? Surely not! Then let us not look as if we were.

Let us learn from our Lord’s caution about worldliness ***what immense need we all have to watch and pray against an earthly spirit.*** What are the vast majority of professing Christians round us doing? They are “laying up treasure on earth.” There can be no mistake about it. Their tastes, their ways, their habits tell a fearful tale. They are not “laying up treasure in heaven.” Oh! let us all beware that we do not sink into hell by paying excessive attention to lawful things. Open transgression of God’s law slays its thousands, but worldliness its tens of thousands.

Let us learn from our Lord’s words about the “single eye,” ***the true secret of the failures,*** which so many Christians seem to make in their religion. There are failures in all quarters. There are thousands in our churches uncomfortable, ill at ease, and dissatisfied with themselves, and they hardly know why. The reason is revealed here. They are trying to keep in with both sides. They are

endeavoring to please God and please man, to serve Christ and serve the world at the same time. Let us not commit this mistake. Let us be decided, thorough-going, uncompromising followers of Christ. Let out motto be that of Paul, "One thing I do." (Phil. 3:13.) Then we shall be happy Christians. We shall feel the sun shining on our faces. Heart, head, and conscience will all be full of light. *Decision* is the secret of happiness in religion. Be decided for Christ, and "your whole body will be full of light."

MATTHEW 6:25-34

"Therefore, I tell you, don't be anxious for your life—what you will eat, or what you will drink; nor yet for your body, what you will wear. Isn't life more than food, and the body more than clothing? See the birds of the sky, that they don't sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns. Your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren't you of much more value than they?"

"Which of you, by being anxious, can add one moment to his life-span? Why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. They don't toil, neither do they spin, yet I tell you that even Solomon in all his glory was not dressed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today exists, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, won't he much more clothe you, you of little faith?"

"Therefore don't be anxious, saying, 'What will we eat?', 'What will we drink?' or, 'With what will we be clothed?' For the Gentiles

seek after all these things, for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first God's Kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore don't be anxious for tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Each day's own evil is sufficient."

These verses are a striking example of the combined wisdom and compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ's teaching. He knows the heart of a man. He knows that we are all ready to turn off warnings against worldliness, by the argument that we cannot help being anxious about the things of this life. "Have we not our families to provide for? Must not our bodily needs be supplied? How can we possibly get through life, if we think first of our souls?" The Lord Jesus foresaw such thoughts, and furnished an answer.

He forbids us to keep up an anxious spirit about the things of this world. Four times over He says, "Don't be anxious." About life—about food—about clothing—about the morrow, "don't be anxious." Be not over-careful. Be not over-anxious. Prudent provision for the future is right. *Wearing, corroding, self-tormenting anxiety is wrong*.

He reminds us of the providential care that God continually takes of everything that He has created. Has He given us "life?" Then He will surely not let us lack anything necessary for its maintenance. Has He given us a "body?" Then He will surely not let us die for lack of clothing. He that calls us into being, will doubtless find food to feed us.

He points out the uselessness of over-anxiety. Our life is entirely in God's hand. All the care in the world will not make us continue a minute beyond the time which God has appointed. We shall not die until our work is done.

He sends us to the birds of the air for instruction. They make no provision for the future. "They don't sow, neither do they reap." They lay up no stores against time yet to come. They do not "gather into barns." They literally live from day to day on what they can pick up, by using the instinct God has put in them. They ought to teach us that no man doing his duty in the station to which God has called him, shall ever be allowed to come to poverty.

He bids us to observe the flowers of the field. Year after year they are decked with the gayest colors, without the slightest labor or exertion on their part. "They don't toil, neither do they spin." God, by His almighty power, clothes them with beauty every season. The same God is the Father of all believers. Why should they doubt that He is able to provide them with clothing, as well as the lilies "of the field?" He who takes thought for perishable flowers, will surely not neglect the bodies in which dwell immortal souls.

He suggests to us, that anxiety about the things of this world is most unworthy of a Christian. One great feature of heathenism is living for the present. Let the heathen, if he will, be anxious. He knows nothing of a Father in heaven. But let the Christian, who has clearer light and knowledge, give proof of it by his faith and contentment. When bereaved of those whom we love, we

are not to “sorrow as those who have no hope.” When tried by cares about this life, we are not to be over-anxious, as if we had no God, and no Christ.

He offers us a gracious promise, as a remedy against an anxious spirit. He assures us that if we “seek first” and foremost to have a place in the kingdom of grace and glory, everything that we really need in this world shall be given to us. It shall be “added,” over and above our heavenly inheritance. “All things shall work together for good for those who love God.” “He withholds no good thing from those who walk blamelessly.” (Rom. 8:28. Psalm 84:11.)

Last of all, He seals up all His instruction on this subject, by ***laying down one of the wisest maxims.*** “Tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Each day’s own evil is sufficient.” We are not to carry cares before they come. We are to attend to today’s business, and leave tomorrow’s anxieties until tomorrow dawns. We may die before tomorrow. We know not what may happen on the morrow. This only we may be assured of, that if tomorrow brings a cross, He who sends it, can and will send grace to bear it.

In all this passage there is a treasury of golden lessons. Let us seek to use them in our daily life. Let us not only read them, but turn them to practical account. Let us watch and pray against worry, and an over-anxious spirit. It deeply concerns our happiness. Half our miseries are caused by imagining things that we think are coming upon us. Half the things that we expect to come upon us, never come at all. Where is our faith? Where is our confidence in our Savior’s

words? We may well take shame to ourselves, when we read these verses, and then look into our hearts. But this we may be sure of, that David's words are true, "I have been young, and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his children begging for bread." (Psalm 37:25.)

Matthew – Chap. 7

MATTHEW 7:1-11

"Don't judge, so that you won't be judged. For with whatever judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with whatever measure you measure, it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but don't consider the beam that is in your own eye? Or how will you tell your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye;' and behold, the beam is in your own eye? You hypocrite! First remove the beam out of your own eye, and then you can see clearly to remove the speck out of your brother's eye."

"Don't give that which is holy to the dogs, neither throw your pearls before the pigs, lest perhaps they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces."

"Ask, and it will be given you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives. He

who seeks finds. To him who knocks it will be opened. Or who is there among you, who, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, who will give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!"

The first portion of these verses is one of those passages of Scripture, which we must be careful not to strain beyond its proper meaning. It is frequently abused and misapplied, by the enemies of true religion. *It is possible to press the words of the Bible so far that they yield not medicine, but poison.*

Our Lord does not mean that it is wrong, under any circumstances, to pass an unfavorable judgment on the conduct and opinions of others. We ought to have decided opinions. We are to "prove all things." We are to "try the spirits." Nor yet does He mean that it is wrong to reprove the sins and faults of others, until we are perfect and faultless ourselves. Such an interpretation would contradict other parts of Scripture. It would make it impossible to condemn error and false doctrine. It would debar any one from attempting the office of a minister or a judge. The earth would be "given into the hands of the wicked." (Job 9:24.) Heresy would flourish. Wrong-doing would abound.

What our Lord means to condemn is a censorious and fault-finding spirit. A readiness to blame others for trifling offences, or matters of indifference—a habit of passing rash and

hasty judgments—a disposition to magnify the errors and infirmities of our neighbors, and make the worst of them—this is what our Lord forbids. It was common among the Pharisees. It has always been common from their day down to the present time. We must all watch against it. We should “believe all things,” and “hope all things “about others, and be very slow to find fault. This is Christian charity. (1 Cor. 13:7.)

The second lesson contained in this passage, is ***the importance of exercising discretion as to the person with whom we speak on the subject of religion.*** Everything is beautiful in its place and season. Our zeal is to be tempered by a prudent consideration of times, places, and people. “Don’t reprove a scoffer,” says Solomon, “lest he hate you.” (Prov. 9:8.) It is not everybody to whom it is wise to open our minds on spiritual matters. There are many, who from violent tempers, or openly profligate habits, are utterly incapable of valuing the things of the Gospel. They will even fly into a passion, and run into greater excesses of sin, if you try to do good to their souls. To name the name of Christ to such people, is truly to “cast pearls before swine.” It does them not good but harm. It rouses all their corruption, and makes them angry. In short, they are like the Jews at Corinth, (Acts 18:6,) or like Nabal, of whom it is written, that he was “such a worthless fellow, that a man could not speak to him.” (1 Sam. 25:17.)

This is a lesson which it is peculiarly difficult to use in the proper way. The right application of it needs great wisdom. We are most of

us far more likely to err on the side of over-caution than of over-zeal. We are generally far more disposed to remember the "time to be silent," than "the time to speak." It is a lesson, however, which ought to stir up a spirit of self-inquiry in all our hearts. Do we ourselves never check our friends from giving us good advice, by our moroseness and irritability of temper? Have we never obliged others to hold their peace and say nothing, by our pride and impatient contempt of counsel? Have we never turned against our kind advisers, and silenced them by our violence and passion? Alas! we may well fear that we have erred in this matter.

The last lesson contained in this passage is ***the duty of prayer, and the rich encouragements there are to pray.*** There is a beautiful connection between this lesson and that which goes before it. Would we know when to be "silent," and when to "speak,"—when to bring forward "holy" things, and produce our "pearls?" We must pray. This is a subject to which the Lord Jesus evidently attaches great importance. The language that He uses is a plain proof of this. He employs three different words to express the idea of prayer. "Ask." "Seek." "Knock." He holds out the broadest, fullest promise to those who pray. "Everyone who asks receives." He illustrates God's readiness to hear our prayers, by an argument drawn from the notorious practice of parents on earth. "Evil" and selfish as they are by nature, they do not neglect the needs of their children according to the flesh. Much more will a God of love and mercy attend to the cries of those who are His children by grace.

Let us take special notice of these words of our Lord about prayer. Few of His sayings, perhaps, are so well known and so often repeated as this. The poorest and most unlearned can tell you, that "if we do not seek we shall not find." But what is the good of knowing it, if we do not use it? *Knowledge, not improved and well employed, will only increase our condemnation at the last day.*

Do we know anything of this asking, seeking, and knocking? Why should we not? There is nothing so simple and plain as praying, if a man really has a will to pray. There is nothing, unhappily, which men are so slow to do. They will use many of the forms of religion, attend many ordinances, do many things that are right, before they will do this. And yet without this no soul can be saved.

Do we ever really pray? If not, we shall at last be without excuse before God, except we repent. We shall not be condemned for not doing what we could not have done, or not knowing what we could not have known. But we shall find that one main reason why we are lost is this, that we never asked that we might be saved.

Do we indeed pray? Then let us pray on, and not faint. It is not lost labor. It is not useless. It will bear fruit after many days. That word never yet failed, "Everyone who asks receives."

MATTHEW 7:12-20

"Therefore whatever you desire for men to do to you, you shall also do to them; for this is the law and the prophets."

"Enter in by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter in by it. How narrow is the gate, and restricted is the way that leads to life! Few are those who find it."

"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves. By their fruits you will know them. Do you gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree produces good fruit; but the corrupt tree produces evil fruit. A good tree can't produce evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree produce good fruit. Every tree that doesn't grow good fruit is cut down, and thrown into the fire. Therefore, by their fruits you will know them."

In this part of the sermon on the mount our Lord begins to draw His discourse to a conclusion. The lessons He here enforces on our notice, are broad, general, and full of the deepest wisdom. Let us mark them in succession.

He lays down a general principle for our guidance in all doubtful questions between man and man. We are "to do to others as we would have others do to us." We are not to deal with others as others deal with us. This is mere selfishness and heathenism. We are to deal with others as we would like others to deal with us. This is real Christianity.

This is a golden rule indeed! It does not merely forbid all petty malice and revenge, all cheating and over-reaching. It does much

more. It settles a hundred difficult points, which in a world like this are continually arising between man and man. It prevents the necessity of laying down endless little rules for our conduct in specific cases. It sweeps the whole debatable ground with one mighty principle. It shows us a balance and measure, by which every one may see at once what is his duty. Is there a thing we would not like our neighbor to do to us? Then let us always remember, that this is the thing we ought not to do to him. Is there a thing we would like him to do to us? Then this is the very thing we ought to do to him. How many intricate questions would be decided at once, if this rule were honestly used!

In the second place, ***our Lord gives us a general caution against the way of the many in religion.*** It is not enough to think as others think, and do as others do. It must not satisfy us to follow the fashion, and swim with the stream of those among whom we live. He tells us that the way that leads to everlasting life is "narrow," and "few" travel in it. He tells us that the way that leads to everlasting destruction is "broad," and full of travelers. "Many are those who enter in by it."

These are fearful truths! They ought to raise great searching's of heart in the minds of all who hear them. "Which way am I going? By what road am I traveling?" In one or other of the two ways here described, every one of us may be found. May God give us an honest, self-inquiring spirit, and show us what we are!

We may well tremble and be afraid, if our religion is that of the multitude. If we can say no more than this, that "we go where others go, and worship where others worship, and hope we shall do as well as others at last," we are literally pronouncing our own condemnation. What is this but being in the "broad way?" What is this but being in the road whose end is "destruction?" Our religion at present is not saving religion.

We have no reason to be discouraged and cast down, if the religion we profess is not popular, and few agree with us. We must remember the words of our Lord Jesus Christ in this passage: "The gate is narrow." Repentance, and faith in Christ, and holiness of life, have never been fashionable. The true flock of Christ has always been small. It must not move us to find that we are reckoned singular, and peculiar, and bigoted, and narrow-minded. This is "the narrow way." Surely it is better to enter into life eternal with a few, than to go to "destruction" with a great company.

In the last place, ***the Lord Jesus gives us a general warning against false teachers in the church.*** We are to "beware of false prophets." The connection between this passage and the preceding one is striking. Would we keep clear of this "broad way?" We must beware of false prophets. They will arise. They began in the days of the apostles. Even then the seeds of error were sown. They have appeared continually ever since. We must be prepared for them, and be on our guard.

This is a warning which is much needed. There are thousands who seem ready to believe anything in religion if they hear it from an ordained minister. They forget that clergymen may err as much as laymen. They are not infallible. Their teaching must be weighed in the balance of Holy Scripture. They are to be followed and believed, so long as their doctrine agrees with the Bible, but not a minute longer. We are to try them "by their fruits." Sound doctrine and holy living are the marks of true prophets. Let us remember this. Our minister's mistakes will not excuse our own. "If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into the ditch."

What is the best safe-guard against false teaching? Beyond all doubt the regular study of the word of God, with prayer for the teaching of the Holy Spirit. The Bible was given to be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. (Psalm. 119:105.) The man who reads it aright will never be allowed greatly to err. It is neglect of the Bible which makes so many a prey to the first false teacher whom they hear. They would have us believe that "they are not learned, and do not pretend to have decided opinions." The plain truth is that they are lazy and idle about reading the Bible, and do not like the trouble of thinking for themselves. Nothing supplies false prophets with followers so much as spiritual sloth under a cloak of humility.

May we all bear in mind our Lord's warning! The world, the devil, and the flesh, are not the only dangers in the way of the Christian. There remains another yet, and that is the "false prophet," the wolf in sheep's clothing. Happy is he who prays over his Bible and knows the

difference between truth and error in religion! There is a difference, and we are meant to know it, and use our knowledge.

MATTHEW 7:21-29

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will tell me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in your name, in your name cast out demons, and in your name do many mighty works?' Then I will tell them, 'I never knew you. Depart from me, you who work iniquity.'"

"Everyone therefore who hears these words of mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man, who built his house on a rock. The rain came down, the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat on that house; and it didn't fall, for it was founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of mine, and doesn't do them will be like a foolish man, who built his house on the sand. The rain came down, the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat on that house; and it fell—and great was its fall."

It happened, when Jesus had finished saying these things, that the multitudes were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them with authority, and not like the scribes.

The Lord Jesus winds up the sermon on the mount by a passage of heart-piercing application. He turns from false prophets to false

professors, from unsound teachers to unsound hearers. Here is a word for all. May we have grace to apply it to our own hearts!

The first lesson here is ***the uselessness of a mere outward profession of Christianity.*** Not everyone that says "Lord, Lord," shall enter the kingdom of heaven. Not all that profess and call themselves Christians shall be saved.

Let us take notice of this. It requires far more than most people seem to think necessary, to save a soul. We may be baptized in the name of Christ, and boast confidently of our ecclesiastical privileges. We may possess head-knowledge, and be quite satisfied with our own state. We may even be preachers, and teachers of others, and do "many wonderful works" in connection with our church. But all this time are we practically doing the will of our Father in heaven? Do we truly repent, truly believe on Christ, and live holy and humble lives? If not, in spite of all our privileges and profession, we shall miss heaven at last, and be forever cast away. We shall hear those dreadful words, "I never knew you. Depart from me."

The day of judgment will reveal strange things. The hopes of many, who were thought great Christians while they lived, will be utterly confounded. The rottenness of their religion will be exposed and put to shame before the whole world. It will then be proved, that to be saved means something more than "making a profession." We must make a "practice" of our Christianity as well as a "profession." Let us often think of that great day. Let us often "judge ourselves,

that we be not judged," and condemned by the Lord. Whatever else we are, let us aim at being real, true, and sincere.

The second lesson here is ***a striking picture of two classes of Christian hearers.*** Those who hear and do nothing—and those who hear and do as well as hear—are both placed before us, and their histories traced to their respective ends.

The man who hears Christian teaching, and practices what he hears, is like "a wise man who built his house on a rock." He does not content himself with listening to exhortations to repent, believe in Christ, and live a holy life. He actually repents. He actually believes. He actually ceases to do evil, learns to do well, abhors that which is sinful, and cleaves to that which is good. He is a doer as well as a hearer. (James 1:22.)

And what is the result? In the time of trial his religion does not fail him. The floods of sickness, sorrow, poverty, disappointments, bereavements beat upon him in vain. His soul stands unmoved. His faith does not give way. His comforts do not utterly forsake him. His religion may have cost him trouble in time past. His foundation may have been obtained with much labor and many tears. To discover his own interest in Christ may have required many a day of earnest seeking, and many an hour of wrestling in prayer. But his labor has not been thrown away. He now reaps a rich reward. The religion that can stand trial is the true religion.

The man who hears Christian teaching, and never gets beyond hearing, is like “a foolish man who built his house on the sand.” He satisfies himself with listening and approving, but he goes no further. He flatters himself, perhaps, that all is right with his soul, because he has feelings, and convictions, and desires, of a spiritual kind. In these he rests. He never really breaks off from sin, and casts aside the spirit of the world. He never really lays hold of Christ. He never really takes up the cross. He is a hearer of truth, but nothing more.

And what is the end of this man’s religion? It breaks down entirely under the first flood of tribulation. It fails him completely, like a summer-dried fountain, when his need is the sorest. It leaves its possessor high and dry, like a wreck on a sand bank, a scandal to the church, a by-word to the infidel, and a misery to himself. Most true is it that what costs little is worth little! A religion which costs us nothing, and consist in nothing but hearing sermons, will always prove at last to be a useless thing.

So ends the sermon on the mount. Such a sermon never was preached before. Such a sermon perhaps has never been preached since. Let us see that it has a lasting influence on our own souls. It is addressed to us as well as to those who first heard it. We are they who shall have to give account of its heart-searching lessons. It is no light matter what we think of them. The word that Jesus has spoken, “the same will judge us in the last day.” (John 12:48.)

Matthew – Chap. 8

MATTHEW 8:1-15

When he came down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him. Behold, a leper came to him and worshiped him, saying, "Lord, if you want to, you can make me clean."

Jesus stretched out his hand, and touched him, saying, "I want to. Be made clean." Immediately his leprosy was cleansed. 8:4 Jesus said to him, "See that you tell nobody, but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."

When he came into Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking him, and saying, "Lord, my servant lies in the house paralyzed, grievously tormented."

Jesus said to him, "I will come and heal him."

The centurion answered, "Lord, I'm not worthy for you to come under my roof. Just say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I am also a man under authority, having under myself soldiers. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and tell another, 'Come,' and he comes; and tell my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

When Jesus heard it, he marveled, and said to those who followed, "Most certainly I tell you, I haven't found so great a faith,

not even in Israel. I tell you that many will come from the east and the west, and will sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven, but the children of the Kingdom will be thrown out into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Jesus said to the centurion, "Go your way. Let it be done for you as you have believed." His servant was healed in that hour.

When Jesus came into Peter's house, he saw his wife's mother lying sick with a fever. He touched her hand, and the fever left her. She got up and served him.

The eighth chapter of Matthew's Gospel is full of our Lord's miracles. No less than five are specially recorded. There is a beautiful fitness in this. It was fitting that the greatest sermon ever preached should be immediately followed by mighty proof, that the preacher was the Son of God. Those who heard the sermon on the mount would be obliged to confess, that, as "none spoke such words as this man," so also none did such works.

The verses we have now read contain three great miracles. A leper is healed with a touch. A palsied person is made well by a word. A woman sick with a fever is restored in a moment to health and strength. On the face of these three miracles, we may read three striking lessons. Let us examine them, and lay them to heart.

Let us learn, for one thing, ***how great is the power of our Lord Jesus Christ.*** LEPROSY is the most fearful disease by which man's body can be afflicted. He that has it is like one dead while he

lives. It is a disease regarded by physicians as incurable. (2 Kings 5:7.) Yet Jesus says, “Be made clean, and immediately his leprosy was cleansed.” To heal a person of the PALSY without even seeing him, by only speaking a word, is to do that which our minds cannot even conceive. Yet Jesus commands, and at once it is done. To give a woman, prostrate with a FEVER, not merely relief, but strength to do work in an instant, would baffle the skill of all the physicians on earth. Yet Jesus “touched” Peter’s wife’s mother, and “she arose, and served him.” These are the doings of one that is Almighty. There is no escape from the conclusion. This was “the finger of God.” (Exod. 8:19.)

Behold here a broad foundation for the faith of a Christian! We are told in the Gospel to come to Jesus, to believe on Jesus, to live the life of faith in Jesus. We are encouraged to lean on Him, to cast all our care on Him, to repose all the weight of our souls on Him. We may do so without fear. He can bear all. He is a strong rock. He is Almighty. It was a fine saying of an old saint, “my faith can sleep sound on no other pillow than Christ’s omnipotence.” He can give life to the dead. He can give power to the weak. He can “increase strength to those who have no might.” Let us trust him, and not be afraid. *The world is full of snares. Our hearts are weak. But with Jesus nothing is impossible.*

Let us learn, for another thing, ***the mercifulness and compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ.*** The circumstances of the three cases we are now considering were all different. He *heard*

the leper's pitiful cry, "Lord, if you want to, you can make me clean." He was *told* of the centurion's servant, but He never saw him. He *saw* Peter's wife's mother, "lying sick with a fever;" and we are not told that she spoke a word. Yet in each case the heart of the Lord Jesus was one and the same. In each case He was quick to show mercy, and ready to heal. Each poor sufferer was tenderly pitied, and each effectually relieved.

Behold here another strong foundation for our faith! Our great High Priest is very gracious. He can be "touched with the feeling of our infirmities." He is never tired of doing us good. He knows that we are a weak and feeble people, in the midst of a weary and troublous world. He is as ready to bear with us, and help us, as He was 1800 years ago. It is as true of Him now as it was then, "He doesn't despise anyone." (Job 36:5.) No heart can feel for us so much as the heart of Christ.

Let us learn, in the last place, ***what a precious thing is the grace of faith.*** We know little about the centurion described in these verses. His name, his nation, his past history, are all hidden from us. But one thing we know, and that is, that he believed. "Lord," he says, "I'm not worthy for you to come under my roof. Just say the word, and my servant will be healed." He believed, let us remember, when Scribes and Pharisees were unbelievers. He believed, though a Gentile born, when Israel was blinded. And our Lord pronounced upon him the commendation, which has been read all over the world

from that time to this, “I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.”

Let us lay firm hold on this lesson. It deserves to be remembered. To believe Christ’s power and willingness to help, and to make a practical use of our belief, is a rare and precious gift. Let us be ever thankful if we have it. To be willing to come to Jesus as helpless, lost sinners, and commit our souls into His hands is a mighty privilege. Let us ever bless God if this willingness is ours, for it is His gift. Such faith is better than all other gifts and knowledge in the world. Many a poor converted heathen, who knows nothing but that he is sick of sin, and trusts in Jesus, shall sit down in heaven, while many learned English scholars are rejected for evermore. Blessed indeed are those who believe!

What do we each know of this faith? This is the great question. Our learning may be small—but do we believe? Our opportunities of giving and working for Christ’s cause may be few—but do we believe? We may neither be able to preach, nor write, nor argue for the Gospel —but do we believe? May we never rest until we can answer this inquiry! Faith in Christ appears a small and simple thing to the children of this world. They see in it nothing great or grand. But faith in Christ is most precious in God’s sight, and like most precious things, is rare. By it true Christians live. By it they stand. By it they overcome the world. Without this faith no one can be saved.

MATTHEW 8:16-27

When evening came, they brought to him many possessed with demons. He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick; that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying: "He took our infirmities, and bore our diseases." Now when Jesus saw great multitudes around him, he gave the order to depart to the other side.

A scribe came, and said to him, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go."

Jesus said to him, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

Another of his disciples said to him, "Lord, allow me first to go and bury my father."

But Jesus said to him, "Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead."

When he got into a boat, his disciples followed him. Behold, a violent storm came up on the sea, so much that the boat was covered with the waves, but he was asleep. They came to him, and woke him up, saying, "Save us, Lord! We are dying!"

He said to them, "Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?" Then he got up, rebuked the wind and the sea, and there was a great calm.

The men marveled, saying, "What kind of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

In the first part of these verses we see a striking example of ***our Lord's wisdom in dealing with those who professed a willingness to be His disciples.*** The passage throws so much light on a subject frequently misunderstood in these days, that it deserves more than ordinary attention.

A certain scribe offers to follow our Lord wherever He goes. It was a remarkable offer, when we consider the class to which the man belonged, and the time at which it was made. But the offer receives a remarkable answer. It is not directly accepted, nor yet flatly rejected. Our Lord only makes the solemn reply, "the foxes have holes, and the birds of the sky have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head."

Another follower of our Lord next comes forward, and asks to be allowed to "bury his father," before going any further in the path of a disciple. The request seems, at first sight, a natural and lawful one. But it draws from our Lord's lips a reply no less solemn than that already referred to, "Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their dead."

There is something deeply impressive in both these sayings. They ought to be well weighed by all professing Christians. They teach us plainly, that people who show a desire to come forward and profess themselves true disciples of Christ, should be warned plainly to

"count the cost," before they begin. Are they prepared to endure hardship? Are they ready to carry the cross? If not, they are not yet fit to begin. They teach us plainly that there are times when a Christian must literally give up all for Christ's sake, and when even such duties as attending to a parent's funeral must be left to be performed by others. Such duties some will always be ready to attend to; and at no time can they be put in comparison with the greater duty of preaching the Gospel, and doing Christ's work in the world.

It would be well for the churches of Christ, if these sayings of our Lord were more remembered than they are. It may well be feared, that the lesson they contain is too often overlooked by the ministers of the Gospel, and that thousands are admitted to full communion, who are never warned to "count the cost." Nothing, in fact, has done more harm to Christianity than the practice of filling the ranks of Christ's army with every volunteer who is willing to make a little profession, and talk fluently of his experience. It has been painfully forgotten that numbers alone do not make strength, and that there may be a great quantity of mere outward religion, while there is very little real grace. Let us all remember this. Let us keep back nothing from young professors and inquirers after Christ. Let us not enlist them on false pretenses. Let us tell them plainly that there is a crown of glory at the end. But let us tell them no less plainly, that there is a daily cross in the way.

In the latter part of these verses we learn, that ***true saving faith is often mingled with much weakness and infirmity.***

It is a humbling lesson, but a very wholesome one.

We are told of our Lord and His disciples crossing the sea of Galilee in a boat. A storm arises, and the boat is in danger of being filled with water, by the waves that beat over it. Meanwhile our Lord is asleep. The frightened disciples awake Him, and cry to Him for help. He hears their cry and stills the waters with a word, so that there is "a great calm." At the same time, He gently reproves the anxiety of His disciples. "Why are you fearful, oh you of little faith!"

What a vivid picture we have here of the hearts of thousands of believers! How many have faith and love enough to forsake all for Christ's sake, and follow Him wherever He goes, and yet are full of fears in the hour of trial! How many have grace enough to turn to Jesus in every trouble, crying, "Lord save us," and yet not grace enough to lie still, and believe in the darkest hour that all is well! Truly believers have reason indeed to be "clothed with humility."

Let the prayer "Lord, increase our faith," always form part of our daily petitions. *We never perhaps know the weakness of our faith, until we are placed in the furnace of trial and anxiety.* Blessed and happy is that person who finds by experience that his faith can stand the fire, and that he can say with Job, "though he slays me, yet will I trust in him." (Job 13:15.)

We have great reason to thank God that Jesus, our great High-priest, is very compassionate and tenderhearted. He knows our frame. He considers our infirmities. He does not cast off His people

because of defects. He pities even those whom he reproves. The prayer even of “little faith” is heard, and gets an answer.

MATTHEW 8:28-34

When he came to the other side, into the country of the Gergesenes, two people possessed by demons met him there, coming out of the tombs, exceedingly fierce, so that nobody could pass that way. Behold, they cried out, saying, “What do we have to do with you, Jesus, Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?” Now there was a herd of many pigs feeding far away from them. The demons begged him, saying, “If you cast us out, permit us to go away into the herd of pigs.”

He said to them, “Go!”

They came out, and went into the herd of pigs: and behold, the whole herd of pigs rushed down the cliff into the sea, and died in the water.

Those who fed them fled, and went away into the city, and told everything, including what happened to those who were possessed with demons. Behold, all the city came out to meet Jesus. When they saw him, they begged that he would depart from their borders.

The subject of these seven verses is deep and mysterious. The casting out of a devil is here described with special fullness. It is one of those passages which throw strong light on a dark and difficult point.

Let us settle it firmly in our minds, that ***there is such a being as the devil.*** It is a dreadful truth, and one too much overlooked. There is an *unseen* spirit ever near us, of mighty *power*, and full of endless *malice* against our souls. From the beginning of creation he has labored to injure man. Until the Lord comes the second time and binds him, he will never cease to tempt, and practice mischief. In the days when our Lord was upon earth, it is clear that he had a peculiar power over the bodies of certain men and women, as well as over their souls. Even in our own times there may be more of this bodily possession than some suppose, though confessedly in far less degree than when Christ came in the flesh. But that the devil is ever near us in spirit, and ever ready to ply our hearts with temptations, ought never to be forgotten.

Let us, in the next place, settle it firmly in our minds, that ***the power of the devil is limited.*** Mighty as he is, there is one mightier still. Keenly set as his will is on doing harm in the world, he can only work by permission. These very verses show us that the evil spirits know they can only go to and fro, and ravage the earth, until the time allowed them by the Lord of lords. “Have you come down here to torment us,” they say, “before the time?” Their very petition shows us that they could not even hurt one of the Gergesene swine, unless Jesus the Son of God allowed them. “Permit us,” they say, “to go away into the herd of pigs.”

Let us, in the next place, settle it in our minds, that ***our Lord Jesus Christ is man’s great deliverer from the power of the***

devil. He can redeem us not only "from all iniquity," and "this present evil world," but from the devil. It was prophesied of old that he should bruise the serpent's head. He began to bruise that head, when he was born of the Virgin Mary. He triumphed over that head when He died upon the cross. He showed His complete dominion over Satan, by "healing all who were oppressed by the devil," when He was upon earth. (Acts 10:38.) Our great remedy in all the assaults of the devil, is to cry to the Lord Jesus, and to seek His help. He can break the chains that Satan casts round us, and set us free. He can cast out every devil that plagues our hearts, as surely as in the days of old. It would be miserable indeed to know that there is a devil ever near us, if we did not also know that Christ was "able to save to the uttermost, seeing he ever lives to make intercession for us." (Heb. 7:25.)

Let us not leave this passage without observing ***the painful worldliness of the Gergesenes,*** among whom this miracle of casting out a devil was wrought. They besought the Lord Jesus to "depart from their borders." They had no heart to feel for anything but the loss of their swine. They cared not that two fellow-creatures, with immortal souls, were freed from Satan's bondage. They cared not that there stood among them a greater than the devil, Jesus the Son of God. They cared for nothing but that their swine were drowned, and "the hope of their gains gone." They ignorantly regarded Jesus as one who stood between them and their profits, and they only wished to be rid of Him.

There are only too many like these Gergesenes. There are thousands who care not one jot for Christ, or Satan, so long as they can make a little more money, and have a little more of the good things of this world. From this spirit may we be delivered! Against this spirit may we ever watch and pray! It is very common. It is awfully infectious. Let us recollect every morning that we have souls to be saved, and that we shall one day die, and after that be judged. Let us beware of loving the world more than Christ. Let us beware of hindering the salvation of others, because we fear the increase of true religion may diminish our gains, or give us trouble.

Matthew – Chap. 9

MATTHEW 9:1-13

He entered into a boat, and crossed over, and came into his own city. Behold, they brought to him a man who was paralyzed, lying on a bed. Jesus, seeing their faith, said to the paralytic, "Son, cheer up! Your sins are forgiven you."

Behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, "This man blasphemes."

Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven;' or to say, 'Get up, and walk?' But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins..." (then he said to the paralytic), "Get up, and take up your mat, and go up to your house."

He arose and departed to his house. But when the multitudes saw it, they marveled and glorified God, who had given such authority to men.

As Jesus passed by from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax collection office. He said to him, "Follow me." He got up and followed him. It happened as he sat in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Jesus and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw it, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

When Jesus heard it, he said to them, "Those who are healthy have no need for a physician, but those who are sick do. But you go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,' for I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

Let us notice in the first part of this passage, ***our Lord's knowledge of men's thoughts.*** There were certain of the scribes, who found fault with the words which Jesus spoke to a man sick of the palsy. They said secretly among themselves, "this man blasphemes." They probably supposed that no one knew what was going on in their minds. They had yet to learn that the Son of God

could read hearts, and discern spirits. Their malicious thought was publicly exposed. They were put to an open shame.

There is an important lesson for us in this. “All things are naked and laid open before the eyes of him with whom we have to do.” (Heb. 4:13.) Nothing can be concealed from Christ. What do we think of, in private, when no man sees us? What do we think of, in church, when we seem so grave and serious? What are we thinking of at this moment, while these words pass under our eyes? Jesus knows. Jesus sees. Jesus records. Jesus will one day call us to give account. It is written that “God will judge the secrets of men, according to my gospel, by Jesus Christ.” (Rom. 2:16.) Surely we ought to be very humble when we consider these things. We ought to thank God daily that the blood of Christ can cleanse from all sin. We ought often to cry, “Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight.” (Psalm 19:14.)

Let us notice in the second place, ***the wonderful call of the apostle Matthew to be Christ’s disciple.***

We find the man, who afterwards was the first to write a Gospel, sitting at the tax collector’s booth. We see him absorbed in his worldly calling, and possibly thinking of nothing but money and gain. But suddenly the Lord Jesus calls on him to follow Him, and become His disciple. At once Matthew obeys. He “makes haste, and delays not” to keep Christ’s commandment. (Psalm. 119:60.) He arises and follows Him.

Let it be a fixed principle in our religion, that *with Christ nothing is impossible*. He can take a tax collector, and make him an apostle. He can change any heart, and make all things new. Let us never despair of any one's salvation. Let us pray on, and speak on, and work on to do good to souls, even to the souls of the worst. "The voice of the Lord is powerful." (Psalm. 29:4.) When He says by the power of the Spirit, "follow me," He can make the hardest and most sinful obey.

Let us observe ***Matthew's decision***. He waited for nothing. He did not tarry for "a convenient time." (Acts 24:25.) And he reaped in consequence a great reward. He wrote a book, which is known all over the earth. He became a blessing to others, as well as blessed in his own soul. He left a name behind him, which is better known than the names of princes and kings. The richest man of the world is soon forgotten when he dies. But as long as the world stands, millions will know the name of Matthew the tax collector.

Let us notice, in the last place, ***our Lord's precious declaration about His own mission.*** The Pharisees found fault with Him, because He allowed publicans and sinners to be in His company. In their proud blindness they fancied, that a teacher sent from heaven ought to have no dealings with such people. They were wholly ignorant of the grand design for which the Messiah was to come into the world—to be a Savior, a Physician, a healer of sin-sick souls. And they drew from our Lord's lips a rebuke, accompanied by

the blessed words, “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

Let us make sure that we thoroughly *understand* the doctrine that these words contain. The first thing needful, in order to have an interest in Christ, is to feel deeply our own corruption, and to be willing to come to Him for deliverance. We are not to keep away from Christ, as many ignorantly do, because we feel bad, and wicked, and unworthy. We are to remember that sinners are those He came into the world to save, and that if we feel ourselves such, it is well. Happy is he who really comprehends that one principal qualification for coming to Christ is a deep sense of sin!

Finally, if by the grace of God we really understand the glorious truth that sinners are those whom Christ came to call, let us take heed that we *never forget it*. Let us not dream that true Christians can ever attain such a state of perfection is this world, as not to need the mediation and intercession of Jesus. Sinners we are in the day we first come to Christ. Poor needy sinners we continue to be so long as we live, drawing all the grace we have every hour out of Christ’s fullness. Sinners we shall find ourselves in the hour of our death, and shall die as much indebted to Christ’s blood, as in the day we first believed.

MATTHEW 9:14-26

Then John’s disciples came to him, saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples don’t fast?”

Jesus said to them, “Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast. No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch would tear away from the garment, and a worse hole is made. Neither do people put new wine into old wineskins, or else the skins would burst, and the wine be spilled, and the skins ruined. No, they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved.”

While he told these things to them, behold, a ruler came and worshiped him, saying, “My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live.”

Jesus got up and followed him, as did his disciples. Behold, a woman who had an issue of blood for twelve years came behind him, and touched the fringe of his garment; for she said within herself, “If I just touch his garment, I will be made well.”

But Jesus, turning around and seeing her, said, “Daughter, cheer up! Your faith has made you well.” And the woman was made well from that hour.

When Jesus came into the ruler’s house, and saw the flute players, and the crowd in noisy disorder, he said to them, “Make room, because the girl isn’t dead, but sleeping.”

They were ridiculing him.

But when the crowd was put out, he entered in, took her by the hand, and the girl arose. The report of this went out into all that land.

Let us mark in this passage, **the gracious name by which the Lord Jesus speaks of Himself.** He calls Himself *"the bridegroom."*

What the bridegroom is to the bride, the Lord Jesus is to the souls of all who believe in Him. He loves them with a deep and everlasting love. He takes them into union with Himself. They are "one with Christ and Christ in them." He pays all their debts to God. He supplies all their daily need. He sympathizes with them in all their troubles. He bears with all their infirmities, and does not reject them for a few weaknesses. He regards them as part of Himself. Those that persecute and injure them are persecuting Him. The glory that He has received from His Father they will one day share with Him, and where He is, there shall they be. Such are the privileges of all true Christians. They are the Lamb's wife. (Rev. 19:7.) Such is the portion to which faith admits us. By it God joins our poor sinful souls to one precious Husband; and those whom God thus joins together, shall never be put asunder. Blessed indeed are those who believe!

Let us mark, in the next place, ***what a wise principle the Lord Jesus lays down for the treatment of young disciples.*** There were some who found fault with our Lord's followers, because they did not fast as John the Baptist's disciples did. Our Lord defends His disciples with an argument full of deep wisdom. He

shows that there would be a lack of fitness in their fasting, so long as He, their Bridegroom, was with them. But He does not stop there. He goes on to show, by two parables, that young beginners in the school of Christianity must be dealt with gently. They must be taught as they are able to bear. They must not be expected to receive everything at once. To neglect this rule would be as unwise as to "put new wine into old bottles," or to put "a piece of new cloth to an old garment."

There is a mine of deep wisdom in this, which all would do well to remember, in the spiritual teaching of those who are young in experience. We must be careful not to attach an excessive importance to the lesser things of religion. We must not be in a hurry to require a minute conformity to one rigid rule in 'things indifferent', until the first principles of repentance and faith have been thoroughly learned. To guide us in this matter, we have great need to pray for grace, and Christian common sense. Tact in dealing with young disciples is a rare gift, but a very useful one. To know what to insist upon as absolutely necessary from the first—and what to reserve, as a lesson to be learned when the learner has come to more perfect knowledge —is one of the highest attainments of a teacher of souls.

Let us mark, in the next place, ***what encouragement our Lord gives to the humblest faith.*** We read in this passage, that a woman severely afflicted with disease, came behind our Lord in the crowd, and "touched the hem" of His garment, in the hope that by so doing she should be healed. She said not a word to obtain help. She

made no public confession of faith. But she had confidence, that if she could only "touch His garment," she would be made well. And so it was. There lay hidden in that act of hers, a seed of precious faith, which obtained our Lord's commendation. She was made whole at once, and returned home in peace. To use the words of a good old writer, "She came trembling, and went back triumphing."

Let us store up in our minds this history. It may perhaps help us mightily in some hour of need. Our faith may be feeble. Our courage may be small. Our grasp of the Gospel, and its promises, may be weak and trembling. But, after all, the grand question is, do we really trust in Christ alone? Do we look to Jesus, and only to Jesus, for pardon and peace? If this be so, it is well. If we may not touch His garment, we can touch His heart. Such faith saves the soul. Weak faith is less comfortable than strong faith. Weak faith will carry us to heaven with far less joy than full assurance. But weak faith gives an interest in Christ as surely as strong faith. He that only touches the hem of Christ's garment shall never perish.

In the last place, let us mark in this passage, ***our Lord's almighty power.*** He restores to life one that was dead. How wonderful that sight must have been! Who that has ever seen the dead, can forget the stillness, the silence, the coldness, when the breath has left the body? Who can forget the dreadful feeling, that a mighty change has taken place, and a mighty gulf been placed between ourselves and the departed? But behold! our Lord goes to the chamber where the dead lies, and calls the spirit back to its

earthly tabernacle. The pulse once more beats. The eyes once more see. The breath once more comes and goes. The ruler's daughter is once more alive, and restored to her father and mother. This was omnipotence indeed! None could have done this but He who first created man, and has all power in heaven and earth.

This is the kind of truth we never can know too well. The more clearly we see Christ's power, the more likely we are to realize Gospel peace. Our position may be trying. Our hearts may be weak. The world may be difficult to journey through. Our faith may seem too small to carry us home. But let us take courage, when we think on Jesus, and not be cast down. Greater is He that is for us, than all those who are against us. Our Savior can raise the dead. Our Savior is almighty.

MATTHEW 9:27-38

As Jesus passed by from there, two blind men followed him, calling out and saying, "Have mercy on us, son of David!"

When he had come into the house, the blind men came to him. Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?"

They told him, "Yes, Lord."

Then he touched their eyes, saying, "According to your faith be it done to you." Their eyes were opened. Jesus strictly charged them, saying, "See that no one knows about this." But they went out and spread abroad his fame in all that land.

As they went out, behold, a mute man who was demon possessed was brought to him. When the demon was cast out, the mute man spoke. The multitudes marveled, saying, "Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel!"

But the Pharisees said, "By the prince of the demons, he casts out demons."

Jesus went about all the cities and the villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the Good News of the Kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness among the people. But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion for them, because they were harassed and scattered, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest indeed is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Pray therefore that the Lord of the harvest will send out laborers into his harvest."

There are four lessons in this passage, which deserve close attention. Let us mark them each in succession.

Let us mark, in the first place, that ***strong faith in Christ may sometimes be found where it might least have been expected.*** Who would have thought that two blind men would have called our Lord the "Son of David?" They could not, of course, have seen the miracles that He did. They could only know Him by common report. But the eyes of their understanding were enlightened, if their bodily eyes were dark. They saw the truth which

Scribes and Pharisees could not see. They saw that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah. They believed that He was able to heal them.

An example like this shows us, that *we must never despair of any one's salvation, merely because he lives in a position unfavorable to his soul.* Grace is stronger than circumstances. The life of religion does not depend merely upon outward advantages. The Holy Spirit can give faith, and keep faith in active exercise without book-learning, without money, and with scanty means of grace. Without the Holy Spirit a man may know all mysteries, and live in the full blaze of the Gospel, and yet be lost. We shall see many strange sights at the last day. Poor cottagers will be found to have believed in the Son of David, while rich men, full of university learning, will prove to have lived and died like the Pharisees, in hardened unbelief. Many that are last will be first, and the first last. (Matt. 20:16.)

Let us mark, in the next place, that ***our Lord Jesus Christ has had great experience of disease and sickness.*** He "went about all the cities and villages" doing good.

He was an eye-witness of all the ills that flesh is heir to. He saw ailments of every kind, sort, and description. He was brought in contact with every form of bodily suffering. None were too loathsome for Him to attend to. None were too frightful for Him to cure. He was a healer of every "sickness and every disease."

There is much comfort to be drawn from this fact. We are each dwelling in a poor frail body. We never know what quantity of

suffering we may have to watch, as we sit by the bedside of dear relations and friends. We never know what racking complaint we ourselves may have to submit to, before we lie down and die. But let us arm ourselves betimes with the precious thought that Jesus is specially fitted to be the sick man's friend. That great high-priest to whom we must apply for pardon and peace with God, is eminently qualified to sympathize with an aching body, as well as to heal an ailing conscience. The eyes of Him who is King of kings used often to look with pity on the diseased. The world cares little for the sick, and often keeps aloof from them. But the Lord Jesus cares specially for the sick. He is the first to visit them, and say, "I stand at the door and knock." Happy are they who hear His voice, and let Him in!

Let us mark, in the next place, ***our Lord's tender concern for neglected souls.*** "He saw multitudes" of people when He was on earth, scattered about "like sheep having no shepherd," and He was moved with compassion. He saw them neglected by those who, for the time, ought to have been teachers. He saw them ignorant, hopeless, helpless, dying, and unfit to die. The sight moved Him to deep pity. That loving heart could not see such things, and not feel.

Now what are our feelings when we see such a sight? This is the question that should arise in our minds. There are many such to be seen on every side. There are millions of idolaters and heathen on earth—millions of deluded Muhammadans—millions of superstitious Roman Catholics. There are thousands of unsaved Protestants near our own doors. Do we feel tenderly concerned about their souls? Do

we deeply pity their spiritual destitution? Do we long to see that destitution relieved? These are serious inquiries, and ought to be answered. It is easy to sneer at missions to the heathen, and those who work for them. But the man who does not feel for the souls of all unconverted people, can surely not have "the mind of Christ." (1 Cor. 2:16.)

Let us mark, in the last place, that ***there is a solemn duty incumbent on all Christians, who would do good to the unconverted part of the world.*** They are to pray for more men to be raised up to work for the conversion of souls. It seems as if it was to be a daily part of our prayers. "Pray therefore that the Lord of the harvest will send forth laborers into his harvest."

If we know anything of prayer, let us make it a point of conscience never to forget this solemn charge of our Lord's. Let us settle it in our minds, that it is one of the surest ways of doing good, and stemming evil. Personal working for souls is good. Giving money is good. But praying is best of all. By prayer we reach Him without whom work and money are alike in vain. We obtain the aid of the Holy Spirit. Money can hire workers. Universities can give learning. Congregations may elect. Bishops may ordain. But the Holy Spirit alone can make ministers of the Gospel, and raise up lay workmen in the spiritual harvest, who need not be ashamed. Never, never may we forget that if we would do good to the world, our first duty is to pray!

Matthew – Chap. 10

MATTHEW 10:1-15

He called to himself his twelve disciples, and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every sickness. Now the names of the twelve apostles are these. The first, Simon, who is called Peter; Andrew, his brother; James the son of Zebedee; John, his brother; Philip; Bartholomew; Thomas; Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus; Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus; Simon the Canaanite; and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him.

Jesus sent these twelve out, and charged them, saying, "Don't go among the Gentiles, and don't enter into any city of the Samaritans. Rather, go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, preach, saying, 'The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!' Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, and cast out demons. Freely you received, so freely give. Don't take any gold, nor silver, nor brass in your money belts. Take no bag for your journey, neither two coats, nor shoes, nor staff: for the laborer is worthy of his food. Into whatever city or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy; and stay there until you go on. As you enter into the household, greet it. If the household is worthy, let your peace come on it, but if it isn't worthy, let your peace return to you. Whoever doesn't receive you, nor hear your words, as you go out of that house or that city, shake off the dust from your feet.

Most certainly I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city."

This chapter is one of peculiar solemnity. Here is the record of the first ordination which ever took place in the church of Christ. The Lord Jesus chooses and sends forth the twelve apostles. Here is an account of the first charge ever delivered to newly ordained Christian ministers. The Lord Jesus Himself delivers it. Never was there so important an ordination. Never was there so solemn a charge!

There are three lessons which stand out prominently on the face of the first fifteen verses of this chapter. Let us take them in order.

We are taught, in the first place, that ***all ministers are not necessarily saved men.*** We see our Lord choosing a Judas Iscariot to be one of His apostles. We cannot doubt that He who knew all hearts, knew well the characters of the men whom He chose. And He includes in the list of apostles one who was a traitor!

We shall do well to bear in mind this fact. Ordination does not confer the saving grace of the Holy Spirit. Ordained men are not necessarily converted. We are not to regard them as infallible, either in doctrine or in practice. We are not to make popes or idols of them, and insensibly put them in Christ's place. We are to regard them as "men of like passions" with ourselves, liable to the same infirmities, and daily requiring the same grace. We are not to think it impossible for them to do very bad things, or to expect them to be above the reach of harm from flattery, covetousness, and the world. We are to

prove their teaching by the word of God, and follow them so far as they follow Christ, but no further. Above all, we ought to pray for them, that they may be successors not of Judas Iscariot, but of James and John. It is an dreadful thing to be a minister of the Gospel! Ministers need many prayers.

We are taught, in the next place, that ***the great work of a minister of Christ is to do good.*** He is sent to seek "lost sheep,"—to proclaim glad tidings—to relieve those who are suffering —to diminish sorrow—and to increase joy. His life is meant to be one of "giving," rather than receiving.

This is a high standard, and a very peculiar one. Let it be well weighed, and carefully examined. It is plain, for one thing, that the life of a faithful minister of Christ cannot be one of ease. He must be ready to spend body and mind, time and strength, in the work of His calling. Laziness and frivolity are bad enough in any profession, but worst of all in that of a watchman for souls. It is plain, for another thing, that the position of the ministers of Christ is not that which ignorant people sometimes ascribe to them, and which they unhappily sometimes claim for themselves. They are not so much ordained to rule as to serve. They are not intended so much to have dominion over the Church, as to supply its needs, and serve its members. (2 Cor. 1:24.) Happy would it be for the cause of true religion, if these things were better understood! *Half the diseases of Christianity have arisen from mistaken notions about the pastor's office!*

We are taught, in the last place, that ***it is a most dangerous thing to neglect the offers of the Gospel.*** It shall prove "more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah" in the judgment day, than for those who have heard Christ's truth, and not received it.

This is a doctrine fearfully overlooked, and one that deserves serious consideration. Men are sadly apt to forget, that it does not require great open sins to be sinned, in order to ruin a soul forever. They have only to go on hearing without believing, listening without repenting, going to Church without going to Christ, and by and bye they will find themselves in hell! We shall all be judged according to our light. We shall have to give account of our use of religious privileges. To hear of the "great salvation," and yet neglect it, is one of the worst sins man can commit. (John 16:9.)

What are we doing ourselves with the Gospel? This is the question which everyone who reads this passage should put to his conscience. Let us assume that we are decent and respectable in our lives, correct and moral in all the relations of life, regular in our formal attendance on the means of grace. It is all well, so far as it goes. But is this all that can be said of us? Are we really receiving the love of the truth? Is Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith? If not, we are in fearful danger. We are far more guilty than the men of Sodom, who never heard the Gospel at all. We may awake to find, that in spite of our regularity, and morality, and correctness, we have lost our souls for all eternity. It will not save us to have lived in the full sunshine of Christian privileges, and to have heard the Gospel

faithfully preached every week. There must be experimental acquaintance with Christ. There must be personal reception of His truth. There must be vital union with Him. We must become his servants and disciples. Without this, the preaching of the Gospel only adds to our responsibility, increases our guilt, and will at length sink us more deeply into hell. These are hard sayings. But the words of Scripture, which we have read, are plain and unmistakable. They are all true.

MATTHEW 10:16-23

"Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to councils, and in their synagogues they will scourge you. Yes, and you will be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony to them and to the nations. But when they deliver you up, don't be anxious how or what you will say, for it will be given you in that hour what you will say. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you."

"Brother will deliver up brother to death, and the father his child. Children will rise up against parents, and cause them to be put to death. You will be hated by all men for my name's sake, but he who endures to the end will be saved. But when they persecute you in this city, flee into the next, for most certainly I tell you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel, until the Son of Man has come."

The truths contained in these verses should be pondered by all who try to do good in the world. To the selfish man, who cares for nothing but his own ease or comfort, there may seem to be little in them. To the minister of the Gospel, and to every one who seeks to save souls, these verses ought to be full of interest. No doubt there is much in them, which applies specially to the days of the apostles. But there is much also which applies to all times.

We see, for one thing, that ***those who would do good to souls, must be moderate in their expectations.*** They must not think that universal success will attend their labors. They must reckon on meeting with much opposition. They must make up their minds to "be hated," persecuted, and ill-used, and that too by their nearest relations. They will often find themselves like "sheep in the midst of wolves."

Let us bear this in mind continually. Whether we preach, or teach, or visit from house to house—whether we write or give counsel, or whatever we do, let it be a settled principle with us not to expect more than Scripture and experience warrant. *Human nature is far more wicked and corrupt than we think.* The power of evil is far greater than we suppose. It is vain to imagine that everybody will see what is good for them, and believe what we tell them. It is expecting what we shall not find, and will only end in disappointment. Happy is that laborer for Christ, who knows these things at his first starting, and has not to learn them by biter experience! Here lies the secret cause why many have turned back,

who once seemed full of zeal to do good. They began with extravagant expectations. They did not count the cost. They fell into the mistake of the great German Reformer, who confessed he forgot at one time, that "old Adam was too strong for young Melancthon."

We see, for another thing, that ***those who would do good have need to pray for wisdom, good sense, and a sound mind.*** Our Lord tells his disciples to be "wise as serpents, and harmless as doves." He tells those who when they are persecuted in one place, they may lawfully "flee to another."

There are few of our Lord's instructions which it is so difficult to use rightly as this. There is a line marked out for us between two extremes; but one that it requires great judgment to define. To avoid persecution by holding our tongues, and keeping our religion entirely to ourselves, is one extreme. We are not to err in that direction. To court persecution, and thrust our religion upon every one we meet, without regard to place, time, or circumstances, is another extreme. In this direction also we are warned not to err any more than in the other. Truly we may say, "who is sufficient for these things?" We have need to cry to the only wise God for wisdom.

The extreme into which most men are liable to fall in the present day, is that of silence, cowardice, and letting others alone. Our so-called *prudence* is apt to degenerate into a compromising line of conduct, or downright unfaithfulness. We are only too ready to suppose that it is of no use trying to do good to certain people. We excuse ourselves from efforts to benefit their souls, by saying it

would be indiscreet, or inexpedient, or would give needless offence, or would even do positive harm. Let us all watch and be on our guard against this spirit. Laziness and the devil are often the true explanation of it. To give way to it is pleasant to flesh and blood, no doubt, and saves us much trouble. But those who give way to it often throw away great opportunities of usefulness.

On the other hand, it is impossible to deny that there is such a thing as a righteous and holy zeal, which is "not according to knowledge." It is quite possible to create much needless offence, commit great blunders, and stir up much opposition, which might have been avoided by a little prudence, wise management, and exercise of judgment. Let us all take heed that we are not guilty in this respect. We may be sure there is such a thing as Christian wisdom, which is quite distinct from Jesuitical deception, or carnal policy. This wisdom let us seek. Our Lord Jesus does not require us to throw aside our common sense, when we undertake to work for Him. There will be offence enough connected with our religion, do what we will; but let us not increase it without cause, Let us strive to "watch carefully how we walk, not as unwise, but as wise." (Ephes. 5:15.)

It is to be feared, that believers in the Lord Jesus do not sufficiently pray for the spirit of knowledge, judgment, and a sound mind. They are apt to fancy that if they have grace, they have all they need. They forget that a gracious heart should pray that it may be full of wisdom, as well as of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 6:3.) Let us all

remember this. Great grace and common sense are perhaps one of the rarest combinations. That they may go together, the life of David, and the ministry of the apostle Paul are striking proofs. In this, however, as in every other respect, our Lord Jesus Christ Himself is our most perfect example. None were ever so faithful as He. But none were ever so truly wise. Let us make Him our pattern, and walk in His steps.

MATTHEW 10:24-33

"A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the disciple that he be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more those of his household! Therefore don't be afraid of them, for there is nothing covered that will not be revealed; and hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light; and what you hear whispered in the ear, proclaim on the housetops. Don't be afraid of those who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul. Rather, fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Hell."

"Aren't two sparrows sold for an assarion coin? Not one of them falls on the ground apart from your Father's will, but the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Therefore don't be afraid. You are of more value than many sparrows. Everyone therefore who confesses me before men, him I will also confess before my Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies me before men, him I will also deny before my Father who is in heaven."

To do good to souls in this world is very hard. All who try it find out this by experience. It needs a large stock of courage, faith, patience, and perseverance. Satan will fight vigorously to maintain his kingdom. Human nature is desperately wicked. To do harm is easy. To do good is hard.

The Lord Jesus knew this well, when He sent forth His disciples to preach the Gospel for the first time. He knew what was before them, if they did not. He took care to supply them with a list of encouragements, in order to cheer them when they felt cast down. Weary missionaries abroad, or fainting ministers at home—disheartened teachers of schools, and desponding visitors of districts, would do well to study often the nine verses we have just read. Let us mark what they contain.

Those who try to do good to souls must not expect to fare better than their great Master. "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master." The Lord Jesus was slandered and rejected by those whom he came to benefit. There was no error in His teaching. There was no defect in His method of imparting instruction. Yet many hated Him, and "called Him Beelzebub." Few believed Him, and cared for what He said. Surely we have no right to be surprised if we, whose *best efforts are mingled with much imperfection*, are treated in the same way as Christ. *If we let the world alone, it will probably let us alone. But if we try to do it spiritual good, it will hate us as it did our Master.*

Those who try to do good must look forward with patience to the day of judgment. "There is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known." They must be content in this present world to be misunderstood, misrepresented, vilified, slandered, and abused. They must not cease to work because their motives are mistaken, and their characters fiercely assailed. They must remember continually that all will be set right at the last day. The secrets of all hearts shall then be revealed. "He will make your righteousness go forth as the light, and your justice as the noon day sun." (Psalm. 37:6.) The purity of their intentions, the wisdom of their labors, and the rightfulness of their cause, shall at length be made manifest to all the world. Let us work on steadily and quietly. Men may not understand us, and may vehemently oppose us. But the day of judgment draws near. We shall be righted at last. The Lord, when He comes again, "will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then shall each man will get his praise from God." (1 Cor. 4:5.)

Those who try to do good must fear God more than man. Man can hurt the body, but there his enmity must stop. He can go no further. God "is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." We may be threatened with the loss of character, property, and all that makes life enjoyable, if we go on in the path of Christian duty. We must not heed such threats, when our course is plain. Like Daniel and the three Hebrew children, we must submit to anything rather than displease God, and wound our consciences. The anger of man

may be hard to bear, but the anger of God is much harder. The fear of man does indeed bring a snare, but we must make it give way to the expulsive power of a stronger principle—even the fear of God. It was a fine saying of good Colonel Gardiner's, "I fear God, and therefore there is none else that I need fear."

Those who try to do good must keep before their minds the providential care of God over them. Nothing can happen in this world without His permission. There is no such thing in reality as chance, accident, or luck. "The very hairs of their heads are all numbered." The path of duty may sometimes lead them into great danger. Health and life may seem to be periled, if they go forward. Let them take comfort in the thought that all around them is in God's hand. Their bodies, their souls, their characters are all in His safe keeping. No disease can seize them—no hand can hurt them, unless He allows. They may say boldly to every fearful thing they meet with, "You could have no power at all against me, unless it were given to you from above."

In the last place, ***those who try to do good should continually remember the day when they will meet their Lord to receive their final portion.*** If they would have Him own them, and confess them before His Father's throne, they must not be ashamed to own and "confess Him" before the men of this world. To do it may cost us much. It may bring on us laughter, mockery, persecution, and scorn. But let us not be laughed out of heaven. Let us recollect the great and dreadful day of account, and not be afraid

to show men that we love Christ, and want them to know and love Him also.

Let these encouragements be treasured up in the hearts of all who labor in Christ's cause, whatever their position may be. The Lord knows their trials, and has spoken these things for their comfort. He cares for all His believing people, but for none so much as those who work for His cause, and try to do good. May we seek to be of that number. Every believer may do something if he tries. There is always something for every one to do. May we each have an eye to see it, and a will to do it.

MATTHEW 10:34-42

"Don't think that I came to send peace on the earth. I didn't come to send peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man at odds against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. A man's foes will be those of his own household. He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me isn't worthy of me. He who doesn't take his cross and follow after me, isn't worthy of me. He who seeks his life will lose it; and he who loses his life for my sake will find it. He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives him who sent me. He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward: and he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. Whoever gives one of these little ones just a cup of cold water to drink in the

name of a disciple, most certainly I tell you he will in no way lose his reward."

In these verses the great Head of the Church winds up His first charge to those whom He sends forth to make known His Gospel. He declares three great truths, which form a fitting conclusion to the whole discourse.

In the first place, He bids us remember that ***His Gospel will not cause peace and agreement wherever it comes.*** "I didn't come to send peace, but a sword." The object of His first coming on earth was not to set up a millennial kingdom in which all would be of one mind, but to bring in the Gospel, which would *lead* to strife's and divisions. We have no right to be surprised, if we see this continually fulfilled. We are not to think it strange, if the Gospel rends asunder families, and causes estrangement between the nearest relations. It is sure to do so in many cases, because of the deep corruption of man's heart. So long as one man believes, and another remains unbelieving —so long as one is resolved to keep his sins, and another desirous to give them up, the result of the preaching of the Gospel must needs be division. For this the Gospel is not to blame, but the heart of man.

There is a deep truth in all this, which is constantly forgotten and overlooked. Many talk vaguely about unity, and harmony, and peace in the Church of Christ, as if they were things that we ought always to expect, and for the sake of which everything ought to be sacrificed. Such people would do well to remember the words of our Lord. No doubt unity and peace are mighty blessings. We ought to seek them,

pray for them, and give up everything in order to obtain them, excepting truth and a good conscience. But it is an idle dream to suppose that the churches of Christ will enjoy much of unity and peace before the millennium comes.

In the second place, our Lord tells us *that true Christians must make up their minds to trouble in this world*. Whether we are ministers or hearers, whether we teach or are taught, it makes little difference. We must carry "a cross." We must be content to lose even life itself for Christ's sake. We must submit to the loss of man's favor, we must endure hardships, we must deny ourselves in many things, or we shall never reach heaven at last. So long as the world, the devil, and our own hearts, are what they are, these things must be so.

We shall find it most useful to remember this lesson ourselves, and to impress it upon others. Few things do so much harm in religion as exaggerated expectations. People look for a degree of worldly comfort in Christ's service which they have no right to expect, and not finding what they look for, are tempted to give up religion in disgust. Happy is he who thoroughly understands, that though Christianity holds out a crown in the end, it brings also a cross in the way.

In the last place, **our Lord cheers us by saying *that the least service done to those who work in His cause is observed and rewarded of God.*** He that gives a believer so little as "a cup of cold water to drink in the name of a disciple, will in no way lose his reward."

There is something very beautiful in this promise. It teaches us that the eyes of the great Master are ever upon those who labor for him, and try to do good. They seem perhaps to work on unnoticed and unregarded. The proceedings of preachers, and missionaries, and teachers, and visitors of the poor, may appear very trifling and insignificant, compared to the movements of kings and parliaments, of armies and of statesmen. But they are not insignificant in the eyes of God. He takes notice who opposes His servants, and who helps them. He observes who is kind to them, as Lydia was to Paul—and who throws difficulties in their way, as Diotrephes did to John. All their daily experience is recorded, as they labor on in His harvest. All is written down in the great book of His remembrance, and will be brought to light at the last day. The chief butler forgot Joseph, when he was restored to his place. But the Lord Jesus never forgets any of His people. He will say to many who little expect it, in the resurrection morning, "I was hungry, and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty, and you gave me drink." (Matt. 25:35.)

Let us ask ourselves, as we close the chapter, in what light we regard Christ's work and Christ's cause in the world? Are we helpers of it, or hinderers? Do we in anyway aid the Lord's "prophets," and "righteous men?" Do we assist His "little ones?" Do we impede His laborers, or do we cheer them on? These are serious questions. They do well and wisely who give the "cup of cold water," whenever they have opportunity. They do better still who work actively in the Lord's vineyard. May we all strive to leave the world a better world than it

was when we were born! This is to have the mind of Christ. This is to find out the value of the lessons this wonderful chapter contains.

Matthew – Chap. 11

MATTHEW 11:1-15

It happened that when Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he departed from there to teach and preach in their cities. Now when John heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples and said to him, "Are you he who comes, or should we look for another?"

Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. Blessed is he who finds no occasion for stumbling in me."

As these went their way, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John, "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? But what did you go out to see? A man in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in king's houses. But why did you go out? To see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and much more than a prophet. For this is he, of whom it is written, 'Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare

your way before you.' Most certainly I tell you, among those who are born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptizer; yet he who is least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he. From the days of John the Baptizer until now, the Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. If you are willing to receive it, this is Elijah, who is to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

The first thing that demands our attention in this passage, is ***the message which John the Baptist sends to our Lord Jesus Christ.*** He sent two of his disciples and said to him, "Are you he who comes, or should we look for another?"

This question did not arise from doubt or unbelief on the part of John. We do that holy man injustice, if we interpret it in such a way. It was put for the benefit of his disciples. It was meant to give them an opportunity of hearing from Christ's own lips, the evidence of His divine mission. No doubt John the Baptist felt that his own ministry was ended. Something within him told him that he would never come forth from Herod's prison-house, but would surely die. He remembered the ignorant jealousies that had already been shown by his disciples towards the disciples of Christ. He took the most likely course to dispel those jealousies forever. He sent his followers to "hear and see" for themselves.

The conduct of John the Baptist in this matter affords a striking example to ministers, teachers, and parents, when they draw near

the end of their course. Their chief concern should be about the souls of those they are going to leave behind them. Their great desire should be to persuade them to cleave to Christ. The death of those who have guided and instructed us on earth ought always to have this effect. It should make us lay hold more firmly on Him who dies no more, "continues ever," and "has an unchangeable priesthood." (Heb. 7:24.)

The second thing that demands our notice in this passage, is ***the high testimony which our Lord bears to the character of John the Baptist.*** No mortal man ever received such commendation as Jesus here bestows on His imprisoned friend. "Among those who are born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptizer." In time past John had boldly confessed Jesus before men, as the Lamb of God. Now Jesus openly declares John to be more than a prophet.

There were some, no doubt, who were disposed to think lightly of John Baptist, partly from ignorance of the nature of his ministry, partly from misunderstanding the question he had sent to ask. Our Lord Jesus silences such cavilers by the declaration he here makes. He tells them not to suppose that John was a timid, vacillating, unstable man, "a reed shaken by the wind." If they thought so, they were utterly mistaken. He was a bold, unflinching witness to the truth. He tells them not to suppose that John was at heart a worldly man, fond of king's courts, and delicate living. If they thought so, they greatly erred. He was a self-denying preacher of repentance,

who would risk the anger of a king, rather than not reprove his sins. In short, He would have them know that John was “more than a prophet.” He was one to whom God had given more honor than to all the Old Testament prophets. They indeed prophesied of Christ, but died without seeing Him. John not only prophesied of Him, but saw Him face to face. They foretold that the days of the Son of man would certainly come, and the Messiah appear. John was an actual eye-witness of those days, and an honored instrument in preparing men for them. To them it was given to predict that Messiah would be “led as a lamb to the slaughter,” and “cut off.” To John it was given to point to Him, and say, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

There is something very beautiful and comforting to true Christians in this testimony which our Lord bears to John. It shows us the tender interest which our great Head feels in the lives and characters of all His members. It shows us what honor He is ready to put on all the work and labor that they go through in His cause. It is a sweet foretaste of the confession which He will make of them before the assembled world, when He presents them faultless at the last day before His Father’s throne.

Do we know what it is to work for Christ? Have we ever felt cast down and dispirited, as if we were doing no good, and no one cared for us? Are we ever tempted to feel, when laid aside by sickness, or withdrawn by providence, “I have labored in vain, and spent my strength for nothing?” Let us meet such thoughts by the recollection

of this passage. Let us remember, there is One who daily records all we do for Him, and sees more beauty in His servants' work than His servants do themselves. The same tongue which bore testimony to John in prison, will bear testimony to all his people at the last day. He will say, "Come, blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." And then shall His faithful witnesses discover, to their wonder and surprise, that there never was a word spoken on their Master's behalf, which does not receive a reward.

MATTHEW 11:16-24

"But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces, who call to their companions and say, 'We played the flute for you, and you didn't dance. We mourned for you, and you didn't lament.' For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' But wisdom is justified by her children."

Then he began to denounce the cities in which most of his mighty works had been done, because they didn't repent. "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon which were done in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. You, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, you will go down

to Hades. For if the mighty works had been done in Sodom which were done in you, it would have remained until this day. But I tell you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom, on the day of judgment, than for you."

These sayings of the Lord Jesus were called forth by the state of the Jewish nation, when He was upon earth. But they speak loudly to us also, as well as to the Jews. They throw great light on some parts of the natural man's character. They teach us the perilous state of many immortal souls in the present day.

The first part of these verses shows us ***the unreasonableness of many unconverted men in the things of religion.*** The Jews, in our Lord's time, found fault with every teacher whom God sent among them. First came John the Baptist preaching repentance —an austere man, a man who withdrew himself from society, and lived an ascetic life. Did this satisfy the Jews? No! They found fault and said, "He has a devil." Then came Jesus the Son of God, preaching the Gospel, living as other men lived, and practicing none of John the Baptist's peculiar austerities. And did this satisfy the Jews? No! They found fault again, and said, "Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!" In short, they were as perverse and hard to please as '*contrary* children'.

It is a mournful fact, that there are always thousands of professing Christians just as unreasonable as these Jews. They are equally perverse, and equally hard to please. Whatever we teach and preach, they find fault. Whatever be our manner of life, they are

dissatisfied. Do we tell them of salvation by *grace*, and justification by faith? At once they cry out against our doctrine as licentious and antinomian. Do we tell them of the *holiness* which the Gospel requires? At once they exclaim, that we are too strict, and precise, and righteous overmuch. Are we *cheerful?* They accuse us of levity. Are we *grave?* They call us gloomy and sour. Do we keep aloof from balls, and races, and plays? They denounce us as puritanical, exclusive and narrow-minded. Do we eat, and drink, and dress like other people, and attend to our worldly callings and go into society? They sneeringly insinuate that they see no difference between us and those who make no religious profession at all, and that we are not better than other men. What is all this but the conduct of the Jews over again? “We played the flute for you, and you didn’t dance. We mourned for you, and you didn’t lament.” He who spoke these words knew the hearts of men.

The plain truth is, that true believers must not expect unconverted men to be satisfied, either with their faith or their practice. If they do, they expect what they will not find. They must make up their minds to hear objections, cavils, and excuses, however holy their own lives may be. Well says Quesnel, “Whatever measures good men take, they will never escape the censures of the world. The best way is not to be concerned at them.” After all, what says the Scripture? “The mind of the flesh is hostile towards God.” “The natural man doesn’t receive the things of God’s Spirit.” (Rom. 8:7. 1 Cor. 2:14.) This is the explanation of the whole matter.

The second part of these verses shows us ***the exceeding wickedness of willful impenitence.*** Our Lord declares that it shall be "more tolerable for Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom, in the day of judgment," than for those towns where people had heard His sermons, and seen His miracles, but not repented.

There is something very solemn in this saying. Let us look at it well. Let us think for a moment what dark, idolatrous, immoral, profligate places Tyre and Sidon must have been. Let us call to mind the unspeakable wickedness of Sodom. Let us remember that the cities named by our Lord, Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, were probably no worse than other Jewish towns, and at all events, were far better than Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom. And then let us observe, that the people of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, are to be in the lowest hell, because they heard the Gospel, and yet did not repent—because they had great religious advantages, and did not use them. How dreadful this sounds!

Surely these words ought to make the ears of every one tingle, who hears the Gospel regularly, and yet remains unconverted. How great is the guilt of such a man before God! How great the danger in which he daily stands? Moral, and decent, and respectable as his life may be, he is actually more guilty than an idolatrous Tyrian or Sidonian, or a miserable inhabitant of Sodom. They had no spiritual light: he has, and neglects it. They heard no Gospel; he hears, but does not obey it. Their hearts might have been softened, if they had enjoyed his privileges. Tyre and Sidon "would have repented."

Sodom “would have remained until this day.” His heart under the full blaze of the Gospel remains hard and unmoved. There is but one painful conclusion to be drawn. His guilt will be found greater than theirs at the last day. Most true is the remark of an English bishop, “Among all the aggravations of our sins, there is none more heinous than the frequent hearing of our duty.”

May we all think often about Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum! Let us settle it in our minds that it will never do to be content with merely hearing and liking the Gospel. We must go further than this. We must actually “repent and be converted.” We must actually lay hold on Christ, and become one with Him. Until then we are in dreadful danger. It will prove more tolerable to have lived in Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom, than to have heard the Gospel in England, and at last died unconverted.

MATTHEW 11:25-30

At that time, Jesus answered, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you hid these things from the wise and understanding, and revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for so it was well-pleasing in your sight. All things have been delivered to me by my Father. No one knows the Son, except the Father; neither does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and he to whom the Son desires to reveal him.”

“Come to me, all you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I

am gentle and lowly in heart; and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

There are few passages in the four Gospels more important than this. There are few which contain, in so short a compass, so many precious truths. May God give us an eye to see, and a heart to feel their value!

Let us learn, in the first place, ***the excellence of a childlike and teachable frame of mind.*** Our Lord says to His Father, "You hid these things from the wise and understanding, and revealed them to infants."

It is not for us to attempt to explain why some receive and believe the Gospel, while others do not. The sovereignty of God in this matter is a deep mystery—we cannot fathom it. But one thing, at all events, stands out in Scripture, as a great practical truth to be had in everlasting remembrance. Those from whom the Gospel is hidden are generally "the wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight." Those to whom the Gospel is revealed are generally humble, simpleminded, and willing to learn. The words of the Virgin Mary are continually being fulfilled, "He has filled the hungry with good things. He has sent the rich away empty." (Luke 1:53.)

Let us watch against PRIDE in every shape—pride of intellect, pride of wealth, pride in our own goodness, pride in our own deserts. Nothing is so likely to keep a man out of heaven, and prevent him seeing Christ, as pride. So long as we think we are something, we

shall never be saved. Let us pray for and cultivate humility. Let us seek to know ourselves aright, and to find out our place in the sight of a holy God. The beginning of the way to heaven, is to feel that we are in the way to hell, and to be willing to be taught of the Spirit. One of the first steps in saving Christianity is to be able to say with Saul, "Lord, what will you have me to do?" (Acts 9:6.) There is hardly a sentence of our Lord's so frequently repeated as this, "He who humbles himself shall be exalted." (Luke 18:14.)

Let us learn, in the second place, from these verses, ***the greatness and majesty of our Lord Jesus Christ.*** The language of our Lord on this subject is deep and wonderful. He says, "All things have been delivered to me by my Father. No one knows the Son, except the Father; neither does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and he to whom the Son desires to reveal him." We may truly say, as we read these words, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain to it." We see something of the perfect union which exists between the first and second Persons of the Trinity. We see something of the immeasurable superiority of the Lord Jesus to all who are nothing more than men. But still, when we have said all this, we must confess that there are heights and depths in this verse, which are beyond our feeble comprehension. We can only admire them in the spirit of little children. But the half of them, we must feel, remains untold.

Let us, however, draw from these words the great practical truth, that all power and authority, in everything that concerns our soul's

interests, is placed in our Lord Jesus Christ's hands. "All things are delivered unto him." He bears the *keys*—to Him we must go for admission into heaven. He is the *door*—through Him we must enter. He is the *Shepherd*—we must hear His voice, and follow Him, if we would not perish in the wilderness. He is the *Physician*—we must apply to Him, if we would be healed of the plague of sin. He is the *bread of life*—we must feed on Him, if we would have our souls satisfied. He is the *light*—we must walk after Him, if we would not wander in darkness. He is the *fountain*—we must wash in His blood, if we would be cleansed, and made ready for the great day of account. Blessed and glorious are these truths! If we have Christ, we have all things. (1 Cor. 3:22.)

Let us learn, in the last place, from this passage, ***the breadth and fullness of the invitations of Christ's Gospel.*** The last three verses of the chapter, which contain this lesson, are indeed precious. They meet the trembling sinner who asks, "Will Christ reveal His Father's love to such a one as me?" with the most gracious encouragement. They are verses which deserve to be read with special attention. For eighteen hundred years they have been a blessing to the world, and have done good to myriads of souls. There is not a sentence in those who does not contain a mine of thought.

Mark who they are that Jesus invites. He does not address those who feel themselves *righteous and worthy*. He addresses "all you who labor and are heavily burdened." It is a wide description. It comprises multitudes in this weary world. All who feel a load on their

heart, of which they would sincerely get free, a load of sin or a load of sorrow, a load of anxiety or a load of remorse—all, whoever they may be, and whatever their past lives—all such are invited to come to Christ.

Mark what a *gracious* offer Jesus makes. "I will give you rest. You will find rest for your souls." How cheering and comfortable are these words! Unrest is one great characteristic of the world. Hurry, vexation, failure, disappointment, stare us in the face on every side. But here is hope. There is an ark of refuge for the weary, as truly as there was for Noah's dove. There is rest in Christ, rest of conscience, and rest of heart, rest built on pardon of all sin, rest flowing from peace with God.

Mark what a *simple* request Jesus makes to the laboring and heavy-laden ones. "Come to me—Take my yoke upon you, learn from me." He interposes no hard conditions. He speaks nothing of works to be done first, and deservingness of His gifts to be established. He only asks us to come to Him just as we are, with all our sins, and to submit ourselves like little children to His teaching. "Go not," He seems to say, "to man for relief. Wait not for help to arise from any other quarter. Just as you are, this very day, come to me."

Mark what an encouraging account Jesus gives of *Himself*. He says, "I am gentle and lowly of heart." How true that is, the experience of all the saints of God has often proved. Mary and Martha at Bethany, Peter after his fall, the disciples after the resurrection, Thomas after his cold unbelief, all tasted the "meekness

and gentleness of Christ." It is the only place in Scripture where the "heart" of Christ is actually named. It is a saying never to be forgotten.

Mark, lastly, the encouraging account that Jesus gives of *His service*. He says, "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light." No doubt there is a cross to be carried, if we follow Christ. No doubt there are trials to be endured, and battles to be fought. But the comforts of the Gospel far outweigh the cross. Compared to the service of the world and sin, compared to the yoke of Jewish ceremonies, and the bondage of human superstition, Christ's service is in the highest sense easy and light. His yoke is no more a burden than the feathers are to a bird. His commandments are not grievous. His ways are ways of pleasantness, and all his paths are peace. (1 John 5:3. Prov. 3:17.)

And now comes the solemn inquiry—Have we accepted this invitation for ourselves? Have we no sins to be forgiven, no griefs to be removed, no wounds of conscience to be healed? If we have, let us hear Christ's voice. He speaks to us as well as to the Jews. He says, "Come to me." Here is the key to true happiness. Here is the secret of having a happy heart. All turns and hinges on an acceptance of this offer of Christ.

May we never be satisfied until we know and feel that we have come to Christ by faith for rest, and do still come to Him for fresh supplies of grace every day! If we have come to Him already, let us learn to cleave to Him more closely. If we have never come to Him

yet, let us begin to come today. His word shall never be broken —"Him that comes unto me, I will in nowise cast out." (John 6:37.)

Matthew – Chap. 12

MATTHEW 12:1-13

At that time, Jesus went on the Sabbath day through the grain fields. His disciples were hungry and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. But the Pharisees, when they saw it, said to him, "Behold, your disciples do what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath."

But he said to them, "Haven't you read what David did, when he was hungry, and those who were with him; how he entered into the house of God, and ate the show bread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for those who were with him, but only for the priests? Or have you not read in the law, that on the Sabbath day, the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are guiltless? But I tell you that one greater than the temple is here. But if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

He departed there, and went into their synagogue. And behold there was a man with a withered hand. They asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath day?" that they might accuse him.

He said to them, "What man is there among you, who has one sheep, and if this one falls into a pit on the Sabbath day, won't he grab on to it, and lift it out? Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath day." Then he told the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out; and it was restored whole, just like the other.

The one great subject which stands out prominently in this passage of Scripture, is the SABBATH DAY. It is a subject on which strange opinions prevailed among the Jews in our Lord's time. The Pharisees had added to the teaching of Scripture about it, and overlaid the true character of the day with the traditions of men. It is a subject on which diverse opinions have often been held in the Churches of Christ, and wide differences exist among men at the present time. Let us see what we may learn about it from our Lord's teaching in these verses.

Let us, in the first place, settle it in our minds as an established principle, that ***our Lord Jesus Christ does not do away with the observance of a weekly Sabbath day.*** He neither does so here, nor elsewhere in the four Gospels. We often find His opinion expressed about the Jewish errors on the subject of the Sabbath. But we do not find a word to teach us that His disciples were not to keep a Sabbath at all.

It is of much importance to observe this. The mistakes that have arisen from a superficial consideration of our Lord's sayings on the Sabbath question, are neither few nor small. Thousands have rushed

to the hasty conclusion, that Christians have nothing to do with the fourth commandment, and that it is no more binding on us than the Mosaic law about sacrifices. There is nothing in the New Testament to justify any such conclusion.

The plain truth is, that our Lord did not abolish the law of the weekly Sabbath. He only freed it from incorrect interpretations, and purified it from man-made additions. He did not tear out of the decalogue the fourth commandment. He only stripped off the miserable traditions with which the Pharisees had incrusted the day, and by which they had made it, not a blessing, but a burden. He left the fourth commandment where he found it, a part of the eternal law of God, of which no jot or tittle was ever to pass away. May we never forget this!

Let us, in the second place, settle it in our minds, that ***our Lord Jesus Christ allows all works of real necessity and mercy to be done on the Sabbath day.***

This is a principle which is abundantly established in the passage of Scripture we are now considering. We find our Lord justifying His disciples for plucking the ears of corn on a Sabbath. It was an act permitted in Scripture. (Deut. 23:25.) They "were hungry," and in need of food. Therefore they were not to blame. We find Him maintaining the lawfulness of healing a sick man on the Sabbath day. The man was suffering from disease and pain. In such a case it was no breach of God's commandment to afford relief. We ought never to rest from doing good.

The arguments by which our Lord supports the lawfulness of any work of necessity and mercy on the Sabbath, are striking and unanswerable. He reminds the Pharisees, who charged Him and His disciples with breaking the law, how David and his men, for lack of other food, had eaten the holy show-bread out of the tabernacle. He reminds them how the priests in the temple are obliged to do work on the Sabbath, by slaying animals and offering sacrifices. He reminds them how even a sheep would be helped out of a pit on the Sabbath, rather than allowed to suffer and die, by any one of themselves. Above all, He lays down the great principle, that *no ordinance of God is to be pressed so far as to make us neglect the plain duties of charity*. "I will have mercy and not sacrifice." The first table of the law is not to be so interpreted as to make us break the second. The fourth commandment is not to be so explained, as to make us unkind and unmerciful to our neighbor. There is deep wisdom in all this. We are reminded of the saying, "Never a man spoke like this man."

In leaving the subject, let us beware that we are never tempted to take low views of the sanctity of the Christian Sabbath. Let us take care that we do not make our gracious Lord's teaching an excuse for Sabbath profanation. Let us not abuse the liberty which He has so clearly marked out for us, and pretend that we do things on the Sabbath from "necessity and mercy," which in reality we do for our own selfish gratification.

There is great reason for warning people on this point. The mistakes of the Pharisee about the Sabbath were in one direction. The mistakes of the Christian are in another. The Pharisee pretended to add to the holiness of the day. The Christian is too often disposed to take away from that holiness, and to keep the day in an idle, profane, irreverent manner. May we all watch our own conduct on this subject. Saving Christianity is closely bound up with Sabbath observance. May we never forget that our great aim should be to "keep the Sabbath holy." Works of necessity may be done. "It is lawful to do well," and show mercy. But to give the Sabbath to idleness, pleasure-seeking, or the world, is utterly unlawful. It is contrary to the example of Christ, and a sin against a plain commandment of God.

MATTHEW 12:14-21

But the Pharisees went out, and conspired against him, how they might destroy him. Jesus, perceiving that, withdrew from there. Great multitudes followed him; and he healed them all, and charged those who they should not make him known: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying, "Behold, my servant whom I have chosen; my beloved in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my Spirit on him. He will proclaim justice to the nations. He will not strive, nor shout; neither will anyone hear his voice in the streets. He won't break a bruised reed. He won't quench a smoking flax, until he leads justice to victory. In his name, the nations will hope."

The first thing which demands our notice in this passage, is ***the desperate wickedness of the human heart,*** which it exemplifies. Silenced and defeated by our Lord's arguments, the Pharisees plunged deeper and deeper into sin. They "went out, and conspired against him, how they might destroy him."

What evil had our Lord done, that He should be so treated? None, none at all. No charge could be brought against His *life*—He was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners—His days were spent in doing good. No charge could be brought against His *teaching*—He had proved it to be agreeable to Scripture and reason, and no reply had been made to His proofs. But it mattered little how perfectly He lived or taught. He was hated.

This is human nature appearing in its true colors. The unconverted heart hates God, and will show its hatred whenever it dares, and has a favorable opportunity. It will persecute God's witnesses. It will dislike all who have anything of God's mind, and are renewed after His image. Why were so many of the prophets killed? Why were the names of the apostles cast out as evil by the Jews? Why were the early martyrs slain? Why were John Huss, and Jerome of Prague, and Ridley, and Latimer burned at the stake? Not for any sins that they had sinned—not for any wickedness they had committed. They all suffered because they were godly men. And human nature, unconverted, hates godly men, because it hates God.

It must never surprise true Christians if they meet with the same treatment that the Lord Jesus met with. "Don't be surprised, my

brothers, if the world hates you." (1 John 3:13.) It is not the utmost consistency, or the closest walk with God, that will exempt them from the enmity of the natural man. They need not torture their consciences by fancying that if they were only more faultless and consistent, everybody would surely love them. It is all a mistake. They should remember, that there was never but one perfect man on earth, and that He was not loved, but hated. It is not the infirmities of a believer that the world dislikes, but his goodness. It is not the remains of the old nature that call forth the world's enmity, but the exhibition of the new. Let us remember these things, and be patient. The world hated Christ, and the world will hate Christians.

The second thing which demands our notice in this passage, is ***the encouraging description of our Lord Jesus Christ's character,*** which Matthew draws from the prophet Isaiah. "He won't break a bruised reed, he won't quench a smoking flax."

What are we to understand by the bruised reed, and smoking flax? The language of the prophet no doubt is figurative. What is it that these two expressions mean? The simplest explanation seems to be, that the Holy Spirit is here describing believers whose grace is at present weak, whose repentance is feeble, and whose faith is small. Towards such people the Lord Jesus Christ will be very tender and compassionate. Weak as the broken reed is, it shall not be broken. Small as the spark of fire may be within the smoking flax, it shall not be quenched. It is a standing truth in the kingdom of grace, that weak grace, weak faith, and weak repentance, are all precious in our

Lord's sight. Mighty as He is, "He doesn't despise anyone." (Job 36:5.)

The doctrine here laid down is full of comfort and consolation. There are thousands in every church of Christ to whom it ought to speak peace and hope. There are some in every congregation, that hear the Gospel, who are ready to despair of their own salvation, because their strength seems so small. They are full of fears and despondency, because their knowledge, and faith, and hope, and love, appear so dwarfish and diminutive. Let them drink comfort out of this text. Let them know that weak faith gives a man as real and true a saving interest in Christ as strong faith, though it may not give him the same joy. There is life in an infant as truly as in a grown up man. There is fire in a spark as truly as in a burning flame. The least degree of grace is an everlasting possession. It comes down from heaven. It is precious in our Lord's eyes. It shall never be overthrown.

Does Satan make light of the beginnings of repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ? No! indeed! he does not. He has great wrath, because he sees his time is short. Do the angels of God think lightly of the first signs of penitence and feeling after God in Christ? No indeed! "there is joy" among them, when they behold the sight. Does the Lord Jesus regard no faith and repentance with interest, unless they are strong and mighty? No! indeed! As soon as that bruised reed, Saul of Tarsus, begins to cry to Him, He sends Ananias to him, saying, "Behold, he is praying." (Acts

9:11.) We err greatly if we do not encourage the very first movements of a soul towards Christ. Let the ignorant world scoff and mock, if it will. We may be sure that "bruised reeds" and "smoking flax" are very precious in our Lord's eyes.

May we all lay these things to heart, and use them in time of needs both for ourselves and others. It should be a standing maxim in our religion, that a spark is better than utter darkness, and little faith better than no faith at all. "Who despises the day of small things?" (Zechar. 4:10.) It is not despised by Christ. It ought not to be despised by Christians.

MATTHEW 12:22-37

Then one possessed by a demon, blind and mute, was brought to him and he healed him, so that the blind and mute man both spoke and saw. All the multitudes were amazed, and said, "Can this be the son of David?" But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, "This man does not cast out demons, except by Beelzebub, the prince of the demons."

Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? If I by Beelzebub cast out demons, by whom do your children cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. But if I by the Spirit of God cast out demons, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you. Or

how can one enter into the house of the strong man, and plunder his goods, unless he first bind the strong man? Then he will plunder his house."

"He who is not with me is against me, and he who doesn't gather with me, scatters. Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, neither in this age, nor in that which is to come."

"Either make the tree good, and its fruit good, or make the tree corrupt, and its fruit corrupt; for the tree is known by its fruit. You offspring of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. The good man out of his good treasure brings out good things, and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings out evil things. I tell you that every idle word that men speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

This passage of Scripture contains "things hard to be understood." The sin against the Holy Spirit in particular has never been fully explained by the most learned divines. It is not difficult to show from Scripture what the sin is not. It is difficult to show clearly what it is. We must not be surprised. The Bible would not be the book of God, if it had not deep places here and there, which man has

no line to fathom. Let us rather thank God that there are lessons of wisdom to be gathered, even out of these verses, which the unlearned may easily understand.

Let us gather from them, in the first place, that ***there is nothing too blasphemous for hardened and prejudiced men to say against Christ.*** Our Lord casts out a devil; and at once the Pharisees declare that He does it "by the prince of the devils."

This was an absurd charge. Our Lord shows that it was unreasonable to suppose that the devil would help to pull down his own kingdom, and "Satan cast out Satan." But there is nothing too absurd and unreasonable for men to say, when they are thoroughly set against Christ. The Pharisees are not the only people who have lost sight of logic, good sense, and temper, when they have attacked the Gospel of Christ.

Strange as this charge may sound, it is one that has often been made against the servants of God. Their enemies have been obliged to confess that they are doing a work, and producing a good effect on the world. The results of Christian labor stare them in the face. They cannot deny them. What then shall they say? They say the very thing that the Pharisees said of our Lord, "It is the devil." The early heretics used language of this kind about Athanasius. The Roman Catholics spread reports of this sort about Martin Luther. Such things will be said as long as the world stands.

We must never be surprised to hear of dreadful charges being made against the best of men, without cause. “If they called the Master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?” It is an old device. When the Christian’s arguments cannot be answered, and the Christian’s works cannot be denied, the last resource of the wicked is to try to blacken the Christian’s character. If this be our lot, let us bear it patiently. Having Christ and a good conscience, we may be content. False charges will not keep us out of heaven. Our character will be cleared at the last day.

In the second place, let us gather out of these verses ***the impossibility of neutrality in religion.*** “He who is not with Christ is against him, and he who doesn’t gather with him, scatters.”

There are many people in every age of the Church, who need to have this lesson pressed upon them. They endeavor to steer a middle course in religion. They are not so bad as many sinners, but still they are not saints. They feel the truth of Christ’s Gospel, when it is brought before them, but are afraid to confess what they feel. Because they have these feelings, they flatter themselves they are not so bad as others. And yet they shrink from the standard of faith and practice which the Lord Jesus sets up. They are not boldly on Christ’s side, and yet they are not openly against Him. Our Lord warns all such that they are in a dangerous position. There are only two parties in religious matters. There are only two camps. There are only two sides. Are we with Christ, and working in His cause? If not, we are

against Him. Are we doing good in the world? If not, we are doing harm.

The principle here laid down is one which it concerns us all to remember. Let us settle it in our minds, that we shall never have peace, and do good to others, unless we are thorough-going and decided in our Christianity. The way of Gamaliel and Erasmus never yet brought happiness and usefulness to any one, and never will.

In the third place, let us gather from these verses ***the exceeding sinfulness of sins against knowledge.*** This is a practical conclusion which appears to flow naturally from our Lord's words about the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Difficult as these words undoubtedly are, they seem fairly to prove that there are degrees in sin. Offences arising from ignorance of the true mission of the Son of Man, will not be punished so heavily as offences committed against the noontide light of the dispensation of the Holy Spirit. The brighter the light, the greater the guilt of him who rejects it. The clearer a man's knowledge of the nature of the Gospel, the greater his sin, if he willfully refuses to repent and believe.

The doctrine here taught is one that does not stand alone in Scripture. Paul says to the Hebrews, "It is impossible for those who were once enlightened—if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance." "If we sin willfully, after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sins, but a fearful looking for of judgment." (Heb. 6:4-7, and 10:26, 27.) It is a doctrine of which we find mournful proofs in every quarter. The

unconverted children of godly parents, the unconverted servants of godly families, and the unconverted members of evangelical congregations are the hardest people on earth to impress. They seem past feeling. The same fire which melts the wax, hardens the clay.

It is a doctrine, moreover, which receives dreadful confirmation from the histories of some of those whose last ends were eminently hopeless. Pharaoh, and Saul, and Ahab, and Judas Iscariot, and Julian, and Francis Spira, are fearful illustrations of our Lord's meaning. In each of these cases there was a combination of clear knowledge and deliberate rejection of Christ. In each there was light in the head, but hatred of truth in the heart. And the end of each seems to have been blackness of darkness forever.

May God give us a will to use our knowledge, whether it be little or great! May we beware of neglecting our opportunities, and leaving our privileges unimproved! Have we light? Then let us live fully up to our light. Do we know the truth? Then let us walk in the truth. This is the best safeguard against the unpardonable sin.

In the last place, let us gather from these verses ***the immense importance of carefulness about our daily words.*** Our Lord tells us, that "every idle word that men speak, they will give account of in the day of judgment." And He adds, "By your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

There are few of our Lord's sayings which are so heart-searching as this. There is nothing, perhaps, to which most men pay less

attention than their words. They go through their daily work, speaking and talking without thought or reflection, and seem to imagine that if they do what is right, it matters but little what they say.

But is it so? Are our words so utterly trifling and unimportant? We dare not say so, with such a passage of Scripture as this before our eyes. Our words are the evidence of the state of our hearts, as surely as the taste of the water is an evidence of the state of the spring. “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.” The lips only utter what the mind conceives. Our words will form one subject of inquiry at the day of judgment. We shall have to give account of our sayings, as well as our doings. Truly these are very solemn considerations. If there were no other text in the Bible, this passage ought to convince us, that we are all “guilty before God,” and need a righteousness better than our own, even the righteousness of Christ. (Phil. 3:9.)

Let us be humble as we read this passage, in the recollection of time past. How many idle, foolish, vain, light, frivolous, sinful, and unprofitable things we have all said! How many words we have used, which, like thistle-down, have flown far and wide, and sown mischief in the hearts of others that will never die! How often when we have met our friends, “our conversation,” to use an old saint’s expression, “has only made work for repentance.” There is deep truth in the remark of Burkitt, “A profane scoff or atheistical jest may stick in the minds of those that hear it, after the tongue that spoke it is dead. A

word spoken is physically transient, but morally permanent." "Death and life," says Solomon, "are in the power of the tongue." (Prov. 18:21.)

Let us be watchful as we read this passage about words, when we look forward to our days yet to come. Let us resolve, by God's grace, to be more careful over our tongues, and more particular about our use of them. Let us pray daily that our "speech may be always with grace." (Coloss. 4:6.) Let us say every morning with holy David, "I will take heed to my ways, that I offend not in my tongue." Let us cry with him to the Strong for strength, and say, "Set a watch over my mouth, and keep the door of my lips." Well indeed might James say, "If any man offends not in word, the same is a perfect man." (Psalm. 39:1, 141:3; James 3:2.)

MATTHEW 12:38-50

Then certain of the scribes and Pharisees answered, "Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you."

But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, but no sign will be given it but the sign of Jonah the prophet. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will stand up in the judgment with this generation, and will condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, someone greater than Jonah is here. The queen of the south will rise up in the

judgment with this generation, and will condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, someone greater than Solomon is here. But the unclean spirit, when he is gone out of the man, passes through waterless places, seeking rest, and doesn't find it. Then he says, 'I will return into my house from which I came out,' and when he has come back, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then he goes, and takes with himself seven other spirits more evil than he is, and they enter in and dwell there. The last state of that man becomes worse than the first. Even so will it be also to this evil generation."

While he was yet speaking to the multitudes, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, seeking to speak to him. One said to him, "Behold, your mother and your brothers stand outside, seeking to speak to you."

But he answered him who spoke to him, "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" He stretched out his hand towards his disciples, and said, "Behold, my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father who is in heaven, he is my brother, and sister, and mother."

The beginning of this passage is one of those places which strikingly illustrate the truth of Old Testament History. Our Lord speaks of the queen of the South, as a real, true person, who had lived and died. He refers to the story of Jonah, and his miraculous preservation in the whale's belly, as undeniable matters of fact. Let us remember this, if we hear men professing to believe the writers of

the New Testament, and yet sneering at the things recorded in the Old Testament, as if they were fables. Such men forget, that in so doing they pour contempt upon Christ Himself. The authority of the Old and New Testament stands or falls together. The same Spirit inspired men to write of Solomon and Jonah, who inspired the Evangelists to write of Christ. These are not unimportant points in this day. Let them be well fixed in our minds.

The first practical lesson which demands our attention in these verses, is ***the amazing power of unbelief.*** Mark how the Scribes and Pharisees call upon our Lord to show them more miracles. "Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you." They pretended that they only needed more evidence, in order to be convinced, and become disciples. They shut their eyes to the many wonderful works which Jesus had already done. It was not enough for those who He had healed the sick, and cleansed the lepers, raised the dead, and cast out devils. They were not yet persuaded. They yet demanded more proof. They would not see what our Lord plainly pointed at in His reply, that they had no real will to believe. There was evidence enough to convince them, but they had no wish to be convinced.

There are many in the Church of Christ, who are exactly in the state of these Scribes and Pharisees. They flatter themselves that they only require a little more proof to become decided Christians. They fancy that if their reason and intellect could only be met with some additional arguments, they would at once give up all for Christ's

sake, take up the cross, and follow Him. But in the meantime, they wait. Alas! for their blindness. They will not see that there is abundance of evidence on every side of them. The truth is, that they do not want to be convinced.

May we all be on our guard against the spirit of unbelief! It is a growing evil in these latter days. Lack of simple, childlike faith is an increasing feature of the times, in every rank of society. The true explanation of a hundred strange things that startle us in the conduct of leading men in churches and states, is downright lack of faith. Men who do not believe all that God says in the Bible, must necessarily take a vacillating and undecided line on moral and religious questions. "If you will not believe, surely you shall not be established." (Isaiah 7:9.)

The second practical lesson which meets us in these verses is ***the immense danger of a partial and imperfect religious reformation.*** Mark what a dreadful picture our Lord draws of the man to whom the unclean spirit returns, after having once left him. How fearful are those words, "I will return into my house from which I came out!" How vivid that description, "he finds it empty, swept, and put in order!" How tremendous the conclusion, "Then he goes, and takes with himself seven other spirits more evil than he is, and they enter in and dwell there. The last state of that man becomes worse than the first!" It is a picture most painfully full of meaning. Let us scan it closely, and learn wisdom.

It is certain that we have in this picture ***the history of the Jewish church and nation,*** at the time of our Lord's coming. Called as they were at first out of Egypt to be God's peculiar people, they never seem to have wholly lost the tendency to worship idols. Redeemed as they afterwards were from the captivity of Babylon, they never seem to have rendered to God a due return for His goodness. Aroused as they had been by John the Baptist's preaching, their repentance appears to have been only skin-deep. At the time when our Lord spoke, they had become, as a nation, harder and more perverse than ever. The grossness of idol-worship had given place to the deadness of mere formality. Seven other spirits worse than the first, had taken possession of them. Their last state was rapidly becoming worse than the first. Yet forty years, and their iniquity came to the full. They madly plunged into a war with Rome. Judea became a very Babel of confusion. Jerusalem was taken. The temple was destroyed. The Jews were scattered over the face of the earth.

Again, it is highly probable that we have in this picture ***the history of the whole body of Christian churches.*** Delivered as they were from heathen darkness by the preaching of the Gospel, they have never really lived up to their light. Revived as many of them were at the time of the Protestant Reformation, they have none of them made a right use of their privileges, or "gone on to perfection." They have all more or less stopped short and settled on their lees. They have all been too ready to be satisfied with mere external amendments. And now there are painful symptoms in many quarters that the evil spirit has returned to his house, and is

preparing an outbreak of infidelity, and false doctrine, such as the churches have never yet seen. Between unbelief in some quarters, and formal superstition in others, everything seems ripe for some fearful manifestation of Antichrist. It may well be feared that the last state of the professing Christian churches will prove worse than the first.

Saddest and worst of all, we have in this picture ***the history of many an individual's soul.*** There are men who seemed at one time of their lives to be under the influence of strong religious feelings. They reformed their ways. They laid aside many things that are bad. They took up many things that are good. But they stopped there, and went no further, and by and bye gave up religion altogether. The evil spirit returned to their hearts, and found them empty, swept, and garnished. They are now worse than they ever were before. Their consciences seem seared. Their sense of religious things appears entirely destroyed. They are like men given over to a reprobate mind. One would say it was "impossible to renew them to repentance." *None prove so hopelessly wicked as those who, after experiencing strong religious convictions, have gone back again to sin and the world.*

If we love life, let us pray that these lessons may be deeply impressed on our minds. Let us never be content with a *partial reformation of life,* without *thorough conversion to God*, and mortification of the whole body of sin. It is a good thing to strive to cast sin out of our hearts. But let us take care that we also receive the

grace of God in its place. Let us make sure that we not only get rid of the old tenant, the devil, but have also got dwelling in us the Holy Spirit.

The last practical lesson which meets us in these verses is ***the tender affection with which the Lord Jesus regards His true disciples.***

Mark how He speaks of every one who does the will of His Father in heaven. He says, "he is my brother, and sister, and mother." What gracious words these are! Who can conceive the depth of our dear Lord's love towards His relations according to the flesh? It was a pure, unselfish love. It must have been a mighty love, a love that passes man's understanding. Yet here we see that all His believing people are counted as His family. He loves them, feels for them, cares for them, as members of His family, bone of His bone, and flesh of His flesh.

There is a solemn warning here to all who mock and persecute true Christians on account of their religion. They consider not what they are doing. They are persecuting the near relations of the King of kings. They will find at the last day that they have mocked those whom the Judge of all regards as "His brother, and sister, and mother."

There is rich encouragement here for all believers. They are far more precious in their Lord's eyes than they are in their own. Their faith may be feeble, their repentance weak, their strength small. They

may be poor and needy in this world. But there is a glorious "whoever" in the last verse of this chapter which ought to cheer them. "Whoever" believes is a near relation of Christ. The elder Brother will provide for him in time and eternity, and never let him be cast away. There is not one "little sister" in the family of the redeemed, whom Jesus does not remember. (Cant. 8:8.) Joseph provided richly for all his relations, and Jesus will provide for His.

Matthew – Chap. 13

MATTHEW 13:1-23

On that day Jesus went out of the house, and sat by the seaside. Great multitudes gathered to him, so that he entered into a boat, and sat, and all the multitude stood on the beach. He spoke to them many things in parables, saying, "Behold, a farmer went out to sow. As he sowed, some seeds fell by the roadside, and the birds came and devoured them. Others fell on rocky ground, where they didn't have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of earth. When the sun had risen, they were scorched. Because they had no root, they withered away. Others fell among thorns. The thorns grew up and choked them: and others fell on good soil, and yielded fruit: some one hundred times as much, some sixty, and some thirty. He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

The disciples came, and said to him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?"

He answered them, "To you it is given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, but it is not given to them. For whoever has, to him will be given, and he will have abundance, but whoever doesn't have, from him will be taken away even that which he has. Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they don't see, and hearing, they don't hear, neither do they understand. In them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says,

'By hearing you will hear, and will in no way understand; Seeing you will see, and will in no way perceive: this people's heart has grown callous, their ears are dull of hearing, they have closed their eyes; or else perhaps they might perceive with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their heart, and should turn again; and I would heal them.'"

"But blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear. For most certainly I tell you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see the things which you see, and didn't see them; and to hear the things which you hear, and didn't hear them."

"Hear, then, the parable of the farmer. When anyone hears the word of the Kingdom, and doesn't understand it, the evil one comes, and snatches away that which has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown by the roadside. What was sown on the rocky places, this is he who hears the word, and immediately with joy

receives it; yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while. When oppression or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. What was sown among the thorns, this is he who hears the word, but the cares of this age and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. What was sown on the good ground, this is he who hears the word, and understands it, who most certainly bears fruit, and brings forth, some one hundred times as much, some sixty, and some thirty."

The chapter which these verses begin is remarkable for the number of parables which it contains. Seven striking illustrations of spiritual truth are here drawn by the great Head of the Church from the book of nature. By so doing He shows us that religious teaching may draw helps from everything in creation. Those that would "find out acceptable words," should not forget this. (Eccles. 12:10.)

The parable of the sower, which begins this chapter, is one of those parables which admit of a very wide application. It is being continually verified under our own eyes. Wherever the word of God is preached or expounded, and people are assembled to hear it, the sayings of our Lord in this parable are found to be true. It describes what goes on, as a general rule, in all congregations.

Let us learn, in the first place, from this parable, that ***the work of the preacher resembles that of the sower.*** Like the sower, the preacher must SOW GOOD SEED, if he wants to see fruit. He must sow the pure word of God, and not the traditions of the church,

or the doctrines of men. Without this his labor will be in vain. He may go to and fro, and seem to say much, and to work much in his weekly round of ministerial duty. But there will be no harvest of souls for heaven, no living results, and no conversions.

Like the sower, the preacher must be DILIGENT. He must spare no pains. He must use every possible means to make his work prosper. He must patiently "sow beside all waters," and "sow in hope." He must be "instant in season and out of season." He must not be deterred by difficulties and discouragements. "He that observes the wind shall not sow." No doubt his success does not entirely depend upon his labor and diligence. But without labor and diligence success will seldom be obtained. (Isaiah. 32:20. 2 Tim. 4:2. Eccles. 11:4.)

Like the sower, the preacher CANNOT GIVE LIFE. He can scatter the seed committed to his charge, but cannot command it to grow. He may offer the word of truth to a people, but he cannot make them receive it and bear fruit. To give life is God's sovereign prerogative. "It is the Spirit who gives life." God alone can "give the increase." (John 6:63. 1 Cor. 3:7.)

Let these things sink down into our hearts. It is no light thing to be a real minister of God's Word. To be an idle, formal workman in the Church is an easy business. To be a faithful sower is very hard. Preachers ought to be specially remembered in our prayers.

In the next place, let us learn from this passage, that ***there are various ways of hearing the word of God without benefit.*** We may listen to a sermon with a heart like the hard "wayside,"—careless, thoughtless, and unconcerned. Christ crucified may be affectionately set before us, and we may hear of His sufferings with utter indifference, as a subject in which we have no interest. Fast as the words fall on our ears, the devil may pluck them away, and we may go home as if we had not heard a sermon at all. Alas! there are many such hearers! It is as true of them as of the idols of old, "eyes have they, but they see not; they have ears, but they hear not." (Psalm. 135:16,17.) Truth seems to have no more effect on their hearts than water on a stone.

We may listen to a sermon with pleasure, while the impression produced on us is only temporary and short-lived. Our hearts, like the "stony ground," may yield a plentiful crop of warm feelings and good resolutions. But all this time there may be no deeply-rooted work in our souls, and the first cold blast of opposition or temptation may cause our *seeming religion* to wither away. Alas! there are many such hearers! The mere love of sermons is no sign of grace. Thousands of baptized people are like the Jews of Ezekiel's day, "You are to them as a very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear your words, but they don't do them." (Ezek. 33:32.)

We may listen to a sermon, and approve of every word it contains, and yet get no good from it, in consequence of the

absorbing influence of this world. Our hearts, like the "thorny ground," may be choked with a noxious crop of cares, pleasures, and worldly plans. We may really like the Gospel, and wish to obey it, and yet insensibly give it no chance of bearing fruit, by allowing other things to fill a place in our affections, and insensibly to fill our whole hearts. Alas! there are many such hearers! They know the truth well. They hope one day to be decided Christians. But they never come to the point of giving up all for Christ's sake. They never make up their minds to "seek first the kingdom of God,"—and so die in their sins.

These are points that we ought to weigh well. We should never forget that there are more ways than one of hearing the word without profit. It is not enough that we come to hear. We may come, and be *careless*. It is not enough that we are not careless hearers. Our impressions may be only *temporary*, and ready to perish. It is not enough that our impressions are not merely temporary. But they may be continually yielding no result, in consequence of our obstinate cleaving to the world. Truly "the heart is deceitful above all things, and it is exceedingly corrupt—who can know it?" (Jerem. 17:9.)

In the last place, let us learn from this parable, that ***there is only one evidence of hearing the word rightly.*** That evidence is to BEAR FRUIT. The fruit here spoken of is the fruit of the Spirit. Repentance towards God, faith towards the Lord Jesus Christ, holiness of life and character, prayerfulness, humility, charity, spiritual-mindedness—these are the only satisfactory proofs that the seed of God's word is doing its proper work in our souls. Without

such proofs, our religion is vain, however high our profession. It is no better than sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal. Christ has said, “I have chosen you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit.” (John 15:16.)

There is no part of the whole parable more important than this. We must never be content with a barren orthodoxy, and a cold maintenance of correct theological views. We must not be satisfied with clear knowledge, warm feelings, and a decent profession. We must see to it that the Gospel we profess to love, produces positive “fruit” in our hearts and lives. This is real Christianity. Those words of James should often ring in our ears, “Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deluding your own selves.” (James 1:22.)

Let us not leave these verses without putting to ourselves the important question, “How do WE hear?” We live in a Christian country. We go to a place of worship Sunday after Sunday, and hear sermons. In what spirit do we hear them? What effect have they upon our characters? Can we point to anything that deserves the name of “fruit?”

We may rest assured that to reach heaven at last, it needs something more than to go to Church regularly on Sundays, and listen to preachers. The word of God must be received into our hearts, and become the mainspring of our conduct. It must produce practical impressions on our inward man, that shall appear in our outward behavior. If it does not do this, it will only add to our condemnation in the day of judgment.

MATTHEW 13:24-43

He set another parable before them, saying, "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field, but while people slept, his enemy came and sowed weeds also among the wheat, and went away. But when the blade sprang up and brought forth fruit, then the weeds appeared also. The servants of the householder came and said to him, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where did this come from?'

"He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.'

"The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and gather them up?'

"But he said, 'No, lest perhaps while you gather up the weeds, you root up the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and in the harvest time I will tell the reapers, "First, gather up the weeds, and bind them in bundles to burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn."'

He set another parable before them, saying, "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field; which indeed is smaller than all seeds. But when it is grown, it is greater than the herbs, and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in its branches."

He spoke another parable to them. "The Kingdom of Heaven is like yeast, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal,

until it was all leavened."

Jesus spoke all these things in parables to the multitudes; and without a parable, he didn't speak to them, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophet, saying,

"I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things hidden from the foundation of the world."

Then Jesus sent the multitudes away, and went into the house. His disciples came to him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field."

He answered them, "He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, the field is the world; and the good seed, these are the children of the Kingdom; and the weeds are the children of the evil one. The enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. As therefore the weeds are gathered up and burned with fire; so will it be at the end of this age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will gather out of his Kingdom all things that cause stumbling, and those who do iniquity, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be weeping and the gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

The parable of the wheat and weeds, which occupies the chief part of these verses, is one of peculiar importance in the present day.

(The consideration of the parables of the mustard seed and the leaves is purposely deferred until a future part of the Exposition.) It is eminently calculated to correct the extravagant expectations in which many Christians indulge, as to the effect of missions abroad, and of preaching the Gospel at home. May we give it the attention which it deserves!

In the first place, this parable teaches us, that ***good and evil will always be found together in the professing Church, until the end of the world.*** The visible Church is set before us as a *mixed* body. It is a vast "field" in which "wheat and weeds" grow side by side. We must expect to find believers and unbelievers, converted and unconverted, "the children of the kingdom, and the children of the wicked one," all mingled together in every congregation of baptized people.

The purest preaching of the Gospel will not prevent this. In every age of the Church, the same state of things has existed. It was the experience of the early Fathers. It was the experience of the Reformers. It is the experience of the best ministers at the present hour. There has never been a visible Church or a religious assembly, of which the members have been all "wheat." The devil, that great enemy of souls, has always taken care to sow "weeds."

The most strict and prudent discipline will not prevent this. Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and Independents, all alike find it to be so. Do what we will to purify a church, we shall never succeed in obtaining a perfectly pure communion. Weeds will be found among

the wheat. Hypocrites and deceivers will creep in. And, worst of all, if we are extreme in our efforts to obtain purity, we do more harm than good. We run the risk of encouraging many a Judas Iscariot, and breaking many a bruised reed. In our zeal to "gather up the weeds," we are in danger of "rooting up the wheat with them." Such zeal is not according to knowledge, and has often done much harm. Those who care not what happens to the wheat, provided they can root up the tares, show little of the mind of Christ. And after all there is deep truth in the charitable saying of Augustine, "Those who are weeds today, may be wheat tomorrow."

Are we inclined to look for the conversion of the whole world by the labors of missionaries and ministers? Let us place this parable before us, and beware of such an idea. We shall never see all the inhabitants of earth the wheat of God, in the present order of things. The weeds and wheat will "grow together *until the harvest.*" The kingdoms of this world will never become the kingdom of Christ, and the millennium begin, until the King Himself returns.

Are we ever tried by the scoffing argument of the infidel, that Christianity can not be a true religion, when there are so many false Christians? Let us call to mind this parable, and remain unmoved. Let us tell the infidel, that the state of things he scoffs at does not surprise us at all. Our Master prepared us for it 1800 years ago. He foresaw and foretold, that His Church would be a field, containing not only wheat, but tares.

Are we ever tempted to leave one Church for another, because we see many of its members unconverted? Let us remember this parable, and take heed what we do. We shall never find a perfect Church. We may spend our lives in migrating from communion to communion, and pass our days in perpetual disappointment. Go where we will, and worship where we may we shall always find weeds.

In the second place the parable teaches us, that ***there is to be a day of separation between the godly and ungodly members of the visible Church, at the end of the world.***

The present mixed state of things is not to be forever. The wheat and the weeds are to be divided at last. The Lord Jesus shall "send forth his angels" in the day of His second advent, and gather all professing Christians into two great companies. Those mighty reapers shall make no mistake. They shall discern with unerring judgment between the righteous and the wicked, and place every one in his own lot. The saints and faithful servants of Christ shall receive glory, honor, and eternal life. The worldly, the ungodly, the careless, and the unconverted shall be "cast into a furnace of fire," and receive shame and everlasting contempt.

There is something peculiarly solemn in this part of the parable. The meaning of it admits of no mistake. Our Lord Himself explains it in words of singular clearness, as if He would impress it deeply on our minds. Well may He say at the conclusion, "Who has ears to hear, let him hear."

Let the ungodly man tremble when he reads this parable. Let him see in its fearful language his own certain doom, unless he repents and is converted. Let him know that he is sowing misery for himself, if he goes on still in his neglect of God. Let him reflect that his end will be to be gathered among the "bundles" of weeds, and be burned. Surely such a prospect ought to make a man think. As Baxter truly says, "We must not misinterpret God's patience with the ungodly."

Let the believer in Christ take comfort when he reads this parable. Let him see that there is happiness and safety prepared for him in the great and dreadful day of the Lord. The voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God will proclaim no terror for him. They will summon him to join what he has long desired to see, a perfect Church and a perfect communion of saints. How beautiful will the whole body of believers appear, when finally separated from the wicked! How fine will the wheat look in the barn of God, when the weeds are at length taken away! How brightly will grace shine, when no longer dimmed by incessant contact with the worldly and unconverted!

The righteous are little known in the present day. The world sees no beauty in them, even as it saw none in their Master. "The world doesn't know us, because it didn't know him." (1 John 3:1.) But the righteous shall one day "shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." To use the words of Matthew Henry, "their sanctification will be perfected, and their justification will be

published." "When Christ, our life, is revealed, then you will also be revealed with him in glory." (Coloss. 3:4.)

MATTHEW 13:44-50

"Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found, and hid. In his joy, he goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field."

"Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who is a merchant seeking fine pearls, who having found one pearl of great price, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it."

"Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a dragnet, that was cast into the sea, and gathered some fish of every kind, which, when it was filled, they drew up on the beach. They sat down, and gathered the good into containers, but the bad they threw away. So will it be in the end of the world. The angels will come forth, and separate the wicked from among the righteous, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth."

The parable of the "TREASURE hidden in the field," and the "merchant man seeking goodly PEARLS," appear intended to convey one and the same lesson. They vary, no doubt, in one striking particular. The "treasure" was found of one who does not seem to have sought it. The "pearl" was found of one who was actually seeking pearls. But the conduct of the finders, in both cases, was

precisely alike. Both "sold all" to make the thing found their own property. And it is exactly at this point that the instruction of both parables agrees.

These two parables are meant to teach us, that ***men really convinced of the importance of salvation, will give up everything to win Christ, and eternal life.***

What was the conduct of the two men our Lord describes? The one was persuaded that there was a "treasure hidden in the field," which would amply repay him, if he bought the field, however great the price that he might give. The other was persuaded that the "pearl" he had found was so immensely valuable, that it would compensate him to purchase it at any cost. Both were convinced that *they had found a thing of great value*. Both were satisfied that *it was worth a great present sacrifice to make this thing their own*. Others might wonder at them. Others might think them foolish for paying such a sum of money for the field and pearl. But they knew what they were about. They were sure that they were making a good bargain.

Behold in this single picture, ***the conduct of a true Christian explained!*** He is what he is, and does what he does in his religion, because he is *thoroughly persuaded* that it is worth while. He comes out from the world. He puts off the old man. He forsakes the vain companions of his past life. Like Matthew, he gives up everything, and, like Paul, he "counts all things loss" for Christ's sake. And why? Because he is convinced that Christ will make amends to him for all he gives up. He sees in Christ an endless "treasure." He sees in Christ

a precious “pearl.” To win Christ he will make any sacrifice. This is true faith. This is the stamp of a genuine work of the Holy Spirit.

Behold in these two parables ***the real clue to the conduct of many unconverted people!*** They are what they are in religion, because they are *not fully persuaded* that it is worth while to be different. They flinch from decision. They shrink from taking up the cross. They halt between two opinions. They will not commit themselves. They will not come forward boldly on the Lord’s side. And why? Because they are not convinced that it will compensate them. They are not sure that “the treasure” is before them. They are not satisfied that “the pearl” is worth so great a price. They cannot yet make up their minds to “sell all,” that they may win Christ. And so too often they perish everlastingly! When a man will venture nothing for Christ’s sake, we must draw the sorrowful conclusion that he has not got the grace of God.

The parable of the NET let down into the sea, has some points in common with that of the wheat and the tares. It is intended to instruct us on a most important subject, ***the true nature of the visible Church of Christ.***

The preaching of the Gospel was the letting down of a large net into the midst of the sea of this world. The professing church which it was to gather together, was to be a mixed body. Within the folds of the net, there were to be fish of every kind, both good and bad. Within the pale of the Church there were to be Christians of various sorts, unconverted as well as converted, false as well as true. The

separation of good and bad is sure to come at last, but not before the end of the world. Such was the account which the great Master gave to His disciples of the churches which they were to found.

It is of the utmost importance to have the lessons of this parable deeply engraved on our minds. There is hardly any point in Christianity on which greater mistakes exist, than *the nature of the visible Church*. There is none, perhaps, on which mistakes are so perilous to the soul.

Let us LEARN from this parable, that all congregations of professed Christians ought to be regarded as *mixed bodies*. They are all assemblies containing "good fish and bad," converted and unconverted, children of God and children of the world, and ought to be described and addressed as such. To tell all baptized people, that they are born again, and have the Spirit, and are members of Christ, and are holy, in the face of such a parable as this, is utterly unwarrantable. Such a mode of address may flatter and please. It is not likely to profit or save. It is painfully calculated to promote self-righteousness, and lull sinners to sleep. It overthrows the plain teaching of Christ, and is ruinous to souls. Do we ever hear such doctrine? If we do, let us remember "the net."

Finally, let it be a settled principle with us, never to be satisfied with mere *outward church-membership*. We may be inside the net, and yet not be in Christ. The waters of baptism are poured on myriads who are never washed in the water of life. The bread and wine are eaten and drunk by thousands at the Lord's table, who

never feed on Christ by faith. Are we converted? Are we among the "good fish?" This is the grand question. It is one which must be answered at last. The net will soon be "drawn to shore." The true character of every man's religion will at length be exposed. There will be an eternal separation between the good fish and the bad. There will be a "furnace of fire" for the wicked. Surely, as Baxter says, "these plain words more need belief and consideration than exposition."

MATTHEW 13:51-58

Jesus said to them, "Have you understood all these things?"

They answered him, "Yes, Lord."

He said to them, "Therefore, every scribe who has been made a disciple in the Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who is a householder, who brings out of his treasure new and old things."

It happened that when Jesus had finished these parables, he departed from there. Coming into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, "Where did this man get this wisdom, and these mighty works? Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother called Mary, and his brothers, James, Joses, Simon, and Judas? Aren't all of his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all of these things?" They were offended by him.

But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor, except in his own country, and in his own house." He didn't do many mighty works there because of their unbelief.

The first thing which we ought to notice in these verses, is ***the striking question*** with which our Lord winds up the seven wonderful parables of this chapter. He said, *"Have you understood all these things?"*

Personal application has been called the "soul" of preaching. A sermon without application is like a letter posted without an address. It may be well-written, rightly dated, and duly signed. But it is useless, because it never reaches its destination. Our Lord's inquiry is an admirable example of real heart-searching application, "Have you understood?"

The mere form of hearing a sermon can profit no man, unless he comprehends what it means. He might just as well listen to the blowing of a trumpet, or the beating of a drum. He might just as well attend a Roman Catholic service in Latin. His intellect must be set in motion, and his heart impressed. Ideas must be received into his mind. He must carry off the seeds of new thoughts. Without this he hears in vain.

It is of great importance to see this point clearly. There is a vast amount of ignorance about it. There are thousands who go regularly to places of worship, and think they have done their religious duty, but never carry away an idea, or receive an impression. Ask them,

when they return home on a Sunday evening, what they have learned, and they cannot tell you a word. Examine them at the end of a year, as to the religious knowledge they have attained, and you will find them as ignorant as the heathen.

Let us watch our souls in this matter. Let us take with us to Church, not only our bodies, but our minds, our reason, our hearts, and our consciences. Let us often ask ourselves, "What have I got from this sermon? what have I learned? what truths have been impressed on my mind?" *Intellect*, no doubt, is not everything in religion. But it does not therefore follow that it is nothing at all. The *heart* is unquestionably the main point. But we must never forget that the Holy Spirit generally reaches the heart through the mind. Sleepy, idle, inattentive hearers, are never likely to be converted.

The second thing, which we ought to notice in these verses, is ***the strange treatment which our Lord received in His own country.***

He came to the town of Nazareth, where He had been brought up, and "taught in their synagogue." His teaching, no doubt, was the same as it always was. "Never a man spoke like this man." But it had no effect on the people of Nazareth. They were "astonished," but their hearts were unmoved. They said, "Isn't this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary?" They despised Him, because they were so familiar with Him. "They were offended in him." And they drew from our Lord the solemn remark, "A prophet is not without honor, except in his own country, and in his own house."

Let us see, in this history, a melancholy page of human nature unfolded to our view. We are all apt to despise mercies, if we are accustomed to them, and have them cheap. The Bibles and religious books, which are so plentiful in England, the means of grace of which we have so abundant a supply, the preaching of the Gospel which we hear every week—all, all are liable to be undervalued. It is mournfully true that in religion, more than in anything else, "familiarity breeds contempt." Men forget that truth is truth, however old and hackneyed it may sound, and despise it because it is old. Alas! by so doing, they provoke God to take it away.

Do we wonder that the relations, servants and neighbors of godly people are not always converted? Do we wonder that the parishioners of eminent ministers of the Gospel are often their hardest and most impenitent hearers? Let us wonder no more. Let us mark the experience of our Lord at Nazareth, and learn wisdom.

Do we ever imagine that if we had only seen and heard Jesus Christ, we would have been His faithful disciples? Do we think that if we had only lived near Him, and been eyewitnesses of His ways, we would not have been undecided, wavering, and half-hearted about religion? If we do, let us think so no longer. Let us observe the people of Nazareth, and learn wisdom.

The last thing which we ought to notice in these verses is ***the ruinous nature of unbelief.*** The chapter ends with the fearful words, "He didn't do many miraculous works there, because of their unbelief."

Behold in this single word the secret of the everlasting ruin of multitudes of souls! They perish forever, because they will not believe. There is nothing beside in earth or heaven that prevents their salvation. Their sins, however many, might all be forgiven. The Father's love is ready to receive them. The blood of Christ is ready to cleanse them. The power of the Spirit is ready to renew them. But a great barrier interposes—they will not believe. "You will not come unto me," says Jesus, "that you might have life." (John 5:40.) May we all be on our guard against this accursed sin. It is the old root-sin, which caused the fall of man. Cut down in the true child of God by the power of the Spirit, it is ever ready to bud and sprout again. There are three great enemies against which God's children should daily pray—pride, worldliness, and unbelief. Of these three, none is greater than unbelief.

Matthew – Chap. 14

MATTHEW 14:1-12

At that time, Herod the tetrarch heard the report concerning Jesus, and said to his servants, "This is John the Baptizer. He is risen from the dead. That is why these powers work in him." For Herod had laid hold of John, and bound him, and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife. For John said to him, "It is not lawful for you to have her." When he would have put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet. But when Herod's birthday came, the daughter of Herodias danced among them and pleased Herod. Whereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatever she should ask. She, being prompted by her mother, said, "Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptizer."

The king was grieved, but for the sake of his oaths, and of those who sat at the table with him, he commanded it to be given, and he sent and beheaded John in the prison. His head was brought on a platter, and given to the young lady: and she brought it to her mother. His disciples came, and took the body, and buried it; and they went and told Jesus.

We have in this passage a page out of God's book of martyrs—the history of the death of John the Baptist. The wickedness of king

Herod, the bold reproof which John gave him, the consequent imprisonment of the faithful reprover, and the disgraceful circumstances of his death, are all written for our learning. “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.” (Psalm 116:15.)

The story of John the Baptist’s death is told more fully by Mark than by Matthew. For the present it seems sufficient to draw two general lessons from Matthew’s narrative, and to fasten our attention exclusively upon them.

Let us learn, in the first place, from these verses, ***the great power of conscience.***

King Herod hears of “the fame of Jesus,” and says to his servants, “This is John the Baptist—he is risen from the dead.” He remembered his own wicked dealings with that holy man, and his heart failed within him. His heart told him that he had despised his godly counsel, and committed a foul and abominable murder. And his heart told him, that though he had killed John, there would yet be a reckoning day. He and John the Baptist would yet meet again. Well says Bishop Hall, “a wicked man needs no other tormentor, especially for sins of blood, than his own heart.”

There is a conscience in all men by nature. Let this never be forgotten. Fallen, lost, desperately wicked as we are all born into the world, God has taken care to leave Himself a witness in our bosoms. It is a poor blind guide, without the Holy Spirit. It can save no one. It leads no one to Christ. It may be seared and trampled under foot. But

there is such a thing as conscience in every man, accusing or excusing him; and Scripture and experience alike declare it. (Rom. 2:15.)

Conscience can make even kings miserable, when they have wilfully rejected its advice. It can fill the princes of this world with fear and trembling, as it did Felix, when Paul preached. They find it easier to imprison and behead the preacher, than to bind his sermon, and silence the voice of his reproof in their own hearts. God's witnesses may be put out of the way, but their testimony often lives and works on, long after they are dead. God's prophets live not forever, but their words often survive them. (2 Tim. 2:9. Zech. 1:5.)

Let the thoughtless and ungodly remember this, and not sin against their consciences. Let them know that their sins will "surely find them out." They may laugh, and jest, and mock at religion for a little time. They may cry, "Who is afraid? What is the mighty harm of our ways?" They may depend upon it, they are sowing misery for themselves, and will reap a bitter crop sooner or later. Their wickedness will overtake them one day. They will find, like Herod, that it is an evil and bitter thing to sin against God. (Jerem. 2:19.)

Let ministers and teachers remember that there is a conscience in men, and work on boldly. Instruction is not always thrown away, because it seems to bear no fruit at the time it is given. Teaching is not always in vain, though we fancy that it is unheeded, wasted, and forgotten. There is a conscience in the hearers of sermons. There is a conscience in the children at our schools. Many a sermon and lesson

will yet rise again, when he who preached or taught it is lying, like John the Baptist, in the grave. Thousands know that we are right, and, like Herod, dare not confess it.

Let us learn, in the second place, that ***God's children must not look for their reward in this world.*** If ever there was a case of godliness unrewarded in this life, it was that of John the Baptist. Think for a moment what a man he was during his short career, and then think to what an end he came. Behold him, that was the Prophet of the Highest, and greater than any born of woman, imprisoned like a malefactor! Behold him cut off by a violent death, before the age of thirty-four—the burning light quenched—the faithful preacher murdered for doing his duty—and this to gratify the hatred of an adulterous woman, and at the command of a capricious tyrant! Truly there was an event here, if there ever was one in the world, which might make an ignorant man say, "What profit is it to serve God?"

But these are the sort of things which show us, that there will one day be a judgment. The God of the spirits of all flesh shall at last set up an assize, and reward every one according to his works. The blood of John the Baptist, and James the apostle, and Stephen—the blood of Polycarp, and Huss, and Ridley, and Latimer, shall yet be required. It is all written in God's book. "The earth shall disclose her blood, and no more cover her slain." (Isaiah 26:21.) The world shall yet know, that there is a God who judges the earth. "If you see the oppression of the poor, and violent taking away of justice and righteousness in a district, don't marvel at the matter—for one

official is eyed by a higher one, and there are officials over them." (Eccles. 5:8.)

Let all true Christians remember, that their best things are yet to come. Let us count it no strange thing, if we have sufferings in this present time. It is a season of probation. We are yet at school. We are learning patience, gentleness, and meekness, which we could hardly learn if we had our good things now. But there is an eternal holiday yet to begin. For this let us wait quietly. It will make amends for all. "Our light affliction which is for the moment, works for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory." (2 Cor. 4:17.)

MATTHEW 14:13-21

Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat, to a deserted place apart. When the multitudes heard it, they followed him on foot from the cities.

Jesus went out, and he saw a great multitude. He had compassion on them, and healed their sick. When evening had come, his disciples came to him, saying, "This place is deserted, and the hour is already late. Send the multitudes away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves food."

But Jesus said to them, "They don't need to go away. You give them something to eat."

They told him, "We only have here five loaves and two fish."

He said, "Bring them here to me." He commanded the multitudes to sit down on the grass; and he took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, he blessed, broke and gave the loaves to the disciples, and the disciples gave to the multitudes. They all ate, and were filled. They took up twelve baskets full of that which remained left over from the broken pieces. Those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

These verses contain one of our Lord Jesus Christ's greatest miracles, the feeding of "five thousand men, besides women and children," with five loaves and two fish. Of all the miracles worked by our Lord, not one is so often mentioned in the New Testament as this. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, all dwell upon it. It is plain that this event in our Lord's history is intended to receive special attention. Let us give it that attention, and see what we may learn.

In the first place, this miracle is ***an unanswerable proof of our Lord's divine POWER.*** To satisfy the hunger of more than five thousand people with so small a portion of food as five loaves and two fish, would be manifestly impossible without a supernatural multiplication of the food. It was a thing that no magician, impostor, or false prophet would ever have attempted. Such a person might possibly pretend to cure a single sick person, or raise a single dead body—and by jugglery and trickery might persuade weak people that he succeeded. But such a person would never attempt such a mighty work as that which is here recorded. He would know well that he could not persuade ten thousand men, women, and children that

they were full when they were hungry. He would be exposed as a cheat and impostor on the spot.

Yet this is the mighty work which our Lord actually performed, and by performing it gave a conclusive proof that He was God. He called that into being which did not before exist. He provided visible, tangible, material food for ten thousand people, out of a supply which in itself would not have satisfied fifty. Surely we must be blind if we do not see in this the hand of Him "who provides food for all flesh," and made the world and all that therein is. To *create* is the peculiar prerogative of God.

We ought to lay firm hold on such passages as this. We should treasure up in our minds every evidence of our Lord's divine power. The cold, orthodox, unconverted man may see little in the story. The true believer should store it in his memory. Let him think of the world, the devil, and his own heart, and learn to thank God that his Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, is almighty.

In the second place, this miracle is ***a striking example of our Lord's COMPASSION toward men.*** He saw a great company in a desert place, ready to faint for hunger. He knew that many in that company had no true faith and love towards Himself. They followed Him from fashion and curiosity, or some equally low motive. (John 6:26.) But our Lord had pity upon all. All were relieved. All partook of the food miraculously provided. All were "filled," and none went away hungry. Let us see in this the heart of our Lord Jesus Christ towards sinners. He is as He was of old, "the Lord, the Lord God,

merciful and gracious, patient, and abundant in goodness and truth." (Exod. 34:6.) He does not deal with men according to their sins, or reward them according to their iniquities. He loads even His enemies with benefits. None will be so excuseless as those who are found impenitent at last. The Lord's goodness leads them to repentance. (Rom. 2:4.) In all His dealings with men on earth, He showed himself one that "delights in mercy." (Micah 7:18.) Let us strive to be like Him. "We ought," says Quesnel, "to have abundance of pity and compassion on diseased souls."

In the last place, this miracle is ***a lively emblem of the sufficiency of the Gospel to meet the soul-needs of all mankind.*** There can be little doubt that all our Lord's miracles have a deep figurative meaning, and teach great spiritual truths. But they must be handled reverently and discreetly. Care must be taken that we do not, like many of the Fathers, see allegories where the Holy Spirit meant none to be seen. But perhaps, if there is any miracle which has a manifest figurative meaning, in addition to the plain lessons which may be drawn from its surface, it is that which is now before us.

What does this hungry multitude in a desert place represent to us? It is an emblem of *all mankind*. The children of men are a large assembly of perishing sinners, famishing in the midst of a wilderness world—helpless, hopeless, and on the way to ruin. We have all gone astray like lost sheep. (Isaiah. 53:6.) We are by nature far away from God. Our eyes may not be opened to the full extent of our danger.

But in reality we are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. (Rev. 3:17.) There is but a step between us and everlasting death.

What do these loaves and fish represent, apparently so inadequate to meet the necessities of the case, but by miracle made sufficient to feed ten thousand people? They are an emblem of *the doctrine of Christ crucified for sinners,* as their vicarious substitute, and making atonement by His death for the sin of the world. That doctrine seems to the natural man weakness itself. Christ crucified was to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness. (1 Cor. 1:23.) And yet Christ crucified has proved the bread of God which comes down from heaven, and gives life to the world. (John 6:33.) The story of the cross has amply met the spiritual needs of mankind wherever it has been preached. Thousands of every rank, age, and nation, are witnesses that it is "the wisdom of God, and the power of God." They have eaten of it and been "filled." They have found it "food indeed and drink indeed."

Let us ponder these things well. There are great depths in all our Lord Jesus Christ's recorded dealings upon earth, which no one has ever fully fathomed. There are mines of rich instruction in all His words and ways, which no one has thoroughly explored. Many a passage of the Gospels is like the cloud which Elijah's servant saw. (1 Kings 18:44.) The more we look at it, the greater it will appear. There is an inexhaustible fullness in Scripture. Other writings seem

comparatively threadbare when we become familiar with them. But as to Scripture, the more we read it, the richer we shall find it.

MATTHEW 14:22-36

Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat, and to go ahead of him to the other side, while he sent the multitudes away. After he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into the mountain by himself to pray. When evening had come, he was there alone. But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, distressed by the waves, for the wind was contrary. In the fourth watch of the night, Jesus came to them, walking on the sea. When the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, "It's a spirit!" and they cried out for fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying "Cheer up! It is I! Don't be afraid."

Peter answered him and said, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the waters."

He said, "Come!"

Peter stepped down from the boat, and walked on the waters to come to Jesus. But when he saw that the wind was strong, he was afraid, and beginning to sink, he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!"

Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand, took hold of him, and said to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" When they got up into the boat, the wind ceased. Those who were in the boat came and worshiped him, saying, "You are truly the Son of God!"

When they had crossed over, they came to the land of Gennesaret. When the people of that place recognized him, they sent into all that surrounding region, and brought to him all who were sick, and they begged him that they might just touch the fringe of his garment. As many as touched it were made whole.

The history contained in these verses, is one of singular interest. The miracle here recorded brings out in strong light the character both of Christ and His people. The power and mercy of the Lord Jesus, and the mixture of faith and unbelief in His best disciples, are beautifully illustrated.

We learn, in the first place, from this miracle, ***what absolute dominion our Savior has over all created things.*** We see Him "walking on the sea," as if it was dry land. Those angry waves which tossed the ship of His disciples to and fro, obey the Son of God, and become a solid floor under His feet. That liquid surface, which was agitated by the least breath of wind, bears up the feet of our Redeemer, like a rock. To our poor, weak minds, the whole event is utterly incomprehensible. The picture of two feet walking on the sea, is said by Doddridge to have been the Egyptian emblem of an impossible thing. The man of science will tell us, that for material flesh and blood to walk on water is a physical impossibility. Enough for us to know that it was done. Enough for us to remember, that to Him who created the seas at the beginning, it must have been perfectly easy to walk over their waves when He pleased.

There is encouragement here for all true Christians. Let them know that *there is nothing created, which is not under Christ's control.* "All things serve Him." He may allow His people to be tried for a season, and tossed to and fro by storms of trouble. He may be later than they wish in coming to their aid, and not draw near until the "fourth watch of the night." But never let them forget that winds, and waves, and storms are all Christ's servants. They cannot move without Christ's permission. "The Lord on high is mightier than the voice of many waters, yes than the mighty waves of the sea." (Psalm 93:4.) Are we ever tempted to cry with Jonah, "the flood was all around me. All your waves and your billows passed over me." (Jonah 2:3.) Let us remember they are "His" billows. Let us wait patiently. We may yet see Jesus coming to us, and "walking on the sea."

We learn, in the second place, from this miracle, ***what power Jesus can bestow on those who believe on Him.*** We see Simon Peter coming down out of the ship, and walking on the water, like His Lord. What a wonderful proof was this of our Lord's divinity! To walk on the sea Himself was a mighty miracle. But to enable a poor weak disciple to do the same, was a mightier miracle still.

There is a deep meaning in this part of our history. It shows us what great things our Lord can do for those that hear His voice, and follow Him. He can enable them to do things which at one time they would have thought impossible. He can carry them through difficulties and trials, which without Him they would never have dared to face. He can give them strength to walk through fire and

water unharmed, and to get the better of every foe. Moses in Egypt, Daniel in Babylon, the saints in Nero's household, are all examples of His mighty power. Let us fear nothing, if we are in the path of duty. The waters may seem deep. But if Jesus says, "Come," we have no cause to be afraid. "He who believes in me, the works that I do he will do also, and greater works than these will he do." (John 14:12.)

Let us learn, in the third place, from this miracle, ***how much trouble disciples bring on themselves by unbelief.*** We see Peter walking boldly on the water for a little way. But by and bye, when be sees "the wind was strong," he is afraid, and begins to sink. The weak flesh gets the better of the willing spirit. He forgets the wonderful proofs of his Lord's goodness and power, which he had just received. He considered not that the same Savior who had enabled him to walk one step, must be able to hold him up forever. He did not reflect that he was nearer to Christ when once on the water, than he was when he first left the ship. Fear took away his memory. Alarm confused his reason. He thought of nothing but the winds and waves and his immediate danger, and his faith gave way. "Lord," He cried, "save me."

What a lively picture we have here of the experience of many a believer! How many there are who have faith enough to take the first step in following Christ, but not faith enough to go on as they begun. They take fright at the trials and dangers which seem to be in their way. They look at the *enemies* that surround them, and the *difficulties* that seem likely to beset their path. They dwell on them

more than on Jesus, and at once their feet begin to sink. Their hearts faint within them. Their hope vanishes away. Their comforts disappear. And why is all this? Christ is not altered. Their enemies are not greater than they were. It is just because, like Peter, *they have ceased to look to Jesus, and have given way to unbelief*. They are taken up with thinking about their enemies, instead of thinking about Christ. May we lay this to heart, and learn wisdom.

Let us learn, in the last place, from this miracle, ***how merciful our Lord Jesus Christ is to weak believers.*** We see Him stretching forth His hand immediately to save Peter, as soon as Peter cried to Him. He does not leave him to reap the fruit of his own unbelief, and sink in the deep waters. He only seems to consider his trouble, and to think of nothing so much as delivering him from it. The only word He utters, is the gentle reproof, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

Behold in this concluding part of the miracle, the exceeding "gentleness of Christ!" He can bear with much, and forgive much, when He sees true grace in a man's heart. As a mother deals gently with her infant, and does not cast it away because of its little waywardness and frowardness, so does the Lord Jesus deal gently with His people. He loved and pitied them before conversion, and after conversion He loves and pities them still more. He knows their feebleness, and bears long with them. He would have us know that doubting does not prove that a man has no faith, but only that his faith is small. And even when our faith is small, the Lord is ready to

help us. “When I said, my foot is slipping, your loving-kindness, O Lord, held me up.” (Psalm. 94:18.)

How much there is in all this to encourage men to serve Christ! Where is the man that ought to be afraid to begin running the Christian race, with such a Savior as Jesus? If we fall, He will raise us again. If we err, He will bring us back. But His mercy shall never be altogether taken from us. He has said, “I will never leave you, nor forsake you,” and He will keep His word. May we only remember, that while we do not despise little faith, we must not sit down content with it. Our prayer must ever be, “Lord, increase our faith.”

Matthew – Chap. 15

MATTHEW 15:1-9

Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem, saying, “Why do your disciples disobey the tradition of the elders? For they don’t wash their hands when they eat bread.”

He answered them, “Why do you also disobey the commandment of God because of your tradition? For God commanded, ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and, ‘He who speaks evil of father or mother, let him be put to death.’ But you say, ‘Whoever may tell his father or his mother, Whatever help you might otherwise have gotten from me is a gift devoted to God,’ he

shall not honor his father or mother.' 'You have made the commandment of God void because of your tradition. You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, 'These people draw near to me with their mouth, and honor me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. And in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrine rules made by men.'"

We have in these verses a conversation between our Lord Jesus Christ, and certain Scribes and Pharisees. The subject of it may seem, at first sight, of little interest in modern days. But it is not so in reality. The principles of the Pharisees are principles that never die. There are truths laid down here, which are of deep importance.

We learn, for one thing, that ***hypocrites generally attach great importance to mere outward things in religion.***

The complaint of the Scribes and Pharisees in this place, is a striking case in point. They brought an accusation to our Lord against His disciples. But what was its nature? It was not that they were covetous or self-righteous. It was not that they were untruthful or uncharitable. It was not that they had broken any part of the law of God. But they "disobey the tradition of the elders. They don't wash their hands when they eat bread." They did not observe some rule of mere human authority, which some old Jew had invented! This was the head and front of their offence!

Do we see nothing of the spirit of the Pharisees in the present day? Unhappily we see only too much. There are thousands of

professing Christians, who seem to care nothing about the religion of their neighbors, provided that it agrees in outward matters with their own. Does their neighbor worship according to their particular form? Can he repeat their shibboleth, and talk a little about their favorite doctrines? If he can, they are satisfied, though there is no evidence that he is converted. If he cannot, they are always finding fault, and cannot speak peaceably of him, though he may be serving Christ better than themselves. Let us beware of this spirit. It is the very essence of hypocrisy. Let our principle be— "the kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit." (Rom. 14:17.)

We learn, for another thing, from these verses, ***the great danger of attempting to add anything to the word of God.*** Whenever a man takes upon him to make additions to the Scriptures, he is likely to end with valuing his own additions above Scripture itself.

We see this point brought out most strikingly in our Lord's answer to the charge of the Pharisees against His disciples. He says, "Why do you disobey the commandment of God because of your *tradition?"* He strikes boldly at the whole system of adding anything, as needful to salvation, to God's perfect word. He exposes the mischievous tendency of the system by an example. He shows how the vaunted traditions of the Pharisees were actually destroying the authority of the fifth commandment. In short, He establishes the great truth, which ought never be forgotten, that there is an inherent

tendency in all traditions, to “make the commandment of God void.” The authors of these traditions may have meant no such thing. Their intentions may have been pure. But that there is a tendency in all religious institutions of mere human authority, to usurp the authority of God’s word, is evidently the doctrine of Christ. It is a solemn remark of Bucer’s, that “a man is rarely to be found, who pays an excessive attention to human inventions in religion, who does not put more trust in them than in the grace of God.”

And have we not seen melancholy proof of this truth, in the history of the Church of Christ? Unhappily we have seen only too much. As Baxter says, “men think God’s laws too many and too strict, and yet make more of their own, and are precise for keeping them.” Have we never read how some have exalted canons, rubrics, and ecclesiastical laws above the word of God, and punished disobedience to them with far greater severity than open sins, like drunkenness and swearing? Have we never heard of the extravagant importance which the Church of Rome attaches to monastic vows, and vows of celibacy, and keeping feasts and fasts; insomuch that she seems to place them far above family duties, and the ten commandments? Have we never heard of men who make more ado about eating meat in Lent, than about gross impurity of life, or murder? Have we never observed in our own land, how many seem to make adherence to Episcopacy the weightiest matter in Christianity, and to regard “Churchmanship,” as they call it, as far outweighing repentance, faith, holiness, and the graces of the Spirit?

These are questions which can only receive one sorrowful answer. The spirit of the Pharisees still lives, after eighteen hundred years. The disposition to "make the commandment of God void by traditions," is to be found among Christians, as well as among Jews. The tendency practically to exalt man's inventions above God's word, is still fearfully prevalent. May we watch against it, and be on our guard! May we remember that no tradition or man-made institution in religion can ever excuse the neglect of relative duties, or justify disobedience to any plain commandment of God's word.

We learn, in the last place, from these verses, that ***the religious worship which God desires, is the worship of the heart.*** We find our Lord establishing this by a quotation from Isaiah, "This people draws near to me with their lips, but their heart is far from me."

The heart is the principal thing in the relation of husband and wife, of friend and friend, of parent and child. The heart must be the principal point to which we attend in all the relations between God and our souls. What is the first thing we need, in order to be Christians? A new heart. What is the sacrifice God asks us to bring to him? A broken and a contrite heart. What is the true circumcision? The circumcision of the heart. What is genuine obedience? To obey from the heart. What is saving faith? To believe with the heart. Where ought Christ to dwell? To dwell in our hearts by faith. What is the chief request that Wisdom makes to every one? "My son, give me your heart."

Let us leave the passage with honest self-inquiry as to the state of our own hearts. Let us settle it in our minds, that all formal worship of God, whether in public or private, is utterly in vain, so long as our "hearts are far from Him." The bended knee, the bowed head, the loud amen, the daily chapter, the regular attendance at the Lord's table, are all useless and unprofitable, so long as our affections are nailed to sin, or pleasure, or money, or the world. The question of our Lord must yet be answered satisfactorily, before we can be saved. He says to every one, "Do you love me?" (John 21:17.)

MATTHEW 15:10-20

He summoned the multitude, and said to them, "Hear, and understand. That which enters into the mouth doesn't defile the man; but that which proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man."

Then the disciples came, and said to him, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended, when they heard this saying?"

But he answered, "Every plant which my heavenly Father didn't plant will be uprooted. Leave them alone. They are blind guides of the blind. If the blind guide the blind, both will fall into a pit."

Peter answered him, "Explain the parable to us."

So Jesus said, "Do you also still not understand? Don't you understand that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the belly, and then out of the body? But the things which proceed out of the

mouth come out of the heart, and they defile the man. For out of the heart come forth evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, sexual sins, thefts, false testimony, and blasphemies. These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands doesn't defile the man."

There are two striking sayings of the Lord Jesus in this passage. One respects false doctrine. The other respects the human heart. Both of them deserve the closest attention.

Respecting FALSE DOCTRINE, our Lord declares, *that* ***it is a duty to oppose it, that its final destruction is sure, and that its teachers ought to be forsaken.*** He says, "Every plant which my heavenly Father didn't plant will be uprooted. Leave them alone."

It is clear from examination of the passage, that the disciples were surprised at our Lord's strong language about the Pharisees and their traditions. They had probably been accustomed from their youth to regard them as the wisest and best of men. They were startled to hear their Master denouncing them as hypocrites, and charging them with transgressing the commandment of God. "Do you know," they said, "that the Pharisees were offended." To this question we are indebted for our Lord's explanatory declaration—a declaration which perhaps has never received the notice it deserves.

The plain meaning of our Lord's words is, that false doctrine like that of the Pharisees, was a plant to which no mercy should be

shown. It was a “plant which His heavenly Father had not planted,” and a plant which it was a duty to root up, whatever offence it might cause. It was no charity to spare it, because it was injurious to the souls of men. It mattered nothing that those who planted it were high in office, or learned. If it contradicted the word of God, it ought to be opposed, refuted, and rejected. His disciples must therefore understand that it was right to resist all teaching that was unscriptural, and to “let alone,” and forsake all instructors who persisted in it. Sooner or later they would find that all false doctrine will be completely overthrown, and put to shame, and nothing shall stand but that which is built on the word of God.

There are lessons of deep wisdom in this saying of our Lord, which serve to throw light on the duty of many a professing Christian. Let us scan them well, and see what they are. It was practical obedience to this saying which produced the blessed Protestant Reformation. Its lessons deserve close attention.

Do we not see here ***the duty of boldness in resisting false teaching?*** Beyond doubt we do. No fear of giving offence, no dread of ecclesiastical censure, should make us hold our peace, when God’s truth is in peril. If we are true followers of our Lord, we ought to be outspoken, unflinching witnesses against error. “Truth,” says Musculus, “must not be suppressed because men are wicked and blind.”

Do we not see again ***the duty of forsaking false teachers, if they will not give up their delusions?*** Beyond doubt we do. No

false delicacy, no mock humility should make us shrink from leaving the ministrations of any minister who contradicts God's word. It is at our peril if we submit to unscriptural teaching. Our blood will be on our own heads. To use the words of Whitby, "It never can be right to follow the blind into the ditch."

Do we not see, in the last place, ***the duty of patience, when we see false teaching abound?*** Beyond doubt we do. We may take comfort in the thought that it will not stand long. God Himself will defend the cause of His own truth. Sooner or later every heresy "shall be rooted up." We are not to fight with carnal weapons, but wait, and preach, and protest, and pray. Sooner or later, as Wycliffe said, "the truth shall prevail."

Respecting the HEART OF MAN, our Lord declares in these verses, that ***it is the true source of all sin and defilement.*** The Pharisees taught that holiness depended on foods and drinks, on bodily washings and purification. They held that all who observed their traditions on these matters were pure and clean in God's sight, and that all who neglected them were impure and unclean. Our Lord overthrew this miserable doctrine, by showing His disciples that the real fountain of all defilement was not outside a man, but within. "Out of the heart," He says, "come forth evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, sexual sins, thefts, false testimony, and blasphemies. These are the things which defile the man." He that would serve God aright needs something far more important than bodily washings. He must seek to have "a clean heart."

What an dreadful picture we have here of human nature, and drawn too by one who knew what was in man. What a fearful catalogue is this of the contents of our own bosoms! What a melancholy list of seeds of evil our Lord has exposed, lying deep down within every one of us, and ready at any time to start into active life! What can the proud and self-righteous say, when they read such a passage as this? This is no sketch of the heart of a robber, or murderer. It is the true and faithful account of the hearts of all mankind. May God grant that we may ponder it well and learn wisdom!

Let it be a settled resolution with us, that *in all our religion the state of our hearts shall be the main thing*. Let it not content us to go to church, and observe the forms of religion. Let us look far deeper than this, and desire to have a "heart right in the sight of God." (Acts 8:21.) The right heart is a heart sprinkled with the blood of Christ, and renewed by the Holy Spirit, and purified by faith. Never let us rest until we find within the witness of the Spirit, that God has created in us a clean heart, and made all things new. (Psalm 51:10. 2 Cor. 5:17.)

Finally, let it be a settled resolution with us to "keep our hearts with all diligence," all the days of our lives. (Prov. 4:23.) Even after renewal they are weak. Even after putting on the new man they are deceitful. Let us never forget that *our chief danger is from within*. The world and the devil combined, cannot do us so much harm as our own hearts will, if we do not watch and pray. Happy is he who

remembers daily the words of Solomon, “One who trusts in himself is a fool.” (Prov. 28:26.)

MATTHEW 15:21-28

Jesus went out from there, and withdrew into the region of Tyre and Sidon. Behold, a Canaanite woman came out from those borders, and cried, saying, “Have mercy on me, Lord, you son of David! My daughter is severely demonized!”

But he answered her not a word.

His disciples came and begged him, saying, “Send her away; for she cries after us.”

But he answered, “I wasn’t sent to anyone but the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

But she came and worshiped him, saying, “Lord, help me.”

But he answered, “It is not appropriate to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.”

But she said, “Yes, Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.”

Then Jesus answered her, “Woman, great is your faith! Be it done to you even as you desire.” And her daughter was healed from that hour.

Another of our Lord's miracles is recorded in these verses. The circumstances which attend it are peculiarly full of interest. Let us take them up in order, and see what they are. Every word in these narratives is rich in instruction.

We see, in the first place, that ***true faith may sometimes be found, where it might have been least expected.***

A Caananitish woman cries to our Lord for help, on behalf of her daughter. "Have mercy on me," she says, "Lord, Son of David." Such a prayer would have showed great faith, had she lived in Bethany, or Jerusalem. But when we find that she came from the "coasts of Tyre and Sidon," such a prayer may well fill us with surprise. It ought to teach us, that it is grace, not place, which makes people believers. We may live in a prophet's family, like Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, and yet continue impenitent, unbelieving, and fond of the world. We may dwell in the midst of superstition and dark idolatry, like the little maid in Naaman's house, and yet be faithful witnesses for God and His Christ. Let us not despair of any one's soul, merely because his lot is cast in an unfavorable position. It is possible to dwell in the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, and yet sit down in the kingdom of God.

We see, in the second place, that ***affliction sometimes proves a blessing to a person's soul.***

This Caananitish mother no doubt had been severely tried. She had seen her darling child vexed with a devil, and been unable to relieve her. But yet that trouble brought her to Christ, and taught her

to pray. Without it she might have lived and died in careless ignorance, and never seen Jesus at all. Surely it was good for her that she was afflicted. (Psalm 119:71.)

Let us mark this well. There is nothing which shows our ignorance so much as our impatience under trouble. We forget that every cross is a message from God, and intended to do us good in the end. Trials are intended to make us think—to wean us from the world, to send us to the Bible, to drive us to our knees. Health is a good thing; but sickness is far better, if it leads us to God. Prosperity is a great mercy, but adversity is a greater one, if it brings us to Christ. Anything, anything is better than living in carelessness, and dying in sin. Better a thousand times be afflicted, like the Canaanitish mother, and like her flee to Christ, then live at ease, like the rich "fool," and die at last without Christ and without hope. (Luke 12:20.)

We see, in the third place, that ***Christ's people are often less gracious and compassionate than Christ Himself.***

The woman about whom we are reading, found small favor with our Lord's disciples. Perhaps they regarded an inhabitant of the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, as unworthy of their Master's help. At any rate they said, "Send her away."

There is only too much of this spirit among many who profess and call themselves believers. They are apt to discourage inquirers after Christ, instead of helping them forward. They are too ready to

doubt the reality of a beginner's grace, because it is small, and to treat him as Saul was treated when he first came to Jerusalem after his conversion. "They did not believe that he was a disciple." (Acts 9:26.) Let us beware of giving way to this spirit. Let us seek to have more of the mind that was in Christ. Like Him let us be gentle, and kind, and encouraging in all our treatment of those who are seeking to be saved. Above all, let us tell men continually that *they must not judge of Christ by Christians.* Let us assure those who there is far more in that gracious Master, than there is in the best of His servants. Peter, and James, and John may say to the afflicted soul, "Send her away." But such a word never came from the lips of Christ. He may sometimes keep us long waiting, as He did this woman. But He will never send us empty away.

We see, in the last place, ***what encouragement there is to persevere in prayer, both for ourselves and others.***

It is hard to conceive a more striking illustration of this truth, than we have in this passage. The prayer of this afflicted mother at first seemed entirely unnoticed—Jesus "answered her not a word." Yet she prayed on. The answer which by and bye fell from our Lord's lips sounded discouraging— "I wasn't sent to anyone but the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Yet she prayed on, "Lord, help me." The second answer of our Lord was even less encouraging than the first—"It is not appropriate to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." Yet "hope deferred" did not "make her heart sick." (Prov. 13:12.) Even then she was not silenced. Even then she finds a plea for

some “crumbs” of mercy to be granted to her. And her importunity obtained at length a gracious reward. “Woman, great is your faith! Be it done to you even as you desire.” That promise never yet was broken, “Seek and you shall find.” (Matt. 7:7.)

Let us remember this history, *when we pray for ourselves*. We are sometimes tempted to think that we get no good by our prayers, and that we may as well give them up altogether. Let us resist the temptation. It comes from the devil. Let us believe, and pray on. Against our besetting sins, against the spirit of the world, against the wiles of the devil, let us pray on, and not faint. For strength to do duty, for grace to bear our trials, for comfort in every trouble, let us continue in prayer. Let us be sure that *no time is so well-spent in every day, as that which we spend upon our knees*. Jesus hears us, and in his own good time will give an answer.

Let us remember this history, *when we intercede for others*. Have we children, whose conversion we desire? Have we relatives and friends, about whose salvation we are anxious? Let us follow the example of this Canaanitish woman, and lay the state of their souls before Christ. Let us name their names before Him night and day, and never rest until we have an answer. We may have to wait many a long year. We may seem to pray in vain, and intercede without profit. But let us never give up. Let us believe that Jesus is not changed, and that He who heard the Canaanitish mother, and granted her request, will also hear us, and one day give us an answer of peace.

MATTHEW 15:29-39

Jesus departed there, and came near to the sea of Galilee; and he went up into the mountain, and sat there. Great multitudes came to him, having with them the lame, blind, mute, maimed, and many others, and they put them down at his feet. He healed them, so that the multitude wondered when they saw the mute speaking, injured whole, lame walking, and blind seeing—and they glorified the God of Israel.

Jesus summoned his disciples and said, "I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days and have nothing to eat. I don't want to send them away fasting, or they might faint on the way."

The disciples said to him, "Where should we get so many loaves in a deserted place as to satisfy so great a multitude?"

Jesus said to them, "How many loaves do you have?"

They said, "Seven, and a few small fish."

He commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground; and he took the seven loaves and the fish. He gave thanks and broke them, and gave to the disciples, and the disciples to the multitudes. They all ate, and were filled. They took up seven baskets full of the broken pieces that were left over. Those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children. Then he sent away the multitudes, got into the boat, and came into the borders of Magdala.

The beginning of this passage contains three points which deserve our special attention. For the present let us dwell exclusively on them.

In the first place, let us remark, ***how much more pain people take about the relief of their bodily diseases, than about their souls.*** We read, that "great multitudes came to him, having with them the lame, blind, mute, maimed, and many others." Many of them, no doubt, had journeyed many miles, and gone through great fatigues. Nothing is so difficult and troublesome, as to move sick people. But the *hope of being healed* was in sight. Such hope is everything to a sick man.

We know little of human nature, if we wonder at the conduct of these people. We need not wonder at all. They felt that health was the greatest of earthly blessings. They felt that pain was the hardest of all trials to bear. There is no arguing against sense. A man feels his strength failing. He sees his body wasting, and his face becoming pale. He is sensible that his appetite is leaving him. He knows, in short, that he is ill, and needs a physician. Show him a physician within reach, who is said never to fail in working cures, and he will go to him without delay.

Let us however not forget that *our souls are far more diseased than our bodies*, and learn a lesson from the conduct of these people. Our souls are afflicted with a malady far more deep-seated, far more complicated, far more hard to cure than any ailment that flesh is heir to. They are in fact plague-stricken by sin. They must be healed, and

healed effectually, or perish everlastingly. Do we really know this? Do we feel it? Are we alive to our spiritual disease? Alas! there is but one answer to these questions. The bulk of mankind do not feel it at all. Their eyes are blinded. They are utterly insensible to their danger. For bodily health they crowd the waiting-rooms of doctors. For bodily health they take long journeys to find purer air. But for their soul's health they take no thought at all. Happy indeed is that man or woman who has found out his soul's disease! Such an one will never rest until he has found Jesus. Troubles will seem nothing to him. Life, life, eternal life is at stake. He will count all things loss that he may win Christ, and be healed.

In the second place, let us remark *the* ***marvelous ease and power with which our Lord healed all who were brought to Him.*** We read that "the multitude wondered when they saw the mute speaking, injured whole, lame walking, and blind seeing—and they glorified the God of Israel."

Behold in these words a lively emblem of our Lord Jesus Christ's power to heal sin-diseased souls! There is no ailment of heart that He cannot cure. There is no form of spiritual complaint that He cannot overcome. The fever of lust, the palsy of the love of the world, the slow consumption of indolence and sloth, the heart-disease of unbelief, all, all give way when he sends forth His Spirit on any one of the children of men. He can put a new song in a sinner's mouth, and make him speak with love of that Gospel which he once ridiculed and blasphemed. He can open the eyes of a man's understanding and

make him see the kingdom of God. He can open the ears of a man and make him willing to hear His voice, and follow Him wherever He goes. He can give power to a man who once walked in the broad way that leads unto destruction, to walk in the way of life. He can make hands that were once instruments of sin, serve Him and do His will. The time of miracles is not yet past. Every conversion is a miracle. Have we ever seen a real instance of conversion? Let us know that we saw in it the hand of Christ. We should have seen nothing really greater, if we had seen our Lord making the dumb to speak, and the lame to walk, when He was on earth.

Would we know what to do, if we desire to be saved? Do we feel soul-sick and want a cure? We must just go to Christ by faith and apply to Him for relief. He is not changed. Eighteen hundred years have made no difference in Him. High at the right hand of God He is still the great Physician. He still "receives sinners." He is still mighty to heal.

In the third place, let us remark ***the abundant compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ.*** We read that Jesus summoned his disciples and said, "I have compassion on the multitude." A great crowd of men and women is always a solemn sight. It should stir our hearts to feel that each is a dying sinner, and each has a soul to be saved. None ever seems to have felt so much when he saw a crowd, as Christ.

It is a curious and striking fact that of all the feelings experienced by our Lord when upon earth, there is none so often mentioned as

“compassion.” His joy, His sorrow, His thankfulness, His anger, His wonder, His zeal, are all occasionally recorded. But none of these feelings are so frequently mentioned as “compassion.” The Holy Spirit seems to point out to us, that this was the distinguishing feature of His character, and the predominant feeling of His mind, when He was among men. Nine times over—to say nothing of expressions in parables—nine times over the Spirit has caused that word “compassion” to be written in the Gospels.

There is something very touching and instructive in this circumstance. Nothing is written by chance, in the word of God. There is a special reason for the selection of every single expression. That word “compassion,” no doubt, was specially chosen for our profit.

It ought to encourage all who are hesitating about beginning to walk in God’s ways. Let them remember that their Savior is full of “compassion.” He will receive them graciously. He will forgive them freely. He will remember their former iniquities no more. He will abundantly supply all their needs. Let them not be afraid. *Christ’s mercy is a deep well, of which no one ever found the bottom.*

It ought to comfort the saints and servants of the Lord when they feel weary. Let them call to mind that Jesus is full of “compassion.” He knows what a world it is in which they live. He knows the body of a man and all its frailties. He knows the devices of their enemy, the devil. And the Lord pities His people. Let them not be cast down. They may feel that weakness, failure, and imperfection are stamped

on all they do. But let them not forget that word which says, “His compassions fail not.” (Lam. 3:22.)

Matthew – Chap. 16

MATTHEW 16:1-12

The Pharisees and Sadducees came, and testing him, asked him to show them a sign from heaven. But he answered them, “When it is evening, you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.’ In the morning, ‘It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening.’ Hypocrites! You know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but you can’t discern the signs of the times! An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and there will be no sign given to it, except the sign of the prophet Jonah.”

He left them, and departed. The disciples came to the other side and had forgotten to take bread. Jesus said to them, “Take heed and beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”

They reasoned among themselves, saying, “We brought no bread.”

Jesus, perceiving it, said, “Why do you reason among yourselves, you of little faith, ‘because you have brought no bread?’ Don’t you yet perceive, neither remember the five loaves for the five

thousand, and how many baskets you took up? Nor the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many baskets you took up? How is it that you don't perceive that I didn't speak to you concerning bread? But beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees."

Then they understood that he didn't tell them to beware of the yeast of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

In these verses we find our Lord assailed by the untiring enmity of the Pharisees and Sadducees. As a general rule these two sects were at enmity between themselves. In persecuting Christ, however, they made common cause. Truly it was *an unholy alliance!* Yet how often we see the same thing in the present day. Men of the most opposite opinions and habits will agree in disliking the Gospel, and will work together to oppose its progress. "There is no new thing under the sun." (Eccles. 1:9.)

The first point in this passage which deserves special notice, is ***the repetition which our Lord makes of words used by Him on a former occasion.*** He says, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and there will be no sign given to it, except the sign of the prophet Jonah." If we turn to the twelfth chapter of this Gospel and the 39th verse, we shall find that He had said the very same thing once before.

This repetition may seem a trifling and unimportant matter in the eyes of some. But it is not so in reality. It throws light on a subject,

which has perplexed the minds of many sincere lovers of the Bible, and ought therefore to be specially observed.

This repetition shows us that our Lord was in the habit of *saying the same things over again*. He did not content Himself with saying a thing once, and afterwards never repeating it. It is evident that it was His custom to bring forward certain truths again and again, and thus to impress them more deeply on the minds of His disciples. He knew the weakness of our memories in spiritual things. He knew that what we hear twice, we remember better than what we hear once. He therefore brought out of His treasury old things as well as new.

Now what does all this teach us? It teaches us that we need not be so anxious to *harmonize* the narratives we read in the four Gospels, as many are disposed to be. It does not follow that the sayings of our Lord, which we find the same in Matthew and Luke, were always used at the same time, or that the events with which they are connected must necessarily be the same. Matthew may be describing one event in our Lord's life. Luke may be describing another. And yet the words of our Lord, on both occasions, may have been precisely alike. To attempt to make out the two events to be one and the same, because of the sameness of the words used, has often led Bible students into great difficulties. It is far safer to hold the view here maintained, that *at different times our Lord often used the same words*.

The second point which deserves special notice in these verses is, ***the solemn warning which our Lord takes occasion to give***

to His disciples. His mind was evidently pained with the false doctrines which He saw among the Jews, and the pernicious influence which they exercised. He seizes the opportunity to utter a caution. “Take heed and beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” Let us mark well what those words contain.

To *whom* was this warning addressed? To the twelve apostles—to the first ministers of the Church of Christ—to men who had forsaken all for the Gospel’s sake! Even they are warned! *The best of men are only men*, and at any time may fall into temptation. “Let him who thinks he stands be careful that he doesn’t fall.” If we love life, and would see good days, let us never think that we do not need that hint, “take heed, and beware.”

Against *what* does our Lord warn His apostles? Against the “doctrine” of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees. The Pharisees, we are frequently told in the Gospels, were self-righteous formalists. The Sadducees were skeptics, freethinkers, and half infidels. Yet even Peter, James, and John must beware of their doctrines! Truly the best and holiest of believers may well be on his guard!

By what *figure* does our Lord describe the false doctrines against which He cautions His disciples? He calls them *yeast*. Like yeast, they might seem a small thing compared to the whole body of truth. Like yeast, once admitted they would work secretly and noiselessly. Like yeast, they would gradually change the whole character of the religion with which they were mixed. How much is often contained

in a single word! It was not merely the open danger of heresy, but "yeast," of which the apostles were to beware.

There is much in all this that calls loudly for the close attention of all professing Christians. The caution of our Lord in this passage has been shamefully neglected. It would have been well for the church of Christ, if the warnings of the Gospel had been as much studied as its promises.

Let us then remember that this saying of our Lord's about the "yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees" was intended for all time. It was not meant only for the generation to which it was spoken. It was meant for the perpetual benefit of the Church of Christ. He who spoke it saw with prophetical eye the future history of Christianity. The Great Physician knew well that Pharisee-doctrines and Sadducee-doctrines would prove the two great wasting diseases of His Church, until the end of the world. He would have us know that there will always be Pharisees and Sadducees in the ranks of Christians. Their succession shall never fail. Their generation shall never become extinct. Their name may change, but their spirit will always remain. Therefore He cries to us, "take heed and beware."

Finally, let us make a *personal use* of this caution, by keeping up *a holy jealousy over our own souls*. Let us remember, that we live in a world where Pharisaism and Sadduceeism are continually striving for the mastery in the Church of Christ. Some want to ADD to the Gospel, and some want to TAKE AWAY from it. Some would bury it, and some would pare it down to nothing. Some would stifle it by

heaping on additions, and some would bleed it to death by subtraction from its truths. Both parties agree only in one respect. Both would kill and destroy the life of Christianity, if they succeeded in having their own way. Against both errors let us watch and pray, and stand upon our guard. Let us not add to the Gospel, to please the Roman Catholic Pharisee. Let us not subtract from the Gospel, to please the Neologian Sadducee. Let our principle be "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth," nothing added to it, and nothing taken away.

MATTHEW 16:13-20

Now when Jesus came into the parts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?"

They said, "Some say John the Baptizer, some, Elijah, and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets."

He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. I also tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it. I will give to you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatever you

bind on earth will have been bound in heaven; and whatever you release on earth will have been released in heaven." Then he charged the disciples that they should tell no one that he is Jesus the Christ.

There are words in this passage which have led to painful differences and divisions among Christians. Men have striven and contended about their meaning, until they have lost sight of all charity, and yet failed to carry conviction to one another's minds. Let it suffice us to **glance briefly at the controverted words**, and then pass on to more practical lessons.

What, then are we to understand, when we read that remarkable saying of our Lord's, "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church?" Does it mean that the apostle Peter himself was to be the foundation on which Christ's Church was to be built? Such an interpretation, to say the least, appears exceedingly improbable. To speak of an erring, fallible child of Adam as the foundation of the spiritual temple, is very unlike the ordinary language of Scripture. Above all, no reason can be given why our Lord should not have said, "I will build my church upon *you,"*—if such had been His meaning, instead of saying, "On this rock I will build my church."

The true meaning of "the rock" in this passage appears to be the truth of our Lord's Messiahship and divinity, which Peter had just confessed. It is as though our Lord had said, "You are rightly called by the name Peter, or stone, for you have confessed that mighty truth, on which, as on a rock, I will build my church."

But what are we to understand, when we read the promise which our Lord makes to Peter, “I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven?” Do these words mean that the right of admitting souls to heaven was to be placed in Peter’s hands? The idea is preposterous. Such an office is the special prerogative of Christ Himself. (Rev. 1:18.) Do the words mean that Peter was to have any primacy or superiority over the rest of the apostles? There is not the slightest proof that such a meaning was attached to the words in the New Testament times, or that Peter had any rank or dignity above the rest of the twelve.

The true meaning of the promise to Peter appears to be, that *he was to have the special privilege of first opening the door of salvation, both to the Jews and Gentiles*. This was fulfilled to the letter, when he preached on the day of Pentecost to the Jews, and visited the Gentile Cornelius at his own house. On each occasion he used “the keys,” and threw open the door of faith. And of this he seems to have been sensible himself— “God,” he says, “made choice among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the Gospel, and believe.” (Acts 15:7.)

Finally, what are we to understand, when we read the words, “Whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven; and whatever you release on earth will have been released in heaven?” Does this mean that the apostle Peter was to have any power of forgiving sins, and absolving sinners? Such an idea is derogatory to Christ’s special office, as our Great High Priest. It is a power which

we never find Peter, or any of the apostles, once exercising. They always refer men to Christ.

The true meaning of this promise appears to be, that Peter and his brethren, the apostles, were to be *specially commissioned to teach with authority the way of salvation*. As the Old Testament priest declared authoritatively whose leprosy was cleansed, so *the apostles were appointed to "declare and pronounce" authoritatively, whose sins were forgiven*. Beside this, they were to be specially inspired to lay down rules and regulations for the guidance of the Church on disputed questions. Some things they were to "bind" or forbid—others they were to "loose" or allow. The decision of the council at Jerusalem, that the Gentiles need not be circumcised, was one example of the exercise of this power (Acts 15:19.) But it was a commission specially confined to the apostles. In discharging it they had no successors. With them it began, and with them it expired.

We will leave these controverted words here. Enough perhaps has been said upon them for our personal edification. Let us only remember that, in whatever sense men take them, they have nothing to do with the Church of Rome. Let us now turn our attention to points which more immediately concern our own souls.

In the first place, let us admire ***the noble confession which the apostle Peter makes in this passage.*** He says, in reply to our Lord's question, "Who do you say that I am?"— "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

At first sight a careless reader may see nothing very remarkable in these words of the apostle. He may think it extraordinary that they should call forth such strong commendation from our Lord. But such thoughts arise from ignorance and inconsideration. Men forget that it is a widely different thing to believe in Christ's divine mission, when we dwell in the midst of professing Christians, and to believe in it when we dwell in the midst of hardened and unbelieving Jews. The glory of Peter's confession lies in this, that he made it when few were with Christ and many against Him. He made it when the rulers of his own nation, the Scribes, and Priests, and Pharisees, were all opposed to his Master. He made it when our Lord was in the "form of a servant," without wealth, without royal dignity, without any visible marks of a King. To make such a confession at such a time, required great faith and great decision of character. The confession itself, as Brentius says, "was an epitome of all Christianity, and a compendium of true doctrine about religion." Therefore it was that our Lord said, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah."

We shall do well to copy that hearty zeal and affection which Peter here displayed. We are perhaps too much disposed to underrate this holy man, because of his occasional instability, and his thrice-repeated denial of his Lord. This is a great mistake. With all his faults, Peter was a true-hearted, fervent, single-minded servant of Christ. With all his imperfections, he has given us a pattern that many Christians would do wisely to follow. Zeal like his may have its ebbs and flows, and sometimes lack steadiness of purpose. Zeal like his may be ill-directed, and sometimes make sad mistakes. But zeal

like his is not to be despised. It awakens the sleeping. It stirs the sluggish. It provokes others to exertion. Anything is better than sluggishness, lukewarmness, and torpor, in the Church of Christ. Happy would it have been for Christendom had there been more Christians like Peter and Martin Luther, and fewer like Erasmus.

In the next place, let us take care that ***we understand what our Lord means when He speaks of His Church.***

The Church which Jesus promises to build upon a rock, is the "blessed company of all believing people." It is not the *visible* church of any one nation, or country, or place. It is the whole body of believers of every age, and tongue, and people. It is a church composed of all who are washed in Christ's blood, clothed in Christ's righteousness, renewed by Christ's Spirit, joined to Christ by faith, and epistles of Christ in life. It is a church of which every member is baptized with the Holy Spirit, and is really and truly holy. It is a church which is one body. All who belong to it are of one heart and one mind, hold the same truths, and believe the same doctrines as necessary to salvation. It is a church which has only one Head. That head is Jesus Christ Himself. "He is the head of the body." (Col. 1:18.)

Let us beware of mistakes on this subject. Few words are so much misunderstood as the word "Church." Few mistakes have so much injured the cause of pure religion. Ignorance on this point has been a fertile source of bigotry, sectarianism, and persecution. Men have wrangled and contended about Episcopal, Presbyterian, and

Independent Churches, as if it were needful to salvation to belong to some particular party, and as if, belonging to that party, we must of course belong to Christ. And all this time they have lost sight of the one true Church, outside of which there is no salvation at all. It will matter nothing at the last day where we have worshiped, if we are not found members of the true Church of God's elect.

In the last place, let us mark ***the glorious promises which our Lord makes to His Church***. He says, "all the powers of hell will not conquer it."

The meaning of this promise is, that the power of Satan shall never destroy the people of Christ. He that brought sin and death into the first creation, by tempting Eve, shall never bring ruin on the new creation, by overthrowing believers. The mystical body of Christ shall never perish or decay. Though often persecuted, afflicted, distressed, and brought low, it shall never come to an end. It shall outlive the wrath of Pharaohs and Roman Emperors. Visible churches, like Ephesus, may come to nothing. But the true Church never dies. Like the bush that Moses saw, it may burn, but shall not be consumed. Every member of it shall be brought safe to glory, In spite of falls, failures, and short-comings—in spite of the world, the flesh, and the devil—no member of the true Church shall ever be cast away. (John 10:28.)

MATTHEW 16:21-23

From that time, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and the third day be raised up.

Peter took him aside, and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This will never be done to you."

But he turned, and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me, for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of men."

In the beginning of these verses we find our Lord revealing to His disciples a great and startling truth. That truth was His approaching death upon the cross. For the first time He places before their minds the astounding announcement, that "He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer—and be killed." He had not come on earth to take a kingdom, but to die. He had not come to reign, and be served, but to shed His blood as a sacrifice, and to give His life as a ransom for many.

It is almost impossible for us to conceive how strange and incomprehensible these tidings must have seemed to His disciples. Like most of the Jews, they could form no idea of a *suffering* Messiah. They did not understand that the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah must be literally fulfilled. They did not see that the sacrifices of the law were all meant to point them to the death of the true Lamb of God. They thought of nothing but the second glorious coming of Messiah, which is yet to take place at the end of the world. They thought so much of Messiah's *crown*, that they lost sight of His

cross. We shall do well to remember this. A right understanding of this matter throws strong light on the lessons which this passage contains.

We learn, in the first place, from these verses, that ***there may be much spiritual ignorance even in a true disciple of Christ.***

We cannot have a clearer proof of this, than the conduct of the apostle Peter in this passage. He tries to dissuade our Lord from suffering on the cross. “Far be it from you, Lord,” he says, “this will not be done to you.” He did not see the full purpose of our Lord’s coming into the world. His eyes were blinded to the necessity of our Lord’s death. He actually did what he could, to prevent that death taking place at all! And yet we know that Peter was a converted man. He really believed that Jesus was the Messiah. His heart was right in the sight of God.

These things are meant to teach us that we must neither regard saved men as infallible, because they are saved men, nor yet suppose they have no grace, because their grace is weak and small. One brother may possess singular gifts, and be a bright and shining light in the Church of Christ. But let us not forget that he is a man, and as a man liable to commit great mistakes. Another brother’s knowledge may be scanty. He may fail to judge rightly on many points of doctrine. He may err both in word and deed. But has he faith and love towards Christ? Does he hold the Head? If so, let us deal patiently with him. What he sees not now, he may see hereafter. Like

Peter, he may now be in the dark, and yet, like Peter, enjoy one day the full light of the Gospel.

Let us learn, in the second place, from these verses, that ***there is no doctrine of Scripture so deeply important as the doctrine of Christ's atoning death.***

We cannot have clearer proof of this, than the language used by our Lord in rebuking Peter. He addresses him by the dreadful name of "Satan," as if he was an *adversary*, and doing the devil's work, in trying to prevent His death. He says to him, whom he had so lately called "blessed," "Get behind me, Satan! You are an offence unto me." He tells the man whose noble confession he had just commended so highly, "for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of men." Stronger words than these never fell from our Lord's lips. The error that drew from so loving a Savior such a stern rebuke to such a true disciple, must have been a mighty error indeed.

The truth is, that our Lord would have us regard the crucifixion as the central truth of Christianity. Right views of His vicarious death, and the benefits resulting from it, lie at the very foundation of Bible-religion. Never let us forget this. On matters of church government, and the form of worship, men may differ from us, and yet reach heaven in safety. On the matter of Christ's atoning death, as the way of peace, truth is only one. If we are wrong here, we are ruined forever. *Error on many other points is only a skin disease. Error about Christ's death is a disease at the heart.* Here let us take our

stand. Let nothing move us from this ground. The sum of all our hopes must be, that "Christ has died for us." (1 Thess. 5:10.) Give up that doctrine, and we have no solid hope at all.

MATTHEW 16:24-28

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, and whoever will lose his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man will come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he will render to everyone according to his deeds. Most certainly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste of death, until they see the Son of Man coming in his Kingdom."

In order to see the connection of these verses, we must remember the mistaken impressions of our Lord's disciples as to the purpose of His coming into the world. Like Peter, they could not bear the idea of the crucifixion. They thought that Jesus had come to set up an earthly kingdom. They did not see that He *must* suffer and die. They dreamed of worldly honors and temporal rewards in their Master's service. They did not understand that true Christians, like Christ, must be made perfect through sufferings. Our Lord corrects these misapprehensions in words of peculiar solemnity, which we shall do well to lay up in our hearts.

Let us learn, in the first place, from these verses, that ***men must make up their minds to trouble and self-denial, if they follow Christ.***

Our Lord dispels the fond dreams of His disciples, by telling those who His followers must "take up the cross." The glorious kingdom they were expecting, was not about to be set up immediately. They must make up their minds to persecution and affliction, if they intended to be His servants. They must be content to "lose their lives," if they would have their souls saved.

It is good for us all to see this point clearly. We must not conceal from ourselves that true Christianity brings with it a *daily cross in this life*, while it offers us a crown of glory in the life to come. The flesh must be daily crucified. The devil must be daily resisted. The world must be daily overcome. There is a warfare to be waged, and a battle to be fought. All this is the inseparable accompaniment of true religion. Heaven is not to be won without it. Never was there a truer word than the old saying, "No cross, no crown!" If we never found this out by experience, our souls are in a poor condition.

Let us learn, in the second place, from these verses, that ***there is nothing so precious as a man's soul.***

Our Lord teaches this lesson by asking one of the most solemn questions that the New Testament contains. It is a question so well known, and so often repeated, that people often lose sight of its searching character. But it is a question that ought to sound in our

ears like a trumpet, whenever we are tempted to neglect our eternal interests— “What will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul?”

There can only be one answer to this question. There is nothing on earth, or under the earth, that can make amends to us for the loss of our souls. There is nothing that money can buy, or man can give, to be named in comparison with our souls. The world, and all that it contains is temporal. It is all fading, perishing, and passing away. The soul is eternal. That one single word is the key to the whole question. Let it sink down deeply into our hearts. Are we wavering in our religion? Do we fear the cross? Does the way seem too narrow? Let our Master’s words ring in our ears, “What will it profit a man?” and let us doubt no more.

Let us learn, in the last place, that ***the second coming of Christ is the time when His people shall receive their rewards.*** “The Son of Man will come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he will render to everyone according to his deeds.”

There is deep wisdom in this saying of our Lord’s, when viewed in connection with the preceding verses. He knows the heart of a man. He knows how soon we are ready to be cast down, and like Israel of old to be “discouraged by the difficulties of the way.” He therefore holds out to us a gracious promise. He reminds us that He has yet to come a second time, as surely as He came the first time. He tells us that this is the time when His disciples shall receive their good

things. There will be glory, honor, and reward in abundance one day for all who have served and loved Jesus. But it is to be in the dispensation of the second advent, and not of the first. The bitter must come before the sweet, the cross before the crown. The first advent is the dispensation of the crucifixion. The second advent is the dispensation of the kingdom. We must submit to take part with our Lord in His humiliation, if we mean ever to share in his glory.

And now let us not leave these verses without serious self-inquiry as to the matters which they contain. We have heard of the necessity of taking up the cross, and denying ourselves. Have we taken it up, and are we carrying it daily? We have heard of the value of the soul. Do we live as if we believed it? We have heard of Christ's second advent. Do we look forward to it with hope and joy? Happy is that man who can give a satisfactory answer to these questions.

Matthew – Chap. 17

MATTHEW 17:1-13

After six days, Jesus took with him Peter, James, and John his brother, and brought them up into a high mountain by themselves. He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his garments became as white as the light. Behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them talking with him.

Peter answered, and said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you want, let's make three tents here—one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them. Behold, a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Listen to him."

When the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces, and were very afraid. Jesus came and touched them and said, "Get up, and don't be afraid." Lifting up their eyes, they saw no one, except Jesus alone. As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, "Don't tell anyone what you saw, until the Son of Man has risen from the dead."

His disciples asked him, saying, "Then why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?"

Jesus answered them, "Elijah indeed comes first, and will restore all things, but I tell you that Elijah has come already, and they didn't recognize him, but did to him whatever they wanted to. Even so the Son of Man will also suffer by them." Then the disciples understood that he spoke to them of John the Baptizer.

These verses contain one of the most remarkable events in our Lord's earthly ministry—the event commonly called the TRANSFIGURATION. The order in which it is recorded is beautiful and instructive. The latter part of the last chapter shows us the *cross*.

Here we are graciously allowed to see something of the *coming reward*. The hearts which have just been saddened by a plain statement of Christ's sufferings, are at once gladdened by *a vision of Christ's glory*. Let us mark this. We often lose much by not tracing the connection between chapter and chapter in the word of God.

There are some mysterious things, no doubt, in the vision here described. It must needs be so. We are yet in the body. Our senses are conversant with physical and material things. Our ideas and perceptions about glorified bodies and dead saints, must necessarily be vague and imperfect. Let us content ourselves with endeavoring to mark out the PRACTICAL LESSONS which the transfiguration is meant to teach us.

In the first place, we have in these verses **a *striking pattern of the glory in which Christ and His people will appear when He comes the second time.***

There can be little question that this was one main object of this wonderful vision. It was meant to encourage the disciples, by giving them a glimpse of good things yet to come. That "face shining as the sun," and that "clothing white as the light," were intended to give the disciples some idea of the *majesty* in which Jesus will appear to the world, when He comes the second time, and all His saints with Him. The corner of the veil was lifted up, to show them their Master's true dignity. They were taught that, if He did not yet appear to the world in the semblance of a king, it was only because the time for putting on His royal apparel was not yet come. It is impossible to draw any

other conclusion from Peter's language, when writing on the subject. He says, with distinct reference to the transfiguration, "We were eye-witnesses of his majesty." (2 Peter 1:16.)

It is good for us to have the coming glory of Christ and His people deeply impressed on our minds. We are sadly apt to forget it. There are few visible indications of it in the world. We see not yet all things put under our Lord's feet. Sin, unbelief, and superstition abound. Thousands are practically saying, "We will not have this man to reign over us." It does not yet appear what His people shall be. Their crosses, their tribulations, their weaknesses, their conflicts, are all manifest enough. But there are few signs of their future reward. Let us beware of giving way to doubts in this matter. Let us silence such doubts by reading over the history of the transfiguration. There is laid up for Jesus, and all that believe on Him, such glory as the heart of man never conceived. It is not only promised, but part of it has actually been seen by three competent witnesses. One of them says, "we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father." (John 1:14.) Surely that which has been seen may well be believed.

In the second place, we have in these verses, ***an unanswerable proof of the resurrection of the body, and the life after death.*** We are told that Moses and Elijah appeared visibly in glory with Christ. They were seen in a bodily form. They were heard talking with our Lord. Fourteen hundred and eighty years had rolled round, since Moses died and was buried. More than nine hundred years had passed away, since Elijah "went up by a whirlwind into

heaven." Yet here they are seen alive by Peter, James, and John. Let us lay firm hold on this part of the vision. It deserves close attention. We must all feel, if we ever think at all, that the state of the dead is an amazing and mysterious subject. One after another we bury them out of our sight. We lay them in their narrow beds, and see them no more, and their bodies become dust. But will they really live again? Shall we really see them again? Will the grave really give back the dead at the last day? These are questions that will occasionally come across the minds of some, in spite of all the plainest statements in the word of God.

Now we have in the transfiguration the clearest evidence that the dead will rise again. We find two men appearing on earth, in their bodies, who had long been separate from the land of the living—and in them, we have a *pledge of the resurrection of all*. All that have ever lived upon earth will again be called to life, and render up their account. Not one will be found missing. There is no such thing as annihilation. All that have ever fallen asleep in Christ will be found in safe keeping; patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs—down to the humblest servant of God in our own day. Though unseen to us, they all live to God. "He is not a God of the dead, but of the living." (Luke 20:38.) Their spirits live as surely as we live ourselves, and will appear hereafter in glorified bodies, as surely as Moses and Elijah in the mount. These are indeed solemn thoughts! There is a resurrection, and men like Felix may well tremble. There is a resurrection, and men like Paul may well rejoice.

In the last place, we have in these verses ***a remarkable testimony to Christ's infinite superiority over all mankind.***

This is a point which is brought out strongly by the voice from heaven, which the disciples heard. Peter, bewildered by the heavenly vision, and not knowing what to say, proposed to build three tabernacles, one for Christ, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. He seemed in fact to place the law-giver and the prophet side by side with his divine Master, as if all three were equal. At once, we are told, the proposal was rebuked in a marked manner. A cloud covered Moses and Elijah, and they were no more seen. A voice at the same time came forth from the cloud, repeating the solemn words, made use of at our Lord's baptism, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased—listen to HIM."

That voice was meant to teach Peter, that there was one there far greater than Moses or Elijah. Moses was a faithful servant of God. Elijah was a bold witness for the truth. But Christ was far above either one or the other. He was the Savior to whom law and prophets were continually pointing. He was the true Prophet, whom all were commanded to hear. (Deut. 18:15.) Moses and Elijah were great men in their day. But Peter and his companions were to remember, that in nature, dignity, and office, they were far below Christ. He was the true sun—they were the planets depending daily on His light. He was the root—they were the branches. He was the Master—they were the servants. Their goodness was all *derived*—His was *original* and His

own. Let them honor Moses and the prophets, as holy men. But if they would be saved, they must take Christ alone for their Master, and glory only in Him. “Listen to Him.”

Let us see in these words a striking lesson to the whole Church of Christ. There is a constant tendency in human nature to “hear man.” Bishops, priests, deacons, popes, cardinals, councils, presbyterian preachers, and independent ministers, are continually exalted to a place which God never intended them to fill, and made practically to usurp the honor of Christ. Against this tendency let us all watch, and be on our guard. Let these solemn words of the vision ever ring in our ears, “Listen to Christ.”

The best of men are only men at their very best. Patriarchs, prophets, and apostles—martyrs, church fathers, reformers, puritans—all, all are sinners, who need a Savior. They may be holy, useful, honorable in their place—but sinners after all. They must never be allowed to stand between us and Christ. He alone is “the Son, in whom the Father is well pleased.” He alone is sealed and appointed to give the bread of life. He alone has the keys in His hands, “God over all, blessed forever.” Let us take heed that we hear His voice, and follow Him. Let us value all religious teaching just in proportion as it leads us to Jesus. The sum and substance of saving religion is to “listen to Christ.”

MATTHEW 17:14-21

When they came to the multitude, a man came to him, kneeling down to him, saying, "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is epileptic, and suffers grievously; for he often falls into the fire, and often into the water. So I brought him to your disciples, and they could not cure him."

Jesus answered, "O Faithless and perverse generation! How long will I be with you? How long will I bear with you? Bring him here to me." Jesus rebuked the demon, and it went out of him, and the boy was cured from that hour.

Then the disciples came to Jesus privately, and said, "Why weren't we able to cast it out?"

He said to them, "Because you have so little faith. For most certainly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a grain of mustard seed, you will tell this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. But this kind doesn't go out except by prayer and fasting."

We read in this passage another of our Lord's great miracles. He heals a young man lunatic and possessed with a devil.

The first thing we see in these verses is ***a lively emblem of the dreadful influence sometimes exercised by Satan over the young.*** We are told of a certain man's son, who was an "epileptic, and suffered grievously." We are told of the evil spirit pressing him on to the destruction of body and soul. "He often falls into the fire,

and often into the water." It was one of those cases of Satanic possession, which, however common in our Lord's times, in our own day is rarely seen. But we can easily imagine that, when they did occur, they must have been peculiarly distressing to the family of the afflicted. It is painful enough to see the bodies of those we love racked by disease. How much more painful must it have been to see body and mind completely under the influence of the devil. "Out of hell," says Bishop Hall, "there could not be greater misery."

But we must not forget that there are many instances of Satan's spiritual dominion over young people, which are quite as painful, in their way, as the case described in this passage. There are thousands of young men who seem to have wholly given themselves up to Satan's temptations, and to be led captive at his will. They cast off all fear of God, and all respect for His commandments. They serve diverse lusts and pleasures. They run wildly into every excess of riot. They refuse to listen to the advice of parents, teachers, or ministers. They fling aside all regard for health, character, or worldly respectability. They do all that lies in their power to ruin themselves, body and soul, for time and eternity. They are willing bondslaves of Satan. Who has not seen such young men? They are to be seen in town and in country. They are to be found among rich and among poor. Surely such young men give mournful proof, that although Satan now-a-days seldom has possession of man's body, he still exercises a fearful dominion over some men's souls.

Yet even about such young men as these, be it remembered, we must never despair. We must call to mind the almighty power of our Lord Jesus Christ. Bad as this boy's case was, of whom we read in these verses, he was "cured from the very hour" that he was brought to Christ! Parents, and teachers, and ministers should go on praying for young men, even at their worst. Hard as their hearts seem now, they may yet be softened. Desperate as their wickedness now appears, they may yet be healed. They may yet repent, and be converted, like John Newton, and their last state prove better than their first. Who can tell? Let it be a settled principle with us, when we read our Lord's miracles, never to despair of the conversion of any soul.

In the second place, we see in these verses ***a striking example of the weakening effect of unbelief.*** The disciples anxiously inquired of our Lord, when they saw the devil yielding to his power, "Why weren't we able to cast it out?" They received an answer full of the deepest instruction— "because you have so little faith." Would they know the secret of their own sad failure in the hour of need? It was lack of faith.

Let us ponder this point well, and learn wisdom. Faith is the key to success in the Christian warfare. Unbelief is the sure road to defeat. Once let our faith languish and decay, and all our graces will languish with it. Courage, patience, long-suffering, and hope, will soon wither and dwindle away. Faith is the root on which they all depend. The same Israelites who at one time went through the Red

Sea in triumph, at another time shrunk from danger, like cowards, when they reached the borders of the promised land. Their God was the same who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. Their leader was that same Moses who had wrought so many wonders before their eyes. But their faith was not the same. They gave way to shameful doubts of God's love and power. "They could not enter in because of unbelief." (Heb. 3:19.)

In the last place, we see in these verses that ***Satan's kingdom is not to be pulled down without diligence and pains.*** This seems to be the lesson of the verse which concludes the passage we are now considering— "This kind goes not out but by prayer and fasting." A gentle rebuke to the disciples appears to be implied in the words. Perhaps they had been too much lifted up by past successes. Perhaps they had been less careful in the use of means in their Master's absence, than they were under their Master's eye. At any rate they receive a plain hint from our Lord, that the *warfare against Satan must never be lightly carried on*. They are warned that no victories are to be won easily over the prince of this world. Without fervent prayer, and diligent self-mortification, they would often meet with failure and defeat.

The lesson here laid down is one of deep importance. "I would," says Bullinger, "that this part of the Gospel pleased us as much as those parts which concede liberty." We are all apt to contract a habit of doing religious acts in a thoughtless, perfunctory way. Like Israel, puffed up with the fall of Jericho, we are ready to say to ourselves,

"The men of Ai are but few;" (Josh. 7:3;) "there is no need to put forth all our strength." Like Israel, we often learn by bitter experience, that spiritual battles are not to be won without hard fighting. The ark of the Lord must never be handled irreverently. God's work must never be carelessly done.

May we all bear in mind our Lord's words to His disciples, and make a practical use of them. In the pulpit, and on the platform—in the Sunday school, and in the district—in our use of family prayers, and in reading our own Bibles—let us diligently watch our own spirit. Whatever we do, let us "do it with our might." (Eccles. 9:10) It is a fatal mistake to underrate our foes. Greater is He that is for us than he that is against us—but, for all that, he that is against us is not to be despised. He is the prince of this world. He is a strong man armed, keeping his house, who will not "go out," and part with his goods without a struggle. We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers. We have need to take the whole armor of God, and not only to take it, but to use it too. We may be very sure that those who win most victories over the world, the flesh, and the devil, are those who pray most in private, and "discipline their bodies, and bring them into subjection." (1 Cor. 9:27.)

MATTHEW 17:22-27

While they were staying in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is about to be delivered up into the hands of men, and they will kill him, and the third day he will be raised up."

They were exceedingly sorrowful. When they had come to Capernaum, those who collected the two drachma tax came to Peter, and said, "Doesn't your teacher pay the temple tax?" He said, "Yes."

When he came into the house, Jesus anticipated him, saying, "What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth receive toll or tribute? From their children, or from strangers?"

Peter said to him, "From strangers."

Jesus said to him, "Therefore the children are exempt. But, lest we cause them to stumble, go to the sea, cast a hook, and take up the first fish that comes up. When you have opened its mouth, you will find a four drachma coin. Take that, and give it to them for me and you."

These verses contain a circumstance in our Lord's history, which is not recorded by any of the evangelists excepting Matthew. A remarkable miracle is worked in order to provide payment of the tax-money, required for the service of the temple. There are three striking points in the narrative, which deserve attentive observation.

Let us observe, in the first place, ***our Lord's perfect knowledge of everything that is said and done in this world.*** We are told that those who "collected the two drachma tax came to Peter, and said, "Doesn't your teacher pay the temple tax?" He said, 'Yes.'" It was evident that our Lord was *not present*, when

the question was asked and the answer given. And yet no sooner did Peter come into the house than our Lord asked him, “What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth receive toll or tribute?” He showed that He was as well acquainted with the conversation, as if He had been listening or standing by.

There is something unspeakably solemn in the thought that *the Lord Jesus knows all things*. There is an eye that sees all our daily conduct. There is an ear that hears all our daily words. All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him, with whom we have to do. Concealment is impossible. Hypocrisy is useless. We may deceive ministers. We may fool our family and neighbors. But the Lord sees us through and through. We cannot deceive Christ.

We ought to endeavor to make practical use of this truth. We should strive to live as in the Lord’s sight, and, like Abraham, to “walk before him.” (Gen. 17:1.) Let it be our daily aim to say nothing we would not like Christ to hear, and to do nothing we would not like Christ to see. Let us measure every difficult question as to right and wrong by one simple test, “How would I behave, if Jesus was standing by my side?” Such a standard is not extravagant and absurd. It is a standard that interferes with no duty or relation of life. It interferes with nothing but sin. Happy is he that tries to realize his Lord’s presence, and to do all and say all as unto Christ.

Let us observe, in the next place, ***our Lord’s almighty power over all creation.*** He makes a fish his paymaster. He makes a voiceless creature bring the tribute-money to meet the collector’s

demand. Well says Jerome, “I know not which to admire most here, our Lord’s foreknowledge, or His greatness.”

We see here a literal fulfillment of the Psalmist’s words, “You make him ruler over the works of your hands; You have put all things under his feet—all sheep and oxen, yes, and the animals of the field, the birds of the sky, the fish of the sea, and whatever passes through the paths of the seas.” (Psalm 8:6-8.)

Here is one among many proofs of *the majesty and greatness of our Lord Jesus Christ*. He only who first created, could at His will command the obedience of all His creatures. “By him were all things created. By Him all things are held together.” (Col. 1:16-18.) The believer who goes forth to do Christ’s work among the heathen, may safely commit himself to his Master’s keeping. He serves one who has all power, even over the beasts of the earth. How wonderful the thought, that such an Almighty Lord should condescend to be crucified for our salvation! How comfortable the thought that when He comes again the second time, He will gloriously manifest His power over all created things to the whole world— “The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock —and dust shall be the serpent’s food.” (Isaiah 65:25.)

In the last place, let us observe, in these verses, ***our Lord’s willingness to make concessions, rather than give offence.*** He might justly have claimed exemption from the payment of this tax-money. He, who was Son of God, might fairly have been excused from paying for the maintenance of His Father’s house. He, who was

"greater than the temple," might have shown good cause for declining to contribute to the support of the temple. But our Lord does not do so. He claims no exemption. He desires Peter to pay the money demanded. At the same time He declares His reasons. It was to be done, "so that we may not offend them." "A miracle is worked," says Bishop Hall, "rather than offend even a tax-collector."

Our Lord's example in this case deserves attention of all who profess and call themselves Christians. There is deep wisdom in those seven words, "so that we may not offend them." They teach us plainly, that there are matters in which Christ's people ought to forego their own opinions, and submit to requirements which they may not thoroughly approve, rather than give offence and "hinder the Gospel of Christ." God's rights undoubtedly we ought never to give up; but we may sometimes safely give up our own. It may sound very fine and seem very heroic to be always standing out tenaciously for our *rights*. But it may well be doubted, with such a passage as this, whether such tenacity is always wise, and shows the mind of Christ. There are occasions, when it shows more grace in a Christian to submit than to resist.

Let us remember this passage as *CITIZENS*. We may not like all the political measures of our rulers. We may disapprove of some of the taxes they impose. But the grand question after all is—Will it do any good to the cause of religion to resist the powers that be? Are their measures really injuring our souls? If not, let us hold our peace, "so that we may not offend them." "A Christian," says Bullinger,

"never ought to disturb the public peace for things of mere temporary importance."

Let us remember this passage as *members of a CHURCH*. We may not like every jot and tittle of the forms and ceremonies used in our communion. We may not think that those who rule us in spiritual matters are always wise. But after all—Are the points on which we are dissatisfied really of vital importance? Is any great truth of the Gospel at stake? If not, let us be quiet, "so that we may not offend them."

Let us remember this passage as *members of SOCIETY*. There may be usages and customs in the circle where our lot is cast, which to us, as Christians, are tiresome, useless, and unprofitable. But are they matters of principle? Do they injure our souls? Will it do any good to the cause of religion, if we refuse to comply with them? If not, let us patiently submit, "lest we cause them to stumble."

Well would it be for the church and the world, if these seven words of our Lord had been more studied, pondered, and used! Who can tell the damage that has been done to the cause of the Gospel, by morbid scrupulosity, and conscientiousness—falsely so called! May we all remember the example of the great apostle of the Gentiles—"we suffer all things, lest we should hinder the Gospel of Christ." (1 Cor. 9:12.)

Matthew – Chap. 18

MATTHEW 18:1-14

In that hour the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?"

Jesus called a little child to himself, and set him in the midst of them, and said, "Most certainly I tell you, unless you turn, and become as little children, you will in no way enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. Whoever therefore humbles himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. Whoever receives one such little child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble, it would be better for him that a huge millstone should be hung around his neck, and that he should be sunk in the depths of the sea."

"Woe to the world because of occasions of stumbling! For it must be that the occasions come, but woe to that person through whom the occasion comes! If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off, and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life maimed or crippled, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into the eternal fire. If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out, and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into the Gehenna of fire. See that you don't despise one of these little ones, for I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father who is in heaven. For the Son of Man came to save that which was lost."

"What do you think? If a man has one hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, doesn't he leave the ninety-nine, go to the mountains, and seek that which has gone astray? If he finds it, most certainly I tell you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish."

The first thing that we are taught in these verses, is ***the necessity of conversion, and of conversion manifested by childlike humility.*** The disciples came to our Lord with the question, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" They spoke as men half-enlightened, and full of carnal expectations. They received an answer well calculated to awaken them from their day-dream—an answer containing a truth which lies at the very foundation of Christianity— "unless you turn, and become as little children, you will in no way enter into the Kingdom of Heaven."

Let these words sink down deeply into our hearts. Without conversion there is no salvation. We all need an entire change of nature. Of ourselves we have neither faith, nor fear, nor love towards God. "We must be born again." Of ourselves we are utterly unfit for dwelling in God's presence. Heaven would be no heaven to us if we were not converted. It is true of all ranks, classes, and orders of mankind. All are born in sin and children of wrath, and all, without exception, need to be born again and made new creatures. A new heart must be given to us, and a new spirit put within us. Old things must pass away, and all things must become new. It is a good thing

to be baptized into the Christian Church, and use Christian means of grace. But after all, “are we converted?”

Would we know whether we are really converted? Would we know the test by which we must try ourselves? The surest mark of true conversion is humility. If we have really received the Holy Spirit, we shall show it by a meek and childlike spirit. Like children, we shall think humbly of our own strength and wisdom, and be very dependent on our Father in heaven. Like children, we shall not seek great things in this world; and having food and clothing and a Father’s love, we shall be content. Truly this is a heart-searching test! It exposes the unsoundness of many a so-called conversion. It is easy to be a convert from one party to another party, from one sect to another sect, from one set of opinions to another set of opinions. Such conversions save no one’s soul. What we all want is a conversion from pride to humility—from high thoughts of ourselves to lowly thoughts of ourselves—from self-conceit to self-abasement—from the mind of the Pharisee to the mind of the Tax-collector. A conversion of this kind we must experience, if we hope to be saved. These are the conversions that are wrought by the Holy Spirit.

The next thing that we are taught in these verses, is ***the great sin of putting stumbling blocks in the way of believers.*** The words of the Lord Jesus on this subject are peculiarly solemn. “Woe unto the world because of offences!—Woe to that man by whom the offence comes.”

We put offences or stumbling blocks in the way of men's souls, whenever we do anything to keep them back from Christ—or to turn them out of the way of salvation—or to disgust them with true religion. We may do it directly by persecuting, ridiculing, opposing, or dissuading them from decided service of Christ. We may do it indirectly by living a life inconsistent with our religious profession, and by making Christianity loathsome and distasteful by our own conduct. Whenever we do anything of the kind, it is clear, from our Lord's words, that we commit a great sin.

There is something very fearful in the doctrine here laid down. It ought to stir up within us great searchings of heart. It is not enough that we wish to do good in this world. Are we quite sure that we are not doing harm? We may not openly persecute Christ's servants. But are there none that we are injuring by our ways and our example? It is dreadful to think of the amount of harm that can be done by one inconsistent professor of religion. He gives a handle to the infidel. He supplies the worldly man with an excuse for remaining undecided. He checks the inquirer after salvation. He discourages the saints. He is, in short, a living sermon on behalf of the devil. The last day alone will reveal the wholesale ruin of souls, that "offences" have occasioned in the Church of Christ. One of Nathan's charges against David was, "you have given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme." (2 Sam. 12:14.)

The next thing that we are taught in these verses is, ***the reality of future punishment after death.*** Two strong expressions are

used by our Lord on this point. He speaks of being "cast into everlasting fire." He speaks of being "cast into hell fire."

The meaning of these words is clear and unmistakable. There is a place of unspeakable misery in the world to come, to which all who die impenitent and unbelieving, must ultimately be consigned. There is revealed in Scripture a "fiery indignation," which sooner or later will devour all God's adversaries. (Heb. 10:27.) The same sure word which holds out a *heaven* to all who repent and are converted, declares plainly that there will be a *hell* for all the ungodly.

Let no man deceive us with vain words upon this dreadful subject. Men have arisen in these latter days, who profess to deny the eternity of future punishment, and repeat the devil's old argument, that we "shall not surely die." (Gen. 3:4.) Let none of their reasonings move us, however plausible they may sound. Let us stand fast in the old paths. The God of *love* and *mercy*, is also a God of *justice*. He will surely requite. The flood in Noah's day, and the burning of Sodom, were meant to show us what He will one day do. No lips have ever spoken so clearly about hell as those of Christ Himself. Hardened sinners will find out, to their cost, that there is such a thing as the "wrath of the Lamb." (Rev. 6:17.)

The last thing we are taught in these verses, is ***the value that God sets on the least and lowest of believers.*** "It is not the will of your Father in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish."

These words are meant for the encouragement of all true Christians, and not for little children only. The connection in which they are found with the parable of the hundred sheep and one that went astray, seems to place this beyond doubt. They are meant to show us that our Lord Jesus is a Shepherd, who cares tenderly for every soul committed to His charge. The youngest, the weakest, the sickliest of His flock is as dear to Him as the strongest. They shall never perish. None shall ever pluck them out of His hand. He will lead them gently through the wilderness of this world. He will not overdrive them a single day, lest any die. (Gen. 33:13.) He will carry them through every difficulty. He will defend them against every enemy. The saying which He spoke shall be literally fulfilled— "Of those whom you have given me I have lost none." (John 18:9.) With such a Savior, who need fear beginning to be a thorough Christian? With such a Shepherd, who, having once begun, need fear being cast away?

MATTHEW 18:15-20

"If your brother sins against you, go, show him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained back your brother. But if he doesn't listen, take one or two more with you, that at the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. If he refuses to hear the church also, let him be to you as a Gentile or a tax collector. Most certainly I tell you, whatever things you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever things you

release on earth will have been released in heaven. Again, assuredly I tell you, that if two of you will agree on earth concerning anything that they will ask, it will be done for them by my Father who is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them."

These words of the Lord Jesus contain an expression which has been often misapplied. The command to "hear the church," has been so interpreted as to contradict other passages of God's word. It has been falsely applied to the authority of the whole visible church in matters of doctrine, and so been made an excuse for the exercise of much ecclesiastical tyranny. *But the abuse of Scripture truths must not tempt us to neglect the use of them.* We must not turn away altogether from any text, because some have perverted it, and made it poison.

Let us notice in the first place, ***how admirable are the rules laid down by our Lord, for the healing of differences among brethren.***

If we have unhappily received any injury from a fellow-member of Christ's Church, the first step to be taken is to visit him "alone," and tell him his fault. He may have injured us unintentionally, as Abimelech did Abraham. (Gen. 21:26.) His conduct may admit of explanation, like that of the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh, when they built an altar, as they returned to their own land. (Joshua 22:24.) At any rate, this friendly, faithful, straight-forward way of dealing is the most likely course to win a brother, if he is to be won.

“A soft tongue breaks the bone.” (Prov. 25:15.) Who can tell but he may say at once, “I was wrong”—and make ample reparation?

If however this course of proceeding fails to produce any good effect, a second step is to be taken. We are to “take with us one or two” companions, and tell our brother of his fault in their presence and hearing. Who can tell but his conscience may be stricken, when he finds his misconduct made known, and he may be ashamed and repent? If not, we shall at all events have the testimony of witnesses, that we did all we could to bring our brother to a right mind, and that he deliberately refused, when appealed to, to make amends.

Finally, if this second course of proceeding prove useless, we are to refer the whole matter to the Christian *congregation* of which we are members—we are to “tell it to the church.” Who can tell but the heart which has been unmoved by private remonstrances, may be moved by the fear of public exposure? If not, there remains but one view to take of our brother’s case—*we must sorrowfully regard him as one who has shaken off all Christian principles*, and will be guided by no higher motives than “a Gentile or a tax collector.”

The passage is a beautiful instance of the mingled wisdom and tender consideration of our Lord’s teaching. What a knowledge it shows of human nature! Nothing does so much harm to the cause of religion as the quarrels of Christians. No stone should be left unturned, no trouble spared, in order to prevent their being dragged before the public. What a delicate thoughtfulness it shows for the sensitiveness of poor human nature! Many a scandalous breach

would be prevented, if we were more ready to practice the rule of "between you and him alone." Happy would it be for the Church and the world, if this portion of our Lord's teaching was more carefully studied and obeyed. Differences and divisions there will be, so long as the world stands. But how many of them would be extinguished at once, if the course recommended in these verses was tried.

In the second place, let us observe ***what a clear argument we have in these verses for the exercise of DISCIPLINE in a Christian congregation.***

Our Lord commands disagreements between Christians, which cannot be otherwise settled, to be referred to the decision of the Christian assembly to which they belong. "Tell it," He says, "to the church." It is evident from this, that he intends every congregation of professing Christians to take cognizance of the moral conduct of its members, either by the action of the whole body collectively, or of heads and elders to whom its authority may be delegated. It is evident also that He intends every congregation to have the power of excluding disobedient and refractory members from participation in its ordinances. "If he refuses," he says, "to hear the church also, let him be to you as a Gentile or a tax collector." He says not a word about temporal punishment, and civil disabilities. *Spiritual* penalties are the only penalty He permits the Church to inflict, and when rightly inflicted, they are not to be lightly regarded. "Whatever things you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven." Such appears to

be the substance of our Lord's teaching about ecclesiastical discipline.

It is vain to deny that the whole subject is surrounded with difficulties. On no point has the influence of the world weighed so heavily on the action of Churches. On no point have Churches made so many mistakes—sometimes on the side of *sleepy remissness*, sometimes on the side of *blind severity*. No doubt the power of excommunication has been fearfully abused and perverted, and, as Quesnel says, "we ought to be more afraid of our sins than of all the excommunications in the world." Still it is impossible to deny, with such a passage as this before us, that church discipline is according to the mind of Christ, and when wisely exercised, is calculated to promote a church's health and well-being. It can never be right that all sorts of people, however wicked and ungodly, should be allowed to come to the table of the Lord, with no one either permitting or forbidding. It is the bounden duty of every Christian to use his influence to prevent such a state of things. A perfect communion can never be attained in this world, but purity should be the mark at which we aim. An increasingly high standard of qualification for full church-membership, will always be found one of the best evidences of a prosperous church.

Let us observe, in the last place, ***what gracious encouragement Christ holds out to those who meet together in His name.*** He says, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them." That saying is

a striking proof of our Lord's divinity. God alone can be in more places than one at the same time.

There is comfort in these words for all who love to meet together for religious purposes. At every assembly for public worship, at every gathering for prayer and praise—at every missionary meeting—at every Bible reading, the King of kings is present—Christ Himself attends! We may be often disheartened by the small number who are present on such occasions, compared to those who meet for worldly ends. We may sometimes find it hard to bear the taunts and ridicule of an ill-natured world, which cries like the enemy of old, "What are these feeble people doing?" (Nehem. 4:2.) But we have no reason for despondency. We may boldly fall back on these words of Jesus. At all such meetings we have the company of Christ Himself.

There is a solemn rebuke in these words for all who neglect the public worship of God, and never attend meetings for any religious purpose. They turn their backs on the society of the Lord of lords. They miss the opportunity of meeting Christ Himself. It avails nothing to say that the proceedings of religious meetings are marked by weakness and infirmity, or that as much good is gotten by staying at home as going to church. The words of our Lord should silence such arguments at once. Surely men are not wise when they speak contemptuously of any gathering where Christ is present.

May we all ponder these things. If we have met together with God's people for spiritual purposes in times past, let us persevere,

and not be ashamed. If we have hitherto despised such meetings, let us consider our ways, and learn wisdom.

MATTHEW 18:21-35

Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Until seven times?"

Jesus said to him, "I don't tell you until seven times, but, until seventy times seven. Therefore the Kingdom of Heaven is like a certain king, who wanted to reconcile accounts with his servants. When he had begun to reconcile, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. But because he couldn't pay, his master commanded him to be sold, with his wife, his children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down and kneeled before him, saying, 'Master, have patience with me, and I will repay you all!' The master of that servant, being moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt."

"But that servant went out, and found one of his fellow servants, who owed him one hundred denarii, and he grabbed him, and took him by the throat, saying, 'Pay me what you owe!'

"So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will repay you!' He would not, but went and cast him into prison, until he should pay back that which was due. So when his fellow servants saw what was done, they were exceedingly distressed, and came and told to their

master all that was done. Then his master called him in, and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt, because you begged me. Shouldn't you also have had mercy on your fellow servant, even as I had mercy on you?' His master was angry, and delivered him to the tormentors, until he should pay all that was due to him. So my heavenly Father will also do to you, if you don't each forgive your brother from your hearts for his misdeeds."

In these verses the Lord Jesus deals with a deeply important subject—the FORGIVENESS OF INJURIES. We live in a wicked world, and it is vain to expect that we can escape ill-treatment, however carefully we may behave. To know how to conduct ourselves, when we are ill-treated, is of great importance to our souls.

In the first place, ***the Lord Jesus lays it down as a general rule, that we ought to forgive others to the uttermost.*** Peter put the question, "How often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Until seven times?" He received for answer, "I don't tell you until seven times, but, until seventy times seven."

The rule here laid down must of course be interpreted with sober-minded qualification. Our Lord does not mean that offences against the law of the land and the good order of society, are to be passed over in silence. He does not mean that we are to allow people to commit thefts, and assaults, with impunity. All that He means is, that *we are to exercise a general spirit of mercy and forgivingness towards our brethren*. We are to bear much, and to put up with

much, rather than quarrel. We are to look over much, and submit to much, rather than have any strife. We are to lay aside everything like malice, strife, revenge, and retaliation. Such feelings are only fit for heathen. They are utterly unworthy of a disciple of Christ.

What a happy world it would be if this rule of our Lord's was more known and better obeyed! How many of the miseries of mankind are occasioned by disputes, quarrels, lawsuits, and an obstinate tenacity about what men call "their rights!" How many of them might be altogether avoided, if men were more willing to forgive, and more desirous for peace! Let us never forget that a fire cannot go on burning without fuel. Just in the same way it takes two to make a quarrel. Let us each resolve by God's grace, that of these two we will never be one. Let us resolve to return good for evil, and blessing for cursing, and so melt down enmity, and change our foes into friends. (Rom. 12:20.) It was a fine feature in Archbishop Cranmer's character, that if you did him an injury, he was sure to be your friend.

In the second place, our Lord supplies us with ***two powerful motives for exercising a forgiving spirit.*** He tells us a story of a man who owed an enormous sum to his master, and had "nothing to pay." Nevertheless at the time of reckoning his master had compassion on him, and "forgave him all." He tells us that this very man, after being forgiven himself, refused to forgive a fellow-servant a trifling debt. He actually cast him into prison, and would not abate a fragment of his demand. He tells us how punishment overtook this

wicked and cruel man, who, after receiving mercy, ought surely to have shown mercy to others. And finally, he concludes the parable with the impressive words, “so my heavenly Father will also do to you, if you don’t each forgive your brother from your hearts for his misdeeds.”

It is clear from this parable that one motive for forgiving others, ought to be the recollection that *we all need forgiveness at God’s hands ourselves*. Day after day we are coming short in many things, “leaving undone what we ought to do, and doing what we ought not to do.” Day after day we require mercy and pardon. *Our neighbors’ offences against us are mere trifles, compared with our offences against God*. Surely it adversely suits poor erring creatures like us, to be extreme in marking what is done amiss by our brethren, or slow to forgive it.

Another motive for forgiving others, ought to be the *recollection of the day of judgment*, and the standard by which we shall all be tried in that day. There will be no forgiveness in that day for unforgiving people. Such people would be unfit for heaven. They would not be able to value a dwelling-place to which “mercy” is the only title, and in which “mercy” is the eternal subject of song. Surely if we intend to stand at the right hand, when Jesus sits on the throne of His glory, we must learn, while we are on earth, to forgive.

Let these truths sink down deeply into our hearts. It is a melancholy fact that *there are few Christian duties so little practiced as that of forgiveness*. It is sad to see how much bitterness,

unmercifulness, spite, harshness, and unkindness there is among men. Yet there are few duties so strongly enforced in the New Testament Scriptures as this duty is, and few the neglect of which so clearly shuts a man out of the kingdom of God.

Would we give proof that we are at peace with God, washed in Christ's blood, born of the Spirit, and made God's children by adoption and grace? Let us remember this passage. Like our Father in heaven, let us be forgiving. Has any man injured us? Let us this day forgive him. As Leighton says "we ought to forgive ourselves little, and others much."

Would we do good to the world? Would we have any influence on others, and make them see the beauty of true religion? Let us remember this passage. *Men who care not for doctrines, can understand a forgiving temper*.

Would we grow in grace ourselves, and become more holy in all our ways, words, and works? Let us remember this passage. nothing so grieves the Holy Spirit, and brings spiritual darkness over the soul, as giving way to a quarrelsome and unforgiving temper. (Ephes. 4:30-32.)

Matthew – Chap. 19

MATTHEW 19:1-15

It happened when Jesus had finished these words, he departed from Galilee, and came into the borders of Judea beyond the Jordan. Great multitudes followed him, and he healed them there. Pharisees came to him, testing him, and saying, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason?"

He answered, "Haven't you read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall join to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh?' So that they are no more two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, don't let man tear apart."

They asked him, "Why then did Moses command us to give her a bill of divorce, and divorce her?"

He said to them, "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it has not been so. I tell you that whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and he who marries her when she is divorced commits adultery."

His disciples said to him, "If this is the case of the man with his wife, it is not expedient to marry."

But he said to them, "Not all men can receive this saying, but those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother's womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men; and there are eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake. He who is able to receive it, let him receive it."

Then little children were brought to him, that he should lay his hands on them and pray; and the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, "Allow the little children, and don't forbid them to come to me; for the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to ones like these." He laid his hands on them, and departed from there.

In these verses we have the mind of Christ declared on two subjects of great moment. One is the relation of husband and wife. The other is the light in which we should regard little children, in the matter of their souls.

It is difficult to overrate the importance of these two subjects. The well-being of nations, and the happiness of society, are closely connected with right views upon them. Nations are nothing but a collection of families. The good order of families depends entirely on keeping up the highest standard of respect for the marriage tie, and on the right training of children. We ought to be thankful, that on both these points, the great Head of the Church has pronounced judgment so clearly.

With respect to marriage, our Lord teaches, that ***the union of husband and wife ought never to be broken off, except for the greatest of all causes, namely, actual unfaithfulness.***

In the days when our Lord was upon earth, divorces were permitted among the Jews for the most trifling and frivolous causes. The practice, though tolerated by Moses, to prevent worse evils—such as cruelty or murder—had gradually become an enormous abuse, and no doubt led to much immorality. (Malachi 2:14-16.) The remark made by our Lord's disciples shows the deplorably low state of public feeling on the subject. They said, "If this is the case of the man with his wife, it is not expedient to marry." They meant of course, "if a man may not put away his wife for a slight cause at any time, he had better not marry at all." Such language from the mouths of apostles sounds strange indeed!

Our Lord brings forward a widely different standard for the guidance of His disciples. He first founds His judgment on the original institution of marriage. He quotes the words used in the beginning of Genesis, where the creation of man, and the union of Adam and Eve, are described, as a proof that no relation should be so highly regarded as that of husband and wife. The relation of parent and child may seem very close, but there is one closer still— "A man shall leave father and mother, and cleave to His wife." He then backs up the quotation by His own solemn words, "What God has joined together, let not man put asunder." And finally He brings in the grave charge of breaking the seventh commandment, against

marriage contracted after a divorce for light and frivolous causes—"whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and he who marries her when she is divorced commits adultery."

It is clear, from the whole tenor of the passage, that the relationship of marriage ought to be highly reverenced and honored among Christians. It is a relationship which was instituted in Paradise, in the time of man's innocency, and is a chosen figure of the mystical union between Christ and His Church. It is a relationship which nothing but death ought to terminate. It is a relationship which is sure to have the greatest influence on those whom it brings together, for happiness, or for misery, for good, or for evil. Such a relationship ought never to be taken in hand unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly; but soberly, discreetly, and with due consideration. It is only too true, that thoughtlessly entering into marriage is one of the most fertile causes of unhappiness, and too often, it may be feared, of sin.

With respect to little CHILDREN, we find our Lord instructing us in these verses, *both by word and deed, both by precept and example*. "Little children were brought to him, that he should lay his hands on them and pray." They were evidently tender infants, too young to receive instruction, but not too young to receive benefit by prayer. The disciples seem to have thought them beneath their Master's notice, and rebuked those that brought them. But this drew forth a solemn declaration from the great Head of the Church—

“Allow the little children, and don’t forbid them to come to me; for the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to ones like these.”

There is something deeply interesting both in the language and action of our Lord on this occasion. We know the weakness and feebleness, both in mind and body, of a little infant. Of all creatures born into the world none is so helpless and dependent. We know who it was who here took such notice of infants, and found time, in His busy ministry among grown up men and women, to “lay his hands on them and pray.” It was the eternal Son of God, the great High Priest, the King of kings, by whom all things consist, “the brightness of the Father’s glory, and the express image of His person.” What an instructive picture the whole transaction places before our eyes! No wonder that the great majority of the Church of Christ have always seen in this passage, a strong, though indirect, argument in favor of infant baptism.

Let us learn from these verses, that the Lord Jesus cares tenderly for the souls of little children. It is probable that Satan specially hates them. It is certain that Jesus specially loves them. Young as they are, they are not beneath his thoughts, and attention. That mighty heart of his has room for the babe in its cradle, as well as for the king on his throne. He regards each one as possessing within its little body an undying principle, that will outlive the Pyramids of Egypt, and see sun and moon quenched at the last day. With such a passage as this before us, we may surely hope well about the salvation of all who die in infancy. “The Kingdom of Heaven belongs to ones like these.”

Finally, let us draw from these verses **encouragement to attempt great things in the religious instruction of children.** Let us begin from their very earliest years to deal with them as having souls to be lost, or saved, and strive to bring them to Christ. Let us make them acquainted with the Bible, as soon as they can understand anything. Let us pray with them, and pray for them, and teach them to pray for themselves. We may rest assured that Jesus looks with pleasure on such endeavors, and is ready to bless them. We may rest assured that such endeavors are not in vain. The seed sown in infancy, is often found after many days. Happy is that church whose infant members are cared for as much as the oldest communicants! The blessing of Him that was crucified will surely be on that church! He put His hands on little children. He prayed for them.

MATTHEW 19:16-22

Behold, a man came to Jesus and said, "Good teacher, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?"

He said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but one, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments."

He said to him, "Which ones?"

Jesus said, "'You shall not murder.' 'You shall not commit adultery.' 'You shall not steal.' 'You shall not give false

testimony."Honor your father and mother.' And, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

The young man said to him, "All these things I have observed from my youth. What do I still lack?"

Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." But when the young man heard the saying, he went away sad, for he was one who had great possessions.

These verses detail a conversation between our Lord Jesus Christ and a young man, who came to Him to inquire about the way to eternal life. Like every conversation recorded in the Gospels, between our Lord and an individual, it deserves special attention. Salvation is an individual business. Every one who wishes to be saved, must have private personal dealings with Christ about his own soul.

We see, for one thing, from the case of this young man, that ***a person may have desires after salvation, and yet not be saved.*** Here is one who in a day of abounding unbelief comes of his own accord to Christ. He comes not to have a sickness healed. He comes not to plead about a child. He comes about his own soul. He opens the conference with the frank question, "Good teacher, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" Surely we might have thought, "this is a promising case—this is no prejudiced ruler or Pharisee—this is a hopeful inquirer." Yet by and bye this very young

man “goes away sorrowful”—and we never read a word to show that he was converted!

We must never forget that *good feelings alone in religion are not the grace of God*. We may know the truth intellectually. We may often feel pierced in conscience. We may have religious affections awakened within us, have many anxieties about our souls, and shed many tears. But all this is not conversion. It is not the genuine, saving work of the Holy Spirit.

Unhappily this is not all that must be said on this point. Not only are good feelings alone not grace, but they are even decidedly dangerous, if we content ourselves with them, and do not act as well as feel. It is a profound remark of that mighty master on moral questions, Bishop Butler, that passive impressions often repeated, gradually lose all their power. Actions often repeated produce a habit in man’s mind. Feelings often indulged in, without leading to corresponding actions, will finally exercise no influence at all.

Let us apply this lesson to our own state. Perhaps we know what it is to feel religious fears, wishes, and desires. Let us beware that we do not rest in them. Let us never be satisfied until we have the witness of the Spirit in our hearts, that we are actually born again and new creatures. Let us never rest until we know that we have really repented, and laid hold on the hope set before us in the Gospel. It is good to feel. But it is far better to be converted.

We see, for another thing, from this young man's case, that ***an unconverted person is often profoundly ignorant on spiritual subjects.*** Our Lord refers this inquirer to the eternal standard of right and wrong, the moral law. Seeing that he speaks so boldly about "doing," Jesus tries him by a command well calculated to draw out the real state of his heart, "If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments." He even repeats to him the second table of the law. And at once the young man confidently replies, "All these things I have observed from my youth. What do I still lack?" So utterly ignorant is he of the spirituality of God's statutes, that he never doubts that he has perfectly fulfilled them. He seems thoroughly unaware that the commandments apply to the thoughts and words, as well as to the deeds, and that if God were to enter into judgment with him, he could "not answer Him one of a thousand!" (Job 9:3.) How dark must his mind have been as to the nature of God's law! How low must his ideas have been as to the holiness which God requires!

It is a melancholy fact, that ignorance like that of this young man is only too common in the Church of Christ. There are thousands of baptized people, who know no more of the leading doctrines of Christianity than the basest heathen. Tens of thousands fill churches and chapels weekly, who are utterly in the dark as to the full extent of man's sinfulness. They cling obstinately to the old notion, that in some sort or other their own doings can save them—and when ministers visit them on their death-beds, they prove as blind as if they had never heard truth at all. So true is it, that the "natural man

receives not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him." (1 Cor. 2:14.)

We see in the last place, from this young man's case, that ***one idol cherished in the heart may ruin a soul forever.*** Our Lord, who knew what was in man, at last shows His inquirer his besetting sin. The same searching voice which said to the Samaritan woman, "Go, call your husband," (John 4:16,) says to the young man, "Go, sell what you have, and give to the poor." At once the weak point in his character is detected. It turns out that, with all his wishes and desires after eternal life, there was one thing he loved better than his soul, and that was his money. He cannot stand the test. He is weighed in the balance and found lacking. And the history ends with the melancholy words, "He went away sad, for he was one who had great possessions."

We have in this history one more proof of the truth, "The love of money is the root of all evil." (1 Tim. 6:10.) We must place this young man in our memories by the side of Judas, Ananias and Sapphira, and learn to beware of covetousness. Alas! it is a rock on which thousands are continually making shipwreck. There is hardly a minister of the Gospel who could not point to many in his congregation, who, humanly speaking, are "not far from the kingdom of God." But they never seem to make progress. They wish. They feel. They intend. They hope. But there they stick fast! And why? Because they are fond of money.

Let us prove our own selves, as we leave the passage. Let us see how it concerns our own souls. Are we honest and sincere in our professed desire to be true Christians? Have we given up all our idols? Is there no secret sin that we are silently clinging to, and refusing to give up? Is there no thing or person that we are privately loving more than Christ and our souls? These are questions that ought to be answered. The true explanation of the unsatisfactory state of many hearers of the Gospel, is *spiritual idolatry*. John might well say, "Keep yourselves from idols." (1 John 5:21.)

MATTHEW 19:23-30

Jesus said to his disciples, "Most certainly I say to you, a rich man will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven with difficulty. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God."

When the disciples heard it, they were exceedingly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?"

Looking at them, Jesus said, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

Then Peter answered, "Behold, we have left everything, and followed you. What then will we have?"

Jesus said to them, "Most certainly I tell you that you who have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on the throne of his glory, you also will sit on twelve thrones, judging the

twelve tribes of Israel. Everyone who has left houses, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, will receive one hundred times, and will inherit eternal life. But many will be last who are first; and first who are last."

The first thing that we learn in these verses, is ***the immense danger which riches bring on the souls of those that possess them.*** The Lord Jesus declares, that "A rich man will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven with difficulty." He goes even further. He uses a proverbial saying to strengthen His assertion— "It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."

Few of our Lord's sayings sound more startling than this. Few run more counter to the opinions and prejudices of mankind. Few are so little believed. Yet this saying is true, and worthy of all acceptance. Riches, which all desire to obtain—riches, for which men labor and toil, and become gray before their time—riches are a most perilous possession. They often inflict great injury on the soul. They lead men into many temptations. They engross men's thoughts and affections. They bind heavy burdens on the heart, and make the way to heaven even more difficult than it naturally is.

Let us beware of the love of money. It is possible to use it well, and do good with it. But for each one who makes a right use of money, there are thousands who make a wrong use of it, and do harm both to themselves and others. Let the worldly man, if he will, make an idol of money, and count him happiest who has most of it.

But let the Christian, who professes to have "treasure in heaven," set his face like a flint against the spirit of the world in this matter. Let him not worship gold. He is not the best man in God's eyes who has most money, but he who has most grace.

Let us pray daily for rich men's souls. They are not to be envied. They are deeply to be pitied. They carry heavy weights in the Christian race. They are of all men the least likely "so to run as to obtain." (1 Cor. 9:24.) Their prosperity in this world is often their destruction in the world to come. Well may the Litany of the Church of England contain the words, "In all time of our wealth, good Lord, deliver us."

The second thing that we learn in this passage, is ***the almighty power of God's grace in the soul.*** The disciples were amazed, when they heard our Lord's language about rich men. It was language so subversive of all their notions about the advantages of wealth, that they cried out with surprise, "Who then can be saved?" They drew from our Lord a gracious answer, "With men this is impossible—but with God all things are possible."

The Holy Spirit can incline even the richest of men to seek treasure in heaven. He can dispose even kings to cast their crowns at the feet of Jesus, and count all things but loss for the sake of the kingdom of God. Proof upon proof of this is given to us in the Bible. *Abraham* was very rich, yet he was the father of the faithful. *Moses* might have been a prince or king in Egypt, but he forsook all his brilliant prospects for the sake of Him who is invisible. *Job* was the

wealthiest man in the east, yet he was a chosen servant of God. *David*, *Jehoshaphat, Josiah, Hezekiah*, were all wealthy monarchs, but they loved God's favor more than their earthly greatness. They all show us that "nothing is too hard for the Lord," and that faith can grow even in the most unlikely soil.

Let us hold fast this doctrine, and never let it go. No man's place or circumstances shut him out from the kingdom of God. Let us never despair of any one's salvation. No doubt rich people require special grace, and are exposed to special temptations. But the Lord God of Abraham, and Moses, and Job, and David has not changed. He who saved them in spite of their riches, can save others also. When He works, who shall hinder it? (Isaiah 43:13.)

The last thing that we learn in these verses, is ***the immense encouragement the Gospel offers to those who give up everything for Christ's sake.*** We are told that Peter asked our Lord what he and the other apostles, who had forsaken their little 'all' for His sake, should receive in return. He obtained a most gracious reply. A full recompense shall be made to all who make sacrifices for Christ's sake—they "will receive one hundred times, and will inherit eternal life."

There is something very cheering in this promise. Few in the present day, excepting converts among the heathen, are ever required to forsake homes, relations, and lands, on account of their religion. Yet there are few true Christians, who have not much to go through, in one way or another, if they are really faithful to their

Lord. The offence of the cross has not yet ceased. Laughter, ridicule, mockery, and family-persecution, are often the portion of an English believer. The favor of the world is often forfeited, places and situations are often imperiled, by a conscientious adherence to the demands of the Gospel of Christ. All who are exposed to trials of this kind may take comfort in the promise of these verses. Jesus foresaw their need, and intended these words to be their consolation.

We may rest assured that no man shall ever be a real loser by following Christ. The believer may seem to suffer loss for a time, when he first begins the life of a decided Christian. He may be much cast down by the afflictions that are brought upon him on account of his religion. But let him rest assured that he will never find himself a loser in the long run. Christ can raise up friends for us who shall more than compensate for those we lose. Christ can open hearts and homes to us, far more warm and hospitable than those that are closed against us. Above all, Christ can give us peace of conscience, inward joy, bright hopes, and happy feelings, which shall far outweigh every pleasant earthly thing that we have cast away for His sake. He has pledged His royal word that it shall be so. None ever found that word fail. Let us trust it, and not be afraid.

Matthew – Chap. 20

MATTHEW 20:1-16

“For the Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who was the master of a household, who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. When he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. He went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace. To them he said, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.’ So they went their way. Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did likewise. About the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle. He said to them, ‘Why do you stand here all day idle?’

“They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’

“He said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and you will receive whatever is right.’ When evening had come, the master of the vineyard said to his manager, ‘Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning from the last to the first.’

“When those who were hired at about the eleventh hour came, they each received a denarius. When the first came, they supposed that they would receive more; and they likewise each received a denarius. When they received it, they murmured against the master of the household, saying, ‘These last have spent only one hour, and you have made them equal to us, who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat!’

“But he answered one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Didn’t you agree with me for a denarius? Take that which is

yours, and go your way. It is my desire to give to this last just as much as to you. Isn't it lawful for me to do what I want to with what I own? Or is your eye envious, because I am good?' So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few are chosen."

There are undeniable difficulties in the parable contained in these verses. The key to the right explanation of them must be sought in the passage which concludes the last chapter. *There* we find the apostle Peter asking our Lord a remarkable question— "Behold, we have left everything, and followed you. What then will we have?" *There* we find Jesus giving a remarkable answer. He makes a special promise to Peter and his fellow disciples— "they should one day sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." He makes a general promise to all who suffer loss for His sake— "they will receive one hundred times, and will inherit eternal life."

Now we must bear in mind that Peter was a Jew. Like most Jews, he had probably been brought up in much ignorance as to God's purposes respecting the salvation of the Gentiles. In fact, we know from the Acts, that it required a vision from heaven to take that ignorance away. (Acts 10:28.) Furthermore we must bear in mind that Peter and his fellow-disciples were weak in faith and knowledge. They were probably apt to attach a great importance to their own sacrifices for Christ's sake, and inclined to self-righteousness and self-conceit. Both these points our Lord knew well. He therefore speaks this parable for the special benefit of Peter and his

companions. He read their hearts. He saw what spiritual medicine those hearts required, and supplied it without delay. In a word, He checked their rising pride, and taught them humility.

In expounding this parable, we need not inquire closely into the meaning of the "denarius," the "market-place," the "steward," or the "hours." Such inquiries often darken counsel by words without knowledge. Well says Calovius, "the theology of parables is not argumentative." The hint of Chrysostom deserves notice. He says, "It is not right to search curiously, and word by word, into all things in a parable but when we have learned the object for which it was composed, to reap this, and not to busy ourselves about anything further." Two main lessons appear to stand out on the face of the parable, and to embrace the general scope of its meaning. Let us content ourselves with these two.

We learn, in the first place, that *in* ***the calling of NATIONS to the professed knowledge of Himself, God exercises, free, sovereign, and unconditional grace.*** He calls the families of the earth into the visible church at His own time, and in His own way.

We see this truth wonderfully brought out in the history of God's dealings with the world. We see the children of Israel called and chosen to be God's people in the very beginning of "the day." We see some of the Gentiles called at a later period, by the preaching of the apostles. We see others being called in the present age, by the labors of missionaries. We see others, like the millions of Chinese and

Hindoos, still “standing idle, because no man has hired them.” And why is all this? We cannot tell. We only know that God loves to hide pride from churches, and to take away all occasion of boasting. He will never allow the older branches of His church to look contemptuously on the younger. His Gospel holds out pardon and peace with God through Christ to the heathen of our own times, as fully as it did to Paul. The converted inhabitants of New Zealand shall be as fully admitted to heaven as the holiest patriarch who died 3500 years ago. The old wall between Jews and Gentiles is removed. There is nothing to prevent the believing heathen being “a fellow-heir and partaker of the same hope” with the believing Israelite. The Gentiles converted at “the eleventh hour” of the world, shall be as really and truly heirs of glory as the Jews. They shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while many of the children of the kingdom are forever cast out. “The last shall indeed be first.”

We learn, in the second place, that in ***the saving of INDIVIDUALS, as well as in the calling of nations, God acts as a sovereign, and gives no account of His matters.*** He has mercy on whom He will have mercy, and that too at His own time. (Rom. 9:15.)

This is a truth which we see illustrated on every side in the church of Christ, as a matter of experience. We see one man called to repentance and faith in the beginning of his days, like Timothy, and laboring in the Lord’s vineyard for forty or fifty years. We see another

man called “at the eleventh hour,” like the thief on the cross, and plucked like a brand out of the fire—one day a hard impenitent sinner, and the next day in paradise. And yet the whole tenor of the Gospel leads us to believe that both these men are equally forgiven before God. Both are equally washed in Christ’s blood, and clothed in Christ’s righteousness. Both are equally justified, both accepted, and both will be found at Christ’s right hand in the last day.

There can be no doubt that this doctrine sounds strange to the ignorant and inexperienced Christian. It confounds the pride of human nature. It leaves the self-righteous no room to boast. It is a leveling, humbling doctrine, and gives occasion to many a murmur. But it is impossible to reject it, unless we reject the whole Bible. *True faith in Christ, though it be but a day old, justifies a man before God as completely as the faith of him who has followed Christ for fifty years*. The righteousness in which Timothy will stand at the day of judgment, is the same as that of the penitent thief. Both will be saved by grace alone. Both will owe all to Christ. We may not like this. But it is the doctrine of this parable, and not of this parable only, but of the whole New Testament. Happy is he who can receive the doctrine with humility! Well says Bishop Hall, “If some have cause to magnify God’s bounty, none have cause to complain.”

Before we leave this parable, let us arm our minds with some necessary cautions. It is a portion of Scripture that is frequently perverted and misapplied. *Men have often drawn from it, not milk, but poison*.

Let us beware of supposing, from anything in this parable, that salvation is in the slightest degree to be obtained by works. To suppose this is to overthrow the whole teaching of the Bible. Whatever a believer receives in the next world, is a matter of grace, and not of debt. God is never a debtor to us, in any sense whatever. When we have done all, we are unprofitable servants. (Luke 17:10.)

Let us beware of supposing, from this parable, that the distinction between Jews and Gentiles is entirely done away by the Gospel. To suppose this is to contradict many plain prophecies, both of the Old Testament and New. In the matter of justification, there is no distinction between the believing Jew and the Greek. Yet Israel is still a special people, and not "numbered among the nations." God has many purposes concerning the Jews, which are yet to be fulfilled.

Let us beware of supposing, from this parable, that all saved souls will have the same degree of glory. To suppose this, is to contradict many plain texts of Scripture. The title of all believers no doubt is the same—the righteousness of Christ. But all will not have the same place in heaven. "Every man shall receive his own reward, according to his own labor." (1 Cor. 3:8.)

Finally, let us beware of supposing from this parable, that it is safe for any one to put off repentance until the end of his days. To suppose this is a most dangerous delusion. The longer men refuse to obey Christ's voice, the less likely they are to be saved. "Now is the accepted time—now is the day of salvation." (2 Cor. 6:2.) Few are ever saved on their death-beds. One thief on the cross was saved,

that none should despair; but only one, that none should presume. A false confidence in those words, “the eleventh hour,” has ruined thousands of souls.

MATTHEW 20:17-23

As Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside, and on the way he said to them, “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death, and will hand him over to the Gentiles to mock, to scourge, and to crucify; and the third day he will be raised up.”

Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to him with her sons, kneeling and asking a certain thing of him. He said to her, “What do you want?”

She said to him, “Command that these, my two sons, may sit, one on your right hand, and one on your left hand, in your Kingdom.”

But Jesus answered, “You don’t know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?”

They said to him, “We are able.”

He said to them, “You will indeed drink my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with, but to sit on my right

hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it is for whom it has been prepared by my Father."

The first thing we should notice in these verses, is ***the clear announcement which the Lord Jesus Christ makes of His own approaching death.*** For the third time we find Him telling His disciples the astounding truth, that He, their wonder-working Master, must soon suffer and die.

The Lord Jesus KNEW from the beginning, all that was before Him. The treachery of Judas Iscariot—the fierce persecution of the chief-priests and scribes—the unjust judgment—the delivery to Pontius Pilate—the mocking—the scourging—the crown of thorns—the cross—the hanging between two malefactors—the nails—the spear—all, all were spread before His mind like a picture.

How great an aggravation of suffering fore-knowledge is, those know well who have lived in the prospect of some fearful surgical operation. Yet none of these things moved our Lord. He says, "I was not rebellious, neither turned away back. I gave my back to the strikers, and my cheeks to those who plucked off the hair—I didn't hide my face from shame and spitting." (Isaiah 50:5, 6.) He saw Calvary in the distance all His life through, and yet walked calmly up to it, without turning to the right hand or to the left. Surely there never was sorrow like unto His sorrow, or love like His love.

The Lord Jesus was a VOLUNTARY sufferer. When He died on the cross, it was not because He had not power to prevent it. He

suffered intentionally, deliberately, and of His own free-will. (John 10:18.) He knew that without shedding of His blood there could be no remission of man's sin. He knew that He was the Lamb of God, who must die to take away the sin of the world. He knew that His death was the appointed sacrifice, which must be offered up to make reconciliation for iniquity. Knowing all this, He went willingly to the cross. His heart was set on finishing the mighty work He came into the world to do. He was well aware that all hinged on His own death, and that, without that death, His miracles and preaching would have done comparatively nothing for the world. No wonder that He thrice pressed on the attention of His disciples that He "must" die. Blessed and happy are they who know the real meaning and importance of the sufferings of Christ!

The next thing that we should notice in these verses, is ***the mixture of ignorance and faith that may be found, even in true-hearted Christians.*** We see the mother of James and John coming to our Lord with her two sons, and proposing on their behalf a strange petition. She asks that they "may sit, one on His right hand, and the other on His left in His kingdom." She seems to have forgotten all He had just been saying about His suffering. Her eager mind can think of nothing but His glory. His plain warnings about the crucifixion, appear to have been thrown away on her sons. Their thoughts were full of nothing but His throne, and the day of His power. There was much of *faith* in their request, but there was much more of *infirmity*. There was something to be commended, in that they could see in Jesus of Nazareth a coming king. But there was also

much to blame, in that they did not remember that He was to be crucified before He could reign. Truly the flesh lusts against the spirit in all God's children, and Luther well remarks, "the flesh ever seeks to be glorified before it is crucified."

There are many Christians, who are very like this woman and her sons. They see in part, and know in part, the things of God. They have faith enough to follow Christ. They have knowledge enough to hate sin, and come out from the world. *And yet there are many truths of Christianity, of which they are deplorably ignorant. They talk ignorantly, they act ignorantly, and commit many sad mistakes.* Their acquaintance with the Bible is very scanty. Their insight into their own hearts is very small. But we must learn from these verses to deal gently with such people, because the Lord has received them. We must not set them down as graceless and godless, because of their ignorance. We must remember that true faith may lie at the bottom of their hearts, though there is much rubbish at the top. We must reflect that the sons of Zebedee, whose knowledge was at one time so imperfect, became at a later period pillars of the Church of Christ. Just so a believer may begin his course in much darkness, and yet prove finally a man mighty in the Scriptures, and a worthy follower of James and John.

The last thing that we should notice in these verses, is ***the solemn reproof which our Lord gives to the ignorant request of the mother of Zebedee's children and her two sons.*** He says to them, "You don't know what you are asking." They

had asked to share in their Master's *reward*, but they had not considered that they must first be partakers in their Master's *sufferings*. (1 Pet 4:13.) They had forgotten that those who would stand with Christ in glory, must drink of His cup of suffering, and be baptized with His baptism. They did not see that those who carry the *cross*, and those alone, shall receive the *crown*. Well might our Lord say, "You don't know what you are asking."

But do we never commit the same mistake that the sons of Zebedee committed? Do we never fall into their error, and make thoughtless, inconsiderate requests? Do we not often say things in prayer without "counting the cost," and ask for things to be granted to us, without reflecting how much our supplications involve? These are heart-searching questions. It may well be feared that many of us cannot give them a satisfactory answer.

We ask that our souls may be saved and go to heaven, when we die. It is a good request indeed. But are we prepared to take up the cross, and follow Christ? Are we willing to give up the world for His sake? Are we ready to put off the old man, and put on the new—to fight, to labor, and to run so as to obtain? Are we ready to withstand a taunting world, and endure hardships for Christ's sake? What shall we say? If we are not so ready, our Lord might say to us also, "You don't know what you are asking."

We ask that God would make us holy. It is a good request indeed. But are we prepared to be sanctified by any process that God in His wisdom may call on us to pass through? Are we ready to be purified

by affliction, weaned from the world by bereavements, drawn nearer to God by losses, sicknesses, and sorrow? Alas! these are hard questions. But if we are not, our Lord might well say to us, “You don’t know what you are asking.”

Let us leave these verses with a solemn resolution to consider well what we are about, when we draw near to God in prayer. Let us beware of thoughtless, inconsiderate and rash petitions. Well might Solomon say, “Be not rash with your mouth, and let not your heart be hasty to utter anything before God.” (Eccles. 5:2.)

MATTHEW 20:24-28

When the ten heard it, they were indignant with the two brothers.

But Jesus summoned them, and said, “You know that the rulers of the nations lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you, but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. Whoever desires to be first among you shall be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

These verses are few in number, but they contain lessons of great importance to all professing Christians. Let us see what they are.

In the first place we learn, that ***there may be pride, jealousy, and love of preeminence even among true disciples of***

Christ. What says the Scripture? “When the ten heard” what James and John had asked, “they were indignant with the two brothers.”

Pride is one of the oldest and most mischievous of sins. By it the angels fell—for “they kept not their first estate.” (Jude 6.) Through pride Adam and Eve were seduced into eating the forbidden fruit. They were not content with their lot, and thought “they would be as Gods.” From pride the saints of God receive their greatest injuries after their conversion. Well says Hooker, “Pride is a vice, which cleaves so fast unto the heart of men, that if we were to strip ourselves off all faults, one by one, we should undoubtedly find it the very last and hardest to put off.” It is a quaint but true saying of Bishop Hall, that “pride is the inmost coat, which we take off last, and which we put on first.”

In the second place we learn, that ***a life of self-denying kindness to others is the true secret of greatness in the kingdom of Christ.*** What says the Scripture? “Whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. Whoever desires to be first among you shall be your slave.”

The standard of the world, and the standard of the Lord Jesus, are indeed widely different. They are more than different. They are flatly contradictory one to the other. Among the children of this world, he is thought the greatest man who has most land, most money, most servants, most rank, and most earthly power. Among the children of God, he is reckoned the greatest who does most to promote the spiritual and temporal happiness of his fellow-

creatures. True greatness consists not in receiving, but in giving—not in selfish absorption of good things, but in imparting good to others —not in being served, but in serving—not in sitting still and being ministered to, but in going about and ministering to others.

The angels of God see far more beauty in the work of the Missionary, than in the work of the Australian digger for gold. They take far more interest in the labors of men like Howard and Judson, than in the victories of generals, the political speeches of statesmen, or the council-chambers of kings. Let us remember these things. Let us beware of seeking false greatness. Let as aim at that which alone is true. We may be sure there is profound wisdom in that saying of our Lord's, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:35.)

In the third place, we learn that ***the Lord Jesus Christ is intended to be the example of all true Christians.*** What says the Scripture? We ought to serve one another, "*even as* the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve."

The Lord God has mercifully provided His people with everything necessary to their sanctification. He has given those who follow after holiness the clearest of precepts, the best of motives, and the most encouraging of promises. But this is not all. He has furthermore supplied them with the most perfect pattern and example, even the life of His own Son. By that life he bids us model our own. In the steps of that life He bids us walk. (1 Peter 2:21.) It is the model after which we must strive to mold our tempers, our words, and our works, in this evil world. "Would my Master have spoken in this

manner? Would my Master have behaved in this way?"—These are the questions by which we ought daily to test ourselves.

How humbling this truth is! What searchings of heart it ought to raise within us! What a loud call it is to "lay aside every weight, and the sin which most easily besets us!" What manner of people ought they to be who profess to copy Christ! What poor unprofitable religion is that which makes a man content with talking and empty profession, while his life is unholy and unclean! Alas! those who know nothing of Christ, as an example, will find at last that He knows nothing of them as His saved people. "He that says he abides in Him ought himself also so to walk even as he walked." (1 John 2:6.)

Finally, let us learn from these verses,that ***Christ's death was an atonement for sin.*** What says the Scripture? "The Son of Man came to give his life as a *ransom* for many."

This is the mightiest truth in the Bible. Let us take care that we grasp it firmly, and never let it go. Our Lord Jesus Christ did not die merely as a martyr, or as a splendid example of self-sacrifice and self-denial. Those who can see no more than *that* in His death, fall infinitely short of the truth. They lose sight of the very foundation-stone of Christianity, and miss the whole comfort of the Gospel. *Christ died as a sacrifice for man's sin.* He died to make reconciliation for man's iniquity. He died to purge our sins by the offering of Himself. He died to redeem us from the curse which we

all deserved, and to make satisfaction to the justice of God, which must otherwise have condemned us. Never let us forget this!

We are all by nature debtors. We owe to our holy Maker ten thousand talents, and are not able to pay. We cannot atone for our own transgressions, for we are weak and frail, and only adding to our debts every day. But, blessed be God! what we could not do, Christ came into the world to do for us. What we could not pay, He undertook to pay for us. To pay it He died for us upon the cross. "He offered himself to God." (Heb. 9:14.) "He suffered for sin, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God." (1 Peter 3:18.) Once more, never let us forget this!

Let us not leave these verses without asking ourselves, where is our humility? what is our idea of true greatness? what is our example? what is our hope? Life, eternal life, depends on the answer we give to these questions. Happy is that man who is truly humble, strives to do good in his day, walks in the steps of Jesus, and rests all his hopes on the ransom paid for him by Christ's blood. Such a man is a true Christian!

MATTHEW 20:29-34

As they went out from Jericho, a great multitude followed him. Behold, ***two blind men*** *sitting by the road, when they heard that Jesus was passing by, cried out, "Lord, have mercy on us, O son of*

David!" The multitude rebuked them, telling those who they should be quiet, but they cried out even more, "Lord, have mercy on us, O son of David!"

Jesus stood still, and called them, and asked, "What do you want me to do for you?"

They told him, "Lord, that our eyes may be opened."

Jesus, being moved with compassion, touched their eyes; and immediately their eyes received their sight, and they followed him.

In these verses we have a touching picture of an event in our Lord's history. He heals two blind men sitting by the wayside near Jericho. The circumstances of the event contain several deeply interesting lessons, which all professing Christians would do well to remember.

For one thing, let us mark ***what strong faith may sometimes be found, where it might least have been expected.*** Blind as these two men were, they believed that Jesus was able to help them. They never saw any of our Lord's miracles. They knew Him only by hear-say, and not face to face. And yet, as soon as they heard that He was passing by, they cried out, "Lord, have mercy on us, O son of David!"

Such faith may well put us to shame. With all our books of evidence, and lives of saints, and libraries of divinity, how few know anything of simple, childlike confidence in Christ's mercy and

Christ's power. And even among those who are believers, the degree of faith is often strangely disproportionate to the privileges enjoyed. Many an unlearned man, who can only read his New Testament with difficulty, possesses the spirit of unhesitating trust in Christ's advocacy, while deeply-read divines are harassed by questionings and doubts. They who, humanly speaking, ought to be first, are often last, and the last first.

For another thing, let us mark ***what wisdom there is in using every opportunity for getting good for our souls.*** These blind men sat "by the wayside." Had they not done so, they might never have been healed. Jesus never returned to Jericho, and they might never have met with Him again.

Let us see, in this simple fact, the importance of diligence in the use of means of grace. Let us never neglect the house of God—never forsake the assembling of ourselves with God's people—never omit the reading of our Bibles—never let drop the practice of private prayer. These things, no doubt, will not save us without the grace of the Holy Spirit. Thousands make use of them, and remain dead in trespasses and sins. But it is just in the use of these things that souls are converted and saved. They are *the ways in which Jesus walks*. It is those who "sit by the wayside" who are likely to be healed. Do we know the diseases of our souls? Do we feel any desire to see the great Physician? If we do we must not wait in idleness, saying, "If I am to be saved, I shall be saved." We must arise and go to the road where

Jesus walks. Who can tell but He will soon pass by for the last time? Let us sit daily by the way-side.

For another thing, let us mark ***the value of pains and perseverance in seeking Christ.*** These blind men were "rebuked" by the multitude that accompanied our Lord. Men told them to "be quiet." But they were not to be silenced in this way. They felt their need of help. They cared nothing for the check which they received. They cried out even more, "Lord, have mercy on us, O son of David!"

We have in this part of their conduct, a most important example. We are not to be deterred by opposition, or discouraged by difficulties, when we begin to seek the salvation of our souls. We must "pray always and not faint." (Luke 18:1.) We must remember the parable of the importunate widow, and of the friend who came to borrow bread at midnight. Like them we must press our petitions at the throne of grace, and say, "I will not let you go, except you bless me." (Gen. 32:26.) Friends, relatives, and neighbors may say unkind things, and reprove our earnestness. We may meet with coldness and lack of sympathy, where we might have looked for help. But let none of these things move us. If we feel our diseases, and want to find Jesus, the great Physician—if we know our sins, and desire to have them pardoned—let us press on. "The violent take the kingdom by force." (Matt. 11:12.)

Finally, let us mark ***how gracious the Lord Jesus is to those who seek Him.*** "Jesus stood still, and called" the blind men.

He kindly asked them what it was that they desired. He heard their petition, and did what they requested. He “being moved with compassion, touched their eyes; and immediately their eyes received their sight.”

We see here an illustration of that old truth, which we can never know too well, the mercifulness of Christ’s heart towards the sons of men. The Lord Jesus is not only a mighty Savior, but merciful, kind, and gracious to a degree that our minds cannot conceive. Well might the apostle Paul say, that “the love of Christ passes knowledge.” (Ephes. 3:19.) Like him, let us pray that we may “know” more of that love. We need it when we first begin our Christian course, poor trembling penitents, and babes in grace. We need it afterwards, as we travel along the narrow way, often erring, often stumbling, and often cast down. We shall need it in the evening of our days, when we go down the valley of the shadow of death. Let us then grasp the love of Christ firmly, and keep it daily before our minds. We shall never know, until we wake up in the next world, how much we are indebted to it.

Matthew – Chap. 21

MATTHEW 21:1-11

When they drew near to Jerusalem, and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village that is opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them, and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord needs them,' and immediately he will send them."

All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophet, saying, "Tell the daughter of Zion, behold, your King comes to you, humble, and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

The disciples went, and did just as Jesus commanded them, and brought the donkey and the colt, and laid their clothes on them; and he sat on them. A very great multitude spread their clothes on the road. Others cut branches from the trees, and spread them on the road. The multitudes who went before him, and who followed kept shouting, "Hosanna to the son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"

When he had come into Jerusalem, all the city was stirred up, saying, "Who is this?" The multitudes said, "This is the prophet, Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee."

These verses contain a very remarkable passage in our Lord Jesus Christ's life. They describe His public entry into Jerusalem, when He came there for the last time, before He was crucified.

There is something peculiarly striking in this incident in our Lord's history. The narrative reads like the account of some royal conqueror's return to his own city. "A very great multitude" accompanies him in a kind of triumphal procession. Loud cries and expressions of praise are heard around him. "All the city was stirred up." The whole transaction is singularly at variance with the past tenor of our Lord's life. It is curiously unlike the ways of Him who did not "cry, nor strive, nor let His voice be heard in the streets"—who withdrew Himself from the multitude on other occasions—and said to those He healed, "see that you say nothing to any man." (Mark 1:44.) And yet the whole transaction admits of explanation. The reasons of this public entry are not hard to find out. Let us see what they were.

The plain truth is, that our Lord knew well that the time of His earthly ministry was drawing to a close. He knew that the hour was approaching when He must finish the mighty work He came to do, by dying for our sins upon the cross. He knew that His last journey had been accomplished, and that there remained nothing now in His earthly ministry, but to be offered as a sacrifice on Calvary. Knowing all this, He no longer, as in time past, sought secrecy. Knowing all this, He thought it good to enter the place where He was to be delivered to death, with peculiar solemnity and publicity. It was not fitting that the Lamb of God should come to be slain on Calvary privately and silently. Before the great sacrifice for the sins of the world was offered up, it was right that every eye should be fixed on the victim. It was suitable that the crowning act of our Lord's life

should be done with as much notoriety as possible. Therefore it was that He made this public entry. Therefore it was that He attracted to himself the eyes of the wondering multitude. Therefore it was that all Jerusalem was moved. The atoning blood of the Lamb of God was about to be shed. The deed was not to be "done in a corner." (Acts 26:26.)

It is good to remember these things. The real meaning of our Lord's conduct at this period of His history is not sufficiently considered by many readers of this passage. It remains for us to consider the practical lessons which these verses appear to point out.

In the first place, let us notice in these verses ***an example of our Lord Jesus Christ's perfect knowledge.*** He sends His two disciples into a village. He tells them that they will there find the donkey on which he was to ride. He provides them with an answer to the inquiry of those to whom the donkey belonged. He tells those who on giving that answer the donkey will be sent. And all happens exactly as He foretells.

There is nothing hidden from the Lord's eyes. There are no secrets with Him. Alone or in company, by night or by day, in private or in public, He is acquainted with all our ways. He who saw Nathanael under the fig-tree is unchanged. Go where we will, and retire from the world as we may, we are never out of sight of Christ.

This is a thought that ought to exercise a restraining and sanctifying effect on our souls. We all know the influence which the

presence of the rulers of this world has upon their subjects. Nature itself teaches us to put a check on our tongues, and demeanor, and behavior, when we are under the eye of a king. The sense of our Lord Jesus Christ's perfect knowledge of all our ways, ought to have the same effect upon our hearts. Let us do nothing we would not like Christ to see, and say nothing we would not like Christ to hear. Let us seek to live and move and have our being under a continual recollection of Christ's presence. Let us behave as we would have done had we walked beside Him, in the company of James and John, by the sea of Galilee. This is the way to be trained for heaven. In heaven, "we shall ever be with the Lord." (1 Thess. 4:17.)

In the second place, let us notice in these verses ***an example of the manner in which prophecies concerning our Lord's first coming were fulfilled.*** We are told that His public entry fulfilled the words of Zechariah, "Your King comes to you, humble, and riding on a donkey."

It appears that this prediction was *literally and exactly fulfilled*. The words which the prophet spoke by the Holy Spirit received no figurative accomplishment. As he said, so it came to pass. As he foretold, so it was done. Five hundred and fifty years had passed away since the prediction was made—and then, when the appointed time arrived, the long-promised Messiah did literally ride into Zion on a donkey. No doubt the vast majority of the inhabitants of Jerusalem saw nothing in the circumstance. The veil was upon their hearts. But we are not left in doubt as to the fulfillment of the

prophecy. We are told plainly, “all this was done that it might be fulfilled.”

From the fulfillment of God’s word in time past, we are surely intended to gather something as to the manner of its fulfillment in time to come. We have a right to expect that prophecies respecting the *second* advent of Christ, will be as literally fulfilled as those respecting His first advent. He came to this earth literally in person the first time. He will come to this earth literally in person the second time. He came in humiliation once literally to suffer. He will come again in glory literally to reign. Every prediction respecting things accompanying His first advent was literally accomplished. It will be just the same when He returns. All that is foretold about the restoration of the Jews—the judgments on the ungodly—the unbelief of the world, the gathering of the elect—shall be made good to the letter. Let us not forget this. In the study of unfulfilled prophecy, a fixed principle of interpretation is of the first importance.

Finally, let us notice in these verses ***a striking example of the worthlessness of man’s favor.*** Of all the multitudes who crowded round our Lord as He entered Jerusalem, none stood by Him when He was delivered into the hands of wicked men. Many cried, “Hosanna!” who four days after cried, “away with Him, crucify Him!”

But this is a faithful picture of human nature. This is a proof of the utter folly of thinking more of the praise of man than the praise of God. Nothing is so fickle and uncertain as *popularity*. It is here

today and gone tomorrow. It is a sandy foundation, and sure to fail those who build upon it. Let us not care for it. Let us seek the favor of Him who is "the same yesterday, and today, and forever." (Heb. 13:8.) Christ never changes. Those whom He loves, He loves to the end. His favor endures forever.

MATTHEW 21:12-22

Jesus entered into the temple area, and drove out all of those who sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the money changers' tables and the seats of those who sold the doves. He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you have made it a den of robbers!"

The blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children who were crying in the temple and saying, "Hosanna to the son of David!" they were indignant, and said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying?"

Jesus said to them, "Yes. Did you never read, 'Out of the mouth of children and infants you have perfected praise?'"

He left them, and went out of the city to Bethany, and lodged there. Now in the morning, as he returned to the city, he was hungry. Seeing a fig tree by the road, he came to it, and found nothing on it but leaves. He said to it, "Let there be no fruit from you forever!"

Immediately the fig tree withered away. When the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, "How did the fig tree immediately wither away?"

Jesus answered them, "Most certainly I tell you, if you have faith, and don't doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you told this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' it would be done. All things, whatever you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive."

We have in these verses an account of two remarkable events in our Lord's history. In both, there was something eminently figurative and typical. Each was an emblem of spiritual things. Beneath the surface of each, lie lessons of solemn instruction.

The first event that demands our attention, is ***our Lord's visit to the temple.*** He found His Father's house in a state which too truly shadowed forth the general condition of the whole Jewish church—everything out of order, and out of course. He found the courts of that holy building disgracefully profaned by worldly transactions. Trading, and buying, and selling, were actually going on within its walls. *There* stood dealers ready to supply the Jew who came from distant countries, with any sacrifice he wanted. *There* sat the money-changer, ready to change his foreign money for the current coin of the land. Bulls, and sheep, and goats, and pigeons, were there exposed for sale, as if the place had been a market. The jingling of money might there be heard, as if these holy courts had been a bank or an exchange.

Such were the scenes that met our Lord's eyes. He saw it all with holy indignation. "He drove out all of those who sold and bought." He "overthrew the money changers' tables." Resistance there was none, for men knew that He was right. Objection there was none, for all felt that he was only reforming a notorious abuse, which had been basely permitted for the sake of gain. Well might He sound in the ears of the astonished traders, as they fled from the temple— "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you have made it a den of robbers!"

Let us see in our Lord's conduct on this occasion, a striking type of what He will do when He comes again the second time. He will purify His visible church as He purified the temple. He will cleanse it from everything that defiles and works iniquity, and cast every worldly professor out of its pale. He will allow no worshiper of money, or lover of gain, to have a place in that glorious temple, which He will finally exhibit before the world. May we all strive to live in the daily expectation of that coming! May we judge ourselves, that we be not condemned and cast out in that searching and sifting day! We should often study those words of Malachi— "Who can endure the day of His coming? and who will stand when He appears? for He is like a refiner's fire, and like launderer's soap." (Mal. 3:2.)

The second event that demands our attention in these verses, is ***our Lord's curse upon the fruitless fig-tree.*** We are told, that being hungry He came to a fig-tree in the way, and "found nothing on it but leaves. He said to it, 'Let there be no fruit from you forever!'

Immediately the fig tree withered away." This is an incident almost without parallel in all our Lord's ministry. It is almost the only occasion on which we find Him making one of His creatures suffer, in order to teach a spiritual truth. There was a heart-searching lesson in that withered fig-tree. It preaches a sermon we shall all do well to hear.

That fig-tree, full of *leaves*, but barren of *fruit*, was a striking emblem of the Jewish church, when our Lord was upon earth. The Jewish church had everything to make an outward show. It had the temple, the priesthood, the daily service, the yearly feasts, the Old Testament Scriptures, the rituals of the Levites, the morning and evening sacrifice. But beneath these goodly leaves, the Jewish church was utterly *destitute of fruit*. It had no grace, no faith, no love, no humility, no spirituality, no real holiness, no willingness to receive its Messiah. (John 1:11.) And hence, like the fig-tree, the Jewish church was soon to wither away. It was to be stripped of all its outward ornaments, and its members scattered over the face of the earth. Jerusalem was to be destroyed. The temple was to be burned. The daily sacrifice was to be taken away. The tree was to wither away to the very ground. And so it came to pass. Never was there a type so literally fulfilled. In every wandering Jew we see a branch of the fig-tree that was crushed.

But we may not stop here. We may find even more instruction in the event we are now considering. These things were written for *our* sakes, as well as for the Jews.

Is not every fruitless branch of Christ's visible church in a dreadful danger of becoming a withered fig-tree? Beyond doubt it is. High ecclesiastical profession, without holiness among the people—overweening confidence in councils, bishops, liturgies, and ceremonies, while repentance and faith have been neglected—have ruined many a visible church in time past, and may yet ruin many more. Where are the once famous churches of Ephesus, and Sardis, and Carthage, and Hippo? They are all gone. They had leaves, but no fruit. Our Lord's curse came upon them. They became withered fig-trees. The decree went forth, "Hew them down." (Dan. 4:23.) Let us remember this. Let us beware of Church-pride. Let us not be high-minded, but fear. (Rom. 2:20.)

Finally, is not *every fruitless professor of Christianity* in dreadful danger of becoming a withered fig-tree? There can be no doubt of it. So long as a man is content with the leaves of religion—with a name to live while he is dead, and a form of godliness without the power—so long his soul is in great peril. So long as he is satisfied with going to church or chapel, and receiving the Lord's supper, and being called a Christian, while his heart is not changed, and his sins not forsaken—so long he is daily provoking God to cut him off without remedy. Fruit, fruit—the fruit of the Spirit, is the only sure proof that we are savingly united to Christ, and in the way to heaven. May this sink down into our hearts, and never be forgotten!

MATTHEW 21:23-32

When he had come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority do you do these things? Who gave you this authority?"

Jesus answered them, "I also will ask you one question, which if you tell me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, where was it from? From heaven or from men?"

They reasoned with themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask us, 'Why then did you not believe him?'

But if we say, 'From men,' we fear the multitude, for all hold John to be a prophet." They answered Jesus, and said, "We don't know."

He also said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things. But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first, and said, 'Son, go work today in my vineyard.' He answered, 'I will not,' but afterward he changed his mind, and went. He came to the second, and said the same thing. He answered, 'I go, sir,' but he didn't go. Which of the two did the will of his father?"

They said to him, "The first."

Jesus said to them, "Most certainly I tell you that the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering into the Kingdom of God

before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you didn't believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. When you saw it, you didn't even repent afterward, that you might believe him."

These verses contain a conversation between our Lord Jesus Christ, and the chief priests and elders of the people. Those bitter enemies of all righteousness saw the sensation which the public entry into Jerusalem, and the cleansing of the temple, had produced. At once they came around our Lord like bees, and endeavored to find occasion for an accusation against Him.

Let us observe, in the first place, ***how ready the enemies of truth are to question the authority of all who do more good than themselves.*** The chief priests have not a word to say about our Lord's teaching. They make no charge against the lives or conduct of Himself or His followers. The point on which they fasten is his commission— "By what authority do you these things? and who gave you this authority?"

The same charge has often been made against the servants of God, when they have striven to check the progress of ecclesiastical corruption. It is the old weapon by which the children of this world have often labored to stop the progress of revivals and reformations. It is the weapon which was often brandished in the face of the Reformers, the Puritans, and the Methodists of the last century. It is the poisoned arrow which is often shot at city-missionaries and lay-agents in the present day. Too many care nothing for the manifest

blessing of God on man's work, so long as he is not sent forth by their own sect or party. It matters nothing to them, that some humble laborer in God's harvest can point to numerous conversions of souls through his instrumentality. They still cry, "By what authority do you these things?"

His success is nothing—they demand his commission. His cures are nothing—they require his diploma. Let us neither be surprised nor moved, when we hear such things. It is the old charge which was brought against Christ Himself. "There is no new thing under the sun." (Eccles. 1:9.)

Let us observe, in the second place, ***the consummate wisdom with which our Lord replied to the question put to Him.*** His enemies had asked Him for His authority for doing what He did. They doubtless intended to make His answer a handle for accusing Him. He knew the drift of their inquiry, and said, "I also will ask you one question, which if you tell me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, where was it from? From heaven or from men?"

We must distinctly understand, that in this answer of our Lord's there was no evasion. To suppose this is a great mistake. The counter question which He asked, was in reality an answer to His enemies' inquiry. He knew they dared not deny that John the Baptist was a man sent from God. He knew that, this being granted, he needed only to remind them of John's testimony to Himself. Had not John declared him to be "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the

world?" Had not John pronounced Him to be the Mighty One, who was to "baptize with the Holy Spirit?" In short, our Lord's question was a home-thrust to the conscience of His enemies. If they once conceded the divine authority of John the Baptist's mission, they must also concede the divinity of His own. If they acknowledged that John came from heaven, they must acknowledge that Jesus Himself was the Christ.

Let us pray that, in this difficult world, we may be supplied with the same kind of wisdom which was here displayed by our Lord. No doubt we ought to act on the injunction of Peter, "and always be ready to give an answer to everyone who asks you a reason concerning the hope that is in you, with humility and fear." (1 Peter 3:15.) We ought to shrink from no inquiry into the principles of our holy religion, and to be ready at any time to defend and explain our practice. But for all this, we must never forget that "wisdom is profitable to direct," and that we should strive to speak wisely in defense of a good cause. The words of Solomon deserve consideration— "Don't answer a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him." (Prov. 26:4)

In the last place, let us observe in these verses, ***what immense encouragement our Lord holds out to those who repent.*** We see this strikingly brought out in the parable of the two sons. Both were told to go and work in their father's vineyard. One son, like the profligate publicans, for some time flatly refused obedience, but afterwards repented and went. The other, like the formal

Pharisees, pretended willingness to go, but in reality went not. “Which of the two,” says our Lord, “did the will of his father?” Even his enemies were obliged to reply, “the first.”

Let it be a settled principle in our Christianity, that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is infinitely willing to receive penitent sinners. It matters nothing what a man has been in time past. Does he repent, and come to Christ? Then old things are passed away, and all things are become new. It matters nothing how high and self-confident a man’s profession of religion may be. Does he really give up his sins? If not, his profession is abominable in God’s sight, and he himself is still under the curse. Let us take courage ourselves, if we have been great sinners hitherto. Only let us repent and believe in Christ, and there is hope. Let us encourage others to repent. Let us hold the door wide open to the very chief of sinners. Never will that word fail, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us the sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9.)

MATTHEW 21:33-46

“Hear another parable. There was a man who was a master of a household, who planted a vineyard, set a hedge about it, dug a winepress in it, built a tower, leased it out to farmers, and went into another country. When the season for the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the farmers, to receive his fruit. The farmers took his servants, beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other servants more than the first—and they treated them the

same way. But afterward he sent to them his son, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But the farmers, when they saw the son, said among themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him, and seize his inheritance.' So they took him, and threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. When therefore the master of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those farmers?"

They told him, "He will miserably destroy those miserable men, and will lease out the vineyard to other farmers, who will give him the fruit in its season."

Jesus said to them, "Did you never read in the Scriptures, 'The stone which the builders rejected, the same was made the head of the corner. This was from the Lord. It is marvelous in our eyes?' "Therefore I tell you, the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and will be given to a nation bringing forth its fruit. He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but on whoever it will fall, it will scatter him as dust."

When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he spoke about them. When they sought to seize him, they feared the multitudes, because they considered him to be a prophet.

The parable contained in these verses was spoken with special reference to the Jews. They are the husbandmen here described. Their sins are set before us here as in a picture. Of this there can be no doubt. It is written, that "He spoke about them."

But we must not flatter ourselves that this parable contains nothing for the Gentiles. There are lessons laid down for us, as well as for the Jew. Let us see what they are.

We see, in the first place, ***what distinguishing privileges God is pleased to bestow on some nations.***

He chose Israel to be a peculiar people to Himself. He separated them from the other nations of the earth, and bestowed on them countless blessings. He gave them revelations of Himself, while all the rest of the earth was in darkness. He gave them the law, and the covenants, and the oracles of God, while all the world beside was let alone. In short, God dealt with the Jews as a man deals with a piece of land which he fences out and cultivates, while all the fields around are left untilled and waste. The vineyard of the Lord was the house of Israel. (Isaiah. 5:7.)

And have we no privileges? Beyond doubt we have many. We have the Bible, and liberty for every one to read it. We have the Gospel, and permission to every one to hear it. We have spiritual mercies in abundance, of which five hundred millions of our fellow men know nothing at all. How thankful we ought to be! The poorest man in England may say every morning, "There are five hundred million immortal souls worse off than I am. Who am I, that I should differ? Bless the Lord, O my soul."

We see, in the next place, ***what a bad use nations sometimes make of their privileges.***

When the Lord separated the Jews from other people, He had a right to expect that they would serve Him, and obey His laws. When a man has taken pains with a vineyard, he has a right to expect fruit. But Israel rendered not a due return for all God's mercies. They mingled with the heathen, and learned their ways. They hardened themselves in sin and unbelief. They turned aside after idols. They kept not God's ordinances. They despised God's temple. They refused to listen to His prophets. They abused those whom he sent to call them to repentance. And finally they brought their wickedness to a height, by killing the Son of God Himself, even Christ the Lord.

And what are we doing ourselves with our privileges? Truly that is a serious question, and one that ought to make us think. It may well be feared, that we are not, as a nation, living up to our light, or walking worthy of our many mercies. Must we not confess with shame, that millions among us seem utterly without God in the world? Must we not acknowledge, that in many a town, and in many a village, Christ seems hardly to have any disciple, and the Bible seems hardly to be believed? It is vain to shut our eyes to these facts. The fruit that the Lord receives from His vineyard in Great Britain, compared with what it ought to be, is disgracefully small. It may well be doubted whether we are not as provoking to Him as the Jews.

We see, in the next place, ***what a dreadful reckoning God sometimes has with nations and churches, which make a bad use of their privileges.***

A time came when the patience of God towards the Jews had an end. Forty years after our Lord's death, the cup of their iniquity was at length full, and they received a heavy chastisement for their many sins. Their holy city, Jerusalem, was destroyed. Their temple was burned. They themselves were scattered over the face of the earth. "The kingdom of God was taken from them, and given to a nation bringing forth its fruits."

And will the same thing ever happen to us? Will the judgments of God ever come down on this nation of England, because of her unfruitfulness under so many mercies? Who can tell? We may well cry with the prophet, "Lord God, you alone know." We only know that judgments have come on many a church and nation in the last 1800 years. The kingdom of God has been taken from the African churches. The Mohammedan power has overwhelmed most of the churches of the East. At all events it becomes all believers to intercede much on behalf of our country. *Nothing offends God so much as neglect of privileges. Much has been given to us, and much will be required.*

We see, in the last place, ***the power of conscience even in wicked men.***

The chief priests and elders at last discovered that our Lord's parable was specially meant for themselves. The point of its closing words was too sharp to be escaped. "They knew that he spoke about them."

There are many hearers of the Gospel in every congregation, who are exactly in the condition of these unhappy men. They know that what they hear Sunday after Sunday is all true. They know that they are wrong themselves, and that every sermon condemns them. But they have neither will nor courage to acknowledge this. They are too proud and too fond of the world to confess their past mistakes, and to take up the cross and follow Christ. Let us all beware of this dreadful state of mind. The last day will prove that there was more going on in the consciences of hearers than was at all known to preachers. Thousands and ten thousands will be found, like the chief priests, to have been convicted by their own conscience, and yet to have died unconverted.

Matthew – Chap. 22

MATTHEW 22:1-14

Jesus answered and spoke again in parables to them, saying, "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a certain king, who made a marriage feast for his son, and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the marriage feast, but they would not come." Again he sent out other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, "Behold, I have made ready my dinner. My oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the marriage feast! But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his merchandise, and the rest grabbed his servants, and treated them shamefully, and killed them. When the king heard that, he was angry, and sent his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city."

"Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited weren't worthy. Go therefore to the intersections of the highways, and as many as you may find, invite to the marriage feast.' Those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together as many as they found, both bad and good. The wedding was filled with guests. But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man who didn't have on wedding clothing,

and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here not wearing wedding clothing?' He was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and throw him into the outer darkness; where the weeping and grinding of teeth will be.' For many are called, but few chosen."

The parable related in these verses is one of very wide signification. In its first application it unquestionably points to the Jews. But we may not confine it to them. It contains heart-searching lessons for all among whom the Gospel is preached. It is a spiritual picture which speaks to us this day, if we have an ear to hear. The remark of Olshausen is wise and true, "parables are like many-sided precious stones, cut so as to cast luster in more than one direction."

Let us observe, in the first place, that ***the salvation of the Gospel is compared to a marriage feast.*** The Lord Jesus tells us that "a certain king made a marriage feast for his son."

There is in the Gospel a complete provision for all the needs of man's soul. There is a supply of everything that can be required to relieve spiritual hunger and spiritual thirst. Pardon, peace with God, lively hope in this world, glory in the world to come, are set before us in rich abundance. It is "a feast of fat things." All this provision is owing to the love of the Son of God, Jesus Christ our Lord. He offers to take us into union with Himself—to restore us to the family of God as dear children—to clothe us with His own righteousness—to give us a place in His kingdom, and to present us faultless before His Father's throne at the last day. The Gospel, in short, is an offer of

food to the hungry—joy to the mourner—a home to the outcast—a loving friend to the lost. It is glad tidings. God offers, through His dear Son, to be at peace with sinful man. Let us not forget this— "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son as the atoning sacrifice for our sins." (1 John 4:10.)

Let us observe, in the second place, that ***the invitations of the Gospel are wide, full, broad, and unlimited.*** The Lord Jesus tells us in the parable, that the king's servants said to those who were bidden, "all things are ready. Come to the marriage feast!"

There is nothing lacking on God's part for the salvation of sinners' souls. No one will ever be able to say at last that it was God's fault, if he is not saved. The Father is ready to love and receive. The Son is ready to pardon and cleanse guilt away. The Spirit is ready to sanctify and renew. Angels are ready to rejoice over the returning sinner. Grace is ready to assist him. The Bible is ready to instruct him. Heaven is ready to be his everlasting home. One thing only is needful, and that is, the sinner must be ready and willing himself. Let this also never be forgotten. Let us not quibble and split hairs upon this point. God will be found clear of the blood of all lost souls. The Gospel always speaks of sinners as responsible and accountable beings. The Gospel places an open door before all mankind. No one is excluded from the range of its offers. Though *efficient* only to believers, those offers are *sufficient* for all the world. Though few enter the strait gate, all are invited to come in.

Let us observe, in the third place, that ***the salvation of the Gospel is rejected by many to whom it is offered.*** The Lord Jesus tells us, that those whom the king's servants invited to the wedding, "made light of it, and went their ways."

There are thousands of hearers of the Gospel who derive from it no benefit whatever. They listen to it Sunday after Sunday, and year after year, and do not believe to the saving of the soul. They feel no special need of the Gospel. They see no special beauty in it. They do not perhaps hate it, or oppose it, or scoff at it, but they do not receive it into their hearts. They like other things far better. Their money, their lands—their business, or their pleasures, are all far more interesting subjects to them than their souls. It is a dreadful state of mind to be in, but awfully common. Let us search our own hearts, and take heed that it is not our own. Open sin may kill its thousands; but indifference and neglect of the Gospel kill their tens of thousands. Multitudes will find themselves in hell, not so much because they openly broke the ten commandments, as because they made light of the gospel. Christ died for them on the cross, but they neglected Him.

Let us observe, in the last place, that ***all false professors of religion will be detected, exposed, and eternally condemned at the last day.*** The Lord Jesus tells us, that when the wedding was at last furnished with guests, the king came in to see them, and "saw a man who didn't have on wedding-clothing." He asked him how he came in there without one, and he received no

reply. And he then commanded the servants to “bind him hand and foot and take him away.”

There will always be some false professors in the Church of Christ, as long as the world stands. In this parable, as Quesnel says, “One single castaway represents all the rest.” It is impossible to read the hearts of men. Deceivers and hypocrites will never be entirely excluded from the ranks of those who call themselves Christians. So long as a man professes subjection to the Gospel, and lives an outwardly correct life, we dare not say positively that he is not clothed in the righteousness of Christ.

But there will be no deception at the last day. The unerring eye of God will discern who are His own people, and who are not. Nothing but true faith shall abide the fire of His judgment. All spurious Christianity shall be weighed in the balance and found lacking. None but true believers shall sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb. It shall avail the hypocrite nothing that he has been a loud talker about religion, and had the reputation of being an eminent Christian among men. His triumphing shall be but for a moment. He shall be stripped of all his borrowed plumage, and stand naked and shivering before the bar of God, speechless, self-condemned, hopeless, and helpless. He shall be cast into outer darkness with shame, and reap according as he has sown. Well may our Lord say, “there shall be weeping and grinding of teeth.”

Let us learn wisdom from the solemn pictures of this parable, and give diligence to make our calling and election sure. We ourselves are

among those to whom the word is spoken, “All things are ready, come to the marriage feast.” Let us see that we refuse not him that speaks. Let us not sleep as others do, but watch and be sober. Time hastens on. The King will soon come in to see the guests. Have we or have we not got on the wedding garment? Have we put on Christ? That is the grand question that arises out of this parable. May we never rest until we can give a satisfactory answer! May those heart-searching words daily ring in our ears, “Many are called, but few are chosen!”

MATTHEW 22:15-22

Then the Pharisees went and took counsel how they might entrap him in his talk. They sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, “Teacher, we know that you are honest, and teach the way of God in truth, no matter who you teach, for you aren’t partial to anyone. Tell us therefore, what do you think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?”

But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, “Why do you test me, you hypocrites? Show me the tax money.”

They brought to him a denarius.

He asked them, “Whose is this image and inscription?”

They said to him, “Caesar’s.”

Then he said to them, "Give therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

When they heard it, they marveled, and left him, and went away.

We see in this passage the first of a series of subtle attacks, which were made on our Lord during the last days of His earthly ministry. His deadly foes, the Pharisees, saw the influence which He was obtaining, both by His miracles and by His preaching. They were determined by some means to silence Him, or put Him to death. They therefore endeavored to "entrap him in his talk." They sent forth "their disciples with the Herodians," to test Him with a hard question. They wished to entice Him into saying something which might serve as a handle for an accusation against Him. Their scheme, we are told in these verses, entirely failed. They took nothing by their movement, and retreated in confusion.

The first thing which demands our attention in these verses, is ***the flattering language with which our Lord was accosted by His enemies.*** "Teacher," they said, "we know that you are honest, and teach the way of God in truth, no matter who you teach, for you aren't partial to anyone." How well these Pharisees and Herodians talked! What smooth and honeyed words were these! They thought, no doubt, that by good words and fair speeches they would throw our Lord off His guard. It might truly be said of them, "his mouth was smooth as butter, but his heart was war. His words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords." (Psalm 55:21.)

It becomes all professing Christians to be much on their guard against FLATTERY. We mistake greatly if we suppose that persecution and hard usage are the only weapons in Satan's armory. That crafty foe has other engines for doing us mischief, which he knows well how to work. He knows how to poison souls by the world's seductive kindness, when he cannot frighten them by the fiery dart and the sword. Let us not be ignorant of his devices. By peace he destroys many.

We are only too apt to forget this truth. We overlook the many examples which God has given us in Scripture for our learning. What brought about the ruin of Samson? Not the armies of the Philistines, but the pretended love of a Philistine woman. What led to Solomon's backsliding? Not the strength of outward enemies, but the blandishment of his numerous wives. What was the cause of king Hezekiah's greatest mistake? Not the sword of Sennacherib, or the threats of Rabshakeh, but the flattery of the Babylonian ambassadors. Let us remember these things, and be on our guard. Peace often ruins nations more than war. Sweet things occasion far more sicknesses than bitter. The sun makes the traveler cast off his protective garments far sooner than the north wind. Let us beware of the flatterer. Satan is never so dangerous as when he appears as an angel of light. The world is never so dangerous to the Christian as when it smiles. When Judas betrayed his Lord, it was with a kiss. The believer that is proof against the world's frown does well. But he that is proof against its flattery does better.

The second thing that demands our attention in these verses, is ***the marvelous wisdom of the reply which our Lord made to His enemies.*** The Pharisees and Herodians asked whether it was lawful to give tribute to Caesar or not. They doubtless thought, that they had put a question which our Lord could not answer without giving them an advantage. Had He simply replied that it was *lawful* to pay tribute, they would have denounced Him to the people as one who dishonored the privileges of Israel, and considered the children of Abraham no longer free, but subjects to a foreign power. Had He, on the other hand, replied that it was *not lawful* to pay tribute, they would have denounced Him to the Romans as a mover of sedition, and a rebel against Caesar, who refused to pay his taxes. But our Lord's conduct completely baffled them. He demanded to see the tribute-money. He asks them whose head is on that coin. They reply, Caesar's. They acknowledge that Caesar has some authority over them, by using money bearing his image and superscription, since he that coins the current money is ruler of the land where that money is current. And at once they receive an irresistibly conclusive answer to their question— "Give therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

The principle laid down in these well-known words is one of deep importance. There is one obedience owing by every Christian to the civil government under which he lives, in all matters which are temporal, and not purely spiritual. He may not approve of every requirement of that civil government. But he must submit to the laws of the commonwealth, so long as those laws are unrepealed. He must

“give to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s.” There is another obedience which the Christian owes to the God of the Bible in all matters which are purely spiritual. No temporal loss, no civil disability, no displeasure of the powers that be, must ever tempt him to do things which the Scripture plainly forbids. His position may be very trying. He may have to suffer much for his conscience sake. But he must never fly in the face of unmistakable requirements of Scripture. If Caesar coins a new Gospel, he is not to be obeyed. We must “give to God the things that are God’s.”

The subject unquestionably is one of great difficulty and delicacy. It is certain that the church must not swallow up the state. It is no less certain that the state must not swallow up the church. On no point, perhaps, have conscientious men been so much tried. On no point have good men disagreed so much, as in solving the problem, “where the things of Caesar end, and the things of God begin.” The civil power, on the one side, has often encroached terribly on the rights of conscience—as the English puritans found to their cost in the unhappy time of the Stuarts. The spiritual power, on the other side, has often pushed its claims to an extravagant extent, so as to take Caesar’s scepter out of his hands—as it did when the church of Rome trampled on our own English king John. In order to have a right judgment in all questions of this kind, every true Christian should constantly pray for wisdom from above. The man whose eye is single, and who daily seeks for grace, and practical common sense, will never be allowed greatly to err.

MATTHEW 22:23-33

On that day Sadducees (those who say that there is no resurrection) came to him. They asked him, saying, "Teacher, Moses said, 'If a man dies, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up children for his brother.' Now there were with us seven brothers. The first married and died, and having no children left his wife to his brother. In like manner the second also, and the third, to the seventh. After them all, the woman died. In the resurrection therefore, whose wife will she be of the seven? For they all had her."

But Jesus answered them, "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are like God's angels in heaven. But concerning the resurrection of the dead, haven't you read that which was spoken to you by God, saying,'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?' God is not the God of the dead, but of the living."

When the multitudes heard it, they were astonished at his teaching.

This passage describes a conversation between our Lord Jesus Christ and the Sadducees. These unhappy men, who said that there was "no resurrection," attempted, like the Pharisees and Herodians,

to perplex our Lord with hard questions. Like them, they hoped "to entangle Him in His talk," and to injure His reputation among the people. Like them, they were completely baffled.

Let us observe, in the first place, that ***absurd skeptical objections to Bible truths are ancient things.*** The Sadducees wished to show the absurdity of the doctrine of the resurrection and the life to come. They therefore came to our Lord with a story which was probably invented for the occasion. They told him that a certain woman had married seven brothers in succession, who had all died and left no children. They then asked "whose wife" this woman would be in the next world, when all rose again. The object of the question was plain and transparent. They meant, in reality, to bring the whole doctrine of a resurrection into contempt, They meant to insinuate, that there must needs be confusion, and strife, and unseemly disorder, if, after death, men and women were to live again.

It must never surprise us, if we meet with like objections against the doctrines of Scripture, and especially against those doctrines which concern another world. There never probably will be lacking "unreasonable men," who will "intrude" into things unseen, and *make imaginary difficulties their excuse for unbelief*. 'Supposed cases' are one of the favorite strongholds in which an unbelieving mind loves to entrench itself. Such a mind will often set up a shadow of its own imagining, and fight with it, as if it was a truth. Such a mind will often refuse to look at the overwhelming mass of plain

evidence by which Christianity is supported, and will fasten down on some one single difficulty, which it fancies is unanswerable.

The talk and arguments of people of this character should never shake our faith for a moment. For one thing, we should remember that there must needs be deep and dark things in a religion which comes from God, and that a child may put questions which the greatest philosopher cannot answer. For another thing, we should remember, that there are countless truths in the Bible, which are clear, and unmistakable. Let us first attend them, believe them, and obey them. So doing, we need not doubt that many a thing now unintelligible to us will yet be made plain. So doing, we may be sure that "what we know not now we shall know hereafter."

Let us observe, in the second place, ***what a remarkable text our Lord brings forward, in proof of the reality of a life to come.*** He places before the Sadducees the words which God spoke to Moses in the bush— "I *am* the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." (Exod. 3:6.) He adds the comment, "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." At the time when Moses heard these words, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had been dead and buried many years. Two centuries had passed away since Jacob, the last of the three, was carried to his tomb. And yet God spoke of them as being still His people, and of Himself as being still their God. He said not, "I *was* their God," but "I *am*."

Perhaps we are often tempted to doubt the truth of a resurrection, and a life to come. But, unhappily, *it is easy to hold truths theoretically, and yet not realize them practically*. There are few of us who would not find it good to meditate on the mighty verity which our Lord here unfolds, and to give it a prominent place in our thoughts. Let us settle it in our minds, that the dead are in one sense still alive. From our eyes they have passed away, and their place knows them no more. But in the eyes of God they live, and will one day come forth from their graves to receive an everlasting sentence. There is no such thing as annihilation. The idea is a miserable delusion. The sun, moon, and stars—the solid mountains, and deep sea, will one day come to nothing. But the weakest babe of the poorest man shall live for evermore, in another world. May we never forget this! Happy is he who can say from his heart the words of the Nicene Creed, "I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come."

Let us observe, in the last place, ***the account which our Lord gives of the state of men and women after the resurrection.*** He silences the fancied objections of the Sadducees, by showing that they entirely mistook the true character of the resurrection state. They took it for granted that it must needs be a gross, carnal existence, like that of mankind upon earth. Our Lord tells those who in the next world we may have a real material body, and yet a body of very different constitution, and different necessities, from that which we have now. He speaks only of the saved, be it remembered. He omits all mention of the lost. He says,

“In the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven.”

We know but little of the life to come in heaven. Perhaps our clearest ideas of it are drawn from considering what it will not be, rather than what it will be. It is a state in which we shall hunger no more, nor thirst any more. Sickness, pain, and disease, will not be known. Wasting, old age, and death will have no place. Marriages, births, and a constant succession of inhabitants, will be no more needed. They who are once admitted into heaven shall dwell there for evermore. And, to pass from negatives to positives, one thing we are told plainly—we shall be “as the angels of God.” Like them, we shall serve God perfectly, unhesitatingly, and unweariedly. Like them, we shall ever be in God’s presence. Like them, we shall ever delight to do His will. Like them, we shall give all glory to the Lamb. These are deep things. But they are all true.

Are we ready for this life? Would we enjoy it, if admitted to take part in it? Is the company of God, and the service of God pleasant to us now? Is the occupation of angels one in which we would delight? These are solemn questions. Our hearts must be heavenly on earth, while we live, if we hope to go to heaven when we rise again in another world. (Coloss. 3:1-4.)

MATTHEW 22:34-46

But the Pharisees, when they heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, gathered themselves together. One of them, a lawyer,

asked him a question, testing him. "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?"

Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. A second likewise is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments."

Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, saying, "What do you think of the Christ? Whose son is he?"

They said to him, "The son of David."

He said to them, "How then does David in the Spirit call him Lord, saying, 'the Lord said to my Lord, sit on my right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet?' If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?"

No one was able to answer him a word, neither did any man dare ask him any more questions from that day forth.

In the beginning of this passage we find our Lord replying to the question of a certain lawyer, who asked him which was "the greatest commandment of the law?" That question was asked in no friendly spirit. But we have reason to be thankful that it was asked at all. It drew from our Lord an answer full of precious instruction. Thus we see how good may come out of evil.

Let us ***mark what an admirable summary these verses contain of our duty towards God and our neighbor.*** Jesus says, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” He says again, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” And He adds, “The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.”

How simple are these two rules, and yet how comprehensive! How soon the words are repeated, and yet how much they contain! How humbling and condemning they are! How much they prove our daily need of mercy and the precious blood of atonement! Happy would it be for the world, if these rules were more known and more practiced!

Love is the grand secret of true obedience to GOD. When we feel towards Him as children feel towards a dear father, we shall delight to do His will. We shall not find His commandments grievous, and work for Him like slaves under fear of the lash. We shall take pleasure in trying to keep His laws, and mourn when we transgress them. *None work so well as those who work out of love.* The fear of punishment, or the desire of reward, are principles of far less power. They do the will of God best, who do it from the heart. Would we train children right? Let us teach them to love God.

Love is the grand secret of right behavior towards our FELLOW MEN. He who loves his neighbor will scorn to do him any willful injury, either in person, property, or character. But he will not rest there. He will desire in every way to do him good. He will strive to

promote his comfort and happiness in every way. He will endeavor to lighten his sorrows, and increase his joys. When a man loves us, we feel confidence in him. We know that he will never intentionally do us harm, and that in every time of need he will be our friend. Would we teach children to behave aright towards others? Let us teach them to love everybody as themselves, and do to others as they would have others do to them.

But how shall we obtain this love towards GOD? It is no natural feeling. We are born in sin, and, as sinners, are afraid of God. How then can we love Him? We can never really love Him until we are at peace with Him through Christ. When we feel our sins forgiven, and ourselves reconciled to our holy Maker, then, and not until then, we shall love Him and have the spirit of adoption. *Faith in Christ is the true spring of love to God. They love most who feel most forgiven.* "We love him because he first loved us." (1 John 4:19.)

And how shall we obtain this love towards our NEIGHBOR? This is also no natural feeling. We are born selfish, hateful, and hating one another. (Titus 3:3.) We shall never love our fellow man aright until our hearts are changed by the Holy Spirit. We must be born again. We must put off the old man, and put on the new, and receive the mind that was in Christ Jesus. Then, and not until then, our cold hearts will know true God-like love towards all. "The fruit of the Spirit is love." (Galat. 5:22.)

Let these things sink down into our hearts. There is much vague talk in these latter days about love and charity. Men profess to

admire them and desire to see them increased, and yet hate the principles which alone can produce them. Let us stand fast in the old paths. We cannot have fruits and flowers without roots. We cannot have love to God and man without faith in Christ, and without regeneration. The way to spread true love in the world, is to teach the atonement of Christ, and the work of the Holy Spirit.

The concluding portion of the passage, contains ***a question put to the Pharisees by our Lord. A***fter answering with perfect wisdom the inquiries of His adversaries, He at last asks them, "What do you think of the Christ? Whose Son is He?" They reply at once, "the son of David." He then asks them to explain, why David in the book of Psalms calls Him Lord. (Psalm. 110:1.) "If David then calls him Lord, how is he his son?" At once His enemies were put to silence. "No one was able to answer him a word." The Scribes and Pharisees no doubt were familiar with the Psalm He quoted, but they could not explain its application. It could only be explained by conceding the pre-existence and divinity of the Messiah. This the Pharisees would not concede. Their only idea of Messiah was, that He was to be a man like one of themselves. Their ignorance of the Scriptures, of which they pretended to know more than others, and their low, carnal view of the true nature of Christ, were thus exposed at one and the same time. Well may Matthew say, by the Holy Spirit, "neither did any man dare ask him any more questions from that day forth!"

Let us not leave these verses without making a practical use of our Lord's solemn question, "What do you think of Christ?" What do we think of His person, and His offices? What do we think of His life, and what of His death for us on the cross? What do we think of His resurrection, ascension, and intercession at the right hand of God? Have we tasted that He is gracious? Have we laid hold on Him by faith? Have we found by experience that He is precious to our souls? Can we truly say He is my Redeemer, and my Savior, my Shepherd, and my Friend?

These are serious inquiries. May we never rest until we can give a satisfactory answer to them. It will not profit us to read about Christ, if we are not joined to Him by living faith. Once more then let us test our religion by this question; "What do we think of Christ?"

Matthew – Chap. 23

MATTHEW 23:1-12

Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to his disciples, saying, "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat. All things therefore they tell you to observe; observe and do, but don't do their works; for they say, and don't do. For they bind heavy burdens that are grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not lift a finger to help them. But all their works

they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad, enlarge the fringes of their garments, and love the place of honor at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, the salutations in the marketplaces, and to be called 'Rabbi, Rabbi' by men. But don't you be called 'Rabbi,' for one is your teacher—the Christ, and all of you are brothers. Call no man on the earth your father, for one is your Father, he who is in heaven. Neither be called masters, for one is your master, the Christ. But he who is greatest among you will be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted."

We are now beginning a chapter which in one respect is the most remarkable in the four Gospels. It contains the last words which the Lord Jesus ever spoke within the walls of the temple. Those last words consist of a withering exposure of the Scribes and Pharisees, and a sharp rebuke of their doctrines and practices. Knowing full well that His time on earth was drawing to a close, our Lord no longer keeps back his opinion of the leading teachers of the Jews. Knowing that He would soon leave His followers alone, like sheep among wolves, He warns them plainly against the false shepherds, by whom they were surrounded.

The whole chapter is a signal example of boldness and faithfulness in denouncing error. It is a striking proof that *it is possible for the most loving heart to use the language of stern reproof.* Above all it is an dreadful evidence of the guilt of unfaithful teachers. So long as the world stands, this chapter ought to be a

warning and a beacon to all ministers of religion. No sins are so sinful as theirs in the sight of Christ.

In the twelve verses which begin the chapter, we see firstly, ***the duty of distinguishing between the office of a false teacher and his example.*** "The Scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat." Rightly or wrongly, they occupied the position of the chief public teachers of religion among the Jews. However unworthily they filled the place of authority, their office entitled them to respect. But while their office was respected, their bad lives were not to be copied. And although their teaching was to be adhered to, so long as it was Scriptural, it was not to be observed when it contradicted the Word of God. To use the words of Brentius, "They were to be heard when they taught what Moses taught," but no longer. That such was our Lord's meaning is evident from the whole tenor of the chapter we are reading. False doctrine is there denounced as well as false practice.

The duty here placed before us is one of great importance. There is a constant tendency in the human mind to run into extremes. If we do not regard the office of the minister with *idolatrous veneration*, we are apt to treat it with improper *contempt*. Against both these extremes we have need to be on our guard. However much we may disapprove of a minister's practice, or dissent from his teaching, we must never forget to respect his office. We must show that we can honor the commission, whatever we may think of the offices that holds it. The example of Paul on a certain occasion is worthy of notice, "I didn't know, brothers, that he was high priest. For it is

written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.'" (Acts 23:5.)

We see secondly, in these verses, that ***inconsistency, ostentation, and love of pre-eminence, among professors of religion, are specially displeasing to Christ. A***s to INCONSISTENCY it is remarkable that the very first thing our Lord says of the Pharisees is, that "they say, and do not." They required from others what they did not practice themselves. As to OSTENTATION, our Lord declares that they did all their works "to be seen of men." They had their phylacteries, or strips of parchment, with texts written on them, which many Jews wore on their clothes, made of an excessive size. They had the "borders," or fringes of their garments, which Moses instructed the Israelites to wear as a remembrance of God, made of an extravagant width. (Num. 15:38.) And all this was done to attract notice, and to make people think how holy they were. As to LOVE OF PRE-EMINENCE, our Lord tells us that the Pharisees loved to have "the chief seats" given them in public places, and to have flattering titles addressed to them. All these things our Lord holds up to reprobation. Against all He would have us watch and pray. They are soul-ruining sins. "How can you believe, who receive glory from one another?" (John 5:44.) Happy would it have been for the Church of Christ, if this passage had been more deeply pondered, and the spirit of it more implicitly obeyed. The Pharisees are not the only people who have imposed austerities on others, and affected a sanctity of apparel, and loved the praise of man. The annals of Church history show that only too many

Christians have walked closely in their steps. May we remember this and be wise! It is perfectly possible for a baptized Englishman to be in spirit a thorough Pharisee.

We see in the third place, from these verses, that ***Christians must never give to any man the titles and honors which are due to God alone and to His Christ.*** We are to "call no man Father on earth."

The rule here laid down must be interpreted with proper Scriptural qualification. We are not forbidden to esteem ministers very highly in love for their work's sake. (1 Thess. 5:13.) Even Paul, one of the humblest saints, called Titus "his own son in the faith," and says to the Corinthians, "I have begotten you through the gospel." (1 Cor. 4:15.) But still we must be very careful that we do not insensibly give to ministers a place and an honor which do not belong to them. We must never allow them to come between ourselves and Christ. The very best are not infallible. They are not priests who can atone for us. They are not mediators who can undertake to manage our soul's affairs with God. They are men of like passions with ourselves, needing the same cleansing blood, and the same renewing Spirit, set apart to a high and holy calling, but still after all, only men. Let us never forget these things. Such cautions are always useful. *Human nature would always rather lean on a visible minister, than an invisible Christ*.

We see in the last place, that ***there is no grace which should distinguish the Christian so much as humility.*** He that

would be great in the eyes of Christ, must aim at a totally different mark from that of the Pharisees. His aim must be, not so much to *rule*, as to *serve* the Church. Well says Baxter, "church greatness consists in being greatly serviceable." The desire of the Pharisee was to receive honor, and to be called "master." The desire of the Christian must be to do good, and to give himself, and all that he has to the service of others. Truly this is a high standard, but a lower one must never content us. The example of our blessed Lord, the direct command of the apostolic Epistles, both alike require us to be "clothed with humility." (1 Peter 5:5.) Let us seek that blessed grace day by day. No grace is so beautiful, however much despised by the world. No grace is such an evidence of saving faith, and true conversion to God. No grace is so often commended by our Lord. Of all His sayings, hardly any is so often repeated as that which concludes the passage we have now read, "Whoever humbles himself will be exalted."

MATTHEW 23:13-33

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and as a pretense you make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation."

"But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you shut up the Kingdom of Heaven against men; for you don't enter in yourselves, neither do you allow those who are entering in to enter. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel around by sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he

becomes one, you make him twice as much of a son of Gehenna as yourselves."

"Woe to you, you blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obligated.' You blind fools! For which is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifies the gold? 'Whoever swears by the altar, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gift that is on it, he is obligated?' You blind fools! For which is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifies the gift? He therefore who swears by the altar, swears by it, and by everything on it. He who swears by the temple, swears by it, and by him who was living in it. He who swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God, and by him who sits on it."

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cumin, and have left undone the weightier matters of the law—justice, mercy, and faith. But you ought to have done these, and not to have left the other undone. You blind guides, who strain out a gnat, and swallow a camel!"

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and unrighteousness. You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the platter, that the outside of it may become clean also."

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitened tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but inwardly

are full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity."

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and decorate the tombs of the righteous, and say, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we wouldn't have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.' Therefore you testify to yourselves that you are children of those who killed the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers. You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the judgment of Hell?"

We have in these verses the charges of our Lord against the Jewish teachers ranged under eight heads. Standing in the midst of the temple, with a listening crowd around Him, He publicly denounces the main errors of the Scribes and Pharisees in unsparing terms. Eight times He uses the solemn expression, "woe to you." Seven times He calls them "hypocrites." Twice He speaks of them as "blind guides"—twice as "fools and blind"—once to "serpents and a brood of vipers." Let us mark that language well. It teaches a solemn lesson. It shows how utterly abominable the spirit of the Scribes and Pharisees is in God's sight, in whatever form it may be found.

Let us glance shortly at the eight charges which our Lord brings forward, and then seek to draw from the whole passage some general instruction.

The first "woe" in the list is directed against the systematic opposition of the Scribes and Pharisees to the progress of the Gospel. They "shut up the kingdom of heaven." They would neither go in themselves, nor allow others to go in. They rejected the warning voice of John the Baptist. They refused to acknowledge Jesus, when He appeared among them, as the Messiah. They tried to keep back Jewish inquirers. They would not believe the Gospel themselves, and they did all in their power to prevent others believing it. This was a great sin.

The second "woe" in the list is directed against the covetousness and self-aggrandizing spirit of the Scribes and Pharisees. They "devoured widows' houses, and for a pretense made long prayers." They imposed on the credulity of weak and unprotected women, by *an affectation of great devoutness,* until they were regarded as their spiritual directors. They scrupled not to abuse the influence thus unrighteously obtained, to their own temporal advantage, and in a word to make money by their religion. This again was a great sin.

The third "woe" in the list is directed against the zeal of the Scribes and Pharisees for making adherents. They "compassed sea and land to make one proselyte." They labored incessantly to make men join their party and adopt their opinions. They did this from no desire to benefit men's souls in the least, or to bring them to God. They only did it to swell the ranks of their sect, and to increase the number of their adherents, and their own importance. Their religious

zeal arose from sectarianism, and not from the love of God. This also was a great sin.

The fourth "woe" in the list is directed against the doctrines of the Scribes and Pharisees about oaths. They drew subtle distinctions between one kind of oath and another. They taught the jesuitical tenet, that some oaths were binding on men, while others were not. They attached greater importance to oaths sworn "by the gold" offered to the temple, than to oaths sworn "by the temple" itself. By so doing they brought the third commandment into contempt—and by making men overrate the value of alms and oblations, advanced their own interests. This again was a great sin.

The fifth "woe" in the list is directed against the practice of the Scribes and Pharisees, to exalt trifles in religion above serious things, to put the last things first, and the first last. They made great ado about tithing "mint," and other garden herbs, as if they could not be too strict in their obedience to God's law. And yet at the same time they neglected great plain duties, such as justice, charity, and honesty. This again was a great sin.

The sixth and seventh "woes" in the list possess too much in common to be divided. They are directed against a general characteristic of the religion of the Scribes. *They set outward decency above inward sanctification and purity of heart*. They made it a religious duty to cleanse the "outside" of their cups and platters, but neglected their own inward man. They were like whitened sepulchers, clean and beautiful externally, but within full of

all corruption. “Even so they outwardly appeared righteous to men, but inwardly were full of hypocrisy and iniquity.” This also was a great sin.

The last “woe” in the list is directed against the affected veneration of the Scribes and Pharisees for the memory of dead saints. They built the “tombs of the prophets,” and garnished “the sepulchers of the righteous.” And yet their own lives proved that they were of one mind with those who “killed the prophets.” Their own conduct was a daily evidence that *they liked dead saints better than living ones*. The very men that pretended to honor dead prophets, could see no beauty in a living Christ. This also was a great sin.

Such is the melancholy picture which our Lord gives of Jewish teachers. Let us turn from the contemplation of it with sorrow and humiliation. It is a fearful exhibition of the morbid anatomy of human nature. It is a picture which unhappily has been reproduced over and over again in the history of the Church of Christ. There is not a point in the character of the Scribes and Pharisees in which it might not be easily shown, that people calling themselves Christians have often walked in their steps.

Let us learn from the whole passage *how deplorable was the condition of the Jewish nation* when our Lord was upon earth. When such were the teachers, what must have been the miserable darkness of those who were taught by them! Truly the iniquity of Israel had come to the full. It was high time indeed for the Sun of Righteousness to arise and the Gospel to be preached.

Let us learn from the whole passage ***how abominable is hypocrisy in the sight of God.*** These Scribes and Pharisees are not charged with being thieves or murderers, but with being hypocrites to the very core. Whatever we are in our religion, let us resolve never to wear a cloak. Let us by all means be honest and real.

Let us learn from the whole passage how awfully dangerous is the position of ***an unfaithful minister***. It is bad enough to be blind ourselves. It is a thousand times worse to be a blind guide. Of all men none is so culpably wicked as an unconverted minister, and none will be judged so severely. It is a solemn saying about such a one, "He resembles an unskillful pilot—he does not perish alone."

Finally, let us beware of supposing from this passage, that the safest course in religion is to make no profession at all. This is to run into a dangerous extreme. It does not follow that there is no such thing as true profession, because some men are hypocrites. It does not follow that all money is bad, because there is much counterfeit coin. Let not hypocrisy prevent our confessing Christ, or move us from our steadfastness, if we have confessed Him. Let us press on, looking unto Jesus, and resting on Him, praying daily to be kept from error, and saying with David, "let my heart be blameless toward your decrees." (Psalm 119:80.)

MATTHEW 23:34-39

"Therefore, behold, I send to you prophets, wise men, and scribes. Some of them you will kill and crucify; and some of them

you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city; that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zachariah son of Barachiah, whom you killed between the sanctuary and the altar. Most certainly I tell you, all these things will come upon this generation."

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets, and stones those who are sent to her! How often I would have gathered your children together, even as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you would not! Behold, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me from now on, until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'"

These verses form the conclusion of our Lord Jesus Christ's address, on the subject of the Scribes and Pharisees. They are the last words which He ever spoke, as a public teacher, in the hearing of the people. The characteristic tenderness and compassion of our Lord, shine forth in a striking manner at the close of His ministry. Though He left His enemies in unbelief, He shows that He loved and pitied them to the last.

We learn, in the first place, from these verses, that ***God often takes great pains with ungodly men.*** He sent the Jews "prophets and wise men and scribes." He gave them repeated warnings. He sent them message after message. He did not allow them to go on sinning without rebuke. They could never say that they were not told when they did wrong.

This is the way in which God generally deals with the unconverted. He does not cut them off in their sins without a call to repentance. He knocks at the door of their hearts by sicknesses and afflictions. He assails their consciences by sermons, or by the advice of friends. He summons them to consider their ways by opening the grave under their eyes, and taking away from them their idols. They often know not what it all means. They are often blind and deaf to all His gracious messages. But they will see His hand at last, though perhaps too late. They will find that "God spoke once, yes twice, though man paid no attention." (Job 33:14) They will discover that they too, like the Jews, had prophets, and wise men, and Scribes sent to them. *There was a voice in every providence*, "Turn, turn, why will you die?" (Ezek 33:11.)

We learn, in the second place, from these verses, that ***God takes notice of the treatment which His messengers and ministers receive, and will one day reckon for it.*** The Jews, as a nation, had often given the servants of God most shameful usage. They had often dealt with them as enemies, because they told them the truth. Some they had persecuted, and some they had scourged, and some they had even killed. They thought perhaps that no account would be required of their conduct. But our Lord tells them they were mistaken. There was an eye that saw all their doings. There was a hand that registered all the innocent blood they shed, in books of everlasting remembrance. The dying words of Zacharias, who was "slain between the temple and the altar," would be found after eight hundred and fifty years, not to have fallen to the ground.

He said, as he died, “the Lord look upon it and require it.” (2 Chron. 24:22.)

Yet a few years, and there would be such an inquisition for blood at Jerusalem as the world had never seen. The holy city would be destroyed. The nation which had murdered so many prophets would itself be wasted by famine, pestilence, and the sword. And even those that escaped would be scattered to the four winds, and become, like Cain the murderer, “fugitives and vagabonds upon earth.” We all know how literally these sayings were fulfilled. Well might our Lord say, “Most certainly all these things will come upon this generation.”

It is good for us all to mark this lesson well. We are too apt to think that “bygones are bygones,” and that things which to us are past, and done, and old, will never be raked up again. But we forget that with God “one day is as a thousand years” and that the events of a thousand years ago are as fresh in His sight, as the events of this very hour. God “requires that which is past,” and above all, God will require an account of the treatment of His saints. The blood of the primitive Christians shed by the Roman Emperors—the blood of the Vallenses and Albigenses, and the sufferers at the massacre of Bartholomew—the blood of the martyrs who were burned at the time of the Reformation, and of those who have been put to death by the Inquisition—all, all will yet be accounted for. It is an old saying, that “the mill-stones of God’s justice grind slowly, but they grind very fine.” The world will yet see that “there is a God who judges the earth.” (Psalm 58:11.)

Let those who persecute God's people in the present day take heed what they are doing. Let them know that all who injure, or ridicule, or mock, or slander others on account of their religion, commit a great sin. Let them know that Christ takes notice of every one who persecutes his neighbor because he is better than himself, or because he prays, reads his Bible, and thinks about his soul. He lives who said, "he that touches you, touches the apple of my eye." (Zech 2:8.) The judgment day will prove that the King of kings will reckon with all who insult His servants.

We learn, in the last place, from these verses, that ***those who are lost forever, are lost through their own fault.***

The words of our Lord Jesus Christ are very remarkable. He says, "I would have gathered your children together—and YOU would not."

There is something peculiarly deserving of notice in this expression. It throws light on a mysterious subject, and one which is often darkened by human explanations. It shows that *Christ has feelings of pity and mercy for many who are not saved, and that the grand secret of man's ruin is his lack of will.* Impotent as man is by nature—unable to think a good thought of himself—without power to turn himself to faith and calling upon God, he still appears to have a mighty ability to ruin his own soul. Powerless as he is to good, he is still powerful to evil. We say rightly that a man can do nothing of himself, but we must always remember that the seat of impotence is his WILL. A will to repent and believe no man can give himself, but a will to reject Christ and have his own way, every man possesses by

nature, and if not saved at last, that will shall prove to have been his destruction. “You *will* not come to me,” says Christ, “that you might have life.” (John 5:40.)

Let us leave the subject with the comfortable reflection, that with Christ nothing is impossible. The hardest heart can be made willing in the day of His power. Beyond doubt, Grace is irresistible. But never let us forget, that the Bible speaks of man as a responsible being, and that it says of some, “you always resist the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 7:51.) Let us understand that the ruin of those who are lost, is not because Christ was not willing to save them—nor yet because they wanted to be saved, but could not—but because they would not come to Christ. Let the ground we take up be always that of the passage we are now considering—Christ would gather men, but they will not to be gathered; Christ would save men, but they will not to be saved. Let it be a settled principle in our religion, that **men’s salvation, if saved, is wholly of God; and that man’s ruin, if lost, is wholly of himself.** The evil that is in us is all our own. The good, if we have any, is all of God. The saved in the next world will give God all the glory. The lost in the next world will find that *they have destroyed themselves*. (Hosea 13:9.)

Matthew – Chap. 24

MATTHEW 24:1-14

Jesus went out from the temple, and was going on his way. His disciples came to him to show him the buildings of the temple. But he answered them, "Don't you see all of these things? Most certainly I tell you, there will not be left here one stone on another, that will not be thrown down."

As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? What is the sign of your coming, and of the end of the age?"

Jesus answered them, "Be careful that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will lead many astray. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you aren't troubled, for all this must happen, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there will be famines, plagues, and earthquakes in various places. But all these things are the beginning of birth pains. Then they will deliver you up to oppression, and will kill you. You will be hated by all of the nations for my name's sake. Then many will stumble, and will deliver up one another, and will hate one another. Many false prophets will arise, and will lead many astray. Because iniquity will be multiplied, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end, the same will be saved. This Good News of the Kingdom will be preached in the whole world for a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come."

These verses begin a chapter full of prophecy—prophecy of which a large portion is unfulfilled—prophecy which ought to be deeply

interesting to all true Christians. It is a subject to which the Holy Spirit says, we "do well to take heed." (2 Peter 1:19.)

All portions of Scripture like this, ought to be approached with deep humility, and earnest prayer for the teaching of the Spirit. On no point have good men so entirely disagreed as on the interpretation of prophecy. On no point have the *prejudices* of one class, the *dogmatism* of a second, and the *extravagance* of a third, done so much to rob the church of truths, which God intended to be a blessing. Well says Olshausen, *"What does not man see, or fail to see, when it serves to establish his own favorite opinions?"*

To understand the drift of the whole chapter, we must carefully keep in view the question which gave rise to our Lord's discourse. On leaving the temple for the last time, the disciples, with the natural feeling of Jews, had called their Master's attention to the splendid buildings of which it was composed. To their surprise and amazement, He tells them that the whole was about to be destroyed. These words appear to have sunk deeply into the minds of the disciples. They came to Him, as He sat upon the Mount of Olives, and asked Him with evident anxiety, "Tell us, when will these things be? What is the sign of your coming, and of the end of the age?"—In these words we see the clue to the subject of the prophecy now before us. It embraces three points—one, the destruction of Jerusalem—another, the second personal advent of Christ—and a third, the end of the world. These three points are undoubtedly in some parts of the chapter so entwined together, that it is difficult to separate and

disentangle them. But all these points appear distinctly in the chapter, and without them it cannot be fairly explained.

The first fourteen verses of the prophecy are taken up with general lessons of wide range and application. They seem to apply with equal force to the close of both Jewish and Christian dispensations, the one event being strikingly typical of the other. They certainly demand special notice from us, on whom the latter ends of the world are come. Let us now see what those lessons are.

The first general lesson before us, is ***a warning against deception.*** The very first words of the discourse are, "Be careful that no one leads you astray."

A more needful warning than this cannot be conceived. Satan knows well the value of prophecy, and has ever labored to bring the subject into contempt. How many false Christs and false prophets arose before the destruction of Jerusalem, the works of Josephus abundantly prove. In how many ways the eyes of man are continually blinded in the present day, as to things to come, it might easily be shown. Irvingism and Mormonism have been only too successfully used as arguments for rejecting the whole doctrine of the second advent of Christ. Let us watch, and be on our guard.

Let no man deceive us as to the leading *facts* of unfulfilled prophecy, by telling us they are impossible—or as to the *manner* in which they will be brought to pass, by telling us it is improbable and contrary to past experience. Let no man deceive us as to the *time*

when unfulfilled prophecies will be accomplished, either by fixing dates on the one hand, or bidding us wait for the conversion of the world on the other. On all these points let the plain meaning of Scripture be our only guide, and not the traditional interpretations of men. Let us not be ashamed to say that we expect a literal fulfillment of unfulfilled prophecy. Let us frankly allow that there are many things we do not understand, but still hold our ground tenaciously, believe much—wait long, and not doubt that all will one day be made clear. Above all, let us remember that the first coming of Messiah to *suffer,* was the most improbable event that could have been conceived, and let us not doubt that as He literally came in person to suffer, so He will literally come again in person to *reign*.

The second grand lesson before us, is ***a warning against over-optimistic and extravagant expectations as to things which are to happen before the end comes.*** It is a warning as deeply important as the preceding one. Happy would it have been for the Church, if it had not been so much neglected.

We are not to expect a reign of universal peace, happiness, and prosperity, before the end comes. If we do, we shall be greatly deceived. Our Lord bids us look for "wars, famines, pestilence," and persecution. It is vain to expect peace until the Prince of Peace returns. Then, and not until then, the swords shall be beaten into ploughshares, and nations learn war no more. Then, and not until then, the earth shall bring forth her increase. (Isaiah, 2:4 Psalm. 68:6.)

We are not to expect a time of universal purity of doctrine and practice in the Church of Christ, before the end comes. If we do, we shall be greatly mistaken. Our Lord bids us look for the rising of "false prophets," the "abounding of iniquity," and the "waxing cold of the love of many." The truth will never be received by all professing Christians, and holiness be the rule among men, until the great Head of the Church returns, and Satan is bound. Then, and not until then, there will be a glorious Church, without spot or blemish. (Ephes. 5:27.)

We are not to expect that all the world will be converted before the end comes. If we do, we shall be greatly mistaken. "The Gospel is to be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations," but we must not think that we shall see it universally believed. It will "take out a people," wherever it is faithfully preached, as witnesses to Christ, but the full gathering of the nations shall never take place until Christ comes. Then, and not until then, shall the earth be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. (Acts 15:14; Habak. 2:14.)

Let us lay these things to heart, and remember them well. They are eminently truths for the present times. Let us learn to be moderate in our expectations from any existing machinery in the Church of Christ, and we shall be spared much disappointment. Let us make haste to spread the Gospel in the world, for the time is *short, not long*. The night comes when no man can work. Troublous times are ahead. Heresies and persecutions may soon weaken and

distract the churches. A fierce war of principles may soon convulse the nations. The doors now open to do good may soon be shut forever. Our eyes may yet see the sun of Christianity go down like the sun of Judaism, in clouds and storms. Above all, let us long for our Lord's return. Oh! for a heart to pray daily, "Come, Lord Jesus!"

MATTHEW 24:15-28

"When, therefore, you see the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take out things that are in his house. Let him who is in the field not return back to get his clothes. But woe to those who are with child and to nursing mothers in those days! Pray that your flight will not be in the winter, nor on a Sabbath, for then there will be great oppression, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, nor ever will be. Unless those days had been shortened, no flesh would have been saved. But for the sake of the chosen ones, those days will be shortened."

"Then if any man tells you, 'Behold, here is the Christ,' or, 'There,' don't believe it. For there will arise false christs, and false prophets, and they will show great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the chosen ones."

"Behold, I have told you beforehand. If therefore they tell you, 'Behold, he is in the wilderness,' don't go out; 'Behold, he is in the

inner chambers,' don't believe it. For as the lightning flashes from the east, and is seen even to the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For wherever the carcass is, there is where the vultures gather together."

One main subject of this part of our Lord's prophecy, is the taking of Jerusalem by the Romans. That great event took place about forty years after the words we have now read were spoken. A full account of it is to be found in the writings of the historian Josephus. Those writings are the best comment on our Lord's words. They are a striking proof of the accuracy of every tittle of His predictions. The horrors and miseries which the Jews endured throughout the siege of their city exceed anything on record. It was truly a time of "oppression, such as has not been since the beginning of the world." It surprises some to find so much importance attached to the taking of Jerusalem. They would rather regard the whole chapter as unfulfilled.

Such people forget that Jerusalem and the temple were the heart of the old Jewish dispensation. When they were destroyed, the old Mosaic system came to an end. The daily sacrifice, the yearly feasts, the altar, the holy of holies, the priesthood, were all essential parts of revealed religion, until Christ came, but no longer. When He died upon the cross, their work was done. They were dead, and it only remained that they should be buried. But it was not fitting that this thing should be done quietly. The ending of a dispensation given with so much solemnity at Mount Sinai, might well be expected to be

marked with peculiar solemnity. The destruction of the holy temple, where so many old saints had seen "shadows of good things to come," might well be expected to form a subject of prophecy. And so it was. The Lord Jesus specially predicts the desolation of "the holy place." The great High Priest describes the end of the dispensation which had been a schoolmaster to bring men to Himself.

But we must not suppose that this part of our Lord's prophecy is exhausted by the first taking of Jerusalem. It is more than probable that our Lord's words have a further and deeper application still. It is more than probable that they apply to a *second siege of Jerusalem,* which is yet to take place, when Israel has returned to their own land —and to a *second tribulation* on the inhabitants thereof, which shall only be stopped by the advent of our Lord Jesus Christ. Such a view of this passage may sound startling to some. But those who doubt its correctness would do well to study the last chapter of the prophet Zechariah, and the last chapter of Daniel. These two chapters contain solemn things. They throw great light on the verses we are now reading, and their connection with the verses which immediately follow.

It now remains for us to consider the lessons which this passage contains for our own personal edification. These lessons are plain and unmistakable. In them at least there is no darkness at all.

For one thing, we see that ***flight from danger may sometimes be the positive duty of a Christian.*** Our Lord

Himself commanded his people under certain circumstances "to flee."

The servant of Christ undoubtedly is not to be a coward. He is to confess his master before men. He is to be willing to die, if needful, for the truth. But the servant of Christ is not required to run into danger, unless it comes in the line of duty. He is not to be ashamed to use reasonable means to provide for his personal safety, when no good is to be done by dying at his post. There is deep wisdom in this lesson. The true martyrs are not always those who court death, and are in a hurry to be beheaded or burned. There are times when it shows more grace to be quiet, and wait, and pray, and watch for opportunities, than to defy our adversaries, and rush into the battle. May we have wisdom to know how to act in time of persecution! It is possible to be rash, as well as to be a coward—and to stop our own usefulness by being over hot, as well as by being over cold.

We see, for another thing, that ***in delivering this prophecy, our Lord makes special mention of the Sabbath.*** "Pray," he says, "that your flight be not on the Sabbath day."

This is a fact that deserves special notice. We live in times when the obligation of the Sabbath upon Christians is frequently denied by good men. They tell us that it is no more binding on us than the ceremonial law. It is difficult to see how such a view can be reconciled with our Lord's words on this solemn occasion. He seems intentionally to mention the Sabbath, when He is foretelling the final destruction of the temple and the Mosaic ceremonies, as if to mark

the day with honor. He seems to hint that, although His people would be absolved from the yoke of sacrifices and ordinances, there would yet remain the keeping of a Sabbath for them. (Heb. 4:9.) The friends of a holy Sunday ought carefully to remember this text. It is one which will bear much weight.

We see for another thing, that ***God's elect are always special objects of God's care.*** Twice in this passage our Lord mentions them. "For the elect's sake the days of tribulation are to be shortened." It will not be possible to deceive the "elect."

Those whom God has chosen to salvation by Christ, are those whom God specially loves in this world. They are the jewels among mankind. He cares more for them than for kings on their thrones, if kings are not converted. He hears their prayers. He orders all the events of nations and the issues of wars for their good, and their sanctification. He keeps them by His Spirit. He allows neither man nor devil to pluck them out of His hand. Whatever tribulation comes on the world, God's elect are safe. May we never rest until we know that we are of this blessed number! There breathes not the man or woman who can prove that he is not one. The promises of the Gospel are open to all. May we give diligence to make our calling and election sure! God's elect are a people who cry unto Him night and day. When Paul saw the faith, and hope, and love of the Thessalonians, then he knew "their election of God." (1 Thess. 1:4; Luke 18:7.)

Finally, we see from these verses, that ***whenever the second advent of Christ takes place, it will be a very SUDDEN event.*** It will be "as the lightning flashes from the east, and is seen even to the west."

This is a practical truth that we should ever keep before our minds. That our Lord Jesus will come again in person to this world, we know from Scripture. That He will come in a time of great tribulation, we also know. But the precise period, the year, the month, the day, the hour, are all hidden things. We only know that it will be a very sudden event. Our plain duty then is to live always prepared for His return. Let us walk by faith, and not by sight. Let us believe in Christ, serve Christ, follow Christ, and love Christ. So living, whenever Christ may return, we shall be ready to meet Him.

MATTHEW 24:29-35

But immediately after the oppression of those days, the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give its light, the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken; and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky. Then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. He will send out his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together his elect ones from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.

"Now from the fig tree learn this parable. When its branch has now become tender, and puts forth its leaves, you know that the summer is near. Even so you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. Most certainly I tell you, this generation will not pass away, until all these things are accomplished. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away."

In this part of our Lord's prophecy, He describes His own second coming, to judge the world. This, at all events, seems the natural meaning of the passage. To take any lower view appears to be a violent straining of Scripture language. If the solemn words here used mean nothing more than the coming of the Roman armies to Jerusalem, we may explain away anything in the Bible. The event here described is one of far greater moment than the march of any earthly army. It is nothing less than the closing act of this dispensation, the second personal advent of Jesus Christ.

These verses teach us, in the first place, that ***when the Lord Jesus returns to this world, He shall come with peculiar glory and majesty.*** He shall come "in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." Before His presence the very sun, moon, and stars shall be darkened, and "the powers of heaven shall be shaken."

The SECOND personal coming of Christ shall be as different as possible from the FIRST. He came the first time as a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. He was born in the manger of Bethlehem, in lowliness and humiliation. He took on him the form of a servant,

and was despised and rejected of men. He was betrayed into the hands of wicked men, condemned by an unjust judgment, mocked, scourged, crowned with thorns, and at last crucified between two thieves. He shall come the second time as the King of all the earth, with all royal majesty. The princes and great men of this world shall themselves stand before His throne to receive an eternal sentence. Before him every mouth shall be stopped, and every knee bow, and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. May we all remember this. Whatever ungodly men may do now, there will be no scoffing, no jesting at Christ, no infidelity at the last day. The servants of Jesus may well wait patiently. Their master shall one day be acknowledged King of kings by all the world.

These verses teach us, in the second place, that ***when Christ returns to this world, He will first take care of His believing people.*** He shall "send his angels," and "gather together his elect."

In the day of judgment true Christians shall be perfectly safe. Not a hair of their heads shall fall to the ground. Not one bone of Christ's mystical body shall be broken. There was an ark for Noah, in the day of the flood. There was a Zoar for Lot, when Sodom was destroyed. There shall be a hiding-place for all believers in Jesus, when the wrath of God at last bursts on this wicked world. Those mighty angels who rejoiced in heaven when each sinner repented, shall gladly catch up the people of Christ to meet their Lord in the air.

That day no doubt will be a dreadful day, but believers may look forward to it without fear.

In the day of judgment true Christians shall at length be gathered together. The saints of every age, and every tongue shall be assembled out of every land. All shall be there, from righteous Abel down to the last soul that is converted to God—from the oldest patriarch down to the little infant that just breathed and died. Let us think what a happy gathering that will be, when all the family of God are at length together. If it has been pleasant to meet one or two saints occasionally on earth, how much more pleasant will it be to meet a "multitude that no man can number!" Surely we may be content to carry the cross, and put up with partings for a few years. We travel on towards a day, when we shall meet to part no more.

These verses teach us, in the third place, that ***until Christ returns to this earth, the Jews will always remain a separate people.*** Our Lord tells us, "This generation shall not pass away, until all these things are fulfilled."

The continued existence of the Jews as a distinct nation, is undeniably a great miracle. It is one of those evidences of the truth of the Bible which the infidel can never overthrow. Without a land, without a king, without a government, scattered and dispersed over the world for eighteen hundred years, the Jews are never absorbed among the people of the countries where they live, like Frenchmen, Englishmen, and Germans, but "dwell alone." Nothing can account for this but the finger of God. The Jewish nation stands before the

world, a crushing answer to infidelity, and a living book of evidence that the Bible is true. But we ought not to regard the Jews only as witnesses of the truth of Scripture. We should see in them a continual pledge, that the Lord Jesus is coming again one day. Like the sacrament of the Lord's supper, they witness to the reality of the second advent, as well as of the first. Let us remember this. Let us see in every wandering Jew a proof that the Bible is true, and that Christ will one day return.

Finally, these verses teach us, that ***our Lord's predictions will certainly be fulfilled.*** He says, "heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."

Our Lord knew well the natural unbelief of human nature. He knew that scoffers would arise in the last days, saying, where is the promise of His coming? (2 Pet. 3:4.) He knew that when He came, faith would be rare on the earth. He foresaw how many would contemptuously reject the solemn predictions He had just been delivering as improbable, unlikely, and absurd. He warns us all against such skeptical thoughts, with a caution of peculiar solemnity. He tells us that, whatever man may say or think, His words shall be fulfilled in their season, and shall not "pass away," unaccomplished. May we all lay to heart His warning. We live in an unbelieving age. Few believed the report of our Lord's first coming, and few believe the report of His second. (Isaiah 53:1.) Let us beware of this infection, and believe to the saving of our souls. We are not reading

cunningly devised fables, but deep and momentous truths. May God give us a heart to believe them.

MATTHEW 24:36-51

But no one knows of that day and hour, not even the angels of heaven, but my Father only.

"As the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and they didn't know until the flood came, and took them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two men will be in the field—one will be taken and one will be left; two women grinding at the mill, one will be taken and one will be left. Watch therefore, for you don't know in what hour your Lord comes. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what watch of the night the thief was coming, he would have watched, and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore also be ready, for in an hour that you don't expect, the Son of Man will come."

"Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master finds doing so when he comes. Most certainly I tell you that he will set him over all that he has. But if that evil servant should say in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' and begins to beat his fellow servants, and eat

and drink with the drunkards, the master of that servant will come in a day when he doesn't expect it, and in an hour when he doesn't know it, and will cut him in pieces, and appoint his portion with the hypocrites. There is where the weeping and gnashing of teeth will be."

There are verses in this passage which are often much misapplied. "The coming of the Son of man" is often spoken of as being the same thing as death. The texts which describe the uncertainty of His coming are often used in epitaphs, and thought suitable to the tomb. But there is really no solid ground for such an application of this passage. Death is one thing, and the coming of the Son of man is quite another. The subject of these verses is not death, but the second advent of Jesus Christ. Let us remember this. *It is a serious thing to wrest Scripture out of its true meaning*.

The first thing that demands our attention in these verses, is ***the dreadful account that they give of the state of the world when the Lord Jesus comes again.***

The world will not be converted when Christ returns. It will be found in the same condition that it was in the day of the flood. When the flood came, men were found "eating and drinking, marrying and given in marriage," absorbed in their worldly pursuits, and utterly regardless of Noah's repeated warnings. They saw no likelihood of a flood. They would not believe there was any danger. But at last the flood came suddenly and "took them all away." All that were not with Noah in the ark were drowned. They were all swept away to their last

account, unpardoned, unconverted, and unprepared to meet God. And our Lord says, “so will be the coming of the Son of Man.”

Let us mark this text, and store it up in our minds. There are many strange opinions current on this subject, even among good men. Let us not flatter ourselves that the heathen will all be converted, and the earth filled with the knowledge of God, before the Lord comes. Let us not dream that the end of all things cannot be at hand, because there is yet much wickedness both in the Church and in the world. Such views receive a flat contradiction in the passage now before us. The days of Noah are the true type of the days when Christ shall return. Millions of professing Christians will be found thoughtless, unbelieving, godless, Christless, worldly, and unfit to meet their Judge. Let us take heed that we are not found among them.

The second thing that demands our attention, is ***the dreadful SEPARATION that will take place when the Lord Jesus comes again.*** We read twice over, that “one shall be taken and the other left.”

The godly and the ungodly, at present, are all mingled together. In the congregation and in the place of worship—in the city and in the field—the children of God and the children of the world are all side by side. But it shall not be so always. In the day of our Lord’s return, there shall at length be a complete division. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye; at the last trumpet, each party shall be separated from the other forever more. Wives shall be separated

from husbands—parents from children—brothers from sisters—masters from servants—preachers from hearers. There shall be no time for parting words, or a change of mind, when the Lord appears. All shall be taken as they are, and reap according as they have sown. Believers shall be caught up to glory, honor, and eternal life. Unbelievers shall be left behind to shame and everlasting contempt. Blessed and happy are they who are of one heart in following Christ! Their union alone shall never be broken. It shall last for evermore. Who can describe the happiness of those who are taken, when the Lord returns? Who can imagine the misery of those who are left behind? May we think on these things and consider our ways.

The last thing that demands our attention in these verses, is the ***practical duty of watchfulness in the prospect of Christ's second coming.*** "WATCH," says our Lord, "for you don't know in what hour your Lord comes." "BE READY, for in an hour that you don't expect, the Son of Man will come."

This is a point which our blessed Master frequently presses upon our notice. We hardly ever find Him dwelling on the second advent without adding an injunction to "watch." He knows the sleepiness of our nature. He knows how soon we forget the most solemn subjects in religion. He knows how unceasingly Satan labors to obscure the glorious doctrine of His coming again. He arms us with heart-searching exhortations to keep awake, if we would not be ruined for evermore. May we all have an ear to hear them.

True Christians ought to live like WATCHMEN. The day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. They should strive to be always on their guard. They should behave like the sentinel of an army in an enemy's land.

They should resolve by God's grace not to sleep at their post. That text of Paul deserves many a thought— "let us not sleep, as the rest do, but let us watch and be sober." (1 Thess. 5:6.)

True Christians ought to live like GOOD SERVANTS, whose master is not at home. They should strive to be always ready for their master's return. They should never give way to the feeling, "my Lord is delaying his coming." They should seek to keep their hearts in such a frame, that whenever Christ appears, they may at once give Him a warm and loving reception. There is a vast depth in that saying, "Blessed is that servant whom his master finds doing so when he comes." We may well doubt whether we are true believers in Jesus, if we are not ready at any time to have our faith changed into sight.

Let us close the chapter with solemn feelings. The things we have just been reading call loudly for great searching's of heart. Let us seek to make sure that we are in Christ, and have an ark of safety when the day of wrath breaks on the world. Let us strive to live that we may be pronounced "blessed" at the last, and not cast off for evermore. Not least, let us dismiss from our minds the common idea that unfulfilled prophecy is a speculative and not a practical thing. If the things we have been considering are not practical, there is no such thing as practical religion at all. Well might John say, "Everyone

who has *this hope set on him* purifies himself, even as he is pure." (1 John 3:3.)

Matthew – Chap. 25

MATTHEW 25:1-13

"Then the Kingdom of Heaven will be like ten virgins, who took their lamps, and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. Those who were foolish, when they took their lamps, took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. Now while the bridegroom delayed, they all slumbered and slept. But at midnight there was a cry, 'Behold! The bridegroom is coming! Come out to meet him!' Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise answered, saying, 'What if there isn't enough for both us and you? You go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.' While they went away to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins also came, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us.' But he answered, 'Most certainly I tell you, I don't know you.' Watch therefore, for you don't know the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming."

The chapter we have now begun is a continuation of our Lord's prophetical discourse on the Mount of Olives. The time to which it all refers is plain and unmistakable. From first to last, there is a continual reference to the second advent of Christ, and the end of the world. The whole chapter contains three great divisions. In the first, our Lord uses his own second coming as an argument for watchfulness and heart-religion. This He does by the parable of the ten virgins. In the second, He uses His own second coming as an argument for diligence and faithfulness. This He does by the parable of the talents. In the third, He winds up all by a description of the great day of judgment, a passage which for majesty and beauty stands unequaled in the New Testament.

The parable of the ten virgins, which we have now read, contains lessons peculiarly solemn and awakening. Let us see what they are.

We see for one thing, that ***the second coming of Christ will find His Church a mixed body, containing evil as well as good.***

The professing Church is compared to "ten virgins, who took their lamps, and went out to meet the bridegroom." All of them had lamps, but only five had oil in their vessels to feed the flame. All of them professed to have one object in view, but five only were truly wise, and the rest were foolish. The visible Church of Christ is just in the same condition. All its members are baptized in the name of Christ, but not all really hear His voice and follow Him. All are called Christians, and profess to be of the Christian religion, but not all

have the grace of the Spirit in their hearts, and really are what they profess to be. Our own eyes tell us that it is so now. The Lord Jesus tells us that it will be so, when He comes again.

Let us mark well this description. It is a humbling picture. After all our preachings and praying's—after all our visiting and teaching—after all our missionary exertions abroad, and means of grace at home, many will be found at last "dead in trespasses and sins!" The wickedness and unbelief of human nature, is a subject about which we have all much to learn.

We see, for another thing, that ***Christ's second coming, whenever it may be, will take men by surprise.***

This is a truth which is set before us in the parable, in a very striking manner. At *midnight*, when the virgins were slumbering and sleeping, there was a cry, "The bridegroom is coming! Come out to meet him!" It will be just the same, when Jesus returns to the world. He will find the vast majority of mankind utterly unbelieving and unprepared. He will find the bulk of His believing people in a sleepy and indolent state of soul. Business will be going on in town and country, just as it does now. Politics, trades, farming, buying, selling, pleasure-seeking, will be taking up men's attention, just as they do now. Rich men will still be faring sumptuously, and poor men murmuring and complaining. Churches will still be full of divisions, and wrangling about trifles, and theological controversies will be still raging. Ministers will still be calling men to repent, and congregations still putting off the day of decision. In the midst of all

this, the Lord Jesus Himself shall suddenly appear. In an hour when no man thinks, the startled world shall be summoned to break off all its employments, and to stand before its lawful King. There is something unspeakably dreadful in the idea. But thus it is written and thus it shall be. Well might a dying minister say, “we are none of us more than half-awake.”

We see, in the next place, that ***when the Lord comes again, many will find out the value of saving religion too late.***

The parable tells us that when the bridegroom came, the foolish virgins said unto the wise, “give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.” It tells us further, that as the wise had no oil to spare, the foolish went to “buy for themselves.” It tells us finally, that they came when the door was shut, and asked in vain for admission. “Lord, Lord,” they cried, “open to us.” All these expressions are striking emblems of things to come. Let us take heed that we do not find them true by experience, to our own eternal ruin.

We may settle it in our minds, that there will be an entire change of opinion one day as to the necessity of decided Christianity. At present, we must all be aware, the vast majority of professing Christians care nothing at all about it. They have no sense of sin. They have no love towards Christ. They know nothing of being born again. Repentance, and faith, and grace, and holiness, are mere words and names to them. They are subjects which they either dislike, or about which they feel no concern. But all this state of things shall one day come to an end. Knowledge, conviction, the

value of the soul, the need of a Savior, shall all burst on men's minds one day like a flash of lightning. But alas! it will be too late. It will be too late to be buying oil, when the Lord returns. The mistakes that are not found out until that day are irretrievable.

Are we ever mocked and persecuted and thought foolish because of our religion? Let us bear it patiently, and pray for those who persecute us. They know not what they are doing. They will certainly alter their minds one day. We may yet hear them confessing, that we were wise and they were foolish. The whole world shall one day acknowledge, that the saints of God made a wise choice.

We see, lastly, in this parable, that ***when Christ returns, true Christians shall receive a rich reward for all they have suffered for their Master's sake.*** We are told that when the bridegroom came, "those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut."

True Christians shall alone be found ready at the second advent. Washed in the blood of atonement, clothed in Christ's righteousness, renewed by the Spirit, they shall meet their Lord with boldness, and sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb, to go out no more. Surely this is a blessed prospect.

They shall be with their Lord—with Him who loved them and gave Himself for them—with Him who bore with them, and carried them through their earthly pilgrimage—with Him, whom they loved

truly and followed faithfully on earth, though with much weakness, and many a tear. Surely this also is a blessed prospect.

The door shall be shut at last—shut on all pain and sorrow—shut on an ill-natured and wicked world—shut on a tempting devil—shut on all doubts and fears—shut, to be opened again no more. Surely, we may again say, this is a blessed prospect.

Let us remember these things. They will bear meditation. They are all true. The believer may have much tribulation, but he has before him abounding consolations. Heaviness may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning. The day of Christ's return shall surely make amends for all.

Let us leave this parable with a settled determination, never to be content with anything short of indwelling grace in our hearts. The lamp and the name of Christian the profession and the ordinances of Christianity, are all well in their way, but they are not the one thing needful. Let us never rest until we know that we have the oil of the Spirit in our hearts.

MATTHEW 25:14-30

"For it is like a man, going into another country, who called his own servants, and entrusted his goods to them. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one; to each according to his own ability. Then he went on his journey. Immediately he who received the five talents went and traded with them, and made

another five talents. In like manner he also who got the two gained another two. But he who received the one went away and dug in the earth, and hid his master's money."

"Now after a long time the master of those servants came, and reconciled accounts with them. He who received the five talents came and brought another five talents, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents. Behold, I have gained another five talents besides them.'

"His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a few things, I will set you over many things. Enter into the joy of your master.'

"He also who got the two talents came and said, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents. Behold, I have gained another two talents besides them.'

"His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a few things, I will set you over many things. Enter into the joy of your master.'

"He also who had received the one talent came and said, 'Master, I knew you that you are a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter. I was afraid, and went away and hid your talent in the earth. Behold, you have what is yours.'

"But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant. You knew that I reap where I didn't sow, and gather where I didn't scatter. You ought therefore to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received back my own with interest. Take away therefore the talent from him, and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will be given, and he will have abundance, but from him who doesn't have, even that which he has will be taken away. Throw out the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'"

The parable of the talents which we have now read is near akin to that of the ten virgins. Both direct our minds to the same important event, the second advent of Jesus Christ. Both bring before us the same people, the members of the professing Church of Christ. The virgins and the servants are one and the same people, but the same people regarded from a different point, and viewed on different sides. The practical lesson of each parable is the main point of difference. Vigilance is the key note of the first parable, diligence that of the second. The story of the virgins calls on the Church to WATCH, the story of the talents calls on the Church to WORK.

We learn, in the first place, from this parable, that ***all professing Christians have received something from God.*** We are all God's "servants." We have all "talents" entrusted to our charge.

The word “talents” is an expression that has been curiously turned aside from its original meaning. It is generally applied to none but people of remarkable ability or gifts. They are called “talented” people. Such an use of the expression is a mere modern invention. In the sense in which our Lord used the word in this parable, it applies to all baptized people without distinction. We have all talents in God’s sight. We are all talented people.

Anything whereby we may glorify God is a talent. Our gifts, our influence, our money, our knowledge, our health, our strength, our time, our senses, our reason, our intellect, our memory, our affections, our privileges as members of Christ’s Church, our advantages as possessors of the Bible—all, all are talents. Whence came these things? What hand bestowed them? Why are we what we are? Why are we not the worms that crawl on the earth? There is only one answer to these questions. All that we have is a loan from God. We are God’s stewards. We are God’s debtors. Let this thought sink deeply into our hearts.

We learn in the second place, that ***many make a bad use of the privileges and mercies they receive from God.*** We are told in the parable of one who “dug in the earth and hid his Lord’s money.” That man represents a large class of mankind.

To hide our talent is to neglect opportunities of glorifying God, when we have them. The Bible-despiser, the prayer-neglecter, and the Sabbath-breaker—the unbelieving, the sensual, and the earthly-minded—the trifler, the thoughtless, and the pleasure-seeker—the

money-lover, the covetous, and the self-indulgent—all, all are alike burying their Lord's money in the ground. They have all light that they do not use. They might all be better than they are. But they are all daily robbing God. He has lent them much and they make Him no return. The words of Daniel to Belshazzar, are strictly applicable to every unconverted person— "the God in whose hand your breath is, and whose are all your ways, you have not glorified." (Dan. 5:23.)

We learn in the third place, that ***all professing Christians must one day have a reckoning with God.*** The parable tells us that "after a long time the master of those servants came, and reckoned with them."

There is a judgment before us all. Words have no meaning in the Bible, if there is none. It is mere trifling with Scripture to deny it. There is a judgment before us according to our works—certain, strict, and unavoidable. High or low, rich or poor, learned or unlearned, we shall all have to stand at the bar of God and to receive our eternal sentence. There will be no escape. Concealment will be impossible. We and God must at last meet face to face. We shall have to render an account of every privilege that was granted to us, and of every ray of light that we enjoyed. We shall find that we are dealt with as accountable and responsible creatures, and that to whomsoever much is given, of them much will be required. Let us remember this every day we live. Let us "judge ourselves that we be not condemned of the Lord."

We learn, in the fourth place, that ***true Christians will receive an abundant reward in the great day of reckoning.*** The parable tells us that the servants who had used their Lord's money well, were commended as "good and faithful," and told to "enter into the joy of their Lord."

These words are full of comfort to all believers, and may well fill us with wonder and surprise. The best of Christians is a poor frail creature, and needs the blood of atonement every day that he lives. But the least and lowest of believers will find that he is counted among Christ's servants, and that his labor has not been in vain in the Lord. He will discover to his amazement, that his Master's eye saw more beauty in his efforts to please Him, than he ever saw himself. He will find that every hour spent in Christ's service, and every word spoken on Christ's behalf, has been written in a book of remembrance. Let believers remember these things and take courage. The cross may be heavy now, but the glorious reward shall make amends for all. Well says Leighton, "Here some drops of joy enter into us, but there we shall enter into joy."

We learn in the last place, that ***all unfruitful members of Christ's Church will be condemned and cast away in the day of judgment.*** The parable tells us that the servant who buried his master's money, was condemned as "wicked," "slothful," and "unprofitable," and cast into "outer darkness." And our Lord adds the solemn words, "there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

There will be no excuse for an unconverted Christian at the last day. The reasons with which he now pretends to satisfy himself will prove useless and vain. The Judge of all the earth will be found to have done right. The ruin of the lost soul will be found to be his own fault. Those words of our Lord, "you knew," are words that ought to ring loudly in many a man's ears, and pierce him to the heart. Thousands are living at this day without Christ and without conversion, and yet pretending that they cannot help it. And all this time they know in their own conscience that they are guilty. They are burying their talent. They are not doing what they can. Happy are they who find this out betimes. It will all come out at the last day.

Let us leave this parable with a solemn determination, by God's grace, *never to be content with a profession of Christianity without practice.* Let us not only talk about religion, but act. Let us not only feel the importance of religion, but do something too. We are not told that the unprofitable servant was a murderer, or a thief, or even a waster of his Lord's money. But he *did nothing*—and this was his ruin. Let us beware of a do-nothing Christianity. Such Christianity does not come from the Spirit of God. "To do no harm," says Baxter, "is the praise of a stone, not of a man."

MATTHEW 25:31-46

"But when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. Before him all the nations will be gathered, and he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He

will set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will tell those on his right hand, 'Come, blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry, and you gave me food to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me drink; I was a stranger, and you took me in; naked, and you clothed me; I was sick, and you visited me; I was in prison, and you came to me.'

"Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry, and feed you; or thirsty, and give you a drink? When did we see you as a stranger, and take you in; or naked, and clothe you? When did we see you sick, or in prison, and come to you?'

"The King will answer them, 'Most certainly I tell you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.' Then he will say also to those on the left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry, and you didn't give me food to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me no drink; I was a stranger, and you didn't take me in; naked, and you didn't clothe me; sick, and in prison, and you didn't visit me.'

"Then they will also answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and didn't help you?'

"Then he will answer them, saying, 'Most certainly I tell you, inasmuch as you didn't do it to one of the least of these, you didn't do it to me.' These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

In these verses our Lord Jesus Christ describes the judgment-day, and some of its leading circumstances. There are few passages in the whole Bible more solemn and heart-searching than this. May we read it with the deep and serious attention which it deserves.

Let us mark in the first place, ***who will be the JUDGE in the last day.*** We read that it will be "the Son of Man," Jesus Christ Himself.

That same Jesus who was born in the manger of Bethlehem, and took upon Him the form of a servant—who was despised and rejected of men, and often had not where to lay His head—who was condemned by the princes of this world, beaten, scourged, and nailed to the cross—that same Jesus shall Himself judge the world, when He comes in His glory. To Him the Father has committed all judgment. (John 5:22.) To Him at last every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that He is Lord. (Philip. 2:10, 11.)

Let believers think of this, and take comfort. He that sits upon the throne in that great and dreadful day will be their Savior, their Shepherd, their High Priest, their elder Brother, their Friend. When they see Him, they will have no cause to be alarmed.

Let unconverted people think of this, and be afraid. Their judge will be that very Christ, whose Gospel they now despise, and whose gracious invitations they refuse to hear. How great will be their confusion at last, if they go on in unbelief and die in their sins! To be condemned in the day of judgment by any one would be dreadful. But to be condemned by Him who would have saved them will be dreadful indeed. Well may the Psalmist say, “Kiss the Son lest he be angry.” (Psalm 2:12.)

Let us mark, in the second place, ***who will be JUDGED in the last day.*** We read that before Christ “shall be gathered all nations.”

All that have ever lived shall one day give account of themselves at the bar of Christ. All must obey the summons of the great King, and come forward to receive their sentence. Those who would not come to worship Christ on earth, will find they must come to His great assize, when He returns to judge the world.

All that are judged will be divided into two great classes. There will no longer be any distinction between kings and subjects, or masters and servants, or dissenters and churchmen. There will be no mention of ranks and denominations, for the former things will have passed away. Grace, or no grace, conversion or unconversion, faith or no faith, will be the only distinctions at the last day. All that are found in Christ will be placed among the sheep at His right hand. All that are not found in Christ will be placed among the goats at His left. Well says Sherlock, “Our separations will avail us nothing,

unless we take care to be found in the number of Christ's sheep, when He comes to judgment."

Let us mark, in the third place, ***in what manner the JUDGMENT will be conducted in the last day.*** We read of several striking particulars on this point. Let us see what they are.

The last judgment will be a judgment *according to evidence*. The works of men are the witnesses which will be brought forward, and above all their works of charity. The question to be ascertained will not merely be what we said, but what we did—not merely what we professed, but what we practiced. Our works unquestionably will not justify us. We are justified by faith without the deeds of the law. But the truth of our faith will be tested by our lives. Faith which has not works is dead, being alone. (James 2:20.)

The last judgment will be a judgment that will bring *joy to all true believers*. They will hear those precious words, "Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom." They will be owned and confessed by their Master before His Father and the holy angels. They shall find that the wages He gives to His faithful servants are nothing less than "a kingdom." The least, and lowest, and poorest, of the family of God, shall have a crown of glory, and be a king.

The last judgment will be a judgment that will bring confusion on all unconverted people. They will hear those dreadful words, "Depart, you cursed, into everlasting fire." They will be disowned by the great Head of the Church before the assembled world. They will

find that as they would sow to the flesh, so of the flesh they must reap corruption. They would not hear Christ, when He said "Come unto me, and I will give you rest," and now they must hear Him say, "Depart, into everlasting fire." They would not carry his cross, and so they can have no place in his kingdom.

The last judgment will be a judgment that will strikingly bring out the characters both of the lost and saved. They on the right hand, who are Christ's sheep, will still be "clothed with humility." They will marvel to hear any work of theirs brought forward and commended. They on the left hand, who are not Christ's, will still be blind and self-righteous. They will not be sensible of any neglect of Christ. "Lord," they say, "when did we see you—and not come to you?" Let this thought sink down into our hearts. Our characters on earth will prove an everlasting possession in the world to come. With the same heart that men die, with that heart they will rise again.

Let us mark, in the last place, ***what will be the FINAL RESULTS of the judgment day.*** We are told this in words that ought never to be forgotten, the wicked "will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

The state of things after the judgment is changeless and without end. The misery of the lost, and the blessedness of the saved, are both alike forever. Let no man deceive us on this point. It is clearly revealed in Scripture. The eternity of God, and heaven, and hell, all stand on the same foundation. As surely as God is eternal, so surely

is heaven an endless day without night, and hell an endless night without day.

Who shall describe THE BLESSEDNESS OF ETERNAL LIFE? It passes the power of man to conceive. It can only be measured by contrast and comparison. An eternal rest, after warfare and conflict—the eternal company of saints, after buffeting with an evil world—an eternally glorious and painless body, after struggling with weakness and infirmity—an eternal sight of Jesus face to face, after only hearing and believing—all this is blessedness indeed. And yet the half of it remains untold.

Who shall describe THE MISERY OF ETERNAL PUNISHMENT? It is something utterly indescribable and inconceivable. The eternal pain of body—the eternal sting of an accusing conscience—the eternal society of none but the wicked, the devil and his angels—the eternal remembrance of opportunities neglected and Christ despised—the eternal prospect of a weary, hopeless future—all this is misery indeed. It is enough to make our ears tingle, and our blood run cold. And yet this **picture** is nothing, compared to the **reality**.

Let us close these verses with serious self-inquiry. Let us ask ourselves on which side of Christ we are likely to be at the last day. Shall we be on the right hand, or shall we be on the left? Happy is he who never rests until he can give a satisfactory answer to this question.

Matthew – Chap. 26

MATTHEW 26:1-13

It happened, when Jesus had finished all these words, that he said to his disciples, "You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified."

Then the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders of the people were gathered together in the court of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas. They took counsel together that they might take Jesus by deceit, and kill him. But they said, "Not during the feast, lest a riot occur among the people."

Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came to him having an alabaster jar of very expensive ointment, and she poured it on his head as he sat at the table. But when his disciples saw this, they were indignant, saying, "Why this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor."

However, knowing this, Jesus said to them, "Why do you trouble the woman? Because she has done a good work for me. For you always have the poor with you; but you don't always have me. For in pouring this ointment on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. Most certainly I tell you, wherever this Good News is

preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of as a memorial of her."

We now approach the closing scene of our Lord Jesus Christ's earthly ministry. Hitherto we have read of His sayings and doings—we are now about to read of His sufferings and death. Hitherto we have seen him as the great Prophet—we are now about to see Him as the great High Priest.

It is a portion of Scripture which ought to be read with peculiar reverence and attention. The place whereon we stand is holy ground. Here we see how the Seed of the woman bruised the Serpent's head. Here we see the great sacrifice to which all the sacrifices of the Old Testament had long pointed. Here we see how the blood was shed which "cleanses from all sin," and the Lamb slain who "takes away the sin of the world." We see in the death of Christ, the great mystery revealed, how God can be just, and yet justify the ungodly. No wonder that all the four Gospels contain a full account of this wonderful event. On other points in our Lord's history, we often find, that when one evangelist speaks, the other three are silent. But when we come to the crucifixion, we find it minutely described by all four.

In these verses we have now read, let us first observe ***how careful our Lord is to recall the attention of His disciples to His own death.*** He said to them, "You know that after two days is the feast of the Passover, and the Son of Man is betrayed to be crucified."

The connection of these words with the preceding chapter is exceedingly striking. Our Lord had just been dwelling on His own second coming in power and glory at the end of the world. He had been describing the last judgment, and all its dreadful accompaniments. He had been speaking of Himself as the Judge, before whose throne all nations would be gathered. And then at once, without pause or interval, He goes on to speak of His crucifixion. While the marvelous predictions of His final glory were yet ringing in the ears of His disciples, He tells them once and again of His coming sufferings. He reminds them that He must die as a sin-offering before He reigned as a king, that He must make atonement on the cross, before he took the crown.

We can never attach too much importance to the atoning death of Christ. It is the leading fact in the word of God, on which the eyes of our soul ought to be ever fixed. Without the shedding of his blood, there is no remission of sin. It is the cardinal truth on which the whole system of Christianity hinges. Without it the Gospel is an arch without a key-stone, a fair building without a foundation, a solar system without a sun. Let us make much of our Lord's incarnation and example, His miracles and his parables, His works and His words, but above all let us make much of His death. Let us delight in the hope of his second personal coming and millennial reign, but let us not think more even of these blessed truths, than of the atonement on the cross. This, after all, is the master-truth of Scripture, that "Christ died for our sins." To this let us daily return. On this let us daily feed our souls. Some, like the Greeks of old, may

sneer at the doctrine, and call it “foolishness.” But let us never be ashamed to say with Paul, “Be it far from me to boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Gal. 6:14.)

Let us observe, in the second place, in these verses, ***what honor Christ loves to put on those who honor Him.*** We are told that when He was “in the house of Simon the leper,” a certain woman came, while He sat at table, and poured a box of precious ointment on His head. She did it, no doubt, out of reverence and affection. She had received soul-benefit from Him, and she thought no mark of honor too costly to be bestowed on Him in return. But this deed of hers called forth disapproval from some who saw it. They called it “waste.” They said it might have been better to sell the ointment, and give the money to the poor. At once our Lord rebuked these cold-hearted fault-finders. He tells them that the woman has “wrought a good work,” and one that he accepts and approves. And he goes on to make a striking prediction, “Wherever this Good News is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of as a memorial of her.”

We see, in this little incident, how perfectly our Lord knew things to come, and how easy it is for him to confer honor. This prophecy of His about this woman is receiving a fulfillment every day before our eyes. Wherever the Gospel of Matthew is read, the deed that she did is known. The deeds and titles of many a king, and emperor, and general, are as completely forgotten, as if written in the sand. But the grateful act of one humble Christian woman is recorded in one

hundred and fifty different languages, and is known all over the globe. The praise of man is but for a few days. The praise of Christ endures forever. The pathway to lasting honor, is to honor Christ.

Last, but not least, we see in this incident a blessed foretaste of things that will yet take place in the day of judgment. In that great day no honor done to Christ on earth shall be found to have been forgotten. The speeches of parliamentary orators, the exploits of warriors, the works of poets and painters, shall not be mentioned in that day. But the least work that the weakest Christian woman has done for Christ, or His members, shall be found written in a book of everlasting remembrance. Not a single kind word or deed, not a cup of cold water, or a box of ointment, shall be omitted from the record. Silver and gold she may have had none—rank, power, and influence she may not have possessed—but if she loved Christ, and confessed Christ, and worked for Christ, her memorial shall be found on high. She shall be commended before assembled worlds.

Do we know what it is to work for Christ? If we do, let us take courage, and work on. What greater encouragement can we desire than we see here? We may be laughed at and ridiculed by the world. Our motives may be misunderstood. Our conduct may be misrepresented. Our sacrifices for Christ's sake may be called "waste,"—waste of time, waste of money, waste of strength. Let none of these things move us. The eye of Him who sat in Simon's house in Bethany is upon us. He notes all we do, and is well-pleased. Let us be

“steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the Lord’s work, because we know that our labor is not in vain in the Lord.” (1 Cor. 15:58.)

MATTHEW 26:14-25

Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests, and said, “What are you willing to give me, that I should deliver him to you?” They weighed out for him thirty pieces of silver. From that time he sought opportunity to betray him.

Now on the first day of unleavened bread, the disciples came to Jesus, saying to him, “Where do you want us to prepare for you to eat the Passover?”

He said, “Go into the city to a certain person, and tell him, ‘The Teacher says, “My time is at hand. I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.”

The disciples did as Jesus commanded them, and they prepared the Passover. Now when evening had come, he was reclining at the table with the twelve disciples. As they were eating, he said, “Most certainly I tell you that one of you will betray me.”

They were exceedingly sorrowful, and each began to ask him, “It isn’t me, is it, Lord?”

He answered, “He who dipped his hand with me in the dish, the same will betray me. The Son of Man goes, even as it is written of

him, but woe to that man through whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would be better for that man if he had not been born."

Judas, who betrayed him, answered, "It isn't me, is it, Rabbi?"

Jesus answered, "Yes, it is you."

We read in the beginning of this passage, how our Lord Jesus Christ was betrayed into the hands of His deadly enemies. The priests and scribes, however anxious to put him to death, were at a loss how to effect their purpose, for fear of an uproar among the people. At this juncture a fitting instrument for carrying out their designs, offered himself to them, in the person of Judas Iscariot. That false apostle undertook to deliver his Master into their hands, for thirty pieces of silver.

There are few blacker pages in all history, than the character and conduct of Judas Iscariot. There is no more dreadful evidence of the wickedness of man. A poet of our own has said, that "sharper than a serpent's tooth is a thankless child." But what shall we say of a disciple who could betray his own Master—an apostle who could sell Christ? Surely this was not the least bitter part of the cup of suffering which our Lord drank.

Let us learn, in the first place, from these verses, that ***a man may enjoy great privileges, and make a great religious profession, and yet his heart all the time may not be right before God.***

Judas Iscariot had the highest possible religious privileges. He was a chosen apostle, and companion of Christ. He was an eye-witness of our Lord's miracles, and a hearer of His sermons. He saw what Abraham and Moses never saw, and heard what David and Isaiah never heard. He lived in the society of the eleven apostles. He was a fellow-laborer with Peter, James, and John. But for all this his heart was never changed. He clung to one darling sin.

Judas Iscariot made a reputable profession of religion. There was nothing but what was right, and proper, and becoming in his outward conduct. Like the other apostles, he appeared to believe and to give up all for Christ's sake. Like them he was sent forth to preach and work miracles. No one of the eleven appears to have suspected him of hypocrisy. When our Lord said, "One of you shall betray me," no one said, "Is it Judas?" Yet all this time his heart was never changed.

We ought to observe these things. They are deeply humbling and instructive. Like Lot's wife, Judas is intended to be a beacon to the whole church. Let us often think about him, and say, as we think, "Search me, O Lord, and try my heart, and see if there be any wicked way in me." Let us resolve, by God's grace, that we will never be content with anything short of sound, thorough, heart conversion.

Let us learn, in the second place, from these verses, that ***the love of money is one of the greatest snares to a man's soul.*** We cannot conceive a clearer proof of this, than the case of Judas. That wretched question, "What will you give me?" reveals the secret sin

which was his ruin. He had given up much for Christ's sake, but he had not given up his covetousness.

The words of the apostle Paul should often ring in our ears, "the love of money is the root of all evil." (1 Tim. 6:10.) The history of the Church abounds in illustrations of this truth. For money Joseph was sold by his brethren. For money Samson was betrayed to the Philistines. For money Gehazi deceived Naaman, and lied to Elisha. For money Ananias and Sapphira tried to deceive Peter. For money the Son of God was delivered into the hands of wicked men. Astonishing indeed does it seem that the cause of so much evil should be loved so well.

Let us all be on our guard against the love of money. The world is full of it in our days. The plague is abroad. Thousands who would abhor the idea of worshiping Juggernaut, are not ashamed to make an idol of gold. We are all liable to the infection, from the least to the greatest. We may love money without having it, just as we may have money without loving it. It is an evil that works very deceitfully. It carries us captives before we are aware of our chains. Once let it get the mastery, and it will harden, paralyze, scorch, freeze, blight, and wither our souls. It overthrew an apostle of Christ. Let us take heed that it does not overthrow us. One leak may sink a ship. One unmortified sin may ruin a soul.

We ought frequently to call to mind the solemn words, "What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and lose his own soul?" "We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can

carry nothing out." Our daily prayer should be, "Give me neither poverty nor riches. Feed me with the food that is needful for me." (Prov. 30:8.) Our constant aim should be to be rich in grace. Those who *"will* be rich" in worldly possessions often find at last that they have made the worst of bargains. Like Esau, they have bartered an eternal portion for a little temporary gratification. Like Judas Iscariot, they have sold themselves to everlasting perdition.

Let us learn, in the last place, from these verses, ***the hopeless condition of all who die unconverted.*** The words of our Lord on this subject are peculiarly solemn. He says of Judas, "It would have been better for that man, if he had not been born." This saying admits of only one interpretation. It teaches plainly, that it is better never to live at all, than to live without faith, and to die without grace. To die in this state is to be ruined forever more. It is a fall from which there is no rising. It is a loss which is utterly irretrievable. There is no change in hell. The gulf between hell and heaven is one that no man can pass. This saying could never have been used, if there was any truth in the doctrine of 'universal salvation'. If it really was true that all would sooner or later reach heaven, and hell sooner or later be emptied of inhabitants, it never could be said that it would have been "good for a man not to have been born." **Hell itself would lose its terrors, if it had an end.** Hell itself would be endurable, if after millions of ages there was a HOPE of freedom and of heaven. But universal salvation will find no foot-hold in Scripture. The teaching of the word of God is plain and express on the subject. There is a worm that never dies, and a fire that is not quenched

(Mark 9:44.) “Except a man be born again,” he will wish one day he had never been born at all. “Better,” says Burkitt, “have no being, than not have a being in Christ.”

Let us grasp this truth firmly, and not let it go. There are always people who dislike the reality and eternity of hell. We live in a day when a morbid charity induces many to exaggerate God’s mercy, at the expense of His justice, and when false teachers are daring to talk of a “love of God, lower even than hell.” Let us resist such teaching with a holy jealousy, and abide by the doctrine of Holy Scripture. Let us not be ashamed to walk in the old paths, and to believe that there is an eternal God, an eternal heaven, and an eternal hell. Once depart from this belief, and we admit the thin edge of the wedge of skepticism, and may at last deny any doctrine of the Gospel. We may rest assured that there is no firm standing ground between a belief in the eternity of hell, and downright infidelity.

MATTHEW 26:26-35

As they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks for it, and broke it. He gave to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” He took the cup, gave thanks, and gave to them, saying, “All of you drink it, for this is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the remission of sins. But I tell you that I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on, until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father’s Kingdom.” When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Then Jesus said to them, "All of you will be made to stumble because of me tonight, for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' But after I am raised up, I will go before you into Galilee."

But Peter answered him, "Even if all will be made to stumble because of you, I will never be made to stumble."

Jesus said to him, "Most certainly I tell you that tonight, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times."

Peter said to him, "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you." All of the disciples also said likewise.

These verses describe the appointment of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Our Lord knew well the things that were before Him, and graciously chose the last quiet evening that he could have before his crucifixion, as an occasion for bestowing a parting gift on his church. How precious must this ordinance have afterwards appeared to His disciples, when they remembered the events of that night. How mournful is the thought, that no ordinance has led to such fierce controversy, and been so grievously misunderstood, as the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. It ought to have united the church, but our sins have made it a cause of division. The thing which should have been for our welfare, has been too often made an occasion of falling.

The first thing that demands our notice in these verses, is ***the right meaning of our Lord's words, "this is my body, this is my blood."***

It is needless to say, that this question has divided the visible church of Christ. It has caused volumes of controversial theology to be written. But we must not shrink from having decided opinions upon it, because theologians have disputed and differed. Unsoundness on this point has given rise to many deplorable superstitions.

The plain meaning of our Lord's words appears to be this— "This bread *represents* my body. This wine *represents* my blood." He did not mean that the bread He gave to His disciples was really and literally His body. He did not mean that the wine He gave to His disciples was really and literally His blood. Let us lay firm hold on this interpretation. It may be supported by several grave reasons.

The conduct of the disciples at the Lord's Supper forbids us to believe that the bread they received was Christ's body, and the wine they received was Christ's blood. They were all Jews, taught from their infancy to believe that it was sinful to eat flesh with the blood. (Deut. 12:23-25.) Yet there is nothing in the narrative to show that they were startled by our Lord's words. They evidently perceived no change in the bread and wine.

Our own senses at the present day forbid us to believe that there is any change in the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper. Our own

taste tells us that they are really and literally what they appear to be. Things above our reason the Bible requires us to believe. But we are never bid to believe that which contradicts our senses.

The true doctrine about our Lord's human nature forbids us to believe that the bread in the Lord's Supper can be His body, or the wine His blood. The natural body of Christ cannot be at one time in more places than one. If our Lord's body could sit at table, and at the same time be eaten by the disciples, it is perfectly clear that it was not a human body like our own. But this we must never allow for one moment. It is the glory of Christianity that our Redeemer is perfect man as well as perfect God.

Finally, the genius of the language in which our Lord spoke at the Lord's Supper, makes it entirely unnecessary to interpret His words literally. The Bible is full of expressions of a similar kind, to which no one thinks of giving any but a figurative meaning. Our Lord speaks of Himself as the "door" and the "vine," and we know that he is using emblems and figures, when He so speaks. There is therefore no inconsistency in supposing that He used figurative language when He appointed the Lord's Supper; and we have the more right to say so, when we remember the grave objections which stand in the way of a literal view of His words.

Let us lay up these things in our minds, and not forget them. In a day of abounding heresy, it is good to be well armed. *Ignorant and confused views of the meaning of Scripture language, are one great cause of religious error.*

The second thing which demands our notice in these verses, is ***the purpose and object for which the Lord's Supper was appointed.***

This is a subject again on which great darkness prevails. The ordinance of the Lord's Supper has been regarded as something mysterious and past understanding. Immense harm has been done to Christianity by the vague and high-flown language in which many writers have indulged in treating of the sacrament. There is certainly nothing to warrant such language in the account of its original institution. The more simple our views of its purpose, the more Scriptural they are likely to be.

The Lord's Supper is *not a sacrifice*. There is no oblation in it—no offering up of anything but our prayers, praises, and thanksgivings. From the day that Jesus died there needed no more offering for sin. By one offering He perfected forever those who are sanctified. (Heb. 10:14.) Priests, altars, and sacrifices, all ceased to be necessary, when the Lamb of God offered up Himself. Their office came to an end. Their work was done.

The Lord's Supper has *no power to automatically confer benefit on those who come to it, if they do not come to it with faith*. The mere formal act of eating the bread and drinking the wine is utterly unprofitable, unless it is done with a right heart. It is eminently an ordinance for the living soul, not for the dead—for the converted, not for the unconverted.

The Lord's Supper was ordained for *a continual remembrance of the sacrifice of Christ's death*, until He comes again. The benefits it confers, are spiritual, not physical. Its effects must be looked for in our inward man. It was intended to remind us, by the visible, tangible emblems of bread and wine, that the offering of Christ's body and blood for us on the cross, is the only atonement for sin, and the life of a believer's soul. It was meant to help our poor weak faith to closer fellowship with our crucified Savior, and to assist us in spiritually feeding on Christ's body and blood. It is an ordinance for redeemed sinners, and not for unfallen angels. By receiving it we publicly declare our sense of guilt, and need of a Savior—our trust in Jesus, and our love to Him—our desire to live upon Him, and our hope to live with Him. Using it in this spirit, we shall find our repentance deepened, our faith increased, our hope brightened, and our love enlarged—our besetting sins weakened, and our graces strengthened. It will draw us nearer to Christ.

Let us bear these things in mind. They need to be remembered in these latter days. There is nothing in our religion which we are so ready to pervert and misunderstand as those parts which approach our senses. *Whatever we can touch with our hand, and see with our eyes, we are apt to exalt into an idol, or to expect good from it as a mere charm.* Let us especially beware of this tendency in the matter of the Lord's Supper. Above all, "let us take heed," in the words of the Homily, "lest of the memory it be made a sacrifice."

The last thing which deserves a brief notice in this passage, is the ***character of the first communicants.*** It is a point full of comfort and instruction.

The little company to which the bread and wine were first administered by our Lord, was composed of the apostles, whom He had chosen to accompany Him during His earthly ministry. They were poor and unlearned men, who loved Christ, but were weak alike in faith and knowledge. They knew but little of the full meaning of their Master's sayings and doings. They knew but little of the frailty of their own hearts. They thought they were ready to die with Jesus, and yet that very night they all forsook Him and fled. All this our Lord knew perfectly well. The state of their hearts was not hidden from Him. And yet He did not keep back from them the Lord's Supper.

There is something very instructive in this circumstance—It shows us plainly that we must not make great knowledge, and great strength of grace, an indispensable qualification for communicants. A man may know but little, and be no better than a child in spiritual strength, but he is not on that account to be excluded from the Lord's table. Does he really feel his sins? Does he really love Christ? Does he really desire to serve Him? If this be so, we ought to encourage and receive him. Doubtless we must do all we can to exclude unworthy communicants. No graceless person ought to come to the Lord's Supper. But we must take heed that we do not reject those whom

Christ has not rejected. There is no wisdom in being more strict than our Lord and His apostles.

Let us leave the passage with serious self-inquiry as to our own conduct with respect to the Lord's Supper. Do we turn away from it, when it is administered? If so, how can we justify our conduct? It will not do to say it is not a necessary ordinance. To say so is to pour contempt on Christ Himself, and declare that we do not obey Him. It will not do to say that we feel unworthy to come to the Lord's table. To say so is to declare that we are unfit to die, and unprepared to meet God. These are solemn considerations. All non-communicants should ponder them well.

Are we in the habit of coming to the Lord's table? If so, in what frame of mind do we come? Do we draw near intelligently, humbly, and with faith? Do we understand what we are doing? Do we really feel our sinfulness and need of Christ? Do we really desire to live a Christian life, as well as profess the Christian faith? Happy is that soul who can give a satisfactory answer to these questions. Let him go forward, and persevere.

MATTHEW 26:36-46

Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to his disciples, "Sit here, while I go there and pray." He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and severely troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is

exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here, and watch with me."

He went forward a little, fell on his face, and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass away from me; nevertheless, not what I desire, but what you desire."

He came to the disciples, and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "What, couldn't you watch with me for one hour? Watch and pray, that you don't enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Again, a second time he went away, and prayed, saying, "My Father, if this cup can't pass away from me unless I drink it, your desire be done." He came again and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. He left them again, went away, and prayed a third time, saying the same words. Then he came to his disciples, and said to them, "Sleep on now, and take your rest. Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Arise, let's be going. Behold, he who betrays me is at hand."

The verses we have now read, describe what is commonly called Christ's agony at Gethsemane. It is a passage which undoubtedly contains deep and mysterious things. We ought to read it with reverence and wonder, for there is much in it which we cannot fully comprehend.

Why do we find our Lord so “sorrowful and very heavy,” as he is here described? What are we to make of His words, “my soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death?” Why do we see Him going apart from His disciples, and falling on His face, and crying to His Father with strong cries, and thrice-repeated prayer? Why is the Almighty Son of God, who had worked so many miracles, so heavy and disturbed? Why is Jesus, who came into the world to die, so like one ready to faint at the approach of death? Why is all this?

There is but one reasonable answer to these questions. The weight that pressed down our Lord’s soul, was not the fear of death, and its pains. Thousands have endured the most agonizing sufferings of body, and died without a groan, and so, no doubt, might our Lord. But the real weight that bowed down the heart of Jesus, was *the weight of the sin* of the world, which seems to have now pressed down upon Him with peculiar force. It was the burden of our guilt imputed to Him, which was now laid on Him, as on the head of the scapegoat. How great that burden must have been, no heart of man can conceive. It is known only to God. Well may the Greek Litany speak of the “unknown sufferings of Christ.” The words of Scott on this subject are probably correct— “Christ at this time endured as much misery, of the same kind with that of condemned spirits, as could possibly consist with a pure conscience, perfect love of God and man, and an assured confidence of a glorious event.”

But however mysterious this part of our Lord’s history may seem to us, we must not fail to observe the precious lessons of practical

instruction, which it contains. Let us now see what those lessons are.

Let us learn, in the first place, that ***prayer is the best practical remedy that we can use in time of trouble.*** We see that Christ Himself prayed, when His soul was sorrowful. All true Christians ought to do the same.

Trouble is a cup that all must drink in this world of sin. We are "born to trouble as the sparks fly upward." (Job 5:7.) We cannot avoid it. Of all creatures, none is so vulnerable as man. Our bodies, our minds, our families, our business, our friends, are all so many doors through which trial will come in. The holiest saints can claim no exemption from it. Like their Master, they are often "men of sorrow."

But what is the first thing to be done in time of trouble? We must pray. Like Job, we must fall down and worship. (Job 1:20.) Like Hezekiah, we must spread our matters before the Lord. (2 Kings 19:14.) The first person we must turn to for help, must be our God. We must tell all our sorrow to our Father in heaven. We must believe confidently that nothing is too trivial or minute to be laid before Him, so long as we do it with entire submission to His will. It is the mark of faith to keep nothing back from our best Friend. So doing, we may be sure we shall have an answer. "If it be possible," and the thing we ask is for God's glory, it shall be done. The thorn in the flesh shall either be removed, or grace to endure it will be given to us, as it was to Paul. (2 Cor. 12:9.) May we all store up this lesson against the day of need. It is a true saying, that "prayers are the leeches of care."

Let us learn, in the second place, that ***entire submission of will to the will of God should be one of our chief aims in this world.*** The words of our Lord are a beautiful example of the spirit that we should follow after in this matter. He says, “Not as I will, but as You will.” He says again, “may Your will be done.”

A will unsanctified and uncontrolled, is one great cause of unhappiness in life. It may be seen in little infants. It is born with us. We all like our own way. We wish and want many things, and forget that we are entirely ignorant what is for our good, and unfit to choose for ourselves. Happy is he who has learned to have no wishes, and in every state to be content. It is a lesson which we are slow to learn, and like Paul, we must learn it not in the school of mortal man, but of Christ. (Phil. 4:11.)

Would we know whether we are born again, and growing in grace? Let us see how it is with us in the matter of our wills. Can we bear disappointment? Can we put up patiently with unexpected trials and vexations? Can we see our pet plans, and darling schemes crossed without murmuring and complaint? Can we sit still, and suffer calmly, as well as go up and down and work actively? These are the things that prove whether we have the mind of Christ. It ought never to be forgotten, that warm feelings and joyful frames are not the truest evidences of grace. A mortified will is a far more valuable possession. Even our Lord Himself did not always rejoice; but He could always say, “may Your will be done.”

Let us learn, in the last place, that ***there is great weakness, even in true disciples of Christ, and that they have need to watch and pray against it.*** We see Peter, James, and John—those three chosen apostles, sleeping when they ought to have been watching and praying. And we find our Lord addressing them in these solemn words, "Watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation—the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

There is a double nature in all believers. Converted, renewed, sanctified as they are, they still carry about with them a mass of indwelling corruption, a body of sin. Paul speaks of this when he says, "I find a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind." (Rom. 7:21-23.) The experience of all true Christians in every age confirms this. They find within, two contrary principles, and a continual strife between the two. To these two principles our Lord alludes when He addresses His half-awakened disciples. He calls the one flesh and the other spirit. He says, "the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

But does our Lord excuse this weakness of His disciples? Be it far from us to think so. Those who draw this conclusion mistake His meaning. He uses that very weakness as an argument for watchfulness and prayer. He teaches us that the very fact that we are encompassed with infirmity, should stir us up continually to "watch and pray."

If we know anything of true religion, let us never forget this lesson. If we desire to walk with God comfortably, and not fall, like David or Peter, let us never forget to watch and pray. Let us live like men on enemy's ground, and be always on our guard. We cannot walk too carefully. We cannot be too jealous over our souls. The world is very ensnaring. The devil is very busy. Let our Lord's words ring in our ears daily like a trumpet. Our spirits may sometimes be very willing. But our flesh is always very weak. Then let us always watch and always pray.

MATTHEW 26:47-56

While he was still speaking, behold, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and clubs, from the chief priest and elders of the people. Now he who betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, "Whoever I kiss, he is the one. Seize him." Immediately he came to Jesus, and said, "Hail, Rabbi!" and kissed him.

Jesus said to him, "Friend, why are you here?" Then they came and laid hands on Jesus, and took him. Behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck the servant of the high priest, and struck off his ear. Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place, for all those who take the sword will die by the sword. Or do you think that I couldn't ask my Father, and he would even now send me more than twelve legions of angels? How then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that it must be so?"

In that hour Jesus said to the multitudes, "Have you come out as against a robber with swords and clubs to seize me? I sat daily in the temple teaching, and you didn't arrest me. But all this has happened, that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled."

Then all the disciples left him, and fled.

We see in these verses the cup of our Lord Jesus Christ's sufferings beginning to be filled. We see Him betrayed by one of His disciples, forsaken by the rest, and taken prisoner by His deadly enemies. Never surely was there sorrow like His sorrow! Never may we forget, as we read this part of the Bible, that *our sins were the cause of these sorrows!* Jesus was "delivered for our offences." (Rom. 4:25.)

Let us notice, for one thing, in these verses, ***what gracious condescension marked our Lord's communion with His disciples.***

We have this point proved by a deeply touching circumstance at the moment of our Lord's betrayal. When Judas Iscariot undertook to guide the multitude to the place where his Master was, he gave them a sign by which they might distinguish Jesus in the dim moonlight from his disciples. He said, "Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he." And so, when he came to Jesus, he said, "Hail! master, and kissed him." That simple fact reveals the affectionate terms on which the disciples associated with our Lord. It is a universal custom in Eastern countries, when friend meets friend, to salute one another

with a kiss. (Exod. 18:7; 1 Sam. 20:41.) It would seem therefore, that when Judas kissed our Lord, he only did that which all the apostles were accustomed to do, when they met their Master after an absence.

Let us draw comfort from this little circumstance for our own souls. Our Lord Jesus Christ is a most gracious and condescending Savior. He is not an "austere man," repelling sinners, and keeping them at a distance. He is not a being so different from us in nature, that we must regard Him with awe rather than affection. He would have us rather regard Him as an elder Brother, and a beloved Friend. His heart in heaven is still the same that it was upon earth. He is ever meek, merciful, and condescending to men of low estate. Let us trust Him and not be afraid.

Let us notice for another thing, how ***our Lord condemns those who think to use carnal weapons in defense of Him and His cause.*** He reproves one of His disciples for striking a servant of the high priest. He bids him "put up his sword into his place." And he adds a solemn declaration of perpetual significance, "all those who take the sword shall perish by the sword."

The sword has a lawful office of its own. It may be used righteously in the defense of nations against oppression. It may become positively necessary to use it, to prevent confusion, plunder, and rapine upon earth. But the sword is not to be used in the propagation and maintenance of the Gospel. Christianity is not to be enforced by bloodshed, and belief in it extorted by force. Happy would it have been for the Church if this sentence had been more

frequently remembered! There are few countries in Christendom, where the mistake has not been made of attempting to change men's religious opinions by compulsion, penalties, imprisonment, and death. And with what effect? The pages of history supply an answer. No wars have been so bloody as those which have arisen out of the collision of religious opinions. Often, mournfully often, the very men who have been most forward to promote those wars, have themselves been slain. May we never forget this! The weapons of the Christian warfare are not carnal, but spiritual. (2 Cor.10:4.)

Let us notice for another thing, how ***our Lord submitted to be made a prisoner of His own free will.*** He was not taken captive because he could not escape. It would have been easy for Him to scatter His enemies to the winds, if he had thought fit. "Do you think," He says to a disciple, "that I cannot pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?"

We see in those words the secret of His voluntary submission to His foes. He came on purpose to fulfill the types and promises of Old Testament Scriptures, and by fulfilling them to provide salvation for the world. He came intentionally to be the true Lamb of God, the Passover Lamb. He came to be the Scapegoat on whom the iniquities of the people were to be laid. His heart was set on accomplishing this great work. It could not be done without the "hiding of his power" for a time. To do it he became a willing sufferer. He was taken, tried, condemned, and crucified entirely of His own free will.

Let us observe this. There is much encouragement in it. The willing sufferer will surely be a willing Savior. The almighty Son of God, who allowed men to bind Him and lead Him away captive, when He might have prevented them with a word, must surely be full of readiness to save the souls that flee to Him. Once more then let us learn to trust Him, and not be afraid.

Let us notice, in the last place, ***how little Christians know the weakness of their own hearts, until they are tried.*** We have a mournful illustration of this in the conduct of our Lord's apostles. The verses we have read conclude with the words, "Then all the disciples forsook him and fled." They forgot their confident assertions made a few hours before. They forgot that they had declared their willingness to die with their Master. They forgot everything but the danger that stared them in the face. The fear of death overcame them. They "forsook him, and fled."

How many professing Christians have done the same? How many, under the influence of excited feelings, have promised that they would never be ashamed of Christ! They have come away from the communion table, or the striking sermon, or the Christian meeting, full of zeal and love, and ready to say to all who caution them against backsliding, "Is your servant a dog that he should do this thing?" And yet in a few days these feelings have cooled down and passed away. A trial has come and they have fallen before it. They have forsaken Christ.

Let us learn from the passage lessons of humiliation and self-abasement. Let us resolve by God's grace to cultivate a spirit of lowliness, and self-distrust. Let us settle it in our minds, that there is nothing so bad that the best of us may not do it, unless he watches, prays, and is held up by the grace of God. And let it be one of our daily prayers, "Hold me up, and I shall be safe." (Psalm 119:117.)

MATTHEW 57-68

Those who had taken Jesus led him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were gathered together. But Peter followed him from a distance, to the court of the high priest, and entered in and sat with the officers, to see the end. Now the chief priests, the elders, and the whole council sought false testimony against Jesus, that they might put him to death; and they found none. Even though many false witnesses came forward, they found none. But at last two false witnesses came forward, and said, "This man said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days.'"

The high priest stood up, and said to him, "Have you no answer? What is this that these testify against you?" But Jesus held his peace. The high priest answered him, "I adjure you by the living God, that you tell us whether you are the Christ, the Son of God."

Jesus said to him, "You have said it. Nevertheless, I tell you, after this you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of the sky."

Then the high priest tore his clothing, saying, "He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Behold, now you have heard his blasphemy. What do you think?"

They answered, "He is worthy of death!"

Then they spit in his face and beat him with their fists, and some slapped him, saying, "Prophesy to us, you Christ! Who hit you?"

We read in these verses how our Lord Jesus Christ was brought before Caiaphas the high priest, and solemnly pronounced guilty. It was fitting that it should be so. The great day of atonement was come. The wondrous type of the scapegoat was about to be completely fulfilled. It was only suitable that the Jewish high priest should do his part, and declare sin to be upon the head of the victim, before he was led forth to be crucified. May we ponder these things and understand them. There was a deep meaning in every step of our Lord's passion.

Let us observe in these verses, that ***the chief priests were the principal agents in bringing about our Lord's death.*** It was not so much the Jewish people, we must remember, who pushed forward this wicked deed, as Caiaphas and his companions, the chief priests.

This is an instructive fact, and deserves notice. It is a clear proof that high ecclesiastical office exempts no man from gross errors in doctrine, and tremendous sins in practice. The Jewish priests could

trace up their pedigree to Aaron, and were his lineal successors. Their office was one of peculiar sanctity, and entailed peculiar responsibilities. And yet these very men were the murderers of Christ!

Let us beware of regarding any minister of religion as infallible. His orders, however regularly conferred, are no guarantee that he may not lead us astray, and even ruin our souls. The teaching and conduct of all ministers must be tried by the Word of God. They are to be followed so long as they follow the Bible, but no longer. The maxim laid down in Isaiah must be our guide "To the law and the testimony—if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." (Isaiah. 8:20.)

Let us observe, in the second place, ***how fully our Lord declared to the Jewish council His own Messiahship, and His future coming in glory.***

The unconverted Jew can never tell us at the present day, that his forefathers were left in ignorance that Jesus was the Messiah. Our Lord's answer to the solemn adjuration of the high priest is a sufficient reply. He tells the council plainly that He is "the Christ, the Son of God." He goes on to warn them that though He had not yet appeared in glory, as they expected Messiah would have done, a day would come when he would do so. "Hereafter you shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." They would yet see that very Jesus of Nazareth, whom they

had arraigned at their bar, appear in all majesty as King of kings. (Rev. 1:7.)

It is a striking fact which we should not fail to notice, that almost the last word spoken by our Lord to the Jews, was a warning prediction about His own second advent. He tells them plainly that they would yet see Him in glory. No doubt he referred to the seventh chapter of Daniel, in the language that he used. But He spoke to deaf ears. Unbelief, prejudice, self-righteousness covered them like a thick cloud. Never was there such an instance of spiritual blindness. Well may the Church of England litany contain the prayer, "From all blindness—and from hardness of heart, good Lord deliver us."

Let us observe, in the last place, ***how much our Lord endured before the council, from false witness and mockery.***

Falsehood and ridicule are old and favorite weapons of the devil. "He is a liar, and the father of it." (John 8:44.) All through our Lord's earthly ministry we see these weapons continually employed against Him. He was called a glutton, a wine-bibber, and a friend of publicans and sinners. He was held up to contempt as a Samaritan. The closing scene of His life was only in keeping with all the past tenor of it. Satan stirred up his enemies to add insult to injury. No sooner was He pronounced guilty, than every sort of mean indignity was heaped upon Him. "They spit in his face, and buffeted him." "They smote him with the palms of their hands." They said,

mockingly, “Prophesy unto us, you Christ, who is he that smote you?”

How wonderful and strange it all sounds! How wonderful that the Holy Son of God should have voluntarily submitted to such indignities, to redeem such miserable sinners as we are! How wonderful, not least, that every tittle of these insults was foretold seven hundred years before they were inflicted! Seven hundred years before, Isaiah had written down the words, “I hid not my face from shame and spitting.” (Isaiah. 50:6.)

Let us draw from the passage one practical conclusion. Let it never surprise us, if we have to endure mockery, and ridicule, and false reports, because we belong to Christ. The disciple is not greater than His Master, nor the servant than His Lord. If lies and insults were heaped upon our Savior, we need not wonder if the same weapons are constantly used against His people. It is one of Satan’s great devices to blacken the characters of godly men, and bring them into contempt. The lives of Luther, Cranmer, Calvin, and Wesley supply abundant examples of this. If we are ever called upon to suffer in this way, let us bear it patiently. We drink the same cup that was drunk by our beloved Lord. But there is one great difference. At the worst, we only drink a few bitter drops. He drank the cup to the very dregs.

MATTHEW 26:69-75

Now Peter was sitting outside in the court, and a maid came to him, saying, "You were also with Jesus, the Galilean!"

But he denied it before them all, saying, "I don't know what you are talking about."

When he had gone out onto the porch, someone else saw him, and said to those who were there, "This man also was with Jesus of Nazareth."

Again he denied it with an oath, "I don't know the man."

After a little while those who stood by came and said to Peter, "Surely you are also one of them, for your speech makes you known."

Then he began to curse and to swear, "I don't know the man!"

Immediately the rooster crowed. Peter remembered the word which Jesus had said to him, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." He went out and wept bitterly.

If the Gospel had been a mere invention of man, we would never have been told that one of its principal preachers was once so weak and erring, as to deny his Master.

The first thing that demands our notice, is ***the full nature of the sin of which Peter was guilty.***

It was a great sin. We see a man, who had followed Christ for three years, and been forward in professing faith and love towards Him—a man who had received boundless mercies, and loving-kindness, and been treated by Christ as a familiar friend—we see this man denying three times that he knows Jesus! This was bad. It was sin committed under circumstances of great aggravation. Peter had been warned plainly of his danger, and had heard the warning. He had just been receiving the bread and wine at our Lord's hand, and declaring loudly that though he died with Him, he would not deny Him! This also was bad. It was a sin committed under apparently small provocation. Two weak women make the remark that he was with Jesus. Those who stood by say, "Surely you are one of them." No threat seems to have been used. No violence seems to have been done. But it was enough to overthrow Peter's faith. He denies before all. He denies with an oath. He curses and swears. Truly it is a humbling picture!

Let us mark this history, and store it up in our minds. It teaches us plainly that the best of saints are only men, and men encompassed with many infirmities. A man may be converted to God, have faith, and hope, and love towards Christ, and yet be overtaken in a fault, and have dreadful falls. It shows us the necessity of humility. So long as we are in the body we are in danger. The flesh is weak, and the devil is active. We must never think, "I cannot fall." It points out to us the duty of charity towards erring saints. We must not set down men as graceless reprobates, because they occasionally stumble and

err. We must remember Peter, and "restore them in the spirit of meekness." (Gal. 6:1.)

The second thing that demands our notice, is ***the series of steps by which Peter was led to deny his Lord.***

These steps are mercifully recorded for our learning. The Spirit of God has taken care to have them written down for the perpetual benefit of the Church of Christ. Let us trace them out one by one.

The first step to Peter's fall was SELF-CONFIDENCE. He said, "Even if everyone else deserts you, I never will." The second step was INDOLENCE. His Master told him to watch and pray. Instead of doing so, he slept. The third step was cowardly COMPROMISING. Instead of keeping close to his Master, he first forsook him, and then "followed him afar off." The last step was NEEDLESS VENTURING INTO EVIL COMPANY. He went into the priest's palace, and "sat with the servants," like one of themselves. And then came the final fall, the cursing, the swearing, and the three-fold DENIAL. Startling as it appears, his heart had been preparing for it. It was the fruit of seeds which he himself had sown. "He ate the fruit of his own ways."

Let us remember this part of Peter's history. It is deeply instructive to all who profess and call themselves Christians. Great illnesses seldom attack the body, without a previous train of premonitory symptoms. Great falls seldom happen to a saint, without a previous course of secret backsliding. The church and the world are sometimes shocked by the sudden misconduct of some

great professor of religion. Believers are discouraged and stumbled by it. The enemies of God rejoice and blaspheme. But if the truth could be known, the explanation of such cases would generally be found to have been *private departure from God*. Men fall in private, long before they fall in public. The tree falls with a great crash, but the secret decay which accounts for it, is often not discovered until it is down on the ground.

The last thing that demands our notice, is ***the sorrow which Peter's sin brought upon him.*** We read at the end of the chapter, "He went out and wept bitterly."

These words deserve more attention than they generally receive. Thousands have read the history of Peter's sin, who have thought little of Peter's tears, and Peter's repentance. May we have an eye to see, and a heart to understand.

We see in Peter's tears, *the close connection between unhappiness and departure from God.* It is a merciful arrangement of God, that in one sense holiness shall always be its own reward. A heavy heart, and an uneasy conscience, a clouded hope, and an abundant crop of doubts, will always be the consequence of backsliding and inconsistency. The words of Solomon describe the experience of many an inconsistent child of God, "The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways." (Prov. 14:14.) Let it be a settled principle in our religion, that if we love inward peace, we must walk closely with God.

We see in Peter's bitter tears, the grand mark of difference between the hypocrite and the true believer. When the hypocrite is overtaken by sin, he generally falls to rise no more. He has no principle of life within him to raise him up. When the child of God is overtaken, he rises again by true repentance, and by the grace of God amends his life. Let no man flatter himself that he may sin with impunity, because David committed adultery, and because Peter denied his Lord. No doubt these holy men sinned greatly. But they did not continue in their sin. They repented greatly. They mourned over their falls. They loathed and abhorred their own wickedness. Well would it be for many, if they would imitate them in their repentance, as well as in their sins. Too many are acquainted with their fall, but not with their recovery. Like David and Peter, they have sinned, but they have not, like David and Peter, repented.

The whole passage is full of lessons that ought never to be forgotten. Do we profess to have a hope in Christ? Let us mark the weakness of a believer, and the steps that lead to a fall. Have we unhappily backslidden, and left our first love? Let us remember that the Savior of Peter still lives. There is mercy for us as well as for him. But we must repent, and seek that mercy, if we would find it. Let us turn unto God, and He will turn to us. His compassions fail not. (Lam. 3:22.)

Matthew – Chap. 27

MATTHEW 27:1-10

Now when morning had come, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death—and they bound him, and led him away, and delivered him up to Pontius Pilate, the governor. Then Judas, who betrayed him, when he saw that Jesus was condemned, felt remorse, and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, "I have sinned in that I betrayed innocent blood."

But they said, "What is that to us? You see to it."

He threw down the pieces of silver in the sanctuary, and departed. He went away and hanged himself. The chief priests took the pieces of silver, and said, "It's not lawful to put them into the treasury, since it is the price of blood." They took counsel, and bought the potter's field with them, to bury strangers in. Therefore that field was called "The Field of Blood" to this day. Then that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled, saying, "They took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him upon whom a price had been set, whom some of the children of Israel priced, and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me."

The opening of this chapter describes the delivery of our Lord Jesus Christ into the hands of the Gentiles. The chief priests and elders of the Jews led Him away to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor. We may see in this incident the finger of God. It was

ordered by His providence, that Gentiles as well as Jews should be concerned in the murder of Christ. It was ordered by His providence, that the priests should publicly confess that the "scepter had departed from Judah." They were unable to put any one to death, without going to the Romans. The words of Jacob were therefore fulfilled. The Messiah, "Shiloh, had indeed come." (Gen. 49:10.)

The subject that principally occupies the verses we have read, is the melancholy end of the false apostle, Judas Iscariot. It is a subject full of instruction. Let us mark well what it contains.

We see in the end of Judas a plain proof of our Lord's innocence of every charge laid against Him.

If there was any living witness who could give evidence against our Lord Jesus Christ, Judas Iscariot was the man. A chosen apostle of Jesus, a constant companion in all His journeyings, a hearer of all His teaching, both in public and private—he must have known if our Lord had done any wrong, either in word or deed. A deserter from our Lord's company, a betrayer of Him into the hands of His enemies, it was his interest for his own character's sake, to prove Jesus guilty. It would extenuate and excuse his own conduct, if he could make out that His former master was an offender, and an impostor.

Why then did not Judas Iscariot come forward? Why did he not stand forth before the Jewish council, and specify his charges, if he had any to make? Why did he not venture to accompany the chief

priests to Pilate, and prove to the Romans that Jesus was a malefactor? There is but one answer to these questions. Judas did not come forward as a witness, because his conscience would not let him. Bad as he was, he knew he could prove nothing against Christ. Wicked as he was, he knew well that his Master was holy, harmless, innocent, blameless, and true. Let this never be forgotten. The absence of Judas Iscariot at our Lord's trial, is one among many proofs that the Lamb of God was without blemish—a sinless man.

We see, for another thing, in the end of Judas, that ***there is such a thing as repentance which is too late.*** We are told plainly that "Judas was filled with remorse. So he took the thirty pieces of silver back to the leading priests and other leaders." We are even told that he went to the priests, and said, "I have sinned." And yet it is clear that he did not repent unto salvation.

This is a point which deserves special attention. It is a common saying, "that it is never too late to repent." The saying, no doubt, is true, if repentance be true; but *unhappily late repentance is often not genuine*. It is possible for a man to feel his sins, and be sorry for them—to be under strong convictions of guilt, and express deep remorse—to be pierced in conscience, and exhibit much distress of mind—and yet, for all this, not repent with his heart. Present danger, or the fear of death, may account for all his feelings, and the Holy Spirit may have done no work whatever in his soul.

Let us beware of trusting to a late repentance. "Now is the accepted time. Today is the day of salvation." ONE penitent thief was

saved in the hour of death, that no man might despair, but ONLY ONE, that no man might presume. Let us put off nothing that concerns our souls, and above all not put off repentance, under the vain idea that it is a thing in our own power. The words of Solomon on this subject are very fearful. “I will not answer when they cry for help. Even though they anxiously search for me, they will not find me.” (Prov. 1:28.)

Let us see, for another thing, in the end of Judas, ***how little comfort ungodliness brings a man at the last.***

We are told that he cast down the thirty pieces of silver for which he had sold his Master, in the temple, and went away in bitterness of soul. That money was dearly earned. It brought him no pleasure, even when he had it. The “treasures of wickedness profit nothing.” (Prov. 10:2.)

Sin is, in truth, the hardest of all masters. In its service there is plenty of fair promises, but an utter dearth of performance. Its pleasures are but for a season. Its wages are sorrow, remorse, self-accusation, and too often death. Those who sow to the flesh, do indeed reap corruption.

Are we tempted to commit sin? Let us remember the words of Scripture, “Your sin will find you out,” and resist the temptation. Let us be sure that sooner or later, in this life or in the life to come, in this world or in the judgment-day, sin and the sinner will meet face to face, and have a bitter reckoning. Let us be sure that of all trades,

sin is the most unprofitable. Judas, Achan, Gehazi, Ananias and Sapphira, all found it so to their cost. Well might Paul say, “What fruit had you in those things whereof you are now ashamed?” (Rom. 6:21.)

Finally, let us see in the case of Judas, *to what a miserable end a man may come, if he has great privileges, and does not use them rightly*. We are told that this unhappy man “departed and went and hanged himself.” What a dreadful death to die! An apostle of Christ, a former preacher of the Gospel, a companion of Peter and John, commits suicide, and rushes into God’s presence unprepared and unforgiven.

Let us never forget that no sinners are so sinful as sinners against light and knowledge. None are so provoking to God. None, if we look at Scripture, have been so often removed from this world by sudden and fearful visitations. Let us remember Lot’s wife, Pharaoh, Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, and Saul king of Israel. They are all cases in point. It is a solemn saying of Bunyan, “that none fall so deep into the pit, as those who fall backward.” It is written in Proverbs, “he that being often reproved hardens his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.” (Prov. 29:1.) May we all strive to live up to our light. There is such a thing as sin against the Holy Spirit. *Clear knowledge of truth in the head, combined with deliberate love of sin in the heart*, go a long way towards it.

And now what is the state of our hearts? Are we ever tempted to rest on our knowledge and profession of religion? Let us remember

Judas and beware. Are we disposed to cling to the world, and give money a prominent place in our minds? Again, let us remember Judas, and beware. Are we trifling with any one sin, and flattering ourselves we may repent by and bye? Once more, let us remember Judas and beware. He is set up before us as a beacon. Let us look well at him, and not make shipwreck.

MATTHEW 27:11-26

Now Jesus stood before the governor—and the governor asked him, saying, "Are you the King of the Jews?"

Jesus said to him, "Yes, it is as you say."

When he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he answered nothing. Then Pilate said to him, "Don't you hear how many things they testify against you?"

He gave him no answer, not even one word, so that the governor marveled greatly. Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release to the multitude one prisoner, whom they desired. They had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas. When therefore they were gathered together, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release to you? Barabbas, or Jesus, who is called Christ?" For he knew that because of envy they had delivered him up.

While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent to him, saying, "Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him." Now the

chief priests and the elders persuaded the multitudes to ask for Barabbas, and destroy Jesus. But the governor answered them, "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?"

They said, "Barabbas!"

Pilate said to them, "What then shall I do to Jesus, who is called Christ?"

They all said to him, "Let him be crucified!"

But the governor said, "Why? What evil has he done?"

But they cried out exceedingly, saying, "Let him be crucified!"

So when Pilate saw that nothing was being gained, but rather that a disturbance was starting, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this righteous person. You see to it."

All the people answered, "May his blood be on us, and on our children!"

Then he released to them Barabbas, but Jesus he flogged and delivered to be crucified.

These verses describe our Lord's appearance before Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor. That sight must have been astonishing to the angels of God. He who will one day judge the world allowed himself to be judged and condemned, though "he had done no

violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth." (Isaiah 53:9.) He from whose lips Pilate and Caiaphas will one day receive their eternal sentence, suffered silently an unjust sentence to be passed upon him. Those silent sufferings fulfilled the words of Isaiah, "as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he opens not his mouth." (Isaiah 53:7.) To those *silent sufferings* believers owe all their peace and hope. Through them they will have boldness in the day of judgment, who in themselves would have nothing to say.

Let us learn from the conduct of Pilate, ***how pitiful is the condition of an unprincipled great man.***

Pilate appears to have been inwardly satisfied that our Lord had done nothing worthy of death. We are told distinctly, "that he knew that for ENVY they had delivered him." Left to the exercise of his own unbiased judgment, he would probably have dismissed the charges against our Lord, and let Him go free.

But Pilate was governor of a jealous and turbulent people. His great desire was to procure favor with them and please them. He cared little how much he sinned against God and conscience, so long as he had the praise of man. Though willing to save our Lord's life, he was afraid to do it, if it offended the Jews. And so, after a feeble attempt to divert the fury of the people from Jesus to Barabbas—and a feebler attempt to satisfy his own conscience, by washing his hands publicly before the people—he at last condemned one whom he himself called "a just person." He rejected the strange and mysterious warning which his wife sent to him after her dream. He

stifled the remonstrances of his own conscience. He “delivered Jesus to be crucified.”

Behold in this miserable man a lively emblem of many a ruler of this world! How many there are, who know well that their public acts are wrong, and yet have not the courage to act up to their knowledge. They fear the people! They dread being laughed at! They cannot bear being unpopular! Like dead fish, they float with the tide. The praise of man is the idol before which they bow down, and to that idol they sacrifice conscience, inward peace, and an immortal soul.

Whatever our position in life may be, let us seek to be guided by principle, and not by expediency. The praise of man is a poor, feeble, uncertain thing. It is here today, and gone tomorrow. Let us strive to please God, and then we may care little who else is pleased. Let us fear God, and then there is none else of whom we need be afraid.

Let us learn from the conduct of the Jews described in these verses, ***the desperate wickedness of human nature.***

The behavior of Pilate afforded the chief priests and elders an occasion of reconsidering what they were about. The difficulties he raised about condemning our Lord, gave time for second thoughts. But there were no second thoughts in the minds of our Lord’s enemies. They pressed on their wicked deed. They rejected the compromise that Pilate offered. They actually preferred having a wretched felon, named Barabbas, set at liberty rather than Jesus. They clamored loudly for our Lord’s crucifixion. And they wound up

all by recklessly taking on themselves all the guilt of our Lord's death, in words of portentous meaning, "His blood be on us and our children."

And what had our Lord done, that the Jews should hate Him so? He was no robber, or murderer. He was no blasphemer of their God, or reviler of their prophets. He was one whose life was love. He was one who "went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil." (Acts 10:38.) He was innocent of any transgression against the law of God or man. And yet the Jews hated Him, and never rested until He was slain! They hated Him, because He told them the truth. They hated Him, because He testified of their works that they were evil. They hated the light, because it made their own darkness visible. In a word, they hated Christ, because He was righteous and they were wicked, because He was holy and they were unholy—because He testified against sin, and they were determined to keep their sins and not let them go.

Let us observe this. There are few things so little believed and realized as the corruption of human nature. Men imagine that if they saw a perfect person, they would love and admire him. They flatter themselves that it is the inconsistency of professing Christians which they dislike, and not their religion. They forget that when a really perfect man was on earth, in the person of the Son of God, He was hated and put to death. That single fact goes far to prove the truth of Edwards' remark— "unconverted men would kill God, if they could get at Him."

Let us never be surprised at the wickedness there is in the world. Let us mourn over it, and labor to make it less, but let us never be surprised at its extent. There is nothing which the heart of man is not capable of conceiving, or the hand of man of doing. As long as we live, let us mistrust our own hearts. Even when renewed by the Spirit, they are still "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked." (Jer. 17:9.)

MATTHEW 27:27-44

Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium, and gathered the whole garrison together against him. They stripped him, and put a scarlet robe on him. They braided a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and a reed in his right hand; and they kneeled down before him, and mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They spit on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. When they had mocked him, they took the robe off of him, and put his clothes on him, and led him away to crucify him.

As they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name, and they compelled him to go with them, that he might carry his cross. They came to a place called "Golgotha," that is to say, "The place of a skull." They gave him sour wine to drink mixed with gall. When he had tasted it, he would not drink. When they had crucified him, they divided his clothing among them, casting lots, and they sat and watched him there. They set up over his head the accusation against him written, "THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS."

Then there were two robbers crucified with him, one on his right hand and one on the left. Those who passed by blasphemed him, wagging their heads, and saying, "You who destroy the temple, and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross!"

Likewise the chief priests also mocking, with the scribes, the Pharisees, and the elders, said, "He saved others, but he can't save himself. If he is the King of Israel, let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God deliver him now, if he wants him; for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" The robbers also who were crucified with him cast on him the same reproach.

These verses describe the sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ after his condemnation by Pilate—His sufferings in the hands of the brutal Roman soldiers, and His final sufferings on the cross. They form a marvelous record.

They are marvelous when we remember who the sufferer is—the eternal Son of God! They are marvelous when we remember the people for whom these sufferings were endured. We and our sins were the cause of all this sorrow. He "died for our sins." (1 Cor. 15:3.)

Let us observe in the first place, ***the extent and reality of our Lord's sufferings.***

The catalogue of all the pains endured by our Lord's body, is indeed a fearful one. Seldom has such suffering been inflicted on one body in the last few hours of a life. The most savage tribes, in their refinement of cruelty, could not have heaped more agonizing tortures on an enemy than were accumulated on the flesh and bones of our beloved Master. Never let it be forgotten that He had a real human body, a body exactly like our own, just as sensitive, just as vulnerable, just as capable of feeling intense pain. And then let us see what that body endured.

Our Lord, we must remember, had already passed a night without sleep, and endured excessive fatigue. He had been taken from Gethsemane to the Jewish council, and from the council to Pilate's judgment hall. He had been twice placed on his trial, and twice unjustly condemned. He had been already scourged and beaten cruelly with rods. And now, after all this suffering He was delivered up to the Roman soldiers, a body of men no doubt expert in cruelty, and of all people least likely to behave with delicacy or compassion. Then harsh men at once proceeded to work their will. They "gathered together the whole band." They stripped our Lord of His clothing, and put on Him, in mockery, a scarlet robe. They platted a crown of sharp thorns, and in derision placed it on His head. They then bowed the knee before Him in mockery, as nothing better than a pretended king. They spit upon Him. They smote Him on the head. And finally having put His own robe on Him, they led Him out of the city, to a place called Golgotha, and there crucified Him between two thieves.

But what was a crucifixion? Let us try to realize it, and understand its misery. The person crucified was laid on his back on a piece of timber, with a cross-piece nailed to it near one end—or on the trunk of a tree with branching arms, which answered the same purpose. His hands were spread out on the cross-piece, and nails driven through each of them, fastening them to the wood. His feet in like manner were nailed to the upright part of the cross. And then, the body having been securely fastened, the cross was raised up, and fixed firmly in the ground. And there hung the unhappy sufferer until pain and exhaustion brought him to his end—not dying suddenly, for no vital part of him was injured—but enduring the most excruciating agony from his hands and feet, and unable to move. Such was the death of the cross. Such was the death that Jesus died for us! For six long hours He hung there before a gazing crowd, naked, and bleeding from head to foot—His head pierced with thorns—His back lacerated with scourging—His hands and feet torn with nails—and mocked and reviled by His cruel enemies to the very last.

Let us meditate frequently on these things. Let us often read over the story of Christ's cross and passion. Let us remember, not least, that all these horrible sufferings were borne without a murmur. No word of impatience crossed our Lord's lips. In His death, no less than in His life, He was perfect. To the very last, Satan found nothing in Him. (John 14:30.)

Let us observe, in the second place, that ***all our Lord Jesus Christ's sufferings were vicarious.*** He suffered not for His own

sins, but for ours. He was eminently our substitute in all His passion.

This is a truth of the deepest importance. Without it the story of our Lord's sufferings, with all its minute details, must always seem mysterious and inexplicable. It is a truth, however, of which the Scriptures speak frequently, and that too with no uncertain sound. We are told that Christ "bore our sins in His own body on the tree,"—that He "suffered for sin, the just for the unjust,"—that "He was made sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him,"—that "He was made a curse for us,"—that "He was offered to bear the sins of many,"—that "He was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities,"—and that "the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all." (1 Peter 2:22, and 3:18. 2 Cor. 5:21. Gal. 3:13. Heb. 9:28. Isaiah 53:5, 6.) May we all remember these texts well. They are among the foundation stones of the Gospel.

But we must not be content with a vague general belief, that Christ's sufferings on the cross were vicarious. We are intended to see this truth in every part of His passion. We may follow Him all through, from the bar of Pilate, to the minute of His death, and see him at every step as our mighty Substitute, our Representative, our Head, our Surety, our Proxy—the Divine Friend who undertook to stand in our stead, and by the priceless merit of His sufferings, to purchase our redemption. Was He scourged? It was that "through His stripes we might be healed." Was he condemned, though innocent? It was that we might be acquitted though guilty. Did He wear a crown of thorns? It was that we might wear the crown of

glory. Was He stripped of His clothing? It was that we might be clothed in everlasting righteousness. Was he mocked and reviled? It was that we might be honored and blessed. Was He reckoned a malefactor, and numbered among transgressors? It was that we might be reckoned innocent, and justified from all sin. Was he declared unable to save Himself? It was that He might be able to save others to the uttermost. Did He die at last, and that the most painful and disgraceful of deaths? It was that we might live for evermore, and be exalted to the highest glory. Let us ponder these things well. They are worth remembering. The very key to peace is a right apprehension of the vicarious sufferings of Christ.

Let us leave the story of our Lord's passion with feelings of deep thankfulness. Our sins are many and great. But a great atonement has been made for them. There was an infinite merit in all Christ's sufferings. They were the sufferings of One who was God as well as man. Surely it is fit, right, and our bounden duty, to praise God daily because Christ has died.

Last, but not least, let us ever learn from the story of the passion, to hate sin with a great hatred. Sin was the cause of all our Savior's suffering. Our sins platted the crown of thorns. Our sins drove the nails into His hands and feet. On account of our sins His blood was shed. Surely the thought of Christ crucified should make us loathe all sin. Well says the Homily of the Passion, "Let this image of Christ crucified be always printed in our hearts. Let it stir us up to the

hatred of sin, and provoke our minds to the earnest love of Almighty God."

MATTHEW 27:45-56

Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. About the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lima sabachthani?" That is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Some of them who stood there, when they heard it, said, "This man is calling Elijah."

Immediately one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him a drink. The rest said, "Let him be. Let's see whether Elijah comes to save him."

Jesus cried again with a loud voice, and yielded up his spirit. Behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom. The earth quaked and the rocks were split. The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection, they entered into the holy city and appeared to many. Now the centurion, and those who were with him watching Jesus, when they saw the earthquake, and the things that were done, feared exceedingly, saying, "Truly this was the Son of God."

Many women were there watching from afar, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, serving him. Among them were Mary

Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

In these verses we read the conclusion of our Lord Jesus Christ's passion. After six hours of agonizing suffering, He became obedient even unto death, and "yielded up the spirit." Three points in the narrative demand a special notice. To them let us confine our attention.

Let us observe, in the first place, ***the remarkable words which Jesus uttered shortly before His death,*** "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?"

There is a deep mystery in these words, which no mortal man can fathom. No doubt they were not wrung from our Lord by mere bodily pain. Such an explanation His utterly unsatisfactory, and dishonorable to our blessed Savior. They were meant to express the real pressure on His soul of the enormous burden of a world's sins. They were meant to show how truly and literally He was our substitute, was made sin, and a curse for us, and endured God's righteous anger against a world's sin in His own person. At that dreadful moment, the iniquity of us all was laid upon Him to the uttermost. It pleased the Lord to bruise Him, and put Him to grief. (Isaiah 53:10.) He bore our sins. He carried our transgressions. Heavy must have been that burden, real and literal must have been our Lord's substitution for us, when He, the eternal Son of God, could speak of Himself as for a time "forsaken."

Let the expression sink down into our hearts, and not be forgotten. We can have no stronger proof of the sinfulness of sin, or of the vicarious nature of Christ's sufferings, than His cry, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" It is a cry that should stir us up to hate sin, and encourage us to trust in Christ.

Let us observe, in the second place, ***how much is contained in the words which describe our Lord's end.*** We are simply told, "He yielded up His spirit."

There never was a last breath drawn, of such deep import as this. There never was an event on which so much depended. The Roman soldiers, and the gaping crowd around the cross, saw nothing remarkable. They only saw a person dying as others die, with all the usual agony and suffering, which attend a crucifixion. But they knew nothing of the eternal interests which were involved in the whole transaction.

That death discharged in full the mighty debt which sinners owe to God, and threw open the door of life to every believer. That death satisfied the righteous claims of God's holy law, and enabled God to be just, and yet the justifier of the ungodly. That death was no mere example of self-sacrifice, but a complete atonement and propitiation for man's sin, affecting the condition and prospects of all mankind. That death solved the hard problem, how God could be perfectly holy, and yet perfectly merciful. It opened to the world a fountain for all sin and uncleanness. It was a complete victory over Satan, and spoiled him openly. It finished the transgression, made

reconciliation for iniquity, and brought in everlasting righteousness. It proved the sinfulness of sin, when it needed such a sacrifice to atone for it. It proved the love of God to sinners, when He sent His own Son to make the atonement. Never, in fact, was there, or could there be again, such a death. No wonder that the earth quaked, when Jesus died, in our stead, on the accursed tree. The solid frame of the world might well tremble and be amazed, when the soul of Christ was made an offering for sin. (Isaiah 53:10.)

Let us observe, in the last place, ***what a remarkable miracle occurred at the hour of our Lord's death, in the very midst of the Jewish temple.*** We are told that "the veil of the temple was rent in two." The curtain which separated the holy of holies from the rest of the temple, and through which the high priest alone might pass, was split from top to bottom.

Of all the wonderful signs which accompanied our Lord's death, none was more significant than this. The mid-day darkness for three hours, must have been a startling event. The earthquake, which rent the rocks, must have been a tremendous shock. But there was a meaning in the sudden rending of the veil from top to bottom, which must have pierced the heart of any intelligent Jew. The conscience of Caiaphas, the high priest, must have been hard indeed, if the tidings of that rent veil did not fill him with dismay.

The rending of the veil proclaimed *the termination and passing away of the ceremonial law*. It was a sign that the old dispensation of sacrifices and ordinances was no longer needed. Its work was

done. Its occupation was gone, from the moment that Christ died. There was no more need of an earthly high priest, and a mercy seat, and a sprinkling of blood, and an offering up of incense, and a day of atonement. The true High Priest had at length appeared. The true Lamb of God had been slain. The true mercy seat was at length revealed. The figures and shadows were no longer needed. May we all remember this! To set up an altar, and a sacrifice, and a priesthood *now,* is to light a candle at noon-day.

That rending of the veil proclaimed the opening of the way of salvation to all mankind. The way into the presence of God was unknown to the Gentile, and only seen dimly by the Jew, until Christ died. But Christ having now offered up a perfect sacrifice, and obtained eternal redemption, the darkness and mystery were to pass away. All were to be invited now to draw near to God with boldness, and approach Him with confidence, by faith in Jesus. A door was thrown open, and a way of life set before the whole world. May we all remember this! From the time that Jesus died, the way of peace was never meant to be shrouded in mystery. There was to be no reserve. The Gospel was the revelation of a mystery, which had been hidden from ages and generations. To clothe religion *now* with mystery, is to mistake the grand characteristic of Christianity.

Let us turn from the story of the crucifixion, every time we read it, with hearts full of praise. Let us praise God for the confidence it gives us, as to the ground of our hope of pardon. Our sins may be many and great, but the payment made by our Great Substitute far

outweighs them all. Let us praise God for the view it given us of the love of our Father in heaven. He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, will surely with Him give us all things. Not least, let us praise God for the view it gives us of the sympathy of Jesus with all His believing people. He can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. He knows what suffering is. *Jesus is just the Savior that an infirm body, with a weak heart, in an evil world, requires.*

MATTHEW 27:57-66

When evening had come, a rich man from Arimathaea, named Joseph, who himself was also Jesus' disciple came. This man went to Pilate, and asked for Jesus' body. Then Pilate commanded the body to be given up. Joseph took the body, and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock, and he rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb, and departed. Mary Magdalene was there, and the other Mary, sitting opposite the tomb. Now on the next day, which was the day after the Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees were gathered together to Pilate, saying, "Sir, we remember what that deceiver said while he was still alive—'After three days I will rise again.' Command therefore that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest perhaps his disciples come at night and steal him away, and tell the people, 'He is risen from the dead;' and the last deception will be worse than the first."

Pilate said to them, "You have a guard. Go, make it as secure as you can." So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone.

These verses contain the history of our Lord Jesus Christ's burial. There was yet one thing needful, in order to make it certain that our Redeemer accomplished that great work of redemption which He undertook. That holy body, in which He bore our sins on the cross, must actually be laid in the grave, and rise again. His resurrection was to be the seal and head-stone of all the work.

The infinite wisdom of God foresaw the objections of unbelievers and infidels, and provided against them. Did the Son of God really die? Did he really rise again? Might there not have been some delusion as to the reality of His death? Might there not have been imposition or deception, as to the reality of His resurrection? All these, and many more objections, would doubtless have been raised, if opportunity had been given. But He who knows the end from the beginning, prevented the possibility of such objections being made. By His over-ruling providence, He ordered things so that the death and burial of Jesus were placed beyond a doubt. Pilate gives consent to His burial. A loving disciple wraps the body in linen, and lays it in a new tomb hewn out of a rock, "wherein was never man yet laid." The chief priests themselves set a guard over the place where His body was deposited. Jews and Gentiles, friends and enemies, all alike testify to the great fact, that Christ did really and actually die, and was laid in a grave. It is a fact that can never be questioned. He was

really “bruised.” He really “suffered.” He really “died.” He was really “buried.” Let us mark this well. It deserves recollection.

Let us learn, for one thing, from these verses, that ***our Lord Jesus Christ has friends of whom little is known.***

We cannot have a more striking example of this truth, than we see in the passage now before us. A man named Joseph of Arimathaea comes forward, when our Lord was dead, and asks permission to bury Him. We have never heard of this man at any former period of our Lord’s earthly ministry. We never hear of him again. We know nothing, but that he was a disciple who loved Christ, and did Him honor. At the time when the apostles had forsaken our Lord—at a time when it was a dangerous thing to confess regard for Him—at a time when there seemed to be no earthly advantage to be gained by confessing His discipleship—at such a time as this Joseph comes boldly forward, and begs the body of Jesus, and lays it in his own new tomb.

This fact is full of comfort and encouragement. It shows us that there are some quiet, retiring souls on earth, who know the Lord, and the Lord knows them, and yet they are little known by the church. It shows us that there are diversities of gifts among Christ’s people. There are some who glorify Christ passively, and some who glorify Him actively. There are some whose vocation it is to build the Church, and fill a public place, and there are some who only come forward, like Joseph, in times of special need. But each and all are led by one Spirit, and each and all glorify God in their several ways.

Let these things teach us to be more hopeful. Let us believe that many shall yet come from the east and west, and sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. There may be in some dark corners of Christendom many, who, like Simeon, and Anna, and Joseph of Arimathaea, are at present little known, who shall shine brightly among the Lord's jewels in the day of His appearing.

Let us learn, for another thing, from these verses, that ***God can make the devices of wicked men work to His own glory.***

We are taught that lesson in a striking manner, by the conduct of the priests and Pharisees, after our Lord was buried. The restless enmity of these unhappy men could not sleep, even when the body of Jesus was in the grave. They called to mind the words, which they remembered he had said, about "rising again." They resolved, as they thought, to make His rising again impossible. They went to Pilate. They obtained from him a guard of Roman soldiers. They set a watch over the tomb of our Lord. They placed a seal upon the stone. In short, they did all they could to "make the sepulcher sure."

They little thought what they were doing. They little thought that unwittingly they were providing the most complete evidence of the truth of Christ's coming resurrection. They were actually making it impossible to prove that there was any deception or imposition. Their seal, their guard, their precautions, were all to become witnesses, in a few hours, that Christ had risen. They might as well have tried to stop the tides of the sea, or to prevent the sun rising, as

to prevent Jesus coming forth from the tomb. They were taken in their own craftiness. (1 Cor. 3:19.) Their own devices became instruments to show forth God's glory.

The history of the Church of Christ is full of examples of a similar kind. The very things that have seemed most unfavorable to God's people, have often turned out to be for their good. What harm did the "persecution which arose about Stephen" do to the Church of Christ? Those who were scattered went every where, preaching the word. (Acts 8:4.) What harm did imprisonment do Paul? It gave him time to write many of those Epistles, which are now read all over the world. What real harm did the persecution of bloody Mary do to the cause of the English Reformation? The blood of the martyrs became the seed of the Church. What harm does persecution do the people of God at this very day? It only drives them nearer to Christ. It only makes them cling more closely to the throne of grace, the Bible, and prayer.

Let all true Christians lay these things to heart, and take courage. We live in a world where all things are ordered by a hand of perfect wisdom, and where all things are working together continually for the good of the body of Christ. The powers of this world are only tools in the hand of God. He is ever using them for His own purposes, however little they may be aware of it. They are the instruments by which He is ever squaring and polishing the living stones of His spiritual temple, and all their schemes and plans will only turn to His praise. Let us be patient in the days of trouble and

darkness, and look forward. The very things which now seem against us, are all working together for God's glory. We see but half now. Yet in a little while, we shall see all. And we shall then discover that all the persecution we now endure was, like the seal and the guard, tending to God's glory. God can make the "wrath of man praise him." (Psalm 76:10.)

Matthew – Chap. 28

MATTHEW 28:1-10

Now after the Sabbath, as it began to dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. Behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from the sky, and came and rolled away the stone from the door, and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him, the guards shook, and became like dead men. The angel answered the women, "Don't be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus, who has been crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, just like he said. Come, see the place where the Lord was lying. Go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has risen from the dead, and behold, he goes before you into Galilee; there you will see him.' Behold, I have told you."

They departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring his disciples word. As they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, "Rejoice!"

They came and took hold of his feet, and worshiped him.

Then Jesus said to them, "Don't be afraid. Go tell my brothers that they should go into Galilee, and there they will see me."

The principal subject of these verses is the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. It is one of those truths which lie at the very foundation of Christianity, and has therefore received special attention in the four Gospels. All four evangelists describe minutely how our Lord was crucified. All four relate with no less clearness, that He rose again.

We need not wonder that so much importance is attached to our Lord's resurrection. It is the seal and headstone of the great work of redemption, which He came to do. It is the crowning proof that He has paid the debt which He undertook to pay on our behalf, won the battle which He fought to deliver us from hell, and is accepted as our Surety and our Substitute by our Father in heaven. Had He never come forth from the prison of the grave, how could we ever have been sure that our ransom had been fully paid? (1 Cor. 15:17.) Had He never risen from His conflict with the last enemy, how could we have felt confident, that He has overcome death, and him that had the power of death, that is the devil? (Heb. 2:14.) But thanks be unto God, we are not left in doubt. The Lord Jesus really "rose again for

our justification." True Christians are "begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." They may boldly say with Paul, "Who is he that condemns—it is Christ that died, yes rather that is risen again." (Rom. 8:34. Rom. 4:25. 1 Peter 1:3.)

We have reason to be very thankful, that this wonderful truth of our religion is so clearly and fully proved. It is a striking circumstance, that of all the facts of out Lord's earthly ministry, none are so incontrovertibly established as the fact that He rose again. The wisdom of God, who knows the unbelief of human nature, has provided a great cloud of witnesses on the subject. Never was there a fact which the friends of God were so slow to believe, as the resurrection of Christ. Never was there a fact which the enemies of God were so anxious to disprove. And yet, in spite of the unbelief of professed friends, and the enmity of foes, the fact was thoroughly established. Its evidences will always appear to a fair and impartial mind unanswerable. It would be impossible to prove anything in the world, if we refuse to believe that Jesus rose again.

Let us notice in these verses, ***the glory and majesty with which Christ rose from the dead.*** We are told that "there was a great earthquake." We are told that "the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door of the sepulcher, and sat upon it." We need not suppose that our blessed Lord needed the help of any angel, when He came forth from the grave. We need not for a moment doubt that He rose again by

His own power. But it pleased God, that His resurrection should be accompanied and followed by signs and wonders. It seemed good that the earth should shake, and a glorious angel appear, when the Son of God arose from the dead as a conqueror.

Let us not fail to see in the manner of our Lord's resurrection, *a type and pledge of the resurrection of His believing people.* The grave could not hold Him beyond the appointed time, and it shall not be able to hold them. A glorious angel was a witness of His rising, and glorious angels shall be the messengers who shall gather believers when they rise again. He rose with a renewed body, and yet a body, real, true, and material, and so also shall His people have a glorious body, and be like their Head. "When we see Him we shall be like Him." (1 John 3:2.)

Let us take comfort in this thought. Trial, sorrow, and persecution are often the portion of God's people. Sickness, weakness, and pain often hurt and wear their poor earthly body. But their good time is yet to come. Let them wait patiently, and they shall have a glorious resurrection. When we die, and where we are buried, and what kind of a funeral we have, matters little. The great question to be asked is this, "How shall we rise again?"

Let us notice in the next place, ***the terror which Christ's enemies felt at the period of His resurrection.*** We are told that at the sight of the angel, "the guards shook and became as dead men." Those hardy Roman soldiers, though not unused to dreadful

sights, saw a sight which made them quail. Their courage melted at once at the appearance of one angel of God.

Let us again see in this fact, a type and emblem of things yet to come. What will the ungodly and the wicked do at the last day, when the trumpet shall sound, and Christ shall come in glory to judge the world? What will they do, when they see *all* the dead, both small and great, coming forth from their graves, and *all* the angels of God assembled round the great white throne? What fears and terrors will possess their souls, when they find they can no longer avoid God's presence, and must at length meet Him face to face? Oh! that men were wise, and would consider their latter end! Oh! that they would remember that there is a resurrection and a judgment, and that there is such a thing as *the wrath of the Lamb!*

Let us notice in the next place, ***the words of comfort which the angel addressed to the friends of Christ.*** We read that he said, "Fear not—for I know that you seek Jesus, who was crucified."

These words were spoken with a deep meaning. They were meant to cheer the hearts of believers in every age, in the prospect of the resurrection. They were intended to remind us, that true Christians have no cause for alarm, whatever may come on the world. The Lord shall appear in the clouds of heaven, and the earth be burned up. The graves shall give up the dead that are in them, and the last day come. The judgment shall be set, and the books shall be opened. The angels shall sift the wheat from the chaff, and divide between the good fish and the bad. But in all this there is nothing that need make believers

afraid. Clothed in the righteousness of Christ, they shall be found without spot and blameless. Safe in the one true ark, they shall not be hurt when the flood of God's wrath breaks on the earth. Then shall the words of the Lord receive their complete fulfillment— "when these things begin to come to pass, lift up your heads, for your redemption draws near." Then shall the wicked and unbelieving see how true was that word, "blessed are the people whose God is the Lord." (Psalm 33:12.)

Let us notice, finally, ***the gracious message which the Lord sent to the disciples after His resurrection.*** He appeared in person to the women who had come to do honor to His body. Last at the cross and first at the tomb, they were the first privileged to see Him after He rose. And to them He gives commission to carry tidings to His disciples. His first thought is for His little scattered flock. "Go, tell my brethren."

There is something deeply touching in those simple words, "my brethren." They deserve a thousand thoughts. Weak, frail, erring as the disciples were, Jesus still calls them His "brethren." He comforts them, as Joseph did his brethren who had sold him, saying, "I am your brother Joseph." Much as they had come short of their profession—sadly as they had yielded to the fear of man, they are still His "brethren." Glorious as He was in Himself—a conqueror over death, and hell, and the grave, the Son of God is still "meek and lowly of heart." He calls His disciples "brethren."

Let us turn from the passage with comfortable thoughts, if we know anything of true religion. Let us see in these words of Christ, an encouragement to trust and not be afraid. Our Savior is one who never forgets His people. He pities their infirmities. He does not despise them. He knows their weakness, and yet does not cast them away. Our great High Priest is also our elder brother.

MATTHEW 28:11-20

Now while they were going, behold, some of the guards came into the city, and told the chief priests all the things that had happened. When they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave a large amount of silver to the soldiers, saying, "Say that his disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept. If this report comes to the governor's ears, we will persuade him and make you free of worry." So they took the money and did as they were told. This saying was spread abroad among the Jews, and continues until this day.

But the eleven disciples went into Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had sent them. When they saw him, they bowed down to him, but some doubted. Jesus came to them and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Therefore go, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I commanded you. Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

These verses form the conclusion of the Gospel of Matthew. They begin by showing us *what absurdities blind prejudice will believe, rather than believe the truth*. They go on to show us what weakness there is in the hearts of some disciples, and how slow they are to believe. They finish by telling us some of the last words spoken by our Lord upon earth—words so remarkable that they demand and deserve all our attention.

Let us observe, in the first place, ***the honor which God has put on our Lord Jesus Christ.*** Our Lord says, "all power is given unto me, in heaven and earth."

This is a truth which is declared by Paul to the Philippians, "God has highly exalted Him and given Him a name which is above every name." (Phil. 2:9.) It is a truth which in nowise takes away from the true notion of Christ's divinity, as some have ignorantly supposed. It is simply a declaration, that, in the counsels of the eternal Trinity, Jesus, as Son of man, is appointed heir of all things, that He is the Mediator between God and man—that the salvation of all who are saved is laid upon Him—and that He is the great fountain of mercy, grace, life, and peace. It was for this "joy set before Him that He endured the cross." (Heb. 12:2.)

Let us embrace this truth reverently, and cling to it firmly. Christ is He who has the keys of death and hell. Christ is the anointed Priest, who alone can absolve sinners. Christ is the fountain of living waters, in whom alone we can be cleansed. Christ is the Prince and Savior, who alone can give repentance and remission of sins. In Him

all fullness dwells. He is the way, the door, the light, the life, the Shepherd, the altar of refuge. He that has the Son has life—and he that has not the Son has not life. May we all strive to understand this. No doubt men may easily think too little of God the Father, and God the Spirit, but no man ever thought too much of Christ.

Let us observe, in the second place, ***the duty which Jesus lays on His disciples.*** He bids them "go and teach all nations." They were not to confine their knowledge to themselves, but communicate it to others. They were not to suppose that salvation was revealed only to the Jews, but to make it known to all the world. They were to strive to make disciples of all nations, and to tell the whole earth that Christ had died for sinners.

Let us never forget that this solemn injunction is still in full force. It is still the bounden duty of every disciple of Christ to do all he can in person, and by prayer, to make others acquainted with Jesus. Where is our faith, if we neglect this duty? Where is our charity? It may well be questioned whether a man knows the value of the Gospel himself, if he does not desire to make it known to all the world.

Let us observe, in the third place, ***the public profession which Jesus requires of those who believe His Gospel.*** He tells His apostles to "baptize" those whom they received as disciples.

It is very difficult to conceive when we read this last command of our Lord's, how men can avoid the conclusion that baptism is necessary, when it may be had. It seems impossible to explain the

word that we have here of any but an outward ordinance, *to be administered to all who join His Church*. That outward baptism is not absolutely necessary to salvation, the case of the penitent thief plainly shows. He went to paradise unbaptized. That outward baptism alone often confers no benefit, the case of Simon Magus plainly shows. Although baptized, he remained "in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity." (Acts 8:23.) But that baptism is a matter of entire indifference, and need not be used at all, is an assertion which seems at variance with our Lord's words in this place.

The plain practical lesson of the words is the necessity of a *public confession of faith in Christ*. It is not enough to be a *secret* disciple. We must not be ashamed to let men see whose we are, and whom we serve. We must not behave as if we did not like to be thought Christians, but take up our cross and confess our Master before the world. His words are very solemn, "Whoever shall be ashamed of me —of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when He comes in the glory of His Father, with the holy angels." (Mark 8:38.)

Let us observe, in the fourth place, ***the obedience which Jesus requires of all who profess themselves His disciples.*** He bids the apostles "teach them to observe all things, whatever He has commanded them."

This is a searching expression. It shows the uselessness of a mere name and form of Christianity. It shows that they only are to be counted true Christians who live in a practical obedience to His

word, and strive to do the things that He has commanded. The water of baptism, and the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper alone will save no man's soul. It profits nothing that we go to a place of worship and hear Christ's ministers, and approve of the Gospel, if our religion goes no further than this. What are our lives? What is our daily conduct, at home and abroad? Is the Sermon on the Mount our rule and standard? Do we strive to copy Christ's example? Do we seek to do the things that He commanded? These are questions that must be answered in the affirmative, if we would prove ourselves born again and children of God. Obedience is the only proof of reality. Faith without works is dead, being alone. "You are my friends," says Jesus, "if you do whatever I command you." (John 15:14.)

Let us observe, in the fifth place, ***the solemn mention of the blessed Trinity which our Lord makes in these verses.*** He bids the apostles to baptize "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

This is one of those great plain texts which directly teach the mighty doctrine of the Trinity. It speaks of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as Three distinct persons, and speaks of all Three as co-equal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit. And yet these Three are One.

This truth is a great mystery. Let it be enough to receive and believe it, and let us ever abstain from all attempts at explanation. It is childish folly to refuse assent to things that we do not understand. We are poor crawling worms of a day, and at our best, know little

about God and eternity. Suffice it for us to receive the doctrine of the Trinity in Unity, with humility and reverence, and to ask no vain questions. Let us believe that no sinful soul could be saved without the work of all three Persons in the blessed Trinity, and let us rejoice that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who co-operated to make man, do always co-operate to save him. Here let us pause. We may receive practically what we cannot explain theoretically.

Finally, let us observe in these verses, ***the gracious promise with which Jesus closes His words.*** He says to His disciples "I am with you always even to the end of the world."

It is impossible to conceive words more comforting, strengthening, cheering, and sanctifying than these. Though left alone, like orphan children in a cold, unkind world, the disciples were not to think they were deserted. Their Master would be ever "with them." Though commissioned to do a work as hard as that of Moses when sent to Pharaoh, they were not to be discouraged. Their Master would certainly be "with them." No words could be more suited to the position of those to whom they were first spoken. No words could be imagined more consolatory to believers in every age of the world. Let all true Christians lay hold on these words and keep them in mind. Christ is "with us" always. Christ is "with us," wherever we go. He came to be "Emmanuel, God with us," when He first came into the world. He declares that He is ever Emmanuel, "with us," when He comes to the end of His earthly ministry and is about to leave the world. He is with us daily to pardon and forgive—

with us daily to sanctify and strengthen—with us daily to defend and keep—with us daily to lead and to guide—with us in sorrow, and with us in joy—with us in sickness, and with us in health—with us in life, and with us in death—with us in time, and with us in eternity.

What stronger consolation could believers desire than this? Whatever happens, they at least are never completely friendless and alone. Christ is ever with them. They may look into the grave, and say with David, “though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for you are with me.” They may look forward beyond the grave, and say with Paul, “we shall ever be with the Lord.” (Psalm 23:4. 1 Thes. 4:17.) He has said it, and He will stand to it, “I am with you always, even to the end of the world.” “I will never leave you and never forsake you.” We could ask nothing more. Let us go on believing, and not be afraid. It is everything to be a real Christian. None have such a King, such a Priest, such a constant Companion, and such an unfailing Friend, as the true servants of Christ.

The Gospel of Mark

Preface – Expository Thoughts on Mark

The volume now in the reader's hands, is a continuation of a work already commenced by "Expository Thoughts on Matthew."

The nature of the work has been so fully explained in the preface to the volume on Matthew, that it seems unnecessary to say anything on the subject. It may be sufficient to repeat that the reader must not expect to find in these "Expository Thoughts," a learned critical commentary on the Gospels. If he expects this he will be disappointed. The work before him makes no pretense to being anything more than a continuous series of short practical expositions.

The main difference between this volume and the one which has preceded it, will be found to consist in the occasional explanatory foot-notes. The subjects of these notes will generally prove to be difficult passages or expressions in the inspired text. I cannot pretend to say that I have thrown any new light on the difficulties in Mark. But I can honestly say that I have endeavored to put the reader in possession of all that can be said on each difficulty.

In composing these Expositions on Mark, I have tried to keep continually before me the three-fold object which I had in view, when I first commenced writing on the Gospels. I have endeavored to produce something which may be useful to heads of families in the conduct of *family devotions*—something which may assist those who *visit the poor* and desire to read to them—and something which may aid all readers of the Bible in the *private study* of God's word. In pursuance of this three-fold object, I have adhered steadily to the leading principles with which I began. I have dwelt principally on the things needful to salvation. I have purposely avoided all topics of minor importance. I have spoken plainly on all subjects, and have striven to say nothing which all may not understand.

I cannot expect that the work will satisfy all who want some book to read at family prayers. In fact I know, from communications which I have received, that some think the expositions too long. The views of the heads of families as to the length of their family prayers are so exceedingly various that it would be impossible to please one class without displeasing others. In some households the family prayers are so short and hurried, that I should despair of writing anything suitable to the master's desires. In such households a few verses of Scripture, read slowly and reverently, would probably be more useful than any commentary at all. As for those who find four pages too much to read at one time, and yet desire to read my Expository Thoughts, I can only suggest that they have an easy remedy in their own hands. They have only to leave out one or two

divisions in each exposition, and they will find it as short as they please.

In preparing for publication this volume on Mark, I have looked through all those Commentaries mentioned in my preface to the volume on Matthew, which throw any light on Mark. After careful examination, I feel obliged to say, that, in my humble judgment, very few commentators, whether ancient or modern, seem to give this Gospel the attention it deserves. It has been too often treated as a mere abridgment of Matthew. This view of it I believe to be an entire mistake.

I now send forth these "Expository Thoughts on Mark" with an earnest prayer that it may please God to use the volume for His glory. It has been written under the pressure of many public duties, and amid many interruptions. No one is more conscious of its defects than myself. But I can honestly say, that my chief desire, if I know anything of my heart, in this and all my writings, is to lead my readers to Christ and faith in Him, to repentance and holiness, to the Bible and to prayer.

If these are the results of this volume in any one case, the labor I have bestowed upon it will be more than repaid.

Mark – Chap. 1

MARK 1:1-8

The Gospel of Mark, which we now begin, is in some respects unlike the other three Gospels. It tells us nothing about the birth and early life of our Lord Jesus Christ. It contains comparatively few of His sayings and discourses. Of all the four inspired histories of our Lord's earthly ministry, this is by far the shortest.

But we must not allow these peculiarities to make us undervalue Mark's Gospel. It is a Gospel singularly full of precious facts about the Lord Jesus, narrated in a simple, terse, pithy, and condensed style. If it tells us few of our Lord's SAYINGS, it is eminently rich in its catalogue of His DOINGS. It often contains minute historical detail of deep interest, which are wholly omitted in Matthew, Luke and John. In short, it is no mere abridged copy of Matthew, as some have rashly asserted, but the independent narrative of an independent witness, who was inspired to write a history of our Lord's WORKS, rather than of His WORDS. Let us read it with holy reverence. Like all the rest of Scripture, every word of Mark is "given by inspiration of God," and every word is "profitable."

Let us observe, in these verses, ***what a full declaration we have of the dignity of our Lord Jesus Christ's person.*** The very first sentence speaks of Him as "the Son of God."

These words, "the Son of God," conveyed far more to Jewish minds than they do to ours. They were nothing less than an assertion of our Lord's divinity. They were a declaration that Jesus was Himself very God, and "equal with God." (John 5:18.)

There is a beautiful fitness in placing this truth in the very beginning of a Gospel. *The divinity of Christ is the citadel and keep of Christianity*. Here lies the infinite value of the atoning sacrifice He made upon the cross. Here lies the peculiar merit of His atoning death for sinners. That death was not the death of a mere man, like ourselves, but of one who is "over all, God blessed forever." (Rom. 9:5.) We need not wonder that the sufferings of one person were a sufficient propitiation for the sin of a world, when we remember that He who suffered was the "Son of God."

Let believers cling to this doctrine with jealous watchfulness. With it, they stand upon a rock. Without it, they have nothing solid beneath their feet. Our hearts are weak. Our sins are many. We need a Redeemer who is able to save to the uttermost, and deliver from the wrath to come. We have such a Redeemer in Jesus Christ. He is "the mighty God." (Isaiah 9:6.)

Let us observe, in the second place, ***how the beginning of the Gospel was a fulfillment of Scripture.*** John the Baptist began his ministry, "as it is written in the prophets."

There was nothing unforeseen and suddenly contrived in the coming of Jesus Christ into the world. In the very beginning of Genesis we find it predicted that "the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head." (Gen. 3:15.) All through the Old Testament we find the same event foretold with constantly increasing clearness. It was a promise often renewed to patriarchs, and repeated by prophets, that a Deliverer and Redeemer should one

day come. His birth, His character, His life, His death, His resurrection, His forerunner, were all prophesied of, long before He came. Redemption was worked out and accomplished in every step, just “as it was written.”

We should always read the Old Testament with a desire to find something in it about Jesus Christ. We study this portion of the Bible with little profit, if we can see in it nothing but Moses, and David, and Samuel, and the prophets. Let us search the books of the Old Testament more closely. It was said by Him whose words can never pass away, “These are the Scriptures that testify about Me,” (John 5:39.)

Let us observe, in the third place, ***how great were the effects which the ministry of John the Baptist produced for a time on the Jewish nation.*** We are told that, “People from Jerusalem and from all over Judea traveled out into the wilderness to see and hear John. And when they confessed their sins, he baptized them in the Jordan River.”

The fact here recorded is one that is much overlooked. We are apt to lose sight of him who went before the face of our Lord, and to see nothing but the Lord Himself. We forget the morning star in the full blaze of the Sun. And yet it is clear that John’s preaching arrested the attention of the whole Jewish people, and created an excitement all over Palestine. It aroused the nation from its slumbers, and prepared it for the ministry of our Lord, when He appeared. Jesus Himself

says, “He was a burning and a shining light—you were willing to rejoice for a season in his light.” (John 5:35.)

We ought to remark here how little dependence is to be placed on what is called “popularity.” If ever there was one who was a popular minister for a season, John the Baptist was that man. Yet of all the crowds who came to his baptism, and heard his preaching, how few, it may be feared, were converted! Some, we may hope, like Andrew, were guided by John to Christ. But the vast majority, in all probability, died in their sins. Let us remember this whenever we see a crowded church. A great congregation no doubt is a pleasing sight. But the thought should often come across our minds, “How many of these people will reach heaven at last?” It is not enough to hear and admire popular preachers. It is no proof of our conversion that we always worship in a place where there is a crowd. Let us take care that we hear the voice of Christ Himself, and follow Him.

Let us observe, in the last place, ***what clear doctrine characterized John the Baptist’s preaching.*** He exalted CHRIST— “There comes one mightier than I after me.” He spoke plainly of the HOLY SPIRIT— “He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

These truths had never been so plainly proclaimed before by mortal man. More important truths than these are not to be found in the whole system of Christianity at this day. The principal work of every faithful minister of the Gospel, is to set the Lord Jesus fully before His people, and to show them His fullness and His power to

save. The next great work He has to do, is to set before them the work of the Holy Spirit, and the need of being born again, and inwardly baptized by His grace. These two mighty truths appear to have been frequently on the lips of John the Baptist. It would be well for the church and the world, if there were more ministers like him.

Let us ask ourselves, as we leave the passage, "How much we know by practical experience of the truths which John preached?" What do we think of Christ? Have we felt our need of Him, and fled to Him for peace? Is He king over our hearts, and all things to our souls? What do we think of the Holy Spirit? Has He wrought a saving work in our hearts? Has He renewed and changed them? Has He made us partakers of the Divine nature? Life or death depend on our answer to these questions. "And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ." (Rom. 8:9.)

MARK 1:9-20

This passage is singularly full of matter. It is a striking instance of that brevity of style, which is the peculiar characteristic of Mark's Gospel. The baptism of our Lord, His temptation in the wilderness, the commencement of his preaching, and the calling of His first disciples are related here in eleven verses.

Let us notice, in the first place, ***the voice from heaven which was heard at our Lord's baptism.*** We read, "There came a voice from heaven, saying, You are my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

That voice was the voice of God the Father. It declared the wondrous and ineffable love which has existed between the Father and the Son from all eternity. “The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand.” (John 3:35.) It proclaimed the Father’s full and complete approbation of Christ’s mission to seek and save the lost. It announced the Father’s acceptance of the Son as the Mediator, Substitute, and Surety of the new covenant.

There is a rich mine of comfort, in these words, for all Christ’s believing members. In themselves, and in their own doings, they see nothing to please God. They are daily sensible of weakness, shortcoming, and imperfection in all their ways. But let them recollect that the Father regards them as members of His beloved Son Jesus Christ. He sees no spot in them. (Cant. 4:7.) He beholds them as “in Christ,” clothed in His righteousness, and invested with His merit. They are “accepted in the Beloved,” and when the holy eye of God looks at them, He is “well pleased.”

Let us notice, in the second place, ***the nature of Christ’s preaching.*** We read that he came saying, “Repent, and believe the Gospel.”

This is that old sermon which all the faithful witnesses of God have continually preached, from the very beginning of the world. From Noah down to the present day the substance of their address has been always the same— “Repent and believe.”

The apostle Paul told the Ephesian elders, when he left them for the last time, that the substance of his teaching among them had been “repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Acts 20:21.) He had the best of precedents for such teaching. The Great Head of the Church had given him a pattern. Repentance and faith were the foundation stones of Christ’s ministry. Repentance and faith must always be the main subjects of every faithful minister’s instruction.

We need not wonder at this, if we consider the necessities of human nature. All of us are by nature born in sin and children of wrath, and all need to repent, be converted, and born again, if we would see the kingdom of God. All of us are by nature guilty and condemned before God, and all must flee to the hope set before us in the Gospel, and believe in it, if we would be saved. All of us, once penitent, need daily stirring up to deeper repentance. All of us, though believing, need constant exhortation to increased faith.

Let us ask ourselves what we know of this repentance and faith. Have we felt our sins, and forsaken them? Have we laid hold on Christ, and believed? We may reach heaven without learning, or riches, or health, or worldly greatness. But we shall never reach heaven, if we die impenitent and unbelieving. A new heart, and a lively faith in a Redeemer, are absolutely needful to salvation. May we never rest until we know them by experience, and can call them our own! With them all true Christianity begins in the soul. In the exercise of them consists the life of religion. It is only through the

possession of then that men have peace at the last. Church-membership and priestly absolution alone save no one. They only die in the Lord who "repent and believe."

Let us notice, in the third place, ***the occupation of those who were first called to be Christ's disciples.*** We read that our Lord called Simon and Andrew, when they were "casting a net into the sea," and James and John while they were "mending their nets."

It is clear, from these words, that the first followers of our Lord were not the great of this world. They were men who had neither riches, nor rank, nor power. But the kingdom of Christ is not dependent on such things as these. His cause advances in the world, "not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts." (Zech. 4:6.) The words of Paul will always be found true—"Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty." (1 Cor. 1:26, 27.) The church which began with a few fishermen, and yet overspread half the world, must have been founded by God.

We must beware of giving way to the common notion, that there is anything disgraceful in being poor, and in working with our own hands. The Bible contains many instances of special privileges conferred on working men. *Moses* was keeping sheep when God appeared to him in the burning bush. *Gideon* was thrashing wheat, when the angel brought him a message from heaven. *Elisha* was

ploughing, when Elijah called him to be prophet in his stead. The *apostles* were fishing, when Jesus called them to follow Him. It is disgraceful to be covetous, or proud, or a cheat, or a gambler, or a drunkard, or a glutton, or unclean. But it is no disgrace to be poor. *The laborer who serves Christ faithfully is far more honorable in God's eyes, than the nobleman who serves sin.*

Let us notice, in the last place, ***the office to which our Lord called His first disciples.*** We read that He said, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."

The meaning of this expression is clear and unmistakable. The disciples were to become fishers for souls. They were to labor to draw men out of darkness into light, and from the power of Satan to God. They were to strive to bring men into the net of Christ's church, that so they might be saved alive, and not perish everlastingly.

We ought to mark this expression well. It is full of instruction. It is the oldest name by which the ministerial office is described in the New Testament. It lies deeper down than the name of bishop, elder, or deacon. It is the first idea which should be before a minister's mind. He is not to be a mere reader of forms, or administrator of ordinances. He is to be a "fisher" of souls. The minister who does not strive to live up to this name has mistaken his calling.

Does the fisherman strive to catch fish? Does he use all means, and grieve if unsuccessful? The minister ought to do the same. Does the fisherman have patience? Does he toil on day after day, and wait,

and work on in hope? Let the minister do the same. Happy is that man, in whom the fisherman's skill, and diligence, and patience, are all combined!

Let us resolve to pray much for ministers. Their office is no light one if they do their duty. They need the help of many intercessions from all praying people. They have not only their own souls to care for, but the souls of others. No wonder that Paul cries, "Who is sufficient for these things?" (2 Cor. 2:16.) If we never prayed for ministers before, let us begin to do it this day.

MARK 1:21-34

These verses begin the long list of miracles which Mark's Gospel contains. They tell us how our Lord cast out devils in Capernaum, and healed Peter's wife's mother of a fever.

We learn, in the first place, from these verses, ***the uselessness of a mere intellectual knowledge of religion.*** Twice we are specially told that the unclean spirits know our Lord. In one place it says, "they knew Him." to another, the devil cries out, "I know you who you are, the Holy One of God." They knew Christ, when Scribes were ignorant of Him, and Pharisees would not acknowledge Him. And yet their knowledge was not unto salvation.

The mere belief of the facts and doctrines of Christianity will never save our souls. Such belief is no better than the belief of devils. They all believe and know that Jesus is the Christ. They believe that

he will one day judge the world, and cast them down to endless torment in hell. It is a solemn and sorrowful thought, that on these points some professing Christians have even less faith than the devil. There are some who doubt the reality of hell and the eternity of punishment. Such doubts as these find no place except in the hearts of self-willed men and women. There is no infidelity among devils. "They believe and tremble." (James 2:19.)

Let us take heed that our faith be a faith of the heart as well as of the head. Let us see that our knowledge has a sanctifying influence on our affections and our lives. Let us not only know Christ but love Him, from a sense of actual benefit received from Him. Let us not only believe that he is the Son of God and the Savior of the world, but rejoice in Him, and cleave to Him with purpose of heart. Let us not only be acquainted with Him by the hearing of the ear, but by daily personal application to Him for mercy and grace. "The life of Christianity," says Luther, "consists in possessive pronouns." It is one thing to say "Christ is a Savior." It is quite another to say "He is my Savior and my Lord." The devil can say the first. The true Christian alone can say the second.

We learn, in the second place, ***to what remedy a Christian ought to resort first, in time of trouble.*** He ought to follow the example of the friends of Simon's mother-in-law. We read that when she "lay sick with a fever," they "told Jesus about her."

There is no remedy like this. Means are to be used diligently, without question, in any time of need. Doctors are to be sent for, in

sickness. Lawyers are to be consulted when property or character needs defense. The help of friends is to be sought. But still, after all, *the first thing to be done, is to cry to the Lord Jesus Christ for help*. None can relieve us so effectually as He can. None is so compassionate, and so willing to relieve. When *Jacob* was in trouble he turned to his God first— "Deliver me, I beg you, from the hand of Esau." (Gen. 32:11.) When *Hezekiah* was in trouble, he first spread Sennacherib's letter before the Lord— "I beseech you, save us out of his hand." (2 Kings 19:19.) When *Lazarus* fell sick, his sisters sent immediately to Jesus "Lord," they said, "he whom you love is sick." (John 11:2.) Now let us do likewise. "Cast your burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain you." "Casting all your cares upon Him." "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God." (Psalm. 55:22; 1 Pet. 5:7; Phil. 4:6.)

Let us not only remember this rule, but practice it too. We live in a world of sin and sorrow. The days of darkness in a man's life are many. It needs no prophet's eye to foresee that we shall all shed many a tear, and feel many a heart-wrench, before we die. Let us be armed with a formula against despair, before our troubles come. Let us know what to do, when sickness, or bereavement, or cross, or loss, or disappointment breaks in upon us like an armed man. Let us do as they did in Simon's house at Capernaum. Let us at once "tell Jesus."

We learn, in the last place, from these verses, ***what a complete and perfect cure the Lord Jesus makes, when He heals.*** He

takes the sick woman by the hand, and lifts her up, and "immediately the fever left her." But this was not all. A greater miracle remained behind. At once we are told "she ministered unto them." That weakness and prostration of strength which, as a general rule, a fever leaves behind it, in her case was entirely removed. The fevered woman was not only made well in a moment, but in the same moment made strong and able to work.

We may see in this case a lively emblem of Christ's dealing with sin-sick souls. That blessed Savior not only gives mercy and forgiveness—He gives renewing grace besides. To as many as receive Him as their Physician, He gives power to become the sons of God. He cleanses them by His Spirit, when He washes them in His precious blood. Those whom He justifies, He also sanctifies. When He bestows an absolution, He also bestows a new heart. When He grants free forgiveness for the past, He also grants strength to "minister" to Him for the time to come. The sin-sick soul is not merely cured, and then left to itself. It is also supplied with a new heart and a right spirit, and enabled so to live as to please God.

There is comfort in this thought for all who feel a desire to serve Christ, but at present are afraid to begin. There are many in this state of mind. They fear that if they come forward boldly, and take up the cross, they shall by and bye fall away. They fear that they shall not be able to persevere, and shall bring discredit on their profession. Let them fear no longer. Let them know that Jesus is an Almighty Savior, who never forsakes those who once commit themselves to Him. Once

raised by His mighty hand from the death of sin, and washed in His precious blood, they shall go on "serving Him" to their life's end. They shall have power to overcome the world, and crucify the flesh, and resist the devil. Only let them begin, and they shall go on. Jesus knows nothing of half-cured cases and half-finished work. Let them trust in Jesus and go forward. The pardoned soul shall always be enabled to serve Christ.

There is comfort here for all who are really serving Christ, and are yet cast down by a sense of their own infirmity. There are many in such case. They are oppressed by doubts and anxieties. They sometimes think they shall never reach heaven after all, but be cast away in the wilderness. Let them fear no longer. Their strength shall be according to their day. The difficulties they now fear shall vanish out of their path. The lion in the way which they now dread, shall prove to be chained. The same gracious hand which first touched and healed, shall uphold, strengthen, and lead them to the last. The Lord Jesus will never lose one of His sheep. Those whom He loves and pardons, He loves unto the end. Though sometimes cast down, they shall never be cast away. The healed soul shall always go on "serving the Lord." *Grace shall always lead to glory!*

MARK 1:35-39

Every fact in our Lord's life on earth, and every word which fell from His lips, ought to be deeply interesting to a true Christian. We see a fact and a saying in the passage we have just read, which deserve close attention.

We see, for one thing, ***an example of our Lord Jesus Christ's habits about private prayer.*** We are told, that "in the morning, rising up a great while before day, He went out and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed."

We shall find the same thing often recorded of our Lord in the Gospel history. When He was baptized, we are told that He was "praying." (Luke 3:21.) When He was transfigured, we are told, that "as He prayed, the form of His face was altered." (Luke 9:29.) Before He chose the twelve apostles, we are told that "He continued all night in prayer to God." (Luke 6:12.) When all men spoke well of Him, and would sincerely have made Him a King, we are told that "He went up into a mountain alone to pray." (Mark 14:23.) When tempted in the garden of Gethsemane, He said, "Sit here, while I pray." (Mark 14:34.) In short, our Lord prayed always, and did not faint. Sinless as He was, He set us an example of diligent communion with His Father. His Godhead did not render Him independent of the use of all means as a man. His very perfection was a perfection kept up through the exercise of prayer.

We ought to see in all this the immense importance of private devotion. If He who was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners," thus prayed continually, how much more ought we who are compassed with infirmity? If He found it needful to offer up supplications with strong crying and tears, how much more needful is it for us, who in many things daily offend?

What shall we say to those who never pray at all, in the face of such a passage as this? There are many such, it may be feared, in the list of baptized people—many who rise up in the morning without prayer, and without prayer lie down at night—many who never speak one word to God. Are they Christians? It is impossible to say so. A praying Master, like Jesus, can have no prayerless servants. The Spirit of adoption will always make a man call upon God. To be prayerless is to be Christless, Godless, and in the high road to destruction.

What shall we say to those who pray, yet give but little time to their prayers? We are obliged to say that they show at present very little of the mind of Christ. Asking little, they must expect to have little. Seeking little, they cannot be surprised if they possess little. It will always be found that when prayers are few, grace, strength, peace, and hope are small.

We shall do well to watch our habits of prayer with a holy watchfulness. Here is the pulse of our Christianity. Here is the true test of our state before God. Here true religion begins in the soul, when it does begin. Here it decays and goes backward, when a man backslides from God. Let us walk in the steps of our blessed Master in this respect as well as in every other. Like Him, let us be diligent in our private devotion. Let us know what it is to "depart into solitary places and pray."

We see, for another thing, in this passage, ***a remarkable saying of our Lord as to the purpose for which He came***

into the world. We find Him saying, "let us go into the next towns, that I may PREACH there also—for that is why I have come."

The meaning of these words is plain and unmistakable. Our Lord declares that He came on earth to be a preacher and a teacher. He came to fulfill the prophetical office, to be the "prophet greater than Moses," who had been so long foretold. (Deut. 18:15.) He left the glory which He had from all eternity with the Father, to do the work of an evangelist. He came down to earth to show to man the way of peace, to proclaim deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind. One principal part of His work on earth, was to go up and down and publish glad tidings, to offer healing to the broken-hearted, light to those who sat in darkness, and pardon to the chief of sinners. He says, "That is why I have come."

We ought to observe here, ***what infinite honor the Lord Jesus puts on the office of the preacher.*** It is an office which the eternal Son of God Himself undertook. He might have spent his earthly ministry in instituting and keeping up ceremonies, like Aaron. He might have ruled and reigned as a king, like David. But He chose a different calling. Until the time when He died as a sacrifice for our sins, His daily, and almost hourly work was to preach. He says, "That is why I have come."

Let us never be moved by those who cry down the preacher's office, and tell us that sacraments and other ordinances are of more importance than sermons. Let us give to every part of God's public worship its proper place and honor, but let us beware of placing any

part of it above preaching. By preaching, the Church of Christ was first gathered together and founded, and by preaching, it has ever been maintained in health and prosperity. By preaching, sinners are awakened. By preaching, inquirers are led on. By preaching, saints are built up. By preaching, Christianity is being carried to the heathen world. There are many now who sneer at missionaries, and mock at those who go out into the high-ways of our own land, to preach to crowds in the open air. But such persons would do well to pause, and consider calmly what they are doing. The very work which they ridicule is the work which turned the world upside down, and cast heathenism to the ground. Above all, it is the very work which Christ Himself undertook. The King of kings and Lord of lords Himself was once a preacher. For three long years He went to and fro proclaiming the Gospel. Sometimes we see Him in a house, sometimes on the mountain side, sometimes in a Jewish synagogue, sometimes in a boat on the sea. But the great work He took up was always one and the same. He came always preaching and teaching. He says, “That is why I have come.”

Let us leave the passage with a solemn resolution never to “despise prophesying.” (1 Thess. 5:20.) The minister we hear may not be highly gifted. The sermons that we listen to may be weak and poor. But after all, preaching is God’s grand ordinance for converting and saving souls. The faithful preacher of the Gospel is handling the very weapon which the Son of God was not ashamed to employ. This is the work of which Christ has said, “That is why I have come.”

MARK 1:40-45

We read in these verses how our Lord Jesus Christ healed a leper. Of all our Lord's miracles of healing none were probably more marvelous than those performed on leprous people. Two cases only have been fully described in the Gospel history. Of these two, the case before us is one.

Let us try to realize, in the first place, ***the dreadful nature of the disease which Jesus cured.***

Leprosy is a complaint of which we know little or nothing in our northern climate. In Bible lands it is far more common. It is a disease which is *utterly incurable*. It is no mere skin disorder, as some ignorantly suppose. It is a radical disease of the whole man. It attacks, not merely the skin, but the blood, the flesh, and the bones, until the unhappy patient begins to lose his extremities, and to rot by inches. Let us remember beside this, that, among the Jews, the leper was reckoned unclean, and was cut off from the congregation of Israel and the ordinances of religion. He was obliged to dwell in a separate house. None might touch him or minister to him. Let us remember all this, and then we may have some idea of the remarkable wretchedness of a leprous person. To use the words of Aaron, when he interceded for Miriam, he was "as one dead, of whom the flesh is half consumed." (Numbers 12:12.)

But is there nothing like leprosy among ourselves? Yes! indeed there is. There is a foul soul-disease which is ingrained into our very

nature, and cleaves to our bones and marrow with deadly force. That disease is the plague of sin. Like leprosy, it is a deep-seated disease infecting every part of our nature, heart, will, conscience, understanding, memory, and affections. Like leprosy, it makes us loathsome and abominable, unfit for the company of God, and unfit for the glory of heaven. Like leprosy, it is incurable by any earthly physician, and is slowly but surely dragging us down to the second death. And, worst of all, far worse than leprosy, it is a disease from which no mortal man is exempt. "We are all," in God's sight, "as an unclean thing." (Isaiah 64:6.)

Do we know these things? Have we found them out? Have we discovered our own sinfulness, guilt, and corruption? Happy indeed is that person who has been really taught to feel that he is a "miserable sinner," and that there is "no health in him!" Blessed indeed is he who has learned that he is a spiritual leper, and a bad, wicked, sinful creature! To know our disease is one step towards a cure. It is the misery and the ruin of many souls that they never yet saw their sins and their need.

Let us learn, in the second place, from these verses, ***the wondrous and almighty power of the Lord Jesus Christ.***

We are told that the unhappy leper came to our Lord, "begging Him, and kneeling down," and saying, "If you will, you can make me clean." We are told that "Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth His hand and touched him, and said to him, I will, be clean." At once the cure was effected. That very instant the deadly plague departed

from the poor sufferer, and he was healed. It was but a word, and a touch, and there stands before our Lord, not a leper, but a sound and healthy man.

Who can conceive the greatness of the change in the feelings of this leper, when he found himself healed? The morning sun rose upon him, a miserable being, more dead than alive, his whole frame a mass of sores and corruption, his very existence a burden. The evening sun saw him full of hope and joy, free from pain, and fit for the society of his fellow-men. Surely the change must have been like life from the dead.

Let us bless God that the Savior with whom we have to do is almighty. It is a cheering and comfortable thought that with Christ nothing is impossible. No heart-disease is so deep-seated but He is able to cure it. No plague of soul is so virulent but our Great Physician can heal it. Let us never despair of any one's salvation, so long as he lives. The worst of spiritual lepers may yet be cleansed. No cases of spiritual leprosy could be worse than those of Manasseh, Saul, and Zaccheus, yet they were all cured—Jesus Christ made them whole. The chief of sinners may yet be brought near to God by the blood and Spirit of Christ. Men are not lost, because they are too bad to be saved, but because they will not come to Christ that He may save them.

Let us learn, in the last place, from these verses, that ***there is a time to be silent about the work of Christ, as well as a time to speak.***

This is a truth which is taught us in a remarkable way. We find our Lord strictly charging this man to tell no one of his cure, to "say nothing to any man." We find this man in the warmth of his zeal disobeying this injunction, and publishing and "blazing abroad" his cure in every quarter. And we are told that the result was that Jesus "could no more enter into the city, but stayed outside in desert places."

There is a lesson in all this of deep importance, however difficult it may be to use it rightly. It is clear that there are times when our Lord would have us work for Him quietly and silently, rather than attract public attention by a noisy zeal. There is a zeal which is "not according to knowledge," as well as a zeal which is righteous and praiseworthy. Everything is beautiful in its season. Our Master's cause may on some occasions be more advanced by quietness and patience, than in any other way. We are not to "give that which is holy to dogs," nor "cast pearls before swine." By forgetfulness of this we may even do more harm than good, and retard the very cause we want to assist.

The subject is a delicate and difficult one, without doubt. Unquestionably the majority of Christians are far more inclined to be silent about their glorious Master than to confess Him before men—and do not need the *bridle* so much as the *spur*. But still it is undeniable that there is a time for all things; and to know the time should be one great aim of a Christian. There are good men who have

more zeal than discretion, and even help the enemy of truth by unseasonable acts and words.

Let us all pray for the Spirit of wisdom and of a sound mind. Let us seek daily to know the path of duty, and ask daily for discretion and good sense. Let us be bold as a lion in confessing Christ, and not be afraid to "speak of Him before princes," if need be. But let us never forget that "Wisdom is profitable to direct" (Eccles. 10:11), and let us beware of doing harm by an ill-directed zeal.

Mark – Chap. 2

MARK 2:1-12

This passage shows our Lord once more at Capernaum. Once more we find Him doing His accustomed work, preaching the word, and healing those that were sick.

We see, in these verses, ***what great spiritual privileges some people enjoy, and yet make no use of them.***

This is a truth which is strikingly illustrated by the history of Capernaum. No city in Palestine appears to have enjoyed so much of our Lord's presence, during His earthly ministry, as did this city. It was the place where He dwelt, after He left Nazareth. (Matt. 4:13.) It was the place where many of His miracles were worked, and many of His sermons delivered. But nothing that Jesus said or did seems to

have had any effect on the hearts of the inhabitants. They crowded to hear Him, as we read in this passage, “until there was no room about the door.” *They were amazed. They were astonished. They were filled with wonder at His mighty works. But they were not converted. They lived in the full noon-tide blaze of the Sun of Righteousness, and yet their hearts remained hard.* And they drew from our Lord the heaviest condemnation that He ever pronounced against any place, except Jerusalem— “And you people of Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? No, you will be brought down to the place of the dead. For if the miracles I did for you had been done in Sodom, it would still be here today. I assure you, Sodom will be better off on the judgment day than you.” (Matt. 11:23, 24)

It is good for us all to mark well this case of Capernaum. We are all to apt to suppose that it needs nothing but the powerful preaching of the Gospel to convert people’s souls, and that if the Gospel is only brought into a place everybody must believe. We forget the amazing power of unbelief, and the depth of man’s enmity against God. We forget that the Capernaites heard the most faultless preaching, and saw it confirmed by the most surprising miracles, and yet remained dead in trespasses and sins. We need reminding that the same Gospel which is the savor of life to some, is the savor of death to others, and that the same fire which softens the wax will also harden the clay. Nothing, in fact, seems to harden man’s heart so much, as to hear the Gospel regularly, and yet deliberately prefer the service of sin and the world. Never was there a people so highly favored as the

people of Capernaum, and never was there a people who appear to have become so hard. Let us beware of walking in their steps. We ought often to use the prayer of the Litany, “From hardness of heart, good Lord, deliver us.”

We see, in the second place, from these verses, ***how great a blessing AFFLICTION may prove to a man’s soul.***

We are told that one paralyzed was brought to our Lord, at Capernaum, in order to be healed. Helpless and impotent, he was carried in his bed by four kind friends, and let down into the midst of the place where Jesus was preaching. At once the object of the man’s desire was gained. The great Physician of soul and body saw him, and gave him speedy relief. He restored him to health and strength. He granted him the far greater blessing of forgiveness of sins. In short, the man who had been carried from his house that morning weak, dependent, and bowed down both in body and soul, returned to his own house rejoicing.

Who can doubt that to the end of his days this man would thank God for his paralysis? Without it he might probably have lived and died in ignorance, and never seen Christ at all. Without it, he might have kept his sheep on the green hills of Galilee all his life long, and never been brought to Christ, and never heard these blessed words, “your sins are forgiven.” That paralysis was indeed a blessing. Who can tell but it was the beginning of eternal life to his soul?

How many in every age can testify that this paralyzed man's experience has been their own! They have learned wisdom by affliction. Bereavements have proved mercies. Losses have proved real gains. Sicknesses have led them to the great Physician of souls, sent them to the Bible, shut out the world, shown them their own foolishness, taught them to pray. Thousands can say like David, "It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes." (Psalm. 119:71.)

Let us beware of murmuring under affliction. We may be sure there is a needs-be for every cross, and a wise reason for every trial. Every sickness and sorrow is a gracious message from God, and is meant to call us nearer to Him. Let us pray that we may learn the lesson that each affliction is appointed to convey. Let us see that we "refuse not Him that speaks."

We see, in the last place, in these verses, ***the priestly power of forgiving sins, which is possessed by our Lord Jesus Christ.***

We read that our Lord said to the sick of the palsy "Son, your sins are forgiven." He said these words with a meaning. He knew the hearts of the Scribes by whom He was surrounded. He intended to show them that He laid claim to be the true High Priest, and to have the power of absolving sinners, though at present the claim was seldom put forward. But that He had the power He told them expressly. He says, "the Son of man has power on earth to forgive

sins." In saying, "your sins are forgiven," He had only exercised His rightful office.

Let us consider how great must be the authority of Him, who has the power to forgive sins! This is the thing that none can do but God. No angel in heaven, no man upon earth, no church in council, no minister of any denomination, can take away from the sinner's conscience the load of guilt, and give him peace with God. They may point to the fountain open for all sin. They may declare with authority whose sins God is willing to forgive. But they cannot absolve by their own authority. They cannot put away transgressions. This is the peculiar prerogative of God, and a prerogative which He has put in the hands of His Son Jesus Christ.

Let us think for a moment how great a blessing it is, that Jesus is our great High Priest, and that we know where to go for absolution! We must have a Priest and a sacrifice between ourselves and God. Conscience demands an atonement for our many sins. God's holiness makes it absolutely needful. Without an atoning Priest there can be no peace of soul. Jesus Christ is the very Priest that we need, mighty to forgive and pardon, tender-hearted and willing to save.

And now let us ask ourselves whether we have yet known the Lord Jesus as our High Priest? Have we applied to Him? Have we sought absolution? If not, we are yet in our sins. May we never rest until the Spirit witnesses with our spirit that we have sat at the feet of Jesus and heard his voice, saying, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

MARK 2:13-22

The person who is called Levi, at the beginning of this passage, is the same person who is called Matthew in the first of the four Gospels. Let us not forget this. It is no less than an apostle and an evangelist, whose early history is now before our eyes.

We learn from these verses ***the power of Christ to call men out from the world, and make them His disciples.*** We read that he said to Levi, when "sitting at the receipt of custom, Follow me." And at once "he arose and followed him." From a tax-collector he became an apostle, and a writer of the first book in the New Testament, which is now known all over the world.

This is a truth of deep importance. Without a divine call no one can be saved. We are all so sunk in sin, and so wedded to the world, that we would never turn to God and seek salvation, unless He first called us by His grace. God must speak to our hearts by His Spirit, before we shall ever speak to Him. Those who are sons of God, says the 17th Article, are "called according to God's purpose by His Spirit working in due season." Now how blessed is the thought that this calling of sinners is committed to so gracious a Savior as Christ!

When the Lord Jesus calls a sinner to be His servant, He acts as a *Sovereign*; but He acts with *infinite mercy*. He often chooses those who seem most unlikely to do His will, and furthest off from His kingdom. He draws them to Himself with almighty power, breaks the chains of old habits and customs, and makes them new creatures. As

the magnet attracts the iron, and the south wind softens the frozen ground, so does Christ's calling draw sinners out from the world, and melt the hardest heart. "The voice of the Lord is mighty in operation." Blessed are they, who, when they hear it, harden not their hearts!

We ought never to despair entirely of any one's salvation, when we read this passage of Scripture. He who called Levi, still lives and still works. The age of miracles is not yet past. The love of money is a powerful principle, but the call of Christ is more powerful. Let us not despair even about those who "sit at the receipt of custom," and enjoy abundance of this world's good things. The voice which said to Levi, "Follow me," may yet reach their hearts. We may yet see them arise, and take up their cross, and follow Christ. Let us hope continually, and pray for others. Who can tell what God may be going to do for any one around us? No one is too bad for Christ to call. Let us pray for all.

We learn, for another thing, from these verses, that ***one of Christ's principal offices is that of a Physician.*** The Scribes and Pharisees found fault with Him for eating and drinking with publicans and sinners. But "when Jesus heard it, He said unto them, Those who are healthy have no need of a physician, but those who are sick."

The Lord Jesus did not come into the world, as some suppose, to be nothing more than a law-giver, a king, a teacher, and an example. Had this been all the purpose of His coming, there would have been

small comfort for man. Diet-regimens and rules of health are all very well for the convalescent, but not suitable to the man laboring under a mortal disease. A teacher and an example might be sufficient for an unfallen being like Adam in the garden of Eden. But fallen sinners like ourselves need healing first, before we can value rules.

The Lord Jesus came into the world to be a physician as well as a teacher. He knew the necessities of human nature. He saw us all sick of a mortal disease, stricken with the plague of sin, and dying daily. He pitied us, and came down to bring divine medicine for our relief. He came to give health and cure to the dying, to heal the broken hearted, and to offer strength to the weak. No sin-sick soul is too far gone for Him. It is His glory to heal and restore to life the most desperate cases. For unfailing skill, for unwearied tenderness, for long experience of man's spiritual ailments, the great Physician of souls stands alone. There is none like Him.

But what do we know ourselves of this special office of Christ? Have we ever felt our spiritual sickness and applied to him for relief? We are never right in the sight of God until we do. We know nothing aright in religion, if we think the sense of sin should keep us back from Christ. To feel our sins, and know our sickness is the beginning of real Christianity. To be sensible of our corruption and abhor our own transgressions, is the first symptom of spiritual health. Happy indeed are they who have found out their soul's disease! Let them know that Christ is the very Physician they require, and let them apply to Him without delay.

We learn, in the last place, from these verses, that ***in religion it is worse than useless to attempt to mix things which essentially differ.*** **"**No man," He tells the Pharisees, "sews a piece of new cloth on an old garment." "No man puts new wine into old bottles."

These words, we must of course see, were a parable. They were spoken with a special reference to the question which the Pharisees had just raised— "Why do the disciples of John fast, but your disciples do not FAST?" Our Lord's reply evidently means, that to enforce fasting among His disciples would be inexpedient and unseasonable. His little flock was as yet young in grace, and weak in faith, knowledge, and experience. They must be led on softly, and not burdened at this early stage with requirements which they were not able to bear. Fasting, moreover, might, be suitable to the disciples of him who was only the Bridegroom's friend, who lived in the wilderness, preached the baptism of repentance, was clothed in camel's hair, and ate locusts and wild honey. But fasting was not equally suitable to the disciples of Him, who was the Bridegroom Himself, brought glad tidings to sinners, and came living like other men. In short, to require fasting of his disciples at present, would be putting "new wine into old bottles." It would be trying to mingle and amalgamate things that essentially differed.

The principle laid down in these little parables is one of great importance. It is a kind of proverbial saying, and admits of a wide application. Forgetfulness of it has frequently done great harm in the

Church. The evils that have arisen from trying to sew the new patch on the old garment, and put the new wine into old bottles, have neither been few nor small.

How was it with the Galatian Church? It is recorded in Paul's epistle. Men wished in that Church to reconcile Judaism with Christianity, and to circumcise as well as baptize. They endeavored to keep alive the law of ceremonies and ordinances, and to place it side by side with the Gospel of Christ. In fact they would sincerely have put the "new wine into old bottles." And in so doing they greatly erred.

How was it with the early Christian Church, after the apostles were dead? We have it recorded in the pages of Church history. Some tried to make the Gospel more acceptable by mingling it with Platonic philosophy. Some labored to recommend it to the heathen by borrowing forms, processions, and vestments from the temples of heathen gods. In short, they "sewed the new patch on the old garment." And in so doing they scattered the seeds of enormous evil. They paved the way for the whole Romish apostasy.

How is it with many professing Christians in the present day? We have only to look around us and see. There are thousands who are trying to reconcile the service of Christ and the service of the world, to have the name of Christian and yet live the life of the ungodly—to keep in with the servants of pleasure and sin, and yet be the followers of the crucified Jesus at the same time. In a word, they are trying to

enjoy the “new wine,” and yet to cling to the “old bottles.” They will find one day that they have attempted that which cannot be done.

Let us leave the passage in a spirit of serious self-inquiry. It is one that ought to raise great searching’s of heart in the present day. Have we never read what the Scripture says? “No man can serve two masters.” “You cannot serve God and mammon. Let us place side by side with these texts the concluding words of our Lord in this passage, “New wine must be put into new bottles.”

MARK 2:23-28

These verses set before us a remarkable scene in our Lord Jesus Christ’s earthly ministry. We see our blessed Master and His disciples going “through the grainfields on the Sabbath day.” We are told that His disciples, “as they went, began to pluck heads of grain.” At once we hear the Pharisees accusing them to our Lord, as if they had committed some great moral offence. “Why are they doing that which is not lawful on the Sabbath day?” They received an answer full of deep wisdom, which all should study well, who desire to understand the subject of Sabbath observance.

We see from these verses, ***what extravagant importance is attached to trifles by those who are mere formalists in religion.***

The Pharisees were mere formalists, if there ever were any in the world. They seem to have thought exclusively of the outward part,

the husk, the shell, and the ceremonial of religion. They even added to these externals by traditions of their own. Their godliness was made up of washings, and fasting's, and peculiarities in dress, and will-worship, while repentance, and faith, and holiness were comparatively overlooked.

The Pharisees would probably have found no fault, if the disciples had been guilty of some offence against the moral law. They would have winked at covetousness, or perjury, or extortions, or excess, because they were sins to which they themselves were inclined. But no sooner did they see an infringement on their man-made traditions about the right way of keeping the Sabbath, than they raised an outcry, and found fault.

Let us watch and pray, lest we fall into the error of the Pharisees. There are never lacking professors who walk in their steps. There are thousands at the present day who plainly think more of the mere outward ceremonial of religion than of its doctrines. They make more ado about keeping saints' days, and turning to the east in the creed, and bowing at the name of Jesus, than about repentance, or faith, or separation from the world. Against this spirit let us ever be on our guard. It can neither comfort, satisfy, nor save.

It ought to be a settled principle in our minds, that a man's soul is in a bad state, when he begins to regard man-made rites and ceremonies, as things of superior importance, and exalts them above the preaching of the Gospel. It is a symptom of spiritual disease. There is mischief within. It is too often the resource of an uneasy

conscience. The first steps of apostasy from Protestantism to Romanism have often been in this direction. No wonder that Paul said to the Galatians, “You observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed on you labor in vain.” (Gal. 4:10, 11.)

We see, in the second place, from these verses, ***the value of a knowledge of holy Scripture.***

Our Lord replies to this accusation of the Pharisees by a reference to holy Scripture. He reminds His enemies of the conduct of David, when he “had need and was hungry.” “Have you never read what David did?” They could not deny that the writer of the book of Psalms, and the man after God’s own heart, was not likely to set a bad example. They knew in fact that he had not turned aside from God’s commandment, all the days of his life, “except only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite.” (1 Kings 15:5.) Yet what had David done? He had gone into the house of God, when pressed by hunger, and eaten “the showbread, which is not lawful to eat but for the priests.” He had thus shown that some requirements of God’s laws might be relaxed in case of necessity. To this Scripture example our Lord refers his adversaries. They found nothing to reply to it. The sword of the Spirit was a weapon which they could not resist. They were silenced and put to shame.

Now the conduct of our Lord on this occasion ought to be a pattern to all His people. Our grand reason for our faith, and practice, should always be, “Thus it is written in the Bible.” “What

says the Scripture?" We should endeavor to have the word of God on our side in all debatable questions. We should seek to be able to give a scriptural answer for our behavior in all matters of dispute. We should refer our enemies to the Bible as our rule of conduct. We shall always find a plain text the most powerful argument we can use. In a world like this we must expect our opinions to be attacked, if we serve Christ, and we may be sure that nothing silences adversaries so soon as a quotation from Scripture.

Let us however remember, that if we are to use the Bible as our Lord did, we must know it well, and be acquainted with its contents. We must read it diligently, humbly, perseveringly, prayerfully, or we shall never find its texts coming to our aid in the time of need. To use the sword of the Spirit effectually, we must be familiar with it, and have it often in our hands. There is no royal road to the knowledge of the Bible. It does not come to man by intuition. The book must be studied, pondered, prayed over, searched into, and not left always lying on a shelf, or carelessly looked at now and then. It is the students of the Bible, and they alone, who will find it a weapon ready in hand in the day of battle.

We see, in the last place, from these verses, the ***true principle by which all questions about the observance of the SABBATH ought to be decided.*** "The Sabbath," says our Lord, "was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath."

There is a mine of deep wisdom in those words. They deserve close attention, and the more so because they are not recorded in any

Gospel but that of Mark. Let us see what they contain.

"The Sabbath was made for man." God made it for Adam in Paradise, and renewed it to Israel on Mount Sinai. It was made for all mankind, not for the Jew only, but for the whole family of Adam. It was made for man's benefit and happiness. It was for the good of his body, the good of his mind, and the good of his soul. It was given to him as a benefit and a blessing, and not as a burden. This was the original institution.

But "man was not made for the Sabbath." The observance of the day of God was never meant to be so enforced as to be an injury to his health, or to interfere with his necessary requirements. The original command to "keep holy the Sabbath day," was not intended to be so interpreted as to do harm to his body, or prevent acts of mercy to his fellow-creatures. This was the point that the Pharisees had forgotten, or buried under their traditions.

There is nothing in all this to warrant the rash assertion of some, that our Lord has done away with the fourth commandment. On the contrary, He manifestly speaks of the Sabbath day as a privilege and a gift, and only regulates the extent to which its observance should be enforced. He shows that works of necessity and mercy may be done on the Sabbath day; but He says not a word to justify the notion that Christians need not "remember the day to keep it holy."

Let us be jealous over our own conduct in the matter of observing the Sabbath. There is little danger of the day being kept too strictly in

the present age. There is far more danger of its being profaned and forgotten entirely. Let us contend earnestly for its preservation among us in all its integrity. We may rest assured that national prosperity and personal growth in grace, are intimately bound up in the maintenance of a holy Sabbath.

Mark – Chap. 3

MARK 3:1-12

These verses show us our Lord again working a miracle. He heals a man in the synagogue, "who had a withered hand." Always about His Father's business—always doing good—doing it in the sight of enemies as well as of friends—such was the daily tenor of our Lord's earthly ministry. And He "left us an example that we should follow His steps." (1 Peter 2:21.) Blessed indeed are those Christians who strive, however feebly, to imitate their Master!

Let us observe in these verses, ***how our Lord Jesus Christ was watched by His enemies.*** We read that "they watched Him, whether He would heal him on the Sabbath day, that they might accuse Him."

What a melancholy proof we have here of the wickedness of human nature! It was the Sabbath day, when these things happened. It was in the synagogue, where men were assembled to hear the word and worship God. Yet even on the day of God, and at the time of

worshiping God, *these wretched formalists were plotting mischief against our Lord.* The very men who pretended to such strictness and, sanctity in little things, were full of malicious and angry thoughts in the midst of the congregation. (Prov. 5:14.)

Christ's people must not expect to fare better than their Master. They are always watched by an ill-natured and spiteful world. Their conduct is scanned with a keen and jealous eye. Their ways are noted and diligently observed. They are marked men. They can do nothing without the world's noticing it. Their dress, their expenditure, their employment of time, their conduct in all the relations of life, are all rigidly and closely marked. Their adversaries wait for their halting, and if at any time they fall into an error, the ungodly rejoice.

It is good for all Christians to keep this before their minds. Wherever we go, and whatever we do, let us remember that, like our Master, we are "watched." The thought should make us exercise a holy jealousy over all our conduct, that we may do nothing to cause the enemy to blaspheme. It should make us diligent to avoid even the "appearance of evil." Above all, it should make us pray much, to be kept blameless in our tempers, tongues, and daily public demeanor. That Savior who was "watched" Himself, knows how to sympathize with his people, and to supply grace to help in time of need.

Let us observe, in the second place, ***the great principle that our Lord lays down about Sabbath observance.*** He teaches that it is lawful "to do good" on the Sabbath.

This principle is taught by a remarkable question. He asks those around Him, whether it was “lawful to do good or evil on the Sabbath days, to save life, or to kill?” Was it better to heal this poor sufferer before Him with the withered hand, or to leave him alone? Was it more sinful to restore a person to health on the Sabbath, than to plot murder, and nourish hatred against an innocent person, as they were doing at that moment against Himself? Was He to be blamed for saving a life on the Sabbath? Were they blameless who were desirous to kill? No wonder that before such a question as this, our Lord’s enemies “held their peace.”

It is plain from these words of our Lord, that no Christian need ever hesitate to do a really good work on the Sunday. A real work of mercy, such as ministering to the sick, or relieving pain, may always be done without scruple. The holiness with which the fourth commandment invests the Sabbath day, is not in the least degree invaded by anything of this kind.

But we must take care that the principle here laid down by our Lord, is not abused and turned to bad account. We must not allow ourselves to suppose that the permission to “do good,” implied that every one might find his own pleasure on the Sabbath. The permission to “do good” was never meant to open the door to amusements, worldly festivities, traveling, journeying, and sensual gratification. It was never intended to license the Sunday railway train, or the Sunday steamboat, or the Sunday exhibition. These things do good to none, and do certain harm to many. They rob many

a servant of his seventh day's rest. They turn the Sunday of thousands into a day of hard toil. Let us beware of perverting our Lord's words from their proper meaning. Let us remember what kind of "doing good" on the Sabbath His blessed example sanctioned. Let us ask ourselves whether there is the slightest likeness between our Lord's works on the Sabbath, and those ways of spending the Sabbath for which many contend, who yet dare to appeal to our Lord's example. Let us fall back on the plain meaning of our Lord's words, and take our stand on them. He gives us a liberty to "do good" on Sunday, but for feasting, sight-seeing, party-giving, and excursions, He gives no liberty at all.

Let us observe, in the last place, ***the feelings which the conduct of our Lord's enemies called forth in His heart.*** We are told that "He looked round about on them with ANGER, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts."

This expression is very remarkable, and demands special attention. It is meant to remind us that our Lord Jesus Christ was a man like ourselves in all things, sin only excepted. Whatever sinless feelings belong to the constitution of man, our Lord partook of, and knew by experience. We read that He "marveled," that He "rejoiced," that He "wept," that He "loved," and here we read that He felt "anger."

It is plain from these words that there is an "anger" which is lawful, right, and not sinful. There is an indignation which is justifiable, and on some occasions may be properly manifested. The

words of Solomon and Paul both seem to teach the same lesson. “The north wind drives away rain, so does an angry countenance a backbiting tongue.” “Be angry and sin not.” (Prov. 25:23. Ephes. 4:26.)

Yet it must be confessed that the subject is full of difficulty. Of all the feelings that man’s heart experiences, there is none perhaps which so soon runs into sin as the feeling of **anger**. There is none which once excited seems less under control. There is none which leads on to so much evil. The length to which ill-temper, irritability, and passion, will carry even godly men, all must know. The history of “the contention” of Paul and Barnabas at Antioch, and the story of Moses being provoked until he “spoke unadvisedly with his lips,” are familiar to every Bible reader. The dreadful fact that passionate words are a breach of the sixth commandment, is plainly taught in the Sermon on the Mount. And yet here we see that there is anger which is lawful.

Let us leave this subject with an earnest prayer, that we may all be enabled to take heed to our spirit in the matter of anger. We may rest assured that there is no human feeling which needs so much cautious guarding as this. *A sinless wrath is a very rare thing. The wrath of man is seldom for the glory of God.* In every case a righteous indignation should be mingled with grief and sorrow for those who cause it, even as it was in the case of our Lord. And this, at all events, we may be sure of—it is better never to be angry, than to be angry and sin.

MARK 3:13-21

The beginning of this passage describes the appointment of the twelve apostles. It is an event in our Lord's earthly ministry, which should always be read with deep interest. What a vast amount of benefit these few men have conferred on the world! The names of a few Jewish fishermen are known and loved by millions all over the globe, while the names of many kings and rich men are lost and forgotten. It is they who do good to souls who are had "in everlasting remembrance." (Psalm 112:6.)

Let us notice in these verses, ***how many of the twelve who are here named, had been called to be disciples before they were ordained apostles.***

There are six, at least, out of the number, whose first call to follow Christ is specially recorded. These six are Peter and Andrew, James and John, Philip and Matthew. In short, there can be little doubt that eleven of our Lord's apostles were converted before they were ordained.

It ought to be the same with all ministers of the Gospel. They ought to be men who have been first called by the Spirit, before they are set apart for the great work of teaching others. The rule should be the same with them as with the apostles— "first converted, then ordained."

It is impossible to overrate the importance of this to the interests of true religion. Bishops and presbyteries can never be too strict and particular in the enquiries they make about the spiritual character of candidates for orders. An unconverted minister is utterly unfit for his office. How can he speak experimentally of that grace which he has never tasted himself? How can he commend that Savior to his people whom he himself only knows by name? How can he urge on souls the need of that conversion and new birth, which he himself has not experienced? Miserably mistaken are those parents who persuade their sons to become clergymen, in order to obtain a good living, or follow a respectable profession! What is it but persuading them to say what is not true, and to take the Lord's name in vain? *None do such injury to the cause of Christianity, as unconverted, worldly ministers. They are a support to the infidel, a joy to the devil, and an offence to God.*

Let us notice, in the second place, ***the nature of the office to which the apostles were ordained.*** They were to "be with Christ." They were to be "sent forth to preach." They were to have "power to heal sicknesses." They were to "cast out devils."

These four points deserve attention. They contain much instruction. Our Lord's twelve apostles, beyond doubt, were a distinct order of men. They had no successors when they died. Strictly and literally speaking, there is no such thing as apostolical succession. No man can be really called a "successor of the apostles," unless he can work miracles, and teach infallibly, as they did. But

still, in saying this, we must not forget, that in many things the apostles were intended to be patterns and models for all ministers of the Gospel. Bearing this in mind, we may draw most useful lessons from this passage, as to the duties of a faithful minister.

Like the apostles, the faithful minister ought to keep up close communion with Christ. He should be much "with Him." His fellowship should be "with the Son." (1 John 1:3.) He should abide in Him. He should be separate from the world, and daily sit, like Mary, at Jesus' feet, and hear His word. He should study Him, copy Him, drink into His Spirit, and walk in His steps. He should strive to be able to say, when he enters the pulpit, "that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you." (1 John 1:3.)

Like the apostles, the faithful minister ought to be a preacher. This must ever be his principal work, and receive the greatest part of his thoughts. He must place it above the administration of the sacraments. (1 Cor. 1:17.) He must exalt it above the reading of forms. An unpreaching minister is of little use to the church of Christ. He is a lampless light-house, a silent trumpeter, a sleeping watchman, a painted fire.

Like the apostles, the faithful minister must labor to do good in every way. Though he cannot heal the sick, he must seek to alleviate sorrow, and to increase happiness among all with whom he has to do. He must strive to be known as the comforter, the counselor, the peacemaker, the helper, and the friend of all. Men should know him,

not as one who rules and domineers, but as one who is “their servant for Jesus’ sake.” (2 Cor. 4:5.)

Like the apostles, the faithful minister must oppose every work of the devil. Though not called now to cast out evil spirits from the body, he must be ever ready to resist the devil’s devices, and to denounce his snares for the soul. He must expose the tendency of races, theaters, balls, gambling, drunkenness, Sabbath-profanation, and sensual gratifications. Every age has its own peculiar temptations. Many are the devices of Satan. But whatever be the direction in which the devil is most busy, there ought the minister to be, ready to confront and withstand him.

How great is the responsibility of ministers! How heavy their work, if they do their duty! How much they need the prayers of all praying people, in order to support and strengthen their hands! No wonder that Paul says so often to the churches, “Pray for us.”

Let us notice, in the last place, ***how our Lord Jesus Christ’s zeal was misunderstood.*** We are told that they “went out to lay hold of him, for they said, he is beside himself.”

There is nothing in this fact that need surprise us. The prophet who came to anoint Jehu was called a “mad fellow.” (2 Kings 9:11.) Festus told Paul that he was “mad.” Few things show the corruption of human nature more clearly, than man’s inability to understand zeal in religion. Zeal about money, or science, or war, or commerce, or business, is intelligible to the world. But zeal about religion is too

often reckoned foolishness, fanaticism, and the sign of a weak mind. If a man injures his health by study, or excessive attention to business, no fault is found— "He is a diligent man." But if he wears himself out with preaching, or spends his whole time in doing good to souls, the cry is raised, "He is an enthusiast and righteous over-much." The world is not altered. The "things of the Spirit" are always "foolishness to the natural man." (1 Cor. 2:14.)

Let it not shake our faith, if we have to drink of the same cup as our blessed Lord. Hard as it may be to flesh and blood to be misunderstood by our relations, we must recollect it is no new thing. Let us call to mind our Lord's words, "He that loves father and mother more than me is not worthy of me." Jesus knows the bitterness of our trials, Jesus feels for us. Jesus will give us help.

Let us bear patiently the unreasonableness of unconverted men, even as our Lord did. Let us pity their blindness and lack of knowledge, and not love them one whit the less. Above all, let us pray that God would change their hearts. Who can tell but the very persons who now try to turn us away from Christ, may one day become new creatures, see all things differently, and follow Christ themselves?

MARK 3:22-30

We all know how painful it is to have our conduct misunderstood and misrepresented, when we are doing right. It is a trial which our Lord Jesus Christ had to endure continually, all through His earthly

ministry. We have an instance in the passage before us. The "Scribes who came down from Jerusalem" saw the miracles which He worked. They could not deny their reality. What then did they do? They accused our blessed Savior of being in league and union with the devil. They said, "He has Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils casts he out devils."

In our Lord's answer to this wicked accusation, there are expressions which deserve special attention. Let us see what lessons they contain for our use.

We ought to notice, in the first place, ***how great is the evil of dissension and divisions.***

This is a lesson which is strongly brought out in the beginning of our Lord's reply to the scribes. He shows the absurdity of supposing that Satan would "cast out Satan," and so help to destroy his own power. He appeals to the notorious fact, which even his enemies must allow, that there can be no strength where there is division. "If a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand."

This truth is one which does not receive sufficient consideration. On no point has the abuse of the right of private judgment produced so much evil. The divisions of Christians are one great cause of the weakness of the visible church. They often absorb energy, time, and power, which might have been well bestowed on better things. They furnish the infidel with a prime argument against the truth of Christianity. They help the devil. Satan indeed is the chief promoter

of religious divisions. If he cannot extinguish Christianity, he labors to make Christians quarrel with one another, and to set every man's hand against his neighbor. None knows better than the devil, that "to divide is to conquer."

Let us resolve, so far as in us lies, to avoid all differences, dissensions, and disputes in religion. Let us loathe and abhor them as the plague of the churches. We cannot be too jealous about all saving truths. But it is easy to mistake morbid scrupulosity for conscientiousness, and zeal about mere trifles for zeal about the truth. *Nothing justifies separation from a church but the separation of that church from the Gospel.* Let us be ready to concede much, and make many sacrifices for the sake of unity and peace.

We ought to notice, in the second place, ***what a glorious declaration our Lord makes in these verses about the forgiveness of sins.*** He says, "I assure you that any sin can be forgiven, including blasphemy."

These words fall lightly on the ears of many persons. They see no particular beauty in them. But to the man who is alive to his own sinfulness and deeply sensible of his need of mercy, these words are sweet and precious. "All sins shall be forgiven." The sins of youth and age—the sins of head, and hand, and tongue, and imagination—the sins against all God's commandments—the sins of persecutors, like Saul—the sins of idolaters, like Manasseh—the sins of open enemies of Christ, like the Jews who crucified Him—the sins of backsliders from Christ, like Peter—all, all may be forgiven. The blood of Christ

can cleanse all away. The righteousness of Christ can cover all, and hide all from God's eyes.

The doctrine here laid down is the crown and glory of the Gospel. The very first thing it proposes to man is free pardon, full forgiveness, complete remission, without money and without price. "Through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him all that believe are justified from all things." (Acts 13:39.)

Let us lay hold on this doctrine without delay, if we never received it before. It is for us, as well as for others. We too, this very day, if we come to Christ, may be completely forgiven. "Though our sins have been as scarlet, they shall be white as snow." (Isaiah 1:18.)

Let us cleave firmly to this doctrine, if we have received it already. We may sometimes feel faint, and unworthy, and cast down. But if we have really come to Jesus by faith, our sins are fully forgiven. They are cast behind God's back—blotted out of the book of His remembrance—sunk into the depths of the sea. Let us believe and not be afraid.

We ought to notice, in the last place, that ***it is possible for a man's soul to be lost forever in hell.*** The words of our Lord are distinct and express. He speaks of one who "has never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation."

This is a dreadful truth, beyond doubt. But it is a truth, and we must not shut our eyes against it. We find it asserted over and over

again in Scripture. Figures of all kinds are multiplied, and language of every sort is employed, in order to make it plain and unmistakable. In short, if there is no such thing as “eternal damnation,” we may throw the Bible aside, and say that words have no meaning at all.

We have great need to keep this dreadful truth steadily in view in these latter days. Teachers have risen up, who are openly attacking the doctrine of the eternity of punishment, or laboring hard to explain it away. Men’s ears are being tickled with plausible sayings about “the love of God,” and the impossibility of a loving God permitting an everlasting hell. The eternity of punishment is spoken of as a mere “speculative question,” about which men may believe anything they please. In the midst of all this flood of false doctrine, let us hold firmly the old truth. Let us not be ashamed to believe that there is an eternal God—an eternal heaven—and an eternal hell. Let us recollect that sin is an infinite evil. It needed an atonement of infinite value to deliver the believer from its consequences—and it entails an infinite loss on the unbeliever who rejects the remedy provided for it. Above all, let us fall back on plain scriptural statements, like that before us this day. ONE PLAIN TEXT IS WORTH A THOUSAND ABSTRUSE ARGUMENTS.

Finally, if it be true that there is an “eternal damnation,” let us give diligence that we ourselves do not fall into it. Let us escape for our lives, and not linger. (Gen. 19:16,17.) Let us flee for refuge to the hope set before us in the Gospel, and never rest until we know and

feel that we are safe. And never, never let us be ashamed of seeking safety. Of sin, worldliness, and the love of pleasure, we may well be ashamed. But we never need be ashamed of seeking to be delivered from an eternal hell.

MARK 3:31-35

In the verses which immediately precede this passage, we see our blessed Lord accused by the Scribes of being in league with the devil. They said, “He has Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devil’s casts he out devils.”

In the verses we have now read, we find that this absurd charge of the Scribes was not all that Jesus had to endure at this time. We are told that “Jesus’ mother and brothers arrived at the house where he was teaching. They stood outside and sent word for him to come out and talk with them.” They could not yet understand the beauty and usefulness of the life that our Lord was living. Though they doubtless loved Him well, they would sincerely have persuaded him to cease from His work, and “spare himself.” Little did they know what they were doing! Little had they observed or understood our Lord’s words when He was only twelve years old, “know you not that I must be about my Father’s business?” (Luke 2:49.)

It is interesting to mark the quiet, firm perseverance of our Lord, in the face of all discouragements. None of these things moved Him. The slanderous suggestions of enemies, and the well-meant remonstrances of ignorant friends, were alike powerless to turn Him

from His course. He had set His face as a flint towards the cross and the crown. He knew the work He had come into the world to do. He had a baptism to be baptized, and was straitened until it was accomplished. (Luke 12:50.)

So let it be with all true servants of Christ. Let nothing turn them for a moment out of the narrow way, or make them stop and look back. Let them not heed the ill-natured remarks of enemies. Let them not give way to the well-intentioned but mistaken entreaties of unconverted relations and friends. Let them reply in the words of Nehemiah, "I am doing a great work, and I cannot come down." (Neh. 6:3.) Let them say, "I have taken up the cross, and I will not cast it away."

We learn from these verses one mighty lesson. We learn, ***who they are that are reckoned the relations of Jesus Christ.*** They are they who are His disciples, and "do the will of God." Of such the great Head of the Church says, "the same is my brother, and sister, and mother."

How much there is in this single expression! What a rich mine of consolation it opens to all true believers! Who can conceive the depth of our Lord's love towards Mary the mother that bore Him, and on whose bosom He had been nursed? Who can imagine the breadth of His love towards His brethren according to the flesh, with whom the tender years of his childhood had been spent? Doubtless no heart ever had within it such deep well-springs of affection as the heart of

Christ. Yet even He says, of all who "do the will of God," that each "is his brother, and sister, and mother."

Let all true Christians drink comfort out of these words. Let them know that there is One at least, who knows them, loves them, cares for them, and reckons them as His own family. What though they be poor in this world? They have no cause to be ashamed, when they remember that they are the brethren and sisters of the Son of God. What though they be persecuted and ill-treated in their own homes because of their religion? They may remember the words of David, and apply them to their own case, "When my father and mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up." (Psalm. 27:10.)

Finally, let all who persecute and ridicule others because of their religion, take warning by these words, and repent. Whom are they persecuting and ridiculing? The relations of Jesus the Son of God! The family of the King of kings and Lord of lords! Surely they would do wisely to hold their peace, and consider well what they are doing. These whom they persecute have a mighty Friend— "Their redeemer is mighty; he shall plead their cause." (Prov. 23:11.)

Mark – Chap. 4

MARK 4:1-20

These verses contain the parable of the sower. Of all the parables spoken by our Lord, none is probably so well-known as this. There is

none which is so easily understood by all, from the gracious familiarity of the figures which it contains. There is none which is of such universal and perpetual application. So long as there is a Church of Christ and a congregation of Christians, so long there will be employment for this parable.

The language of the parable requires no explanation. To use the words of an ancient writer, “it needs application, not exposition.” Let us now see what it teaches.

We are taught, in the first place, ***that there are some hearers of the Gospel, whose hearts are like the wayside in a field.***

These are they who hear sermons, but pay no attention to them. They go to a place of worship, for form or fashion, or to appear respectable before men. But they take no interest whatever in the preaching. It seems to them a mere matter of words and names, and unintelligible talk. It is neither money, nor food, nor drink, nor clothes, nor company; and as they sit under the sound of it, they are taken up with thinking of other things. It matters nothing whether it is Law or Gospel. It produces no more effect on them than water on a stone. And at the end they go away, knowing no more than when they came in.

There are myriads of professing Christians in this state of soul. There is hardly a church or chapel, where scores of them are not to be found. Sunday after Sunday they allow the devil to catch away the good seed that is sown on the surface of their hearts. Week after

week they live on, without faith, or fear, or knowledge, or grace—feeling nothing, caring nothing, taking no more interest in religion, than if Christ had never died on the cross at all. And in this state they often die and are buried, and are lost forever in hell. This is a mournful picture, but only too true.

We are taught, in the second place, that ***there are some hearers of the Gospel whose hearts are like the stony ground in a field.***

These are they on whom preaching produces temporary impressions, but no deep, lasting, and abiding effect. They take pleasure in hearing sermons in which the truth is faithfully set forth. They can speak with apparent joy and enthusiasm about the sweetness of the Gospel, and the happiness which they experience in listening to it. They can be moved to tears by the appeals of preachers, and talk with apparent earnestness of their own inward conflicts, hopes, struggles, desires, and fears. But unhappily there is no stability about their religion. "They have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time." There is no real work of the Holy Spirit within their hearts. Their impressions are like Jonah's gourd, which came up in a night and perished in a night. They fade as rapidly as they grow. No sooner does "affliction and persecution arise for the word's sake," than they fall away. Their goodness proves as "the morning cloud, and the early dew." (Hosea 6:4.) Their religion has no more life in it than the cut flower. It has no root, and soon withers away.

There are many in every congregation which hears the Gospel, who are just in this state of soul. They are not careless and inattentive hearers, like many around them, and are therefore tempted to think well of their own condition. They feel a pleasure in the preaching to which they listen, and therefore flatter themselves they must have grace in their hearts. And yet they are thoroughly deceived. Old things have not yet passed away. There is no real work of conversion in their inward man. With all their feelings, affections, joys, hopes, and desires, they are actually on the high road to destruction.

We are taught, in the third place, that ***there are some hearers of the Gospel, whose hearts are like the thorny ground in a field.***

These are they who attend to the preaching of Christ's truth, and to a certain extent obey it. Their understanding assents to it. Their judgment approves of it. Their conscience is affected by it. Their affections are in favor of it. They acknowledge that it is all right, and good, and worthy of all reception. They even abstain from many things which the Gospel condemns, and adopt many habits which the Gospel requires. But here unhappily they stop short. Something appears to chain them fast, and they never get beyond a certain point in their religion. And the grand secret of their condition is the WORLD. "The cares of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things," prevent the word having its full effect on their souls. With everything apparently that is promising and

favorable in their spiritual state, they stand still. They never come up to the full standard of New Testament Christianity. They bring no fruit to perfection.

There are few faithful ministers of Christ who could not point to cases like these. Of all cases they are the most melancholy. To go so far and yet go no further—to see so much and yet not see all—to approve so much and yet not give Christ the heart, this is indeed most deplorable! And there is but one verdict that can be given about such people. Without a decided change they will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Christ will have all our hearts. “If any man will be a friend of the world, he is the enemy of God.” (James 4:4.)

We are taught, in the last place, that ***there are some hearers of the Gospel, whose hearts are like the good ground in a field.***

These are they who really receive Christ’s truth into the bottom of their hearts, believe it implicitly, and obey it thoroughly. In these the fruits of that truth will be seen—uniform, plain, and unmistakable results in heart and life. SIN will be truly hated, mourned over, resisted, and renounced. CHRIST will be truly loved, trusted in, followed, loved, and obeyed. HOLINESS will show itself in all their life, in humility, spiritual-mindedness, patience, meekness, and charity. There will be something that can be seen. The true work of the Holy Spirit cannot be hidden.

There will always be some people in this state of soul, where the Gospel is faithfully preached. Their numbers may very likely be few, compared to the worldly around them. Their experience and degree of spiritual attainment may differ widely, some bringing forth thirty, some sixty, and some a hundred-fold. But the fruit of the seed falling into good ground will always be of the same kind. There will always be visible repentance, visible faith in Christ, and visible holiness of life. Without these things, there is no saving religion.

And now let us ask ourselves, What are we? Under which class of hearers ought we to be ranked? With what kind of hearts do we hear the word? Never, never may we forget, that there are three ways of hearing without profit, and only one way of hearing aright! Never, never may we forget that there is only one infallible mark of being a right-hearted hearer! That mark is to bear fruit. To be without fruit, is to be in the way to hell.

MARK 4:21-25

These verses seem intended to enforce the parable of the sower on the attention of those who heard it. They are remarkable for the succession of short, pithy, proverbial sayings which they contain. Such sayings are eminently calculated to arrest an ignorant hearer. They often strike, and stick in the memory, when the main subject of the sermon is forgotten.

We learn, from these verses, that ***we ought not only to receive knowledge, but to impart it to others.***

A candle is not lighted in order to be hidden and concealed, but to be set on a candlestick and used. Religious light is not given to a man for himself alone, but for the benefit of others. We are to try to spread and diffuse our knowledge. We are to display to others the precious treasure that we have found; and persuade them to seek it for themselves. We are to tell them of the good news that we have heard, and endeavor to make them believe and value it themselves.

We shall all have to give account of our use of knowledge one day. The books of God in the day of judgment will show what we have done. If we have buried our talent in the earth—if we have been content with a lazy, idle, do-nothing Christianity, and cared nothing what happened to others, so long as we went to heaven ourselves—there will be a fearful exposure at last— "There is nothing hidden, which shall not be manifested."

It becomes all Christians to lay these things to heart. It is high time that the old tradition, that the clergy alone ought to teach and spread religious knowledge, should be exploded and cast aside forever. To do good and diffuse light is a duty for which all members of Christ's Church are responsible, whether ministers or laymen. Neighbors ought to tell neighbors, if they have found an unfailing remedy in time of plague. Christians ought to tell others that they have found medicine for their souls, if they see them ignorant, and dying for lack of it. What says the apostle Peter? "As every man has received the gift, even so minister the same one to another." (1 Peter

4:10.) They will be happy days for the Church when that text is obeyed.

We learn, in the second place, from these verses, ***the importance of hearing, and of considering well what we hear.***

This is a point to which our Lord evidently attaches great weight. We have seen it already brought out in the parable of the sower. We see it here enforced in two remarkable expressions. “If any man have an ear to hear, let him hear.” “Take heed what you hear.”

Hearing the truth is one principal avenue through which grace is conveyed to the soul of man. “Faith comes by hearing.” (Rom. 10:17.) One of the first steps towards conversion is to receive from the Spirit a hearing ear. Seldom are men brought to repentance and faith in Christ without “hearing.” The general rule is that of which Paul reminds the Ephesians, “you also trusted, after you HEARD the word of truth.” (Eph. 1:13.)

Let us bear this in mind when we hear preaching decried as a means of grace. There are never lacking men who seek to cast it down from the high place which the Bible gives it. There are many who proclaim loudly that it is of far more importance to the soul to hear liturgical forms read, and to receive the Lord’s Supper, than to hear God’s word expounded. Of all such notions let us beware. Let it be a settled principle with us that “hearing the word,” is one of the foremost means of grace that God has given to man. Let us give to

every other means and ordinance its proper value and proportion. But never let us forget the words of Paul, “despise not prophesyings,” and his dying charge to Timothy, “Preach the word.” (1 Thess. 5:20; 2 Tim. 4:2.)

We learn, in the last place, from these verses, ***the importance of a diligent use of religious privileges.*** What says our Lord? “Unto you that hear shall more be given. He that has, to him shall be given—and he that has not, from him shall be taken even that which he has.”

This is a principle which we find continually brought forward in Scripture. All that believers have is undoubtedly of grace. Their repentance, faith, and holiness, are all the gift of God. But the degree to which a believer attains in grace, is ever set before us as closely connected with his own diligence in the use of means, and his own faithfulness in living fully up to the light and knowledge which he possesses. Indolence and laziness are always discouraged in God’s word. Labor and pains in hearing, reading, and prayer, are always represented as bringing their own reward. “The soul of the diligent shall be made fat.” (Prov. 13:4.) “An idle soul shall suffer hunger.” (Prov. 19:15.)

Attention to this great principle is the main secret of spiritual prosperity. The man who makes rapid progress in spiritual attainments—who grows visibly in grace, and knowledge, and strength, and usefulness—will always be found to be a diligent man. He leaves no stone unturned to promote his soul’s well-doing. He is

diligent over his Bible, diligent in his private devotions, diligent as a hearer of sermons, diligent in his attendance at the Lord's table. And he reaps according as he sows. Just as the muscles of the body are strengthened by regular exercise, so are the graces of the soul increased by diligence in using them.

Do we wish to grow in grace? Do we desire to have stronger faith, brighter hope, and clearer knowledge? Beyond doubt we do, if we are true Christians. Then let us live fully up to our light, and improve every opportunity. Let us never forget our Lord's words in this passage. "With what measure we use;" to our souls, "it shall be measured to us again." The more we do for our souls, the more shall we find God does for them.

MARK 4:26-29

The parable contained in these verses is short, and only recorded in Mark's Gospel. But it is one that ought to be deeply interesting to all who have reason to hope that they are true Christians. It sets before us the history of the work of grace in an individual soul. It summons us to an examination of our own experience in divine things.

There are some expressions in the parable which we must not press too far. Such are the "sleeping and rising" of the farmer, and the "night and day." In this, as in many of our Lord's parables, WE MUST CAREFULLY KEEP IN VIEW THE MAIN SCOPE AND OBJECT OF THE WHOLE STORY, AND NOT LAY TOO MUCH

STRESS ON LESSER POINTS. In the case before us the main thing taught is the close resemblance between some familiar operations in the culture of grain, and the work of grace in the heart. To this let us rigidly confine our attention.

We are taught, firstly, that, as in the growth of grain, so in the work of grace, ***there must be a sower.***

The earth, as we all know, never brings forth grain of itself. It is a mother of weeds, but not of wheat. The hand of man must plough it, and scatter the seed, or else there would never be a harvest.

The heart of man, in like manner, will never of itself turn to God, repent, believe, and obey. It is utterly barren of grace. It is entirely dead towards God, and unable to give itself spiritual life. The Son of man must break it up by His Spirit, and give it a new nature. He must scatter over it by the hand of his laboring ministers the good seed of the word.

Let us mark this truth well. Grace in the heart of man is an exotic. It is a new principle from outside, sent down from heaven and implanted in his soul. Left to himself, no man living would ever seek God. And yet in communicating grace, God ordinarily works by means. To despise the instrumentality of teachers and preachers, is to expect corn where no seed has been sown.

We are taught, secondly, that, as in the growth of grain, so in the work of grace, ***there is much that is beyond man's***

comprehension and control.

The wisest farmer on earth can never explain all that takes place in a grain of wheat, when he has sown it. He knows the broad fact that unless he puts it into the soil, and covers it up, there will not be an ear of corn in time of harvest. But he cannot command the prosperity of each grain. He cannot explain why some grains come up and others die. He cannot specify the hour or the minute when life shall begin to show itself. He cannot define what that life is. These are matters he must leave alone. He sows his seed, and leaves the growth to God. "God gives the increase." (1 Cor. 3:7.)

The workings of grace in the heart in like manner, are utterly mysterious and unsearchable. We cannot explain why the word produces effects on one person in a congregation, and not upon another. We cannot explain why, in some cases—with every possible advantage, and in spite of every entreaty—people reject the word, and continue dead in trespasses and sins. We cannot explain why in other cases—with every possible difficulty, and with no encouragement—people are born again, and become decided Christians. We cannot define the manner in which the Spirit of God conveys life to a soul, and the exact process by which a believer receives a new nature. All these are hidden things to us. We see certain results, but we can go no further. "The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound thereof, but can not tell whence it comes, and where it goes—so is every one that is born of the Spirit." (John 3:8.)

Let us mark this truth also, for it is deeply instructive. It is humbling no doubt to ministers, and teachers of others. The highest abilities, the most powerful preaching, the most diligent working, cannot command success. God alone can give spiritual life. But it is a truth at the same time, which supplies an admirable antidote to over-anxiety and despondency. Our principal work is to sow the seed. That done, we may wait with faith and patience for the result. "We may sleep, and rise night and day," and leave our work with the Lord. He alone can, and, if He thinks fit, He will give success.

We are taught, thirdly, that, as in the growth of grain, so in the work of grace, ***life manifests itself gradually.***

There is a true proverb which says, "Nature does nothing at a bound." The ripe ear of wheat does not appear at once, as soon as the seed bursts forth into life. The plant goes through many stages, before it arrives at perfection— "first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear." But in all these stages one great thing is true about it—even at its weakest, it is a living plant.

The work of grace, in like manner, goes on in the heart by degrees. The children of God are not born perfect in faith, or hope, or knowledge, or experience. Their beginning is generally a "day of small things." They see in part their own sinfulness, and Christ's fullness, and the beauty of holiness. But for all that, the weakest child in God's family is a true child of God. With all his weakness and infirmity he is alive. The seed of grace has really come up in his heart, though at present it be only in the blade. He is "alive from the

dead." And the wise man says, "a living dog is better than a dead lion." (Eccles. 9:4.)

Let us mark this truth also, for it is full of consolation. Let us not despise grace, because it is weak, or think people are not converted, because they are not yet as strong in the faith as Paul. Let us remember that grace, like everything else, must have a beginning. The mightiest oak was once an acorn. The strongest man was once a babe. Better a thousand times have grace in the blade than no grace at all.

We are taught, lastly, that, as in the growth of grain, so in the work of grace, ***there is no harvest until the seed is ripe.***

No farmer thinks of cutting his wheat when it is green. He waits until the sun, and rain, and heat, and cold, have done their appointed work, and the golden ears hang down. Then, and not until then, he puts in the sickle, and gathers the wheat into his barn.

God deals with His work of grace exactly in the same way. He never removes His people from this world until they are ripe and ready. He never takes them away until their work is done. They never die at the wrong time, however mysterious their deaths appear sometimes to man. Josiah, and James the brother of John were both cut off in the midst of usefulness. Our own King Edward the Sixth was not allowed to reach mature state. But we shall see in the resurrection morning that there was a needs-be. All was done well

about their deaths, as well as about their births. The Great Husbandman never cuts His grain until it is ripe.

Let us leave the parable with this truth on our minds, and take comfort about the death of every believer. Let us rest satisfied, that there is no chance, no accident, no mistake about the decease of any of God's children. They are all "God's field," and God knows best when they are ready for the harvest.

MARK 4:30-34

The parable of the mustard seed is one of those parables which partake of the character both of history and prophecy. It seems intended to illustrate the history of Christ's visible church on earth, from the time of the first advent down to the judgment day. The seed cast into the earth, in the preceding parable, showed us the work of grace in a heart. The mustard seed shows us THE PROGRESS OF PROFESSING CHRISTIANITY IN THE WORLD.

We learn, in the first place, that, like the grain of mustard seed, ***Christ's visible church was to be small and weak in its beginnings.***

A grain of mustard seed was a proverbial expression among the Jews for something very small and insignificant. Our Lord calls it "smaller than all the seeds that are in the earth." Twice in the Gospels we find our Lord using the figure as a word of comparison, when speaking of a weak faith. (Matt. 17:20; Luke 17:6.) The idea was

doubtless familiar to a Jewish mind, however strange it may sound to us. Here, as in other places, the Son of God shows us the wisdom of *using language familiar to the minds of those whom we may address.*

It would be difficult to find an emblem which more faithfully represents the history of the visible church of Christ than this grain of mustard seed.

Weakness and apparent insignificance were undoubtedly the characteristics of its beginning. How did its Head and King come into the world? He came as a feeble infant, born in a manger at Bethlehem, without riches, or armies, or attendants, or power. Who were the men that the Head of the Church gathered round Himself, and appointed His apostles? They were poor and unlearned people—fishermen, publicans, and men of like occupations, to all appearance the most unlikely people to shake the world. What was the last public act of the earthly ministry of the great Head of the Church? He was crucified, like a malefactor, between two thieves, after having been forsaken by nearly all His disciples, betrayed by one, and denied by another. What was the doctrine which the first builders of the Church went forth from the upper chamber in Jerusalem to preach to mankind? It was a doctrine which to the Jews was a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness. It was a proclamation that the great Head of their new religion had been put to death on a cross, and that notwithstanding this, they offered life through His death to the world! In all this the mind of man can perceive nothing but

weakness and feebleness. Truly the emblem of a grain of mustard seed was verified and fulfilled to the very letter. To the eyes of man the beginning of the visible church was contemptible, insignificant, powerless, and small.

We learn, in the second place, that, like the mustard seed, ***the visible church, once planted, was to grow and greatly increase.***

"The grain of mustard seed," says our Lord, "when it is sown, grows up and becomes greater than all garden plants." These words may sound startling to an English ear. We are not accustomed to such a growth in our cold northern climate. But to those who know eastern countries, there is nothing surprising in it. The testimony of well-informed and experienced travelers is distinct, that such an increase is both possible and probable.

No figure could be chosen more strikingly applicable to the growth and increase of Christ's visible church in the world. It began to grow from the day of Pentecost, and grew with a rapidity, which nothing can account for but the finger of God. It grew wonderfully when three thousand souls were converted at once, and five thousand more in a few days afterwards. It grew wonderfully, when at Antioch, and Ephesus, and Philippi, and Corinth, and Rome, congregations were gathered together, and Christianity firmly established. It grew wonderfully, when at last the despised religion of Christ overspread the greater part of Europe, and Asia Minor, and North Africa, and, in spite of fierce persecution and opposition,

supplanted heathen idolatry, and became the professed creed of the whole Roman empire. Such growth must have been marvelous in the eyes of many. But it was only what our Lord foretold in the parable before us. “The kingdom of God is like a grain of mustard seed.”

The visible church of Christ is not yet done growing. Notwithstanding the melancholy apostasy of some of its branches, and the deplorable weakness of others, it is still extending and expanding over the world. New branches have continually been springing up in America, in India, in Australia, in Africa, in China, in the Islands of the South Seas, during the last fifty years. Evils undoubtedly there are many. False profession and corruption abound. But still, on the whole, heathenism is waning, wearing out, and melting away. In spite of all the predictions of Voltaire and Paine, in spite of foes without, and treachery within, the visible church progresses—the mustard plant still grows!

And the prophecy, we may rest assured, is not yet exhausted. A day shall yet come, when the great Head of the church shall take to Himself His power, and reign, and put down every enemy under His feet. The earth shall yet be filled with the knowledge of God, as the waters cover the sea. (Hab. 2:14.) Satan shall yet be bound. The heathen shall yet be our Lord’s inheritance, and the utmost parts of the earth His possession. And then this parable shall receive its full accomplishment. The little seed shall become “a great tree,” and fill the whole earth. (Dan. 4:11.)

Let us leave the parable with a resolution never to despise any movement or instrumentality in the church of Christ, because at first it was weak and small. Let us remember the manger of Bethlehem, and learn wisdom. The name of Him who lay there, a helpless infant, is now known all over the globe. The little seed which was planted in the day when Jesus was born, has become a great tree, and we ourselves are rejoicing under its shadow. Let it be a settled principle in our religion, never to "despise the day of small things." (Zech. 4:10.) One child may be the beginning of a flourishing school—one conversion the beginning of a mighty church—one word the beginning of some blessed Christian enterprise—one seed the beginning of a rich harvest of saved souls.

MARK 4:35-41

These verses describe a storm on the sea of Galilee, when our Lord and His disciples were crossing it, and a miracle performed by our Lord in calming the storm in a moment. Few miracles recorded in the Gospel were so likely to strike the minds of the apostles as this. Four of them at least were fishermen. Peter, Andrew, James, and John, had probably known the sea of Galilee, and its storms, from their youth. Few events in our Lord's journeyings to and fro upon earth, contain more rich instruction than the one related in this passage.

Let us learn, in the first place, that ***Christ's service does not exempt His servants from storms.*** Here were the twelve disciples in the path of duty. They were obediently following Jesus,

wherever He went. They were daily attending on His ministry, and hearkening to His word. They were daily testifying to the world, that, whatever Scribes and Pharisees might think, they believed on Jesus, loved Jesus, and were not ashamed to give up all for His sake. Yet here we see these men in trouble, tossed up and down by a tempest, and in danger of being drowned.

Let us mark well this lesson. If we are true Christians, we must not expect everything smooth in our journey to heaven. We must count it no strange thing, if we have to endure sicknesses, losses, bereavements, and disappointments, just like other men. Free pardon and full forgiveness, grace along the way, and glory at the end —all this our Savior has promised to give. But He has never promised that we shall have no affliction. He loves us too well to promise that. By affliction He teaches us many precious lessons, which without it we should never learn. By affliction He shows us our emptiness and weakness, draws us to the throne of grace, purifies our affections, weans us from the world, makes us long for heaven. In the resurrection morning, we shall all say, "It is good for me that I was afflicted." We shall thank God for every storm.

Let us learn, in the second place, that ***our Lord Jesus Christ was really and truly man.*** We are told in these verses, that when the storm began, and the waves beat over the ship, He was in the back part of the boat, "asleep." He had a body exactly like our own—a body that could hunger, and thirst, and feel pain, and be weary, and need rest. No wonder that His body needed repose at this time. He

had been diligent in His Father's business all the day. He had been preaching to a great multitude in the open air. No wonder that "when the evening was come," and His work finished, he fell "asleep."

Let us mark this lesson also attentively. The Savior in whom we are bid to trust, is as really a man as He is God. He knows the trials of a man, for He has experienced them. He knows the bodily infirmities of a man, for He has felt them. He can well understand what we mean, when we cry to Him for help in this world of need. He is just the very Savior that men and women, with weary frames and aching heads, in a weary world, require for their comfort every morning and night. "We have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities." (Heb. 4:15.)

Let us learn, in the third place, that ***our Lord Jesus Christ, as God, has almighty power.*** We see Him in these verses doing that which is proverbially impossible. He speaks to the WINDS, and they obey Him. He speaks to the WAVES and they submit to His command. He turns the RAGING STORM into a calm with a few words— "Peace, be still." Those words were the words of Him who first created all things. The elements knew the voice of their Master, and, like obedient servants, were quiet at once.

Let us mark this lesson also, and lay it up in our minds. With the Lord Jesus Christ nothing is impossible. No stormy passions are so strong but He can tame them. No temper is so rough and violent but He can change it. No conscience is so disturbed, but He can speak peace to it, and make it calm. No man ever need despair, if He will

only bow down his pride, and come as a humbled sinner to Christ. Christ can do miracles upon his heart. No man ever need despair of reaching his journey's end, if he has once committed his soul to Christ's keeping. Christ will carry him through every danger. Christ will make him conqueror over every foe. What though our relations oppose us? What though our neighbors laugh us to scorn? What though our place be hard? What though our temptations be great? It is all nothing, if Christ is on our side, and we are in the ship with Him. Greater is He that is for us, than all those who are against us.

Finally, we learn from this passage, that ***our Lord Jesus Christ is exceedingly patient and piteous in dealing with His own people.*** We see the disciples on this occasion showing great lack of faith, and giving way to most improper fears. They forgot their Master's miracles and care for them in days gone by. They thought of nothing but their present peril. They awoke our Lord hastily, and cried, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" We see our Lord dealing most gently and tenderly with them. He gives them no sharp reproof. He makes no threat of casting them off, because of their unbelief. He simply asks the touching question, "Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?"

Let us mark well this lesson. The Lord Jesus is very empathetic and full of tender mercy. "As a father pities his children, even so the Lord pities those who fear Him." (Psalm 103:13.) He does not deal with believers according to their sins, nor reward them according to their iniquities. He sees their weakness. He is aware of their short-

comings. He knows all the defects of their faith, and hope, and love, and courage. And yet He will not cast them off. He bears with them continually. He loves them even to the end. He raises them when they fall. He restores them when they err. His patience, like His love, is a patience that passes knowledge. When He sees a heart right, it is His glory to pass over many a short-coming.

Let us leave these verses with the comfortable recollection that Jesus is not changed. His heart is still the same that it was when He crossed the sea of Galilee and stilled the storm. High in heaven at the right hand of God, Jesus is still sympathizing—still almighty—still piteous and patient towards His people. Let us be more charitable and patient towards our brethren in the faith. They may err in many things, but if Jesus has received them and can bear with them, surely we may bear with them too. Let us be more hopeful about ourselves. We may be very weak, and frail, and unstable; but if we can truly say that we do come to Christ and believe on Him, we may take comfort. The question for conscience to answer is not, "Are we like the angels? are we perfect as we shall be in heaven?" The question is, "Are we real and true in our approaches to Christ? Do we truly repent and believe?"

Mark – Chap. 5

MARK 5:1-17

These verses describe one of those mysterious miracles which the Gospels frequently record—the casting out of a devil. Of all the cases of this kind in the New Testament, none is so fully described as this one. Of all the three evangelists who relate the history, none gives it so fully and minutely as Mark.

We see, in the first place, in these verses, that ***the possession of a man's body by the devil, was a real and true thing in the time of our Lord's earthly ministry.***

It is a painful fact, that there are never lacking professing Christians who try to explain away our Lord's miracles. They endeavor to account for them by natural causes, and to show that they were not worked by any extraordinary power. Of all miracles, there are none which they assault so strenuously as the casting out of devils. They do not scruple to deny Satanic possession entirely. They tell us that it was nothing more than lunacy, or frenzy, or epilepsy, and that the idea of the devil inhabiting a man's body is absurd.

The best and simplest answer to such skeptical objections, is a reference to the plain narratives of the Gospels, and especially to the one before us at this moment. The facts here detailed are utterly inexplicable, if we do not believe Satanic possession. It is notorious that lunacy, and frenzy, and epilepsy are not infectious complaints, and at any rate cannot be communicated to a herd of swine! And yet men ask us to believe, that as soon as this man was healed, two thousand swine ran violently down a steep place into the sea, from a sudden impulse, without any apparent cause to account for their so

doing! Such reasoning is the height of credulity. When men can satisfy themselves with such explanations, they are in a pitiable state of mind.

Let us beware of a skeptical and incredulous spirit in all matters relating to the devil. No doubt there is much in the subject of Satanic possession which we do not understand, and cannot explain. But let us not therefore refuse to believe it. The eastern king who would not believe in the possibility of ice, because he lived in a hot country, and had never seen it, was not more foolish than the man who refuses to believe in Satanic possession, because he never saw a case himself, and cannot understand it. We may be sure, that upon the subject of the devil and his power, we are far more likely to believe too little than too much. Unbelief about the existence and personality of Satan, has often proved the first step to unbelief about God.

We see, in the second place, in these verses, ***what an awfully cruel, powerful, and malicious being Satan is.*** On all these three points, the passage before us is full of instruction.

The ***cruelty*** of Satan appears in the miserable condition of the unhappy man, of whose body he had possession. We read that he dwelt “among the tombs,” that “no man could bind him, no, not with chains” that no man could tame him—and that he was “always night and day in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones,” naked, and without clothing. Such is the state to which the devil would bring us all, if he only had the power. He

would rejoice to inflict upon us the utmost misery, both of body and mind. Cases like this are faint types of the miseries of hell.

The ***power*** of Satan appears in the dreadful words which the unclean spirit used, when our Lord asked, "What is your name?" He answered, saying "My name is Legion—for we are many." We probably have not the faintest idea of the number, subtlety, and activity of Satan's agents. We forget that he is king over an enormous host of subordinate spirits who do his will. We would probably find, if our eyes were opened to see spirits, that they are about our path, and about our bed, and observing all our ways, to an extent of which we have no conception. In private and in public, in church and in the world, there are busy enemies ever near us, of whose presence we are not aware.

The ***malice*** of Satan appears in the strange petition "send us into the swine." Cast forth from the man, whose body they had so long inhabited and possessed, they still thirsted to do mischief. Unable to injure any more an immortal soul, they desired leave to injure the dumb beasts which were feeding near. Such is the true character of Satan. It is the bent of his nature to do harm, to kill, and to destroy. No wonder that he is called Apollyon, the destroyer.

Let us beware of giving way to the senseless habit of jesting about the devil. It is a habit which furnishes dreadful evidence of the blindness and corruption of human nature, and one which is far too common. When it is seemly in the condemned criminal to jest about his executioner, then, and not until then, it will be seemly for mortal

man to talk lightly about Satan. Well would it be for us all, if we strove more to realize the power and presence of our great spiritual enemy, and prayed more to be delivered from him. It was a true saying of an eminent Christian, now gone to rest, “No prayer is complete which does not contain a petition to be kept from the devil.”

We see, in the last place, from these verses, ***how complete is our Lord’s power and authority over the devil.*** We see it in the cry of the unclean spirit, “I adjure you by God, that you torment me not.” We see it in the command, “Come out of the man, you unclean spirit,” and the immediate obedience that followed. We see it in the blessed change that at once took place in him that was possessed—he was found “sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind.” We see it in the petition of all the devils— “send us into the swine,” confessing their consciousness that they could do nothing without leave. All these things show that one mightier than Satan was there. Strong as the great enemy of man was, he was in the presence of One stronger than he. Numerous as his hosts were, he was confronted with One who could command more than twelve legions of angels. “Where the word of the king is, there is power.” (Eccles. 8:4.)

The truth here taught is full of strong consolation for all true Christians. We live in a world full of difficulties and snares. We are ourselves weak and compassed with infirmity. The dreadful thought that we have a mighty spiritual enemy ever near us, subtle, powerful,

and malicious as Satan is, might well disquiet us, and cast us down. But, thanks be unto God, we have in Jesus an almighty Friend, who is “able to save us to the uttermost.” He has already triumphed over Satan on the cross. He will ever triumph over him in the hearts of all believers, and intercede for those who their faith fail not. And He will finally triumph over Satan completely, when He shall come forth at the second advent, and bind him in the bottomless pit.

And now, Are we ourselves delivered from Satan’s power? This after all is the grand question that concerns our souls. He still reigns and rules in the hearts of all who are children of disobedience. (Eph. 2:3.) He is still a king over the ungodly. Have we, by grace, broken his bonds, and escaped his hand? Have we really renounced him and all his works? Do we daily resist him and make him flee? Do we put on the whole armor of God and stand against his wiles? May we never rest until we can give satisfactory answers to these questions.

MARK 5:18-20

The after-conduct of those whom our Lord Jesus Christ healed and cured when upon earth, is a thing which is not often related in the Gospels. The story often describes the miraculous cure, and then leaves the after history of the person cured in obscurity, and passes on to other things.

But there are some deeply interesting cases, in which the after-conduct of persons cured is described; and the man from whim the devil was cast out in the country of the Gadarenes is one. The verses

before us tell the story. Few as they are, they are full of precious instruction.

We learn from these verses that ***the Lord Jesus knows better than His people what is the right position for them to be in.*** We are told that when our Lord was on the point of leaving the country of the Gadarenes, the man "that had been possessed with the devil, begged Him that he might go with Him." We can well understand that request. He felt grateful for the blessed change that had taken place in himself. He felt full of love towards his Deliverer. He thought he could not do better than follow our Lord, and go with Him as his companion and disciple. He was ready to give up home and country, and go after Christ. And yet, strange as it appears at first sight, the request was refused. "Jesus did not let him." Our Lord had other work for him to do. Our Lord saw better than he did in what way he could glorify God most. "Go home to your friends," He says, "and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how he has had compassion on you."

There are lessons of profound wisdom in these words. The place that Christians wish to be in, is not always the place which is best for their souls. The position that they would choose, if they could have their own way, is not always that which Jesus would have them occupy.

There are none who need this lesson so much as believers newly converted to God. Such people are often very poor judges of what is really for their good. Full of the new views which they have been

graciously taught, excited with the novelty of their present position, seeing everything around them in a new light, knowing little yet of the depths of Satan and the weakness of their own hearts—knowing only that a little time ago they were blind, and now, through mercy, they see—of all people they are in the greatest danger of making mistakes. With the best intentions, they are apt to fall into mistakes about their plans in life, their choices, their moves, their professions. They forget that what we like best, is not always best for our souls, and that the seed of grace needs winter as well as summer, cold as well as heat, to ripen it for glory.

Let us pray that God would guide us in all our ways after conversion, and not allow us to err in our choices, or to make hasty decisions. That place and position is most healthful for us in which we are kept most humble—most taught our own sinfulness—drawn most to the Bible and prayer—led most to live by faith and not by sight. It may not be quite what we like. But if Christ by His providence has placed us in it, let us not be in a hurry to leave it. Let us therein abide with God. The great thing is to have no will of our own, and to be where Jesus would have us be.

We learn, for another thing, from these verses, that ***a believer's own home has the first claims on his attention.*** We are taught that in the striking words which our Lord addresses to the man who had been possessed with the devil. "Go home," He says, "to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you." The friends of this man had probably not seen him for some

years, excepting under the influence of Satan. Most likely he had been as one dead to them, or worse than dead, and a constant cause of trouble, anxiety, and sorrow. Here then was the path of duty. Here was the way by which he could most glorify God. Let him go home and tell his friends what Jesus had done for him. Let him be a living witness before their eyes of the compassion of Christ. Let him deny himself the pleasure of being in Christ's bodily presence, in order to do the higher work of being useful to others.

How much there is in these simple words of our Lord! What thoughts they ought to stir up in the hearts of all true Christians! "Go home and tell your friends." Home is the place above all others where the child of God ought to make his first endeavors to do good. Home is the place where he is most continually seen, and where the reality of his grace ought most truly to appear. Home is the place where his best affections ought to be concentrated. Home is the place where he should strive daily to witness for Christ. Home is the place where he was daily doing harm by his example, so long as he served the world. Home is the place where he is specially bound to be a living epistle of Christ, so soon as he has been mercifully taught to serve God. May we all remember these things daily! May it never be said of us, that we are saints abroad, but wicked by our own fireside —talkers about religion abroad, but worldly and ungodly at home!

But after all, have we anything to tell others? Can we testify to any work of grace in our hearts? Have we experienced any deliverance from the power of the world, the flesh, and the devil? Have we ever

tasted the graciousness of Christ? These are indeed serious questions. If we have never yet been born again, and made new creatures, we can of course have nothing to "tell."

If we have anything to tell others about Christ, let us resolve to tell it. Let us not be silent, if we have found peace and rest in the Gospel. Let us speak to our relations, and friends, and families, and neighbors, according as we have opportunity, and tell them what the Lord has done for our souls. All are not called to be ministers. All are not intended to preach. But all can walk in the steps of the man of whom we have been reading, and in the steps of Andrew, and Philip, and the Samaritan woman. (John 1:41, 45; 4:29.) Happy is he who is not ashamed to say to others, "Come and hear what the Lord has done for my soul." (Psalm. 66:16.)

MARK 5:21-34

The main subject of these verses is the miraculous healing of a sick woman. Great is our Lord's experience in cases of disease! Great is his sympathy with His sick and ailing members! The gods of the heathen are generally represented as terrible and mighty in battle, delighting in bloodshed, the strong man's patrons, and the warrior's friends. The Savior of the Christian is always set before us as gentle, and easy to be entreated, the healer of the broken hearted, the refuge of the weak and helpless, the comforter of the distressed, the sick man's best friend. And is not this just the Savior that human nature needs? The world is full of pain and trouble. The weak on earth are far more numerous than the strong.

Let us mark, in these verses, ***what misery sin has brought into the world.*** We read of one who had had a most painful disease "for twelve years." She had "suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing better, but rather grew worse." Means of every kind had been tried in vain. Medical skill had proved unable to cure. Twelve long weary years had been spent in battling with disease, and relief seemed no nearer than at first. "Hope deferred" might well "make her heart sick." (Prov. 13:12.)

How incredible it is that we do not hate sin more than we do! Sin is the cause of all the pain and disease in the world. God did not create man to be an ailing and suffering creature. It was sin, and nothing but sin, which brought in all the ills that flesh is heir to. It was sin to which we owe every racking pain, and every loathsome infirmity, and every humbling weakness to which our poor bodies are liable. Let us keep this ever in mind. Let us hate sin with a godly hatred.

Let us mark, in the second place, ***how different are the feelings with which people draw near to Christ.*** We are told in these verses that "many people followed" our Lord, "and thronged him." But we are only told of one person who "came in the press behind," and touched Him with faith and was healed. Many followed Jesus from curiosity, and derived no benefit from Him. One, and only one, followed under a deep sense of her need, and of our

Savior's power to relieve her, and that one received a mighty blessing.

We see the same thing going on continually in the Church of Christ at the present day. Multitudes go to our places of worship, and fill our pews. Hundreds come up to the Lord's table, and receive the bread and wine. But of all these worshipers and communicants, how few really obtain anything from Christ! Fashion, custom, ritual, habit, the love of excitement, or an itching ear, are the true motives of the vast majority. There are but few here and there who touch Christ by faith, and go home "in peace." These may seem hard sayings. But they are unhappily too true!

Let us mark, in the third place, ***how immediate and instantaneous was the cure which this woman received.*** No sooner did she touch our Lord's clothes than she was healed. The thing that she had sought in vain for twelve years, was done in a moment. The cure that many physicians could not effect, was wrought in an instant of time. "She felt in her body that she was healed of that plague."

We need not doubt that we are meant to see here an emblem of the relief that the Gospel confers on souls. The experience of many a weary conscience has been exactly like that of this woman with her disease. Many a man has spent sorrowful years in search of peace with God, and failed to find it. He has gone to earthly remedies and obtained no relief. He has wearied himself in going from place to place, and church to church, and has felt after all "nothing bettered,

but rather worse." But at last he has found rest. And where has he found it? He has found it, where this woman found hers, in Jesus Christ. He has ceased from his own works. He has stopped looking to his own endeavors and doings for relief. He has come to Christ Himself, as a humble sinner, and committed himself to His mercy. At once the burden has fallen from off his shoulders. Heaviness is turned to joy, and anxiety to peace. One touch of real faith can do more for the soul than a hundred self-imposed austerities. One look at Jesus is more efficacious than years of sack-cloth and ashes. May we never forget this to our dying day! Personal application to Christ is the real secret of peace with God.

Let us mark, in the fourth place, ***how much it becomes Christians to confess before men the benefit they receive from Christ.*** We see that this woman was not allowed to go home, when cured, without her cure being noticed. Our Lord inquired who had touched Him, and "looked round about to see her who had done this thing." No doubt He knew perfectly the name and history of the woman. He needed not that any should tell Him. But He desired to teach her, and all around Him, that *healed souls should make public acknowledgment of mercies received.*

There is a lesson here which all true Christians would do well to remember. We are not to be ashamed to confess Christ before men, and to let others know what He has done for our souls. If we have found peace through His blood, and been renewed by His Spirit, we must not shrink from avowing it, on every proper occasion. It is not

necessary to blow a trumpet in the streets, and force our experience on everybody's notice. All that is required is a willingness to acknowledge Christ as our Master, without flinching from the ridicule or persecution which by so doing we may bring on ourselves. More than this is not required; but less than this ought not to content us. If we are ashamed of Jesus before men, He will one day be ashamed of us before His Father and the angels.

Let us mark, in the last place, ***how precious a grace is faith.*** "Daughter," says our Lord to the woman who was healed, "your FAITH has made you whole—go in peace."

Of all the Christian graces, none is so frequently mentioned in the New Testament as faith, and none is so highly commended. No grace brings such glory to Christ. Hope brings an eager expectation of good things to come. Love brings a warm and willing heart. Faith brings an empty hand, receives everything, and can give nothing in return. No grace is so important to the Christian's own soul. By faith we begin. By faith we live. By faith we stand. We walk by faith and not by sight. By faith we overcome. By faith we have peace. By faith we enter into rest. No grace should be the subject of so much self-inquiry. We should often ask ourselves, Do I really believe? Is my faith true, genuine, and the gift of God?

May we never rest until we can give a satisfactory answer to these questions! Christ is not changed since the day when this woman was healed. He is still gracious and still mighty to save. There is but one

thing needful if we want salvation. That one thing is the hand of faith. Let a man only "touch" Jesus, and he shall be made whole.

MARK 5:35-43

A great miracle is recorded in these verses. A dead girl is restored to life. Mighty as the "King of terrors" is, there is One mightier than he. The keys of death are in our Lord Jesus Christ's hands. He will one day "swallow up death in victory." (Isaiah 25:8.)

Let us learn from these verses, that ***rank places no man beyond the reach of sorrow.*** Jairus was a "ruler;" yet sickness and trouble came to his house. Jairus probably had wealth, and all the medical help that wealth can command; yet money could not keep death away from his child. The daughters of rulers are liable to sickness, as well as the daughters of poor men. The daughters of rulers must die.

It is good for us all to remember this. We are too apt to forget it. We often think and talk as if the possession of riches was the great antidote to sorrow, and as if money could secure us against sickness and death. But it is the very extreme of blindness to think so. We have only to look around us and see a hundred proofs to the contrary. Death comes to palaces, as well as to cottages—to landlords as well as to tenants—to rich as well as to poor. It tarries no man's leisure or convenience. It will not be kept out by locks and bars. "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." (Heb. 9:27.) **All are going to one place, the grave.**

We may be sure there is far more equality in the portions appointed to men than at first sight appears. Sickness is a great leveler. It makes no distinction. Heaven is the only place where "the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick." (Isa. 33:24.) Happy are they who set their affections on things above! They, and they only, have a treasure which is incorruptible. Yet a little while, and they will be where they shall hear no more evil tidings. All tears shall be wiped from their faces. They shall mourn no more. Never again shall they hear those sorrowful words, "your daughter—your son—your wife—your husband—is dead." The former things will have passed away.

Let us learn, for another thing, ***how almighty is the power of our Lord Jesus Christ.*** That message which pierced the ruler's heart, telling him that his child was dead, did not stop our Lord for a moment. At once he cheered the father's fainting spirits with these gracious words, "be not afraid, only believe." He comes to the house where many are weeping and wailing, and enters the room where the girl is lying. He takes her by the hand, and says, "little girl, I say unto you, Arise." At once the heart begins to beat again, and the breath returns to the lifeless body. "The girl arose and walked." No wonder that we read the words, "they were astonished with a great astonishment."

Let us think for a moment how wonderful was the change which took place in that house. From weeping to rejoicing—from mourning to congratulation—from death to life—how great and marvelous must have been the transition! They only can tell that, who have seen

death face to face, and had the light of their households quenched, and felt the iron entering into their own souls. They, and they only, can conceive what the family of Jairus must have felt, when they saw their beloved one given back once more into their bosom by the power of Christ. There must have been a happy family gathering that night!

Let us see in this glorious miracle ***a proof of what Jesus can do for dead souls.*** He can raise our children from the death of trespasses and sins, and make them walk before Him in newness of life. He can take our sons and daughters by the hand, and say to them, "arise," and bid them live not to themselves, but to Him that died for them and rose again. Have we a dead soul in our family? Let us call on the Lord to come and quicken him. (Eph. 2:1.) Let us send to Him message after message, and entreat Him to help. He that came to the support of Jairus is still plenteous in mercy, and mighty in power.

Finally, let us see in this miracle ***a blessed pledge of what our Lord will do in the day of His second appearing.*** He will call His believing people from their graves. He will give them a better, more glorious, and more beautiful body, than they had in the days of their pilgrimage. He will gather together His elect from north, and south, and east, and west, to part no more, and die no more. Believing parents shall once more see believing children. Believing husbands shall once more see believing wives. Let us beware of sorrowing like those who have no hope, over friends who

fall asleep in Christ. The youngest and loveliest believer can never die before the right time. Let us look forward. There is a glorious resurrection morning yet to come. “Those who sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him.” (1 Thess. 4:14.) Those words shall one day receive a complete fulfillment, “I will ransom them from the power of the grave—I will redeem them from death—O death, I will be your plague—O grave, I will be your destruction.” (Hosea 13:14.) He that raised the daughter of Jairus still lives! When He gathers His flock around Him at the last day, not one lamb shall be found missing.

Mark – Chap. 6

MARK 6:1-6

This passage shows us our Lord Jesus Christ in “his hometown,” at Nazareth. It is a melancholy illustration of the wickedness of man’s heart, and deserves special attention.

We see, in the first place, ***how apt men are to undervalue things with which they are familiar.*** The men of Nazareth “were offended” at our Lord. They could not think it possible that one who had lived so many years among themselves, and whose brethren and sisters they knew, could deserve to be followed as a public teacher.

Never had any place on earth such privileges as Nazareth. For thirty years the Son of God resided in this town, and went to and fro

in its streets. For thirty years He walked with God before the eyes of its inhabitants, living a blameless, perfect life. But it was all lost upon them. They were not ready to believe the Gospel, when the Lord came among them and taught in their synagogue. They would not believe that one whose face they knew so well, and who had lived so long, eating, and drinking, and dressing like one of themselves, had any right to claim their attention. They were "offended at Him."

There is nothing in all this that need surprise us. The same thing is going on around us every day, in our own land. The holy Scriptures, the preaching of the Gospel, the public ordinances of religion, the abundant means of grace that England enjoys, are continually undervalued by English people. They are so accustomed to them, that they do not know their privileges. It is a dreadful truth, that in religion, more than in anything else, **familiarity breeds contempt.**

There is comfort in this part of our Lord's experience, for some of the Lord's people. There is comfort for faithful ministers of the Gospel, who are cast down by the unbelief of their parishioners or regular hearers. There is comfort for true Christians who stand alone in their families, and see all around them cleaving to the world. Let both remember that they are drinking the same cup as their beloved Master. Let them remember that He too was despised most by those who knew Him best. Let them learn that the **utmost consistency of conduct will not make others adopt their views and opinions**, any more than it did the people of Nazareth. Let them

know that the sorrowful words of their Lord will generally be fulfilled in the experience of His servants, “a prophet is not without honor, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house.”

We see, in the second place, ***how humble was the rank of life which our Lord condescended to occupy before He began His public ministry.*** The people of Nazareth said of Him, in contempt, “Is not this the carpenter?”

This is a remarkable expression, and is only found in the Gospel of Mark. It shows us plainly that for the first thirty years of His life, our Lord was not ashamed to work with His own hands. There is something marvelous and overwhelming in the thought! He who made heaven, and earth, and sea, and all that therein is—He, without whom nothing was made that was made—the Son of God Himself, took on Him the form of a servant, and “in the sweat of His face ate bread,” as a working man. This is indeed that “love of Christ that passes knowledge.” Though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor. Both in life and death He humbled Himself, that through Him sinners might live and reign for evermore.

Let us remember, when we read this passage, that there is no sin in poverty. We never need be ashamed of poverty, unless our own sins have brought it upon us. We never ought to despise others, because they are poor. It is disgraceful to be a gambler, or a drunkard, or a covetous man, or a liar; but it is no disgrace to work with our own hands, and earn our bread by our own labor. The

thought of the carpenter's shop at Nazareth, should cast down the high thoughts of all who make an idol of riches. It cannot be dishonorable to occupy the same position as the Son of God, and Savior of the world.

We see, in the last place, ***how exceedingly sinful is the sin of unbelief.*** Two remarkable expressions are used in teaching this lesson. One is, that our Lord "could do no mighty work" at Nazareth, by reason of the hardness of the people's hearts. The other is, that "He was amazed at their unbelief." The one shows us that unbelief has a power to rob men of the highest blessings. The other shows that it is so suicidal and unreasonable a sin, that even the Son of God regards it with surprise.

We can never be too much on our guard against unbelief. It is the oldest sin in the world. It began in the garden of Eden, when Eve listened to the devil's promises, instead of believing God's words, "you shall die." It is the most ruinous of all sins in its consequences. It brought death into the world. It kept Israel for forty years out of Canaan. It is the sin that especially fills hell. "He that believes not shall be damned." It is the most foolish and inconsistent of all sins. It makes a man refuse the plainest evidence, shut his eyes against the clearest testimony, and yet believe lies. Worst of all, it is the commonest sin in the world. Thousands are guilty of it on every side. In profession they are Christians. They know nothing of Paine and Voltaire. But in practice they are really unbelievers. They do not implicitly believe the Bible, and receive Christ as their Savior.

Let us watch our own hearts carefully in the matter of unbelief. The heart, and not the head, is the seat of its mysterious power. It is neither the lack of evidence, nor the difficulties of Christian doctrine, that make men unbelievers. It is lack of will to believe. They love sin. They are wedded to the world. In this state of mind they never lack specious reasons to confirm their will. The humble, childlike heart is the heart that believes.

Let us go on watching our hearts, even after we have believed. The root of unbelief is never entirely destroyed. We have only to leave off watching and praying, and a noxious crop of unbelief will soon spring up. No prayer is so important as that of the disciples, "Lord, increase our faith."

MARK 6:7-13

These verses describe the first sending forth of the apostles to preach. The great Head of the church made proof of His ministers, before He left them alone in the world. He taught them to try their own powers of teaching, and to find out their own weaknesses, while He was yet with them. Thus, on the one hand, He was enabled to correct their mistakes. Thus, on the other, they were trained for the work they were one day to do, and were not novices, when finally left to themselves. Well would it be for the church, if all ministers of the Gospel were prepared for their duty in like manner, and did not so often take up their office untried, unproved, and inexperienced.

Let us observe, in these verses, ***how our Lord Jesus Christ sent forth His apostles "two by two."*** Mark is the only evangelist who mentions this fact. It is one that deserves especial notice.

There can be no doubt that this fact is meant to teach us the advantages of Christian company to all who work for Christ. The wise man had good reason for saying, "Two are better than one." (Eccles. 4:9.) Two men together will do more work than two men singly. They will help one another in judgment, and commit fewer mistakes. They will aid one another in difficulties, and less often fail of success. They will stir one another up when tempted to idleness, and less often relapse into indolence and indifference. They will comfort one another in times of trial, and be less often cast down. "Woe to him that is alone when he falls; for he has not another to help him up." (Eccles. 4:10.)

It is probable that this principle is not sufficiently remembered in the church of Christ in these latter days. The harvest is undoubtedly great all over the world, both at home and abroad. The laborers are unquestionably few, and the supply of faithful men far less than the demand. The arguments for sending out men "one by one," under existing circumstances, are undeniably strong and weighty. But still the conduct of our Lord in this place is a striking fact. The fact that there is hardly a single case in the Acts, where we find Paul or any other apostle working entirely alone, is another remarkable circumstance. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion, that if the rule of

going forth “two and two” had been more strictly observed, the missionary field would have yielded larger results than it has.

One thing at all events is clear, and that is the duty of all workers for Christ to work together and help one another whenever they can. “As iron sharpens iron, so does the countenance of a man his friend.” Ministers and missionaries, and district visitors, and Sunday school teachers, should take opportunities for meeting, and taking sweet counsel together. The words of Paul contain a truth which is too much forgotten— “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” (Heb. 10:24, 25.)

Let us observe, in the second place, ***what solemn words our Lord uses about those who will not receive nor hear His ministers.*** He says, “it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city.”

This is a truth which we find very frequently laid down in the Gospels. It is painful to think how entirely it is overlooked by many. Thousands appear to suppose, that so long as they go to church, and do not murder, or steal, or cheat, or openly break any of God’s commandments, they are in no great danger. They forget that it needs something more than mere abstinence from outward irregularities to save a man’s soul. They do not see that one of the greatest sins a man can commit in the sight of God, is to hear the Gospel of Christ and not believe it—to be invited to repent and

believe, and yet to remain careless and unbelieving. In short, to reject the Gospel will sink a man to the lowest place in hell.

Let us never turn away from a passage like this without asking ourselves—What are we doing with the Gospel? We live in a Christian land. We have the Bible in our houses. We hear of the salvation of the Gospel frequently every year. But have we received it into our hearts? Have we really obeyed it in our lives? Have we, in short, laid hold on the hope set before us, taken up the cross, and followed Christ? If not, we are far worse than the heathen, who bow down to stocks and stones. We are far more guilty than the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. They never heard the Gospel, and therefore never rejected it. But as for us, we hear the Gospel, and yet will not believe. May we search our own hearts, and take heed that we do not ruin our own souls!

Let us observe, in the last place, ***what was the doctrine which our Lord's apostles preached.*** We read that "they went out and preached that men should REPENT."

The necessity of repentance may seem at first sight a very simple and elementary truth. And yet volumes might be written to show the fullness of the doctrine, and the suitableness of it to every age and time, and to every rank and class of mankind. It is inseparably connected with right views of God, of human nature, of sin, of Christ, of holiness, and of heaven. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. All need to be brought to a sense of their sins—to a sorrow for them—to a willingness to give them up—and to a hunger

and thirst after pardon. All, in a word, need to be born again and to flee to Christ. This is repentance unto life. Nothing less than this is required for the salvation of any man. Nothing less than this ought to be pressed on men, by every one who professes to teach Bible religion. We must bid men repent, if we would walk in the steps of the apostles, and when they have repented, we must bid them repent more and more to their last day.

Have we ourselves repented? This, after all, is the question that concerns us most. It is well to know what the apostles taught. It is well to be familiar with the whole system of Christian doctrine. But it is far better to know repentance by experience and to feel it inwardly in our own hearts. May we never rest until we know and feel that we have repented! There are no impenitent people in the kingdom of heaven. All who enter in there have felt, mourned over, forsaken, and sought pardon for sin. This must be our experience, if we hope to be saved.

MARK 6:14-29

These verses describe the death of one of the most eminent saints of God. They relate the murder of John the Baptist. Of all the evangelists none tells this melancholy story so fully as Mark. Let us see what practical lessons the passage contains for our own souls.

We see, in the first place, ***the amazing power of truth over the conscience.*** Herod "fears" John the Baptist while he lives, and

is troubled about him after he dies. A friendless, solitary preacher, with no other weapon than God's truth, disturbs and terrifies a king.

Everybody has a conscience. Here lies the secret of a faithful minister's power. This is the reason why Felix "trembled," and Agrippa was "almost persuaded," when Paul the prisoner spoke before them. God has not left Himself without witness in the hearts of unconverted people. Fallen and corrupt as man is, there are thoughts within him accusing or excusing, according as he lives—thoughts that will not be shut out—thoughts that can make even kings, like Herod, restless and afraid.

None ought to remember this so much as ministers and teachers. If they preach and teach Christ's truth, they may rest assured that their work is not in vain. Children may seem inattentive in schools. Hearers may seem careless in congregations. But in both cases there is often far more going on in the conscience than our eyes see. Seeds often spring up and bear fruit, when the sower, like John the Baptist, is dead or gone.

We see, in the second place, ***how far people may go in religion, and yet miss salvation by yielding to one master-sin.***

King Herod went further than many. He "feared John." He "knew that he was a just man and a holy." He "observed" him. He "heard him, and did many things" in consequence. He even "heard him gladly." But there was one thing Herod would not do. He would not

cease from adultery. He would not give up Herodias. And so he ruined his soul for evermore.

Let us take warning from Herod's case. Let us keep back nothing —cleave to no favorite vice—spare nothing that stands between us and salvation. Let us often look within, and make sure that there is no darling lust or pet transgression, which, Herodias-like, is murdering our souls. Let us rather cut off the right hand, and pluck out the right eye, than go into hell-fire. Let us not be content with admiring favorite preachers, and gladly hearing evangelical sermons. Let us not rest until we can say with David, "I esteem all Your commandments concerning all things to be right, and I hate every false way." (Psalm 119:128.)

We see, in the third place, ***how boldly a faithful minister of God ought to rebuke sin.*** John the Baptist spoke plainly to Herod about the wickedness of his life. He did not excuse himself under the plea that it was imprudent, or impolitic, or untimely, or useless to speak out. He did not say smooth things, and palliate the king's ungodliness by using soft words to describe his offence. He told his royal hearer the plain truth, regardless of all consequences— "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife."

Here is a pattern that all ministers ought to follow. Publicly and privately, from the pulpit and in private visits, they ought to rebuke all open sin, and deliver a faithful warning to all who are living in it. It may give offence. It may entail immense unpopularity. With all this they have nothing to do. Duties are theirs. Results are God's.

No doubt it requires great grace and courage to do this. No doubt a reprover, like John the Baptist, must go to work wisely and lovingly in carrying out his Master's commission, and rebuking the wicked. But it is a matter in which his character for faithfulness and charity are manifestly at stake. If he believes a man is injuring his soul, he ought surely to tell him so. If he loves him truly and tenderly, he ought not to let him ruin himself unwarned. Great as the present offence may be, in the long run the faithful reprover will generally be respected. "He that rebukes a man, afterwards shall find more favor than he that flatters him with his tongue." (Prov. 28:23.)

We see, in the fourth place, ***how bitterly people hate a reprover, when they are determined to keep their sins.*** Herodias, the king's unhappy partner in iniquity, seems to have sunk even deeper in sin than Herod. Hardened and seared in conscience by her wickedness, she hated John the Baptist for his faithful testimony, and never rested until she had procured his death.

We need not wonder at this. When men and women have chosen their line, and resolved to have their own wicked way, they dislike any one who tries to turn them. They want to be let alone. They are irritated by opposition. They are angry when they are told the truth. The prophet Elijah was called a "man that troubled Israel." The prophet Micaiah was hated by Ahab, "because he never prophesied good of him, but evil." The prophets and faithful preachers of every age have been treated in like manner. They have been hated by some, as well as not believed.

Let it never surprise us when we hear of faithful ministers of the Gospel being spoken against, hated, and reviled. Let us rather remember that they are ordained to bear witness against sin, the world, and the devil, and that if they are faithful, they cannot help giving offence. It is no disgrace to a minister's character to be disliked by the wicked and ungodly. It is no real honor to a minister to be thought well of by everybody. Those words of our Lord are not enough considered— "Woe unto you when all men speak well of you."

We see, in the fifth place, ***how much sin may sometimes follow from feasting and reveling.*** Herod keeps his birth-day with a splendid banquet. Company, drinking, dancing, fill up the day. In a moment of excitement, he grants a wicked girl's request to have the head of John the Baptist cut off. Next day, in all probability, he repented bitterly of his conduct. But the deed was done. It was too late.

This is a faithful picture of what often results from feasting and merry-making. People do things at such seasons, from heated feelings, which they afterwards deeply repent. Happy are they who keep clear of temptations, and avoid giving occasion to the devil. Men never know what they may do when they once venture off safe ground. Late hours, and crowded rooms, and splendid entertainments, and mixed company, and music, and dancing, may seem harmless to many people. But the Christian should never

forget, that to take part in these things is to open a wider door to temptation.

We see, finally, in these verses, ***how little reward some of God's best servants receive in this world.*** An unjust imprisonment and a violent death, were the last fruit that John the Baptist reaped, in return for his labor. Like Stephen and James, and others, of whom the world was not worthy, he was called to seal his testimony with his blood.

Histories like these are meant to remind us, that the true Christian's best things are *yet to come*. His rest, his crown, his wages, his reward, are all on the other side of the grave. Here, in this world, he must walk by faith, and not by sight; and if he looks for the praise of man, he will be disappointed. Here, in this life, he must sow, and labor, and fight, and endure persecution; and if he expects a great earthly reward, he expects what he will not find. But this life is not all. There is to be a day of retribution. There is a glorious harvest yet to come. **Heaven will make amends for all.** Eye has not seen, and ear has not heard the glorious things that God has laid up for all that love Him. The value of real religion is not to be measured by the things seen, but the things unseen. "The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed." "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." (Rom. 8:18; 2 Cor. 4:17.)

MARK 6:30-34

Let us mark in this passage, ***the conduct of the apostles when they returned from their first mission as preachers.*** We read that they "gathered themselves together unto Jesus, and told Him all things, both what they had done, and what they had taught."

These words are deeply instructive. They are a bright example to all ministers of the Gospel, and to all laborers in the great work of doing good to souls. All such should daily do as the apostles did on this occasion. They should tell all their proceedings to the great Head of the Church. They should spread all their work before Christ, and ask of Him counsel, guidance, strength, and help.

Prayer is the main secret of success in spiritual business. It moves Him who can move heaven and earth. It brings down the promised aid of the Holy Spirit, without whom the finest sermons, the clearest teaching, and the most diligent labors, are all alike in vain. It is not always those who have the most eminent gifts who are most successful laborers for God. It is generally those who keep up closest communion with Christ and are most constant in prayer. It is those who cry with the prophet Ezekiel, "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain that they may live." (Ezek. 37:9.) It is those who follow most exactly the apostolic model, and "give themselves to prayer, and the ministry of the word." (Acts 6:4.) Happy is that church which has a praying as well as a preaching ministry! The question we should ask about a new minister, is not

merely “Can he preach well?” but “Does he pray much for his people and his work?”

Let us mark, in the second place, ***the words of our Lord to the apostles, when they returned from their first public ministry.*** Jesus said to them, “Come with Me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.”

These words are full of tender consideration. Our Lord knows well that His servants are flesh as well as spirit, and have bodies as well as souls. He knows that at best they have a treasure in earthen vessels, and are themselves encompassed with many infirmities. He shows those who He does not expect from them more than their bodily strength can do. He asks for what we can do, and not for what we cannot do. “Come with Me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.”

These words are full of deep wisdom. Our Lord knows well that His servants must attend to their own souls as well as the souls of others. He knows that a constant attention to public work is apt to make us forget our own private soul-business, and that while we are keeping the vineyards of others, we are in danger of neglecting our own. (Cant. 1:6.) He reminds us that it is good for ministers to withdraw occasionally from public work, and look within. “Come with Me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.”

There are few unhappily in the church of Christ, who need these admonitions. There are but few in danger of overworking

themselves, and injuring their own bodies and souls by excessive attention to others. The vast majority of professing Christians are indolent and slothful, and do nothing for the world around them. There are few comparatively who need the bridle nearly so much as the spur. Yet these few ought to lay to heart the lessons of this passage. They should economize their health as a talent, and not squander it away like gamblers. They should be content with spending their daily income of strength, and should not draw recklessly on their principal. They should remember that to do a little, and do it well, is often the way to do most in the long run. Above all they should never forget to watch their own hearts jealously, and to make time for regular self-examination, and calm meditation. The prosperity of a man's ministry and public work is intimately bound up with the prosperity of his own soul. Occasional retirement is one of the most useful ordinances.

Finally, let us mark the ***feelings of our Lord Jesus Christ towards the people who came together to Him.*** We read that He "was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep without a shepherd." They were destitute of teachers. They had no guides but the blind Scribes and Pharisees. They had no spiritual food but man-made traditions. Thousands of immortal souls stood before our Lord, ignorant, helpless, and on the high-road to ruin. It touched the gracious heart of our Lord Jesus Christ. He was "moved with compassion toward them. He began to teach them many things."

Let us never forget that our Lord is the same yesterday, today and forever. He never changes. High in heaven, at God's right hand, He still looks with compassion on the children of men. He still pities the ignorant, and those who are out of the way. He is still willing to "teach them many things." Special as His love is towards His own sheep who hear His voice, He still has a mighty 'general love' towards all mankind—a love of real pity, a love of compassion. We must not overlook this. It is a poor theology which teaches that Christ cares for none except believers. There is warrant in Scripture for telling the chief of sinners, that Jesus pities them, and cares for their souls, that Jesus is willing to save them, and invites them to believe and be saved.

Let us ask ourselves, as we leave the passage, whether we know anything of the mind of Christ? Are we, like Him, tenderly concerned about the souls of the unconverted? Do we, like Him, feel deep compassion for all who are yet as sheep without a shepherd? Do we care about the impenitent and ungodly near our own doors? Do we care about the Heathen, the Jew, the Mohammedan, and the Roman Catholic in foreign lands? Do we use every means, and give our money willingly, to spread the Gospel in the world? These are serious questions, and demand a serious reply. *The man who cares nothing for the souls of other people is not like Jesus Christ. It may well be doubted whether he is converted himself, and knows the value of his own soul.*

MARK 6:35-46

Of all our Lord Jesus Christ's miracles, none is so frequently described in the Gospels, as that which we have now read. Each of the four Evangelists was inspired to record it. It is evident that it demands a more than ordinary attention from every reader of God's word.

Let us observe, for one thing, in this passage, ***what an example this miracle affords of our Lord Jesus Christ's almighty POWER.*** We are told that He fed five thousand men, with five loaves and two fish. We are distinctly told that this multitude had nothing to eat. We are no less distinctly told that the whole provision for their sustenance consisted of only five loaves and two fish. And yet we read that our Lord took these loaves and fish, blessed, broke, and gave them to His disciples to set before the people. And the conclusion of the narrative tells us, that "they ate, and were filled," and that "twelve baskets full of fragments" were taken up.

Here was creative power, beyond all question. Something real, solid, substantial, must manifestly have been called into being, which did not before exist. There is no room left for the theory, that the people were under the influence of an optical delusion, or a heated imagination. Five thousand hungry people would never have been satisfied, if they had not received into their mouths material bread. Twelve baskets full of fragments would never have been taken up, if the five loaves had not been miraculously multiplied. In short, it is plain that the hand of Him who made the world out of nothing was present on this occasion. None but He who at the first created all

things, and sent down manna in the desert, could thus have “spread a table in the wilderness.”

It becomes all true Christians to store up facts like these in their minds, and to remember them in time of need. We live in the midst of an evil world, and see few with us, and many against us. We carry within us a weak heart, too ready at any moment to turn aside from the right way. We have near us, at every moment, a busy devil, watching continually for our halting, and seeking to lead us into temptation. Where shall we turn for comfort? What shall keep faith alive, and preserve us from sinking in despair? There is only one answer. We must look to Jesus. We must think on His almighty power, and His wonders of old time. We must call to mind how He can create food for His people out of nothing, and supply the needs of those who follow Him, even in the wilderness. And as we think these thoughts, we must remember that this Jesus still lives, never changes, and is on our side.

Let us observe, for another thing, in this passage, ***our Lord Jesus Christ’s conduct, when the miracle of feeding the multitude had been performed.*** We read, that “when He had sent them away, He departed into a mountain to pray.”

There is something deeply instructive in this circumstance. Our Lord never sought the praise of man. After one of His greatest miracles, we find Him immediately seeking solitude, and spending His time in prayer. He practiced what He had taught elsewhere, when He said, “enter into your closet, and shut your door, and pray

to your Father which is in secret." None ever did such mighty works as He did. None ever spoke such words. None ever was so constant in prayer.

Let our Lord's conduct in this respect be our example. We cannot work miracles as He did; in this He stands alone. But we can walk in His steps, in the matter of private devotion. If we have the Spirit of adoption, we can pray. Let us resolve to pray more than we have done hitherto. Let us strive to make time, and place, and opportunity for being alone with God. Above all, let us not only pray BEFORE we attempt to work for God, but pray also AFTER our work is done.

It would be well for us all, if we examined ourselves more frequently as to our habits about private prayer. What time do we give to it in the twenty-four hours of the day? What progress can we mark, one year with another, in the fervency, fullness, and earnestness of our prayers? What do we know by experience, of "laboring fervently in prayer?" (Col. 4:12.) These are humbling inquiries, but they are useful for our souls. There are few things, it may be feared, in which Christians come so far short of Christ's example, as they do in the matter of prayer. Our Master's strong crying and tears—His continuing all night in prayer to God—His frequent withdrawal to private places, to hold close communion with the Father, are things more talked of and admired than imitated. We live in an age of hurry, bustle, and so-called activity. Men are tempted continually to cut short their private devotions, and abridge their prayers. When this is the case, we need not wonder that the

Church of Christ does little in proportion to its machinery. The Church must learn to copy its Head more closely. Its members must be more in their closets. “We have little,” because little is asked. (James 4:2.)

MARK 6:47-56

The event first recorded in these verses, is a beautiful emblem of the position of all believers, between the first and second advents of Jesus Christ. Like the disciples, we are now tossed to and fro by storms, and do not enjoy the visible presence of our Lord. Like the disciples, we shall see our Lord face to face again, though it may be a time of great extremity, when He returns. Like the disciples, we shall see all things changed for the better, when our Master comes to us. We shall no longer be buffeted by storms. There will be a great calm.

There is nothing fanciful in such an application of the passage. We need not doubt that there is a deep meaning in every step of His life, who was “God manifest in the flesh.” For the present, however, let us confine ourselves to the plain, practical lessons which these verses contain.

Let us notice, in the first place, ***how our Lord sees the troubles of His believing people, and in due time will help them.*** We read that when “the ship was in the midst of the sea, and He alone on the land,” He “saw His disciples toiling in rowing” came to them walking on the sea—cheered them with the gracious words, “It is I, be not afraid” and changed the storm into a calm.

There are thoughts of comfort here for all true believers. Wherever they may be, or whatever their circumstances, the Lord Jesus sees them. Alone, or in company—in sickness or in health—by sea or by land—in perils in the city—in perils in the wilderness—the same eye which saw the disciples tossed on the lake, is ever looking at us. We are never beyond the reach of His care. Our way is never hidden from Him. He knows the path that we take, and is still able to help. He may not come to our aid at the time we like best, but He will never allow us utterly to fail. He who walked upon the water never changes. He will always come at the right time to uphold His people. Though He tarry, let us wait patiently. Jesus sees us, and will not forsake us.

Let us notice, in the second place, ***the fears of the disciples, when they first saw our Lord walking upon the sea.*** We are told that "they supposed it had been a ghost, and cried out. For they all saw Him, and were afraid."

What a faithful picture of human nature we have in these words! How many thousands in the present day, if they had seen what the disciples saw, would have behaved in the same manner! How few, if they were on board a ship, in a storm at midnight, and suddenly saw one walking on the water, and drawing near to the ship—how few would preserve their composure, and be altogether free from fears! Let men laugh, if they please, at the superstitious fears of these unlearned disciples. Let them boast, if they like, of the march of intellect, and the spread of knowledge, in these latter times. There

are few, we may confidently assert, who, placed in the same position as the apostles, would have shown more courage than they. The boldest skeptics have sometimes proved the greatest cowards, when appearances have been seen at night, which they could not explain.

The truth is, there is an instinctive feeling in all men, which makes them shrink from anything which seems to belong to another world. There is a consciousness which many try in vain to conceal by affected composure, that there are beings unseen, as well as seen, and that the life which we now live in the flesh, is not the only life in which man has a portion. The common stories about ghosts and apparitions, are undoubtedly foolish and superstitious. They are almost always traceable to the fears and imaginations of weak-minded people. Yet the universal attention which such stories obtain, all over the world, is a fact that deserves notice. It is an indirect evidence of 'latent belief in unseen things', just as counterfeit coin is an evidence that there is true money. It forms a peculiar testimony which the infidel would find it hard to explain away. It proves that there is something within men, which testifies of a world beyond the grave, and that when men feel it, they are afraid.

The plain duty of the true Christian is, to live provided with an antidote against all fears of the great unseen world. That antidote is faith in an unseen Savior, and constant communion with Him. Armed with that antidote, and seeing Him who is invisible, nothing need make us afraid. We travel on towards a world of spirits. We are surrounded even now by many dangers. But with Jesus for our

Shepherd, we have no cause for alarm. With Him for our Shield, we are safe.

Let us notice, in the conclusion of the chapter, ***what a bright example we have of our duty to one another.*** We are told that when our Lord came into the land of Gennesaret, the people "ran through that whole region," and brought to Him in beds "those that were sick." We read that "wherever he entered, into villages, or cities, or country, they laid the sick in the streets, and besought Him, that they might touch if it were but the border of His garment."

Let us see here a pattern for ourselves. Let us go and do likewise. Let us strive to bring all around us who are in need of spiritual medicine, to Jesus the great Physician, that they may be healed. Souls are dying every day. Time is short. Opportunities are rapidly passing away. The night comes when no man can work.

Let us spare no pains in laboring to bring men and women to the knowledge of Jesus Christ, that they may be saved. It is a comfortable thought, that "as many as touch Him will be made whole."

Mark – Chap. 7

MARK 7:1-13

This passage contains a humbling picture of what human nature is capable of doing in religion. It is one of those Scriptures which ought to be frequently and diligently studied by all who desire the prosperity of the Church of Christ.

The first thing which demands our attention in these verses, is ***the low and degraded condition of Jewish religion, when our Lord was upon earth.*** What can be more deplorable than the statement now before us? We find the principal teachers of the Jewish nation finding fault, "because our Lord's disciples ate bread with unwashed hands!" We are told that they attached great importance to the washing of cups, and pots, and bronze vessels, and tables!" In short, the man who paid most rigid attention to mere external observances of human invention was reckoned the holiest man!

The nation, be it remembered, in which this state of things existed, was the most highly favored in the world. To it, was given the law on Mount Sinai, the service of God, the priesthood, the covenants, and the promises. Moses, and Samuel, and David, and the prophets, lived and died among its people. No nation upon earth ever had so many spiritual privileges. No nation ever misused its privileges so fearfully, and so thoroughly forsook its own mercies. Never did fine gold become so dim! From the religion of the books of Deuteronomy and Psalms, to the religion of washing hands, and pots, and cups—how great was the fall! No wonder that in the time of our Lord's earthly ministry, He found the people like sheep without a

shepherd. *External observances alone feed no consciences and sanctify no hearts!*

Let the history of the Jewish church be a warning to us never to trifle with false doctrine. If we once tolerate it we never know how far it may go, or into what degraded state of religion we may at last fall. Once leave the King's highway of truth, and we may end with washing pots and cups, like Pharisees and Scribes. There is nothing too base, trifling, or irrational for a man, if he once turns his back on God's word. There are branches of the Church of Christ at this day in which the Scriptures are never read, and the Gospel never preached—branches in which the only religion now remaining consists in using a few unmeaning forms and keeping certain man-made fasts and feasts—branches which began well, like the Jewish church, and, like the Jewish church, have now fallen into utter barrenness and decay. We can never be too jealous about false doctrine. A little leaven leavens the whole lump. Let us earnestly contend for the whole faith once delivered to the saints.

The second thing, that demands our attention, is ***the uselessness of mere lip-service in the worship of God.*** Our Lord enforces this lesson by a quotation from the Old Testament—"Well has Elijah prophesied of you hypocrites, This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me."

The heart is the part of man which God chiefly notices in religion. The bowed head, and the bended knee—the grave face and the rigid posture—the ritual response, and the formal amen—all these

together do not make up a spiritual worshiper. The eyes of God look further and deeper. He requires the worship of the heart. “My son,” he says to every one of us, “Give me your heart.”

Let us remember this in the public congregation. It must not content us to take our bodies to church, if we leave our hearts at home. The eye of man may detect no flaw in our service. Our minister may look at us with approbation. Our neighbors may think us patterns of what a Christian ought to be. Our voice may be heard foremost in the praise and prayer. But it is all worse than nothing in God’s sight, if our hearts are far away. It is only wood, hay, and stubble before Him who discerns thoughts, and reads the secrets of the inward man.

Let us remember this in our private devotions. It must not satisfy us to say good words, if our heart and our lips do not go together. What does it profit us to be fluent and lengthy, if our imaginations are roving far away, while we are upon our knees? It profits us nothing at all. God sees what we are really doing, and rejects our offering. Heart-prayers are the prayers He loves to hear. Heart-prayers are the only prayers that He will answer. Our petitions may be weak, and stammering, and poor in our eyes. They may be presented with no fine words, or well-chosen language, and might seem almost unintelligible, if they were written down. But if they come from a right heart, God understands them. Such prayers are His delight.

The last thing that demands our attention in these verses, is ***the tendency of man's inventions in religion to supplant God's word.*** Three times we find this charge brought forward by our Lord against the Pharisees. "Laying aside the commandments of God, you hold the traditions of men." "Full well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your own traditions." "Making the Word of God of none effect through your traditions." The first step of the Pharisees, was to add their traditions to the Scriptures, as useful supplements. The second was to place them on a level with the Word of God, and give them equal authority. The last was to honor them above the Scripture, and to degrade Scripture from its lawful position. This was the state of things which our Lord found when he was upon earth. Practically, the traditions of man were everything, and the Word of God was nothing at all. Obedience to the traditions constituted true religion. Obedience to the Scriptures was lost sight of altogether.

It is a mournful fact, that Christians have far too often walked in the steps of Pharisees in this matter. The very same process has taken place over and over again. The very same consequences have resulted. Religious observances of man's invention, have been pressed on the acceptance of Christians—observances to all appearance useful, and at all events well-meant, but observances nowhere commanded in the word of God. These very observances have by and by been required with more vigor than God's own commandments, and defended with more zeal than the authority of

God's own Word. We need not look far for examples. The history of our own church will supply them.

Let us beware of attempting to add anything to the word of God, as necessary to salvation. It provokes God to give us over to judicial blindness. It is as good as saying that His Bible is not perfect, and that we know better than He does what is necessary for man's salvation. It is just as easy to destroy the authority of God's word by addition as by subtraction, by burying it under man's inventions as by denying its truth. The whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible, must be our rule of faith nothing added and nothing taken away.

Finally, let us draw a broad line of distinction between those things in religion which have been devised by man, and those which are plainly commanded in God's word. What God commands is necessary to salvation. What man commands is not. What man devises may be useful and expedient for the times; but salvation does not hinge on obedience to it. What God requires is essential to life eternal. He that wilfully disobeys it ruins his own soul.

MARK 7:14-23

We see in the beginning of this passage, ***how slow of understanding men are in spiritual things.*** "Hearken," says our Lord to the people, "hearken unto me every one of you, and understand." "Are you so without understanding?" He says to His disciples— "Do you not perceive?"

The corruption of human nature is a universal disease. It affects not only a man's heart, will, and conscience, but his mind, memory, and understanding. The very same person who is quick and clever in worldly things, will often utterly fail to comprehend the simplest truths of Christianity. He will often be unable to grasp the plainest reasonings of the Gospel. He will see no meaning in the clearest statements of evangelical doctrine. They will sound to him either foolish or mysterious. He will listen to them like one listening to a foreign language, catching a word here and there, but not seeing the drift of the whole. "The world by wisdom knows not God." (1 Cor. 1:21.) It hears, but does not understand.

We must pray daily for the teaching of the Holy Spirit, if we would make progress in the knowledge of divine things. Without Him, the mightiest intellect and the strongest reasoning powers will carry us but a little way. In reading the Bible and hearing sermons, everything depends on the spirit in which we read and hear. A humble, teachable, child-like frame of mind is the grand secret of success. Happy is he who often says with David, "Teach me Your statutes." (Psalm 119:64.) Such an one will understand as well as hear.

We see, in the second place, from this passage, that ***the heart is the chief source of defilement and impurity in God's sight.*** Moral purity does not depend on washing or not washing—touching things or not touching them—eating things or not eating them, as the Scribes and Pharisees taught. "There is nothing from outside a man,

that entering into him can defile him—but the things which come out of him, these are those who defile the man."

There is a deep truth in these words which is frequently overlooked. Our original sinfulness and natural inclination to evil are seldom sufficiently considered. The wickedness of men is often attributed to bad examples, bad company, peculiar temptations, or the snares of the devil. It seems forgotten that every man carried within him a fountain of wickedness. We need no bad company to teach us, and no devil to tempt us, in order to run into sin. We have within us the beginning of every sin under heaven.

We ought to remember this in the training and education of children. In all our management we must never forget, that the seeds of all mischief and wickedness are in their hearts. It is not enough to keep boys and girls at home, and shut out every outward temptation. They carry within them a heart ready for any sin, and until that heart is changed they are not safe, whatever we do. When children do wrong, it is a common practice to lay all the blame on bad companions. But it is mere ignorance, blindness, and foolishness to do so. Bad companions are a great evil no doubt, and an evil to be avoided as much as possible. But no bad companion teaches a boy or girl half as much sin as their own hearts will suggest to them, unless they are renewed by the Spirit. The beginning of all wickedness is within. If parents were half as diligent in praying for their children's conversion as they are in keeping them from bad company, their children would turn out far better than they do.

We see, in the last place, from this passage, ***what a black catalogue of evils the human heart contains.*** "For from within, out of a person's heart, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, eagerness for lustful pleasure, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. All these vile things come from within; they are what defile you and make you unacceptable to God."

Let us distinctly understand, when we read these words, that our Lord is speaking of the human heart generally. He is not speaking only of the notorious profligate, or the prisoner in the jail. He is speaking of all mankind. All of us, whether high or low, rich or poor, masters or servants, old or young, learned or unlearned—all of us have by nature such a heart as Jesus here describes. The seeds of all the evils here mentioned lie hidden within us all. They may lie dormant all our lives. They may be kept down by the fear of consequences—the restraint of public opinion—the dread of discovery—the desire to be thought respectable—and, above all, by the almighty grace of God. But every man has within him the root of every sin.

How humble we ought to be, when we read these verses! "We are all as an unclean thing" in God's sight. (Isaiah. 64:6.) He sees in each one of us countless evils, which the world never sees at all, for He reads our hearts. Surely of all sins to which we are liable, self-righteousness is the most unreasonable and unfitting.

How thankful we ought to be for the Gospel, when we read these verses! That Gospel contains a complete provision for all the needs of our poor defiled natures. The blood of Christ can "cleanse us from all sin." The Holy Spirit can change even our sinful hearts, and keep them clean, when changed. The man that does not glory in the Gospel, can surely know little of the plague that is within him.

How watchful we ought to be, when we remember these verses! What a careful guard we ought to keep over our imaginations, our tongues, and our daily behavior! At the head of the black list of our heart's contents, stand "evil thoughts." Let us never forget that. Thoughts are the parents of words and deeds. Let us pray daily for grace to keep our thoughts in order, and let us cry earnestly and fervently, "lead us not into temptation."

MARK 7:24-30

We know nothing of the woman who is here mentioned, beyond the facts that we here read. Her name, her former history, the way in which she was led to seek our Lord, though a Gentile, and dwelling in the borders of Tyre and Sidon—all these things are hidden from us. But the few facts that are related about this woman are full of precious instruction. Let us observe them, and learn wisdom.

In the first place, ***this passage is meant to encourage us to pray for others.*** The woman who came to our Lord, in the history now before us, must doubtless have been in deep affliction. She saw a beloved child possessed by an unclean spirit. She saw her in a

condition in which no teaching could reach the mind, and no medicine could heal the body—a condition only one degree better than death itself. She hears of Jesus, and beseeches Him to "cast the demon out of her daughter." She prays for one who could not pray for herself, and never rests until her prayer is granted. By prayer she obtains the cure which no human means could obtain. Through the prayer of the mother, the daughter is healed. On her own behalf that daughter did not speak a word; but her mother spoke for her to the Lord, and did not speak in vain. Hopeless and desperate as her case appeared, she had a praying mother, and where there is a praying mother there is always hope.

The truth here taught is one of deep importance. The case here recorded is one that does not stand alone. Few duties are so strongly recommended by Scriptural example, as the duty of intercessory prayer. There is a long catalogue of instances in Scripture, which show the benefits that may be conferred on others by praying for them. The nobleman's son at Capernaum—the centurion's servant—the daughter of Jairus, are all striking examples. Incredible as it may seem, God is pleased to do great things for souls, when friends and relations are moved to pray for them. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." (James 5:16.)

Fathers and mothers are especially bound to remember the case of this woman. They cannot give their children new hearts. They can give them Christian education, and show them the way of life; but they cannot give them a will to choose Christ's service, and a heart to

love God. Yet there is one thing they can always do—they can pray for them. They can pray for the conversion of profligate sons, who will have their own way, and run greedily into sin. They can pray for the conversion of worldly daughters, who set their affections on things below, and love pleasure more than God. Such prayers are heard on high. Such prayers will often bring down blessings. Never, never let us forget that the children for whom many prayers have been offered, seldom finally perish. Let us pray more for our sons and daughters. Even when they will not let us speak to them about religion, they cannot prevent us speaking for them to God.

In the second place, ***this passage is meant to teach us to persevere in praying for others.*** The woman whose history we are now reading, appeared at first to obtain nothing by her application to our Lord. On the contrary, our Lord's reply was discouraging. Yet she did not give up in despair. She prayed on, and did not faint. She pressed her suit with ingenious arguments. She would take no refusal. She pleaded for a few "crumbs" of mercy, rather than none at all. And through this holy importunity she succeeded. She heard at last these joyful words— "For this saying go your way; the demon is gone out of your daughter!"

Perseverance in prayer is a point of great moment. Our hearts are apt to become cool and indifferent, and to think that it is no use to draw near to God. Our hands soon hang down, and our knees wax faint. Satan is ever laboring to draw us off from our prayers, and filling our minds with reasons why we may give them up. These

things are true with respect to all prayers, but they are especially true with respect to intercessory prayer. It is always far more meager than it ought to be. It is often attempted for a little season, and then left off. We see no immediate answer to our prayers. We see the people for whose souls we pray, going on still in sin. We draw the conclusion that it is useless to pray for them, and allow our intercession to come to an end.

In order to arm our minds with arguments for perseverance in intercessory prayer, let us often study the case of this woman. Let us remember how she prayed on and did not faint, in the face of great discouragement. Let us mark how at last she went home rejoicing, and let us resolve, by God's grace, to follow her example.

Do we know what it is to pray for ourselves? This, after all, is the first question for self-inquiry. The man who never speaks to God about his own soul, can know nothing of praying for others. He is as yet Godless, Christless, and hopeless, and has to learn the very rudiments of religion. Let him awake, and call upon God.

But do we pray for ourselves? Then let us take heed that we pray for others also. Let us beware of selfish prayers—prayers which are wholly taken up with our own affairs, and in which there is no place for other souls beside our own. Let us name all whom we love before God continually. Let us pray for all—the worst, the hardest, and the most unbelieving. Let us continue praying for them year after year, in spite of their continued unbelief. God's time of mercy may be a distant one. Our eyes may not see an answer to our intercession. The

answer may not come for ten, fifteen, or twenty years. It may not come until we have exchanged prayer for praise, and are far away from this world. But while we live, let us pray for others. It is the greatest kindness we can do to any one, to speak for him to our Lord Jesus Christ. The day of judgment will show that one of the greatest links in drawing some souls to God, has been the intercessory prayer of friends.

MARK 7:31-37

The first thing that demands our notice in these verses, is ***the mighty miracle that is here recorded.*** We read that they brought unto our Lord "one that was deaf and had an impediment in his speech," and besought Him that He would "put His hand upon him." At once the petition is granted, and the cure is wrought. Speech and hearing are instantaneously given to the man by a word and a touch. "Immediately his ears were opened, and his tongue was loosed, and he spoke plain."

We see but half the instruction of this passage, if we only regard it as an example of our Lord's divine power. It is such an example, beyond doubt, but it is something more than that. We must look further, deeper, and lower than the surface, and we shall find in the passage precious spiritual truths.

Here we are meant to see our Lord's power to heal the spiritually deaf. He can give the chief of sinners a hearing ear. He can make him delight in listening to the very Gospel which he once ridiculed and

despised. Here also we are meant to see our Lord's power to heal the spiritually dumb. He can teach the hardest of transgressors to call upon God. He can put a new song in the mouth of him whose talk was once only of this world. He can make the vilest of men speak of spiritual things, and testify the Gospel of the grace of God.

When Jesus pours forth His Spirit, nothing is impossible. We must never despair of others. We must never regard our own hearts as too bad to be changed. He that healed the deaf and dumb still lives. The cases which society pronounces hopeless, are not incurable if they are brought to Christ.

The second thing which demands our notice in these verses, is ***the peculiar manner in which our Lord thought good to work the miracle here recorded.*** We are told that when the deaf and dumb person was brought to Jesus, "He took him aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spit and touched his tongue; and looking up to heaven, he sighed" and then, and not until then, came the words of commanding power, "Ephphatha, that is, be opened."

There is undoubtedly much that is mysterious in these actions. We know not why they were used. It would have been as easy to our Lord to speak the word, and command health to return at once, as to do what He here did. His reasons for the course He adopted are not recorded. We only know that the result was the same as on other occasions—the man was cured.

But there is one simple lesson to be learned from our Lord's conduct on this occasion. That lesson is, that **Christ was not tied to the use of any one means in doing His works** among men. Sometimes He thought fit to work in one way, sometimes in another. His enemies were never able to say, that unless He employed certain invariable agency He could not work at all.

We see the same thing going on still in the Church of Christ. We see continual proof that **the Lord is not tied to the use of any one means exclusively in conveying grace to the soul.** Sometimes He is pleased to work by the word preached publicly, sometimes by the word read privately. Sometimes He awakens people by sickness and affliction, sometimes by the rebukes or counsel of friends. Sometimes He employs means of grace to turn people out of the way of sin. Sometimes He arrests their attention by some providence, without any means of grace at all. He will not have any means of grace made an idol and exalted, to the disparagement of other means. He will not have any means despised as useless, and neglected as of no value. All are good and valuable. All are in their turn employed for the same great end, the conversion of souls. All are in the hands of Him who "gives not account of His matters," and knows best which to use, in each separate case that He heals.

The last thing which demands our notice in these verses, is ***the remarkable testimony which was borne by those who saw the miracle here recorded.*** They said of our Lord, "He has done all things well!"

It is more than probable that those who said these words were little sensible of their full meaning, when applied to Christ. Like Caiaphas, they "spoke not of themselves." (John 11:51.) But the truth to which they gave utterance is full of deep and unspeakable comfort, and ought to be daily remembered by all true Christians. Let us remember it as we look back over the days past of our lives, from the hour of our conversion. "Our Lord has done all things well." In the first bringing us out of darkness into marvelous light—in humbling us and teaching us our weakness, guilt, and folly—in stripping us of our idols, and choosing all our portions in placing us where we are, and giving us what we have—how well everything has been done! How great the mercy that we have not had our own way!

Let us remember it as we look forward to the days yet to come. We know not what they may be, bright or dark, many or few. But we know that we are in the hands of Him who "does all things well." He will not err in any of His dealings with us. He will take away and give —He will afflict and bereave—He will move and He will settle, with perfect wisdom, at the right time, in the right way. The great Shepherd of the sheep makes no mistakes. He leads every lamb of His flock by the right way to the city of habitation.

We shall never see the full beauty of these words until the resurrection morning. We shall then look back over our lives, and know the meaning of everything that happened from first to last. We shall remember all the way by which we were led, and confess that all was "well done." The why and the wherefore, the causes and the

reasons of everything which now perplexes, will be clear and plain as the sun at noon-day. We shall wonder at our own past blindness, and marvel that we could ever have doubted our Lord's love. "Now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face. Now we know in part, but then shall we know even as we are known." (1 Cor. 13:12.)

Mark – Chap. 8

MARK 8:1-13

Once more we see our Lord feeding a great multitude with a few loaves and fish. He knew the heart of man. He saw the rise of cavilers and skeptics, who would question the reality of the wonderful works He performed. By repeating the mighty miracle here recorded, He stops the mouth of all who are not willfully blind to evidence. Publicly, and before four thousand witnesses, He shows His almighty power a second time.

Let us observe in this passage ***how great is the kindness and compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ.*** He saw around Him a "very great multitude," who had nothing to eat. He knew that the great majority were following Him from no other motive than idle curiosity, and had no claim whatever to be regarded as His disciples. Yet when He saw them hungry and destitute, He pitied them— "I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat."

The feeling heart of our Lord Jesus Christ appears in these words. He has compassion even on those who are not His people—the faithless, the graceless, the followers of this world. He feels tenderly for them, though they know it not. He died for them, though they care little for what He did on the cross. He would receive them

graciously, and pardon them freely, if they would only repent and believe on Him. Let us ever beware of measuring the love of Christ by any human measure. *He has a special love, beyond doubt, for His own believing people*. But He has also a general love of compassion, even for the unthankful and the evil. His love "passes knowledge." (Ephes. 3:19.)

Let us strive to make Jesus our pattern in this, as well as in everything else. Let us be kind, and compassionate, and piteous, and courteous to all men. Let us be ready to do good to all men, and not only to friends and the household of faith. Let us carry into practice our Lord's injunction, "Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you." (Matt. 5:44.) This is to show the mind of Christ. This is the right way to heap coals of fire on an enemy's head, and to melt foes into friends (Rom. 12:20.)

Let us observe, in the second place, from this passage, that ***with Christ nothing is impossible***. The disciples said, "But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?" They might well say so. Without the hand of Him who first made the world out of nothing, the thing could not be. But in the almighty hands of Jesus seven loaves and a few fishes were made sufficient to satisfy four thousand men. Nothing is too hard for the Lord.

We must never allow ourselves to doubt Christ's power to supply the spiritual needs of all His people. He has "bread enough and to spare" for every soul that trusts in Him. Weak, infirm, corrupt, empty as believers feel themselves, let them never despair, while

Jesus lives. In Him there is a boundless store of mercy and grace, laid up for the use of all His believing members, and ready to be bestowed on all who ask in prayer. “It pleased the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell.” (Colos. 1:19.)

Let us never doubt Christ’s providential care for the temporal needs of all His people. He knows their circumstances. He is acquainted with all their necessities. He will never allow them to lack anything that is really for their good. His heart is not changed since He ascended up on high, and sat down on the right hand of God. He still lives who had compassion on the hungry crowd in the wilderness, and supplied their need. How much more, may we suppose, will He supply the need of those who trust Him? He will supply them without fail. Their faith may occasionally be tried. They may sometimes be kept waiting, and be brought very low. But the believer shall never be left entirely destitute. “Bread shall be given him; his water shall be sure.” (Isaiah 33:16.)

Let us observe, in the last place, ***how much sorrow unbelief occasions to our Lord Jesus Christ.*** We are told that when “the Pharisees began to question with Him, seeking of Him a sign from heaven, testing Him, He sighed deeply in His spirit.” There was a deep meaning in that sigh! It came from a heart which mourned over the ruin that these wicked men were bringing on their own souls. Enemies as they were, Jesus could not behold them hardening themselves in unbelief without sorrow.

The feeling which our Lord Jesus Christ here expressed, will always be the feeling of all true Christians. Grief over the sins of others is one leading evidence of true grace. The man who is really converted, will always regard the unconverted with pity and concern. This was the mind of David— "I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved." (Psalm 119:158.) This was the mind of the godly in the days of Ezekiel— "They sighed and cried for the abominations done in the land." (Ezek. 9:4.) This was the mind of Lot— "He vexed his righteous soul with the unlawful deeds" of those around him. (2 Peter 2:8.) This was the mind of Paul— "I have great heaviness and continual sorrow for my brethren." (Rom. 9:2.) In all these cases we see something of the mind of Christ. As the great Head feels, so feel the members. They all grieve when they see sin.

Let us leave the passage with solemn self-inquiry. Do we know anything of likeness to Christ, and fellow-feeling with Him? Do we feel hurt, and pained, and sorrowful, when we see men continuing in sin and unbelief? Do we feel grieved and concerned about the state of the unconverted? These are heart-searching questions, and demand serious consideration. There are few surer marks of an unconverted heart, than carelessness and indifference about the souls of others.

Finally, let us never forget that unbelief and sin are just as great a cause of grief to our Lord now, as they were eighteen hundred years ago. Let us strive and pray that we may not add to that grief by any act or deed of ours. The sin of grieving Christ is one which many commit continually without thought or reflection. He who sighed

over the unbelief of the Pharisees is still unchanged. Can we doubt that when He sees some persisting in unbelief at the present day, He is grieved? From such sin may we be delivered!

MARK 8:14-21

Let us notice ***the solemn warning which our Lord gives to His disciples*** at the beginning of this passage. He says, "Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the leaven of Herod."

We are not left to conjecture the meaning of this warning. This is made clear by the parallel passage in Matthew's Gospel. We there read that Jesus did not mean the leaven of "bread," but the leaven of "doctrine." The self-righteousness and formalism of the Pharisees—the worldliness and skepticism of the courtiers of Herod, were the object of our Lord's caution. Against both He bids His disciples be on their guard.

Such warnings are of deep importance. It would be well for the Church of Christ, if they had been more remembered. The assaults of persecution from without have never done half so much harm to the Church, as the rise of false doctrines within. False prophets and false teachers within the camp have done far more mischief in Christendom than all the bloody persecutions of the emperors of Rome. The sword of the foe has never done such damage to the cause of truth as the tongue and the pen.

The doctrines which our Lord specifies, are precisely those which have always been found to inflict most injury on the cause of Christianity. Formalism on the one hand, and skepticism on the other, have been chronic diseases in the professing Church of Christ. In every age multitudes of Christians have been infected by them. In every age men need to watch against them, and be on their guard.

The expression used by our Lord in speaking of false doctrine is singularly forcible and appropriate. He calls it "leaven." No word more suitable could have been employed. It exactly describes the small beginnings of false doctrine—the subtle quiet way in which it insensibly pervades a man's religion—the deadly power with which it changes the whole character of his Christianity. Here, in fact, lies the great danger of false doctrine. If it approached us under its true colors, it would do little harm. The great secret of its success is its subtlety and likeness to truth. Every error in religion has been said to be a truth abused.

Let us often "examine ourselves whether we be in the faith," and beware of "leaven." Let us no more trifle with a little false doctrine, than we would trifle with a little immorality or a little lie. Once admit it into our hearts, and we never know how far it may lead us astray. The beginning of departure from the pure truth is like the letting out of waters—first a drop, and at last a torrent. A little leaven leavens the whole lump. (Gal. 5:9.)

Let us notice ***the dull understanding of the disciples***, when our Lord gave the warning of this passage. They thought that the

“leaven” of which He spoke must be the leaven of bread. It never struck them that He was speaking of doctrine. They drew from Him the sharp reproof— “Perceive you not yet, neither understand? are your hearts hardened? How is it that you do not understand?” Believers, converted, renewed, as the disciples were, they were still dull of apprehension in spiritual things. Their eyes were still dim, and their perception slow in the matters of the kingdom of God.

We shall find it useful to ourselves to remember what is here recorded of the disciples. It may help to correct the high thoughts which we are apt to entertain of our own wisdom, and to keep us humble and lowly-minded. We must not fancy that we know everything as soon as we are converted. Our knowledge, like all our graces, is always imperfect, and never so far from perfection as at our first beginning in the service of Christ. There is more ignorance in our hearts than we are at all aware of. “If any man think that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know.” (1 Cor. 8:2.)

Above all, we shall find it useful to remember what is here recorded, in dealing with young Christians. We must not expect perfection in a new convert. We must not set him down as graceless and godless and a false professor, because at first he sees but half the truth and commits many mistakes. His heart may be right in the sight of God, and yet, like the disciples, he may be very slow of understanding in the things of the Spirit. We must bear with him patiently, and not cast him aside. We must give him time to grow in

grace and knowledge, and his latter end may find him ripe in wisdom, like Peter and John. It is a blessed thought that Jesus, our Master in heaven, despises none of His people. Incredible and blameworthy as their slowness to learn undoubtedly is, His patience never gives way. He goes on teaching them, "line upon line, precept upon precept." Let us do likewise. Let it be a rule with us never to despise the weakness and dullness of young Christians. Wherever we see a spark of true grace, however dim and mixed with infirmity, let us be helpful and kind. Let us do as we would be done by.

MARK 8:22-26

We do not know the reason of the peculiar means employed by our Lord Jesus Christ, in working the miracle recorded in these verses. We see a blind man miraculously healed. We know that a word from our Lord's mouth, or a touch of His hand would have been sufficient to effect a cure. But we see Jesus taking this blind man by the hand—leading him out of the town—spitting on his eyes —putting His hands on him, and then, and not until then, restoring his sight. And the meaning of all these actions, the passage before us leaves entirely unexplained.

But it is well to remember, in reading passages of this kind, that ***the Lord is not tied to the use of any one means***. In the conversion of men's souls there are diversities of operation, but it is the same Spirit which converts. So also in the healing of men's bodies there were varieties of agency employed by our Lord, but it was the

same divine power that effected the cure. In all His works God is a sovereign. He gives no account of any of His matters.

One thing in the passage demands our special observation. That thing is ***the gradual nature of the cure which our Lord performed on this blind man.*** He did not deliver him from his blindness at once, but by degrees. He might have done it in a moment, but He chose to do it step by step. First the blind man said that he only saw "men as trees walking." Afterwards his eyesight was restored completely, and he "saw every man clearly." In this respect the miracle stands entirely alone.

We need hardly doubt that this gradual cure was meant to be an emblem of spiritual things. We may be sure that there was a deep meaning in every word and work of our Lord's earthly ministry, and here, as in other places, we shall find a useful lesson.

Let us see then in this gradual restoration to sight, ***a vivid illustration of the manner in which the Spirit frequently works in the conversion of souls.*** We are all naturally blind and ignorant in the matters which concern our souls. Conversion is an illumination, a change from darkness to light, from blindness to seeing the kingdom of God. Yet few converted people see things distinctly at first. The nature and proportion of doctrines, practices, and ordinances of the Gospel are dimly seen by them, and imperfectly understood. They are like the man before us, who at first saw men as trees walking. Their vision is dazzled and unaccustomed to the new world into which they have been introduced. It is not until

the work of the Spirit has become deeper and their experience been somewhat matured, that they see all things clearly, and give to each part of religion its proper place. This is the history of thousands of God's children. They begin with seeing men as trees walking they end with seeing all clearly. Happy is he who has learned this lesson well, and is humble and distrustful of his own judgment.

Finally, let us see in the gradual cure of this blind man, ***a striking picture of the present position of Christ's believing people in the world, compared with that which is to come.*** We see in part and know in part in the present dispensation. We are like those that travel by night. We know not the meaning of much that is passing around us. In the providential dealings of God with His children, and in the conduct of many of God's saints, we see much that we cannot understand—and cannot alter. In short, we are like him that saw "men as trees walking."

But let us look forward and take comfort. The time comes when we shall see all "clearly." The night is far spent. The day is at hand. Let us be content to wait, and watch, and work, and pray. When the day of the Lord comes, our spiritual eyesight will be perfected. We shall see as we have been seen, and know as we have been known.

MARK 8:27-33

The circumstances here recorded are of great importance. They took place during a journey, and arose out of a conversation "by the way." Happy are those journeys, in which time is not wasted on

trifles, but redeemed as far as possible for the consideration of serious things.

Let us observe ***the variety of opinions about Christ***, which prevailed among the Jews. Some said that He was John the Baptist—some Elijah—and others one of the prophets. In short every kind of opinion appears to have been current, excepting that one which was true.

We may see the same thing on every side at the present day. Christ and his Gospel are just as little understood in reality, and are the subject of just as many different opinions as they were eighteen hundred years ago. Many know the name of Christ, acknowledge Him as one who came into the world to save sinners, and regularly worship in buildings set apart for His service. Few thoroughly realize that He is very God—the one Mediator—the one High Priest—the only source of life and peace—their own Shepherd and their own Friend. Vague ideas about Christ are still very common. Intelligent experimental acquaintance with Christ is still very rare. May we never rest until we can say of Christ, "My beloved is mine and I am His." (Cant. 2:16.) This is saving knowledge. This is life eternal.

Let us observe ***the good confession of faith which the apostle Peter witnessed.*** He replied to our Lord's question, "Whom do you say that I am?" "You are the Christ."

This was a noble answer, when the circumstances under which it was made are duly considered. It was made when Jesus was poor in

condition, without honor, majesty, wealth, or power. It was made when the heads of the Jewish nation, both in church and state, refused to receive Jesus as the Messiah. Yet even then Simon Peter says, “You are the Christ.” His strong faith was not stumbled by our Lord’s poverty and low estate. His confidence was not shaken by the opposition of Scribes and Pharisees, and the contempt of rulers and priests. None of these things moved Simon Peter. He believed that He whom he followed, Jesus of Nazareth, was the promised Savior, the true Prophet greater than Moses, the long-predicted Messiah. He declared it boldly and unhesitatingly, as the creed of himself and his few companions— “You are the Christ.”

There is much that we may profitably learn from Peter’s conduct on this occasion. Erring and unstable as he sometimes was—the faith he exhibited, in the passage now before us, is well worthy of imitation. Such bold confessions as his, are the truest evidence of living faith, and are required in every age, if men will prove themselves to be Christ’s disciples. We too must be ready to confess Christ, even as Peter did. We shall never find our Master and His doctrine popular. We must be prepared to confess Him, with few on our side, and many against us. But let us take courage and walk in Peter’s steps, and we shall not fail of receiving Peter’s reward. Jesus takes notice of those who confess Him before men, and will one day confess them as His servants before an assembled world.

Let us observe ***the full declaration which our Lord makes of His own coming death and resurrection.*** We read that “He

began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again."

The events here announced must have sounded strange to the disciples. To be told that their beloved Master, after all His mighty works, would soon be put to death, must have been heavy tidings and past their understanding. But the words which convey the announcement are scarcely less remarkable than the event— "He *must* suffer—He *must* be killed—He *must* rise again."

Why did our Lord say "must?" Did He mean that He was unable to escape suffering—that He must die by compulsion of a stronger power than His own? Impossible. This could not have been His meaning. Did He mean that He must die to give a great example to the world of self-sacrifice and self-denial, and that this, and this alone, made His death necessary? Once more it may be replied, "Impossible." There is a far deeper meaning in the word "must" suffer and be killed. He meant that *His death and passion were necessary in order to make atonement for man's sin.* Without shedding His blood there could be no remission. Without the sacrifice of His body on the cross, there could be no satisfaction to God's holy law. He "must" suffer to make reconciliation for iniquity. He "must" die, because without His death as a propitiatory offering, sinners could never have life. He "must" suffer, because without His vicarious sufferings, our sins could never be taken away. In a word,

He “must” be delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification.

Here is the center truth of the Bible. Let us never forget that. All other truths compared to this are of secondary importance. Whatever views we hold of religious truth, let us see that we have a firm grasp upon the atoning efficacy of Christ’s death. Let the truth so often proclaimed by our Lord to His disciples, and so diligently taught by the disciples to the world, be the foundation truth in our Christianity. In life and in death, in health and in sickness, let us lean all our weight on this mighty fact—that though we have sinned, Christ has died for sinners—and that though we deserve nothing, Christ has suffered on the cross for us, and by that suffering purchased heaven for all who believe in Him.

Finally, let us observe in this passage ***the strange mixture of grace and infirmity which may be found in the heart of a true Christian.*** We see that very Peter who had just witnessed so noble a confession, presuming to rebuke his Master because He spoke of suffering and dying. We see him drawing down on himself the sharpest rebuke which ever fell from our Lord’s lips during His earthly ministry— “Get behind me, Satan! You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.”

We have here a humbling proof that the best of saints is a poor fallible creature. Here was *ignorance* in Simon Peter. He did not understand the necessity of our Lord’s death, and would have actually prevented His sacrifice on the cross. Here was *self-conceit* in

Simon Peter. He thought he knew what was right and fitting for his Master better than his Master Himself, and actually undertook to show the Messiah a more excellent way. And last, but not least, Simon Peter did it all with the *best intentions!* He meant well. His motives were pure. But zeal and earnestness are no excuse for error. A man may mean well and yet fall into tremendous mistakes.

Let us learn humility from the facts here recorded. Let us beware of being puffed up with our own spiritual attainments, or exalted by the praise of others. Let us never think that we know everything and are not likely to err. We see that it is but a little step from making a good confession to being a "Satan" in Christ's way. Let us pray daily, "Hold me up—keep me—teach me—let me not err."

Lastly, let us learn charity towards others from the facts here recorded. Let us not be in a hurry to cast off our brother as graceless because of errors and mistakes. Let us remember that his heart may be right in the sight of God, like Peter's, though like Peter he may for a time turn aside. Rather let us call to mind Paul's advice, and act upon it. "If a man be overtaken in a fault, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness; considering yourself, lest you also be tempted." (Gal. 6:1.)

MARK 8:34-38

The words of our Lord Jesus Christ in this passage are peculiarly weighty and solemn. They were spoken to correct the mistaken views of His disciples, as to the nature of His kingdom. But they contain

truths of the deepest importance to Christians in every age of the Church. The whole passage is one which should often form the subject of private meditation.

We learn, for one thing, from these verses, ***the absolute necessity of self-denial, if we would be Christ's disciples, and be saved.*** What says our Lord? "Whoever will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."

Salvation is undoubtedly all of grace. It is offered freely in the Gospel to the chief of sinners, without money and without price. "By grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God—not of works, lest any man should boast." (Ephes. 2:8, 9.) But all who accept this great salvation, must prove the reality of their faith by carrying the cross after Christ. They must not think to enter heaven without trouble, pain, suffering, and conflict on earth. They must be content to take up the cross of DOCTRINE, and the cross of PRACTICE—the cross of holding a faith which the world despises, and the cross of living a life which the world ridicules as too strict, and righteous overmuch. They must be willing to crucify the flesh, to mortify the deeds of the body, to fight daily with the devil, to come out from the world and to lose their lives, if needful, for Christ's sake and the Gospel's. These are hard sayings, but they admit of no evasion. The words of our Lord are plain and unmistakable. If we will not carry the cross, we shall never wear the crown.

Let us not be deterred from Christ's service by fear of the cross. Heavy as that cross may seem, Jesus will give us grace to bear it. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Phil. 4:13.) Thousands and tens of thousands have borne it before us, and have found Christ's yoke easy, and Christ's burden light. No good thing on earth was ever attained without trouble. We cannot surely expect that without trouble we can enter the kingdom of God. Let us go forward boldly, and allow no difficulty to keep us back. The cross by the way is but for a few years. The glory at the end is for evermore.

Let us often ask ourselves whether our Christianity costs us anything? Does it entail any sacrifice? Has it the true stamp of heaven? Does it carry with it any cross? If not, we may well tremble and be afraid. We have everything to learn. **A religion which costs nothing, is worth nothing.** It will do us no good in the life that now is. It will lead to no salvation in the life to come.

We learn, for another thing, from these verses, ***the unspeakable value of the soul.*** What says our Lord? "What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" These words were meant to stir us up to exertion and self-denial. They ought to ring in our ears like a trumpet, every morning when we rise from our beds, and every night when we lie down. May they be deeply engraved in our memories, and never effaced by the devil and the world!

We have all souls that will live for evermore. Whether we know it or not, we all carry about with us something which will live on when

our bodies are moldering in the grave. We have all souls, for which we shall have to give account to God. It is an dreadful thought, when we consider how little attention most men give to anything except this world. But it is true.

Any man may lose his own soul. He cannot save it. Christ alone can do that. But he can lose it, and that in many different ways. He may murder it, by loving gin and cleaving to the world. He may poison it by choosing a religion of lies, and believing man-made superstitions. He may starve it, by neglecting all means of grace, and refusing to receive into his heart the Gospel. Many are the ways that lead to the pit. Whatever way a man takes, he, and he alone, is accountable for it. Weak, corrupt, fallen, impotent as human nature is, man has a mighty power of destroying, ruining, and losing his own soul.

The whole world cannot make up to a man the loss of his soul. The possession of all the treasures that the world contains, would not compensate for eternal ruin. They would not satisfy us, and make us happy while we had them. They could only be enjoyed for a few years, at best, and must then be left for evermore. Of all unprofitable and foolish bargains that man can make, the worst is that of giving up his soul's salvation for the sake of this present world. It is a bargain of which thousands, like Esau, who sold his birth-right for a mess of pottage, have repented—but many, unhappily, like Esau, have repented too late.

Let these sayings of our Lord sink deep into our hearts. Words are inadequate to express their importance. May we remember them in the hour of temptation, when the soul seems a small and unimportant thing, and the world seems very bright and great. May we remember them in the hour of persecution, when we are tried by the fear of man, and half inclined to forsake Christ. In hours like these, let us call to mind this mighty question of our Lord, and repeat it to ourselves, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

We learn, in the last place, from these verses, ***the great danger of being ashamed of Christ.*** What says our Lord? "Whoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."

When can it be said of any one, that he is ashamed of Christ? We are guilty of it, when we are ashamed of letting people see that we believe and love the doctrines of Christ, that we desire to live according to the commandment of Christ, and that we wish to be reckoned among the people of Christ. Christ's doctrine, laws, and people were never popular, and never will be. The man who boldly confesses that he loves them, is sure to bring on himself ridicule and persecution. Whoever shrinks from this confession from fear of this ridicule and persecution, is ashamed of Christ, and comes under the sentence of the passage before us.

Perhaps there are few of our Lord's sayings which are more condemning than this. "The fear of man" does indeed "bring a snare." (Prov. 29:25.) There are thousands of men who would face a lion, or storm a breach, if duty called them, and fear nothing—and yet would be ashamed of being thought "religious" and would not dare to avow that they desired to please Christ rather than man. Amazing indeed is the power of ridicule! Incredible is the bondage in which men live to the opinion of the world!

Let us all pray daily for faith and courage to confess Christ before men. Of sin, or worldliness, or unbelief, we may well be ashamed. We ought never to be ashamed of Him who died for us on the cross. In spite of laughter, mockery, and hard words, let us boldly avow that we serve Christ. Let us often look forward to the day of His second coming, and remember what He says in this place. Better a thousand times confess Christ now, and be despised by man, than be disowned by Christ before His Father in the day of judgment.

Mark – Chap. 9

MARK 9:1-13

The connection of this passage with the end of the last chapter ought never to be overlooked. Our Lord had been speaking of His own coming death and passion—of the necessity of self-denial, if men would be His disciples—of the need of losing our lives, if we

would have them saved. But in the same breath he goes on to speak of His future kingdom and glory. He takes off the edge of His "hard sayings," by promising a sight of that glory to some of those who heard Him. And in the history of the transfiguration, which is here recorded, we see that promise fulfilled.

The first thing which demands our notice in these verses, is ***the marvelous vision they contain of the glory which Christ and His people shall have at His second coming.***

There can be no doubt that this was one of the principal purposes of the transfiguration. It was meant to teach the disciples, that though their Lord was lowly and poor in appearance now, He would one day appear in such royal majesty as became the Son of God. It was meant to teach those who when their Master came the second time, His saints, like Moses and Elijah, would appear with Him. It was meant to remind them, that though reviled and persecuted now, because they belonged to Christ, they would one day be clothed with honor, and be partakers of their Master's glory.

We have reason to thank God for this vision. We are often tempted to give up Christ's service, because of the cross and affliction which it entails. We see few with us, and many against us. We find our names cast out as evil, and all manner of evil said of us, because we believe and love the Gospel. Year after year we see our companions in Christ's service removed by death, and we feel as if we knew little about them, except that they are gone to an unknown world, and that we are left alone. All these things are trying to flesh

and blood. No wonder that the faith of believers sometimes languishes, and their eyes fail while they look for their hope.

Let us see in the story of the transfiguration, a remedy for such doubting thoughts as these. The vision of the holy mount is a gracious pledge that glorious things are in store for the people of God. Their crucified Savior shall come again in power and great glory. His saints shall all come with Him, and are in safe keeping until that happy day. We may wait patiently. “When Christ, who is our life shall appear, then shall you also appear with Him in glory.” (Colos. 3:4.)

The second thing which demands our notice in this passage, is ***the strong expression of the apostle Peter, when he saw his Lord transfigured.*** “Master,” he said, “it is good for us to be here.”

No doubt there was much in this saying, which cannot be commended. It showed an ignorance of the purpose for which Jesus came into the world, to suffer and to die. It showed a forgetfulness of his brethren, who were not with him, and of the dark world which so much needed his Master’s presence. Above all, the proposal which he made at the same time to “build three tabernacles” for Moses, Elijah, and Christ, showed a low view of his Master’s dignity, and implied that he did not know that a greater than Moses and Elijah was there. In all these respects the apostle’s exclamation is not to be praised, but to be blamed.

But having said this, let us not fail to remark what joy and happiness this glorious vision conferred on this warm-hearted disciple. Let us see in his fervent cry "It is good to be here," what comfort and consolation the sight of glory can give to a true believer. Let us look forward, and try to form some idea of the pleasure which the saints shall experience, when they shall at last meet the Lord Jesus at His second coming, and meet to part no more. A vision of a few minutes was sufficient to warm and stir Peter's heart. The sight of two saints in glory was so cheering and quickening, that he would gladly have enjoyed more of it. What then shall we say, when we see our Lord appear at the last day with all His saints? What shall we say, when we ourselves are allowed to share in His glory, and join the happy company, and feel that we shall go out no more from the joy of our Lord? These are questions that no man can answer. The happiness of that great day of gathering together is one that we cannot now conceive. The feelings of which Peter had a little foretaste, will then be ours in full experience. We shall all say with one heart and one voice, when we see Christ and all His saints, "It is good to be here."

The last thing which demands our notice in this passage is ***the distinct testimony which it bears to Christ's office and dignity, as the promised Messiah.*** We see this testimony first in the appearance of Moses and Elijah, the representatives of the law and the prophets. They appear as witnesses that Jesus is He of whom they spoke in old times, and of whom they wrote that He would come. They disappear after a few minutes, and leave Jesus alone, as

though they would show that they were only witnesses, and that our Master having come, the servants resign to Him the chief place. We see this testimony, secondly, in the miraculous voice from heaven, saying, “This is my beloved Son—hear Him.” The same voice of God the Father, which was heard at our Lord’s baptism, was heard once more at His transfiguration. On both occasions there was the same solemn declaration, “This is my beloved Son.” On this last occasion, there was an addition of two most important words, “Hear Him.”

The whole conclusion of the vision was calculated to leave a lasting impression on the minds of the three disciples. It taught them in the most striking manner, that their Lord was far above them and the prophets, as the master of the house is above the servants, and that they must in all things believe, follow, obey, trust, and hear Him.

Finally, the last words of the voice from heaven, are words that should be ever before the minds of all true Christians. They should *“hear Christ.”* He is the great Teacher; those who would be wise must learn of Him. He is the light of the world—those who would not err must follow Him. He is the Head of the Church—those who would be living members of His mystical body must ever look to Him. The grand question that concerns us all is not so much what man says, or ministers say—what the Church says, or what councils say—but what says Christ? Him let us hear. In Him let us abide. On him let us lean. To Him let us look. He and He only will never fail us, never disappoint us, and never lead us astray. Happy are they who know experimentally the meaning of the text, “my sheep hear my voice,

and I know them, and they follow me—and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." (John 10:27, 28.)

MARK 9:14-29

The contrast between these verses and those which precede them in the chapter is very striking. We pass from the mount of transfiguration to a melancholy history of the work of the devil. We come down from the vision of glory, to a conflict with Satanic possession. We change the blessed company of Moses and Elijah, for the crude communion of unbelieving Scribes. We leave the foretaste of millennial glory, and the solemn voice of God the Father testifying to God the Son, and return once more to a scene of pain, weakness, and misery—a boy in agony of body, a father in deep distress, and a little band of feeble disciples restrained by Satan's power, and unable to give relief. The contrast, we must all feel, is very great. Yet it is but a faint emblem of the change of scene that Jesus voluntarily undertook to witness, when He first laid aside His glory and came into the world. And it is after all a vivid picture of the life of all true Christians. With them, as with their Master, work, conflict, and scenes of weakness and sorrow will always be the rule. With them too, visions of glory, foretastes of heaven, seasons on the mount, will always be the exception.

Let us learn from these verses, ***how dependent Christ's disciples are on the company and help of their Master.***

We see this truth brought out in a striking manner in the scene which meets our Lord's eyes, when He came down from the mount. Like Moses, when he came down from Mount Sinai, He finds his little flock in confusion. He sees His nine apostles beset by a party of malicious Scribes, and baffled in an attempt to heal one who had been brought to them possessed with a devil. The very same disciples who a short time before had done many miracles and "cast out many devils," had now met with a case too hard for them. They were learning by humbling experience the great lesson, "without me you can do nothing." (John 15:5.)—It was a useful lesson, no doubt, and over-ruled to their spiritual good. It would probably be remembered all the days of their lives. The things that we learn by smarting experience, abide in our memories, while truths heard with the ear are often forgotten. But we may be sure it was a bitter lesson at the time. We do not like to learn that we can do nothing without Christ.

We need not look far to see many illustrations of this truth in the history of Christ's people in every age. The very men who at one time have done great exploits in the cause of the Gospel, at another time have failed entirely, and proved weak and unstable as water. The temporary recantations of Cranmer and Jewell are striking examples. The holiest and best of Christians has nothing to glory of. His strength is not his own. He has nothing but what he has received. He has only to provoke the Lord to leave him for a season, and he will soon discover that his power is gone. Like Samson, when his hair was shorn, he is weak as any other man.

Let us learn a lesson of humility from the failure of the disciples. Let us strive to realize every day our need of the grace and presence of Christ. With Him we may do all things. Without Him we can do nothing at all. With Him we may overcome the greatest temptations. Without Him the least may overcome us. Let our cry be every morning, "leave us not to ourselves—we know not what a day may bring forth—if your presence does not go with us we cannot go up."

Let us learn, in the second place, from these verses, ***how early in life we are liable to be injured by Satan.*** We read a fearful description of the miseries inflicted by Satan on the young man, whose case is here recorded. And we are told that he had been under this dreadful visitation from his very infancy. It came to him, "from childhood."

There is a lesson of deep importance here which we must not overlook. We must labor to do good to our children even from their earliest years. If Satan begins so early to do them harm, we must not be behind him in diligence to lead them to God. How soon in life a child becomes responsible and accountable, is a difficult question to solve. Perhaps far sooner than many of us suppose. One thing, at all events, is very clear—it is never too soon to strive and pray for the salvation of the souls of children—never too soon to speak to them as moral beings, and tell them of God, and Christ, and right, and wrong. The devil, we may be quite sure, loses no time in endeavoring to influence the minds of young people. He begins with them even "from childhood." Let us work hard to counteract him. If young

hearts can be filled by Satan, they can also be filled with the Spirit of God.

Let us learn, in the third place, from these verses, ***how faith and unbelief can be mixed together in the same heart.*** The words of the child's father set this truth before us in a touching way. "Lord," he cried, "I believe; help my unbelief."

We see in those words a vivid picture of the heart of many a true Christian. Few indeed are to be found among believers, in whom trust and doubt, hope and fear, do not exist side by side. Nothing is perfect in a child of God, so long as he is in the body. His knowledge, and love, and humility, are all more or less defective, and mingled with corruption. And as it is with his other graces, so it is with his faith. He believes, and yet has about him a remainder of unbelief.

What shall we do with our FAITH? We must *use it*. Weak, trembling, doubting, feeble as it may be, we must use it. We must not wait until it is great, perfect, and mighty, but like the man before us, turn it to account, and hope that one day it will be more strong. "Lord," he said, "I believe."

What shall we do with our UNBELIEF? We must *resist it*, and pray against it. We must not allow it to keep us back from Christ. We must take it to Christ, as we take all other sins and infirmities, and cry to Him for deliverance. Like the man before us, we must cry, "Lord, help my unbelief."

These are experimental truths. Happy are they who know something of them. The world is ignorant of them. Faith and unbelief, doubts and fears, are all foolishness to the natural man. But let the true Christian study these things well, and thoroughly understand them. It is of the utmost importance to our comfort to know, that a true believer may be known by his inward warfare, as well as by his inward peace.

Let us mark, in the last place, ***the complete dominion which our Lord exercises over Satan and all his agents.*** The spirit who was too strong for the disciples, is at once cast out by the Master. He speaks with mighty authority, and Satan at once is obliged to obey, "I charge you, come out of him, and enter no more into him."

We may leave the passage with comfortable feelings. Greater is He that is for us than all those who are against us. Satan is strong, busy, active, malicious. But Jesus is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him—from the devil, as well as from sin—from the devil, as well as from the world. Let us possess our souls in patience. Jesus still lives, and will not let Satan pluck us out of His hand. Jesus still lives, and will soon come again to deliver us entirely from the fiery darts of the wicked one. The great chain is prepared. (Rev. 20:1.) Satan shall one day be bound. "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under our feet shortly." (Rom. 16:20.)

MARK 9:30-37

Let us mark, in these verses, ***our Lord's renewed announcement of His own coming, death, and resurrection.*** "He taught His disciples, and said unto them, The Son of man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill Him; and after He is killed, he shall rise the third day."

The dullness of the disciples in spiritual things appears once more, as soon as this announcement was made. There was good in the tidings as well as seeming evil—sweet as well as bitter—life as well as death—the resurrection as well as the cross. But it was all darkness to the bewildered twelve. "They did not understand what He was saying, and were afraid to ask." Their minds were still full of their mistaken ideas of their Master's reign upon earth. They thought that His earthly kingdom was immediately to appear. Never are we so slow to understand, as when prejudice and pre-conceived opinions darken our eyes.

The immense importance of our Lord's death and resurrection comes out strongly in this fresh announcement which He makes. It is not for nothing that He reminds us again that He must die. He would have us know that His death was the great end for which He came into the world. He would remind us that by that death the great problem was to be solved—how God could be just, and yet justify sinners. He did not come upon earth merely to teach, and preach, and work miracles. He came to make satisfaction for sin, by His own blood and suffering on the cross. Let us never forget this. The incarnation, and example, and words of Christ, are all of deep

importance. But the grand object which demands our notice in the history of His earthly ministry, is His death on Calvary.

Let us mark, in the second place, in these verses, ***the ambition and love of pre-eminence which the apostles exhibited.*** "By the way they disputed among themselves who was the greatest."

How strange this sounds! Who would have thought that a few fishermen and publicans could have been overcome by envious rivalry, and the desire of supremacy? Who would have expected that poor men, who had given up all for Christ's sake, would have been troubled by strife and dissension, as to the place and precedence which each one deserved? Yet so it is. The fact is recorded for our learning. The Holy Spirit has caused it to be written down for the perpetual use of Christ's Church. Let us take care that it is not written in vain.

It is an dreadful fact, whether we like to allow it or not, that pride is one of the commonest sins which beset human nature. We are all born Pharisees. We all naturally think far better of ourselves than we ought. We all naturally imagine that we deserve something better than we have. It is an old sin. It began in the garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve thought they had not got everything that their merits deserved. It is a subtle sin. It rules and reigns in many a heart without being detected, and can even wear the garb of humility. It is a most soul ruining sin. It prevents repentance, keeps men back from Christ—checks brotherly love, and nips in the bud spiritual desires.

Let us watch against it, and be on our guard. Of all garments, none is so graceful, none wears so well, and none is so rare, as true humility.

Let us mark, in the third place, ***the peculiar standard of true greatness which our Lord sets before His disciples.*** He says to them, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all."

These words are deeply instructive. They show us that the maxims of the world are directly contrary to the mind of Christ. The world's idea of greatness is to rule, but Christian greatness consists in serving. The world's ambition is to receive honor and attention, but the desire of the Christian should be to give rather than receive, and to attend on others rather than be attended on himself. In short, the man who lays himself out most to serve his fellow men, and to be useful in his day and generation, is the greatest man in the eyes of Christ.

Let us strive to make a practical use of this heart-searching maxim. Let us seek to do good to our fellow men, and to mortify that self-pleasing and self-indulgence, to which we are all so prone. Is there any service that we can render to our fellow Christians? Is there any kindness that we can do them, to help them and promote their happiness? If there is, let us do it without delay. Well would it be for Christendom, if empty boasts of churchmanship and orthodoxy were less frequent, and practical attention to our Lord's words in this passage more common. The men who are willing to be last of all, and servants of all, for Christ's sake, are always few. Yet these are the

men who do good, break down prejudices, convince infidels that Christianity is a reality, and shake the world.

Let us mark, in the last place, ***what encouragement our Lord gives us to show kindness to the least and lowest who believe in His name.*** He teaches this lesson in a very touching manner; He took a child in His arms, and said to His disciples, “Whoever shall receive one of such child in my name, receives me, and whoever shall receive me, receives Him that sent me.”

The principle here laid down is a continuation of that which we have just considered. It is one which is foolishness to the natural man. Flesh and blood can see no other way to greatness than crowns, and rank, and wealth, and high position in the world. The Son of God declares that the way lies in devoting ourselves to the care of the weakest and lowest of His flock. He enforces His declaration by marvelous words, which are often read and heard without thought. He tells us that to “receive one child in His name, is to receive Christ, and to receive Christ is to receive God.”

There is rich encouragement here for all who devote themselves to the charitable work of doing good to neglected souls. There is encouragement for everyone who labors to restore the outcast to a place in society—to raise the fallen—to gather together the ragged children, whom no man cares for—to pluck the worst of characters from a life of sin, like brands from the burning and to bring the wanderers home. Let all such take comfort when they read these

words. Their work may often be hard and discouraging. They may be mocked, ridiculed, and held up to scorn by the world. But let them know that the Son of God marks all they do, and is well pleased. Whatever the world may think, these are they whom Jesus will delight to honor at the last day.

MARK 9:38-50

We see in these verses, ***the mind of Christ on the great subject of TOLERATION in religion***. The apostle John said to Jesus, "Teacher, we saw a man using your name to cast out demons, but we told him to stop because he isn't one of our group."

The man was doing a good work without doubt. He was warring on the same side as the apostles, beyond question. But this did not satisfy John. He did not work in the company of the apostles. He did not fight in line with them. And therefore John had opposed him. But let us hear now what the great Head of the church decides! "Don't stop him!" Jesus said. "No one who performs miracles in my name will soon be able to speak evil of me. Anyone who is not against us is for us."

Here is a golden rule indeed, and one that human nature severely needs, and has too often forgotten. Men of all branches of Christ's Church are apt to think that no good can be done in the world, unless it is done by their own party and denomination. They are so narrow-minded, that they cannot conceive the possibility of working on any other pattern but that which they follow. They make an idol of their

own peculiar ecclesiastical machinery, and can see no merit in any other. They are like him who cried when Eldad and Medad prophesied in the camp, “Moses, my master, make them stop!” (Num. 11:28.)

To this intolerant spirit we owe some of the blackest pages of Church history. Christians have repeatedly persecuted Christians for no better reason than that which is here given by John. They have practically proclaimed to their brethren, “you shall either follow us, or not work for Christ at all.”

Let us be on our guard against this feeling. It is only too near the surface of all our hearts. Let us study to realize that liberal, tolerant spirit which Jesus here recommends, and be thankful for good works wheresoever and by whoever done. Let us beware of the slightest inclination to stop and check others, merely because they do not choose to adopt our plans, or work by our side. We may think our fellow Christians mistaken in some points. We may fancy that more would be done for Christ, if they would join us, and if all worked in the same way. We may see many evils arising from religious dissensions and divisions. But all this must not prevent us rejoicing if the works of the devil are destroyed and souls are saved.

Is our neighbor warring against Satan? Is he really trying to labor for Christ? This is the grand question. Better a thousand times that the work should be done by other hands than not done at all. Happy is he who knows something of the spirit of Moses, when he said, “I wish that all the Lord’s people were prophets, and that the Lord

would put his Spirit upon them all!" and of Paul, when he says, "If Christ is preached, I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice." (Num. 11:29; Phil. 1:18.)

We see, for another thing, in these verses, ***the need of giving up anything that stands between us and the salvation of our souls.*** The "hand" and the "foot" are to be cut off, and the "eye" to be plucked out, if they are occasions of falling. The things that are dear to us as eye, foot, or hand, are to be cast off and given up if they injure our souls, whatever pain the sacrifice may cost us.

This is a rule that sounds stern and harsh at first sight. But our loving Master did not give the rule without cause. Compliance with it is absolutely necessary, since neglect of it is the sure way to hell. Our bodily senses are the channels through which many of our most formidable temptations approach us. Our bodily members are ready instruments of evil, but slow to that which is good. The eye, the hand, and the foot are good servants, when under right direction. But they need daily watching, lest they lead us into sin.

Let us resolve by God's grace to make a practical use of our Lord's solemn injunction in this place. Let us regard it as the advice of a wise physician, the counsel of a tender father, the warning of a faithful friend. However men may ridicule us for our strictness and preciseness, let us habitually "crucify our flesh with its affections and lusts." Let us deny ourselves any enjoyment, rather than incur peril of sinning against God. Let us walk in Job's steps—he says, "I made a covenant with my eyes." (Job 31:1.) Let us remember Paul—he says,

"I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast away." (1 Cor. 9:27.)

We see, in the last place, in these verses, ***the reality, awfulness, and eternity of future punishment.*** Three times the Lord Jesus speaks of "hell." Three times He mentions the "worm that never dies." Three times He says that "the fire is not quenched."

These are dreadful expressions. They call for reflection rather than exposition. They should be pondered, considered, and remembered by all professing Christians. It matters little whether we regard them as figurative and emblematic. If they are so, one thing at least is very clear. The worm and the fire are emblems of real things. There is a real hell, and that hell is eternal.

There is no mercy in keeping back from men the subject of hell. Fearful and tremendous as it is, it ought to be pressed on all, as one of the great truths of Christianity. Our loving Savior speaks frequently of it. The apostle John, in the book of Revelation, often describes it. The servants of God in these days must not be ashamed of confessing their belief in it. Were there no boundless mercy in Christ for all that believe in Him, we might well shrink from the dreadful topic. Were there no precious blood of Christ able to cleanse away all sin, we might well keep silence about the wrath to come. But there is mercy for all who ask in Christ's name. There is a fountain open for all sin. Let us then boldly and unhesitatingly maintain that there is a hell, and beseech men to flee from it, before it be too late.

“Knowing the terrors of the Lord,” the worm, and the fire, let us “persuade men.” (2 Cor. 5:11.) It is not possible to say too much about Christ. But it is quite possible to say too little about hell.

Let the concluding words of our Lord ring in our ears, as we leave the passage— “Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another.” Let us make sure that we have in our hearts the saving grace of the Holy Spirit, sanctifying, purifying, preserving from corruption, our whole inward man. Let us watch the grace given to us with daily watchfulness, and pray to be kept from carelessness and sin, lest we be overtaken in faults, bring misery on our consciences, and discredit on our profession. Above all let us live in peace one with another, not seeking great things, or striving for the pre-eminence, but clothed with humility, and loving all who love Christ in sincerity. These seem simple things. But in attending to them is great reward.

Mark – Chap. 10

MARK 10:1-12

The opening verse of this passage shows us ***the patient perseverance of our Lord Jesus Christ as a teacher***. We are told that “Jesus then left that place and went into the region of Judea and across the Jordan. Again crowds of people came to him, and as was his custom, he taught them.”

Wherever our Lord went, He was always about His Father's business, preaching, teaching, and laboring to do good to souls. He threw away no opportunity. In the whole history of His earthly ministry, we never read of an idle day. Of Him it may be truly said, that He "sowed beside all waters," and that "in the morning He sowed his seed, and in the evening withheld not His hand." (Isaiah 32:20. Eccles. 11:6.)

And yet our Lord knew the hearts of all men. He knew perfectly well that the great proportion of His hearers were hardened and unbelieving. He knew, as He spoke, that most of His words fell to the ground uncared for and unheeded, and that so far as concerned the salvation of souls, most of His labor was in vain. He knew all this, and yet He labored on.

Let us see in this fact a standing pattern to all who try to do good to others, whatever their office may be. Let it be remembered by every minister and every missionary—by every schoolmaster and every Sunday-school teacher—by every district visitor and every lay agent—by every head of a house who has family prayers—and by every caretaker who has the charge of children. Let all such remember Christ's example, and resolve to do likewise. We are not to give up teaching, because we see no good done. We are not to relax our exertions, because we see no fruit of our toil. We are to work on steadily, keeping before us the great principle, that **duty is ours, and results are God's.**

There must be ploughmen and sowers as well as reapers and binders of sheaves. The honest master pays his laborers according to the work they do, and not according to the crops that grow on his land. Our Master in heaven will deal with all His servants at the last day in like manner. He knows that success is not in their hands. He knows that they cannot change hearts. He will reward them according to their labor, and not according to the fruits which have resulted from their labor. It is not "the good and *successful* servant," but "the good and *faithful* servant," to whom He will say, "Enter into the joy of your Lord." (Matt. 25:21.)

The greater portion of this passage is meant to show us *the dignity and importance of marriage*. It is plain that the prevailing opinions of the Jews upon this subject, when our Lord was upon earth, were lax and low in the extreme. The binding character of the marriage tie was not recognized. Divorce for slight and trivial causes was allowable and common. The duties of husbands towards wives, and of wives towards husbands, as a natural consequence, were little understood. To correct this state of things, our Lord sets up a high and holy standard of principles. He refers to the original institution of marriage at the creation, as the union of one man and one woman. He quotes and endorses the solemn words used at the marriage of Adam and Eve, as words of perpetual significance, "a man shall leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife—and the two shall be one flesh." He adds a solemn comment to these words— "What God has joined together, let not man put asunder." And finally, in reply to the inquiry of His disciples, he declares that divorce followed by re-

marriage, except for the cause of unfaithfulness, is a breach of the seventh commandment.

The importance of the whole subject, on which our Lord here pronounces judgment, can hardly be over-rated. We ought to be very thankful that we have so clear and full an exposition of His mind upon it. The marriage relationship lies at the very root of the social system of nations. The public morality of a people, and the private happiness of the families which compose a nation, are deeply involved in the whole question of the law of marriage. The experience of all nations confirms the wisdom of our Lord's decision in this passage in the most striking manner. It is a fact clearly ascertained, that polygamy, and permission to obtain divorce on slight grounds, have a direct tendency to promote immorality. In short, the nearer a nation's laws about marriage approach to the law of Christ, the higher has the moral tone of that nation always proved to be.

It becomes all those who are married, or purpose marriage, to ponder well the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ in this passage. Of all relations of life, none ought to be regarded with such reverence, and none taken in hand so cautiously as the relation of husband and wife. In no relation is so much earthly happiness to be found, if it be entered upon discreetly, advisedly, and in the fear of God. In none is so much misery seen to follow, if it be taken in hand unadvisedly, lightly, wantonly, and without thought. From no step in life does so much benefit come to the soul, if people marry "in the Lord." From none does the soul take so much harm, if fancy, passion, or any mere

worldly motive is the only cause which produce the union. Solomon was the wisest of men. “Was it not because of marriages like these that Solomon king of Israel sinned? Among the many nations there was no king like him. He was loved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel, but even he was led into sin by foreign women.” (Neh. 13:26.)

There is, unhappily, only too much necessity for impressing these truths upon people. It is a mournful fact, that few steps in life are generally taken with so much levity, self-will, and forgetfulness of God as marriage. Few are the young couples who think of inviting Christ to their wedding! It is a mournful fact that unhappy marriages are one great cause of the misery and sorrow of which there is so much in the world. People find out too late that they have made a mistake, and go in bitterness all their days. Happy are they, who in the matter of marriage observe three rules. The first is to marry only in the Lord, and after prayer for God’s approval and blessing. The second is not to expect too much from their partners, and to remember that marriage is, after all, the union of two sinners, and not of two angels. The third rule is to strive first and foremost for one another’s sanctification. The more holy married people are, the happier they are. “Christ loved the church, and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify it.” (Eph. 5:25, 26.)

MARK 10:13-16

The scene brought before us in these four verses is deeply interesting. We see young children brought to Christ, “that He

should touch them," and the disciples rebuking those that brought them. We are told that when Jesus saw this He was "much displeased," and rebuked His disciples in words of a very remarkable tenor. And finally we are told, that "He took them up in His arms, put His hands upon them, and blessed them."

Let us learn, for one thing, from this passage, ***how much attention the souls of children should receive from the Church of Christ.*** The Great Head of the Church found time to take special notice of children. Although His time on earth was precious, and grown-up men and women were perishing on every side for lack of knowledge, He did not think little boys and girls of small importance. He had room in His mighty heart even for them. He declared by His outward gesture and deed, His good will toward them. And not least, He has left on record words concerning them, which His Church should never forget, "Of such is the kingdom of God."

We must never allow ourselves to suppose that little children's souls may be safely let alone. Their characters for life depend exceedingly on what they see and hear during their first seven years. They are never too young to learn evil and sin. They are never too young to receive religious impressions. They think in their childish way about God, and their souls, and a world to come, far sooner and far more deeply than most people are aware. They are far more ready to respond to appeals to their feeling of right and wrong than many suppose. They have each a conscience. God has mercifully not left

Himself without a witness in their hearts, fallen and corrupt as their natures are. They have each a soul which will live forever in heaven or in hell. We cannot begin too soon to endeavor to bring them to Christ.

These truths ought to be diligently considered by every branch of the Church of Christ. It is the bounden duty of every Christian congregation to make provision for the spiritual training of its children. The boys and girls of every family should be taught as soon as they can learn—should be brought to public worship as soon as they can behave with propriety—should be regarded with affectionate interest as the future congregation, which will fill our places when we are dead. We may confidently expect Christ's blessing on all attempts to do good to children. No church can be regarded as being in a healthy state which neglects its younger members, and lazily excuses itself on the plea, that "young people will be young," and that it is useless to try to do them good. Such a church shows plainly that it has not the mind of Christ. A congregation which consists of none but grown up people, whose children are idling at home or running wild in the streets or fields, is a most deplorable and unsatisfactory sight. The members of such a congregation may pride themselves on their numbers, and on the soundness of their own views. They may content themselves with loud assertions that they cannot change their children's hearts, and that God will convert them some day if he thinks fit. But they have yet to learn that Christ regards them as neglecting a solemn duty,

and that Christians who do not use every means to bring children to Christ are committing a great sin.

Let us learn, for another thing, from this passage, ***how much encouragement there is to bring young children to be baptized.*** Of course it is not pretended that there is any mention of baptism, or even any reference to it in the verses before us. All we mean to say is that the expressions and gestures of our Lord in this passage, are a strong indirect argument in favor of infant baptism. It is on this account that the passage occupies a prominent place in the baptismal service of the Church of England.

The subject of infant baptism is undoubtedly a delicate and difficult one. Holy and praying men are unable to see alike upon it. Although they read the same Bible, and profess to be led by the same Spirit, they arrive at different conclusions about this sacrament. The great majority of Christians hold that infant baptism is scriptural and right. A comparatively small section of the Protestant Church, but one containing many eminent saints among its members, regards infant baptism as unscriptural and wrong. The difference is a melancholy proof of the blindness and infirmity which remain even in the saints of God.

But the difference now referred to must not make members of the Church of England shrink from holding decided opinions on the subject. That church has declared plainly, in its Articles, that “the baptism of young children is in any wise to be retained, as most

agreeable with the institution of Christ." To this opinion we need not be afraid to adhere.

It is allowed on all sides that infants may be elect and chosen of God unto salvation—may be washed in Christ's blood, born again of the Spirit, have grace, be justified; sanctified, and enter heaven. If these things be so, it is hard to see why they may not receive the outward sign of baptism.

It is allowed furthermore that infants are members of Christ's visible church, by virtue of their parents' Christianity. What else can we make of Paul's words, "now are they holy," (1 Cor. 7:14.) If this be so, it is difficult to understand why an infant may not receive the outward sign of admission into the church, just as the Jewish child received the outward sign of circumcision.

The objection that baptism ought only to be given to those who are old enough to repent and believe, does not appear a convincing one. We read in the New Testament that the "houses" of Lydia and Stephanus were baptized, and that the jailer of Philippi and "all his" were baptized. It is very difficult to suppose that in no one of these three cases were there any children. (Acts 16:15, 33. 1 Cor. 1:16.)

The objection that our Lord Jesus Christ Himself never directly commanded infants to be baptized is not a weighty one. The church of the Jews, to which He came, had always been accustomed to admit children into the church by the sign of circumcision. The very fact

that Jesus says nothing about the age for baptizing, goes far to prove that He intended no change to be made.

The subject may be safely left here. Few controversies have done so much harm, and led to so little spiritual fruit as the controversy about baptism. On none has so much been said and written without producing conviction. On none does experience seem to show that Christians had better leave each other alone, and agree to differ.

The baptism that it concerns us all to know, is not so much the baptism of water, as the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Thousands are washed in baptismal waters who are never renewed by the Spirit. Have we been born again? Have we received the Holy Spirit, and been made new creatures in Jesus Christ? If not, it matters little when, and where, and how we have been baptized; we are yet in our sins. Without a new birth there can be no salvation. May we never rest until we know and feel that we have passed from death to life, and are indeed born of God!

MARK 10:17-27

The story we have now read is recorded no less than three times in the New Testament. Matthew, Mark, and Luke were all inspired by one Spirit to write it for our learning. There is no doubt a wise purpose in this three-fold repetition of the same simple facts. It is intended to show us that the lessons of the passage deserve particular notice from the Church of Christ.

Let us learn for one thing from this passage, ***the self-ignorance of man.***

We are told of one who "came running" to our Lord, and "kneeled to him and asked" the solemn question, "what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" At first sight there was much that was promising in this man's case. He showed anxiety about spiritual things, while most around him were careless and indifferent. He showed a disposition to reverence our Lord, by kneeling to Him, while Scribes and Pharisees despised Him. Yet all this time this man was profoundly ignorant of his own heart. He hears our Lord recite those commandments which make up our duty to our neighbor, and at once declares, "All these have I observed from my youth." The searching nature of the moral law, its application to our thoughts, and words, as well as actions, are matters with which he is utterly unacquainted.

The spiritual blindness here exhibited is unhappily most common. Myriads of professing Christians at the present day have not an idea of their own sinfulness and guilt in the sight of God. They flatter themselves that they have never done anything very wicked. "They have never murdered, or stolen, or committed adultery, or borne false witness. They cannot surely be in much danger of missing heaven." They forget the holy nature of that God with whom they have to do. They forget how often they break His law in temper, or imagination, even when their outward conduct is correct. They never study such portions of Scripture as the fifth chapter of Matthew, or at

any rate they study it with a thick veil over their hearts, and do not apply it to themselves. The result is that they are wrapped up in self-righteousness. Like the church of Laodicea, they are "rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." (Rev. 3:17.) Self-satisfied they live, and self-satisfied too often they die.

Let us beware of this state of mind. So long as we think that we can keep the law of God, Christ profits us nothing. Let us pray for self-knowledge. Let us ask for the Holy Spirit to convince us of sin, to show us our own hearts, to show us God's holiness, and so to show us our need of Christ. Happy is he who has learned by experience the meaning of Paul's words, "I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." (Rom. 7:9.) Ignorance of the Law and ignorance of the Gospel will generally be found together. He whose eyes have really been opened to the spirituality of the commandments, will never rest until he has found Christ.

Let us learn, for another thing, from this passage, ***the love of Christ towards sinners.***

This is a truth which is brought out in the expression used by Mark, when, in his account of this man's story, he says, that "Jesus beholding him, loved him." That love, beyond doubt, was a love of pity and compassion. Our Lord beheld with pity the strange mixture of earnestness and ignorance which the case before Him presented. He saw with compassion a soul struggling with all the weakness and infirmity entailed by the fall—the conscience ill at ease, and sensible

that it needed relief—the understanding sunk in darkness and blinded as to the first principles of spiritual religion. Just as we look with sorrow at some noble ruin, roofless, and shattered, and unfit for man's use, yet showing many a mark of the skill with which it was designed and raised at first, so may we suppose that Jesus looked with tender concern at this man's soul.

We must never forget that Jesus feels love and compassion for the souls of the ungodly. Without controversy He feels a distinguishing love for those who hear His voice and follow Him. They are His sheep, given to Him by the Father, and watched with a special care. They are His bride, joined to Him in an everlasting covenant, and dear to Him as part of Himself. But the heart of Jesus is a wide heart. He has abundance of pity, compassion, and tender concern even for those who are following sin and the world. He who wept over unbelieving Jerusalem is still the same. He would still gather into his bosom the ignorant and self-righteous, the faithless and impenitent, if they were only willing to be gathered. (Matt. 23:37.) We may boldly tell the chief of sinners that Christ loves him. Salvation is ready for the worst of men, if they will only come to Christ. If men are lost, it is not because Jesus does not love them, and is not ready to save. His own solemn words unravel the mystery, "Men love darkness rather than light." "You will not come unto me that you might have life." (John 3:19; 5:40.)

Let us learn, in the last place, from this passage, ***the immense danger of the love of money.*** This is a lesson which is twice

enforced on our notice. Once it comes out in the conduct of the man whose history is here related. With all his professed desire after eternal life, he loved his money better than his soul. “He went away grieved.” Once it comes out in the solemn words of our Lord to His disciples, “How hard is it for those who have riches to enter into the kingdom of God.” “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.” The last day alone will fully prove how true those words are.

Let us watch against the love of money. It is a snare to the poor as well as to the rich. It is not so much the having money, as the trusting in it, which ruins the soul. Let us pray for contentment with such things as we have. The highest wisdom is to be of one mind with Paul, “I have learned, in whatever state I am, therewith to be content.” (Phil. 4:11.)

MARK 10:28-34

The first thing which demands our attention in these verses, is ***the glorious promise which they contain.*** The Lord Jesus said to His apostles, “I tell you the truth, no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life.”

There are few wider promises than this in the word of God. There is none certainly in the New Testament which holds out such

encouragement for the life that now is. Let everyone that is fearful and faint-hearted in Christ's service look at this promise. Let all who are enduring hardness and tribulation for Christ's sake, study this promise well, and drink out of it comfort.

To all who make sacrifices on account of the Gospel, Jesus promises "a hundred-fold now in this time." They shall have not only pardon and glory in the world to come. They shall have even here upon earth, hopes, and joys, and sensible comforts sufficient to make up for all that they lose. They shall find in the communion of saints, new friends, new relations, new companions, more loving, faithful, and valuable than any they had before their conversion. Their introduction into the family of God shall be an abundant recompense for exclusion from the society of this world. This may sound startling and incredible to many ears. But thousands have found by experience that it is true.

To all who make sacrifices on account of the Gospel, Jesus promises "eternal life in the world to come." As soon as they put off their earthly tabernacle, they shall enter upon a glorious existence, and in the morning of the resurrection shall receive such honor and joy as pass man's understanding. Their light afflictions for a few years shall end in an everlasting reward. Their fights and sorrows while in the body, shall be exchanged for perfect rest and a conqueror's crown. They shall dwell in a world where there is no death, no sin, no devil, no cares, no weeping, no parting, for the

former things will have passed away. God has said it, and it shall all be found true.

Where is the saint who will dare to say in the face of these glorious promises, that there is no encouragement to serve Christ? Where is the man or woman whose hands are beginning to hang down, and whose knees are beginning to faint in the Christian race? Let all such ponder this passage, and take fresh courage. The time is short. The end is sure. Heaviness may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning. Let us wait patiently on the Lord.

The second thing, which demands our attention in these verses, is ***the solemn warning which they contain.*** The Lord Jesus saw the secret self-conceit of His apostles. He gives them a word in season to check their high thoughts. “Many that are first shall be last, and the last first.”

How true were these words, when applied to the TWELVE APOSTLES! There stood among those who heard our Lord speak, a man who at one time seemed likely to be one of the foremost of the twelve. He was one who appeared more careful and trustworthy than any. He had the charge of the money bag, and kept what was put in it. And yet that man fell away and came to a disgraceful end. His name was Judas Iscariot.

Again, there did not stand among our Lord’s hearers that day one who at a later period did more for Christ than any of the twelve. At the time when our Lord spoke he was a young Pharisee, brought up

at the feet of Gamaliel, and zealous for nothing so much as the law. And yet that young man in the end was converted to the faith of Christ, was not behind the chief apostles, and labored more abundantly than all. His name was Saul. Well might our Lord say, “the first shall be last; and the last first.”

How true were these words, when we apply them to the HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN CHURCHES! There was a time when Asia Minor, and Greece, and Northern Africa, were full of professing Christians, while England and America were heathen lands. Sixteen hundred years have made a mighty change. The churches of Africa and Asia have fallen into complete decay. The English and American churches are laboring to spread the Gospel over the world. Well might our Lord say, “the first shall be last, and the last first.”

How true these words appear to believers, when they look back over their own lives, and remember all they have seen from the time of their own conversion! How many began to serve Christ at the same time with themselves and seemed to run well for a season. But where are they now? The world has got hold of one. False doctrine has beguiled another. A mistake in marriage has spoiled a third. Few indeed are the believers who cannot call to mind many such cases. Few have failed to discover, by sorrowful experience, that “the last are often first, and the first last.”

Let us learn to pray for humility, when we read texts like this. It is not enough to begin well. We must persevere, and go on, and continue in well-doing. We must not be content with the fair

blossoms of a few religious convictions, and joys, and sorrows, and hopes, and fears. We must bear the good fruit of settled habits of repentance, faith, and holiness. Happy is he who counts the cost, and resolves, having once begun to walk in the narrow way, by God's grace never to turn aside.

The last thing that demands our attention in this passage, is ***our Lord's clear foreknowledge of His own suffering and death.*** Calmly and deliberately He tells His disciples of His coming passion at Jerusalem. One after another He describes all the leading circumstances which would attend His death. Nothing is reserved. Nothing is kept back.

Let us mark this well. There was nothing involuntary and unforeseen in our Lord's death. It was the result of his own free, determinate, and deliberate choice. From the beginning of His earthly ministry He saw the cross before Him, and went to it a willing sufferer. He knew that His death was the needful payment that must be made to reconcile God and man. That payment He had covenanted and engaged to make at the price of His own blood. And so when the appointed time came, like a faithful substitute, He kept His word, and died for our sins on Calvary.

Let us ever bless God that the Gospel sets before us such a Savior, so faithful to the terms of the covenant—so ready to suffer—so willing to be reckoned sin and a curse in our stead. Let us not doubt that He who fulfilled his engagement to suffer, will also fulfill His engagement to save all who come to Him. Let us not only accept Him

gladly as our Redeemer and Advocate, but gladly give ourselves, and all we have, to His service. Surely, if Jesus cheerfully died for us, it is a small thing to require Christians to live for Him.

MARK 10:35-45

Let us mark in this passage, *the ignorance of our Lord's disciples*. We find James and John petitioning for the first places in the kingdom of glory. We find them confidently declaring their ability to drink of their Master's cup and be baptized with their Master's baptism. In spite of all the plain warnings of our Lord, they clung obstinately to the belief that Christ's kingdom on earth was immediately going to appear. Notwithstanding their many shortcomings in Christ's service, they had no misgivings as to their power to endure anything which might come upon them. With all their faith, and grace, and love to Jesus, they neither knew their own hearts, nor the nature of the path before them. They still dreamed of temporal crowns, and earthly rewards. They still knew not what manner of men they were.

There are few true Christians who do not resemble James and John, when they first begin the service of Christ. We are apt to expect far more present enjoyment from our religion, than the Gospel warrants us to expect. We are apt to forget the cross, and the tribulation, and to think only of the crown. We form an incorrect estimate of our own fortitude and power of endurance. We misjudge our own ability to stand temptation and trial. And the result of all is

that we often buy wisdom dearly, by bitter experience, after many disappointments, and not a few falls.

Let the case before us teach us the importance of a solid and calm judgment in our religion. Like James and John, we are right in coveting the best gifts, and in telling all our desires to Christ. Like them we are right in believing that Jesus is King of kings, and will one day reign upon the earth. But let us not, like them, forget that there is a cross to be borne by every Christian, and that "through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom of God." (Acts 14:22.) Let us not, like them, be over-confident in our own strength, and forward in professing that we can do anything that Christ requires. Let us, in short, beware of a boastful spirit, when we first begin to run the Christian course. If we remember this, it may save us many a humbling fall.

Let us mark, secondly, in this passage, ***what praise our Lord bestows on lowliness, and devotion to the good of others.*** It seems that the ten were much displeased with James and John, because of the petition which they made to their Master. Their ambition and love of pre-eminence were once more excited at the idea of any one being placed above themselves. Our Lord saw their feelings, and, like a wise physician, proceeded at once to supply a corrective medicine. He tells them that their ideas of greatness were built on a mistaken foundation. He repeats with renewed emphasis, the lesson already laid down in the preceding chapter, "Whoever of you will be the chief, shall be servant of all." And He backs up all by

the overwhelming argument of His own example— “Even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.”

Let all who desire to please Christ, watch and pray against self-esteem. It is a feeling which is deeply rooted in our hearts. Thousands have come out from the world, taken up the cross, professed to forsake their own righteousness, and believe in Christ, who have felt irritated and annoyed, when a brother has been more honored than themselves. These things ought not so to be. We ought often to ponder the words of Paul, “Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory; but in lowliness of mind, let each esteem others better than themselves.” (Philipp. 2:3.) Blessed is that man who can sincerely and gladly rejoice when others are exalted, though he himself is overlooked and passed by!

Above all, let all who desire to walk in Christ’s steps labor to be useful to others. Let them lay themselves out to do good in their day and generation. There is always a vast field for doing it, if men have the will and inclination. Let them never forget, that true greatness does not consist in being an admiral, or a general—a statesman, or an artist. It consists in devoting ourselves, body, and soul, and spirit to the blessed work of making our fellow men more holy and more happy. It is those who exert themselves by the use of Scripture means to lessen the sorrow, and increase the joy of all around them—the Howards, the Wilberforces, the Martyns, the Judsons of a country—who are truly great in the sight of God. While they live they are laughed at, mocked, ridiculed, and often persecuted. But their

memorial is on high. Their names are written in heaven. Their praise endures forever. Let us remember these things, and while we have time do good unto all men, and be servants of all for Christ's sake. Let us strive to leave the world better, holier, happier than it was when we were born. A life spent in this way is truly Christ-like, and brings its own reward.

Let us mark, lastly, in this passage, ***the language which our Lord uses in speaking of His own death.*** He says, "The Son of Man came to give His life a ransom for many."

This is one of those expressions which ought to be carefully treasured up in the minds of all true Christians. It is one of the texts which prove incontrovertibly the atoning character of Christ's death. That death was no common death, like the death of a martyr, or of other holy men. It was the public payment, by an Almighty Representative, of the debts of sinful man to a holy God. It was the ransom which a Divine Surety undertook to provide, in order to procure liberty for sinners, tied and bound by the chain of their sins. By that death Jesus made a full and complete satisfaction for man's countless transgressions. He bore our sins in His own body on the tree. The Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all. When He died, He died for us. When He suffered, He suffered in our stead. When He hung on the cross, He hung there as our Substitute. When His blood flowed, it was the price of our souls.

Let all who trust in Christ take comfort in the thought that they build on a sure foundation. It is true that we are sinners, but Christ

has borne our sins. It is true that we are poor helpless debtors, but Christ has paid our debts. It is true that we deserve to be shut up forever in the prison of hell. But thanks be to God, Christ has paid a full and complete ransom for us. The door is wide open. The prisoners may go free. May we all know this privilege by heartfelt experience, and walk in the blessed liberty of the children of God.

MARK 10:46-52

We read in these verses an account of one of our Lord's miracles. Let us see in it, as we read, a vivid emblem of spiritual things. We are not studying a history which concerns us personally no more than the exploits of Caesar or Alexander. We have before us a picture which ought to be deeply interesting to the soul of every Christian.

In the first place, we have here ***an example of strong faith.*** We are told that as Jesus went out of Jericho, a blind man named Bartimaeus "sat by the wayside begging. And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out, and say, Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me."

Bartimaeus was blind in body, but not in soul. The eyes of his understanding were open. He saw things which Annas and Caiaphas, and hosts of letter-learned Scribes and Pharisees, never saw at all. He saw that Jesus of Nazareth, as our Lord was contemptuously called—Jesus, who had lived for thirty years in an obscure Galilean village—this very Jesus was the Son of David—the Messiah of whom prophets had prophesied long ago. He had witnessed none of our

Lord's mighty miracles. He had not had the opportunity of beholding dead people raised with a word, and lepers healed by a touch. Of all these privileges, his blindness totally deprived him. But he had heard the report of our Lord's mighty works, and hearing had believed. He was satisfied from mere hear-say, that He of whom such wonderful things were reported, must be the promised Savior, and must be able to heal him. And so when our Lord drew near, he cried, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me."

Let us strive and pray that we may have like precious faith. Like Bartimaeus, we are not allowed to see Jesus with our bodily eyes. But we have the report of His power, and grace, and willingness to save, in the Gospel. We have exceeding great promises from His own lips, written down for our encouragement. Let us trust those promises implicitly, and commit our souls to Christ unhesitatingly. Let us not be afraid to repose all our confidence on His own gracious words, and to believe that what He has engaged to do for sinners, He will surely perform. What is the beginning of all saving faith, but a soul's venture on Christ? What is the life of saving faith, when once begun, but a continual leaning on an unseen Savior's word? What is the first step of a Christian, but a crying, like Bartimaeus, "Jesus have mercy on me?" What is the daily course of a Christian, but keeping up the same spirit of faith? "Though now we see Him not, yet believing we rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory." (1 Peter 1:8.)

We have, in the second place, in these verses, ***an example of determined perseverance in the face of difficulties.*** We are

told that when Bartimaeus began to cry out, “Jesus, Son of David have mercy on me,” he met with little encouragement from those who were near him. On the contrary, “many charged him that he should hold his peace.” But he was not to be stopped. If others did not know the misery of blindness, he did. If others did not think it worthwhile to take such trouble, in order to obtain relief, he, at any rate, knew better. He cared not for the rebukes of unfeeling bystanders. He heeded not the ridicule which his importunity probably brought on him. “He cried the more a great deal,” and so crying obtained his heart’s desire, and received his sight.

Let all who wish to be saved, mark well this conduct of Bartimaeus, and walk diligently in his steps. Like him, we must care nothing what others think and say of us, when we seek the healing of our souls. There never will be lacking people who will tell us that it is “too soon,” or “too late” that we are going “too fast,” or “too far” that we need not pray so much, or read our Bibles so much—or be so anxious about salvation. We must give no heed to such people. Like Bartimaeus, we must *cry the more*, “Jesus have mercy on me.”

What is the reason that men are so half-hearted in seeking Christ? Why are they so soon deterred, and checked, and discouraged in drawing near to God? The answer is short and simple. They do not feel sufficiently their own sins. They are not thoroughly convinced of the plague of their own hearts, and the disease of their own souls. Once let a man see his own guilt, as it really is, and he will never rest until he has found pardon and peace in Christ. It is they

who, like Bartimaeus, really know their own deplorable condition, who persevere, like Bartimaeus, and are finally healed.

In the last place, we have, in these verses, ***an example of the constraining influence which gratitude to Christ ought to have upon our souls.*** Bartimaeus did not return home as soon as he was restored to sight. He would not leave Him from whom he had received such mercy. At once he devoted the new powers, which his cure gave him, to the Son of David who had worked the cure. His history concludes with the touching expression, he "followed Jesus in the way."

Let us see in these simple words, a lively emblem of the effect that the grace of Christ ought to have on every one who tastes it. It ought to make him a follower of Jesus in his life, and to draw him with mighty power into the way of holiness. Freely pardoned, he ought to give himself freely and willingly to Christ's service. Bought at so mighty a price as the blood of Christ, he ought to devote himself heartily and thoroughly to Him who redeemed him. Grace really experienced will make a man feel daily, "What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits." It did so for the apostle Paul—he says, "the love of Christ constrains us." (2 Cor. 5:14.) It will do so for all true Christians at the present day. The man who boasts of having a saving interest in Christ, while he does not follow Christ in his life, is a miserable self-deceiver, and is ruining his own soul. "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they," and they only, "are the sons of God." (Rom. 8:14.)

Have we had our eyes opened by the Spirit of God? Have we yet been taught to see sin, and Christ, and holiness, and heaven, in their true light? Can we say, One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see? If so, we shall know the things of which we have been reading, by experience. If not, we are yet in the broad way that leads to destruction, and have everything to learn.

Mark – Chap. 11

MARK 11:1-11

The event described in these verses, is a singular exception in the history of our Lord's earthly ministry. Generally speaking, we see Jesus withdrawing Himself from public notice—often passing His time in the remote parts of Galilee—not infrequently abiding in the wilderness—and so fulfilling the prophecy, that He should "not cry, nor strive, nor let His voice be heard in the streets." Here, and here only, our Lord appears to drop His private character, and of His own choice to call public attention to Himself. He deliberately makes a public entry into Jerusalem, at the head of His disciples. He voluntarily rides into the holy city, surrounded by a vast multitude, crying, Hosanna, like king David returning to his palace in triumph. (2 Sam. 19:40.) All this too was done at a time when myriads of Jews were gathered out of every land to Jerusalem, to keep the Passover. We may well believe that the holy city rang with the tidings of our Lord's arrival. It is probable there was not a house in Jerusalem in

which the entry of the prophet of Nazareth was not known and talked of that night.

These things should always be remembered in reading this portion of our Lord's history. It is not for nothing that this entry into Jerusalem is four times related in the New Testament. It is evident that it is a scene in the earthly life of Jesus, which Christians are intended to study with special attention. Let us study it in that spirit, and see what practical lessons we may learn from the passage for our own souls.

Let us observe, in the first place, ***how public our Lord purposely made the last act of His life.*** He came to Jerusalem to die, and He desired that all Jerusalem should know it. When He taught the deep things of the Spirit, He often spoke to none but His apostles. When He delivered His parables, He often addressed none but a multitude of poor and ignorant Galileans. When He worked His miracles, He was generally at Capernaum, or in the land of Zebulon and Naphtali. But when the time came that He should die, He made a public entry into Jerusalem. He drew the attention of rulers, and priests, and elders, and Scribes, and Greeks, and Romans to Himself. He knew that the most wonderful event that ever happened in this world was about to take place. The eternal Son of God was about to suffer in the stead of sinful men—the great sacrifice for sin about to be offered up—the great Passover Lamb about to be slain—the great atonement for a world's sin about to be made. He therefore ordered it so that His death was eminently a public death. He over-ruled

things in such a way that the eyes of all Jerusalem were fixed upon Him, and when He died, He died before many witnesses.

Let us see here one more proof of the unspeakable importance of the death of Christ. Let us treasure up His gracious sayings. Let us strive to walk in the steps of His holy life. Let us prize His intercession. Let us long for His second coming. But never let us forget that the crowning fact in all we know of Jesus Christ, is His death upon the cross. From that death flow all our hopes. Without that death we would have nothing solid beneath our feet. May we prize that death more and more every year we live; and in all our thoughts about Christ, rejoice in nothing so much as the great fact that He died for us!

Let us observe, in the second place, in this passage, ***the voluntary poverty which our Lord underwent, when He was upon earth.*** How did He enter Jerusalem when He came to it on this remarkable occasion? Did He come in a royal chariot, with horses, soldiers, and a retinue around Him, like the kings of this world? We are told nothing of the kind. We read that He borrowed the colt of a donkey for the occasion, and sat upon the garments of His disciples for lack of a saddle. This was in perfect keeping with all the tenor of His ministry. He never had any of the riches of this world. When He crossed the sea of Galilee, it was in a borrowed boat. When He rode into the holy city, it was on a borrowed beast. When He was buried, it was in a borrowed tomb.

We have in this simple fact, an instance of that marvelous union of weakness and power, riches and poverty, the godhead and the manhood, which may be so often traced in the history of our blessed Lord. Who that reads the Gospels carefully can fail to observe, that He who could feed thousands with a few loaves, was Himself sometimes hungry—and He who could heal the sick and infirm, was Himself sometimes weary—that He who could cast out devils with a word, was Himself tempted—and He who could raise the dead, could Himself submit to die?

We see the very same thing in the passage before us. We see the power of our Lord in His bending the wills of a vast multitude to conduct Him into Jerusalem in triumph. We see the poverty of our Lord in His borrowing a donkey to carry Him when He made His triumphal entry. It is all wonderful, but there is a fitness in it all. It is appropriate and right that we should never forget the union of the divine and human natures in our Lord's person. If we saw His divine acts only, we might forget that He was man. If we saw His seasons of poverty and weakness only, we might forget that He was God. But we are intended to see in Jesus divine strength and human weakness united in one person. We cannot explain the mystery; but we may take comfort in the thought, "this is our Savior, this is our Christ—one able to sympathize, because He is man, but one Almighty to save, because He is God."

Finally, let us see in the simple fact, that our Lord rode on a borrowed donkey, one more proof that ***poverty is in itself no sin.***

The causes which occasion much of the poverty there is around us, are undoubtedly very sinful. Drunkenness, extravagance, profligacy, dishonesty, idleness, which produce so much of the destitution in the world, are unquestionably wrong in the sight of God. But to be born a poor man, and to inherit nothing from our parents—to work with our own hands for our bread, and to have no land of our own—all this is not sinful at all. The honest poor man is as honorable in the sight of God as the richest king. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself was poor. Silver and gold He had none. He had often nowhere to lay His head. Though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor. To be like Him in circumstances, cannot be in itself wrong. Let us do our duty in that state of life to which God has called us, and if He thinks fit to keep us poor let us not be ashamed. The Savior of sinners cares for us as well as for others. The Savior of sinners knows what it is to be poor.

MARK 11:12-21

We see in the beginning of this passage, ***one of the many proofs that our Lord Jesus Christ was really man.*** We read that "He was hungry." He had a nature and bodily constitution, like our own in all things, sin only excepted. He could weep, and rejoice, and suffer pain. He could be weary and need rest. He could be thirsty, and need drink. He could be hungry, and need food.

Expressions like this should teach us the condescension of Christ. How wonderful they are when we reflect upon them! He who is the eternal God—He who made the world and all that it contains—He

from whose hand the fruits of the earth, the fish of the sea, the fowls of the air, the beasts of the field, all had their beginning—He, even He was pleased to suffer hunger, when He came into the world to save sinners. This is a great mystery. Kindness and love like this pass man's understanding. No wonder that Paul speaks of the "unsearchable riches of Christ." (Ephes. 3:8.)

Expressions like this should teach us Christ's power to sympathize with His believing people on earth. He knows their sorrows by experience. He can be touched with the feeling of their infirmities. He has had experience of a body and its daily needs. He has allowed Himself the severe sufferings that the body of man is liable to. He has tasted pain, and weakness, and weariness, and hunger, and thirst. When we tell Him of these things in our prayers, He knows what we mean, and is no stranger to our troubles. Surely this is just the Savior and Friend that poor aching, groaning, human nature requires!

We learn, in the second place, from these verses, ***the great danger of unfruitfulness and formality in religion.*** This is a lesson which our Lord teaches in a remarkable typical action. We are told that coming to a fig tree in search of fruit, and finding "on it nothing but leaves," He pronounced on it the solemn sentence, "may no one eat fruit from you again." And we are told that the next day the fig tree was found "dried up from the roots." We cannot doubt for a moment that this whole transaction was an emblem of spiritual

things. It was a parable in deeds, as full of meaning as any of our Lord's parables in words.

But who were they to whom this withered fig tree was intended to speak? It was a sermon of three-fold application, a sermon that ought to speak loudly to the consciences of all professing Christians. Though withered and dried up, that fig tree yet speaks. There was a voice in it for the JEWISH CHURCH. Rich in the leaves of a formal religion, but barren of all fruits of the Spirit, that Church was in fearful danger, at the very time when this withering took place. Well would it have been for the Jewish Church if it had had eyes to see its peril!

There was a voice in the fig tree for all the branches of Christ's VISIBLE CHURCH in every age, and every part of the world. There was a warning against an empty profession of Christianity unaccompanied by sound doctrine and holy living, which some of those branches would have done well to lay to heart.

But above all there was a voice in that withered fig tree for all CARNAL, HYPOCRITICAL, AND FALSE-HEARTED CHRISTIANS. Well would it be for all who are content with a name to live while in reality they are dead, if they would only see their own faces in the glass of this passage.

Let us take care that we each individually learn the lesson that this fig tree conveys. Let us always remember, that baptism, and church-membership, and reception of the Lord's Supper, and a

diligent use of the outward forms of Christianity, are not sufficient to save our souls. They are leaves, nothing but leaves, and without fruit will add to our condemnation. Like the fig leaves of which Adam and Eve made themselves garments, they will not hide the nakedness of our souls from the eye of an all-seeing God, or give us boldness when we stand before Him at the last day. No! we must bear fruit, or be lost forever. There must be fruit in our hearts and fruit in our lives, the fruit of repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, and true holiness in our conversation. Without such fruits as these a profession of Christianity will only sink us lower into hell.

We learn, in the last place, from this passage, ***how reverently we ought to use places which are set apart for public worship.*** This is a truth which is taught us in a striking manner by our Lord Jesus Christ's conduct, when He went into the temple. We are told that "He cast out those who sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of those who sold doves." And we are told that He enforced this action by warrant of Scripture, saying, "Is it not written, My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations? but you have made it a den of thieves."

We need not doubt that there was a deep meaning in this action of our Lord on this occasion. Like the cursing of the fig tree, the whole transaction was eminently typical. But in saying this, we must not allow ourselves to lose sight of one simple and obvious lesson which lies on the surface of the passage. That lesson is the sinfulness

of careless and irreverent behavior in the use of buildings set apart for the public service of God. It was not so much as the house of sacrifice, but as the "house of prayer," that our Lord purified the temple. His action clearly indicates the feeling with which every "house of prayer" should be regarded. A Christian place of worship no doubt is in no sense so sacred as the Jewish tabernacle, or temple. Its arrangements have no typical meaning. It is not built after a divine model, and intended to serve as an example of heavenly things. But it does not follow because these things are so, that a Christian place of worship is to be used with no more reverence than a private dwelling, or a shop, or an inn. There is surely a decent reverence, which is due to a place where Christ and His people regularly meet together and public prayer is offered up—a reverence which it is foolish and unwise to brand as superstitious, and confound with Popery. There is a certain feeling of sanctity and solemnity which ought to belong to all places where Christ is preached, and souls are born again, a feeling which does not depend on any consecration of man, and ought to be encouraged rather than checked. At all events the mind of the Lord Jesus in this passage seems very plain. He takes notice of men's behavior in places of worship, and all irreverence or profanity is an offence in His sight.

Let us remember these verses whenever we go to the house of God, and take heed that we go in a serious frame, and do not offer the sacrifice of fools. Let us call to mind where we are—what we are doing—what business we are about—and in whose presence we are engaged. Let us beware of giving God a mere formal service, while

our hearts are full of the world. Let us leave our business and money at home, and not carry them with us to church. Let us beware of allowing any buying and selling in our hearts, in the midst of our religious assemblies. The Lord still lives, who cast out buyers and sellers from the temple, and when He sees such conduct He is much displeased.

MARK 11:22-26

Let us learn from these words of our Lord Jesus Christ, ***the immense importance of faith.***

This is a lesson which our Lord teaches first by a proverbial saying. Faith shall enable a man to accomplish works, and overcome difficulties, as great and formidable as the "removing of a mountain, and casting it into the sea." Afterwards the lesson is impressed upon us still further, by a general exhortation to exercise faith when we pray. "What things soever you desire, when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you shall have them." This promise must of course be taken with a reasonable qualification. It assumes that a believer will ask things which are not sinful, and which are in accordance with the will of God. When He asks such things, he may confidently believe that his prayer will be answered. To use the words of James, "Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering." (James 1:6.)

The faith here commended must be distinguished from that faith which is essential to justification. In principle undoubtedly all true

faith is one and the same. It is always trust or belief. But in the object and operations of faith, there are diversities, which it is useful to understand. Justifying faith is that act of the soul by which a man lays hold on Christ, and has peace with God. Its special object is the atonement for sin which Jesus made on the cross. The faith spoken of in the passage now before us is a grace of more general signification, the fruit and companion of justifying faith, but still not to be confounded with it. It is rather a general confidence in God's power, wisdom, and goodwill towards believers. And its special objects are the promises, the word, and the character of God in Christ.

Confidence in God's power and will to help every believer in Christ, and in the truth of every word that God has spoken, is the grand secret of success and prosperity in our religion. In fact, it is the very root of saving Christianity. "By it the elders obtained a good report." "He that comes unto God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." To know the full worth of it in the sight of God, we should often study the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Do we desire to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ? Do we wish to make progress in our religion, and become strong Christians, and not mere babes in spiritual things? Then let us pray daily for more faith, and watch our faith with most jealous watchfulness. Here is the corner-stone of our religion. A flaw or weakness here will affect the whole condition of our inner man.

According to our faith will be the degree of our peace, our hope, our joy, our decision in Christ's service, our boldness in confession, our strength in work, our patience in trial, our resignation in trouble, our sensible comfort in prayer. All, all will hinge on the proportion of our faith. Happy are they who know how to rest their whole weight continually on a covenant God, and to walk by faith, not by sight. "He that believes shall not make haste." (Isaiah. 28:16.)

Let us learn, for another thing, from these verses, ***the absolute necessity of a forgiving spirit towards others.*** This lesson is here taught us in a striking way. There is no immediate connection between the importance of faith, of which our Lord had just been speaking, and the subject of forgiving injuries. But the connecting link is prayer. First we are told that faith is essential to the success of our prayers. But then it is added, no prayers can be heard which do not come from a forgiving heart. "When you stand praying, forgive, if you have ought against any, that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses."

The value of our prayers, we can all understand, depends exceedingly on the state of mind in which we offer them. But the point before us is one which receives far less attention than it deserves. Our prayers must not only be earnest, fervent, and sincere, and in the name of Christ. They must contain one more ingredient besides. They must come from a forgiving heart. We have no right to look for mercy, if we are not ready to extend mercy to our brethren. We cannot really feel the sinfulness of the sins we ask to have

pardoned if we cherish malice towards our fellow men. We must have the heart of a brother toward our neighbor on earth, if we wish God to be our Father in heaven. We must not flatter ourselves that we have the Spirit of adoption if we cannot bear and forbear.

This is a heart-searching subject. The quantity of malice, bitterness, and party spirit among Christians is fearfully great. No wonder that so many prayers seem to be thrown away and unheard. It is a subject which ought to come home to all classes of Christians. All have not equal gifts of knowledge and utterance in their approaches to God. But all can forgive their fellow-men. It is a subject which our Lord Jesus Christ has taken special pains to impress on our minds. He has given it a prominent place in that pattern of prayers, the Lord's prayer. We are all familiar from our infancy with the words, "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us." Well would it be for many, if they would consider what those words mean!

Let us leave the passage with serious self-inquiry. Do we know what it is to be of a forgiving spirit? Can we forgive the injuries that we receive from time to time in this evil world? Can we pass over a transgression and pardon an offence? if not, where is our Christianity? If not, why should we wonder that our souls do not prosper? Let us resolve to amend our ways in this matter. Let us determine by God's grace to forgive, even as we hope to be forgiven. This is the nearest approach we can make to the mind of Christ Jesus. This is the character which is most suitable to a poor sinful

child of Adam. God's free forgiveness of sins is our highest privilege in this world. God's free forgiveness will be our only title to eternal life in the world to come. Then let us be forgiving during the few years that we are here upon earth.

MARK 11:27-33

Let us observe in these verses how much spiritual blindness may be in the hearts of those who hold high ecclesiastical office. We see "the chief priests and scribes and elders" coming to our Lord Jesus, and raising difficulties and objections in the way of His work.

These men, we know, were the accredited teachers and rulers of the Jewish Church. They were regarded by the Jews as the fountain and spring-head of religious knowledge. They were, most of them, regularly ordained to the position they held, and could trace their orders by regular descent from Aaron. And yet we find these very men, at the time when they ought to have been instructors of others, full of prejudice against the truth, and bitter enemies of the Messiah!

These things are written to show Christians that they must beware of depending too much on ordained men. They must not look up to ministers as Popes, or regard them as infallible. The orders of no church confer infallibility, whether they be Episcopal, Presbyterian, or Independent. Bishops, priests, and deacons, at their best, are only flesh and blood, and may err, both in doctrine and practice, as well as the chief priests and elders of the Jews. Their acts and teaching must always be tested by the word of God. They must

be followed so far as they follow Scripture, and no further. There is only one Priest and Bishops of souls, who makes no mistakes. That one is the Lord Jesus Christ. In Him alone is no weakness, no failure, no shadow of infirmity. Let us learn to lean more entirely on Him. Let us "call no man father on earth," (Matt. 23:9.) So doing, we shall never be disappointed.

Let us observe, in the second place, ***how envy and unbelief make men throw discredit on the commission of those who work for God.*** These chief priests and elders could not deny the reality of our Lord's miracles of mercy. They could not say that His teaching was contrary to Holy Scripture, or that His life was sinful. What then did they do? They attacked His claim to attention, and demanded His authority— "By what authority do you these things? and who gave you this authority?"

There can be no doubt whatever that, as a general principle, all who undertake to teach others, should be regularly appointed to the work. Paul himself declares that this was the case with our Lord, in the matter of the priestly office— "No man takes this honor unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron." (Heb. 5:4.) And even now, when the office of the sacrificing priest no longer exists, the words of the twenty-third Article of the Church of England are wise and scriptural— "It is not lawful for any man to take upon him the office of public preaching, or ministering the sacraments in the congregation, before he be lawfully called and sent to execute the same." But it is one thing to maintain the lawfulness of an outward

call to minister in sacred things, and quite another to assert that it is the one thing needful, without which no work for God can be done. This is the point on which the Jews evidently erred in the time of our Lord's earthly ministry, and on which many have unhappily followed them down to the present day.

Let us beware of this narrow spirit, and specially in these last ages of the world. Unquestionably we must not undervalue order and discipline in the church. It is just as valuable there as it is in an army. But we must not suppose that God is absolutely tied to the use of ordained men. We must not forget that there may be an inward call of the Holy Spirit without any outward call of man, no less than an outward call of man without any inward call of the Holy Spirit. The first question after all is this— "Is a man for Christ, or against Him? What does he teach? How does he live? Is he doing good?" If questions like these can be answered satisfactorily, let us thank God and be content. We must remember that a physician is useless, however high his degree and diploma, if he cannot cure diseases, and a soldier useless, however well dressed and drilled, if he will not face the enemy in the day of battle. The best doctor is the man who can cure, and the best soldier the man who can fight.

Let us observe, in the last place, ***what dishonesty and equivocation unbelievers may be led into by prejudice against the truth.*** The chief priests and elders dared not answer our Lord's question about John's Baptism. They dared not say, it was "of men," because they feared the people. They dared not confess

that it was “of heaven,” because they saw our Lord would say, “Why did you not believe him? He testified plainly of me.” What then did they do? They told a direct lie. They said, “We don’t know.”

It is a melancholy fact, that dishonesty like this is far from being uncommon among unconverted people. There are thousands who evade appeals to their conscience by answers which are not true. When pressed to attend to their souls, they say things which they know are not correct. They love the world and their own way, and like our Lord’s enemies are determined not to give them up, but like them also are ashamed to say the truth. And so they answer exhortations to repentance and decision by false excuses. One man pretends that he “cannot understand” the doctrines of the Gospel. Another assures as that he really “tries” to serve God, but makes no progress. A third declares that he has every wish to serve Christ, but “has no time.” All these are often nothing better than miserable equivocations. As a general rule, they are as worthless as the chief priest’s answer, “We don’t know.”

The plain truth is that we ought to be very slow to give credit to the unconverted man’s professed reasons for not serving Christ. We may be tolerably sure that when he says “I cannot,” the real meaning of his heart is “I will not.” A really honest spirit in religious matters is a mighty blessing. Once let a man be willing to live up to his light, and act up to his knowledge, and he will soon know of the doctrine of Christ, and come out from the world. (John 7:17.) The ruin of thousands is simply this, that they deal dishonestly with their own

souls. They allege pretended difficulties as the cause of their not serving Christ, while in reality they “love darkness rather than light,” and have no honest desire to change. (John 3:19.)

Mark – Chap. 12

MARK 12:1-12

The verses before us contain a historical parable. The history of the Jewish nation, from the day that Israel left Egypt down to the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, is here set before us as in a mirror. Under the figure of the vineyard and the husbandmen, the Lord Jesus tells the story of God’s dealings with His people for fifteen hundred years. Let us study it attentively, and apply it to ourselves.

Let us observe, in the first place, ***God’s special kindness to the Jewish Church and nation.*** He gave to them peculiar privileges. He dealt with them as a man deals with a piece of land which he separates and hedges in for “a vineyard.” He gave them good laws and ordinances. He planted them in a goodly land, and cast out seven nations before them. He passed by greater and mightier nations to show them favor. He let alone Egypt, and Assyria, and Greece, and Rome, and showered down mercies on a few million people in Palestine. The vineyard of the Lord was the house of Israel. No family under heaven ever received so many signal and distinguishing privileges as the family of Abraham.

And we too, who live in Great Britain, can we say that we have received no special mercies from God? We cannot say so. Why are we not a heathen country, like China? Why are we not a land of idolaters, like Hindostan? We owe it all to the distinguishing favor of God. It is not for our goodness and worthiness, but of God's free grace, that England is what England is among the nations of the earth. Let us be thankful for our mercies, and know the hand from which they come. Let us not be high-minded, but humble, lest we provoke God to take our mercies away. If Israel had peculiar national privileges, so also has England. Let Englishmen mark this well, and take heed lest that which happened to Israel should happen also to them.

Let us observe, in the second place, ***God's patience and patience towards the Jewish nation.*** What is their whole history as recorded in the Old Testament, but a long record of repeated provocations, and repeated pardons? Over and over again we read of prophets being sent to them, and warnings being delivered, but too often entirely in vain. One servant after another came to the vineyard of Israel, and asked for fruit. One servant after another was "sent away empty" by the Jewish husbandmen, and no fruit borne by the nation to the glory of God. "They mocked the messengers of God, and despised His words, and misused His prophets." (2 Chron. 36:16.) Yet hundreds of years passed away before "the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, until there was no remedy." Never was there a people so patiently dealt with as Israel.

And we too, who dwell in Great Britain, have we no patience of God to be thankful for? Beyond doubt, we have abundant cause to say that our Lord is patient. He does not deal with us according to our sins, or reward us according to our iniquities. We have often provoked Him to take our candlestick away, and to deal with as He has dealt with Tyre, and Babylon, and Rome. Yet His patience and loving-kindness continue still. Let us beware that we do not presume on His goodness too far. Let us hear in His mercies a loud call to us to bear fruit, and let us strive to abound in that righteousness which alone exalts a nation. (Prov. 14:34.) Let every family in the land feel its responsibility to God, and then the whole nation will be seen showing forth His praise.

Let us observe, in the third place, ***the hardness and wickedness of human nature, as exemplified in the history of the Jewish people.***

It is difficult to imagine a more striking proof of this truth, than the summary of Israel's dealings with God's messengers, which our Lord sketches in this parable. Prophet after prophet was sent to them in vain. Miracle after miracle was wrought among them, without any lasting effect. The Son of God Himself, the well beloved, at last came down to them, and was not believed. God Himself was manifest in the flesh, dwelling among them, and "they took Him and killed Him."

There is no truth so little realized and believed as the "desperate wickedness" of the human heart. Let the parable before us this day be always reckoned among the standing proofs of it. Let us see in it

what men and women can do, in the full blaze of religious privileges —in the midst of prophecies and miracles—in the presence of the Son of God Himself. “The carnal mind is enmity against God.” (Rom. 8:7.) Men never saw God face to face but once, when Jesus became a man, and lived upon earth. They saw Him holy, harmless, undefiled, going about doing good. Yet they would not have Him, rebelled against Him, and at last killed Him. Let us dismiss from our minds the idea that there is any innate goodness or natural rectitude, in our hearts. Let us put away the common notion that seeing and knowing what is good is enough to make a man a Christian. The great experiment has been made in the instance of the Jewish nation. We, too, like Israel, might have among us miracles, prophets, and the company of Christ Himself in the flesh, and yet, like Israel, have them in vain. Nothing but the Spirit of God can change the heart. “We must be born again.” (John 3:7.)

Let us observe, in the last place, that ***men’s consciences may be pierced, and yet they may continue impenitent.*** The Jews, to whom our Lord addressed the solemn historical parable which we have been reading, saw clearly that it applied to themselves. They felt that they and their forefathers were the husbandmen to whom the vineyard was let, and who ought to have rendered fruit to God. They felt that they and their forefathers were the wicked laborers, who had refused to give the Master of the vineyard His dues, and had “shamefully handled” His servants, “beating some, and killing some.” Above all, they felt that they themselves were planning the last crowning act of wickedness, which

the parable described. They were about to kill the well-beloved Son, and "cast Him out of the vineyard." All this they knew perfectly well. "They knew that He had spoken the parable against them." Yet though they knew it, they would not repent. Though convicted by their own consciences, they were hardened in sin.

Let us learn from this dreadful fact, that knowledge and conviction alone save no man's soul. It is quite possible to know that we are wrong, and be unable to deny it, and yet to cleave to our sins obstinately, and perish miserably in hell. The thing that we all need, is a change of heart and will. For this let us pray earnestly. Until we have this, let us never rest. Without this, we shall never be real Christians, and reach heaven. Without it we may live all our lives, like the Jews, knowing inwardly that we are wrong, and yet, like the Jews, persevere in our own way, and die in our sins.

MARK 12:13-17

Let us observe in the beginning of this passage, ***how men of different religious opinions can unite in opposing Christ.*** We read of "Pharisees and Herodians" coming together to "catch our Lord in His words," and perplex Him with a hard question. The Pharisee was a superstitious formalist, who cared for nothing but the outward ceremonies of religion. The Herodian was a mere man of the world, who despised all religion, and cared more for pleasing men than God. Yet when there came among them a mighty teacher who assailed the ruling passions of both alike, and spared neither

formalist nor worldling, we see them making common cause, and uniting in a common effort to stop His mouth.

It has always been so from the beginning of the world. We may see the same thing going on at the present day. Worldly men and formalists have little real sympathy with one another. They dislike one another's principles, and despise one another's ways. But there is one thing which they both dislike even more, and that is the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ. And hence, whenever there is a chance of opposing the Gospel, we shall always see the worldly man and the formalist combine and act together. We must expect no mercy from them—they will show none. We must never reckon on their divisions—they will always patch up an alliance to resist Christ.

Let us observe, for another thing in this passage, ***the exceeding subtlety of the question propounded to our Lord.*** His enemies asked him, "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, the Roman emperor, or not? Shall we give, or shall we not give?" Here was a question, which it seemed at first sight impossible to answer without peril. If our Lord had replied "Give," the Pharisees would have accused him before the priests, as one who regarded the Jewish nation as under subjection to Rome. If our Lord had replied, "Do not give," the Herodians would have accused him before Pilate, as a seditious person who taught rebellion against the Roman government. The trap was indeed well planned. Surely we may see in it the cunning hand of one greater than man. That old serpent the devil was there.

We shall do well to remember, that of all questions which have perplexed Christians, none have ever proved so intricate and puzzling, as the class of questions which the Pharisees and Herodians here propounded. What are the dues of Caesar, and what are the dues of God—where the rights of the church end, and where the rights of the state begin—what are lawful civil claims and what are lawful spiritual claims—all these are hard knots and deep problems which Christians have often found it difficult to untie, and almost impossible to solve. Let us pray to be delivered from them. Never does the cause of Christ suffer so much as when the devil succeeds in bringing churches into collisions and law-suits with the civil power. In such collisions precious time is wasted—energies are misapplied—ministers are drawn off from their proper work—the souls of people suffer, and a church's victory often proves only one degree better than a defeat. "Give peace in our time, O Lord," is a prayer of wide meaning, and one that should often be on a Christian's lips.

Let us observe, in the last place, ***the marvelous wisdom which our Lord showed in His answer to His enemies.***

Their flattering words did not deceive Him. He "knew their hypocrisy." His all-seeing eye detected the "potsherds covered with silver dross" which stood before Him. (Prov. 26:23.) He was not imposed upon, as too many of His people are, by glowing language and fine speeches.

He made the daily practice of His own enemies supply Him with an answer to their cunning questions. He tells them to "bring Him a denarius," a common coin which they themselves were in the habit of using. He asks them "whose image and superscription" are stamped upon that coin? They are obliged to reply, "Caesar's." They were themselves using a Roman coin, issued and circulated by the Roman government. By their own confession they were in some way under the power of the Romans, or this Roman money would not have been current among them. At once our Lord silences them by the memorable words, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's." He bids them pay tribute to the Roman government in temporal things, for by using its money they allowed themselves bound to do so. Yet He bids them give obedience to God in spiritual things, and not to suppose that duty to an earthly sovereign and a heavenly sovereign are incapable of being reconciled one with the other. In short, He bids the proud Pharisee not to refuse his dues to Caesar, and the worldly Herodian not to refuse his dues to God.

Let us learn from this masterly decision the great principle, that true Christianity was never meant to interfere with a man's obedience to the civil power. So far from this being the case it ought to make him a quiet, loyal, and faithful subject. He ought to regard the powers that be as "ordained of God," and to submit to their rules and regulations so long as the law is enforced, though he may not thoroughly approve of them. If the law of the land and the law of God come in collision, no doubt his course is clear—he must obey God

rather than man. Like the three children, though he serves a heathen king, he must not bow down to an idol. Like Daniel, though he submits to a tyrannical government, he must not give over praying in order to please the ruling powers.

Let us often pray for a larger measure of that spirit of wisdom which dwelt so abundantly in our blessed Lord. Many are the evils which have arisen in the Church of Christ, from a morbid and distorted view of the relative positions of the civil government and of God. Many are the rents and divisions which have been occasioned by lack of sound judgment as to their comparative claims. Happy is he who remembers our Lord's decision in this passage, understands it rightly, and makes a practical application of it to his own times.

MARK 12:18-27

These verses relate a conversation between our Lord Jesus Christ and the Sadducees. The religion of these men, we know, was little better than infidelity. They said there was "no resurrection." They too, like the Pharisees, thought to entangle and perplex our Lord with hard questions. The Church of Christ must not expect to fare better than its Master. Formalism on one side and infidelity on another, are two enemies for whose attacks we must always be prepared.

We learn from this passage, ***how much unfairness may often be detected in the arguments of infidels.***

The question propounded by the Sadducees is a striking illustration of this. They tell him of a woman who married seven brothers in succession, had no children, and outlived her seven husbands. They ask, “whose wife” of all the seven the woman would be “in the resurrection?” It may well be surmised that the case was a supposed and not a real one. On the face of it there is the strongest appearance of improbability. The chances against such a case occurring in reality, are almost infinite. But that was nothing to the Sadducees. All they cared for was to raise a difficulty, and if possible to put our Lord to silence. The doctrine of the resurrection they had not the face manfully to deny. The possible consequences of the doctrine were the ground which they chose to take up. There are three things which we shall do well to remember, if unhappily we have at any time to argue with infidels.

For one thing, let us remember that an infidel will always try to press us with the difficulties and abstruse things of religion, and especially with those which are connected with the world to come. We must avoid this mode of argument as far as possible. It is leaving the open field to fight in a jungle. We must endeavor, as far as we can, to make our discussion turn on the great plain facts and evidences of Christianity.

For another thing, let us remember, we must be on our guard against unfairness and dishonesty in argument. It may seem hard and uncharitable to say this. But experience proves that it is needful. Thousands of professed infidels have confessed in their latter days

that they had never studied the Bible which they pretended to deny, and though well read in the works of unbelievers and skeptics, had never calmly examined the foundations of Christianity.

Above all, let us remember that every infidel has a conscience. To this we may always appeal confidently. The very men who talk most loudly and disdainfully against religion, are often feeling conscious, even while they talk, that they are wrong. The very arguments which they have sneered at and ridiculed, will often prove at last not to have been thrown away.

We learn, in the second place, from this passage, ***how much of religious error may be traced to ignorance of the Bible.*** Our Lord's first words in reply to the Sadducees declare this plainly. He says, "Do you not err, because you know not the Scriptures?"

The truth of the principle here laid down, is proved by facts in almost every age of church history. The reformation in Josiah's day was closely connected with the discovery of the book of the law. The false doctrines of the Jews in our Lord's time were the result of neglecting the Scriptures. The dark ages of Christendom were times when the Bible was kept back from the people. The Protestant Reformation was mainly effected by translating and circulating the Bible. The churches which are most flourishing at this day, are churches which honor the Bible. The nations which enjoy most moral light, are nations in which the Bible is most known. The parishes in our land where there is most true religion, are those in which the Bible is most studied. The godliest families are Bible-reading

families. The holiest men and women are Bible-reading people. These are simple facts which cannot be denied.

Let these things sink deeply into our hearts, and bear fruit in our lives. Let us not be ignorant of the Bible, lest we fall into some deadly error. Let us rather read it diligently, and make it our rule of faith and practice. Let us labor to spread the Bible over the world. The more the book is known, the better the world will be. Not least, let us teach our children to value the Bible. The very best portion we can give them, is a knowledge of the Scriptures.

We learn, in the last place, from this passage, ***how different will be the state of things after the resurrection, from the state in which we live now.*** Our Lord tells us, that "when they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels which are in heaven."

It would be foolish to deny that there are many difficulties connected with the doctrine of the life to come. It must needs be so. The world beyond the grave is a world unseen by mortal eye, and therefore unknown. The conditions of existence there, are necessarily hidden from us, and if more were told, we would probably not understand it. Let it suffice us to know that the bodies of the saints shall be raised, and, though glorified, shall be like their bodies on earth—so like, that those who knew them once shall know them again. But though raised with a real body, the risen saint will be completely freed from everything which is now an evidence of weakness and infirmity. There shall be nothing like Mahomet's gross

and sensual Paradise in the Christian's future existence. Hunger and thirst being no more—there shall be no need of food. Weariness and fatigue being no more—there shall be no need of sleep. Death being no more—there shall be no need of births to supply the place of those who are removed. Enjoying the full presence of God and His Christ—men and women shall no more need the marriage union, in order to help one another. Able to serve God without weariness, and attend on Him without distraction—doing His will perfectly, and seeing His face continually—clothed in a glorious body—they shall be "as the angels which are in heaven."

There is comfort in all this for the true Christian. In the body that he now has he often "groans, being burdened," from a daily sense of weakness and imperfection. (2 Cor. 5:4.) He is now tried by many cares about this world—what to eat, and what to drink, and what to put on—how to manage his affairs, where to live, and what company to choose. In the world to come, all shall be changed. Nothing shall be lacking to make his happiness complete.

One thing only we must carefully bear in mind. Let us take heed that we rise again in "the resurrection of life," and not in "the resurrection of condemnation." (John 5:29.) To the believer in the Lord Jesus, the resurrection will be the greatest of blessings. To the worldly, the godless, and the profane, the resurrection will be a misery and a curse. Let us never rest until we are one with Christ and Christ in us, and then we may look forward with joy to a life to come.

MARK 12:28-34

These verses contain a conversation between our Lord Jesus Christ and "one of the Scribes." For the third time in one day we see our Lord tried by a hard question. Having put to silence the Pharisees and Sadducees, He is asked to decide a point on which much difference of opinion prevailed among the Jews— "Which is the first commandment of all?" We have reason to bless God that so many hard questions were propounded to our Lord. Without them the marvelous words of wisdom which His three answers contain, might never have been spoken at all. Here, as in many other cases, we see how God can bring good out of evil. He can make the most malicious assaults of His enemies work round to the good of His church, and redound to His own praise. He can make the enmity of Pharisees and Sadducees and Scribes minister instruction to His people. Little did the three questioners in this chapter think what benefit their crafty questions would confer on all Christendom. "Out of the eater came forth meat." (Judges 14:14.)

Let us observe, in these verses, ***how high is our Lord Jesus Christ's standard of duty to God and man.***

The question that the Scribe propounded was a very wide one— "Which is the first commandment of all?" The answer he received was probably very unlike what he expected. At any rate, if he thought that our Lord would commend to him the observance of some outward form or ceremony, he was mistaken. He hears these solemn words— "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength

—this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, you shall love your neighbor as yourself."

How striking is our Lord's description of the *FEELING* with which we ought to regard both God and our neighbor! We are not merely to obey the one, or to abstain from injuring the other. In both cases we are to give far more than this. We are to give love, the strongest of all affections, and the most comprehensive. A rule like this includes everything. It makes all petty details unnecessary. Nothing will be intentionally lacking where there is love.

How striking again is our Lord's description of the *MEASURE* in which we should love God and our neighbor! We are to love God better than ourselves, with all the powers of our inward man. We cannot love Him too well. We are to love our neighbor as ourselves, and to deal with him in all respects as we would like him to deal with us. The marvelous wisdom of this distinction is clear and plain. We may easily err in our affections toward others, either by thinking too little or too much of them. We therefore need the rule to love them as ourselves, neither more nor less. We cannot err in our affection toward God in the matter of excess. He is worthy of all we can give Him. We are therefore to love Him with all our heart.

Let us keep these two grand rules continually before our minds, and use them daily in our journey through life. Let us see in them a summary of all that we ought to aim at in our practice, both as regards God and man. By them let us try every difficulty of conscience that may happen to beset us, as to right and wrong.

Happy is that man who strives to frame his life according to these rules.

Let us learn from this brief exposition of the true standard of duty, how great is the need in which we all naturally stand of the atonement and mediation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Where are the men or women who can say with truth, that they have perfectly loved God and perfectly loved man? Where is the person on earth who must not plead "guilty," when tried by such a law as this? No wonder that the Scripture says, "there is none righteous, no! not one." "By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified." (Rom. 3:10, 20.) It is only gross ignorance of the requirements of God's law which makes people undervalue the Gospel. The man who has the clearest view of the moral law, will always be the man who has the highest sense of the value of Christ's atoning blood.

Let us observe, for another thing, in these verses, ***how far a man may go in religion, and yet not be a true disciple of Christ.***

The Scribe, in the passage now before us, was evidently a man of more knowledge than most of his equals. He saw things which many Scribes and Pharisees never saw at all. His own words are a strong proof of this. "There is one God—and there is none other but He and to love Him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbor as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." These words are remarkable in themselves, and doubly remarkable

when we remember who the speaker was, and the generation among whom he lived. No wonder that we read next, that our Lord said, “you are not far from the kingdom of God.”

But we must not shut our eyes to the fact, that we are nowhere told that this man became one of our Lord’s disciples. On this point there is a mournful silence. The parallel passage in Matthew throws not a gleam of light on his case. The other parts of the New Testament tell us nothing about him. We are left to draw the painful conclusion that, like the rich young man, he could not make up his mind to give up all and follow Christ; or that, like the chief rulers, elsewhere mentioned, he “loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.” (John 12:43.) In short, though “not far from the kingdom of God,” he probably never entered into it, and died outside.

Cases like that of this Scribe, are unhappily far from being uncommon. There are thousands on every side, who, like him, see much and know much of religious truth, and yet live and die undecided. There are few things which are so much overlooked as the length to which people may go in religious attainments, and yet never be converted and never saved. May we all mark well this man’s case, and take heed!

Let us beware of resting our hopes of salvation on mere intellectual knowledge. We live in days when there is great danger of doing so. Education makes children acquainted with many things in religion, of which their parents were once utterly ignorant. But

education alone will never make a Christian in the sight of God. We must not only know the leading doctrines of the Gospel with our heads, but receive them into our hearts, and be guided by them in our lives. May we never rest until we are inside the kingdom of God, until we have truly repented, really believed, and have been made new creatures in Christ Jesus. If we rest satisfied with being "not far from the kingdom," we shall find at last that we are shut out for evermore.

MARK 12:35-44

We have seen in the former part of this chapter, how the enemies of our Lord endeavored to "catch Him in His words." We have seen how the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Scribes successively propounded to Him hard questions—questions we can hardly fail to observe more likely to minister strife than edification. The passage before us begins with a question of a very different character. Our Lord Himself propounds it. He asks His enemies about Christ and the meaning of Holy Scripture. Such questions are always truly profitable. *Well would it be for the church if theological discussions were less about trifles, and more about weighty matters*, and things necessary to salvation.

Let us learn, in the first place, from these verses, ***how much there is about Christ in the Old Testament Scriptures.*** Our Lord desires to expose the ignorance of the Jewish teachers about the true nature of the Messiah. He does it by referring to a passage in the book of Psalms, and showing that the Scribes did not rightly

understand it. And in so doing He shows us that one subject, about which David was inspired by the Holy Spirit to write, was Christ.

We know, from our Lord's own words in another place, that the Old Testament Scriptures "testify of Christ." (John 5:39.) They were intended to teach men about Christ, by types, and figures, and prophecy, until He Himself should appear on earth. We should always keep this in mind, in reading the Old Testament, but never so much as in reading the Psalms. Christ is undoubtedly to be found in every part of the Law and the Prophets, but nowhere is He so much to be found, as in the book of Psalms. His experience and sufferings at His first coming into the world—His future glory, and His final triumph at His second coming—are the chief subjects of many a passage in that wonderful part of God's word. It is a true saying, that we should look for Christ quite as much as David, in reading the Psalms.

Let us beware of undervaluing, or despising the Old Testament. In its place and proportion, the Old Testament is just as valuable as the New. There are probably many rich passages in that part of the Bible which have never yet been fully explored. There are deep things about Jesus in it, which many walk over like hidden gold mines, and know not the treasures beneath their feet. Let us reverence all the Bible. All is given by inspiration, and all is profitable. One part throws light upon another, and no part can ever be neglected without loss and damage to our souls. A boastful contempt for the Old

Testament Scriptures has often proved the first step towards infidelity.

Let us learn, in the second place, from these verses, ***how odious is the sin of hypocrisy in the sight of Christ.*** This is a lesson which is taught us by our Lord's warning against the Scribes. He exposes some of their notorious practices—their ostentatious manner of dressing—their love of the honor and praise of man rather than God—their love of money, disguised under a pretended concern for widows—their long-protracted public devotions, intended to make men think them eminently godly. And He winds up all by the solemn declaration, "these shall receive greater damnation."

Of all the sins into which men can fall, none seem so exceedingly sinful as false profession and hypocrisy. At all events, none have drawn from our Lord's mouth such strong language, and such heavy denunciations. It is bad enough to be led away captive by open sin, and to serve diverse lusts and pleasures. But it is even worse to pretend to have a religion, while in reality we serve the world. Let us beware of falling into this abominable sin. Whatever we do in religion, let us never wear a cloak. Let us be real, honest, thorough, and sincere in our Christianity. We cannot deceive an all-seeing God. We may take in poor short-sighted man by a little talk and profession, and a few cant phrases, and an affectation of devoutness. But God is not mocked. He is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. His all-seeing eye pierces through the paint, and varnish, and tinsel, which cover the unsound heart. The day of

judgment will soon be here. The “joy of the hypocrite is but for a moment.” (Job 20:5.) His end will be shame and everlasting contempt.

One thing, however, must never be forgotten in connection with the subject of hypocrisy. Let us not flatter ourselves, because some make a false profession of religion, that others need not make any profession at all. This is a common delusion, and one against which we must carefully guard. It does not follow, because some bring Christianity into contempt by professing what they do not really believe and feel, that we should run unto the other extreme, and bring it into contempt by a cowardly silence and by keeping our religion out of sight. Let us rather be doubly careful to adorn our doctrine by our lives. Let us prove our sincerity by the consistency of our lives. Let us show the world that there is true coin, as well as counterfeit coin, and that the visible Church contains Christians who can witness a good confession, as well as Pharisees and Scribes. Let us confess our Master modestly and humbly, but firmly and decidedly, and show the world that although some men may be hypocrites, there are others who are honest and true.

Let us learn, in the last place, from these verses, ***how pleasing to Christ is self-denying liberality in giving.*** This is a lesson which is taught us in a striking manner, by our Lord’s commendation of a certain poor widow. We are told that He “beheld how the people cast in” their voluntary contributions for God’s service into the public, collecting box or “treasury.” He saw “many that were rich

casting in much." At last he saw this poor widow cast in all that she had for her daily maintenance. And then we hear Him pronounce the solemn words, "This poor woman has cast more in than they all" more in the sight of Him who looks not merely at the amount given, but at the ability of the giver—not merely at the quantity contributed, but at the motive and heart of the contributor.

There are few of our Lord's sayings so much overlooked as this. There are thousands who remember all His doctrinal discourses, and yet contrive to forget this little incident in His earthly ministry. The proof of this is to be seen in the meager and sparing contributions which are yearly made by Christ's church to do good in the world. The proof is to be seen in the miserably small incomes of all the missionary societies, in proportion to the wealth of the churches. The proof is to be seen in the long annual lists of self-complacent guinea subscribers, of whom many could easily give hundreds of pounds. The stinginess of professing Christians in all matters which concern God and religion, is one of the crying sins of the day, and one of the worst signs of the times. The givers to Christ's cause are but a small section of the visible church. Not one baptized person in twenty, probably, knows anything of being "rich towards God." (Luke 12:21.) The vast majority spend pounds on themselves, and give not even pence to Christ. Let us mourn over this state of things, and pray God to amend it. Let us pray Him to open men's eyes, and awake men's hearts, and stir up a spirit of liberality. Above all, let us each do our own duty, and give liberally and gladly to every Christian object while we can. There will be no giving when we are dead. Let us give

as those who remember that the eyes of Christ are upon us. He still sees exactly what each gives, and knows exactly how much is left behind. Above all let us give as the disciples of a crucified Savior, who gave Himself for us, body and soul, on the cross. Freely we have received. Let us freely give.

Mark – Chap. 13

MARK 13:1-8

The chapter we have now begun is full of prophecy—prophecy of which part has been fulfilled, and part remains to be accomplished. Two great events form the subject of this prophecy. One is the destruction of Jerusalem, and the consequent end of the Jewish dispensation. The other is the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the winding up of the state of things under which we now live. The destruction of Jerusalem was an event which happened only forty years after our Lord was crucified. The second coming of Christ is an event which is yet to come, and we may yet live to see it with our own eyes.

Chapters like this ought to be deeply interesting to every true Christian. No history ought to receive so much of our attention as the past and future history of the Church of Christ. The rise and fall of worldly empires are events of comparatively small importance in the sight of God. Babylon, and Greece, and Rome, and France, and England, are as nothing in His eyes by the side of the mystical body of Christ. The march of armies and the victories of conquerors are mere trifles in comparison with the progress of the Gospel, and the final triumph of the Prince of Peace. May we remember this in reading prophetical Scripture! “Blessed is he that reads.” (Rev. 1:3.)

The first thing that demands our attention in the verses before us, is ***the prediction of our Lord concerning the temple at Jerusalem.***

The disciples, with the natural pride of Jews, had called their Master's attention to the architectural splendor of the temple. "See," they said, "what massive stones and what buildings are here!" They received an answer from the Lord very different from what they expected, a heart-saddening answer, and one well calculated to stir up inquisitive thoughts in their minds. No word of admiration falls from His lips. He expresses no commendation of the design or workmanship of the gorgeous structure before Him. He appears to lose sight of the form and loveliness of the material building, in His concern for the wickedness of the nation to which it belonged. "Do you see," He replies, "these great buildings? There shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be cast down."

Let us learn from this solemn saying, that the true glory of a Church does not consist in its buildings for public worship, but in the faith and godliness of its members. The eyes of our Lord Jesus Christ could find no pleasure in looking at the very temple which contained the holy of holies, and the golden candlestick, and the altar of burnt offering. Much less, may we suppose, can he find pleasure in the most splendid places of worship among professing Christians, if His Word and His Spirit are not honored in it.

We shall all do well to remember this. We are naturally inclined to judge things by the outward appearance, like children who value

poppies more than corn. We are too apt to suppose that where there is a stately ecclesiastical building and a magnificent ceremonial—carved stone and painted glass—fine music and gorgeously-dressed ministers, there must be some real religion. And yet there may be no religion at all. It may be all form, and show, and appeal to the senses. There may be nothing to satisfy the conscience—nothing to cure the heart. It may prove on inquiry that Christ is not preached in that stately building, and the Word of God not expounded. The ministers may perhaps be utterly ignorant of the Gospel, and the worshipers may be dead in trespasses and sins. We need not doubt that God sees no beauty in such a building as this. We need not doubt the Parthenon had no glory in God's sight compared to the dens and caves where the early Christians worshiped, or that the lowest room where Christ is preached at this day, is more honorable in his eyes than St. Peter's Cathedral at Rome.

Let us however not run into the absurd extreme of supposing that it matters not what kind of building we set apart for God's service. There is no Popery in making a church handsome. There is no true religion in having a dirty, mean, shabby, and disorderly place of worship. "Let all things be done decently and in order." (1 Cor. 14:40.) But let it be a settled principle in our religion, however beautiful we make our churches, to regard pure doctrine and holy practice as their principal ornaments. *Without* these two things, the noblest ecclesiastical edifice is radically defective. It has no glory if God is not there. *With* these two things, the humblest brick cottage where the Gospel is preached, is lovely and beautiful. It is

consecrated by Christ's own presence and the Holy Spirit's own blessing.

The second thing that demands our attention in these verses, is ***the remarkable manner in which our Lord commences the great prophecy of this chapter.***

We are told that four of His disciples, aroused no doubt by His warning prediction about the temple, applied to Him for further information. "Tell us," they said, "when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled?"

The answer which our Lord gives to these questions, begins at once with a prediction of coming false doctrine and coming wars. If His disciples thought He would promise them immediate success and temporal prosperity in this world, they were soon undeceived. So far from bidding them expect a speedy victory of truth, He tells them to look out for the rise of error. "Take heed lest any man deceive you. Many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ." So far from bidding them expect a general reign of peace and quietness, He tells them to prepare for wars and troubles. "Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There shall be earthquakes in diverse places, and there shall be famines and troubles—these are the beginnings of sorrows."

There is something deeply instructive in this opening of our Lord's prophetical discourse. It seems like the key note of what His Church is to expect between His first and second advents. It looks as

if it were specially intended to correct the mistaken views, not only of His apostles, but of the vast body of professing Christians in every age. It looks as if our Lord knew well that man is always catching at the idea of a "good time coming," and as if He would give us plain notice that there will be no "good time" until He returns. It may not be pleasant to us to hear such tidings. But it is in strict accordance with what we read in the prophet Jeremiah, "The prophets that have been before, prophesied of war, and of evil, and of pestilence. The prophet which prophesies of peace, when the word of the prophet shall come to pass, then shall the prophet be known, that the Lord has truly sent him." (Jer. 28:8, 9.)

Let us learn from our Lord's opening prediction to be moderate in our expectations. Nothing has created so much disappointment in the Church of Christ, as the extravagant expectations in which many of its members have indulged. Let us not be carried away by the common idea, that the world will be converted before the Lord Jesus returns, and the earth filled with the knowledge of the Lord. It will not be so. There is nothing in Scripture to justify such expectations. Let us cease to expect a reign of peace. Let us rather look for wars. Let us cease to expect all men to be made holy by any existing instrumentality—schools, missions, preaching, or anything of the kind. Let us rather look for the rise of Antichrist Himself. Let us understand that we live in a day of election, and not of universal conversion. There will be no universal peace until the Prince of Peace appears. There will be no universal holiness until Satan is bound. It may cost us much to hold such opinions as these. But there is not a

church or congregation on earth, whose state does not show that these opinions are true, and that while "many are called, few are chosen." It may bring on us the unkind remarks and the unfavorable judgment of many. But the end will prove who is right and who is wrong. For that end let us wait patiently. Let us labor, and teach, and work, and pray. But let it not surprise us if we find our Lord's word strictly true— "Narrow is the way which leads unto life, and few there be that find it." (Matt. 7:14.)

MARK 13:9-13

In reading the prophecies of the Bible concerning Christ's Church, we shall generally find judgment and mercy blended together. They are seldom all bitter without any sweet—seldom all darkness without any light. The Lord knows our weakness, and readiness to faint, and has taken care to mingle consolations with threatening's—kind words with hard words, like warp and woof in a garment. We may mark this throughout the book of Revelation. We may see it all through the prophecy we are now considering. We may note it in the few verses which we have just read.

Let us observe, in the first place, ***what troubles our Lord bids His people expect between the time of His first and second comings.*** Trouble, no doubt, is the portion of all men, since the day that Adam fell. It came in with the thorns and thistles. "Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upwards." (Job 5:7) But there are special troubles to which believers in Jesus Christ are liable and of these our Lord gives them plain warning.

They must expect trouble *from the world*. They must not look for the help of "rulers and kings." They will find their ways and their doctrines bring them no favor in high places. On the contrary, they will often be imprisoned, beaten, and brought before judgment seats as malefactors, for no other reason than their adherence to the Gospel of Christ.

They must expect trouble *from their own families*. "Brother shall betray brother to death, and the father the son." Their own flesh and blood will often forget to love them, from hatred to their religion. They will find sometimes that the enmity of the carnal mind against God, is stronger than even the ties of family and blood.

We shall do well to lay these things to heart, and to "count the cost" of being a Christian. We must think it no strange thing if our religion brings with it some bitter things. Our lot, no doubt, is cast in favorable times. The lines of a British Christian are fallen in pleasant places. We have no reason to be afraid of death or imprisonment, if we serve Christ. But, for all that, we must make up our minds to endure a certain proportion of hardship, if we are real, thorough, and decided Christians. We must be content to put up with laughter, ridicule, mockery, slander, and petty persecution. We must even bear hard words and unkindness from our nearest and dearest relations. The "offence of the cross" is not ceased. "The natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God." Those who are "born after the flesh" will persecute those that are "born after the Spirit." (1 Cor. 2:14; Gal. 4:29.) The utmost consistency of life will not prevent it. If

we are converted, we must never be surprised to find that we are hated for Christ's sake.

Let us observe, in the second place, ***what rich encouragement the Lord Jesus holds out to His persecuted people.*** He sets before them three rich cordials to cheer their souls.

For one thing He tells us that "the Gospel must first be preached among all nations." It must be, and it shall be. In spite of men and devils, the story of the cross of Christ shall be told in every part of the world. The gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Notwithstanding persecution, imprisonment, and death, there never shall be lacking a succession of faithful men, who shall proclaim the glad tidings of salvation by grace. Few may believe them. Many of their hearers may continue hardened in sin. But nothing shall prevent the Gospel being preached. The word shall never be bound, though those who preach it may be imprisoned and slain. (2 Tim. 2:9.)

For another thing, our Lord tells us, that those who are placed in special trial for the Gospel's sake, shall have special help in their time of need. The Holy Spirit shall assist them in making their defense. They shall have a mouth and wisdom which their adversaries shall not be able to gainsay or resist. As it was with Peter and John and Paul, when brought before Jewish and Roman councils, so shall it be with all true-hearted disciples. How thoroughly this promise has been fulfilled, the histories of Huss, and Luther, and Latimer, and Ridley, and Baxter abundantly prove. Christ has been faithful to His word.

For another thing, our Lord tells us that patient perseverance shall result in final salvation. “He who endures unto the end, the same shall be saved.” Not one of those who endure tribulation shall miss his reward. All shall at length reap a rich harvest. Though they sow in tears, they shall reap in joy. Their light affliction, which is but for a moment, shall lead to an eternal weight of glory.

Let us gather comfort from these comfortable promises for all true-hearted servants of Christ. Persecuted, vexed, and mocked, as they are now, they shall find at length they are on the victorious side. Beset, perplexed, tried, as they sometimes are, they shall never find themselves entirely forsaken. Though cast down, they shall not be destroyed. Let them possess their souls in patience. The end of all that they see going on around them is certain, fixed, and sure. The kingdoms of this world shall yet become the kingdoms of their God and of his Christ. And when the scoffers and ungodly, who so often insulted them, are put to shame, believers shall receive a crown of glory that fades not away.

MARK 13:14-23

We are taught in these verses ***the lawfulness of using means to provide for our own personal safety.*** The language of our Lord Jesus Christ on the subject is clear and unmistakable— “Let those who be in Judea FLEE to the mountains—let him that is on the housetop not go down into the house—let him that is in the field not turn back again—pray you that your flight be not in the winter.” Not a word is said to make us suppose that flight from danger, in certain

circumstances, is unworthy of a Christian. As to the time prophesied of in the passage before us, men may differ widely. But as to the lawfulness of taking measures to avoid peril, the teaching of the passage is plain.

The lesson is one of wide application, and of much usefulness. A Christian is not to neglect the use of means, because he is a Christian, in the things of this life, any more than in the things of the life to come. A believer is not to suppose that God will take care of him, and provide for his needs, if he does not make use of means and the common sense which God has given him, as well as other people. Beyond doubt he may expect the special help of his Father in heaven, in every time of need. But he must expect it in the diligent use of lawful means. To profess to trust God, while we idly sit still and do nothing, is nothing better than fanaticism, and brings religion into contempt.

The word of God contains several instructive examples on this subject, to which we shall do well to take heed. The conduct of Jacob, when he went to meet his brother Esau, is a striking case in point. He first prays a most touching prayer, and then sends his brother a carefully arranged present. (Gen. 32:9-13.) The conduct of Hezekiah, when Sennacherib came against Jerusalem, is another case. “With us,” he tells the people, “is the Lord our God, to fight our battles.” And yet, at the same time, he built up the walls of the city, and made darts and shields. (2 Chron. 32:5.) The conduct of Paul is another case. Frequently we read of his fleeing from one place to another, to

preserve life. Once we see him let down from the walls of Damascus by a basket. Once we hear him telling the soldiers on board the Alexandrian ship, “Except the shipmen abide in the ship, you cannot be saved.” (Acts 27:31.) We know the great apostle’s faith and confidence. We know his courage and reliance on his Master. And yet we see that even he never despised the use of means. Let us not be ashamed to do likewise.

One thing only let us bear in mind. Let us not rest upon means while we use them. Let us look far beyond them to the blessing of God. It is a great sin to be like Asa, and seek not to the Lord but to the physicians. To use all means diligently, and then leave the whole event in the hand of God, is the mark at which a true believer ought to aim.

We are taught, for another thing, in these verses, ***the great privileges of God’s elect.*** Twice in the passage our Lord uses a remarkable expression about them. He says of the great tribulation, “Except that the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh should be saved; but for the elect’s sake, whom He has chosen, He has shortened the days.” He says again of the false Christs and false prophets, that they “shall show signs and wonders, to deceive, if it were possible, the elect.”

It is plain from this, and other passages in the Bible, that God has an elect people in the world. They are those, according to the seventeenth article of our church, whom “He has decreed by His counsel, secret to us, to deliver from curse and damnation; those

whom He has chosen in Christ out of mankind, and decreed to bring by Christ to everlasting salvation, as vessels made to honor." To them, and them only, belong the great privileges of justification, sanctification, and final glory. They, and they only, are "called by the Spirit in due season." They, and they only, "obey the calling. They are made sons of God by adoption. They are made like the image of God's only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. They walk religiously in good works, and at length, by God's mercy, attain to everlasting felicity." To them belong the precious promises of the Gospel. They are the bride, the Lamb's wife. They are the body of Christ. They are those whom God especially cares for in the world. Kings, princes, noblemen, rich men, are all nothing in God's eyes, compared to His elect. These things are plainly revealed in Scripture. The pride of man may not like them. But they cannot be gainsaid.

The subject of election is, no doubt, deep and mysterious. Unquestionably it has been often sadly perverted and abused. But **the misuse of truths must not prevent us from using them.** Rightly used, and fenced with proper cautions, election is a doctrine "full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort." Before we leave the subject, let us see what these cautions are.

For one thing, we must never forget that God's election does not destroy man's responsibility and accountableness for his own soul. The same Bible which speaks of election, always addresses men as free agents, and calls on them to repent, to believe, to seek, to pray, to strive, to labor. "In our doings," most wisely says the seventeenth

article, “that will of God is to be followed, which we have expressly declared unto us in the word of God.”

For another thing, let us never forget that the great thing we have to do, is to repent and believe the Gospel. We have no right to take any comfort from God’s election, unless we can show plain evidence of repentance and faith. We are not to stand still, troubling ourselves with anxious speculations whether we are elect or not, when God commands us plainly to repent and believe. (Acts 17:30. 1 John 3:23.) Let us cease to do evil. Let us learn to do well. Let us break off from sin. Let us lay hold on Christ. Let us draw near to God in prayer. So doing, we shall soon know and feel whether we are God’s elect. To use the words of an old divine, we must begin at the grammar school of repentance and faith before we go to the university of election. It was when Paul remembered the faith, and hope, and love of the Thessalonians, that he said, “I know your election of God.” (1 Thess. 1:4.)

MARK 13:24-31

This part of our Lord’s prophecy on the Mount of Olives is entirely unfulfilled. The events described in it are all yet to take place. They may possibly take place in our own day. The passage therefore is one which we ought always to read with peculiar interest.

Let us observe, in the first place, ***what solemn majesty will attend our Lord Jesus Christ’s second coming to this world.*** The language that is used about the sun, moon, and stars,

conveys the idea of some universal convulsion of the universe at the close of the present dispensation. It reminds us of the apostle Peter's words, "the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat." (2 Pet.3:10.) At such a time as this, amid terror and confusion, exceeding all that even earthquakes or hurricanes are known to produce, men "shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory."

The second coming of Christ shall be utterly unlike the first. He came the first time in weakness, a tender infant, born of a poor woman in the manger at Bethlehem, unnoticed, unhonored, and scarcely known. He shall come the second time in royal dignity, with the armies of heaven around Him, to be known, recognized, and feared by all the tribes of the earth. He came the first time to suffer—to bear our sins—to be reckoned a curse—to be despised, rejected, unjustly condemned, and slain. He shall come the second time to reign—to put down every enemy beneath His feet—to take the kingdoms of this world for His inheritance—to rule them with righteousness—to judge all men, and to live for evermore.

How vast the difference! How mighty the contrast! How startling the comparison between the second advent and the first! How solemn the thoughts that the subject ought to stir up in our minds! Here are *comforting* thoughts for Christ's friends. Their own King will soon be here. They shall reap according as they have sown. They shall receive a rich reward for all that they have endured for Christ's sake. They shall exchange their cross for a crown.

Here are *confounding* thoughts for Christ's foes. That same Jesus of Nazareth, whom they have so long despised and rejected, shall at length have the pre-eminence. That very Christ, whose Gospel they have refused to believe, shall appear as their Judge, and helpless, hopeless, and speechless, they will have to stand before His bar. May we all lay these things to heart, and learn wisdom!

Let us observe, in the next place, *that the first event after the Lord's second coming, shall be the gathering of His elect*. "He shall send His angels and gather together His elect from the four winds."

The safety of the Lord's people shall be provided for, when judgment falls upon the earth. He will do nothing until He has placed them beyond the reach of harm. The flood did not begin until Noah was safe in the ark. The fire did not fall on Sodom until Lot was safe within the walls of Zoar. The wrath of God on unbelievers shall not be let loose until believers are hidden and secure.

The true Christian may look forward to the advent of Christ without fear. However dreadful the things that shall come upon the earth, his Master will take care that no harm comes to him. He may well bear patiently the partings and separations of this present time. He shall have a joyful meeting, by and bye, with all his brethren in the faith, of every age, and country, and people, and tongue. Those who meet in that day, shall meet to part no more. The great gathering is yet to come. (2 Thess. 2:1.)

Let us observe, in the next place, ***how important it is to note the signs of our own times.*** Our Lord bids His disciples "learn a parable of the fig tree." Just as its budding leaves tell men that summer is near, so the fulfillment of events in the world around us, should teach us that the Lord's coming "is near, even at the door."

It becomes all true Christians to observe carefully the public events of their own day. It is not only a duty to do this, but a sin to neglect it. Our Lord reproved the Jews for "not discerning the signs of the times." (Matt. 16:3.) They did not see that the scepter was passing away from Judah, and the weeks of Daniel running out. Let us beware of falling into their error. Let us rather open our eyes, and look at the world around us. Let us mark the drying up of the Turkish power, and the increase of missionary work in the world. Let us mark the revival of Popery, and the rise of new and subtle forms of infidelity. Let us mark the rapid spread of lawlessness and contempt for authority. What are these things but the budding of the fig tree? They show us that this world is wearing out, and needs a new and better dynasty. It need its rightful king, even Jesus. May we watch, and keep our garments, and live ready to meet our Lord! (Rev. 16:15.)

Let us observe, lastly, in these verses, ***how carefully our Lord asserts the certainty of His predictions being fulfilled.*** He speaks as though he foresaw the incredulity and skepticism of these latter days. He warns us emphatically against it— "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."

We ought never to allow ourselves to suppose that any prophecy is improbable or unlikely to be fulfilled, merely because it is contrary to past experience. Let us not say, “Where is the likelihood of Christ coming again? Where is the likelihood of the world being burned up?” We have nothing to do with “likely or unlikely” in such matters. The only question is, “what is written in God’s word?” The words of Peter should never be forgotten— “There shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, saying, Where is the promise of His coming?” (2 Pet. 3:3, 4.)

We shall do well to ask ourselves what we would have thought if we had lived on earth two thousand years ago. Would we have thought it more probable that the Son of God would come on earth as a poor man, and die, or that He would come on earth as a King, and reign? Would we not have said at once, that if He came at all, He would come to reign, and not to die? Yet we know that He did come as “a man of sorrows,” and died on the cross. Then let us not doubt that He will come the Second time in glory, and reign as a King for evermore.

Let us leave the passage with a thorough conviction of the truth of every jot of its predictions. Let us believe that every word of it shall prove at last to have been fully accomplished. Above all, let us strive to live under an abiding sense of its truth, like good servants ready to meet their master. Then, whatever be the fulfillment of it, or however soon, we shall be safe.

MARK 13:32-37

These verses conclude Mark's report of our Lord's prophecy on the Mount of Olives. They ought to form a *personal application* of the whole discourse to our consciences.

We learn from these verses, that ***the exact time of our Lord Jesus Christ's second advent is purposely withheld from His church.*** The event is certain. The precise day and hour are not revealed. "Of that day and hour knows no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven."

There is deep wisdom and mercy in this intentional silence. We have reason to thank God that the thing has been hidden from us. Uncertainty about the date of the Lord's return is calculated to keep believers in an attitude of constant expectation, and to preserve them from despondency. What a dreary prospect the early church would have had before it, if it had known for certain that Christ would not return to earth for at least fifteen hundred years! The hearts of men like Athanasius, Chrysostom, and Augustine, might well have sunk within them, if they had been aware of the centuries of darkness through which the world would pass, before their Master came back to take the kingdom. What a quickening motive, on the other hand, true Christians have perpetually had, for a close walk with God! They have never known, in any age, that their Master might not come suddenly to take account of his servants. *This very uncertainty has supplied them with a reason for living always ready to meet Him.*

There is one caution connected with the subject, which must not be overlooked. We must not allow the uncertainty of the time of our

Lord's second advent to prevent our giving attention to the unfulfilled prophecies of Scripture. This is a great delusion, but one into which, unhappily, many Christians fall. There is a wide distinction to be drawn between dogmatical and positive assertions about dates, and a humble, prayerful searching into the good things yet to come. Against dogmatism about times and seasons, our Lord's words in this place are a standing caution. But as to the general profitableness of studying prophecy, we can have no plainer authority than the apostle Peter's words— "You do well that you take heed to prophecy;" and the apostle John's words in Revelation— "Blessed is he that reads." (2 Peter 1:19. Rev. 1:3.)

We learn, in the second place, from these verses, ***what are the practical duties of all true believers in the prospect of the second coming of Jesus Christ.*** Our Lord mentions three things, to which His people should attend. He tells them plainly that He is coming again one day, in power and great glory. He tells them at the same time, that the precise hour and date of that coming are not known. What then are His people to do? In what position of mind are they to live? They are to watch. They are to pray. They are to work.

We are to *WATCH*. We are to live always on our guard. We are to keep our souls in a wakeful, lively state, prepared at any time to meet our Master. We are to beware of anything like spiritual lethargy, dullness, deadness, and torpor. The company, the employment of time, the society which induces us to forget Christ and His second advent, should be marked, noted, and avoided. "Let us not sleep as

do others," says the apostle. "but let us watch and be sober" (1 Thess. 5:6.)

We are to *PRAY*. We are to keep up habits of regular communion and communion with God. We are to allow no coldness to come in between us and our Father in heaven, but to speak with Him daily; that so we may be ready at any moment to see Him face to face. Moreover, we are to make special prayer about the Lord's coming, that we may be "found in peace, without spot and blameless," and that our hearts may at no time be "overcharged" with the cares of this life, and so the day come upon us unawares. (2 Peter 3:14. Luke 21:34.)

Finally, we are to *WORK*. We are to realize that we are all servants of a great Master, who has given to every man his work, and expects that work to be done. We are to labor to glorify God, each in our particular sphere and relation. There is always something for everyone to do. We are to strive each of us to shine as a light—to be the salt of our own times—to be faithful witnesses for our Master, and to honor Him by conscientiousness and consistency in our daily lives. Our great desire must be to be found not idle and sleeping, but working and doing.

Such are the simple injunctions to which our Lord would have us attend. They ought to stir up in the hearts of all professing Christians great self-examination. Are we looking for our Savior's return? Do we long for His appearing? Can we say with sincerity, Come, Lord Jesus? Do we live as if we expected Christ to come again? These are

questions which demand serious consideration. May we give them the attention which they deserve!

Does our Lord require us to neglect any of the duties of life, in the expectation of His return? He requires nothing of the kind. He does not bid the farmer neglect his land, or the laborer his work, the merchant his business, or the lawyer his calling. All He asks is that baptized people should live up to the faith into which they were baptized—should live as penitent people—live as believing people—live as people who know that "without holiness no man can see the Lord." So living, we are ready to meet our Master. Not living in this way, we are neither fit for death, judgment, nor eternity. To live in this way is to be truly happy, because it is to be truly prepared for anything that may come upon the earth. Let us never be content with a lower standard of practical Christianity than this. The last words of the prophecy are peculiarly solemn— "What I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch!"

Mark – Chap. 14

MARK 14:1-9

This chapter begins that part of Mark's Gospel, which describes our Lord's sufferings and death. Hitherto we have chiefly seen our Savior as our prophet and teacher. We have now to see Him as our

High Priest. Hitherto we have had to consider His miracles and sayings. We have now to consider His vicarious sacrifice on the cross.

Let us first observe in these verses, ***how God can disappoint the designs of wicked men, and over-rule them to His own glory.***

It is plain from Mark's words, and the parallel passage in Matthew, that our Lord's enemies did not intend to make His death a public transaction. "They sought to take Him secretly." "They said, not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar of the people." In short, it would appear that their original plan was to do nothing until the feast of the Passover was over, and the Passover-worshipers had returned to their own homes.

The overruling providence of God completely defeated this political design. The betrayal of our Lord took place at an earlier time than the chief priests had expected. The death of our Lord took place on the very day when Jerusalem was most full of people, and the Passover feast was at its height. In every way the counsel of these wicked men was turned to foolishness. They thought they were going to put an end forever to Christ's spiritual kingdom; and in reality they were helping to establish it. They thought to have made Him vile and contemptible by the crucifixion; and in reality they made Him glorious. They thought to have put Him to death privily and without observation; and instead, they were compelled to crucify Him publicly, and before the whole nation of the Jews. They thought to have silenced His disciples, and stopped their teaching—and instead,

they supplied them with a text and a subject for evermore. So easy is it for God to cause the wrath of man to praise Him. (Psalm 76:10.)

There is comfort in all this for true Christians. They live in a troubled world, and are often tossed to and fro by anxiety about public events. Let them rest themselves in the thought that everything is ordered for good by an all-wise God. Let them not doubt that all things in the world around them, are working together for their Father's glory. Let them call to mind the words of the second Psalm— "The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take council together against the Lord." And yet it goes on, "He that sits in the heavens shall laugh—the Lord shall have them in derision." It has been so in time past. It will be so in time to come.

Let us observe, secondly, in these verses, ***how good works are sometimes undervalued and misunderstood.*** We are told of the good work of a certain woman, in pouring ointment on our Lord's head, in a house at Bethany. She did it, no doubt, as a mark of honor and respect, and in token of her own gratitude and love towards Him. Yet this act of hers was blamed by some. Their cold hearts could not understand such costly liberality. They called it "waste." "They had indignation within themselves." They "murmured against her."

The spirit of these narrow-minded fault-finders is unhappily only too common. Their followers and successors are to be found in every part of Christ's visible church. There is never lacking a generation of people who depreciate what they call "extremes" in religion, and are

incessantly recommending what they term “moderation” in the service of Christ. If a man devotes his time, money, and affections to the pursuit of worldly things, they do not blame him. If he gives himself up to the service of money, pleasure, or politics, they find no fault. But if the same man devotes himself, and all he has, to Christ, they can scarcely find words to express their sense of his folly. “He is beside himself.” “He is out of his mind.” “He is a fanatic.” “He is an enthusiast.” “He is righteous over-much.” “He is an extreme man.” In short, they regard it as “waste.”

Let charges like these not disturb us, if we hear them made against us because we strive to serve Christ. Let us bear them patiently, and remember that they are as old as Christianity itself. Let us pity those who make such charges against believers. They show plainly that they have no sense of obligation to Christ. **A cold heart makes a slow hand.** If a man once understands the sinfulness of sin, and the mercy of Christ in dying for him, he will never think anything too good or too costly to give to Christ. He will rather feel, “what shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits to me.” (Psalm 116:12.) He will fear wasting time, talents, money, affections on the things of this world. He will not be afraid of lavishing them on his Savior. He will fear going into extremes about business, money, politics, or pleasure; but he will not be afraid of doing too much for Christ.

Let us observe, in the last place, ***how highly our Lord Jesus Christ esteems any service done to Himself.*** Nowhere,

perhaps, in the Gospels, do we find such strong praises bestowed on any person, as this woman here receives. Three points, in particular, stand out prominently in our Lord's words, to which many who now ridicule and blame others for their religion's sake, would do well to take heed.

For one thing, our Lord says, "Why are you troubling her?" A heart-searching question that, and one which all who persecute others because of their religion would find it hard to answer! What cause can they show? What reason can they assign for their conduct? None! none at all. They trouble others out of envy, malice, ignorance, and dislike of the true Gospel.

For another thing, our Lord says, "She has done a beautiful thing to Me." How great and marvelous is that praise, from the lips of the King of kings! Money is often given to the church or bestowed on charitable institutions, from ostentation, or other false motives. But it is the person who loves and honors Jesus Himself, who really "does good works."

For another thing, our Lord says, "She has done what she could." No stronger word of commendation than that could possibly have been used. Thousands live and die without grace, and are lost eternally, who are always saying, "I try all I can. I do all I can." And yet in saying so, they tell as great a lie as Ananias and Sapphira. Few, it may be feared, are to be found like this woman, and really deserve to have it said of them, that they "do what they can."

Let us leave the passage with practical self-application. Let us, like this holy woman, whose conduct we have just heard described, devote ourselves, and all we have, to Christ's glory. Our position in the world may be lowly, and our means of usefulness few. But let us, like her, "do what we can."

Finally, let us see in this passage a sweet foretaste of things yet to come in the day of judgment. Let us believe that the same Jesus who here pleaded the cause of His loving servant, when she was blamed, will one day plead for all who have been His servants in this world. Let us work on, remembering that His eye is upon us, and that all we do is noted in His book. Let us not heed what men say or think of us, because of our religion. The praise of Christ at the last day, will more than compensate for all we suffer in this world from un kind tongues.

MARK 14:10-16

In these verses, Mark tells us how our Lord was delivered into the hands of His enemies. It came to pass through the treachery of one of His own twelve disciples. The false apostle, Judas Iscariot, betrayed Him.

We ought to mark, firstly, in this passage, ***to what lengths a man may go in a false profession of religion.***

It is impossible to conceive a more striking proof of this painful truth, than the history of Judas Iscariot. If ever there was a man who at one time looked like a true disciple of Christ, and bade fair to

reach heaven, that man was Judas. He was chosen by the Lord Jesus Himself to be an apostle. He was privileged to be a companion of the Messiah, and an eye-witness of His mighty works, throughout His earthly ministry. He was an associate of Peter, James and John. He was sent forth to preach the kingdom of God, and to work miracles in Christ's name. He was regarded by all the eleven apostles as one of themselves. He was so like his fellow disciples, that they did not suspect him of being a traitor. And yet this very man turns out at last a false-hearted child of the devil—departs entirely from the faith—assists our Lord's deadliest enemies, and leaves the world with a worse reputation than any one since the days of Cain. Never was there such a fall, such an apostasy, such a miserable end to a fair beginning—such a total eclipse of a soul!

And how can this amazing conduct of Judas be accounted for? There is only one answer to that question. "The love of money" was the cause of this unhappy man's ruin. That same groveling covetousness, which enslaved the heart of Balaam, and brought on Gehazi a leprosy, was the destruction of Iscariot's soul. No other explanation of his behavior will satisfy the plain statements of Scripture. His act was an act of base covetousness, without a redeeming feature about it. The Holy Spirit declares plainly "he was a thief." (John 12:6.) And his case stands before the world as an eternal comment on the solemn words, "the love of money is the root of all evil." (1 Tim. 6:10.)

Let us learn from this melancholy history of Judas, to be "clothed with humility," and to be content with nothing short of the grace of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. Knowledge, gifts, profession, privileges, church-membership, power of preaching, praying, and talking about religion, are all useless things, if our hearts are not converted. They are all no better than sounding brass, and a tinkling cymbal, if we have not put off the old man, and put on the new. They will not deliver us from hell. Above all, let us remember our Lord's caution, to "beware of covetousness." (Luke 12:15.) It is a sin that eats like a canker, and once admitted into our hearts, may lead us finally into every wickedness. Let us pray to be "content with such things as we have." (Heb. 13:5.) The possession of money is not the one thing needful. Riches entail great peril on the souls of those who have them. The true Christian ought to be far more afraid of being rich than of being poor.

We ought to mark, secondly, in this passage, ***the intentional connection between the time of the Jewish Passover and the time of Christ's death.*** We cannot doubt for a moment that it was not by chance, but by God's providential appointment, that our Lord was crucified in the Passover week, and on the very day that the Passover lamb was slain. It was meant to draw the attention of the Jewish nation to Him as the true Lamb of God. It was meant to bring to their minds the true object and purpose of His death. Every sacrifice, no doubt, was intended to point the Jew onward to the one great sacrifice for sin which Christ offered. But none, certainly, was so striking a figure and type of our Lord's sacrifice, as the slaying of

the Passover lamb. It was pre-eminently an ordinance which was a "schoolmaster unto Christ." (Gal. 3:24.) Never was there a type so full of meaning in the whole circle of Jewish ceremonies, as the Passover was at its original institution.

Did the Passover remind the Jew of the marvelous deliverance of his forefathers out of the land of Egypt, when God slew the first-born? No doubt it did. But it was also meant to be a sign to him of the far greater redemption and deliverance from the bondage of sin, which was to be brought in by our Lord Jesus Christ.

Did the Passover remind the Jew, that by the death of an innocent lamb, the families of his forefathers were once exempted from the death of their first-born? No doubt it did. But it was also meant to teach him the far higher truth, that the death of Christ on the cross was to be the life of the world.

Did the Passover remind the Jew that the sprinkling of blood on the door-posts of his forefathers' houses, preserved them from the sword of the destroying angel? No doubt it did. But it was also meant to show him the far more important doctrine that Christ's blood sprinkled on man's conscience, cleanses it from all stain of guilt, and makes him safe from the wrath to come.

Did the Passover remind the Jew that none of his fore-fathers were safe from the destroying angel, in the night when he slew the first-born, unless he actually ate of the slain lamb? No doubt it did. But it was meant to guide his mind to the far higher lesson, that all

who would receive benefit from Christ's atonement, must actually feed upon Him by faith, and receive Him into their hearts.

Let us call these things to mind, and weigh them well. We shall then see a peculiar fitness and beauty in the time appointed by God for our Lord Jesus Christ's death on the cross. It happened at the very season when the mind of all Israel was being directed to the deliverance from Egypt, and to the events of that wondrous night, when it took place. The lamb slain and eaten by every member of the family—the destroying angel—the safety within the blood-sprinkled door, would have been talked over and considered in every Jewish household, the very week that our blessed Lord was slain. It would be strange indeed if such a remarkable death as His, at such a time, did not set many minds thinking, and open many eyes. To what extent we shall never know until the last day.

Let it be a rule with us, in the reading of our Bibles, to study the types and ordinances of the Mosaic law with prayerful attention. They are all full of Christ. The altar—the scape-goat—the daily burnt-offering—the day of atonement, are all so many sign-posts pointing to the great sacrifice offered by our Lord on Calvary. Those who neglect to study the Jewish ordinances, as dark, dull, and uninteresting parts of the Bible, only show their own ignorance, and miss great advantages. Those who examine them with Christ as the key to their meaning, will find them full of Gospel light and comfortable truth.

MARK 14:17-25

These verses contain Mark's account of the institution of the Lord's Supper. The simplicity of the description deserves special observation. Well would it have been for the Church, if men had not departed from the simple statements of Scripture about this blessed sacrament! It is a mournful fact that it has been corrupted by false explanations and superstitious additions, until its real meaning, in many parts of Christendom, is utterly unknown. Let us however, at present, dismiss from our minds all matters of controversy, and study the words of Mark with a view to our own personal edification.

Let us learn from the passage before us, ***that self-examination should precede the reception of the Lord's Supper.*** We cannot doubt that this was one object of our Lord's solemn warning, "One of you who eats with me shall betray me." He meant to stir up in the minds of his disciples, those very searching's of heart which are here so touchingly recorded— "They began to be sorrowful, and to say unto Him one by one, Is it I?" He meant to teach His whole Church throughout the world, that the time of drawing near to the Lord's table should be a time for diligent self-inquiry.

The benefit of the Lord's Supper depends entirely on the spirit and frame of mind in which we receive it. The bread which we there eat, and the wine which we there drink, have no power to do good to our souls, as medicine does good to our bodies, without the co-operation of our hearts and wills. They will not convey any blessing to us, by virtue of the minister's consecration, if we do not receive them rightly, worthily, and with faith. To assert, as some do, that the

Lord's supper must do good to all communicants, whatever be the state of mind in which they receive it, is a monstrous and unscriptural figment of imagination, and has given rise to gross and wicked superstition.

The state of mind which we should look for in ourselves, before going to the Lord's table, is well described in the Catechism of the Church of England. We ought to "examine ourselves whether we repent truly of our former sins—whether we steadfastly purpose to lead a new life—whether we have a lively faith in God's mercy through Christ—and a thankful remembrance of His death—and whether we are in charity with all men." If our conscience can answer these questions satisfactorily, we may receive the Lord's supper without fear. More than this God does not require of any communicant. Less than this ought never to content us.

Let us take heed to ourselves in the matter of the Lord's supper. It is easy to err about it on either side. On the one hand, we are not to be content with staying away from the Lord's table under the vague plea of unfitness. As long as we so stay away, we are disobeying a plain command of Christ, and are living in sin. But, on the other hand, we are not to go to the Lord's table as a mere form, and without thought. As long as we receive the sacrament in that state of mind, we derive no good from it, and are guilty of a great transgression. It is a dreadful thing to be unfit for the sacrament, for this is to be unfit to die. It is a no less dreadful thing to receive it unworthily, for this is most provoking to God. The only safe course is

to be a decided servant of Christ, and to live the life of faith in Him. Then we may draw near with boldness, and take the sacrament to our comfort.

Let us learn, in the second place, from these verses, that ***the principal object of our Lord's Supper, is to remind us of Christ's sacrifice for us on the cross.*** The bread is intended to bring to our recollection the "body" of Christ, which was wounded for our transgressions. The wine is intended to bring to our recollection the "blood" of Christ, which was shed to cleanse us from all sin. The atonement and propitiation which our Lord effected by His death as our Surety and Substitute, stand out prominently in the whole ordinance. The false doctrine which some teach, that His death was nothing more than the death of a very holy man, who left us an example how to die, turns the Lord's supper into an unmeaning ordinance, and cannot possibly be reconciled with our Lord's words at its institution.

A clear understanding of this point is of great importance. It will place us in the right position of mind, and teach us how we ought to feel in drawing near to the Lord's table. It will produce in us true *humility* of spirit. The bread and wine, will remind us **how sinful sin must be**, **when nothing but Christ's death could atone for it.** It will produce in us *hopefulness* about our souls. The bread and wine will remind us that though our sins are great, a great price has been paid for our redemption. Not least, it will produce in us *gratitude*. The bread and wine will remind us how great is our debt

to Christ, and how deeply bound we are to glorify Him in our lives. May these be the feelings that we experience, whenever we receive the Lord's supper!

Finally, we learn from these verses, ***the nature of the spiritual benefits which the Lord's supper as intended to convey, and the persons who have a right to expect them.*** We may gather this lesson from the significant actions which are used in receiving this sacrament. Our Lord commands us to "eat" bread and to "drink" wine. Now eating and drinking are the acts of a living person. The object of eating and drinking is to be strengthened and refreshed. The conclusion we are meant to draw, is manifestly this, that the Lord's supper is appointed for "the strengthening and refreshing of our souls," and that those who ought to partake of it are those who are lively, real Christians. All such will find this sacrament a means of grace. It will assist them to rest in Christ more simply, and to trust in Him more entirely. The visible symbols of bread and wine will aid, quicken, and confirm their faith.

A right view of this point is of the utmost moment in these latter days. We must always beware of thinking that there is any way of eating Christ's body, and drinking Christ's blood, but by faith—or that receiving the Lord's supper will give any man a different interest in Christ's sacrifice on the cross from that which faith gives. Faith is the one grand means of communication between the soul and Christ. The Lord's supper can aid, quicken, and confirm faith, but can never supersede it, or supply its absence. Let this never be forgotten. Error

on this point is a most fatal delusion, and leads to many superstitions.

Let it be a settled principle in our Christianity, that no unbeliever ought to go to the Lord's table, and that the sacrament will not do our souls the slightest good, if we do not receive it with repentance and faith. The Lord's supper is not a converting or justifying ordinance, and those who come to it unconverted and unjustified, will go away no better than they came, but rather worse. It is an ordinance for believers, and not for unbelievers, for the living and not for the dead. It is meant to sustain life, but not to impart it—to strengthen and increase grace, but not to give it—to help faith to grow, but not to sow or plant it. Let these things sink down into our hearts, and never be forgotten.

Are we alive unto God? This is the great question. If we are, let us go to the Lord's supper, and receive it thankfully, and never turn our backs on the Lord's table. If we do not go, we commit a great sin.

Are we yet dead in sin and worldliness? If we are, we have no business at the communion table. We are on the broad way that leads to destruction. We must repent. We must be born again. We must be joined to Christ by faith. Then, and not until then, we are fit to be communicants.

MARK 14:26-31

We see in these verses, ***how well our Lord foreknew the weakness and infirmity of His disciples.*** He tells them plainly what they were going to do. “All of you shall desert me.” He tells Peter in particular of the astounding sin which he was about to commit— “This night, before the rooster crows twice, you shall deny me three times.”

Yet our Lord’s fore-knowledge did not prevent His choosing these twelve disciples to be His apostles. He allowed them to be His intimate friends and companions, knowing perfectly well what they would one day do. He granted them the mighty privilege of being continually with Him, and hearing His voice, with a clear foresight of the melancholy weakness and lack of faith which they would exhibit at the end of His ministry. This is a remarkable fact and deserves to be had in continual remembrance.

Let us take comfort in the thought that the Lord Jesus does not cast off his believing people because of failures and imperfections. He knows what they are. He takes them, as the husband takes the wife, with all their blemishes and defects, and, once joined to Him by faith, will never leave them. He is a merciful and compassionate High-priest. It is His glory to pass over the transgressions of His people, and to cover their many sins. He knew what they were before conversion—wicked, guilty, and defiled; yet He loved them. He knows what they will be after conversion—weak, erring, and frail; yet He loves them. He has undertaken to save them, notwithstanding all their shortcomings, and what He has undertaken He will perform.

Let us learn to pass a charitable judgment on the conduct of professing believers. Let us not set them down in a low place, and say they have no grace, because we see in them much weakness and corruption. Let us remember that our Master in heaven bears with their infirmities, and let us try to bear with them too. The Church of Christ is little better than a great hospital. We ourselves are all, more or less, weak, and all daily need the skillful treatment of the heavenly Physician. There will be no complete cures until the resurrection day.

We see, in the second place, in these verses, ***how much comfort professing Christians may miss by carelessness and inattention.*** Our Lord spoke plainly of His resurrection—"After I am risen, I will go before you into Galilee." Yet His words appear to have been thrown away, and spoken in vain. Not one of his disciples seems to have noticed them, or treasured them up in his heart. When He was betrayed, they forsook Him. When He was crucified, they were almost in despair. And when He rose again on the third day, they would not believe that it was true. They had heard of it frequently with the hearing of the ear, but it had never made any impression on their hearts.

What an exact picture we have here of human nature! How often we see the very same thing among professing Christians in the present day! How many truths we read yearly in the Bible, and yet remember them no more than if we had never read them at all! How many words of wisdom we hear in sermons heedlessly and thoughtlessly, and live on as if we had never heard them! The days of

darkness and affliction come upon us by and bye, and then we prove unarmed and unprepared. On sick-beds, and in mourning, we see a meaning in texts and passages which we at one time heard listlessly and unconcerned. Things flash across our minds at such seasons, and make us feel ashamed that we had not noticed them before. We then remember to have read them, and heard them, and seen them, but they made no impression upon us. Like Hagar's well in the wilderness, they were close at hand, but, like Hagar, we never saw them. (Gen. 21:19.)

Let us pray for a quick understanding in hearing and reading God's word. Let us search into every part of it, and not lose any precious truth in it for lack of care. So doing, we shall lay up a good foundation against the time to come, and in sorrow and sickness be found armed.

Let us mark how little reason ministers have to be surprised, if the words that they preach in sermons are often unnoticed and unheeded. They only drink of the same cup with their Master. Even He said many things which were not noticed when first spoken. And yet we know that "never man spoke like this man." "The disciple is not greater than his Master, nor the servant than his Lord." We have need of patience. Truths that seem neglected at first, often bear fruit after many days.

We see in the last place, in these verses, ***how much ignorant self-confidence may sometimes be found in the hearts of professing Christians.*** The apostle Peter could not think it

possible that he could ever deny his Lord. “If I have to die with you,” he says, “I will never deny you.” And he did not stand alone in his confidence. The other disciples were of the same opinion. “And all the others vowed the same.” Yet what did all this confident boasting come to? Twelve hours did not pass away before all the disciples forsook our Lord and fled. Their loud professions were all forgotten. The present danger swept all their promises of fidelity clean away. So little do we know how we shall act in any particular position until we are placed in it! So much do present circumstances alter our feelings!

Let us learn to pray for humility. “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.” (Prov. 16:18.) There is far more wickedness in all our hearts than we know. We never can tell how far we might fall, if once placed in temptation. There is no degree of sin into which the greatest saint may not run, if he is not held up by the grace of God, and if he does not watch and pray. The seeds of every wickedness lie hidden in our hearts. They only need the convenient season to spring forth into a mischievous vitality. “Let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.” “He that trusts his own heart is a fool.” (1 Cor. 10:12. Prov. 28:26.) Let our daily prayer be, “Hold me up and I shall be safe.”

MARK 14:32-42

The history of our Lord’s agony in the garden of Gethsemane is a deep and mysterious passage of Scripture. It contains things which the wisest divines cannot fully explain. Yet it has upon its surface plain truths of most momentous importance.

Let us mark, in the first place, ***how keenly our Lord felt the burden of a world's sin.*** It is written that He began to be filled with horror and deep distress. He told them, "My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death," and that "he fell on the ground, and prayed, that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him." There is only one reasonable explanation of these expressions. It was no mere fear of the physical suffering of death, which drew them from our Lord's lips. It was a sense of the enormous load of human guilt, which began at that time to press upon Him in a peculiar way. It was a sense of the unutterable weight of our sins and transgressions which were then specially laid upon Him. He was being "made a curse for us." He was bearing our griefs and carrying our sorrows according to the covenant He came on earth to fulfill. He was being "made sin for us who Himself knew no sin." His holy nature felt acutely the hideous burden laid upon Him. These were the reasons of His extraordinary sorrow.

We ought to see in our Lord's agony in Gethsemane the exceeding sinfulness of sin. It is a subject on which the thoughts of professing Christians are far below what they should be. The careless, light way in which such sins as swearing, Sabbath-breaking, lying, and the like, are often spoken of, is a painful evidence of the low condition of men's moral feelings. Let the recollection of Gethsemane have a sanctifying effect upon us. Whatever others do, let us never "make a mock at sin."

Let us mark, in the second place, ***what an example our Lord gives us of the importance of prayer in time of trouble.*** In the hour of His distress we find Him employing this great remedy. Twice we are told that when His soul was exceeding sorrowful, "He prayed."

We shall never find a better formula than this, for the patient bearing of affliction. The first person to whom we should turn in our trouble is God. The first expression of grief we should make, should be in the form of a prayer. The reply may not be given immediately. The relief we need may not be granted at once. The thing that tries us may never be removed and taken away. But the mere act of pouring out our hearts, and unbosoming ourselves at a throne of grace will do us good. The advice of James is wise and weighty— "Is any afflicted? Let him pray." (James 5:13.)

Let us mark, in the third place, ***what a striking example our Lord gives us of submission of will, to the will of God.*** Deeply as His human nature felt the pressure of a world's guilt, He still prays that, "if it were possible," the hour might pass from Him. "Take away this cup from me—nevertheless not what I will, but what you will."

We can imagine no higher degree of perfection than that which is here set before us. To take patiently whatever God sends—to like nothing but what God likes—to wish nothing but what God approves —to prefer pain, if it pleases God to send it; to forego ease, if God does not think fit to bestow it—to lie passive under God's hand, and

know no will but His—this is the highest standard at which we can aim, and of this our Lord's conduct in Gethsemane is a perfect pattern.

Let us strive and labor to have "the mind that was in Christ" in this matter. Let us daily pray and endeavor to be enabled to mortify our self-will. It is for our happiness to do so. Nothing brings us so much misery on earth as having our own way. It is the best proof of real grace to do so. Knowledge, and gifts, and convictions, and feelings, and wishes, are all very uncertain evidences. They are often to be found in unconverted people. But a continually increasing disposition to submit our own wills to the will of God, is a far more healthy symptom. It is a sign that we are really "growing in grace, and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ."

Let us mark, lastly, in these verses, ***how much infirmity may be found even in the best Christians.*** We have a painful illustration of this truth in the conduct of Peter, James, and John. They slept when they ought to have watched and prayed. Though invited by our Lord to watch with Him, they slept. Though warned a short time before that danger was at hand, and their faith likely to fail, they slept. Though fresh from the Lord's table, with all its touching solemnities, they slept. Never was there a more striking proof that **the best of men are but men**, and that, so long as saints are in the body, they are compassed with infirmity.

These things are written for our learning. Let us take heed that they are not written in vain. Let us ever be on our guard against the

slothful, indolent, lazy spirit in religion, which is natural to us all, and especially in the matter of our private prayers. When we feel that spirit creeping over us, let us remember Peter, James, and John in the garden, and take care.

The solemn counsel which our Lord addresses to His disciples should often ring in our ears— "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak." It should be the Christian's daily motto from the time of his conversion to the hour of his death.

Are we true Christians? and would we keep our souls awake? Let us not forget that we have within us a double nature—a ready "spirit" and weak "flesh" a carnal nature inclined to evil, and a spiritual nature inclined to good. These two are contrary one to the other. (Gal. 5:17.) Sin and the devil will always find helpers in our hearts. If we do not crucify and rule over the flesh, it will often rule over us and bring us to shame.

Are we true Christians, and would we keep our souls awake? Then let us never forget to "watch and pray." We must watch like soldiers —we are upon enemy's ground. We must always be on our guard. We must fight a daily fight, and war a daily warfare. The Christian's rest is yet to come. We must pray without ceasing, regularly, habitually, carefully, and at stated times. We must pray as well as watch, and watch as well as pray. Watching without praying is self-confidence and self-conceit. Praying without watching is enthusiasm and fanaticism. The man who knows his own weakness, and knowing it

both watches and prays, is the man that will be held up and not allowed to fall.

MARK 14:43-52

Let us notice in these verses, ***how little our Lord's enemies understood the nature of His kingdom.*** We read that Judas came to take Him "with a great multitude, with swords and clubs." It was evidently expected that our Lord would be vigorously defended by His disciples, and that He would not be taken prisoner without fighting. The chief priests and scribes clung obstinately to the idea, that our Lord's kingdom was a worldly kingdom, and therefore supposed that it would be upheld by worldly means. They had yet to learn the solemn lesson contained in our Lord's words to Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world." (John 18:36.)

We shall do well to remember this in all our endeavors to extend the kingdom of true religion. It is not to be propagated by violence, or by an arm of flesh.

"The weapons of our warfare are not carnal." "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts." (2 Cor. 10:4. Zech. 4:6.) The cause of truth does not need force to maintain it. False religions, like Mohammedanism, have often been spread by the sword. False Christianity, like that of the Roman Church, has often been enforced on men by bloody persecutions. But the real Gospel of Christ requires no such aids as these. It stands by the power of the Holy Spirit. It grows by the hidden influence of the Holy Spirit on

men's hearts and consciences. There is no clearer sign of a bad cause in religion than a readiness to appeal to the sword.

Let us notice, secondly, in these verses, ***how all things in our Lord's passion happened according to God's Word.*** His own address to those who took Him, exhibits this in a striking manner—"the Scripture must be fulfilled."

There was no accident or chance in any part of the close of our Lord's earthly ministry. The steps in which He walked from Gethsemane to Calvary were all marked out hundreds of years before. The twenty-second Psalm, and the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, were literally fulfilled. The wrath of His enemies—His rejection by His own people—His being dealt with as a malefactor—His being condemned by the assembly of the wicked—all had been foreknown, and all foretold. All that took place was only the working out of God's great design to provide an atonement for a world's sin. The armed men whom Judas brought to lay hands on Jesus, were, like Nebuchadnezzar and Sennacherib, *unconscious instruments in carrying God's purposes into effect*.

Let us rest our souls on the thought, that all around us is ordered and overruled by God's almighty wisdom. The course of this world may often be contrary to our wishes. The position of the Church may often be very unlike what we desire. The wickedness of worldly men, and the inconsistencies of believers, may often afflict our souls. But there is a hand above us, moving the vast machine of this universe, and making all things work together for His glory. The Scriptures are

being yearly fulfilled. Not one jot or tittle in them shall ever fail to be accomplished. The kings of the earth may take counsel together, and the rulers of the nations may set themselves against Christ (Psalm. 2:2), but the resurrection morning shall prove that, even at the darkest time, all things were being done according to the will of God.

Let us notice, lastly, in these verses, ***how much the faith of true believers may give way.*** We are told that when Judas and his company laid hands on our Lord, and He quietly submitted to be taken prisoner, the eleven disciples "all forsook Him and fled." Perhaps up to that moment they were buoyed up by the hope that our Lord would work a miracle, and set Himself free. But when they saw no miracle worked, their courage failed them entirely. Their former protestations were all forgotten. Their promises to die with their Master, rather than deny Him, were all cast to the winds. The fear of present danger got the better of faith. The sense of immediate peril drove every other feeling out of their minds. They "all forsook Him and fled."

There is something deeply instructive in this incident. It deserves the attentive study of all professing Christians. Happy is he who marks the conduct of our Lord's disciples, and gathers from it wisdom!

Let us learn from the flight of these eleven disciples not to be over-confident in our own strength. The fear of man does indeed bring a snare. We never know what we may do, if we are tempted, or

to what extent our faith may give way. Let us be clothed with humility.

Let us learn to be charitable in our judgment of other Christians. Let us not expect too much from them, or set them down as having no grace at all, if we see them overtaken in a fault. Let us not forget that even our Lord's chosen apostles forsook Him in His time of need. Yet they rose again by repentance, and became pillars of the Church of Christ.

Finally, let us leave the passage with a deep sense of ***our Lord's ability to sympathize with His believing people.*** If there is one trial greater than another, it is the trial of being disappointed in those we love. It is a bitter cup, which all true Christians have frequently to drink. Ministers fail them. Relations fail them. Friends fail them. One cistern after another proves to be broken, and to hold no water. But let them take comfort in the thought, that there is one unfailing Friend, even Jesus, who can be touched with the feeling of their infirmities, and has tasted of all their sorrows. Jesus knows what it is to see friends and disciples failing Him in the hour of need. Yet He bore it patiently, and loved them notwithstanding all. He is never weary of forgiving. Let us strive to do likewise. Jesus, at any rate, will never fail us. It is written, "His compassions fail not" (Lam. 3:22).

MARK 14:53-65

Solomon tells us in the book of Ecclesiastes, that one evil he has seen under the sun, is when “folly is set in great dignity, and the rich sit in low place.” (Eccles. 10:6.) We can imagine no more complete illustration of his words than the state of things we have recorded in the passage before us. We see the Son of God, “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,” arraigned as a malefactor before “the chief priests, and elders, and scribes.” We see the heads of the Jewish nation combining together to kill their own Messiah, and judging Him who will one day come in glory to judge them and all mankind. These things sound marvelous, but they are true.

Let us observe in these verses, ***how foolishly Christians sometimes thrust themselves into temptation.*** We are told that when our Lord was led away prisoner, “Peter followed Him afar off, even into the palace of the high priest—and he sat with the servants, and warmed himself at the fire.” There was no wisdom in this act. Having once forsaken his Master and fled, he ought to have remembered his own weakness, and not to have ventured into danger again. It was an act of rashness and presumption. It brought on him fresh trials of faith, for which he was utterly unprepared. It threw him into bad company, where he was not likely to get good, but harm. It paved the way for his last and greatest transgression—his thrice-repeated denial of his Master.

But it is an experimental truth that ought never to be overlooked, that when a believer has once begun to back-slide and leave his first

faith, he seldom stops short at his first mistake. He seldom makes only one stumble. He seldom commits only one fault. A blindness seems to come over his understanding. He appears to cast overboard his common sense and discretion. Like a stone rolling downhill, the further he goes on in sinning, the faster and more decided is his course. Like David, he may begin with idleness, and end with committing every possible crime. Like Peter, he may begin with cowardice—go on to foolish trifling with temptation, and then end with denying Christ.

If we know anything of true saving religion, let us ever beware of the beginnings of backsliding. It is like the letting out of water, first a drop and then a torrent. Once out of the way of holiness, there is no saying to what we may come. Once giving way to petty inconsistencies, we may find ourselves one day committing every sort of wickedness. Let us keep far from the brink of evil. Let us not play with fire. Let us never fear being too particular, too strict, and too precise. No petition in the Lord's prayer is more important than the last but one, "Lead us not into temptation."

Let us observe, in the second place, in these verses, ***how much our Lord Jesus Christ had to endure from lying lips, when tried before the chief priests.*** We are told that "many bore false witness against Him; but their witness agreed not together."

We can easily conceive that this was not the least heavy part of our blessed Savior's passion. To be seized unjustly as a malefactor, and put on trial as a criminal, when innocent, is a severe affliction.

But to hear men inventing false charges against us and coining slanders—to listen to all the malignant virulence of unscrupulous tongues let loose against our character, and know that it is all untrue—this is a cross indeed! "The words of a talebearer," says Solomon, "are as wounds." (Prov. 18:8.) "Deliver my soul," says David, "from lying lips and a deceitful tongue." (Psalm 120:2.) All this was a part of the cup which Jesus drank for our sakes. Great indeed was the price at which our souls were redeemed!

Let it never surprise true Christians if they are slandered and misrepresented in this world. They must not expect to fare better than their Lord. Let them rather look forward to it as a matter of course, and see in it a part of the cross which all must bear after conversion. Lies and false reports are among Satan's choicest weapons. When he cannot deter men from serving Christ, he labors to harass them and make Christ's service uncomfortable. Let us bear it patiently, and not count it a strange thing. The words of the Lord Jesus should often come to our minds— "Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you." "Blessed are you, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake." (Luke 6:26. Matt. 5:11.)

Let us observe, lastly, in these verses, ***what distinct testimony our Lord bore to His own Messiahship, and second advent in glory.*** The high priest asks Him the solemn question, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" He receives at once the emphatic reply, "I am—and you shall see the Son of Man

sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven."

These words of our Lord ought always to be had in remembrance. The Jews could never say after these words, that they were not clearly told that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ of God. Before the great councils of their priests and elders, He declared, "I am the Christ." The Jews could never say after these words, that He was so lowly and poor a person, that He was not worthy to be believed. He warned them plainly that His glory and greatness was all yet to come. They were only deferred and postponed until His second advent. They would yet see Him in royal power and majesty, "sitting on the right hand of power," coming in the clouds of heaven, a Judge, a Conqueror, and a King. If Israel was unbelieving, it was not because Israel was not told what to believe.

Let us leave the passage with a deep sense of the reality and certainty of our Lord Jesus Christ's second coming. Once more at the very end of His ministry, and in the face of His deadly enemies, we find Him asserting the mighty truth that He will come again to judge the world. Let it be one of the leading truths in our own personal Christianity. Let us live in the daily recollection that our Savior is one day coming back to this world. Let the Christ in whom we believe, be not only the Christ who died for us and rose again—the Christ who lives for us and intercedes—but the Christ who will one day return in glory, to gather together and reward His people, and to punish fearfully all His enemies.

MARK 14:66-72

A shipwreck is a melancholy sight, even when no lives are lost. It is sad to think of the destruction of property, and disappointment of hopes which generally attend it. It is painful to see the suffering and hardship, which the ship's crew often have to undergo in their struggle to escape from drowning. Yet no shipwreck is half so melancholy a sight as the backsliding and fall of a true Christian. Though raised again by God's mercy, and finally saved from hell, he loses much by his fall. Such a sight we have brought before our minds in the verses we have now read. We are there told that most painful and instructive story, how Peter denied his Lord.

Let us learn, in the first place, from these verses, ***how far and how shamefully a great saint may fall.*** We know that Simon Peter was an eminent apostle of Jesus Christ. He was one who had received special commendation from our Lord's lips, after a noble confession of His Messiahship— "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona," "I will give unto you the keys of the kingdom of heaven." He was one who had enjoyed special privileges, and had special mercies shown to him. Yet here we see this same Simon Peter so entirely overcome by fear that he actually denies his Lord. He declares that he knows not Him whom he had accompanied and lived with for three years! He declares that he knows not Him who had healed his own wife's mother, taken him up into the mount of transfiguration, and saved him from drowning in the sea of Galilee! And he not only denies his Master once, but does it three times! And he not only denies Him

simply, but does it “cursing and swearing!” And above all, he does all this in the face of the plainest warnings, and in spite of his own loud protestation that he would do nothing of the kind, but rather die!

These things are written to show the Church of Christ what human nature is, even in the best of men. They are intended to teach us that, even after conversion and renewal of the Holy Spirit, believers are compassed with infirmity and liable to fall. They are meant to impress upon us the immense importance of daily watchfulness, prayerfulness, and humility so long as we are in the body. “Let him that thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall.”

Let us carefully remember that Simon Peter’s case does not stand alone. The word of God contains many other examples of the infirmity of true believers, which we shall do well to observe. The histories of Noah, Abraham, David, Hezekiah, will supply us with mournful proof, that “the infection of sin remains even in the regenerate,” and that no man is so strong as to be beyond the danger of falling. Let us not forget this. Let us walk humbly with our God. “Happy is the man that fears aways.” (Prov. 28:14.)

Let us learn, in the second place, from these verses, ***how small a temptation may cause a saint to have a great fall.*** The beginning of Peter’s trial was nothing more than the simple remark of “a maid of the High Priest.” “You also were with Jesus of Nazareth.” There is nothing to show that these words were spoken with any hostile purpose. For anything we can see, they might fairly mean that this maid remembered that Peter used to be a companion

of our Lord. But this simple remark was enough to overthrow the faith of an eminent apostle, and to make him begin to deny his Master. The chief and foremost of our Lord's chosen disciples is cast down, not by the threats of armed men, but by the saying of one weak woman!

There is something deeply instructive in this fact. It ought to teach us that no temptation is too small and trifling to overcome us, except we watch and pray to be held up. If God be for us we may remove mountains and get the victory over a host of foes. "I can do all things," says Paul, "through Christ that strengthens me." (Phil. 4:13.) If God withdraws His grace, and leaves us to ourselves, we are like a city without gates and walls, a prey to the first enemy, however weak and contemptible.

Let us beware of making light of temptations because they seem little and insignificant. There is nothing little that concerns our souls. A little leaven leavens the whole lump. A little spark may kindle a great fire. A little leak may sink a great ship. A little provocation may bring out from our hearts great corruption, and end in bringing our souls into great trouble.

Finally, let us learn from these verses ***that backsliding brings saints into great sorrow.*** The conclusion of the passage is very affecting. "Peter called to mind the words that Jesus said unto him, Before the rooster crows, you shall deny me thrice." Who can pretend to describe the feelings that must have flashed across the apostle's mind? Who can conceive the shame, and confusion, and self-

reproach, and bitter remorse which must have overwhelmed his soul? To have fallen so foully! To have fallen so repeatedly! To have fallen in the face of such plain warnings! All these must have been cutting thoughts. The iron must indeed have entered into his soul. There is deep and solemn meaning in the one single expression used about him— "Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him. And he broke down and wept."

The experience of Peter is only the experience of all God's servants who have yielded to temptation. Lot, and Samson, and David, and Jehoshaphat in Bible history—Cranmer and Jewell in the records of our own English Church—have all left evidence, like Peter, that "the backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways." (Prov. 14:14.) Like Peter, they erred grievously. Like Peter, they repented truly. But, like Peter, they found that they reaped a bitter harvest in this world. Like Peter, they were freely pardoned and forgiven. But, like Peter, they shed many tears.

Let us leave the passage with the settled conviction that ***sin is sure to lead to sorrow, and that the way of most holiness is always the way of most happiness.*** The Lord Jesus has mercifully provided that it shall never profit His servants to walk carelessly and to give way to temptation. If we will turn our backs on Him we shall be sure to smart for it. Though He forgives us, He will make us feel the folly of our own ways. Those that follow the Lord most fully, shall always follow Him most comfortably. "Their sorrows shall be multiplied who hasten after other gods." (Psalm 16:4.)

Mark – Chap. 15

Mark 15:1-15

These verses begin the chapter in which Mark describes the slaying of "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." It is a part of the Gospel history which should always be read with peculiar reverence. We should call to mind, that Christ was cut off, not for Himself, but for us. (Dan. 9:26.) We should remember that His death is the life of our souls, and that unless His blood had been shed, we must have perished miserably in our sins.

Let us mark in these verses, ***what a striking proof the Jewish rulers gave to their own nation that the times of Messiah had come.***

The chapter opens with the fact, that the chief priests bound Jesus and "delivered Him to Pilate," the Roman Governor. Why did they do so? Because they had no longer the power of putting any one to death, and were under the dominion of the Romans. By this one act and deed they declared that the prophecy of Jacob was fulfilled. "The scepter had departed from Judah, and the lawgiver from between his feet," and Shiloh the Messiah, whom God had promised to send, must have come. (Gen. 49:10.) Yet there is nothing whatever to show that they remembered this prophecy. Their eyes were

blinded. They either could not, or would not, see what they were doing.

Let us never forget that wicked men are often fulfilling God's predictions to their own ruin, and yet know it not. In the very height of their madness, folly, and unbelief, they are often unconsciously supplying fresh evidence that the Bible is true. The unhappy scoffers who make a jest of all serious religion, and can scarcely talk of Christianity without ridicule and scorn, would do well to remember that their conduct was long ago foreseen and foretold. "There shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts." (2 Peter 3:3)

Let us mark, secondly, in these verses, ***the meekness and lowliness of our Lord Jesus Christ.*** When He stood before Pilate's bar, and was "accused of many things," He answered nothing. Though the charges against Him were false, and He knew no sin, He was content to endure the contradiction of sinners against Himself, not answering again. (Heb.12:3.) Though he was innocent of any transgression, He submitted to bear groundless accusations made against Him without a murmur. Great is the contrast between the second Adam and the first! Our first father Adam was guilty, and yet tried to excuse himself. The second Adam was guiltless, and yet made no defense at all. "As a sheep before her shearers is silent, so He does not open His mouth." (Isa. 53:7.)

Let us learn a practical lesson from our Savior's example. Let us learn to suffer patiently, and not to complain, whatever God may

think fit to lay upon us. Let us take heed to our ways, that we offend not in our tongues, in the hour of temptation. (Psalm 39:1.) Let us beware of giving way to irritation and ill temper, however provoking and undeserved our trials may seem to be. Nothing in the Christian character glorifies God so much as patient suffering. “If when you do well and suffer for it, you take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were you called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that you should follow His steps.” (1 Pet. 2:20, 21.)

Let us mark, thirdly, in these verses, ***the wavering and undecided conduct of Pilate.***

It is clear from the passage before us that Pilate was convinced of our Lord’s innocence. “He knew that the chief priests had delivered him for ENVY.” We see him feebly struggling for a time to obtain our Lord’s acquittal, and to satisfy his own conscience. At last he yields to the importunity of the Jews, and “willing to satisfy the people,” delivers Jesus to be crucified—to the eternal disgrace and ruin of his own soul.

A man in high place without religious principles, is one of the most pitiable sights in the world. He is like a large ship tossed to and fro on the sea without compass or rudder. His very greatness surrounds him with temptations and snares. It gives him power for good or evil, which, if he knows not how to use it aright, is sure to bring him into difficulties, and to make him unhappy. Let us pray much for great men. They need great grace to keep them from the

devil. *High places are slippery places.* No wonder that Paul recommends intercession "for kings and for all that are in authority." (1 Tim. 2:1, 2.) Let us not envy great men. They have many and peculiar temptations. How hard it is for a rich man enter the kingdom of God. "Do you seek you great things for yourself? seek them not." (Jerem. 45:5.)

Let us mark, fourthly, in these verses, *the exceeding guilt of the Jews in the matter of the death of Christ.* At the eleventh hour the chief priests had an opportunity of repenting if they would have taken it. They had the choice given them whether Jesus or Barabbas should be let go free. Coolly and deliberately they persevered in their bloody work. They chose to have a murderer let go free. They chose to have the Prince of Life put to death. The *power* of putting our Lord to death was no longer theirs. The *responsibility* of His death they publicly took upon themselves. "What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?" was Pilate's question. "Crucify him, crucify him," was the dreadful answer. The agents in our Lord's death were undoubtedly Gentiles. But the guilt of our Lord's death must always rest chiefly upon the Jews.

We marvel at the wickedness of the Jews at this part of our Lord's history—and no wonder. To reject Christ and choose Barabbas was indeed an astounding act! It seems as if blindness, madness, and folly could go no further. But let us take heed that we do not unwittingly follow their example. Let us beware that we are not found at last to have chosen Barabbas and rejected Christ. The

service of sin and the service of God are continually before us. The friendship of the world and the friendship of Christ are continually pressed upon our notice. Are we making the right choice? Are we cleaving to the right Friend? These are solemn questions. Happy is he who can give them a satisfactory answer.

Let us mark, finally, in these verses, ***what a striking type the release of Barabbas affords of the Gospel plan of salvation.*** The guilty is set free and the innocent is put to death. The great sinner is delivered, and the sinless one remains bound. Barabbas is spared, and Christ is crucified.

We have in this striking fact a vivid emblem of the manner in which God pardons and justifies the ungodly. He does it, because Christ has suffered in their stead, the just for the unjust. They deserve punishment, but a mighty Substitute has suffered for them. They deserve eternal death, but a glorious Surety has died for them. We are all by nature in the position of Barabbas. We are guilty, wicked, and worthy of condemnation. But "when we were without hope," Christ the innocent died for the ungodly. And now God for Christ's sake can be just, and yet "the justifier of the one who believes in Jesus."

Let us bless God that we have such a glorious salvation set before us. Our plea must ever be, not that we are deserving of acquittal, but that Christ has died for us. Let us take heed, that having so great a salvation we really make use of it for our own souls. May we never rest until we can say by faith, "Christ is mine. I deserve hell. But

Christ has died for me, and believing in Him I have a hope of heaven."

MARK 15:16-32

The passage we have now read, is one of those which show us the infinite love of Christ toward sinners. The sufferings described in it would fill our minds with mingled horror and compassion, if they had been inflicted on one who was only a man like ourselves. But when we reflect that the sufferer was the eternal Son of God, we are lost in wonder and amazement. And when we reflect further that these sufferings were voluntarily endured to deliver sinful men and women like ourselves from hell, we may see something of Paul's meaning when he says, "The love of Christ passes knowledge." "God commends His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Ephes. 3:19; Rom. 5:8.)

We shall find it useful to examine separately the several parts of our Lord's passion. Let us follow Him step by step from the moment of His condemnation by Pilate to His last hour upon the cross. There is a deep meaning in every jot and tittle of His sorrows. All were striking emblems of spiritual truths. And let us not forget as we dwell on the wondrous story, that we and our sins were the cause of all these sufferings. "Christ suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God." (1 Peter 3:18.) It is the death of our own Surety and Substitute that we are reading.

First of all we see **Jesus delivered into the hands of the Roman soldiers, as a criminal condemned to death.** He before whom the whole world will one day stand and be judged, allowed Himself to be sentenced unjustly, and given over into the hands of wicked men.

And why was this? It was that we, the poor sinful children of men, believing on Him, might be delivered from the pit of destruction, and the torment of the prison of hell. It was that we might be set free from every charge in the day of judgment, and be presented faultless before God the Father with exceeding joy.

Secondly, we see **Jesus insulted and made a laughing-stock by the Roman soldiers.** They "clothed Him with purple" in derision, and put "a crown of thorns" on His head, in mockery of his kingdom. "They smote Him on the head with a reed, and spit upon Him," as one utterly contemptible, and no better than "the filth of the world." (1 Cor. 4:13.)

And why was this? It was that we, vile as we are, might have glory, honor, and eternal life through faith in Christ's atonement. It was done that we might be received into God's kingdom with triumph at the last day, and receive the crown of glory that fades not away.

Thirdly, we see **Jesus stripped of His garments and crucified naked before His enemies.** The soldiers who led Him away "parted His garments, casting lots upon them."

And why was this? It was that we, who have no righteousness of our own, might be clothed in the perfect righteousness that Christ has wrought out for us, and not stand naked before God at the last day. It was done, that we, who are all defiled with sin, might have a wedding-garment, wherein we may sit down by the side of angels, and not be ashamed.

Fourthly, we see **Jesus suffering the most ignominious and humiliating of all deaths, even the death of the cross.** It was the punishment reserved for the worst of malefactors. The man on whom it was inflicted was counted accursed. It is written, “Cursed is everyone that hangs on a tree.” (Gal. 3:13.)

And why was this? It was that we, who are born in sin and children of wrath, might be counted blessed for Christ’s sake. It was done to remove the curse which we all deserve because of sin, by laying it on Christ. “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.” (Gal. 3:13.)

Fifthly, we see **Jesus reckoned a transgressor and a sinner.** “With him they crucify two thieves.” He who had done no sin, and in whom there was no deceit, “was numbered with the transgressors.”

And why was this? It was that we, who are miserable transgressors, both by nature and practice, may be reckoned innocent for Christ’s sake. It was done that we, who are worthy of

nothing but condemnation, may be counted worthy to escape God's judgment, and be pronounced not guilty before the assembled world.

Lastly, we see **Jesus mocked when dying, as one who was an impostor, and unable to save Himself.**

And why was this? It was that we, in our last hours, through faith in Christ may have strong consolation. It all came to pass that we may enjoy a strong assurance—may know whom we have believed, and may go down the valley of the shadow of death fearing no evil.

Let us leave the passage with a deep sense of the enormous debt which all believers owe to Christ. All that they have, and are, and hope for, may be traced up to the doing and dying of the Son of God. Through His condemnation, they have acquittal—through His sufferings, peace—through His shame, glory—through His death, life. Their sins were imputed to Him. His righteousness is imputed to them. No wonder that Paul says, "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift." (2 Cor. 9:15.)

Finally, let us leave the passage with the deepest sense of Christ's unutterable love to our souls. Let us remember what we are, corrupt, evil, and miserable sinners. Let us remember who the Lord Jesus is, the eternal Son of God, the maker of all things. And then let us remember that for our sakes Jesus voluntarily endured the most painful, horrible, and disgraceful death. Surely the thought of this love should constrain us daily to live not unto ourselves, but unto Christ. It should make us ready and willing to present our bodies a

living sacrifice to Him who lived and died for us. (2 Cor. 5:4. Rom 12:1.) Let the cross of Christ be often before our minds. Rightly understood, no object in all Christianity is so likely to have a sanctifying as well as a comforting effect on our souls.

MARK 15:33-38

We have in these verses the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. All deaths are solemn events. Nothing in the whole history of a man is so important as his end. But never was there a death of such solemn import as that which is now before us. In the instant that our Lord drew His last breath, the work of atonement for a world's sin was accomplished. The ransom for sinners was at length paid. The kingdom of heaven was thrown fully open to all believers. All the solid hope that mortal men enjoy about their souls, may be traced to the giving up the spirit on the cross.

Let us observe, in these verses, ***the visible signs and wonders which accompanied our Lord's death.*** Mark mentions two in particular, which demand our attention. One is the darkening of the sun for the space of three hours. The other is the rending of the veil which divided the holy of holies from the holy place in the temple. Both were miraculous events. Both had, no doubt, a deep meaning about them. Both were calculated to arrest the attention of the whole multitude assembled at Jerusalem. The darkness would strike even thoughtless Gentiles, like Pilate and the Roman soldiers. The rent veil would strike even Annas and Caiaphas and their unbelieving companions. There were probably few houses

in Jerusalem that evening in which men would not say, “we have heard and seen unusual things today.”

What did the MIRACULOUS DARKNESS teach? It taught the exceeding wickedness of the Jewish nation. They were actually crucifying their own Messiah, and slaying their own King. The sun himself hid his face at the sight. It taught the exceeding sinfulness of sin in the eyes of God. The Son of God himself must needs be left without the cheering light of day, when He became sin for us and carried our transgressions.

What did the miraculous RENDING OF THE VEIL mean? It taught the abolition and termination of the whole Jewish law of ceremonies. It taught that the way into the holiest of all was now thrown open to all mankind by Christ’s death. (Heb. 9:8.) It taught that Gentiles as well as Jews might now draw near to God with boldness, through Jesus the one High Priest, and that all barriers between man and God were forever cast down.

May we never forget the practical lesson of the rent veil! To attempt to revive the Jewish ceremonial in the Church of Christ, by returning to altars, sacrifices, and a priesthood, is nothing better than closing up again the rent veil, and lighting a candle at noon-day.

May we never forget the practical lesson of the miraculous darkness! It should lead our minds on to that blackness of darkness which is reserved for all obstinate unbelievers. (Jude 13.) The darkness endured by our blessed Surety on the cross was only for

three hours. The chains of darkness which shall bind all who reject His atonement and die in sin, shall be for evermore.

Let us observe, secondly, in these verses, ***how truly and really our Lord Jesus Christ was made a curse for us, and bore our sins.*** We see it strikingly brought out in those marvelous words which He used at the ninth hour, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

It would be useless to pretend to fathom all the depth of meaning which these words contain. They imply an amount of mental suffering, such as we are unable to conceive. The agony of some of God's holiest servants has been occasionally very great, under an impression of God's favor being withdrawn from them. What then may we suppose was the agony of the holy son of God—when all the sin of all the world was laid upon His head—when He felt Himself reckoned guilty, though without sin—when He felt His Father's countenance turned away from Him? The agony of that season must have been something past understanding. It is a high thing. We cannot attain to a comprehension of it. We may believe it, but we cannot explain and find it out to perfection.

One thing, however, is very plain, and that is the impossibility of explaining these words at all, except we receive the doctrine of Christ's atonement and substitution for sinners. To suppose, as some dare to do, that Jesus was nothing more than a man, or that His death was only a great example of self-sacrifice, makes this dying cry of His, utterly unintelligible. It makes Him appear less patient and

calm in a dying hour than many a martyr, or even than some heathen philosophers. One explanation alone is satisfactory. That explanation is the mighty scriptural doctrine of Christ's vicarious sacrifice and substitution for us on the cross. He uttered His dying cry, under the heavy pressure of a world's sin laid upon Him, and imputed to Him.

Let us observe, lastly, in these verses, that ***it is possible to be forsaken of God for a time, and yet to be loved by Him.*** We need not doubt this, when we read our Lord's dying words on the cross. We hear Him saying to His Father, "Why have you forsaken me?" and yet addressing Him as "my God." We know too, that our Lord was only forsaken for a season, and that even when forsaken He was the beloved son in whom, both in His suffering and doing, the Father was "well pleased."

There is deep experimental instruction in this, which deserves the notice of all true Christians. No doubt there is a sense in which our Lord's feeling of being "forsaken" was peculiar to Himself, since He was suffering for our sins and not for His own. But still after making this allowance, there remains the great fact that Jesus was for a time "forsaken of the Father," and yet for all that was the Father's "Beloved Son." As it was with the Great Head of the Church, so it may be in a modified sense with His members. They too, though chosen and beloved of the Father, may sometimes feel God's face turned away from them. They too, sometimes from illness of body, sometimes from peculiar affliction, sometimes from carelessness of walk, sometimes from God's sovereign will to draw them nearer to

Himself, may be constrained to cry, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

It becomes believers who feel “forsaken,” to learn from our Lord’s experience not to give way to despair. No doubt they ought not to be content with their position. They ought to search their own hearts, and see whether there is not some secret thing there which causes their consolations to be small. (Job 15:11.) But let them not write bitter things against themselves, and hastily conclude that they are cast off forever, or are self-deceivers, and have no grace at all. Let them still wait on the Lord, and say with Job, “Though he slays me, yet will I trust in him.” (Job 13:15.) Let them remember the words of Isaiah and David, “Who is among you that fears the Lord—that walks in darkness, and has no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.” “Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disturbed within me! Hope in God, for I shall yet praise him.” (Isaiah 50:10. Psalm 42:11.)

MARK 15:39-47

The death of our Lord Jesus Christ is the most important fact in Christianity. On it depend the hopes of all saved sinners both for time and eternity. We need not therefore to be surprised to find the reality of His death carefully placed beyond dispute. Three kinds of witnesses to the fact are brought before us in the verses we have now read. The Roman centurion, who stood near the cross,—the women, who followed our Lord from Galilee to Jerusalem,—the disciples, who buried Him. All were all witnesses that Jesus really died. Their

united evidence is above suspicion. They could not be deceived. What they saw was no swoon, or trance, or temporary insensibility. They saw that same Jesus, who was crucified, lay down His life, and become obedient even unto death. Let this be established in our minds. Our Savior really and truly died.

Let us notice, for one thing in this passage, ***what honorable mention is here made of women.*** We are specially told that, when our Lord gave up the spirit, "there were women looking on afar off." The names of some of them are recorded. We are also told that they were the same who had followed our Lord in Galilee and ministered unto Him, and that there were "many other women who came up with him to Jerusalem."

We would hardly have expected to have read such things. We might well have supposed that, when all the disciples but one had forsaken our Lord and fled, the weaker and more timid sex would not have dared to show themselves His friends. It only shows us what grace can do. God sometimes chooses the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty. The last are sometimes first, and the first last. The faith of women sometimes stands upright, when the faith of men fails and gives way.

But it is interesting to remark throughout the New Testament how often we find the grace of God glorified in women, and how much benefit God has been pleased to confer through them on the Church, and on the world. In the Old Testament, we see sin and death brought in by the woman's transgression. In the New, we see

Jesus born of a woman, and life and immortality brought to light by that miraculous birth. In the Old Testament, we often see woman proving a hindrance and a snare to man. The women before the flood, the histories of Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Delilah, Bathsheba, Jezebel, are all painful examples. In the New Testament, we generally see women mentioned as a help and assistance to the cause of true religion. Elizabeth, Mary, Martha, Dorcas, Lydia, and the women named by Paul to the Romans, are all cases in point. The contrast is striking, and we need not doubt intentional. It is one of the many proofs, that grace is more abundant under the Gospel than under the law. It seems meant to teach us that women have an important place in the Church of Christ, one that ought to be assigned to them, and one that they ought to fill. There is a great work that women can do for God's glory, without being public teachers. Happy is that congregation in which women know this, and act upon it!

Let us notice, for another thing, in this passage, that ***Jesus has friends of whom little is known.*** We cannot conceive a more remarkable proof of this than the person who is here mentioned for the first time, Joseph of Arimathaea. We know nothing of this man's former history. We know not how he had learned to love Christ, and to desire to do Him honor. We know nothing of his subsequent history after our Lord left the world. All we know is the touching collection of facts before us. We are told that he "waited for the kingdom of God," and that at a time when our Lord's disciples had all forsaken Him, He "went in boldly unto Pilate, and asked for the body

of Jesus," and buried it honorably in his own tomb. Others had honored and confessed our Lord when they saw Him working miracles, but Joseph honored Him and confessed himself a disciple, when he saw Him a cold, blood-sprinkled corpse. Others had shown love to Jesus while He was speaking and living, but Joseph showed love when He was silent and dead.

Let us take comfort in the thought that there are true Christians on earth, of whom we know nothing, and in places where we would not expect to find them. No doubt the faithful are always few. But we must not hastily conclude that there is no grace in a family or in a parish, because our eyes may not see it. We know in part and see only in part, outside the circle in which our own lot is cast. The Lord has many "hidden ones" in the Church, who, unless brought forward by special circumstances will never be known until the last day. The words of God to Elijah should not be forgotten, "Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel" (1 Kings 19:18.)

Let us notice, lastly in this passage, ***what honor our Lord Jesus Christ has placed on the grave, by allowing Himself to be laid in it.*** We read that he was "laid in a sepulcher hewn out of a rock," and a "stone rolled unto the door."

This is a fact that in a dying world we should always remember. It is appointed unto men once to die. We are all going to one place, and we naturally shrink from it. The coffin and the funeral, the worm and corruption, are all painful subjects. They chill us, sadden us, and fill our minds with heaviness. It is not in flesh and blood to regard them

without solemn feelings. One thing, however, ought to comfort believers, and that is the thought, that the grave is "the place where they Lord once lay." As surely as He rose again victorious from the tomb, so surely shall all who believe in Him rise gloriously in the day of His appearing. Remembering this, they may look down with calmness into the "house appointed for all living." They may recollect that Jesus himself was once there on their behalf, and has robbed death of his sting. They may say to themselves, "the sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law—but thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Cor. 15:56, 57.)

The great matter that concerns us all, is to make sure that we are spiritually buried with Christ, while we are yet alive. We must be joined to Him by faith, and conformed to His image. With Him we must die to sin, and be buried by baptism into His death. (Rom. 6:4.) With Him we must rise again and be quickened by His Spirit. Except we know these things, Christ's death and burial will profit us nothing at all.

Mark – Chap. 16

MARK 16:1-8

Let us observe, in this passage, ***the power of strong love to Christ.*** We have a forcible illustration of this it the conduct of Mary

Magdalene, and the other Mary, which Mark here records. He tells us that they had "bought sweet spices" to anoint our Lord, and that "very early in the morning, the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulcher, at the rising of the sun."

We may well believe that it required great courage to do this. To visit the grave in the dim twilight of an eastern day-break, would try most women, under any circumstances. But to visit the grave of one who had been put to death as a common malefactor, and to rise early to show honor to one whom their nation had despised, this was a mighty boldness indeed. Yet these are the kind of acts which show the difference between weak faith and strong faith—between weak feeling and strong feeling towards Christ. These holy women had tasted of our Lord's pardoning mercies. Their hearts were full of gratitude to Him for light, and hope, and comfort, and peace. They were willing to risk all consequences in testifying their affection to their Savior. So true are the words of Canticles— "Love is strong as death—many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it." (Cant. 8:6, 7.)

Why is it that we see so little of this strong love to Jesus among Christians of the present day? How is it that we so seldom meet with saints who will face any danger, and go through fire and water for Christ's sake? There is only one answer. It is the weak faith, and the low sense of obligation to Christ, which so widely prevail. **A low and feeble sense of sin will always produce a low and feeble sense of the value of salvation.** A slight sense of our debt to God

will always be attended by a slight sense of what we owe for our redemption. It is the man who feels much forgiven who loves much. “To whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.” (Luke 7:47.)

Let us observe, secondly, in this passage, ***how the difficulties which Christians fear, will sometimes disappear as they approach them.*** These holy women, as they walked to our Lord’s grave, were full of fears about the stone at the door. “They said among themselves, Who shall roll away the stone from the door of the sepulcher?” But their fears were needless. Their expected trouble was found not to exist. “When they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away.”

What a striking emblem we have in this simple narrative, of the experience of many Christians! How often believers are oppressed and cast down by anticipation of evils, and yet, in the time of need, find the thing they feared removed, and the “stone rolled away.” A large proportion of a saint’s anxieties arise from things which never really happen. We look ahead to all the possibilities of the journey towards heaven. We conjure up in our imagination all kind of crosses and obstacles. We mentally carry tomorrow’s troubles, as well as today’s. And often, very often, we find at the end, that our doubts and alarms were groundless, and that the thing we dreaded most has never come to pass at all. Let us pray for more practical faith. Let us believe that in the path of duty, we shall never be entirely forsaken. Let us go forward boldly, and we shall often find that the lion in the

way is chained, and what appears to be a hedge of thorns, is only a shadow.

Let us observe, thirdly, in this passage, ***that the friends of Christ have no cause to be afraid of angels.*** We are told, that when Mary Magdalene and her companion saw an angel sitting in the sepulcher, "they were frightened." But they were at once reassured by his words— "Don't be alarmed, You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here."

The lesson at first sight, may seem of little importance. We see no visions of angels in the present day. We do not expect to see them. But the lesson is one which we may find useful at some future time. The day is drawing near when the Lord Jesus shall come again to judge the world, with all the angels round Him. The angels in that day shall gather together His elect from the four winds. The angels shall gather the tares into bundles to burn them. The angels shall gather the wheat of God into His barn. Those whom the angels take they shall carry to glory, honor, and immortality. Those whom they leave behind shall be left to shame and everlasting contempt.

Let us strive so to live, that when we die we may be carried by angels into Abraham's bosom. Let us endeavor to be known of angels as those who seek Jesus, and love Him in this world, and so are heirs of salvation. Let us give diligence to make our repentance sure, and so to cause joy in the presence of the angels of God. Then, whether we wake or sleep, when the archangel's voice is heard, we shall have no cause to be afraid. We shall rise from our grave, and see in the

angels our friends and fellow-servants, in whose company we shall spend a blessed eternity.

Let us observe, lastly, in this passage, ***the exceeding kindness of God towards his backsliding servants.*** The message which the angel conveys is a striking illustration of this truth. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were bidden to tell the disciples that "Jesus goes before them into Galilee," and that "there they shall see him." But the message is not directed generally to the eleven apostles. This alone, after their late desertion of their master, would have been a most gracious action. Yet Peter who had denied his Lord three times, is specially mentioned by name. Peter, who had sinned particularly, is singled out and noticed particularly. There were to be no exceptions in the deed of grace. All were to be pardoned. All were to be restored to favor—and Peter as well as the rest.

We may well say when we read words like these, "this is not the manner of man." On no point perhaps are our views of religion so narrow, low, and contracted, as on the point of God's exceeding willingness to pardon penitent sinners. We think of Him as such an one as ourselves. We forget that "he delights in mercy." (Micah 7:18.)

Let us leave the passage with a determination to open the door of mercy very wide to sinners, in all our speaking and teaching about religion. Not least, let us leave it with a resolution never to be unforgiving towards our fellow men. If Christ is so ready to forgive us, we ought to be very ready to forgive others.

MARK 16:9-14

Let us mark, in these verses, ***what abundant proof we have that our Lord Jesus Christ really rose again from the dead.*** In this one passage Mark records no less than three distinct occasions on which He was seen after His resurrection. First, he tells us, our Lord appeared to one witness, Mary Magdalene—then to two witnesses, two disciples walking into the country—and lastly to eleven witnesses, the eleven apostles all assembled together. Let us remember, in addition to this, that other appearances of our Lord are described by other writers in the New Testament, beside those mentioned by Mark. And then let us not hesitate to believe, that of all the facts of our Lord's history, there is none more thoroughly established than the fact, that He rose from the dead.

There is great mercy in this. The resurrection of Christ is one of the foundation-stones of Christianity. It was the seal of the great work that He came on earth to do. It was the crowning proof that the ransom He paid for sinners was accepted, the atonement for sin accomplished, the head of him who had the power of death bruised, and the victory won. It is well to remark how often the resurrection of Christ is referred to by the apostles. "He was delivered for our offences," says Paul, "and was raised again for our justification." (Rom. 4:25.) "He has begotten us again to a living hope," says Peter, "by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." (1 Peter 1:3.)

We ought to thank God that the fact of the resurrection is so clearly established. The Jew, the Gentile, the priests, the Roman

guard, the women who went to the tomb, the disciples who were so hesitant to believe, are all witnesses whose testimony cannot be gainsaid. Christ has not only died for us, but has also risen again. To deny it shows far greater credulity than to believe it. To deny it a man must put credit in monstrous and ridiculous improbabilities. To believe it a man has only to appeal to simple undeniable facts.

Let us mark, secondly, in these verses, ***our Lord Jesus Christ's singular kindness to Mary Magdalene.*** We are told that "when he was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils." To her before all others of Adam's children, was granted the privilege of being first to behold a risen Savior. Mary, the mother of our Lord, was yet alive. John, the beloved disciple, was yet upon earth. Yet both were passed over on this occasion in favor of Mary Magdalene. A woman who at one time had probably been chief of sinners, a woman who at one time had been possessed by seven devils, was the first to whom Jesus showed Himself alive, when He rose victorious from the tomb. The fact is remarkable, and full of instruction.

We need not doubt, for one thing, that, by appearing "first to Mary Magdalene," our Lord meant to show us how much He values love and faithfulness. *Last at the cross and first at the grave*, last to confess her Master while living, and first to honor Him when dead, this warm-hearted disciple was allowed to be the first to see Him, when the victory was won. It was intended to be a perpetual memorial to the Church, that those who honor Christ, He will honor,

and that those who do much for Him upon earth, shall find Him even upon earth doing much for them. May we never forget this. May we ever remember that for those who forsake all for Christ's sake, there "is an hundred-fold now in this present time."

We need not doubt, for another thing, that our Lord's appearing "first to Mary Magdalene" was intended to comfort all who have become penitent believers, after having run into great excesses of sin. It was meant to show us that, however far we may have fallen, we are raised to entire peace with God, if we repent and believe the Gospel. Though before far off, we are made near. Though before enemies, we are made dear children. Old things are passed away, and all things are become new. (2 Cor. 5:17.) The blood of Christ makes us completely clean in God's sight. We may have begun like Augustine, and John Newton, and been ringleaders in every kind of iniquity. But once brought to Christ, we need not doubt that all is forgiven. We may draw near with boldness, and have access with confidence. Our sins and iniquities, like those of Mary Magdalene, are remembered no more.

Let us mark, lastly, in these verses, ***how much weakness there is sometimes in the faith of the best Christians.*** Three times in this very passage we find Mark describing the unbelief of the eleven apostles. Once, when Mary Magdalene told those who our Lord had risen, "they believed not." Again, when our Lord had appeared to two of them, as they walked, we read of the residue, "neither believed they them." Finally, when our Lord Himself

appeared to them as they sat at meat, we are told that “he upbraided them for their unbelief and hardness of heart.” Never perhaps was there so striking an example of man’s unwillingness to believe that which runs counter to his early prejudices. Never was there so remarkable a proof of man’s forgetfulness of plain teaching. These eleven men had been told repeatedly by our Lord that He would rise again. And yet, when the time came, all was forgotten, and they were found unbelieving. Let us however see in the doubts of these good men the over-ruling hand of an all-wise God. If they were convinced at last, who were so unbelieving at first, how strong is the proof supplied us that Christ rose indeed. It is the glory of God to bring good out of evil. The very doubts of the eleven apostles are the confirmation of our faith in these latter days.

Let us learn from the unbelief of the apostles, a useful practical lesson for ourselves. Let us cease to feel surprise when we feel doubts arising in our own heart. Let us cease to expect perfection of faith in other believers. We are yet in the body. We are men of like passions with the apostles. We must count it no strange thing, if our experience is sometimes like theirs, and if our faith, like theirs, sometimes gives way. Let us resist unbelief manfully. Let us watch, and pray, and strive to be delivered from its power. But let us not conclude that we have no grace, because we are sometimes harassed with doubts, nor suppose that we have no part or lot with the apostles, because at seasons we feel unbelieving.

Let us not fail to ask ourselves, as we leave this passage, whether we have risen with Christ, and been made partakers spiritually of His resurrection. This, after all, is the one thing needful. To know the facts of Christianity with the head, and to be able to argue for them with the tongue, will not save our souls. We must yield ourselves to God as those alive from the dead. (Rom. 6:13.) We must be raised from the death of sin, and walk in newness of life. This and this only is saving Christianity.

MARK 16:15-18

We ought to notice, firstly, in these verses, ***the parting commission which our Lord gives to His apostles.*** He is addressing them for the last time. He marks out their work until He comes again, in words of wide and deep significance, "Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature."

The Lord Jesus would have us know that all the world needs the Gospel. In every quarter of the globe man is the same, sinful, corrupt, and alienated from God. Civilized or uncivilized, in China, or in Africa, he is by nature everywhere the same—without knowledge, without holiness, without faith, and without love. Wherever we see a child of Adam, whatever be his color, we see one whose heart is wicked, and who needs the blood of Christ, the renewing of the Holy Spirit, and reconciliation with God.

The Lord Jesus would have us know that the salvation of the Gospel is to be offered freely to all mankind. The glad tidings that

“God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son,” and that “Christ has died for the ungodly,” is to be proclaimed freely “to every creature.” We are not justified in making any exception in the proclamation. We have no warrant for limiting the offer to the elect. We come short of the fullness of Christ’s words, and take away from the breadth of His sayings, if we shrink from telling anyone, “God is full of love to you, Christ is willing to save you.” “Whoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” (Rev. 22:17.)

Let us see in these words of Christ, the strongest argument in favor of missionary work, both at home and abroad. Remembering these words, let us be unwearied in trying to do good to the souls of all mankind. If we cannot go to the heathen in China and India, let us seek to enlighten the darkness which we shall easily find within reach of our own door. Let us labor on, unmoved by the sneers and taunts of those who disapprove missionary operations, and hold them up to scorn. We may well pity such people. They only show their ignorance, both of Scripture and of Christ’s will. They understand neither what they say, nor what they affirm.

We ought to notice, secondly, in these verses, ***the terms which our Lord tells us should be offered to all who hear the Gospel.*** “He that believes and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believes not shall be damned.” Every word in that sentence is of deep importance. Every expression in it deserves to be carefully weighed.

We are taught here the importance of baptism. It is an ordinance generally necessary to salvation, where it can be had. Not “he that

believes" simply, but "he that believes and is baptized shall be saved." Thousands no doubt receive not the slightest benefit from their baptism. Thousands are washed in sacramental water, who are never washed in the blood of Christ. But it does not follow therefore that baptism is to be despised and neglected. It is an ordinance appointed by Christ Himself, and when used reverently, intelligently, and prayerfully, is doubtless accompanied by a special blessing. The baptismal water itself conveys no grace. We must look far beyond the mere outward element to Him who commanded it to be used. But the public confession of Christ, which is implied in the use of that water, is a sacramental act, which our Master Himself has commanded; and when the ordinance is rightly used, we may confidently believe that He seals it by His blessing.

We are taught here, furthermore, the absolute necessity of faith in Christ to salvation. This is the one thing needful. "He that believes not" is the man that shall be lost for evermore. He may have been baptized, and made a member of the visible church. He may be a regular communicant at the Lord's Table. He may even believe intellectually all the leading articles of the creed. But all shall profit him nothing if he lacks saving faith in Christ. Have we this faith? This is the great question that concerns us all. Except we feel our sins, and feeling them flee to Christ by faith, and lay hold on Him, we shall find at length we had better never have been born.

We are taught here, furthermore, the certainty of God's judgments on those who die unbelieving. "He that believes not shall

be damned." How dreadful the words sound! How fearful the thought that they came from the lips of Him who said, "My words shall not pass away." Let no man deceive us with vain words. There is an eternal hell for all who will persist in their wickedness, and depart out of this world without faith in Christ. The greater the mercy offered to us in the Gospel, the greater will be the guilt of those who obstinately refuse to believe. "Oh! that men were wise. Oh! that they would consider their latter end." (Deut. 32:29.) He that died upon the cross, has given us plain warning that there is a hell, and that unbelievers shall be damned. Let us take heed that His warning is not given to us in vain!

We ought to notice, lastly, in these verses, ***the gracious promises of special help which our Lord holds out in His parting words to His apostles.*** He knew well the enormous difficulties of the work which He had just commissioned them to do. He knew the mighty battle they would have to fight with heathenism, the world, and the devil. He therefore cheers them by telling those who miracles shall help forward their work. "These signs will accompany those who believe: They will cast out demons in my name, and they will speak new languages. They will be able to handle snakes with safety, and if they drink anything poisonous, it won't hurt them. They will be able to place their hands on the sick and heal them." The fulfillment of most of these promises is to be found in the Acts of the Apostles.

The age of miracles no doubt is long passed. They were never meant to continue beyond the first establishment of the Church. It is only when plants are first planted, that they need daily watering and support. The whole analogy of God's dealings with His church, forbids us to expect that miracles would always continue. In fact, miracles would cease to be miracles, if they happened regularly without cessation or intermission. It is well to remember this. The remembrance may save us much perplexity.

But though the age of physical miracles is past, we may take comfort in the thought that the church of Christ shall never want Christ's special aid in its seasons of special need. The great Head in heaven will never forsake His believing members. His eye is continually upon them. He will always time His help wisely, and come to their support in the day that He is needed. "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him." (Isaiah. 59:19.)

Finally, let us never forget, that Christ's believing Church in the world is of itself a standing miracle. The conversion and perseverance in grace of every member of that Church, is a sign and wonder, as great as the raising of Lazarus from the dead. The renewal of every saint is as great a marvel as the casting out of a devil, or the healing of a sick man, or the speaking with a new tongue. Let us thank God for this and take courage. The age of spiritual miracles is not yet past. Happy are they who have learned

this by experience, and can say, “I was dead, but am alive again—I was blind, but I see.”

MARK 16:19-20

These words form the conclusion of Mark’s Gospel. Short as the passage is, it is a singularly suitable conclusion to the history of our Lord Jesus Christ’s earthly ministry. It tells us where our Lord went, when He left this world, and ascended up on high. It tells us what His disciples experienced after their Master left them, and what all true Christians may expect until He appears again.

Let us mark, in these verses, ***the place to which our Lord went when He had finished His work on earth, and the place where He is at this present time.*** We are told that “He was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God.” He returned to that glory which He had with the Father before He came into the world He received, as our victorious Mediator and Redeemer, the highest position of dignity and power in heaven which our minds can conceive. There He sits, not idle, but carrying on the same blessed work for which He died on the cross. There He lives, ever making intercession for all who come unto God by Him, and so able to save them to the uttermost. (Heb. 7:25.)

There is strong consolation here for all true Christians. They live in an EVIL world. They are often careful and troubled about many things, and are severely cast down by their own weakness and infirmities. They live in a DYING world. They feel their bodies

gradually failing and giving way. They have before them the dreadful prospect of soon launching forth into a world unknown. What then shall comfort them? They must lean back on the thought of their Savior in heaven, never slumbering, and never sleeping, and always ready to help. They must remember that though they sleep, Jesus wakes—though they faint, Jesus is never weary—though they are weak, Jesus is Almighty—and though they die, Jesus lives for evermore. Blessed indeed is this thought! Our Savior, though unseen, is an actually living person. We travel on toward a dwelling where our best Friend is gone before, to prepare a place for us. (John. 14:2.) The Forerunner has entered in and made all things ready. No wonder that Paul exclaims, "Who is He that condemns? It is Christ that died; yes, rather that is risen again—who is even at the right hand of God—who also makes intercession for us." (Rom. 8:34)

Let us mark, for another thing, in these verses, ***the blessing which our Lord Jesus Christ bestows on all who work faithfully for Him.*** We are told that, when the disciples went forth and preached, the Lord "worked with them," and "confirmed His word with signs that accompanied it."

We know well from the Acts of the Apostles, and from the pages of church history, the manner in which these words have been proved true. We know that bonds and afflictions, persecution and opposition, were the first fruits that were reaped by the laborers in Christ's harvest. But we know also that, in spite of every effort of Satan, the word of truth was not preached in vain. Believers from

time to time were gathered out of the world. Churches of saints were founded in city after city, and country after country. The little seed of Christianity grew gradually into a great tree. Christ Himself wrought with His own workmen, and, in spite of every obstacle, His work went on. The good seed was never entirely thrown away. Sooner or later there were "signs following."

Let us not doubt that these things were written for our encouragement, on whom the latter ends of the world are come. Let us believe that no one shall ever work faithfully for Christ, and find at last that His work has been altogether without profit. Let us labor on patiently, each in our own position. Let us preach, and teach, and speak, and write, and warn, and testify, and rest assured that our labor is not in vain. We may die ourselves, and see no result from our work. But the last day will assuredly prove that the Lord Jesus always works with those who work for Him, and that there were "signs following," though it was not given to the workmen to see them. Let us then be "steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." We may go on our way heavily, and sow with many tears; but if we sow Christ's precious seed, we shall "come again with joy and bring our sheaves with us." (1 Cor. 15:58; Psalm. 126:6.)

And now let us close the pages of Mark's Gospel with self-inquiry and self-examination. Let it not content us to have seen with our eyes, and heard with our ears, the things here written for our learning about Jesus Christ. Let us ask ourselves whether we know any thing of Christ "dwelling in our hearts by faith?" Does the Spirit

“witness with our spirit” that Christ is ours and we are His? Can we really say that we are “living the life of faith in the son of God,” and that we have found by experience that Christ is “precious” to our own souls? These are solemn questions. They demand serious consideration. May we never rest until we can give them satisfactory answers! “He that has the Son has life, and he that has not the Son of God has not life.” (1 John 5:12.)

The Gospel of Luke

Preface – Expository Thoughts On Luke

The volume now in the reader's hands, is a continuation of the "Expository Thoughts on the Gospels," of which two volumes have been already published.

The general design of the work has been so fully explained in the preface to the volume on Matthew, that it seems needless to say anything further on the subject. I will only remark that I have steadily adhered to the threefold object, which I proposed to myself, when I first began. I have endeavored to produce something which may meet the needs of heads of families in conducting family prayers —of district visitors in reading to the sick and unlearned—and of private students of the Bible who have neither large libraries nor much leisure. These three classes I have constantly kept in view. Their needs have been continually before my eyes. Whatever would be unsuitable to them I have diligently tried to avoid.

I now send forth this volume with an earnest prayer, that the Holy Spirit may bless it, and that God may be pleased to use it for His own glory and the benefit of many souls. **My chief desire in all my writings, is to exalt the Lord Jesus Christ and make**

Him beautiful and glorious in the eyes of men; and to promote the increase of repentance, faith, and holiness upon earth. If this shall be the result of this volume, the labor that it has cost me will be more than repaid.

I have a strong conviction that we need more reverent, deep-searching study of the Scripture in the present day. Most of Christians see nothing beyond the surface of the Bible when they read it. We need a more clear knowledge of Christ, as a living Person, a living Priest, a living Physician, a living Friend, a living Advocate at the right hand of God, and a living Savior soon about to come again. Most of Christians know little of Christianity but its skeleton of doctrines. I desire never to forget these two things. If I can do anything to make Christ and the Bible more honorable in these latter days, I shall be truly thankful and content.

Luke – Chap. 1

LUKE 1:1-4

LUKE'S INTRODUCTION

The Gospel of Luke, which we now begin, contains many precious things which are not recorded in the other three Gospels. Such, for instance, are the histories of Zachariah and Elizabeth, the angel's announcement to the Virgin Mary—and, to speak generally, the whole contents of the first two chapters. Such, again, are the

narratives of the conversion of Zaccheus and of the penitent thief—the walk to Emmaus, and the famous parables of the Pharisee and Tax-collector, the rich man and Lazarus, and the Prodigal Son. These are portions of Scripture for which every well-instructed Christian feels peculiarly thankful. And for these we are indebted to the Gospel of Luke.

The short preface which we have now read is a peculiar feature of Luke's Gospel. But we shall find, on examination, that it is full of most useful instruction.

In the first place, **Luke gives us a short, but valuable, sketch of the nature of a Gospel.** He calls it, "a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us." It is a narrative of facts about Jesus Christ.

Christianity is a religion built upon facts. Let us never lose sight of this. It came before mankind at first in this shape. The first preachers did not go up and down the world, proclaiming an elaborate, artificial system of abstruse doctrines and deep principles. They made it their first business to tell men great plain facts. They went about telling a sin-laden world, that the Son of God had come down to earth, and lived for us, and died for us, and risen again. The Gospel, at its first publication, was far more simple than many make it now. It was neither more nor less than the history of Christ.

Let us aim at greater simplicity in our own personal religion. Let Christ and His Person be the sun of our system, and let the main

desire of our souls be to live the life of faith in Him, and daily know Him better. This was Paul's Christianity. "To me to live is Christ." (Philipp. 1:21.)

In the second place, **Luke draws a beautiful picture of the true position of the apostles in the early church.** He calls them, "eye-witnesses and servants of the word."

There is an instructive humility in this expression. There is an utter absence of that man-exalting tone which has so often crept into the Church. Luke gives the apostles no flattering titles. He affords not the slightest excuse to those who speak of them with idolatrous veneration, because of their office and nearness to our Lord.

He describes them as "eye-witnesses." They told men what they had seen with their own eyes, and heard with their own ears. (1 John 1:1.) He describes them as "servants of the word." They were servants of the word of the Gospel. They were men who counted it their highest privilege to carry about, as messengers, the tidings of God's love to a sinful world, and to tell the story of the cross.

Well would it have been for the Church and the world, if Christian ministers had never laid claim to higher dignity and honor than the apostles claimed for themselves. It is a mournful fact, that ordained men have constantly exalted themselves and their office to a most unscriptural position. It is a no less mournful fact, that people have constantly helped forward the evil, by a lazy acceptance of the demands of priest-craft, and by contenting themselves with a mere

vicarious religion. There have been faults on both sides. Let us remember this, and be on our guard.

In the third place, **Luke describes his own qualifications for the work of writing a Gospel.** He says that he "had perfect understanding of all things from the very first."

It would be mere waste of time to inquire from what source Luke obtained the information which he has given us in his Gospel. We have no good reason for supposing that he saw our Lord work miracles, or heard Him teach. To say that he obtained his information from the Virgin Mary, or any of the apostles, is mere conjecture and speculation. Enough for us to know that Luke wrote by inspiration of God. Unquestionably he did not neglect the ordinary means of getting knowledge. But the Holy Spirit guided him, no less than all other writers of the Bible, in his choice of matter. The Holy Spirit supplied him with thoughts, arrangement, sentences, and even words. And the result is, that what Luke wrote is not to be read as the "word of man," but the "word of God." (1 Thess. 2:13.)

Let us carefully hold fast the great doctrine of the plenary inspiration of every word of the Bible. Let us never allow that any writer of the Old or New Testament could make even the slightest verbal mistake or error, when, writing as he was "moved by the Holy Spirit." (2 Peter 1:21.) Let it be a settled principle with us in reading the Bible, that when we cannot understand a passage, or reconcile it with some other passage, the fault is not in the Book, but in

ourselves. The adoption of this principle will place our feet upon a rock. To give it up is to stand upon a quicksand, and to fill our minds with endless uncertainties and doubts.

Finally, **Luke informs us of one main object he had in view in writing his Gospel.** It was that Theophilus "might know the certainty of those things wherein he had been instructed."

There is no encouragement here for those who place confidence in unwritten traditions, and the voice of the church. Luke knew well the weakness of man's memory, and the readiness with which a history alters its shape both by additions and alterations, when it depends only on word of mouth and report. What therefore does he do? He takes care to "write."

There is no encouragement here for those who are opposed to the spread of religious knowledge, and talk of ignorance, as the "mother of devotion." Luke does not wish his friend to remain in doubt on any matter of his faith. He tells him that he wants him to "know the certainty of those things wherein he had been instructed."

Let us close the passage with thankfulness for the Bible. Let us bless God daily that we are not left dependent on man's traditions, and need not be led astray by ministers' mistakes. We have a written volume, which is "able to make us wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus." (2 Tim. 3:15.)

Let us begin Luke's Gospel with an earnest desire to know more ourselves of the truth as it is in Jesus, and with a hearty determination to do what in us lies to spread the knowledge of that truth throughout the world.

Notes on Luke 1:1-4

Luke. Our information about St. Luke is scanty. What we have no reason to doubt is that he was the companion of St. Paul on his travels and that he was a "doctor" (Colossians 4:14). It is generally agreed that his Gospel was written with a special reference to Gentile converts rather than Jews.

1. Many have undertaken. Who these many were, we do not know. St. Luke's meaning appears to be simply that they wrote without any divine call or inspiration.

2. The word. Some think that this means the Lord Jesus Christ, the "Word" who "was made flesh" (John 1:14). It seems, however, more probable that we are to take it as the written word or the word of the Gospel.

3. Orderly account. We must carefully observe that this expression does not imply that Luke followed the chronological order of the chief events in our Lord's life more than the other evangelists. It rather means that he grouped together and classified in an orderly way the principal facts which he was inspired to record.

Theophilus. We know nothing certain about this person. The prevailing opinion is that he was some Christian Gentile in a high position to whom St. Luke, for reasons unknown to us, was directed to address himself in writing his Gospel. The expression most

excellent seems to indicate that he was no common person. It is the same expression which St. Paul used in addressing Felix and Festus (Acts 24:3; 26:25).

LUKE 1:5-12

THE BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST FORETOLD

The first event recorded in Luke's Gospel, is the sudden appearance of an angel to a Jewish priest, named Zachariah. The angel announces to him that a son is about to be born to him, by a miraculous interposition, and that this son is to be the **forerunner** of the long-promised Messiah. The word of God had plainly foretold that when Messiah came, someone would go before him to prepare his way. (Malachi 3:1.) The wisdom of God provided that when this forerunner appeared, he would be born in the family of a priest.

We can form very little idea, at this period of the world, of the immense importance of this angel's announcement. To the mind of a pious Jew, it must have been glad tidings of great joy. It was the first communication from God to Israel since the days of Malachi. It broke the long silence of four hundred years. It told the believing Israelite that the prophetic weeks of Daniel were at length fulfilled, (Dan. 9:25,)—that God's choicest promise was at length going to be accomplished—and that "the seed" was about to appear in whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed. (Gen. 22:18.) We must place ourselves in imagination in the position of Zachariah, in order to give the verses before us their due weight.

Let us mark, for one thing, in this passage, **the high testimony which is borne to the character of Zachariah and Elizabeth.** We are told that they were "both righteous before God," and that "they walked in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless."

It matters little whether we interpret this "righteousness" as that which is imputed to all believers for their justification, or that which is wrought inwardly in believers by the operation of the Holy Spirit, for their sanctification. The two sorts of righteousness are never disjoined. There are none justified who are not sanctified, and there are none sanctified who are not justified. Suffice it for us to know that Zachariah and Elizabeth had grace when grace was very rare, and kept all the burdensome observances of the ceremonial law with devout conscientiousness, when few Israelites cared for them excepting in name and form.

The main thing that concerns us all, is the example which this holy pair hold up to Christians. Let us all strive to serve God faithfully, and live fully up to our light, even as they did. Let us not forget the plain words of Scripture, "He that does righteousness is righteous." (1 John 3:7.) Happy are those Christian families in which it can be reported that both husband and wife are "righteous," and exercise themselves to have a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men. (Acts 24:16.)

Let us mark, for another thing, in this passage, **the heavy trial which God was pleased to lay on Zachariah and Elizabeth.**

We are told that “they had no child.” The full force of these words can hardly be understood by a modern Christian. To an ancient Jew they would convey the idea of a very weighty affliction. To be childless was one of the bitterest of sorrows. (1 Sam. 1:10.)

The grace of God exempts no one from trouble. “Righteous” as this holy priest and his wife were, they had a “crook in their lot.” Let us remember this, if we serve Christ, and let us count trial no strange thing. Let us rather believe that a hand of perfect wisdom is measuring out all our portion, and that when God chastises us, it is to make us “partakers of his holiness.” (Heb. 12:10.) If afflictions drive us nearer to Christ, the Bible, and prayer, they are positive blessings. We may not think so now. But we shall think so when we wake up in another world.

Let us mark, for another thing, in this passage, **the means by which God announced the coming birth of John the Baptist.** We are told that “an ANGEL of the Lord appeared to Zachariah.”

The ministry of angels is undoubtedly a deep subject. Nowhere in the Bible do we find such frequent mention of them, as in the period of our Lord’s earthly ministry. At no time do we read of so many appearances of angels, as about the time of our Lord’s incarnation and entrance into the world. The meaning of this circumstance is sufficiently clear. It was meant to teach the church that Messiah was no angel, but the Lord of angels, as well as of men. Angels announced His coming. Angels proclaimed His birth. Angels rejoiced at his

appearing. And by so doing they made it plain that He who came to die for sinners, was not one of themselves, but one far above them, the King of kings and Lord of lords.

One thing, at all events, about angels, we must never forget. They take a deep interest in the work of Christ, and the salvation which Christ has provided. They sang high praise when the Son of God came down to make peace by His own blood between God and man. They rejoice when sinners repent, and sons are born again to our Father in heaven. They delight to minister to those who shall be heirs of salvation. Let us strive to be like them, while we are upon earth—to be of their mind, and to share their joys. This is the way to be in tune for heaven. It is written of those who enter in there, that they shall be "as the angels." (Mark 12:25.)

Let us mark, lastly, in this passage, **the effect which the appearance of an angel produced on the mind of Zachariah.** We are told that he "was troubled, and fear fell upon him."

The experience of this righteous man here, tallies exactly with that of other saints under similar circumstances. Moses at the burning bush, and Daniel at the river of Hiddekel—the women at the sepulcher, and John at the isle of Patmos—all showed like fear to that of Zachariah. Like him, when they saw visions of things belonging to another world, they trembled and were afraid.

How are we to account for this fear? To that question there is only one answer. It arises from our inward sense of weakness, guilt, and corruption. The vision of an inhabitant of heaven reminds us forcibly of our own imperfection, and of our natural unfitness to stand before God. If angels are so great and terrible, what must the Lord of angels be?

Let us bless God, that we have a mighty Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. Believing on Him, we may draw near to God with boldness, and look forward to the day of judgment without fear. When the mighty angels shall go forth to gather together God's elect, the elect will have no cause to be afraid. To them the angels are fellow-servants and friends. (Rev. 22:9.)

Let us tremble when we think of the terror of the wicked at the last day. If even the righteous are troubled by a sudden vision of friendly spirits, where will the ungodly appear, when the angels come forth to gather them like tares for the burning? The fears of the saints are groundless, and endure but for a little season. The fears of the lost, when once aroused, will prove well-grounded, and will endure for evermore.

Notes on Luke 1:5-12

5. The priestly division of Abijah. There were twenty-four divisions of the sons of Aaron, among whom the temple service was divided. Abijah was the eighth at the original institution (1 Chronicles 24:10).
A descendant of Aaron. "Yet Elizabeth was cousin to Mary, who was from the tribe of Judah. This indicates the marriage of some

predecessor into the other tribe. The priests were allowed to marry into any of the tribes of Israel" (Watson).

1. All the assembled worshipers were praying outside. "When the priest came into the holy place to offer incense, notice was given to all, by the sound of a little bell, that the time of prayers was now" (Lightfoot).

2. An angel of the Lord appeared. "The presence of angels is no novelty, but their apparition. They are always with us, but rarely seen, that we may awfully respect their message when they are seen" (Bishop Hall).

LUKE 1:13-17

We have, in these verses, the words of the angel who appeared to Zachariah. They are words full of deep spiritual instruction.

We learn here, for one thing, that **prayers are not necessarily rejected because the answer is long delayed.** Zachariah, no doubt, had often prayed for the blessing of children, and, to all appearance, had prayed in vain. At his advanced time of life, he had probably long ceased to mention the subject before God, and had given up all hope of being a father. Yet the very first words of the angel show plainly that the bygone prayers of Zachariah had not been forgotten— "Your prayer is heard—your wife Elizabeth shall bear you a son."

We shall do well to remember this fact, whenever we kneel down to pray. We must beware of hastily concluding that our supplications

are useless, and specially in the matter of intercessory prayer in behalf of others. It is not for us to prescribe either the time or the way in which our requests are to be answered. He who knows best the time for people to be born, knows also the time for them to be born again. Let us rather "continue in prayer," "watch unto prayer," "pray always, and not faint." "Delay of answer," says an old divine, "must not discourage our faith. It may be, God has long granted, before we shall know of His grant."

We learn, in the second place, that **no children cause such true joy, as those who have the grace of God.** It was a child about to be filled with the Holy Spirit, to whose father it was said, "You shall have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth."

Grace is the principal portion that we should desire for our children. It is a thousand times better for them than beauty, riches, honors, rank, or high connections. Until they have grace we never know what they may do. They may make us weary of our life, and bring down our grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. When they are converted, and not until then, they are provided for, both for time and eternity. "A wise son makes a glad father." (Prov. 10:1.) Whatever we seek for our sons and daughters, let us first seek that they may have a place in the covenant, and a name in the book of life.

We learn, in the third place, **the nature of true greatness.** The angel describes it, when he tells Zachariah that his son "shall be great in the sight of the Lord."

The measure of greatness which is common among men is utterly false and deceptive. Princes and potentates, conquerors and leaders of armies, statesmen and philosophers, artists and authors—these are the kind of men whom the world calls "great." Such greatness is not recognized among the angels of God. Those who do great things for God, they reckon great. Those who do little for God, they reckon little. They measure and value every man according to the position in which he is likely to stand at the last day.

Let us not be ashamed to make the angels of God our example in this matter. Let us seek for ourselves and our children that true greatness which will be owned and recognized in another world. It is a greatness which is within the reach of all—of the poor as well as the rich—of the servant as well as of the master. It does not depend on power or patronage, on money or on friends. It is the free gift of God to all who seek it at the Lord Jesus Christ's hands. It is the portion of all who hear Christ's voice and follow Him—who fight Christ's battle and do Christ's work in the world. Such may receive little honor in this life. But great shall be their reward at the last day.

We learn, in the fourth place, that **children are never too young to receive the grace of God.** Zachariah is informed that his son "shall be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb."

There is no greater mistake than to suppose that infants, by reason of their tender age, are incapable of being operated upon by the Holy Spirit. The manner of His work upon a little child's heart, is

undoubtedly mysterious and incomprehensible. But so also are all His works upon the sons of men. Let us beware of limiting God's power and compassion. He is a merciful God. With Him nothing is impossible.

Let us remember these things in connection with the subject of infant baptism. It is a feeble objection to say that infants ought not to be baptized, because they cannot repent and believe. If an infant can be filled with the Holy Spirit, he is surely not unworthy to be admitted into the visible church. Let us remember these things specially in the training of young children. We should always deal with them as responsible to God. We should never allow ourselves to suppose that they are too young to have any religion. Of course we must be reasonable in our expectations. We must not look for evidences of grace, unsuitable to their age and capacities. But we must never forget that the heart which is not too young to sin, is also not too young to be filled with the grace of God.

We learn, in the last place, from these verses, **the character of a really great and successful minister of God.** The picture is set before us in a striking manner by the angel's description of John the Baptist. He is one who will "turn hearts"—turn them from ignorance to knowledge, from carelessness to thoughtfulness, from sin to God. He is one who will "go before the Lord"—he will delight in nothing so much as being the messenger and herald of Jesus Christ. He is one who "will make ready a people for the Lord." He will strive

to gather out of the world a company of believers, who will be ready to meet the Lord in the day of His appearing.

For such ministers let us pray night and day. They are the true pillars of a Church, the true salt of the earth, the true light of the world. Happy is that Church, and happy is that nation, which has many such men. Without such men, learning, titles, endowments, and splendid buildings, will keep no Church alive. Souls will not be saved—good will not be done—Christ will not be glorified, excepting by men full of the Holy Spirit.

Notes on 1:13-17

13. "Give him the name John." The word John means "the grace, gift, or mercy of the Lord" (Cruden).

15. "He is never to take wine or other fermented drink." From this it would appear that John the Baptist was a Nazirite, a person separated by special vow to the Lord (see Numbers 6:3).

17. "To turn the hearts of the fathers to their children." This is a difficult expression. De Dieu's is the most likely explanation. He says it means, "the fathers upon, or together with the children"—that is, all ages and all sorts of people—parents and children together.

LUKE 1:18-25

We see in this passage, **the power of unbelief in a good man.** Righteous and holy as Zachariah was, the announcement of the angel appears to him incredible. He cannot think it possible that

an old man like himself should have a son. “How shall I know this?” he says, “for I am an old man, and my wife well along in years.”

A well-instructed Jew, like Zachariah, ought not to have raised such a question. No doubt he was well acquainted with the Old Testament Scriptures. He ought to have remembered the wonderful births of Isaac, and Samson, and Samuel in old times. He ought to have remembered that what God has done once, He can do again, and that with Him nothing is impossible. But he forgot all this. He thought of nothing but the arguments of mere human reason and sense. And it often happens in religious matters, that where reason begins, faith ends.

Let us learn in wisdom from the fault of Zachariah. It is a fault to which God’s people in every age have been sadly liable. The histories of Abraham, and Isaac, and Moses, and Hezekiah, and Jehoshaphat, will all show us that a true believer may sometimes be overtaken by unbelief. It is one of the first corruptions which came into man’s heart in the day of the fall, when Eve believed the devil rather than God. It is one of the most deep-rooted sins by which a saint is plagued, and from which he is never entirely freed until he dies. Let us pray daily, “Lord increase my faith.” Let us not doubt that when God says a thing, that thing shall be fulfilled.

We see furthermore, in these verses, **the privilege and portion of God’s angels.** They carry messages to God’s Church. They enjoy God’s immediate presence. The heavenly messenger who appears to Zachariah, rebukes his unbelief by telling him who he is— “I am

Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God—and am sent to speak unto you."

The name "Gabriel" would doubtless fill the mind of Zachariah with humiliation and self-abasement. He would remember it was that same Gabriel, who 490 years before had brought to Daniel the prophecy of the seventy weeks, and had told him how Messiah should be cut off. (Dan. 9:26.) He would doubtless contrast his own sad unbelief, when peaceably ministering as a priest in God's temple, with the faith of holy Daniel when dwelling a captive at Babylon, while the temple at Jerusalem was in ruins. Zachariah learned a lesson that day which he never forgot.

The account which Gabriel gives of his own office, should raise in our minds great searching's of heart. This mighty spirit, far greater in power and intelligence than we are, counts it his highest honor to "stand in God's presence" and do His will. Let our aims and desires be in the same direction. Let us strive so to live, that we may one day stand with boldness before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. The way to this high and holy position is open before us. Christ has consecrated it for us by the offering of His own body and blood. May we endeavor to walk in it during the short time of this present life, that so we may stand in our lot with God's elect angels in the endless ages of eternity. (Dan. 12:13.)

We see, finally, in this passage, **how exceeding sinful is the sin of unbelief in the sight of God.** The doubts and questionings of Zachariah brought down upon him a heavy chastisement. "You

shall be silent," says the angel, "and not able to speak, because you believe not my words." It was a chastisement peculiarly suitable to the offence. The tongue that was not ready to speak the language of believing praise was struck speechless. It was a chastisement of long continuance. For nine long months at least, Zachariah was condemned to silence, and was daily reminded, that by unbelief he had offended God.

Few sins appear to be so peculiarly provoking to God as the sin of unbelief. None certainly have called down such heavy judgments on men. It is a practical denial of God's Almighty power, to doubt whether He can do a thing, when He undertakes to do it. It is giving the lie to God to doubt whether He means to do a thing, when He has plainly promised that it shall be done. The forty years wanderings of Israel in the wilderness, should never be forgotten by professing Christians. The words of Paul are very solemn— "They could not enter in because of unbelief." (Heb. 3:19.)

Let us watch and pray daily against this soul-ruining sin. Concessions to it rob believers of their inward peace—weaken their hands in the day of battle—bring clouds over their hopes—make their chariot wheels drive heavily. According to the degree of our faith will be our enjoyment of Christ's salvation—our patience in the day of trial—our victory over the world. Unbelief, in short, is the true cause of a thousand spiritual diseases, and once allowed to nestle in our hearts, will eat as does a canker. "If you will not believe, you shall not be established." (Isaiah 7:9.) In all that respects the pardon of our

sins, and the acceptance of our souls—the duties of our peculiar station and the trials of our daily life, let it be a settled maxim in our religion, to trust every word of God implicitly, and to beware of unbelief.

Notes on 1:18-25

18. "How can I be sure of this?" There is a big difference between Zechariah's question here and the Virgin Mary's in verse 34. Zechariah's question implies doubt about the angel's whole announcement, but Mary's question implies no doubt about the event but is only asking about how it will be accomplished.

LUKE 1:26-33

THE BIRTH OF JESUS FORETOLD

We have, in these verses, the announcement of the most marvelous event that ever happened in this world—the incarnation and birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a passage which we should always read with mingled wonder, love and praise.

We should notice, in the first place, **the lowly and unassuming manner in which the Savior of mankind came among us.** The angel who announced His advent, was sent to an obscure town of Galilee, named Nazareth. The woman who was honored to be our Lord's mother, was evidently in a humble position of life. Both in her station and her dwelling-place, there was an utter absence of what the world calls "greatness."

We need not hesitate to conclude, that there was a wise providence in all this arrangement. The Almighty counsel, which orders all things in heaven and earth, could just as easily have appointed Jerusalem to be the place of Mary's residence as Nazareth, or could as easily have chosen the daughter of some rich scribe to be our Lord's mother, as a poor woman. But it seemed good that it should not be so. The first advent of Messiah was to be an advent of humiliation. That humiliation was to begin even from the time of His conception and birth.

Let us beware of despising poverty in others, and of being ashamed of it if God lays it upon ourselves. The condition of life which Jesus voluntarily chose, ought always to be regarded with holy reverence. The common tendency of the day to bow down before rich men, and make an idol of money, ought to be carefully resisted and discouraged. The example of our Lord is a sufficient answer to a thousand groveling maxims about wealth, which pass current among men. "Though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor." (2 Cor. 8:9.)

Let us admire the amazing condescension of the Son of God. The Heir of all things not only took our nature upon Him, but took it in the most humbling form in which it could have been assumed. It would have been condescension to come on earth as a king and reign. It was a miracle of mercy passing our comprehension to come on earth as a poor man, to be despised, and suffer, and die. Let His love constrain us to live not to ourselves, but to Him. Let His

example daily bring home to our conscience the precept of Scripture — “Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate.” (Rom. 12:16.)

We should notice, in the second place, **the high privilege of the Virgin Mary.** The language which the angel Gabriel addresses to her is very remarkable. He calls her “highly favored.” He tells her that “the Lord is with her.” He says to her, “Blessed are you among women.”

It is a well-known fact, that the Roman Catholic Church pays an honor to the Virgin Mary, hardly inferior to that which it pays to her blessed Son. She is formally declared by the Roman Catholic Church to have been “conceived without sin.” She is held up to Roman Catholics as an object of worship, and prayed to as a mediator between God and man, no less powerful than Christ Himself. For all this, be it remembered, there is not the slightest warrant in Scripture. There is no warrant in the verses before us now. There is no warrant in any other part of God’s word.

But while we say this, we must in fairness admit, that no woman was ever so highly honored as the mother of our Lord. It is evident that one woman only out of the countless millions of the human race, could be the means whereby God could be “manifest in the flesh,” and the Virgin Mary had the mighty privilege of being that one. By one woman, sin and death were brought into the world at the beginning. By the child-bearing of one woman, life and immortality

were brought to light when Christ was born. No wonder that this one woman was called “highly favored” and “blessed.”

One thing in connection with this subject should never be forgotten by Christians. There is a relationship to Christ within reach of us all—a relationship far nearer than that of flesh and blood—a relationship which belongs to all who repent and believe. “Whoever shall do the will of God,” says Jesus, “the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.” “Blessed is the womb that bare you,” was the saying of a woman one day. But what was the reply? “Yes! rather blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it.” (Mark 3:35; Luke 11:27.)

We should notice, finally, in these verses, **the glorious account of our Lord Jesus Christ,** which the angel gives to Mary. Every part of the account is full of deep meaning, and deserves close attention.

Jesus “shall be great,” says Gabriel. Of His greatness we know something already. He has brought in a great salvation. He has shown Himself a Prophet greater than Moses. He is a great High Priest. And He shall be greater still when He shall be owned as a King.

Jesus “shall be called the Son of the Highest,” says Gabriel. He was so before He came into the world. Equal to the Father in all things, He was from all eternity the Son of God. But He was to be

known and acknowledged as such by the Church. The Messiah was to be recognized and worshiped as nothing less than very God.

"The Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of his father David," says Gabriel, "and He shall reign over the house of Jacob forever." The literal fulfillment of this part of the promise is yet to come. Israel is yet to be gathered. The Jews are yet to be restored to their own land, and to look to Him whom they once pierced, as their King and their God. Though the accomplishment of this prediction tarry, we may confidently wait for it. It shall surely come one day and not tarry. (Hab. 2:3.)

Finally, says Gabriel, "Of the kingdom of Jesus there shall be no end." Before His glorious kingdom, the empires of this world shall one day go down and pass away. Like Nineveh, and Babylon, and Tyre, and Carthage, they shall all come to nothing one day, and the saints of the most high shall take the kingdom. Before Jesus, every knee shall one day bow, and every tongue confess that He is Lord. His kingdom alone shall prove an everlasting kingdom, and His dominion that which shall not pass away. (Dan. 7:14, 27.)

The true Christian should often dwell on this glorious promise and take comfort in its contents. He has no cause to be ashamed of his Master. Poor and despised as he may often be for the Gospel's sake, he may feel assured that he is on the conquering side. The kingdoms of this world shall yet become the kingdoms of Christ. Yet a little time and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry. (Heb. 10:37.) For that blessed day let us patiently wait, and watch,

and pray. Now is the time for carrying the cross, and for fellowship with Christ's sufferings. The day draws near when Christ shall take His great power and reign; and when all who have served Him faithfully shall exchange a cross for a crown.

Notes on 1:26-33

27. Pledged to be married. Let us note the wise providence through which the mother of our Lord, though a virgin, was a virgin pledged to be married. It screened her reputation from unseemly remarks. It provided a helper and protector for her in her time of weakness and need.

28. "Highly favored." "The angel greets the virgin; he does not pray to her. He greets her as a saint; he does not pray to her as a goddess" (Bishop Hall).

29. Greatly troubled. The Greek word here is very strong and intense and is used nowhere else in the New Testament.

LUKE 1:34-38

Let us mark, in these verses, **the reverent and discreet manner in which the angel Gabriel speaks of the great mystery of Christ's incarnation.** In reply to the question of the Virgin "How shall this be?" he uses these remarkable words— "The Holy Spirit shall come upon you, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow you."

We shall do well to follow the example of the angel in all our reflections on this deep subject. Let us ever regard it with holy

reverence, and abstain from those improper and unprofitable speculations upon it, in which some have unhappily indulged. Enough for us to know that "the Word was made flesh," and that when the Son of God came into the world, a real "body was prepared for Him," so that He "took part of our flesh and blood," and was "made of a woman." (John 1:14; Heb.10:5; Heb. 2:14; Gal. 4:4.) Here we must stop. The manner in which all this was effected is wisely hidden from us. If we attempt to pry beyond this point, we shall but darken counsel by words without knowledge, and rush in where angels fear to tread. In a religion which really comes down from heaven there must needs be mysteries. Of such mysteries in Christianity, the incarnation is one.

Let us mark, in the second place, **the prominent place assigned to the Holy Spirit in the great mystery of the incarnation.** We find it written, "The Holy Spirit shall come upon you."

An intelligent reader of the Bible will probably not fail to remember, that the honor here given to the Spirit is in precise harmony with the teaching of Scripture in other places. In every step of the great work of man's redemption, we shall find special mention of the work of the Holy Spirit. Did Jesus die to make atonement for our sins? It is written that "through the eternal Spirit He offered himself without spot to God." (Heb. 9:14.) Did He rise again for our justification? It is written that He "was quickened by the Spirit." (1 Peter 3:18.) Does He supply His disciples with comfort between the

time of His first and second advent? It is written that the Comforter, whom He promised to send is “the Spirit of truth.” (John 14:17.)

Let us take heed that we give the Holy Spirit the same place in our personal religion, which we find Him occupying in God’s word. Let us remember, that all that believers have, and are, and enjoy under the Gospel, they owe to the inward teaching of the Holy Spirit. The work of each of the three Persons of the Trinity is equally and entirely needful to the salvation of every saved soul. The ELECTION of God the Father, the REDEMPTION of God the Son, and the SANCTIFICATION of God the Spirit, ought never to be separated in our Christianity.

Let us mark, in the third place, **the mighty principle which the angel Gabriel lays down to silence all objections about the incarnation.** “With God nothing shall be impossible.”

A hearty reception of this great principle is of immense importance to our own inward peace. Questions and doubts will often arise in men’s minds about many subjects in religion. They are the natural result of our fallen estate of soul. Our faith at the best is very feeble. Our knowledge at its highest is clouded with much infirmity. And among many antidotes to a doubting, anxious, questioning state of mind, few will be found more useful than that before us now—a thorough conviction of the almighty power of God. With Him who called the world into being and formed it out of nothing, everything is possible. Nothing is too hard for the Lord.

There is no sin too black and bad to be pardoned. The blood of Christ cleanses from all sin. There is no heart too hard and wicked to be changed. The heart of stone can be made a heart of flesh. There is no work too hard for a believer to do. We may do all things through Christ strengthening us. There is no trial too hard to be borne. The grace of God is sufficient for us. There is no promise too great to be fulfilled. Christ's words never pass away, and what He has promised He is able to perform. There is no difficulty too great for a believer to overcome. When God is for us who shall be against us? The mountain shall become a plain. Let principles like these be continually before our minds. The angel's receipt is an invaluable remedy. Faith never rests so calmly and peacefully as when it lays its head on the pillow of God's omnipotence.

Let us mark, in the last place, **the meek and ready acquiescence of the Virgin Mary in God's revealed will concerning her.** She says to the angel, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to your word."

There is far more of admirable grace in this answer than at first sight appears. A moment's reflection will show us, that it was no light matter to become the mother of our Lord in this unheard of and mysterious way. It brought with it, no doubt, at a distant period great honor; but it brought with it for the present no small danger to Mary's reputation, and no small trial to Mary's faith. All this danger and trial the holy Virgin was willing and ready to risk. She asks no further questions. She raises no further objections. She accepts the

honor laid upon her with all its attendant perils and inconveniences. “Behold,” she says, “the handmaid of the Lord.”

Let us seek in our daily practical Christianity to exercise the same blessed spirit of faith which we see here in the Virgin Mary. Let us be willing to go anywhere, and do anything, and be anything, whatever be the present and immediate inconvenience, so long as God’s will is clear and the path of duty is plain. The words of good Bishop Hall on this passage are worth remembering. “All disputations with God after His will is known, arise from infidelity. There is not a more noble proof of faith than to captivate all the powers of our understanding and will to our Creator, and without any questionings to go blindfold where He will lead us.”

Notes on 1:34-38

36. Even Elizabeth your relative. The angel helps the Virgin Mary’s faith by telling her about something that will assist her to receive his message. This is how God deals with us. He knows our weakness.

LUKE 1:39-45

MARY VISITS ELIZABETH

We should observe in this passage, **the benefit of fellowship and communion between believers.** We read of a visit paid by the Virgin Mary to her cousin Elizabeth. We are told in a striking manner how the hearts of both these holy women were cheered, and their minds lifted up by this interview. Without this visit, Elizabeth

might never have been so filled with the Holy Spirit, as we are here told she was; and Mary might never have uttered that song of praise which is now known all over the Church of Christ. The words of an old divine are deep and true— "Happiness communicated doubles itself. Grief grows greater by concealing—joy by expression."

We should always regard communion with other believers as an eminent means of grace. It is a refreshing break in our journey along the narrow way to exchange experience with our fellow travelers. It helps us insensibly and it helps them, and so is a mutual gain. It is the nearest approach that we can make on earth to the joy of heaven. "As iron sharpens iron, so does the countenance of a man his friend." We need reminding of this. The subject does not receive sufficient attention, and the souls of believers suffer in consequence. There are many who fear the Lord and think upon His name, and yet forget to speak often one to another. (Malachi 3:16.) First let us seek the face of God. Then let us seek the face of God's friends. If we did this more, and were more careful about the company we keep, we would oftener know what it is to feel filled with the Holy Spirit.

We should observe in this passage, **the clear spiritual knowledge which appears in the language of Elizabeth.** She uses an expression about the Virgin Mary which shows that she herself was deeply taught of God. She calls her "the mother of my Lord."

Those words "my Lord" are so familiar to our ears, that we miss the fullness of their meaning. At the time they were spoken they

implied far more than we are apt to suppose. They were nothing less than a distinct declaration that the child who was to be born of the Virgin Mary was the long promised Messiah, the "Lord" of whom David in spirit had prophesied, the Christ of God. Viewed in this light, the expression is a wonderful example of faith. It is a confession worthy to be placed by the side of that of Peter, when he said to Jesus, "You are the Christ."

Let us remember the deep meaning of the words, "the Lord," and beware of using them lightly and carelessly. Let us consider that they rightly apply to none but Him who was crucified for our sins on Calvary. Let the recollection of this fact invest the words with a holy reverence, and make us careful how we let them fall from our lips. There are two texts connected with the expression which should often come to our minds. In one it is written, "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Spirit." In the other it is written, "Every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (1 Cor. 12:3. Philipp. 2:11.)

Finally, we should observe in these verses, **the high praise which Elizabeth bestows upon the grace of faith.** "Blessed," she says, "is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!" We need not wonder that this holy woman should thus commend faith. No doubt she was well acquainted with the Old Testament Scriptures. She knew the great things that faith had done. What is the whole history of God's saints in every age but a record of men and women who obtained a good report by faith?

What is the simple story of all from Abel downwards but a narrative of redeemed sinners who believed, and so were blessed? By faith they embraced promises. By faith they lived. By faith they walked. By faith they endured hardships. By faith they looked to an unseen Savior, and good things yet to come. By faith they battled with the world, the flesh, and the devil. By faith they overcame, and got safely home. Of this goodly company the Virgin Mary was proving herself one. No wonder that Elizabeth said, "Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!"

Do we know anything of this precious faith? This, after all, is the question that concerns us. Do we know anything of the faith of God's elect, the faith which is the working of God? (Titus 1:2. Col. ii. 12.) Let us never rest until we know it by experience. Once knowing it, let us never cease to pray that our faith may grow exceedingly. Better a thousand times be rich in faith than rich in gold. Gold will be worthless in the unseen world to which we are all traveling. Faith will be owned in that world before God the Father and the holy angels. When the great white throne is set, and the books are opened, when the dead are called from their graves, and receiving their final sentence, the value of faith will at length be fully known. Men will learn then, if they never learned before, how true are the words, "Blessed are those who believed."

LUKE 1:46-56

MARY'S SONG

These verses contain the Virgin Mary's famous hymn of praise, in the prospect of becoming the "mother of our Lord." Next to the Lord's Prayer, perhaps, few passages of Scripture are better known than this. Wherever the Church of England Prayer-book is used, this hymn forms part of the evening service. And we need not wonder that the compilers of that Prayer-book gave it so prominent a place. No words can express more aptly the *praise for redeeming mercy* which ought to form part of the public worship of every branch of Christ's Church.

Let us mark, firstly, **the full acquaintance with Scripture which this hymn exhibits.** We are reminded as we read it, of many expressions in the book of Psalms. Above all, we are reminded of the song of Hannah, in the book of Samuel. (1 Sam. 2) It is evident that the memory of the Blessed Virgin was stored with Scripture. She was familiar, whether by hearing or by reading, with the Old Testament. And so, when out of the abundance of her heart her mouth spoke, she gave vent to her feelings in Scriptural language. Moved by the Holy Spirit to break forth into praise, she chooses language which the Holy Spirit had already consecrated and used.

Let us strive, every year we live, to become more deeply acquainted with Scripture. Let us study it, search into it, dig into it, meditate on it, until it dwell in us richly. (Coloss. 3:16.) In particular, let us labor to make ourselves familiar with those parts of the Bible which, like the book of Psalms, describe the experience of the saints of old. We shall find it most helpful to us in all our approaches to

God. It will supply us with the best and most suitable language both for the expression of our needs and thanksgivings. Such knowledge of the Bible can doubtless never be attained without regular, daily study. But the time spent on such study is never mis-spent. It will bear fruit after many days.

Let us mark, secondly, in this hymn of praise, **the Virgin Mary's deep humility.** She who was chosen of God to the high honor of being Messiah's mother, speaks of her own "low estate," and acknowledges her need of a "Savior." She does not let fall a word to show that she regarded herself as a sinless, "immaculate" person. On the contrary, she uses the language of one who has been taught by the grace of God to feel her own sins, and so far from being able to save others, requires a Savior for her own soul. We may safely affirm that none would be more forward to reprove the honor paid by the Romish Church to the Virgin Mary, than the Virgin Mary herself.

Let us copy this holy humility of our Lord's mother, while we steadfastly refuse to regard her as a mediator, or to pray to her. Like her, let us be lowly in our own eyes, and think little of ourselves. Humility is the highest grace that can adorn the Christian character. It is a true saying of an old divine, that "a man has just so much Christianity as he has humility." It is the grace, which of all is most suiting to human nature. Above all, it is the grace which is within the reach of every converted person. All are not rich. All are not learned. All are not highly gifted. All are not preachers. But all children of God may be clothed with humility.

Let us mark, thirdly, **the lively thankfulness of the Virgin Mary.** It stands out prominently in all the early part of her hymn. Her "soul magnifies the Lord." Her "spirit rejoices in God." "All generations shall call her blessed." "Great things have been done for her." We can scarcely enter into the full extent of feelings which a holy Jewess would experience on finding herself in Mary's position. But we should try to recollect them as we read her repeated expressions of praise.

We too shall do well to walk in Mary's steps in this matter, and cultivate a thankful spirit. It has ever been a mark of God's most distinguished saints in every age. David, in the Old Testament, and Paul, in the New, are remarkable for their thankfulness. We seldom read much of their writings without finding them blessing and praising God. Let us rise from our beds every morning with a deep conviction that we are debtors, and that every day we have more mercies than we deserve. Let us look around us every week, as we travel through the world, and see whether we have not much to thank God for. If our hearts are in the right place, we shall never find any difficulty in building an Ebenezer. Well would it be if our prayers and supplications were more mingled with thanksgiving. (1 Sam. 7:12. Phil. 4:6.)

Let us mark, fourthly, **the experimental acquaintance with God's former dealings with His people, which the Virgin Mary possessed.** She speaks of God as One whose "mercy is on those who fear Him"—as One who "scatters the proud, and puts

down the mighty, and sends the rich empty away"—as One who "exalts them of low degree, and fills the hungry with good things." She spoke, no doubt, in recollection of Old Testament history. She remembered how Israel's God had put down Pharaoh, and the Canaanites, and the Philistines, and Sennacherib, and Haman, and Belshazzar. She remembered how He had exalted Joseph and Moses, and Samuel, and David, and Esther, and Daniel, and never allowed His chosen people to be completely destroyed. And in all God's dealings with herself, in placing honor upon a poor woman of Nazareth—in raising up Messiah in such a dry ground as the Jewish nation seemed to have become—she traced the handiwork of Israel's covenant God.

The true Christian should always give close attention to Bible history, and the lives of individual saints. Let us often examine the "footsteps of the flock." (Cant. 1:8.) Such study throws light on God's mode of dealing with His people. He is of one mind. What He does for them, and to them, in time past, He is likely to do in time to come. Such study will teach us what to expect, check unwarrantable expectations, and encourage us when cast down. Happy is that man whose mind is well stored with such knowledge. It will make him patient and hopeful.

Let us mark, lastly, **the firm grasp which the Virgin Mary had of Bible promises.** She ends her hymn of praise by declaring that God has "blessed Israel in remembrance of His mercy," and that He has done "as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his seed

forever." These words show clearly that she remembered the old promise made to Abraham, "In you shall all nations of the earth be blessed." And it is evident that in the approaching birth of her Son she regarded this promise as about to be fulfilled.

Let us learn from this holy woman's example, to lay firm hold on Bible promises. It is of the deepest importance to our peace to do so. Promises are, in fact, the manna that we should daily eat, and the water that we should daily drink, as we travel through the wilderness of this world. We see not yet all things put under us. We see not Christ, and heaven, and the book of life and the mansions prepared for us. We walk by faith, and this faith leans on promises. But on those promises we may lean confidently. They will bear all the weight we can lay on them. We shall find one day, like the Virgin Mary, that God keeps His word, and that what He has spoken, so He will always in due time perform.

Notes on 1:46-56

47. "My Savior." Let us notice the Virgin Mary's expressions of need of salvation. It would be difficult to find a more complete answer to the Roman Catholic teaching about her, and especially the doctrine of the immaculate conception, than her language in this hymn.

51. "His arm." "God's great power is represented by his finger, his greater power by his hand, his greatest power by his arm. The production of lice was by God's finger (Exodus 8:19). His other miracles in Egypt were performed by his hand (Exodus 3:20). The

destruction of Pharaoh and army in the Red Sea, by God's arm (Exodus 15:6)" (Whitby).

LUKE 1:57-66

THE BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

We have in this passage the history of a birth, the birth of a burning and shining light in the Church, the forerunner of Christ Himself—John the Baptist. The language in which the Holy Spirit describes the event is well worthy of remark. It is written that "The Lord showed great mercy to Elizabeth." There was mercy in bringing her safely through her time of trial. There was mercy in making her the mother of a living child. Happy are those family circles, whose births are viewed in this light—as especial instances of "the mercy" of the Lord.

We see in the conduct of Elizabeth's neighbors and cousins, **a striking example of the kindness we owe to one another.** It is written that "They rejoiced with her." How much more happiness there would be in this evil world, if conduct like that of Elizabeth's relations was more common! Sympathy in one another's joys and sorrows costs little, and yet is a grace of most mighty power. Like the oil on the wheels of some large engine, it may seem a trifling and unimportant thing, yet in reality it has an immense influence on the comfort and well-working of the whole machine of society. A kind word of congratulation or consolation is seldom forgotten. The heart that is warmed by good tidings, or chilled by affliction, is peculiarly

susceptible, and sympathy to such a heart is often more precious than gold.

The servant of Christ will do well to remember this grace. It seems “a little one,” and amid the din of controversy, and the battle about mighty doctrines, we are sadly apt to overlook it. Yet it is one of those pins of the tabernacle which we must not leave in the wilderness. It is one of those ornaments of the Christian character which make it beautiful in the eyes of men. Let us not forget that it is enforced upon us by a special precept— “Rejoice with those who do rejoice, and weep with those who weep.” (Rom. 12:15.) The practice of it seems to bring down a special blessing. The Jews who came to comfort Mary and Martha at Bethany, saw the greatest miracle that Jesus ever worked. Above all, it is commended to us by the most perfect example. Our Lord was ready both to go to a marriage feast, and to weep at a grave. (John 2, John 11) Let us be ever ready to go and do likewise.

We see in the conduct of Zachariah in this passage, **a striking example of the benefit of affliction.** He resists the wishes of his relations to call his new-born son after his own name. He clings firmly to the name “John,” by which the angel Gabriel had commanded him to be called. He shows that his nine months’ dumbness had not been inflicted on him in vain. He is no longer faithless, but believing. He now believes every word that Gabriel had spoken to him, and every word of his message shall be obeyed.

We need not doubt that the past nine months had been a most profitable time to the soul of Zachariah. He had learned, probably, more about his own heart, and about God, than he ever knew before. His conduct shows it. Correction had proved instruction. He was ashamed of his unbelief. Like Job, he could say, “I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you.” Like Hezekiah, when the Lord left him, he had found out what was in his heart. (Job 42:5. 2 Chron. 32:31.)

Let us take heed that affliction does us good, as it did to Zachariah. We cannot escape trouble in a sin-laden world. Man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upwards. (Job 5:7.) But in the time of our trouble, let us make earnest prayer that we may “hear the rod and who has appointed it,” that we may learn wisdom by the rod, and not harden our hearts against God. “Sanctified afflictions,” says an old divine, “are spiritual promotions.” The sorrow that humbles us, and drives us nearer to God, is a blessing, and a downright gain. No case is more hopeless than that of the man who, in time of affliction turns his back upon God. There is a dreadful mark set against one of the kings of Judah— “In his time of trouble King Ahaz became even more unfaithful to the Lord.” (2 Chron. 28:22.)

We see in the early history of John Baptist **the nature of the blessing that we should desire for all young children**. We read that “the hand of the Lord was with him.”

We are not told distinctly what these words mean. We are left to gather their meaning from the promise that went before John before

his birth, and the life that John lived all his days. But we need not doubt that the hand of the Lord was with John to sanctify and renew his heart—to teach and fit him for his office—to strengthen him for all his work as the forerunner of the Lamb of God—to encourage him in all his bold denunciation of men's sins—and to comfort him in his last hours, when he was beheaded in prison. We know that he was filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb. We need not doubt that from his earliest years the grace of the Holy Spirit appeared in his ways. In his boyhood as well as in his manhood the constraining power of a mighty principle from above appeared in him. That power was the "hand of the Lord."

This is the portion that we ought to seek for our children. It is the best portion, the happiest portion, the only portion that can never be lost, and will endure beyond the grave. It is good to have over them "the hand" of teachers and instructors; but it is better still to have "the hand of the Lord." We may be thankful if they obtain the patronage of the great and the rich. But we ought to care far more for their obtaining the favor of God. The hand of the Lord is a thousand times better than the hand of Herod. The one is weak, foolish, and uncertain; caressing today and beheading tomorrow. The other is almighty, all-wise, and unchangeable. Where it holds it holds for evermore. Let us bless God that the Lord never changes. What He was in John the Baptist's day, He is now. What He did for the son of Zachariah, He can do for our boys and girls. But He waits to be entreated. If we would have the hand of the Lord with our children, we must diligently seek it.

Notes on 1:57-66

59. On the eighth day. This is in line with Leviticus 12:3. If a child died uncircumcised before the eighth day, we find nothing in Scripture to say that it was not saved. Using the same argument, we may rightly conclude that baptism is not necessary for the salvation of infants under the Christian dispensation. It is not the lack of ordinances but the contempt for them that destroys souls. A little child cannot be guilty of such contempt.

62. Made signs. It is probable that Zechariah was deaf as well as dumb.

LUKE 1:67-80

ZACHARIAH'S SONG

Another hymn of praise demands our attention in these verses. We have read the thanksgiving of Mary, the mother of our Lord. Let us now read the thanksgiving of Zachariah, the father of John the Baptist. We have heard what praises the first advent of Christ drew from the Virgin of the house of David. Let us now hear what praise it draws from an aged priest.

We should notice, firstly, **the deep thankfulness of a Jewish believer's heart in the prospect of Messiah's appearing.** Praise is the first word that falls from the mouth of Zachariah as soon as his speechlessness is removed, and his tongue restored. He begins with the same expression with which Paul begins several of his epistles— "Blessed be the Lord."

At this period of the world we can hardly understand the depth of this good man's feelings. We must imagine ourselves in his position. We must fancy ourselves seeing the fulfillment of the oldest promise in the Old Testament—the promise of a Savior, and beholding the accomplishment of this promise brought near to our own door. We must try to realize what a dim and imperfect view men had of the Gospel before Christ actually appeared, and the shadows and types passed away. Then perhaps we may have some idea of the feelings of Zachariah when he cried out, "Blessed be the Lord."

It may be feared that Christians have very low and inadequate conceptions of their amazing privileges in living under the full light of the Gospel. We have probably a very faint idea of the comparative dimness and twilight of the Jewish dispensation. We have a very feeble notion of what a church must have been before the incarnation of Christ. Let us open our eyes to the extent of our obligations. Let us learn from the example of Zachariah, to be more thankful.

We should notice, secondly, in this hymn of praise, **how much emphasis Zachariah lays on God's fulfillment of His promises.** He declares that God has "visited and redeemed his people," speaking of it in the manner of the prophets as a thing already accomplished, because sure to take place. He goes on to proclaim the instrument of this redemption— "a horn of salvation"—a strong Savior of the house of David. And then he adds that all this is done, "as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophet, to perform

the mercy promised, to remember His holy covenant, and the oath which He swore to our father Abraham."

It is clear that the souls of Old Testament believers fed much on God's promises. They were obliged to walk by faith far more than we are. They knew nothing of the great facts which we know about Christ's life, and death, and resurrection. They looked forward to redemption as a thing hoped for, but not yet seen—and their only warrant for their hope was God's covenanted word. Their faith may well put us to shame. So far from disparaging Old Testament believers, as some are disposed to do, we ought to marvel that they were what they were.

Let us learn to rest on promises and embrace them as Zachariah did. Let us not doubt that every word of God about His people concerning things future, shall as surely be fulfilled as every word about them has been fulfilled concerning things past. Their safety is secured by promise. The world, the flesh, and the devil, shall never prevail against any believer. Their acquittal at the last day is secured by promise. They shall not come into condemnation, but shall be presented spotless before the Father's throne. Their final glory is secured by promise. Their Savior shall come again the second time, as surely as He came the first—to gather His saints together and to give them a crown of righteousness. Let us be persuaded of these promises. Let us embrace them and not let them go. They will never fail us. God's word is never broken. He is not a man that He should lie. We have a seal on every promise which Zachariah never saw. We

have the seal of Christ's blood to assure us, that what God has promised God will perform.

We should notice, thirdly, in this hymn, **what clear views of Christ's kingdom Zachariah possessed.** He speaks of being "saved and delivered from the hands of enemies," as if he had in view a temporal kingdom and a temporal deliverer from Gentile power. But he does not stop here. He declares that the kingdom of Messiah, is a kingdom in which His people are to "serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him." This kingdom, he proclaimed, was drawing near. Prophets had long foretold that it would one day be set up. In the birth of his son John the Baptist, and the near approach of Christ, Zachariah saw this kingdom close at hand.

The foundation of this kingdom of Messiah was laid by the preaching of the Gospel. From that time the Lord Jesus has been continually gathering out subjects from an evil world. The full completion of the kingdom is an event yet to come. The saints of the Most High shall one day have entire dominion. The little stone of the Gospel-kingdom shall yet fill the whole earth. But whether in its incomplete or complete state, the subjects of the kingdom are always of one character. They "serve God without fear." They serve God in "holiness and righteousness."

Let us give all diligence to belong to this kingdom. Small as it seems now, it will be great and glorious one day. The men and women who have served God in "holiness and righteousness" shall

one day see all things put under them. Every enemy shall be subdued, and they shall reign forever in that new heaven and earth, wherein dwells righteousness.

We should notice, finally, **what clear views of doctrine Zachariah enjoyed.** He ends his hymn of praise by addressing his infant son John the Baptist. He foretells that he shall "go before the face" of Messiah, and "give knowledge of the salvation" that He is about to bring in—a salvation which is all of grace and mercy—a salvation of which the leading privileges are "remission of sins," "light," and "peace."

Let us end the chapter by examining what we know of these three glorious privileges. Do we know anything of pardon? Have we turned from darkness to light? Have we tasted peace with God? These, after all, are the realities of Christianity. These are the things, without which church-membership and sacraments save no one's soul. Let us never rest until we are experimentally acquainted with them. Mercy and grace have provided them. Mercy and grace will give them to all who call on Christ's name. Let us never rest until the Spirit witnesses with our spirit that our sins are forgiven us, that we have passed from darkness to light, and that we are actually walking in the narrow way, the way of peace.

Notes on 1:67-80

69. "Horn of salvation." "The horn of an animal is its weapon for defense and vengeance, its ornament and beauty too. It is used therefore in the prophetic style, to denote the power of the strongest

empires. This is how we are to understand it here. By this image the exceeding greatness of the Redeemer's strength, and the never-ceasing exertion of it on behalf of his church are signified" (Henry Venn).

70. "As he said through his holy prophets." Let us note that it is expressly said that God spoke through the prophets. When we read their words we read the words of God. "They neither spake nor wrote any word of their own, but uttered syllable by syllable as the Spirit put it into their mouths; as a harp or lute gives a sound according to the discretion of the musician" (Hooker).

Luke – Chap. 2

LUKE 2:1-7

THE BIRTH OF JESUS

We have, in these verses, the story of a birth—the birth of the incarnate Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. Every birth of a living child is a marvelous event. It brings into being a soul that will never die. But never since the world began was a birth so marvelous as the birth of Christ. In itself it was a miracle— "God was manifest in the flesh." (1 Tim. 3:16.) The blessings it brought into the world were unspeakable—it opened to man the door of everlasting life.

In reading these verses, let us first notice **the TIMES when Christ was born.** It was in the days when Augustus, the first

Roman emperor, made “a decree that all the world should be taxed.”

The wisdom of God appears in this simple fact. The scepter was practically departing from Judah. (Gen. 49:10.) The Jews were coming under the dominion and taxation of a foreign power. Strangers were beginning to rule over them. They had no longer a really independent government of their own. The “due time” had come for the promised Messiah to appear. Augustus taxes “the world,” and at once Christ is born.

It was a time peculiarly suitable for the introduction of Christ’s Gospel. The whole civilized earth was at length governed by one master. (Dan. 2:40.) There was nothing to prevent the preacher of a new faith going from city to city, and country to country. The princes and priests of the heathen world had been weighed in the balances and found lacking. Egypt, and Assyria, and Babylon, and Persia, and Greece, and Rome, had all successively proved that “the world by wisdom knew not God.” (1 Cor. 1:21.) Notwithstanding their mighty conquerors, and poets, and historians, and architects, and philosophers, the kingdoms of the world were full of dark idolatry. It was indeed “due time” for God to interpose from heaven, and send down an almighty Savior. It was “due time” for Christ to be born. (Rom. 5:6.)

Let us ever rest our souls on the thought, that times are in God’s hand. (Psalm 31:15.) He knows the best season for sending help to His church, and new light to the world. Let us beware of giving way to over anxiety about the course of events around us, as if we knew

better than the King of kings what time relief should come. “Cease, Philip, to try to govern the world,” was a frequent saying of Luther to an anxious friend. It was a saying full of wisdom.

Let us notice, secondly, **the PLACE where Christ was born.** It was not at Nazareth of Galilee, where His mother, the Virgin Mary, lived. The prophet Micah had foretold that the event was to take place at Bethlehem. (Micah 5:2.) And so it came to pass. At Bethlehem Christ was born.

The overruling providence of God appears in this simple fact. He orders all things in heaven and earth. He turns the hearts of kings wherever He will. He overruled the time when Augustus decreed the taxing. He directed the enforcement of the decree in such a way, that Mary must needs be at Bethlehem when “the time came for the baby to be born.” Little did the haughty Roman emperor, and his officer Cyrenius, think that they were only instruments in the hand of the God of Israel, and were only carrying out the eternal purposes of the King of kings. Little did they think that they were helping to lay the foundation of a kingdom, before which the empires of this world would all go down one day, and Roman idolatry pass away. The words of Isaiah, upon a like occasion, should be remembered, “He means not so, neither does his heart think so.” (Isaiah 10:7.)

The heart of a believer should take comfort in the recollection of God’s providential government of the world. A true Christian should never be greatly moved or disturbed by the conduct of the rulers of the earth. He should see with the eye of faith a hand overruling all

that they do to the praise and glory of God. He should regard every king and potentate—an Augustus, a Cyrenius, a Darius, a Cyrus, a Sennacherib—as a creature who, with all his power, can do nothing but what God allows, and nothing which is not carrying out God's will. And when the rulers of this world "set themselves against the Lord," he should take comfort in the words of Solomon, "There is one higher than they." (Eccles. 5:8.)

Let us notice, lastly, **the MANNER in which Christ was born.** He was not born under the roof of His mother's house, but in a strange place, and at an "inn." When born, He was not laid in a carefully prepared cradle. He was "laid in a manger (that is, a feeding trough for the cattle), because there was no room in the inn."

We see here the grace and condescension of Christ. Had He come to save mankind with royal majesty, surrounded by His Father's angels, it would have been an act of undeserved mercy. Had He chosen to dwell in a palace, with power and great authority, we should have had reason enough to wonder. But to become poor as the very poorest of mankind, and lowly as the very lowliest—this is a love that passes knowledge. It is unspeakable and unsearchable. Never let us forget that through this humiliation Jesus has purchased for us a title to glory. Through His life of suffering, as well as His death, He has obtained eternal redemption for us. All through His life He was poor for our sakes, from the hour of His birth to the hour of His death. And through His poverty we are made rich. (2 Cor. 8:9.)

Let us beware of despising the poor, because of their poverty. Their condition is one which the Son of God has sanctified and honored, by taking it voluntarily on Himself. God is no respecter of people. He looks at the hearts of men, and not at their incomes. Let us never be ashamed of the *affliction of poverty*, if God thinks fit to lay it upon us. To be godless and covetous is disgraceful, but it is no disgrace to be poor. A lowly dwelling place, and coarse food, and a hard bed, are not pleasing to flesh and blood. But they are the portion which the Lord Jesus Himself willingly accepted from the day of His entrance into the world. Wealth ruins far more souls than poverty. When the love of money begins to creep over us, let us think of the manger at Bethlehem, and of Him who was laid in it. Such thoughts may deliver us from much harm.

Notes on 2:1-7

1. Caesar Augustus. This is that Octavius who, after the defeat of Anthony and Cleopatra at Actium, took the government of the Roman Empire into his own hands and was the first Caesar or Roman emperor.

3. Everyone went to his own town to register. Quesnel remarks, "Augustus imagines that he is busy advancing the glory of his name, and the luster of his reign. And yet his orders, by means of others more powerful and absolute than his, become subservient to the accomplishment of prophecies, of which he is altogether ignorant—about the birth of a King whom he will never know, and about the establishment of a monarchy, which will subject his and all others to itself. This is what happens in all ages, and people take no notice of

it."

7. She wrapped him in strips of cloth. On this expression the Fathers and most Roman Catholic writers have built the idea that our Lord's birth was a childbirth without labor or pain. Such an idea is, to say the least, an unprofitable conjecture. There is nothing mentioned here which a mother, in Mary's position, in an eastern climate, might not have done for herself without help. There is no need to imagine or invent miraculous circum- stances in our Lord's incarnation besides those which are fully revealed.

LUKE 2:8-20

THE SHEPHERDS AND THE ANGELS

We read, in these verses, how the birth of the Lord Jesus was first announced to the children of men. The birth of a king's son is generally made an occasion of public reveling and rejoicing. The announcement of the birth of the Prince of Peace was made privately, at midnight, and without anything of worldly pomp and ostentation.

Let us mark **who they were to whom the tidings first came that Christ was born.** They were "shepherds abiding in the field near Bethlehem, keeping watch over their flocks by night." To shepherds—not to priests and rulers—to shepherds—not to Scribes and Pharisees, an angel appeared, proclaiming, "unto you is born this day a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

The saying of James should come into our mind, as we read these words— “Has not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him.” (James 2:5.) The lack of money debars no one from spiritual privileges. The things of God’s kingdom are often hidden from the great and noble, and revealed to the poor. The busy labor of the hands need not prevent a man being favored with special communion with God. Moses was keeping sheep, Gideon was threshing wheat, Elisha was ploughing, when they were each honored by direct calls and revelations from God. Let us resist the suggestion of Satan, that religion is not for the working man. The weak of the world are often called before the mighty. The last are often first, and the first last.

Let us mark, secondly, **the language used by the angel in announcing Christ’s birth to the shepherds.** He said, “I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.”

We need not wonder at these words. The spiritual darkness which had covered the earth for four thousand years, was about to be rolled away. The way to pardon and peace with God was about to be thrown open to all mankind. The head of Satan was about to be crushed. Liberty was about to be proclaimed to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind. The mighty truth was about to be proclaimed that God could be just, and yet, for Christ’s sake, justify the ungodly. Salvation was no longer to be seen through types and figures, but openly, and face to face. The knowledge of God was no longer to be

confined to the Jews, but to be offered to the whole Gentile world. The days of heathenism were numbered. The first stone of God's kingdom was about to be set up. If this was not "good tidings," there never were tidings that deserved the name.

Let us mark, thirdly, **who they were that first praised God, when Christ was born.** They were ANGELS, and not men—angels who had never sinned, and needed no Savior—angels who had not fallen, and required no redeemer, and no atoning blood. The first hymn to the honor of "God manifest in the flesh," was sung by "a multitude of the heavenly host."

Let us note this fact. It is full of deep spiritual lessons. It shows us what good servants the angels are. All that their heavenly Master does pleases and interests them. It shows us what clear knowledge they have. They know what misery sin has brought into creation. They know the blessedness of heaven, and the privilege of an open door into it. Above all, it shows us the deep love and compassion which the angels feel towards poor lost man. They rejoice in the glorious prospect of many souls being saved, and many brands plucked from the burning.

Let us strive to be more like-minded with the angels. Our spiritual ignorance and deadness appear most painfully in our inability to enter into the joy which we see them here expressing. Surely if we hope to dwell with them forever in heaven, we ought to share something of their feelings while we are here upon earth. Let us seek a more deep sense of the sinfulness and misery of sin, and

then we shall have a more deep sense of thankfulness for redemption.

Let us mark, fourthly, **the hymn of praise which the heavenly host sung in the hearing of the shepherds.** They said, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men.”

These famous words are variously interpreted. Man is by nature so dull in spiritual things, that it seems as if he cannot understand a sentence of heavenly language when he hears it. Yet a meaning may be drawn from the words which is free from any objection, and is not only good sense, but excellent theology, “Glory to God in the highest!” the song begins. Now is come the highest degree of glory to God, by the appearing of His Son Jesus Christ in the world. He by His life and death on the cross will glorify God’s attributes—justice, holiness, mercy, and wisdom—as they never were glorified before. Creation glorified God, but not so much as redemption.

“Peace on earth!” the song goes on. Now is come to earth the peace of God which passes all understanding—the perfect peace between a holy God and sinful man, which Christ was to purchase with His own blood—the peace which is offered freely to all mankind—the peace which, once admitted into the heart, makes men live at peace one with another, and will one day overspread the whole world.

“Good will towards men!” the song concludes. Now is come the time when God’s kindness and good will towards guilty man is to be fully made known. His power was seen in creation. His justice was seen in the flood. But His mercy remained to be fully revealed by the appearing and atonement of Jesus Christ.

Such was the purport of the angels’ song. Happy are they that can enter into its meaning, and with their hearts subscribe to its contents. The man who hopes to dwell in heaven, should have some experimental acquaintance with the language of its inhabitants.

Let us mark, before we leave the passage, **the prompt obedience to the heavenly vision displayed by the shepherds.** We see in them no doubts, or questionings, or hesitation. Strange and improbable as the tidings might seem, they at once act upon them. They went to Bethlehem in haste. They found everything exactly as it had been told them. Their simple faith received a rich reward. They had the mighty privilege of being the first of all mankind, after Mary and Joseph, who saw with believing eyes the new-born Messiah. They soon returned, “glorifying and praising God” for what they had seen.

May our spirit be like theirs! May we ever believe implicitly, act promptly, and wait for nothing, when the path of duty is clear! So doing, we shall have a reward like that of the shepherds. The journey that is begun in faith, will generally end in praise.

Notes on 2:8-20

8. Shepherds living out in the fields nearby. It has been argued from these words that our Lord could not have been born on Christmas day because it was not the custom of the Jews to keep flocks in the field in winter. It may be doubted whether the argument is quite conclusive (see Genesis 31:40 where Jacob complains about the cold nights). However, it is an undeniable fact that the precise month or day of our Lord's nativity is not known. Every month in the year has found its advocates in the conjectures made on the subject. There is no certainty about it. Had it been good for us to know the day, God would have told us. For keeping Christmas we have no authority but that of the church.

LUKE 2:21-24

JESUS PRESENTED IN THE TEMPLE

The first point which demands our attention in this passage, is **the obedience which our Lord rendered, as an infant, to the Jewish law**. We read of His being circumcised on the eighth day. It is the earliest fact which is recorded in His history.

It is a mere waste of time to speculate, as some have done, about the reason why our Lord submitted to circumcision. We know that "in Him was no sin," either original or actual. (1 John 3:5.) His being circumcised was not meant in the least as an acknowledgment that there was any tendency to corruption in His heart. It was not a

confession of inclination to evil, and of need of grace to mortify the deeds of His body. All this should be carefully borne in mind.

Let it suffice us to remember that our Lord's circumcision was a public testimony to Israel, that according to the flesh He was a Jew, made of a Jewish woman, and "made under the law." (Galat. 4:4.) Without it He would not have fulfilled the law's requirements. Without it He could not have been recognized as the son of David, and the seed of Abraham.

Let us remember, furthermore, that circumcision was absolutely necessary before our Lord could be heard as a teacher in Israel. Without it he would have had no place in any lawful Jewish assembly, and no right to any Jewish ordinance. Without it He would have been regarded by all Jews as nothing better than an uncircumcised Gentile, and an apostate from the faith of the fathers.

Let our Lord's submission to an ordinance which He did not need for Himself, be a lesson to us in our daily life. Let us endure much, rather than increase the offence of the Gospel, or hinder in any way the cause of God. The words of Paul deserve frequent pondering—"Though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more, and unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews—to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain those who are under the law." "I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some." (1 Cor. 9:19-22.) The man who wrote these words walked very closely in the footsteps of His crucified Master.

The second point which demands our attention in this passage, is **the name by which our Lord was called, by God's special command.** "Eight days later, when the baby was circumcised, he was named JESUS, the name given him by the angel even before he was conceived." The word Jesus means simply "Savior." It is the same word as "Joshua" in the Old Testament. Very striking and instructive is the selection of this name. The Son of God came down from heaven to be not only the Savior, but the King, the Lawgiver, the Prophet, the Priest, the Judge of fallen man. Had He chosen any one of these titles, He would only have chosen that which was His own. But He passed by them all. He selects a name which speaks of mercy, grace, help, and deliverance for a lost world. It is as a deliverer and Redeemer that He desires principally to be known.

Let us often ask ourselves what our own hearts know of the Son of God. Is He our Jesus, our Savior? This is the question on which our salvation turns. Let it not content us to know Christ as One who wrought mighty miracles, and spoke as never man spoke; or to know Him as One who is very God, and will one day judge the world. Let us see that we know Him experimentally, as our Deliverer from the guilt and power of sin, and our Redeemer from Satan's bondage. Let us strive to be able to say, "This is my Friend—I was dead, and He gave me life—I was a prisoner, and He set me free." Precious indeed is this name of Jesus to all true believers! It is "as ointment poured forth." (Cant. 1:3.) It restores them when conscience-troubled. It comforts them when cast down. It smooths their pillows in sickness. It

supports them in the hour of death. “The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runs into it, and is safe.” (Prov. 18:10.)

The last point which demands our attention in this passage, is **the poor and humble condition of our Lord’s mother, the Virgin Mary.** This is a fact which, at first sight, may not stand out clearly in the form of these verses. But a reference to the twelfth chapter of Leviticus will at once make it plain. There we shall see, that the offering which Mary made was specially appointed to be made by poor people— “If she is not able to bring a lamb, then she shall bring two turtle-doves, or two young pigeons.” In short, her offering was a public declaration that she was poor. (Lev. 12:6.)

Poverty, it is manifest, was our Lord’s portion upon earth, from the days of His earliest infancy. He was nursed and tended as a babe, by a poor woman. He passed the first thirty years of His life on earth, under the roof of a poor man. We need not doubt that He ate a poor man’s food, and wore a poor man’s apparel, and worked a poor man’s work, and shared in all a poor man’s troubles. Such condescension is truly marvelous. Such an example of humility passes man’s understanding.

Facts like these ought often to be laid to heart by poor people. They would help to silence murmuring and complaining, and go far to reconcile them to their hard lot. The simple fact that Jesus was born of a poor woman, and lived all his life on earth among poor people, ought to silence the common argument that “religion is not for the poor.” Above all it ought to encourage every poor believer in

all his approaches to the throne of grace in prayer. Let him remember in all his prayers that his mighty Mediator in heaven is accustomed to poverty, and knows by experience the heart of a poor man. Well would it be for the world if working men could only see that Christ is the true poor man's friend!

Notes on 2:21-24

21. Circumcise him. "He who was above the law, would come under the law, to free us from the law" (Bishop Hall).

Named . . . before he had been conceived. "We read of four people in the Old Testament to whom God gave names before they were born: Isaac (Genesis 17:19); Josiah (1 Kings 13:2); Ishmael (Genesis 16:11); Cyrus (Isaiah 44:28); and in the New Testament we read of two: John the Baptist and Jesus Christ. This tells us how certain God was about future contin- gencies" (Poole).

24. Two young pigeons. "The offering of the poor, which if a rich man offered he did not do his duty" (Lightfoot). Simeon's praise and prophecy (2:25-35)

LUKE 2:25-35

THE PROPHECY OF SIMEON

We have in these verses the history of one whose name is nowhere else mentioned in the New Testament, "a just and devout man" named Simeon. We know nothing of his life before or after the time when Christ was born. We are only told that he came by the Spirit into the temple, when the child Jesus was brought there by His

mother, and that he “took him up in his arms and blessed God” in words which are now well-known all over the world.

We see, in the case of Simeon, *how* **God has a believing people even in the worst of places, and in the darkest times.** Religion was at a very low ebb in Israel when Christ was born. The faith of Abraham was spoiled by the doctrines of Pharisees and Sadducees. The fine gold had become deplorably dim. Yet even then we find in the midst of Jerusalem a man “just and devout”—a man “upon whom is the Holy Spirit.”

It is a cheering thought that God never leaves Himself entirely without a witness. Small as His believing church may sometimes be, the gates of hell shall never completely prevail against it. The true church may be driven into the wilderness, and be a scattered little flock, but it never dies. There was a Lot in Sodom and an Obadiah in Ahab’s household, a Daniel in Babylon and a Jeremiah in Zedekiah’s court; and in the last days of the Jewish Church, when its iniquity was almost full, there were godly people, like Simeon, even in Jerusalem.

True Christians, in every age, should remember this and take comfort. It is a truth which they are apt to forget, and in consequence to give way to despondency. “I alone am left,” said Elijah, “and they seek my life to take it away.” But what said the answer of God to him, “Yet have I reserved seven thousand in Israel.” (1 Kings 19:14, 18.) Let us learn to be more hopeful. Let us believe that grace can live and

flourish, even in the most unfavorable circumstances. There are more Simeons in the world than we suppose.

We see in the song of Simeon **how completely a believer can be delivered from the fear of death.** "Lord," says old Simeon, "now let you your servant depart in peace." He speaks like one for whom the grave has lost its terrors, and the world its charms. He desires to be released from the miseries of this pilgrim-state of existence, and to be allowed to go home. He is willing to be "absent from the body and present with the Lord." He speaks as one who knows where he is going when he departs this life, and cares not how soon he goes. The change with him will be a change for the better, and he desires that his change may come.

What is it that can enable a mortal man to use such language as this? What can deliver us from that "fear of death" to which so many are in bondage? What can take the sting of death away? There is but one answer to such questions. Nothing but strong faith can do it. Faith laying firm hold on an unseen Savior, faith resting on the promises of an unseen God—faith, and faith only, can enable a man to look death in the face, and say, "I depart in peace." It is not enough to be weary of pain, and sickness, and ready to submit to anything for the sake of a 'hopeful change'. It is not enough to feel indifferent to the world, when we have no more strength to mingle in its business, or enjoy its pleasures. We must have something more than this, if we desire to depart in real peace. We must have faith like old Simeon's, even that faith which is the gift of God. Without such

faith we may die quietly, and there may seem “no bands in our death.” (Psalm 73:4.) But, dying without such faith, we shall never find ourselves at home, when we wake up in another world.

We see, furthermore, in the song of Simeon, **what clear views of Christ’s work and office some Jewish believers attained, even before the Gospel was preached.** We find this good old man speaking of Jesus as “the salvation which God had prepared”—as “a light to enlighten the Gentiles, and the glory of his people Israel.” Well would it have been for the letter-learned Scribes and Pharisees of Simeon’s time, if they had sat at his feet, and listened to his word.

Christ was indeed “a light to enlighten the Gentiles.” Without Him they were sunk in gross darkness and superstition. They knew not the way of life. They worshiped the works of their own hands. Their wisest philosophers were utterly ignorant in spiritual things. “Professing themselves to be wise they became fools.” (Rom. 1:22.) The Gospel of Christ was like sun-rise to Greece and Rome, and the whole heathen world. The light which it let in on men’s minds on the subject of religion, was as great as the change from night to day.

Christ was indeed “the glory of Israel.” The descent from Abraham—the covenants—the promises—the law of Moses—the divinely ordered Temple service—all these were mighty privileges. But all were as nothing compared to the mighty fact, that out of Israel was born the Savior of the world. This was to be the highest honor of the Jewish nation, that the mother of Christ was a Jewish

woman, and that the blood of One "made of the seed of David, according to the flesh," was to make atonement for the sin of mankind. (Rom. 1:3.)

The words of old Simeon, let us remember, will yet receive a fuller accomplishment. The "light" which he saw by faith, as he held the child Jesus in his arms, shall yet shine so brightly that all the nations of the Gentile world shall see it. The "glory" of that Jesus whom Israel crucified, shall one day be revealed so clearly to the scattered Jews, that they shall look on Him whom they pierced, and repent, and be converted. The day shall come when the veil shall be taken from the heart of Israel, and all shall "glory in the Lord." (Isaiah. 45:25.) For that day let us wait, and watch, and pray. If Christ be the light and glory of our souls, that day cannot come too soon.

We see, lastly, in this passage, **a striking account of the RESULTS which would follow when Jesus Christ and His Gospel came into the world. E**very word of old Simeon on this subject deserves private meditation. The whole forms a prophecy which is being daily fulfilled.

Christ was to be "a sign spoken against." He was to be a mark for all the fiery darts of the wicked one. He was to be "despised and rejected of men." He and His people were to be a "city set upon a hill," assailed on every side, and hated by all sorts of enemies. And so it proved. Men who agreed in nothing else have agreed in hating Christ. From the very first, thousands have been persecutors and unbelievers. Christ was to be the occasion of "the fall of many in

Israel." He was to be a stone of stumbling and rock of offence to many proud and self-righteous Jews, who would reject Him and perish in their sins. And so it proved. To multitudes among them Christ crucified was a stumbling-block, and His Gospel "a savor of death." (1 Cor. 1:23; 2 Cor. 2:16.)

Christ was to be the occasion of "rising again to many in Israel." He was to prove the Savior of many who, at one time, rejected, blasphemed, and reviled Him, but afterwards repented and believed. And so it proved. When the thousands who crucified Him repented, and Saul who persecuted Him was converted, there was nothing less than a rising again from the dead.

Christ was to be the occasion of "the thoughts of many hearts being revealed." *His Gospel was to bring to light the real characters of many people.* The enmity to God of some—the inward weariness and hunger of others, would be discovered by the preaching of the cross. It would show what men really were. And so it proved. The Acts of the Apostles, in almost every chapter, bear testimony that in this, as in every other item of his prophecy, old Simeon spoke truth.

And now what do we think of Christ? This is the question that ought to occupy our minds. What thoughts does He call forth in our hearts? This is the inquiry which ought to receive our attention. Are we for Him, or are we against Him? Do we love Him, or do we neglect Him? Do we stumble at His doctrine, or do we find it life from the dead? Let us never rest until these questions are satisfactorily answered.

Notes on 2:25-35

25. The consolation of Israel. This was a name given by the Jews to the Messiah. Lightfoot says, "The whole nation waited for the consolation of Israel; in that there was nothing more common with them than to swear by the desire which they had of seeing it."

The Holy Spirit was upon him. Note that this was before the death and ascension of Christ and the outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. We must never forget that the Old Testament saints were taught by the Holy Spirit as much as believers after the Gospel was manifested by Christ, though not in such full measure.

30. "Salvation." The word so translated is only used here and in three other places (Luke 3:6; Acts 28:28: Ephesians 6:17). It is a more abstract, energetic word than the one commonly translated by this word.

35. "A sword will pierce your own soul." The simplest explanation of these words is that Simeon foretells sorrow coming on the Virgin Mary, as cutting and heart-piercing as a sword. This was specially fulfilled when she stood by the cross and saw her son dying there.

LUKE 2:36-40

THE ADORATION OF ANNA

The verses we have now read introduce us to a servant of God whose name is nowhere else mentioned in the New Testament. The history of Anna, like that of Simeon, is related only by Luke. The wisdom of God ordained that a woman as well as a man should testify to the fact that Messiah was born. In the mouth of two

witnesses it was established that Malachi's prophecy was fulfilled, and the messenger of the covenant had suddenly come to the Temple. (Malachi 3:1.)

Let us observe, in these verses, **the character of a holy woman before the establishment of Christ's Gospel.** The facts recorded about Anna are few and simple. But we shall find them full of instruction.

Anna was a woman of irreproachable character. After a married life of only seven years' duration, she had spent eighty-four years as a lone widow. The trials, desolation, and temptation of such a condition were probably very great. But Anna by grace overcame them all. She answered to the description given by Paul. She was "a widow indeed." (1 Tim. 5:5.)

Anna was a woman who loved God's house. "She departed not from the temple." She regarded it as the place where God especially dwelt, and toward which every pious Jew in foreign lands, like Daniel, loved to direct his prayers. "Nearer to God, nearer to God," was the desire of her heart, and she felt that she was never so near as within the walls which contained the ark, the altar, and the holy of holies. She could enter into David's words, "my soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the Lord." (Psalm 84:2.)

Anna was a woman of great self-denial. She "served God with fasting's night and day." She was continually crucifying the flesh and keeping it in subjection by voluntary abstemiousness. Being fully

persuaded in her own mind that the practice was helpful to her soul, she spared no pains to keep it up.

Anna was a woman of much prayer. She “served God with prayer night and day.” She was continually communing with him, as her best Friend, about the things that concerned her own peace. She was never weary of pleading with Him on behalf of others, and, above all, for the fulfillment of His promises of Messiah.

Anna was a woman who held communion with other saints. So soon as she had seen Jesus, she “spoke of Him” to others whom she knew in Jerusalem, and with whom she was evidently on friendly terms. There was a bond of union between her and all who enjoyed the same hope. They were servants of the same Master; and travelers to the same home.

And Anna received a rich reward for all her diligence in God’s service, before she left the world. She was allowed to see Him who had been so long promised, and for whose coming she had so often prayed. Her faith was at last changed to sight, and her hope to certainty. The joy of this holy woman must indeed have been “unspeakable and full of glory.” (1 Peter 1:8.)

It would be well for all Christian women to ponder the character of Anna, and learn wisdom from it. The times, no doubt, are greatly changed. The social duties of the Christian are very different from those of the Jewish believer at Jerusalem. All are not placed by God in the condition of widows. But still, after every deduction, there

remains much in Anna's history which is worthy of imitation. When we read of her consistency, and holiness, and prayerfulness, and self-denial, we cannot but wish that many daughters of the Christian Church would strive to be like her.

Let us observe, secondly, in these verses, **the description given of saints in Jerusalem in the time when Jesus was born.** They were people "who looked for redemption."

Faith, we shall always find, is the universal character of God's elect. These men and women here described, dwelling in the midst of a wicked city, walked by faith, and not by sight. They were not carried away by the flood of worldliness, formality, and self-righteousness around them. They were not infected by the carnal expectations of a mere worldly Messiah, in which most Jews indulged. They lived in the faith of patriarchs and prophets, that the coming Redeemer would bring in holiness and righteousness, and that His principal victory would be over sin and the devil. For such a Redeemer they waited patiently. For such a victory they earnestly longed.

Let us learn a lesson from these good people. If they, with so few helps and so many discouragements, lived such a life of faith, how much more ought we with a finished Bible and a full Gospel. Let us strive, like them, to walk by faith and look forward. The second advent of Christ is yet to come. The complete "redemption" of this earth from sin, and Satan, and the curse, is yet to take place. Let us declare plainly by our lives and conduct, that for this second advent

we look and long. We may be sure that the highest style of Christianity even now, is to “wait for redemption,” and to love the Lord’s appearing. (Rom. 8:23; 2 Tim. 4:8.)

Let us observe, lastly, in these verses, **what clear proof we have that the Lord Jesus was really and truly man, as well as God.** We read, that when Mary and Joseph returned to their own city Nazareth, “the child GREW and became strong.”

There is, doubtless, much that is deeply mysterious in the Person of the Lord Jesus. How the same Person could be at once perfect God and perfect man, is a point that necessarily passes our understanding. In what manner and measure, and in what proportion at the early part of His life, that divine knowledge which He doubtless possessed, was exercised, we cannot possibly explain. It is a lofty truth. We cannot attain unto it.

One thing, however, is perfectly clear, and we shall do well to lay firm hold upon it. Our Lord partook of everything that belongs to man’s nature, sin only excepted. As man He was born an infant. As man He grew from infancy to boyhood. As man He yearly increased in bodily strength and mental power, during His passage from boyhood to full age. Of all the sinless conditions of man’s body, its first feebleness, its after growth, its regular progress to maturity, He was in the fullest sense a partaker. We must rest satisfied with knowing this. To pry beyond is useless. To know this clearly is of much importance. A absence of settled knowledge of it has led to many wild heresies.

One comfortable practical lesson stands out on the face of this truth, which ought never to be overlooked. Our Lord is able to sympathize with man in every stage of man's existence, from the cradle to the grave. He knows by experience the nature and temperament of—the child, the boy, and the young man. He has stood in their place. He has occupied their position. He knows their hearts. Let us never forget this in dealing with young people about their souls. Let us tell them confidently, that there is One in heaven at the right hand of God, who is exactly suited to be their Friend. He who died on the cross was once a boy Himself, and feels a special interest in boys and girls, as well as in grown up people.

Notes on 2:36-40

36. A prophetess. This is a remarkable expression and is used on only one other occasion in the New Testament (Revelation 2:20). If the word is to be taken in its fullest sense, it seems to show that the spirit of prophecy, which had been withheld for nearly 400 years, since Malachi's time, was being restored to Israel when Christ was born.

38. Spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. This presentation of our Lord in the temple appears to have been the primary fulfillment of the prophecy of Malachi 3:1, "suddenly the Lord . . . will come to his temple." It was indeed a sudden, unostentatious coming. The only witnesses, apparently, were an old man and an old woman, and the only attendants a poor woman and her equally poor husband; and the form in which the Lord appeared was as a little infant in arms! How little we would have expected this.

LUKE 2:41-52

JESUS AND HIS PARENTS AT THE PASSOVER

These verses should always be deeply interesting to a reader of the Bible. *They record the only facts which we know about our Lord Jesus Christ during the first thirty years of His life on earth, after His infancy*. How many things a Christian would like to know about the events of those thirty years, and the daily history of the house at Nazareth! But we need not doubt that there is wisdom in the silence of Scripture on the subject. If it had been good for us to know more, more would have been revealed.

Let us first, draw from the passage **a lesson for all married people.** We have it in the conduct of Joseph and Mary, here described. We are told that "they went to Jerusalem every year, at the feast of the Passover." They regularly honored God's appointed ordinances and they honored them together. The distance from Nazareth to Jerusalem was great. The journey, to poor people without any means of conveyance, was, doubtless, troublesome and fatiguing. To leave house and home for some two weeks was no slight expense. But God had given Israel a command, and Joseph and Mary strictly obeyed it. God had appointed an ordinance for their spiritual good, and they regularly kept it. And all that they did concerning the Passover they did together. When they went up to the feast, they always went up side by side.

So ought it to be with all Christian husbands and wives. They ought to help one another in spiritual things, and to encourage one another in the service of God. Marriage, unquestionably, is not a sacrament, as the Romish Church vainly asserts. But marriage is a state of life which has the greatest effect on the souls of those who enter into it. It helps them upwards or downwards. It leads them nearer to heaven or nearer to hell. We all depend much on the company we keep. Our characters are insensibly molded by those with whom we pass our time. To none does this apply so much as to married people. Husbands and wives are continually doing either good or harm to one another's souls.

Let all who are married, or think of being married, ponder these things well. Let them take example from the conduct of Joseph and Mary, and resolve to do likewise. Let them pray together, and read the Bible together, and go to the house of God together, and talk to one another about spiritual matters. Above all, let them beware of throwing obstacles and discouragements in one another's way about means of grace. Blessed are those husbands who say to their wives as Elkanah did to Hannah, "Do all that is in your heart." Happy are those wives who say to their husbands as Leah and Rachel did to Jacob, "Whatever God has said unto you, do." (1 Sam. 1:23; Gen. 31:16.)

Let us, secondly, draw from the passage, **an example for all young people.** We have it in the conduct of our Lord Jesus Christ, when He was left by Himself in Jerusalem at the age of twelve years.

For four days He was out of sight of Mary and Joseph. For three days they "sought him sorrowing," not knowing what had befallen Him. Who can imagine the anxiety of such a mother at losing such a child? And where did they find Him at last? Not idling His time away, or getting into mischief, as many boys of twelve years old do. Not in vain and unprofitable company. "They found him in the temple of God—sitting in the midst" of the Jewish teachers, "hearing" what they had to say, and "asking questions" about things He wished to be explained.

So ought it to be with the younger members of Christian families. They ought to be steady and trustworthy behind the backs of their parents, as well as before their faces. They ought to seek the company of the wise and prudent, and to use every opportunity of getting spiritual knowledge, before the cares of life come on them, and while their memories are fresh and strong.

Let Christian boys and girls ponder these things well, and take example from the conduct of Jesus at the age of only twelve years. Let them remember, that if they are old enough to do wrong, they are also old enough to do right; and that if able to read story-books and to talk, they are also able to read their Bibles and pray. Let them remember, that they are accountable to God, even while they are yet young, and that it is written that God "heard the voice of a BOY." (Gen. 21:17.) Happy indeed are those families in which the children "seek the Lord early," and cost their parents no tears. Happy are those parents who can say of their boys and girls, when absent from

them, “I can trust my children that they will not willfully run into sin.”

Let us, in the last place, draw from this passage, **an example for all true Christians.** We have it in the solemn words which our Lord addressed to His mother Mary, when she said to Him, “Son, why have you dealt with us thus?” “Know you not,” was the reply, “that I must be about my father’s business?” A mild reproof was evidently implied in that reply. It was meant to remind His mother that He was no common person, and had come into the world to do no common work. It was a hint that she was insensibly forgetting that He had come into the world in no ordinary way, and that she could not expect Him to be ever dwelling quietly at Nazareth. It was a solemn remembrancer that, as God, He had a Father in heaven, and that this heavenly Father’s work demanded His first attention.

The expression is one that ought to sink down deeply into the hearts of all Christ’s people. It should supply them with a mark at which they should aim in daily life, and a test by which they should try their habits and conversation. It should quicken them when they begin to be slothful. It should check them when they feel inclined to go back to the world. “Are we about our Father’s business? Are we walking in the steps of Jesus Christ?” Such questions will often prove very humbling, and make us ashamed of ourselves. But such questions are eminently useful to our souls. Never is a Church in so healthy a condition as when its believing members aim high, and strive in all things to be like Christ.

Notes on 2:41-52

42. Twelve years old. This age appears to have been thought of by the Jews as a kind of turning point away from the state of childhood. Lightfoot quotes a saying from one of the rabbinical writers: "Let a man deal gently with his son, till he comes to be twelve years old; but from that time let him descend with him into his way of living—that is, let him diligently keep him close to that way, rule, and act, by which he may get his living."

51. Was obedient. These words imply a continual habit during his stay at Nazareth, and not a single, isolated act.

52. Grew . . . in favor with God and men. A sentence from Poole's Annotations on this subject is worth reading: "If any ask how he who was the eternal wisdom of the Father, who is the only one God, increased in wisdom, they must know that all things in Scripture which are spoken of Christ, are not spoken with respect to his entire person, but with respect to the one or other nature united in that Person. He increased in wisdom, as he did in age or stature, with respect to his human, not his divine nature. And as God daily magnified his grace and favor towards him, so God gave him favor with the unrighteous and the people of Galilee."

Luke – Chap. 3

LUKE 3:1-6

THE MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

These verses describe the beginning of the Gospel of Christ. It began with the preaching of John the Baptist. The Jews could never say, that when Messiah came, He came without notice or preparation. He graciously sent a mighty forerunner before His face, by whose ministry the attention of the whole nation was awakened.

Let us notice first, in this passage, **the wickedness of the times when Christ's Gospel was brought into the world.** The opening verses of the chapter tell us the names of some who were rulers and governors in the earth, when the ministry of John the Baptist began. It is a melancholy list, and full of instruction. There is hardly a name in it which is not infamous for wickedness. Tiberius, and Pontius Pilate, and Herod, and his brother, and Annas, and Caiaphas, were men of whom we know little or nothing but evil. The earth seemed given into the hands of the wicked. (Job 9:24.) When such were the rulers, what must the people have been? Such was the state of things when Christ's forerunner was commissioned to begin preaching. Such were the times when the first foundation of Christ's church was brought out and laid. We may truly say, that God's ways are not our ways.

Let us learn *never to despair about the cause of God's truth, however black and unfavorable its prospects may appear*. At the very time when things seem hopeless, God may be preparing a mighty deliverance. At the very season when Satan's kingdom seems to be triumphing, the "little stone, cut without hands," may be on the

point of crushing it to pieces. The darkest hour of the night is often that which just precedes the day.

Let us beware of slacking our hands from any work of God, because of the wickedness of the times, or the number and power of our adversaries. “He that observes the wind shall not sow, and he that regards the clouds shall not reap.” (Eccles. 11:4.) Let us work on, and believe that help will come from heaven, when it is most needed. In the very hour when a Roman emperor, and ignorant priests, seemed to have everything at their feet, the Lamb of God was about to come forth from Nazareth, and set up the beginnings of His kingdom. What He has done once, He can do again. In a moment He can turn His church’s midnight into the blaze of noon day.

Let us notice, secondly, in this passage, **the account which Luke gives of the calling of John the Baptist into the ministry.** We are told that “the word of God came to John, the son of Zachariah.” He received a special call from God to begin preaching and baptizing. A message from heaven was sent to his heart, and under the impulse of that message, he undertook his marvelous work.

There is something in this account which throws great light on the office of all ministers of the Gospel. It is an office which no man has a right to take up, unless he has an inward call from God, as well as an outward call from man. Visions and revelations from heaven, of course we have no right to expect. Fanatical claims to special gifts of the Spirit must always be checked and discouraged. But an inward

call a man must have, before he puts his hand to the work of the ministry. The word of God must "come to him," as really and truly as it came to John the Baptist, before he undertakes to "come to the word." In short, he must be able to profess with a good conscience, that he is "inwardly moved by the Holy Spirit" to take upon him the office of a minister. The man who cannot say this, when he comes forward to be ordained, is committing a great sin, and running without being sent.

Let it be a part of our daily prayers, that our churches may have no ministers excepting those who are really called of God. An unconverted minister is an injury and burden to a church. How can a man speak of truths which he has never tasted? How can he testify of a Savior whom he has never seen by faith, and never laid hold on for his own soul? The pastor after God's own heart, is a man to whom the Word of God has come. He runs confidently and speaks boldly, because he has been sent.

Let us notice, lastly, in this passage, **the close connection between true repentance and forgiveness.** We are told that John the Baptist came "preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." The plain meaning of this expression is, that John preached the necessity of being baptized, in token of repentance, and that he told his hearers that except they repented of sin, their sins would not be forgiven.

We must carefully bear in mind that *no repentance can make atonement for sin*. The blood of Christ, and nothing else, can wash

away sin from man's soul. No quantity of repentance can ever justify us in the sight of God. "We are accounted righteous before God, only for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, by faith, and not for our own works or deserving's." It is of the utmost importance to understand this clearly. The trouble that men bring upon their souls, by misunderstanding this subject, is more than can be expressed.

But while we say all this, we must carefully remember that *without repentance no soul was ever yet saved.* We must know our sins, mourn over them, forsake them, abhor them, or else we shall never enter the kingdom of heaven. There is nothing meritorious in this. It forms no part whatever of the price of our redemption. Our salvation is all of grace, from first to last. But the great fact still remains, that saved souls are always penitent souls, and that saving faith in Christ, and true repentance toward God, are never found asunder. This is a mighty truth, and one that ought never to be forgotten.

Do we ourselves repent? This, after all, is the question which most nearly concerns us. Have we been convinced of sin by the Holy Spirit? Have we fled to Jesus for deliverance from the wrath to come? Do we know anything of a broken and contrite heart, and a thorough hatred of sin? Can we say, "I repent," as well as "I believe?" If not, let us not delude our minds with the idea that our sins are yet forgiven. It is written, "Except you repent, you shall all likewise perish." (Luke 13:3.)

Notes on 3:1-6

5. “Every valley shall be filled in.” These and similar expressions in this verse are figurative. The prophecy does not refer to literal leveling of mountains and filling up of valleys; rather, difficulties and obstacles as great as mountains and valleys in the way of a king’s march will go down before the progress of Christ’s Gospel.

6. “All mankind will see God’s salvation.” This is a prophecy which has yet to be completely fulfilled. It will be completed when Christ’s kingdom is fully set up at his second coming, when everyone will know him, from the least to the greatest. It is one among many examples that the prophets of the Old Testament often spoke about both comings in the same moment and foretold the complete victories of the second appearing of Jesus in the same breath with the partial victories of his first appearing. Some began to “see God’s salvation” as soon as the Gospel was first preached. A little flock was taken out at once. All will eventually see God’s salvation, from the least to the greatest.

LUKE 3:7-14

We have, in these verses, a specimen of John the Baptist’s ministry. It is a portion of Scripture which should always be specially interesting to a Christian mind. The immense effect which John produced on the Jews, however temporary, is evident, from many expressions in the Gospels. The remarkable testimony which our Lord bore to John, as “a prophet greater than any born of woman,” is well-known to all Bible readers. WHAT THEN WAS THE

CHARACTER OF JOHN'S MINISTRY? This is the question to which the chapter before us supplies a practical answer.

We should first mark **the holy boldness with which John addresses the multitudes who came to his baptism.** He speaks to them as "a generation of vipers." He saw the rottenness and hypocrisy of the profession that the crowd around him were making, and uses language descriptive of their case. His head was not turned by popularity. He cared not who was offended by his words. The spiritual disease of those before him was desperate, and of long standing, and he knew that desperate diseases need strong remedies.

Well would it be for the Church of Christ, if it possessed more plain-speaking ministers, like John the Baptist, in these latter days. A morbid dislike to strong language—an excessive fear of giving offence—a constant flinching from directness and plain speaking, are, unhappily, too much the characteristics of the modern Christian pulpit. Uncharitable language is no doubt always to be deprecated. But there is no charity in flattering unconverted people, by abstaining from any mention of their vices, or in applying smooth epithets to damnable sins. There are two texts which are too much forgotten by Christian preachers. In one it is written, "Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you." In the other it is written, "Obviously, I'm not trying to be a people pleaser! No, I am trying to please God. If I were still trying to please people, I would not be Christ's servant." (Luke 6:26; Gal. 1:10.)

We should mark, secondly, **how plainly John speaks to his hearers about hell and danger.** He tells them that there is a "wrath to come." He speaks of "the ax" of God's judgments, and of unfruitful trees being cast into "the fire."

The subject of HELL is always offensive to human nature. The minister who dwells much upon it, must expect to find himself regarded as barbaric, violent, unfeeling, and narrow-minded. Men love to hear "smooth things," and to be told of peace, and not of danger. (Isaiah. 30:10.) But the subject is one that ought not to be kept back, if we desire to do good to souls. It is one that our Lord Jesus Christ brought forward frequently in His public teachings. That loving Savior, who spoke so graciously of the way to heaven, has also used the plainest language about the way to hell.

Let us beware of being wise above that which is written, and more charitable than Scripture itself. Let the language of John the Baptist be deeply engraved in our hearts. Let us never be ashamed to avow our firm belief, that there is a "wrath to come" for the impenitent, and that it is possible for a man to be lost as well as to be saved. To be silent on the subject is dreadful treachery to men's souls. It only encourages them to persevere in wickedness, and fosters in their minds the devil's old delusion, "You shall not surely die." That minister is surely our best friend who tells us honestly of danger, and warns us, like John the Baptist, to "flee from the wrath to come." Never will a man flee until he sees there is real cause to be afraid. Never will he seek heaven until he is convinced that there is risk of

his falling into hell. The religion in which there is no mention of hell, is not the religion of John the Baptist, and of our Lord Jesus, and His apostles.

We should mark, thirdly, **how John exposes the uselessness of a repentance which is not accompanied by fruits in the life.** He said to the multitude, who came to be baptized, "Bring forth fruit worthy of repentance." He tells those who "Every tree which brings not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire."

This is a truth which should always occupy a prominent place in our Christianity. It can never be impressed on our minds too strongly, that religious talking and profession are utterly worthless, without religious doing and practice. It is vain to say with our lips that we repent, if we do not at the same time repent in our lives. It is more than vain. It will gradually sear our consciences, and harden our hearts. To say that we are sorry for our sins is mere hypocrisy, unless we show that we are really sorry for them, by giving them up. Doing is the very life of repentance. Tell us not merely what a man says in religion. Tell us rather what he does. "The talk of the lips," says Solomon, "tends only to poverty." (Prov. 14:23.)

We should mark, fourthly, **what a blow John strikes at the common notion, that connection with godly people can save our souls.** "Do not begin to say to yourselves," he tells the Jews, "we have Abraham to our Father; for I say unto you that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham."

The strong hold that this notion has obtained on the heart of man, in every part of the world, is an affecting proof of our fallen and corrupt condition. Thousands have always been found, in every age of the church, who have believed that connection with godly men made them acceptable in the sight of God. Thousands have lived and died in the blind delusion, that because they were allied to holy people by ties of blood or church-membership, they might themselves hope to be saved.

Let it be a settled principle with us, that saving religion is a PERSONAL thing. It is a business between each man's own soul and Christ. It will profit us nothing at the last day, to have belonged to the Church of Luther, or Calvin, or Cranmer, or Knox, or Owen, or Wesley, or Whitfield. Had we the faith of these holy men? Did we believe as they believed, and strive to live as they lived, and to follow Christ as they followed Him? These will be the only points on which our salvation will turn. It will save no man to have had Abraham's blood in his veins, if he did not possess Abraham's faith and do Abraham's works.

We should remark, lastly, in this passage, **the searching test of sincerity which John applied to the consciences of the various classes who came to his baptism.** He bade each man who made a profession of repentance, to begin by breaking off from those sins which specially beset him. The selfish multitude must show common charity to each other. The publicans must "exact no more than their due." The soldiers must "do violence to no man, and

be content with their wages." He did not mean that, by so doing, they would atone for their sins, and make their peace with God. But he did mean that, by so doing, they would prove their repentance to be sincere.

Let us leave the passage with a deep conviction of the wisdom of this mode of dealing with souls, and specially with the souls of those who are beginning to make a profession of religion. Above all, let us see here the right way to prove our own hearts. It must not content us to cry out against sins to which, by natural temperament, we are not inclined, while we deal gently with other sins of a different character. Let us find out our own peculiar corruptions. Let us know our own besetting sins. Against them let us direct our principal efforts. With these let us wage unceasing war. Let the rich break off from the rich man's sins, and the poor from the sins of the poor. Let the young man give up the sins of youth, and the old man the sins of old age. This is the first step towards proving that we are in earnest, when we first begin to feel about our souls. Are we real? Are we sincere? Then let us begin by looking at home, and looking within.

Notes on 3:7-14

8. "Produce fruit in keeping with repentance." The word translated pro- duce fruit is the same as that used by John when he speaks about breaking the law and being righteous (1 John 3:4, 7). Both in 1 John and here a continued habit is implied, and not a single act.

"We have Abraham as our father." A passage in Stella, the Spanish commentator on Luke's Gospel, is worth quoting: "There are many

monks who imitate these Jews, saying, we have Benedict, Augustine, Jerome, Francis, or Dominic for our father, just as they said, We have Abraham as our father. They relate to others the marvelous doings of the founders of their order, and cry up their praises with wonderful commendation. They say, our order has so many holy men enrolled in the catalogue of saints, so many popes, so many cardinals, so many bishops, so many teachers. In them they rejoice and boast, while they themselves have degenerated from the true excellencies of their founders, by iniquity and laxity of morals. To all these we may deservedly say what Christ said to the Jews, 'If you are Abraham's children, do the deeds of Abraham.'"

"Out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham." These words mean: "Think not that God will not have a people to praise him if he cuts you off and does not save you. Even if you were all thrown out, he could raise up a family for himself of true believers from these stones." The calling of the Gentiles was evidently implied.

14. Let it be carefully noted that John the Baptist does not say a word to show that the work of tax collectors or soldiers is unlawful in God's sight.

LUKE 3:15-20

We learn, firstly, from these verses, that **one effect of a faithful ministry is to set men thinking.** We read concerning John the Baptist's hearers, that "the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not."

The cause of true religion has gained a giant step in a parish, or congregation, or family, when people begin to think. Thoughtlessness about spiritual things is one great feature of unconverted men. It cannot be said, in many cases, that they either like the Gospel, or dislike it. But they do not give it a place in their thoughts. They never "consider." (Isaiah 1:3.)

Let us always thank God when we see a spirit of reflection on religious subjects coming over the mind of an unconverted man. Thinking and deliberation are the high road to conversion. The truth of Christ has nothing to fear from sober examination. We invite inquiry. We desire to have its claims fully investigated. We know that its fitness to supply every need of man's heart and conscience is not appreciated in many cases, simply because it is not known. Thinking, no doubt, is not faith and repentance. But it is always a hopeful symptom. When hearers of the Gospel begin to "muse in their hearts," we ought to bless God and take courage.

We learn, secondly, from these verses, that **a faithful minister will always exalt Christ.** We read that when John saw the state of mind in which his hearers were, he told them of a coming One far mightier than himself. He refused the honor which he saw the people ready to give him, and referred them to Him who had the "winnowing fork in his hand,"—the Lamb of God, the Messiah.

Conduct like this will always be the characteristic of a true "man of God." He will never allow anything to be credited to him, or his office, which belongs to his divine Master. He will say like Paul, "we

preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus, the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake." (2 Cor. 4:5.) To commend Christ dying, and rising again for the ungodly—to make known Christ's love and power to save sinners, this will be the main object of his ministry. "He must increase but I must decrease," will be a ruling principle in all his preaching. He will be content that his own name be forgotten, so long as Christ crucified is exalted.

Would we know whether a minister is sound in the faith, and deserving of our confidence as a teacher? We have only to ask a simple question, Where is Christ in his teaching? Would we know whether we ourselves are receiving benefit from the preaching we attend? Let us ask whether its effect is to magnify Christ in our esteem? A minister who is really doing us good will make us think more of Jesus every year we live.

We learn, thirdly, from these verses, **the essential difference between the Lord Jesus and even the best and holiest of His ministers.** We have it in the solemn words of John the Baptist— "I indeed baptize you with water—He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Man, when ordained, can administer the outward ordinances of Christianity, with a prayerful hope, that God will graciously bless the means which he has Himself appointed. But man cannot read the hearts of those to whom he ministers. He can preach the Gospel faithfully to their ears, but he cannot make them receive it into their consciences. He can apply baptismal water to their foreheads, but he

cannot cleanse their inward nature. He can give the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper into their hands, but he cannot enable them to eat Christ's body and blood by faith. Up to a certain point he can go, but he can go no further. No ordination, however solemnly conferred, can give man power to change the heart. Christ, the great Head of the Church, can alone do this by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is His peculiar office to do it, and it is an office which He has delegated to no child of man.

May we never rest until we have tasted by experience the power of Christ's grace upon our souls! We have been baptized with water. But have we also been baptized with the Holy Spirit? Our names are in the baptismal register. But are they also in the Lamb's book of life? We are members of the visible Church. But are we also members of that mystical body of which Christ alone is the Head? All these are privileges which Christ alone bestows, and for which all who would be saved must make personal application to Him. Man cannot give them. They are treasures laid up in Christ's hand. From Him we must seek them by faith and prayer, and believing we shall not seek in vain.

We learn, fourthly, in these verses, **the change that Christ will work in his visible church at his second appearing.** We read in the figurative words of His forerunner, "that he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable."

The visible Church is now a ‘mixed’ body. Believers and unbelievers, holy and unholy, converted and unconverted, are now mingled in every congregation, and often sit side by side. It passes the power of man to separate them. False profession is often so like true; and grace is often so weak and feeble, that, in many cases, the right discernment of character is an impossibility. The wheat and the chaff will continue together until the Lord returns.

But there will be a dreadful separation at the last day The unerring judgment of the King of kings shall at length divide the wheat from the chaff, and divide them for evermore. The righteous shall be gathered into a place of happiness and safety. The wicked shall be cast down to shame and everlasting contempt. In the great sifting day, every one shall go to his own place.

May we often look forward to that day, and judge ourselves, that we be not judged of the Lord. May we give all diligence to make our calling and election sure, and to know that we are God’s “wheat.” A mistake in the day that the floor is “purged,” will be a mistake that is irretrievable.

We learn, lastly, from these verses, *that the reward of God’s servants is often not in this world.* Luke closes his account of John the Baptist’s ministry, by telling us of his imprisonment by Herod. The end of that imprisonment we know from other parts of the New Testament. It led at last to John being beheaded.

All true servants of Christ must be content to wait for their wages. Their best things are yet to come. They must count it no strange thing, if they meet with hard treatment from man. The world that persecuted Christ will never hesitate, to persecute Christians. "Marvel not if the world hate you." (1 John 3:13.)

But let us take comfort in the thought that the great Master has laid up in heaven for His people such things as pass man's understanding. The blood that His saints have shed in His name will all be reckoned for one day. The tears that often flow so freely in consequence of the unkindness of the wicked, will one day be wiped from all faces. And when John the Baptist, and all who have suffered for the truth are at last gathered together, they will find it true that **heaven makes amends for all.**

Notes on 3:15-20

16. "Baptize . . . with fire." The meaning of these words is doubtful and has never been fully known. Some restrict their meaning to the coming down of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, when "tongues of fire" rested on each person (Acts 2:3). Others apply these words exclusively to the con- verting work of the Holy Spirit, purifying and refining the heart as fire purifies gold. Both views are probably included.

LUKE 3:21-38

THE BAPTISM AND GENEALOGY OF JESUS

We see in the passage before us, **the high honor the Lord Jesus has put on baptism.** We find that among others who came to John the Baptist, the Savior of the world came, and was "baptized."

An ordinance which the Son of God was pleased to use, and afterwards to appoint for the use of His whole Church, ought always to be held in peculiar reverence by His people. Baptism cannot be a thing of slight importance, if Christ Himself was baptized. The use of baptism would never have been enjoined on the Church of Christ, if it had been a mere outward form, incapable of conveying any blessing.

It is hardly necessary to say that errors of every sort and description abound on the subject of baptism. Some make an idol of it, and exalt it far above the place assigned to it in the Bible. Some degrade it and dishonor it, and seem almost to forget that it was ordained by Christ Himself. Some limit the use of it so narrowly that they will baptize none unless they are grown up, and can give full proof of their conversion. Some invest the baptismal water with such magic power, that they would like missionaries to go into heathen lands and baptize all people, old and young indiscriminately, and believe that however ignorant the heathen may be, baptism must do them good. On no subject, perhaps, in religion, have Christians more need to pray for a right judgment and a sound mind.

Let it suffice us to hold firmly the general principle, that baptism was graciously intended by our Lord to be a help to His Church, and

"a means of grace," and that, when rightly and worthily used, we may confidently look upon it for a blessing. But let us never forget that the grace of God is not tied to any sacrament, and that we may be baptized with water, without being baptized with the Holy Spirit.

We see, secondly, in this passage, **the close connection that ought to exist between the administration of baptism and prayer.** We are specially told by Luke, that when our Lord was baptized He was also "praying."

We need not doubt that there is a great lesson in this fact, and one that the Church of Christ has too much overlooked. We are meant to learn that the baptism which God blesses must be a baptism accompanied by prayer. The sprinkling of water is not sufficient. The use of the name of the blessed Trinity is not enough. The form of the sacrament alone conveys no grace. There must be something else beside all this. There must be "the prayer of faith." A baptism without prayer, it may be confidently asserted, is a baptism on which we have no right to expect God's blessing.

Why is it that the sacrament of baptism appears to bear so little fruit? How is it that thousands are every year baptized, and never give the slightest proof of having received benefit from it? The answer to these questions is short and simple. In the vast majority of baptisms there is no prayer except the prayer of the officiating minister. Parents bring their children to the font, without the slightest sense of what they are doing. Sponsors stand up and answer for the child, in evident ignorance of the nature of the ordinance they

are attending, and as a mere matter of form. What possible reason have we for expecting such baptisms to be blessed by God? None! none at all! Such baptisms may well be barren of results. They are not baptisms according to the mind of Christ. Let us pray that the eyes of Christians on this important subject may be opened. It is one on which there is great need of change.

We see, thirdly, in these verses, **a remarkable proof of the doctrine of the Trinity.** We have all the Three Persons of the Godhead spoken of, as co-operating and acting at one time. God the Son begins the mighty work of His earthly ministry, by being baptized. God the Father solemnly accredits Him as the appointed Mediator, by a voice from heaven. God the Holy Spirit descends "in a bodily shape like a dove" upon our Lord, and by so doing declares that this is He to whom "the Father gives the Spirit without measure." (John 3:34.)

There is something deeply instructive, and deeply comforting in this revelation of the blessed Trinity, at this particular season of our Lord's earthly ministry. It shows us how mighty and powerful is the agency that is employed in the great business of our redemption. It is the common work of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. All Three Persons in the Godhead are equally concerned in the deliverance of our souls from hell. The thought should cheer us, when disturbed and cast down. The thought should hearten and encourage us, when weary of the conflict with the world, the flesh, and the devil. The enemies of our souls are mighty, but the Friends of

our souls are mightier still. The whole power of the triune Jehovah is engaged upon our side. “A three-fold cord is not easily broken.” (Eccles. 4:12.)

We see, fourthly, in these verses, *a* **marvelous proclamation of our Lord’s office as Mediator between God and man.** A voice was heard from heaven at His baptism, “which said, You are my beloved Son; in you I am well pleased.” There is but One who could say this. It was the voice of God the Father.

These solemn words no doubt contain much that is deeply mysterious. One thing however about them is abundantly clear. They are a divine declaration, that our Lord Jesus Christ is the promised Redeemer, whom God from the beginning undertook to send into the world, and that with His incarnation, sacrifice, and substitution for man, God the Father is satisfied and well pleased—In Him, He regards the claim of His holy law as fully discharged. Through Him, He is willing to receive poor sinful man to mercy, and to remember his sins no more.

Let all true Christians rest their souls on these words, and draw from them daily consolation. Our sins and shortcomings are many and great. In ourselves we can see no good thing. But if we believe in Jesus, the Father sees nothing in us that He cannot abundantly pardon. He regards us as the members of His own dear Son, and, for His Son’s sake, He is well pleased.

We see, lastly, in these verses, **what a frail and dying creature is man.** We read at the end of the chapter a long list of names, containing the genealogy of the family in which our Lord was born, traced up through David and Abraham to Adam. How little we know of many of the seventy-five people, whose names are here recorded! They all had their joys and sorrows, their hopes and fears, their cares and troubles, their schemes and plans, like any of ourselves. But they have all passed away from the earth, and gone to their own place. And so will it be with us. We too are passing away, and shall soon be gone.

Forever let us bless God, that in a dying world we are able to turn to a living Savior, "I am he," says Jesus, "who lives and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore." "I am the resurrection and the life," (Rev. 1:18; John 11:25.) Let our main care be, to be one with Christ and Christ with us. Joined to the Lord Jesus by faith we shall rise again to live for evermore. The second death shall have no power over us. "Because I live," says Christ, "you shall live also." (John 14:19.)

Notes on 3:21-38

23. About thirty years old. This was the age, it will be recalled, when the
Levites were first allowed to work in the tabernacle (Numbers 4:3).
Joseph, the son of Heli. Every careful reader of the Bible knows well that there is a great difficulty connected with our Lord's genealogy. The difficulty lies in the complete difference between the part of the

genealogy between David and Joseph as recorded by St. Luke and the same part as recorded by St. Matthew. Between Abraham and David the two genealogies agree; between David and Joseph they almost entirely differ. How can this difference be reconciled?

The most probable explanation is to view St. Luke's genealogy as the genealogy of Mary, and not of Joseph. Heli was the father of Mary and the father-in-law of Joseph. It does not say that Heli "begat" Joseph, and that the Greek does not necessarily mean Joseph was "his son" is clear from the expressions used about Mary and Jude; see Acts 1:14. It is Mary's family, therefore, and not Joseph's that St. Luke describes, and Joseph's family and not Mary's that is described by St. Matthew.

Luke – Chap. 4

Luke 4:1-13

THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS

The first event recorded in our Lord's history, after His baptism, is His temptation by the devil. From a season of honor and glory he passed immediately to a season of conflict and suffering. First came the testimony of God the Father, "You are my beloved Son." Then came the sneering suggestion of Satan, "If you are the Son of God." The portion of Christ will often prove the portion of Christians. From great privilege to great trial there will often be but a step.

Let us first mark in this passage, **the power and unwearied malice of the devil.**

That old serpent who tempted Adam to sin in Paradise, was not afraid to assault the second Adam, the Son of God. Whether he understood that Jesus was "God manifest in the flesh" may perhaps be doubted. But that he saw in Jesus One who had come into the world to overthrow his kingdom, is clear and plain. He had seen what happened at our Lord's baptism. He had heard the marvelous words from heaven. He felt that the great Friend of man was come, and that his own dominion was in peril. The Redeemer had come. The prison door was about to be thrown open. The lawful captives were about to be set free. All this, we need not doubt, Satan saw, and resolved to fight for his own. The prince of this world would not give way to the Prince of peace without a mighty struggle. He had overcome the first Adam in the garden of Eden—why should he not overcome the second Adam in the wilderness? He had spoiled man once of Paradise—why should he not spoil him of the kingdom of God.

Let it never surprise us, if we are tempted by the devil. Let us rather expect it, as a matter of course, if we are living members of Christ. The Master's lot will be the lot of His disciples. That mighty spirit who did not fear to attack Jesus himself, is still going about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. That murderer and liar who vexed Job, and overthrew David and Peter, still lives, and is not yet bound. If he cannot rob us of heaven, he will at any rate make our journey there painful. If he cannot destroy our souls, he will at least

bruise our heels. (Gen. 3:15.) Let us beware of despising him, or thinking lightly of his power. Let us rather put on the whole armor of God, and cry to the strong for strength. “Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” (James 4:7.)

Let us mark, secondly, **our Lord Jesus Christ’s ability to sympathize with those who are tempted.** This is a truth that stands out prominently in this passage. Jesus has been really and literally tempted Himself.

It was proper that He who came “to destroy the works of the devil,” should begin His own work by a special conflict with Satan. It was proper that the great Shepherd and bishop of souls should be fitted for His earthly ministry by strong temptation, as well as by the word of God and prayer. But above all, it was proper that the great High Priest and advocate of sinners should be one who has had personal experience of conflict, and has known what it is to be in the fire. And this was the case with Jesus, It is written that He suffered being tempted.” (Heb. 2:18.) How much He suffered, we cannot tell. But that His pure and spotless nature did suffer intensely, we may be sure.

Let all true Christians take comfort in the thought that they have a Friend in heaven, who can be touched with the feeling of their infirmities. (Heb. 4:15.) When they pour out their hearts before the throne of grace, and groan under the burden that daily harasses them, there is One making intercession who knows their sorrows. Let us take courage. The Lord Jesus is not an “austere man.” He knows

what we mean when we complain of temptation, and is both able and willing to give us help.

Let us mark, thirdly, **the exceeding subtlety of our great spiritual enemy, the devil.** Three times we see him assaulting our Lord, and trying to draw Him into sin. Each assault showed the hand of a master in the art of temptation. Each assault was the work of one acquainted by long experience with every weak point in human nature. Each deserves an attentive study.

Satan's first device was to persuade our Lord to DISTRUST HIS FATHER'S PROVIDENTIAL CARE. He comes to Him, when weak and exhausted with forty days' hunger, and suggests to Him to work a miracle, in order to gratify a carnal appetite. Why should He wait any longer? Why should the Son of God sit still and starve? Why not "command this stone to become bread?"

Satan's second device was to persuade our Lord to GRASP AT WORLDLY POWER BY UNLAWFUL MEANS. He takes Him to the top of a mountain and shows Him "all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time." All these he promises to give Him, if He will but "fall down and worship him." The concession was small. The promise was large. Why not by a little momentary act, obtain an enormous gain?

Satan's last device was to persuade our Lord to an act of PRESUMPTION. He takes Him to a pinnacle of the temple and suggests to Him to "cast Himself down." By so doing he would give

public proof that He was one sent by God. In so doing He might even depend on being kept from harm. Was there not a text of Scripture, which specially applied to the Son of God, in such a position? Was it not written that "angels should bear Him up?"

On each of these three temptations it would be easy to write much. Let it be sufficient to remind ourselves, that we see in them the three favorite weapons of the devil. UNBELIEF, WORLDLINESS, and PRESUMPTION are three grand engines which he is ever working against the soul of man, and by which he is ever enticing him to do what God forbids, and to run into sin. Let us remember this, and be on our guard. The *acts* that Satan suggests to us to do, are often in appearance trifling and unimportant. But the *principle* involved in each of these little acts, we may be sure, is nothing short of rebellion against God. Let us not be ignorant of Satan's devices.

Let us mark lastly, **the manner in which our Lord resisted Satan's temptations.** Three times we see Him foiling and baffling the great enemy who assaulted Him. He does not yield a hair's breadth to him. He does not give him a moment's advantage. Three times we see Him using the same weapon, in reply to his temptations "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." (Ephes. 6:17.) He who was "full of the Holy Spirit," was yet not ashamed to make the Holy Scripture His weapon of defense, and His rule of action.

Let us learn from this single fact, if we learn nothing else from this wondrous history, the high authority of the Bible, and the immense value of a knowledge of its contents. Let us read it, search

into it, pray over it, diligently, perseveringly, unweariedly. Let us strive to be so thoroughly acquainted with its pages, that its text may abide in our memories, and stand ready at our right hand in the day of need. Let us be able to appeal from every perversion and false interpretation of its meaning, to those thousand plain passages, which are written as it were with a sunbeam. The Bible is indeed a sword, but we must take heed that we know it well, if we would use it with effect.

Notes on 4:1-13

1. Led by the Spirit. The word translated led is the same one that we find in Romans 8:14 and Galatians 5:18, applied to the influence of the Holy Spirit on the hearts of believers. Our Lord did not seek conflict with the Devil but was led to it.

4. "It is written." This text, as well as the two others quoted by our Lord in reply to the Devil, were taken from the Pentateuch (Deuteronomy 8:3; 6:13, 16).

5. In an instant. Lightfoot quotes a rabbinical definition of a moment — "the 58,888th part of an hour."

9. The highest point of the temple. This is supposed to have been a tur- ret overhanging a deep valley. Josephus describes the place and says that "if any looked down, his eyes would grow dizzy, not being able to reach to so vast a depth."

10. "It is written." Let it be carefully noted that the Devil can quote Scripture when it suits him. There is no good thing which may not be abused.

13. He left him. This is evidence of the personality of Satan. If the

Devil was not a person, judging from the whole passage, there is no meaning in words. He “speaks,” “leads,” “shows,” offers to “give,” etc. These expressions can only be used about a person.

LUKE 4:14-22

JESUS IN THE SYNAGOGUE AT NAZARETH

These verses relate events which are only recorded in the Gospel of Luke. They describe the first visit which our Lord paid, after entering on His public ministry, to the city of Nazareth, where He had been brought up. Taken together with the two verses which immediately follow, they furnish an awfully striking proof, that “the carnal mind is enmity against God.” (Rom. 8:7.)

We should observe, in these verses, **what marked honor our Lord Jesus Christ gave to public means of grace.** We are told that “He went into the synagogue of Nazareth on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read” the Scriptures. In the days when our Lord was on earth, the Scribes and Pharisees were the chief teachers of the Jews. We can hardly suppose that a Jewish synagogue enjoyed much of the Spirit’s presence and blessing under such teaching. Yet even then we find our Lord visiting a synagogue, and reading and preaching in it. It was the place where His Father’s day and word were publicly recognized, and, as such, He thought it good to do it honor.

We need not doubt that there is a practical lesson for us in this part of our Lord's conduct. He would have us know that we are not lightly to forsake any assembly of worshipers, which professes to respect the name, the day, and the book of God. There may be many things in such an assembly which might be done better. There may be a deficiency of fullness, clearness, and distinctness in the doctrine preached. There may be a lack of unction and devoutness in the manner in which the worship is conducted. But so long as no positive error is taught, and there is no choice between worshiping with such an assembly, and having no public worship at all, it becomes a Christian to think much before he stays away. If there be but two or three in the congregation who meet in the name of Jesus, there is a special blessing promised. But there is no like blessing promised to him who tarries alone at home.

We should observe, for another thing, in these verses, **what a striking account our Lord gave to the congregation at Nazareth, of His own office and ministry.** We are told that He chose a passage from the book of Isaiah, in which the prophet foretold the nature of the work Messiah was to do when He came into the world. He read how it was foretold that He would "preach the Gospel to the poor"—how He would be sent to "heal the broken hearted"—how He would "preach deliverance to the captives, sight to the blind, and liberty to the bruised"—and how He would "proclaim that a year of jubilee to all the world had come." And when our Lord had read this prophecy, He told the listening crowd around Him, that He Himself was the Messiah of whom these words were written, and

that in Him and in His Gospel the marvelous figures of the passage were about to be fulfilled.

We may well believe that there was a deep meaning in our Lord's selection of this special passage of Isaiah. He desired to impress on His Jewish hearers, the true character of the Messiah, whom He knew all Israel were then expecting. He well knew that they were looking for a mere temporal king, who would deliver them from Roman dominion, and make them once more, foremost among the nations. Such expectations, He would have them understand, were premature and wrong. Messiah's kingdom at His first coming was to be a spiritual kingdom over hearts. His victories were not to be over worldly enemies, but over sin. His redemption was not to be from the power of Rome, but from the power of the devil and the world. It was in this way, and in no other way at present, that they must expect to see the words of Isaiah fulfilled.

Let us take care that we know for ourselves in what light we ought chiefly to regard Christ. It is right and good to reverence Him as very God. It is well to know Him as Head over all things—the mighty Prophet—the Judge of all—the King of kings. But we must not rest here, if we hope to be saved. We must know Jesus as the Friend of the poor in spirit, the Physician of the diseased heart, the deliverer of the soul in bondage. These are the principal offices He came on earth to fulfill. It is in this light we must learn to know Him, and to know Him by inward experience, as well as by the hearing of the ear. Without such knowledge we shall die in our sins.

We should observe, finally, **what an instructive example we have in these verses of the manner in which religious teaching is often heard.** We are told that when our Lord had finished His sermon at Nazareth, His hearers "bore Him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth." They could not find any flaw in the exposition of Scripture they had heard. They could not deny the beauty of the well-chosen language to which they had listened. "Never man spoke like this man." *But their hearts were utterly unmoved and unaffected*. They were even full of envy and enmity against the Preacher. In short, there seems to have been no effect produced on them, except a little temporary feeling of admiration.

It is vain to conceal from ourselves that there are thousands of people in Christian churches, in little better state of mind than our Lord's hearers at Nazareth. There are thousands who listen regularly to the preaching of the Gospel, and admire it while they listen. They do not dispute the truth of what they hear. They even feel a kind of intellectual pleasure in hearing a good and powerful sermon. But their religion never goes beyond this point. Their sermon-hearing does not prevent them living a life of thoughtlessness, worldliness, and sin.

Let us often examine ourselves on this important point. Let us see what practical effect is produced on our hearts and lives by the preaching which we profess to like. Does it lead us to true repentance towards God, and lively faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ? Does it

excite us to weekly efforts to cease from sin, and to resist the devil? These are the fruits which sermons ought to produce, if they are really doing us good. Without such fruit, a mere barren admiration is utterly worthless. It is no proof of grace. It will save no soul.

Notes on 4:14-21

21. He began to say (KJV). It is clear that the full exposition of the passage in Isaiah which our Lord gave has been withheld from us. The words which are recorded in this verse are probably the beginning of what our Lord said. The sermon itself is not recorded.

LUKE 4:22-32

Three great lessons stand out on the face of this passage. Each deserves the close attention of all who desire spiritual wisdom.

We learn for one thing, **how apt men are to despise the highest privileges, when they are familiar with them.** We see it in the conduct of the men of Nazareth when they had heard the Lord Jesus preach. They could find no fault in His sermon. They could point to no inconsistency in His past life. But because the preacher had dwelt among them thirty years, and His face, and voice, and appearance were familiar to them, they would not receive His doctrine. They said to one another, “Is not this Joseph’s son?” Is it possible that one so well-known as this man can be the Christ? And they drew from our Lord’s lips the solemn saying, “No prophet is accepted in his own country.”

We shall do well to remember this lesson in the matter of ordinances and means of grace. We are always in danger of undervaluing them, when we have them in abundance. We are apt to think lightly of the privilege of an open Bible, a preached Gospel, and the liberty of meeting together for public worship. We grow up in the midst of these things, and are accustomed to have them without trouble. And the consequence is that we often hold them very cheap, and underrate the extent of our mercies. Let us take heed to our own spirit in the use of sacred things. Often as we may read the Bible, let us never read it without deep reverence. Often as we hear the name of Christ, let us never forget that He is the One Mediator, in whom is life. Even the manna that came down from heaven was at length scorned by Israel, as "light bread." (Num. 21:5.) It is an evil day with our souls, when Christ is in the midst of us, and yet, because of our familiarity with His name, is lightly esteemed.

We learn, for another thing, **how bitterly human nature dislikes the doctrine of the sovereignty of God.** We see this in the conduct of the men of Nazareth, when our Lord reminded those who God was under no obligation to work miracles among them. Were there not many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah? No doubt there were. Yet to none of them was the prophet sent. All were passed over in favor of a GENTILE widow at Zarephath. Were there not many lepers in Israel in the days of Elisha? No doubt there were. Yet to none of them was the privilege of healing granted. Naaman the SYRIAN was the only one who was cleansed. Such doctrine as this was intolerable to the men of Nazareth. It wounded their pride and

self-conceit. It taught those who God was no man's debtor, and that if they themselves were passed over in the distribution of His mercies, they had no right to find fault. They could not bear it. They were "filled with wrath." They thrust our Lord out of their city, and had it not been for an exercise of miraculous power on His part, they would doubtless have put Him to a violent death.

Of all the doctrines of the Bible none is so offensive to human nature as the doctrine of God's sovereignty. To be told that God is great, and just, and holy, and pure, man can bear. But to be told that "He has mercy on whom He will have mercy"—that He "gives no account of His matters," that it is "not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy"—these are truths that natural man cannot stand. They often call forth all his enmity against God, and fill him with wrath. Nothing, in short, will make him submit to them but the humbling teaching of the Holy Spirit.

Let us settle it in our minds that, whether we like it or not, the sovereignty of God is a doctrine clearly revealed in the Bible, and a fact clearly to be seen in the world. Upon no other principle can we ever explain why some members of a family are converted, and others live and die in sin—why some quarters of the earth are enlightened by Christianity, and others remain buried in heathenism. One account only can be given of all this. All is ordered by the sovereign hand of God. Let us pray for humility in respect of this deep teaching. Let us remember that our life is but a vapor, and that our best knowledge compared to that of God is unmixed folly.

Let us be thankful for such light as we enjoy ourselves, and use it diligently while we have it. And let us not doubt that at the last day the whole world shall be convinced, that He who now "gives no account of His matters" has done all things well.

We learn, lastly, from this passage, **how diligently we ought to persevere in well doing, notwithstanding discouragements.** We are doubtless meant to draw this lesson from the conduct of our Lord, after His rejection at Nazareth. Not moved by the treatment He received, He patiently works on. Thrust out of one place, He passes on to another. Cast forth from Nazareth He comes to Capernaum, and there "teaches on the Sabbath days."

Such ought to be the conduct of all the people of Christ. Whatever the work they are called to do, they should patiently continue in it, and not give up for lack of success. Whether preachers, or teachers, or visitors, or missionaries, they must labor on and not faint. There is often more stirring in the hearts and consciences of people than those who teach and preach to them are at all aware of. There is preparatory work to be done in many a part of God's vineyard, which is just as needful as any other work, though not so agreeable to flesh and blood. There must be sowers as well as reapers. There must be some to break up the ground and pick out the stones, as well as some to gather in the harvest. Let each labor on in his own place. The day comes when each shall be rewarded according to his work. The very discouragements we meet with enable us to show the world that there are such things as faith and patience. When men see us

working on, in spite of treatment like that which Jesus received at Nazareth, it makes them think. It convinces those who, at all events, we are persuaded that we have truth on our side.

Notes on 4:22-32

22. "Joseph's son?" These words show us in what light our Lord was regarded at Nazareth, and how little the miraculous circumstances of his conception and birth were generally known.

25. "In Elijah's time." Let us not fail to note that our Lord speaks of the times of Elijah and the events which happened in them as realities. His language is one among many arguments to prove that the historical books of the Old Testament are authentic and not mere collections of instructive fables, as some have dared to assert.

30. He walked right through the crowd. Clearly, this was a miracle. How it happened we are not told. It is enough for us to know that his enemies could not lay hands on him against his will and that when finally he was handed over to be crucified, it was only because he was willing to allow himself to be slain.

LUKE 4:33-44

JESUS DRIVES OUT AN EVIL SPIRIT, AND HEALS MANY

We should notice, in this passage, **the clear religious knowledge possessed by the devil and his agents.** Twice in these verses we have proof of this. "I know you who you are, the holy one of God," was the language of an unclean devil in one case. "You are Christ the son of God," was the language of many devils in

another. Yet this knowledge was a knowledge unaccompanied by faith, or hope, or charity. Those who possessed it were miserable fallen beings, full of bitter hatred both against God and man.

Let us beware of an unsanctified knowledge of Christianity. It is a dangerous possession, but a fearfully common one in these latter days. We may know the Bible intellectually, and have no doubt about the truth of its contents. We may have our memories well stored with its leading texts, and be able to talk glibly about its leading doctrines. And all this time the Bible may have no influence over our hearts, and wills, and consciences. We may, in reality, be nothing better than the devils.

Let it never content us to know religion with our heads only. We may go on all our lives saying, "I know that, and I know that," and sink at last into hell, with the words upon our lips. Let us see that our knowledge bears fruit in our lives. Does our knowledge of sin make us hate it? Does our knowledge of Christ make us trust and love Him? Does our knowledge of God's will make us strive to do it? Does our knowledge of the fruits of the Spirit make us labor to show them in our daily behavior? Knowledge of this kind is really profitable. Any other religious knowledge will only add to our condemnation at the last day.

We should notice, secondly, in this passage, **the almighty power of our Lord Jesus Christ.** We see sicknesses and devils alike yielding to His command. He rebukes unclean spirits, and they come forth from the unhappy people whom they had possessed. He

rebukes a fever, and lays his hands on sick people, and at once their diseases depart, and the sick are healed.

We cannot fail to observe many similar cases in the four Gospels. They occur so frequently that we are apt to read them with a thoughtless eye, and forget the mighty lesson which each one is meant to convey. They are all intended to fasten in our minds the great truth that Christ is the appointed Healer of every evil which sin has brought into the world. Christ is the true antidote and remedy for all the soul-ruining mischief which Satan has wrought on mankind. Christ is the universal physician to whom all the children of Adam must repair, if they would be made whole. In Him is life, and health, and liberty. This is the grand doctrine which every miracle of mercy in the Gospel is ordained and appointed to teach. Each is a plain witness to that mighty fact, which lies at the very foundation of the Gospel. The ability of Christ to supply to the uttermost every need of human nature, is the very corner-stone of Christianity. Christ, in one word, is "all." (Coloss. 3:11.) Let the study of every miracle help to engrave this truth deeply on our hearts.

We should notice, thirdly, in these verses, **our Lord's practice of occasional retirement from public notice into some solitary place.** We read, that after healing many that were sick and casting out many devils, "he departed and went into a desert place." His object in so doing is shown by comparison with other places in the Gospels. He went aside from His work for a season, to hold communion with His Father in heaven, and to pray. Holy and sinless

as his human nature was, it was a nature kept sinless in the regular use of means of grace, and not in the neglect of them.

There is an example here which all who desire to grow in grace and walk closely with God would do well to follow. We must make time for private meditation, and for being alone with God. It must not content us to pray daily and read the Scriptures, to hear the Gospel regularly and to receive the Lord's Supper. All this is well. But something more is needed. We should set apart special seasons for solitary self-examination and meditation on the things of God. How often in a year this practice should be attempted each Christian must judge for himself. But that the practice is most desirable seems clear both from Scripture and experience.

We live in hurrying, bustling times. The excitement of daily business and constant engagements keeps many men in a perpetual whirl, and entails great peril on souls. The neglect of this habit of withdrawing occasionally from worldly business is the probable cause of many an inconsistency or backsliding which brings scandal on the cause of Christ. The more work we have to do the more we ought to imitate our Master. If He, in the midst of His abundant labors, found time to retire from the world occasionally, how much more may we? If the Master found the practice necessary, it must surely be a thousand times more necessary for His disciples.

We ought to notice, lastly, in these verses, **the declaration of our Lord as to one of the objects of His coming into the world.** We read that He said, "I must preach the kingdom of God to

other cities also—for therefore was I sent." An expression like this ought to silence forever the foolish remarks that are sometimes made against preaching. The mere fact that the eternal Son of God undertook the office of a preacher, should satisfy us that preaching is one of the most valuable means of grace. To speak of preaching, as some do, as a thing of less importance than reading public prayers or administering the sacraments, is, to say the least, to exhibit ignorance of Scripture. It is a striking circumstance in our Lord's history, that although He was almost incessantly preaching, we never read of His baptizing any person. The witness of John is distinct on this point— "Jesus baptized not." (John 4:2.)

Let us beware of despising preaching. In every age of the Church, it has been God's principal instrument for the awakening of sinners and the edifying of saints. The days when there has been little or no preaching have been days when there has been little or no good done in the Church. Let us hear sermons in a prayerful and reverent frame of mind, and remember that they are the principal engines which Christ Himself employed, when He was upon earth. Not least, let us pray daily for a continual supply of faithful preachers or God's word. According to the state of the pulpit will always be the state of a congregation and of a Church.

Notes on 4:33-44

35. "Be quiet!" Literally, "Be muzzled." See 1 Corinthians 9:9; 1 Timothy
5:18. It is the same word our Lord uses to address the stormy sea

(Mark
4:39), where it is translated, “Quiet! Be still!”
38. Simon’s mother-in-law. Clearly, the apostle Simon Peter was married. The Roman Catholic doctrine of the celibacy of the clergy finds no countenance in the Bible.
39. She got up at once and began to wait on them. The completeness of our Lord’s cures is shown here. It is well known that fevers leave people too weak for any exertion, even when they begin to recover and are out of danger.

Luke – Chap. 5

Luke 5:1-11

THE MIRACULOUS CATCH OF FISH

We have, in these verses, the history of what is commonly called the miraculous catch of fish. It is a remarkable miracle on two accounts. For one thing, it shows us our Lord's complete dominion over the animal creation. The fish of the sea are as much obedient to His will, as the frogs, and flies, and lice, and locusts, in the plagues of Egypt. All are His servants, and all obey His commands. For another thing, there is a singular similarity between this miracle worked at the beginning of our Lord's ministry, and another which we find Him working after His resurrection, at the end of His ministry, recorded by John. (John 21) In both we read of a miraculous catch of fish. In both the Apostle Peter has a prominent place in the story. And in both there is, probably, a deep spiritual lesson, lying below the outward surface of the facts described.

We should observe, in this passage, **our Lord Jesus Christ's unwearied readiness for every good work.** Once more we find Him preaching to a people who "pressed upon Him to hear the word of God." And where does He preach? Not in any consecrated building, or place set apart for public worship, but in the open air—not in a pulpit constructed for a preacher's use, but in a fisherman's

boat. Souls were waiting to be fed. Personal inconvenience was allowed no place in His consideration. God's work must not stand still.

The servants of Christ should learn a lesson from their Master's conduct on this occasion. We are not to wait until every little difficulty or obstacle is removed, before we put our hand to the plough, or go forth to sow the seed of the word. Convenient buildings may often be lacking for assembling a company of hearers. Convenient rooms may often not be found for gathering children to school. What, then, are we to do? Shall we sit still and do nothing? God forbid! If we cannot do all we want, let us do what we can. Let us work with such tools as we have. While we are lingering and delaying, souls are perishing. It is the slothful heart that is always looking at the hedge of thorns and the lion in the way. (Prov. 15:19; 22:13.) Where we are and as we are, in season of out of season, by one means or by another, by tongue or by pen, by speaking or by writing, let us strive to be ever working for God. But let us never stand still.

We should observe, secondly, in this passage, **what encouragement our Lord gives to unquestioning obedience.** We are told, that after preaching He bade Simon "launch out into the deep and let down his net for a catch." He receives an answer which exhibits in a striking manner the mind of a good servant. "Master," says Simon, "we have toiled all the night and have taken nothing—nevertheless, at your word I will let down the

net." And what was the reward of this ready compliance with the Lord's commands? At once, we are told, "When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break."

We need not doubt that a practical lesson for all Christians is contained under these simple circumstances. We are meant to learn the blessing of immediate unhesitating obedience to every plain command of Christ. The path of duty may sometimes be hard and disagreeable. The wisdom of the course we propose to follow may not be apparent to the world. But none of these things must move us. We are not to confer with flesh and blood. We are to go straight forward when Jesus says, "go;" and do a thing boldly, unflinchingly, and decidedly, when Jesus says, "do it." We are to walk by faith and not by sight, and believe that what we don't see now to be right and reasonable, we shall see hereafter. So acting, we shall never find in the long run that we are losers. So acting, we shall find, sooner or, later, that we reap a great reward.

We should observe, thirdly, in this passage, **how much a sense of God's presence abases man and makes him feel his sinfulness.** We see this strikingly illustrated by Peter's words, when the miraculous draught convinced him that One greater than man was in his boat. We read that "he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

In measuring these words of Peter, we must of course remember the time at which they were spoken. He was, at best, but a babe in

grace, weak in faith, weak in experience, and weak in knowledge. At a later period in his life he would, doubtless, have said, “Abide with me,” and not, “depart.” But still, after every deduction of this kind, the words of Peter exactly express the first feelings of man when he is brought into anything like close contact with God. The sight of divine greatness and holiness makes him feel strongly his own littleness and sinfulness. Like Adam after the fall, his first thought is to hide himself. Like Israel under Sinai, the language of his heart is, “let not God speak with us, lest we die.” (Exod. 20:19.)

Let us strive to know more and more, every year we live, our need of a mediator between ourselves and God. Let us seek more and more to realize that without a mediator our thoughts of God can never be comfortable, and the more clearly we see God the more uncomfortable we must feel. Above all, let us be thankful that we have in Jesus the very Mediator whose help our souls require, and that through Him we may draw near to God with boldness, and cast fear away. Out of Christ, God is a consuming fire. In Christ, He is a reconciled Father. Without Christ, the strictest moralist may well tremble, as he looks forward to his end. Through Christ, the chief of sinners may approach God with confidence, and feel perfect peace.

We should observe, lastly, in this passage, **the mighty promise which Jesus holds out to Peter**— “Fear not,” He says, “from henceforth you shall catch men.”

That promise, we may well believe, was not intended for Peter only but for all the Apostles—and not for all the Apostles only, but for

all faithful ministers of the Gospel who walk in the Apostles' steps. It was spoken for their encouragement and consolation. It was intended to support them under that sense of weakness and unprofitableness by which they are sometimes almost overwhelmed. They certainly have a treasure in earthen vessels. (2 Cor. 4:7.) They are men of like passions with others. They find their own hearts weak and frail, like the hearts of any of their hearers. They are often tempted to give up in despair, and to leave off preaching. But here stands a promise, on which the great Head of the Church would have them daily lean— "Fear not, you shall catch men."

Let us pray daily for all ministers that they may be true successors of Peter and his brethren, that they may preach the same full and free Gospel which they preached, and live the same holy lives which they lived. These are the only ministers who will ever prove successful fishermen. To some of them God may give more honor, and to others less. But all true and faithful preachers of the Gospel have a right to believe that their labor shall not prove in vain. They may often preach the Word with many tears, and see no result of their labor. But God's word shall not return void. (Isaiah. 55:11.) The last day shall show that no work for God was ever thrown away. Every faithful fisherman shall find his Master's words made good— "You shall catch men."

Notes on 5:1-11

10. "You will catch men." It has often been remarked, and with much jus- tice, that the Greek word translated catch means literally "take

alive." It is only used here and in one other place, 2 Timothy 2:26, a passage which is often misinterpreted but which, rightly understood, is a remarkable parallel to our Lord's words in this place.

Let us not forget, in reading this miracle, that holy and good men in every age have seen in it a remarkable type and emblem of the history of Christ's church in the world. They have seen the ships as emblems of the churches, the fishermen as ministers, the net as the Gospel, the sea as the world, the shore as eternity, and the miraculous catch of fish as the success attending work done in strict compliance with Christ's word. There may be truth in all this. But it needs to be cautiously and delicately used. The habit of allegorizing and seeing hidden meanings in the plain language of Scripture has often done great harm.

LUKE 5:12-16

JESUS HEALS A LEPER

We see in this passage, **our Lord Jesus Christ's POWER over incurable diseases.** "A man full of leprosy" applies to Him for relief, and is at once healed. This was a mighty miracle. Of all ills which can afflict the body of man, leprosy appears to be the most severe. It affects every part of the constitution at once. It brings sores and decay upon the skin, corruption into the blood, and rottenness into the bones. It is a living death, which no medicine can check or stop. Yet here we read of a leper being made well in a moment. It is but one touch from the hand of the Son of God, and the cure is

effected. One single touch of that almighty hand! “And immediately the leprosy departed from him.”

We have in this wonderful history a lively emblem of Christ’s power to heal our souls. What are we all but spiritual lepers in the sight of God? Sin is the deadly sickness by which we are all affected. It has eaten into our vitals. It has infected all our faculties. Heart, conscience, mind, and will, all are diseased by sin. From the sole of our foot to the crown of our head, there is no soundness about us, but covered with wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores. (Isaiah 1:6.) Such is the state in which we are born. Such is the state in which we naturally live. We are in one sense dead long before we are laid in the grave. Our bodies may be healthy and active, but our souls are by nature dead in trespasses and sins.

Who shall deliver us from this body of death? Let us thank God that Jesus Christ can. He is that divine Physician, who can make old things pass away and all things become new. In Him is life. He can wash us thoroughly from all the defilement of sin in His own blood. He can quicken us, and revive us by His own Spirit. He can cleanse our hearts, open the eyes of our understandings, renew our wills, and make us whole. Let this sink down deeply into our hearts. There is medicine to heal our sickness. If we are lost it is not because we cannot be saved. However corrupt our hearts, and however wicked our past lives, there is hope for us in the Gospel. There is no case of spiritual leprosy too hard for Christ.

We see, secondly, in this passage, **our Lord Jesus Christ's WILLINGNESS to help those that are in need.** The petition of the afflicted leper was a very touching one. "Lord," he said, "if you will, you can make me clean." The answer he received was singularly merciful and gracious. At once our Lord replies, "I will—be clean!"

Those two little words, "I will," deserve special notice. They are a deep mine, rich in comfort and encouragement to all laboring and heavy laden souls. They show us the mind of Christ towards sinners. They exhibit His infinite willingness to do good to the sons of men, and His readiness to show compassion. Let us always remember, that if men are not saved, it is not because Jesus is not willing to save them. He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. He would have all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. He has no pleasure in the death of him that dies. He would have gathered Jerusalem's children, as a hen gathers her chicks, if they would only have been gathered. He would, but they would not. The blame of the sinner's ruin must be borne by himself. It is his own will, and not Christ's will, if he is lost forever. It is a solemn saying of our Lord's, "You will not come unto me that you might have life." (2 Pet. 3:9; 1 Tim. 2:4; Ezek. 18:32; Matt. 23:37; John 5:40)

We see, thirdly, in this passage, **what respect our Lord Jesus Christ paid to the ceremonial law of Moses.** He bids the leper "go and show himself to the priest," according to the requirement in Leviticus, that he may be legally pronounced clean. He bids him offer

an offering on the occasion of his doing so, “according as Moses commanded.” Our Lord knew well that the ceremonies of the Mosaic law were only shadows and figures of good things to come, and had in themselves no inherent power. He knew well that the last days of the Levitical institutions were close at hand, and that they were soon to be laid aside forever. But so long as they were not abrogated He would have them respected. They were ordained by God Himself. They were pictures and lively emblems of the Gospel. They were not therefore to be lightly esteemed.

There is a lesson here for Christians, which we shall do well to remember. Let us take heed that we do not despise the ceremonial law, because its work is done. Let us beware of neglecting those parts of the Bible, which contain it, under the idea that the believer in the Gospel has nothing to do with them. It is true that the darkness is past, and the true light now shines. (1 John 2:8.) We have nothing to do now with altars, sacrifices, or priests. Those who wish to revive them are like men who light a candle at noon day. But true as this is, we must never forget that the ceremonial law is still full of instruction. It contains that same Gospel in the bud, which we now see in full flower. Rightly understood we shall always find it throwing strong light on the Gospel of Christ. The Bible reader who neglects to study it, will always find at least that by the neglect his soul has suffered damage.

We see, lastly, in this passage, **our Lord Jesus Christ’s diligence about private prayer. A**lthough “great multitudes

came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities," He still made time for secret devotion. Holy and undefiled as He was He would not allow the demands of public business to prevent regular private communion with God. We are told that "He withdrew himself into the wilderness and prayed."

There is an example set before us here, which is much overlooked in these latter days. There are few professing Christians, it may be feared, who strive to imitate Christ in this matter of private devotion. There is abundance of hearing, and reading, and talking, and profession, and visiting, and almsgiving, and subscribing to societies, and teaching at schools. But is there, together with all this, a due proportion of private prayer? Are believing men and women sufficiently careful to be frequently alone with God? These are humbling and heart-searching questions. But we shall find it useful to give them an answer.

Why is it that there is so much apparent religious working, and yet so little result in positive conversions to God—so many sermons, and so few souls saved—so much machinery, and so little effect produced—so much running here and there, and yet so few brought to Christ? Why is all this? The reply is short and simple. There is not enough private prayer. The cause of Christ does not need less working, but it does need among the workers more praying. Let us each examine ourselves, and amend our ways. The most successful workmen in the Lord's vineyard, are those who are like their Master, often and much upon their knees.

Notes on 5:12-16

16. And prayed. This frequent mention of our Lord's praying is peculiar to Luke. Wordsworth remarks, "A similar instance is seen in his narrative of our Lord's baptism, and of the transfiguration (Luke 3:21; 9:28, 29). The Gentiles, for whom St Luke's Gospel was especially designed, needed instruction in the duty and benefits of prayer. Accordingly this subject occupies a prominent place in his Gospel. It is eminently the Gospel of prayer." (See Luke 6:12; 9:18, 28; 11:1; Matthew 14:23; Mark 1:35.)

LUKE 5:17-26

JESUS HEALS A PARALYTIC

A threefold miracle demands our attention in these verses. At one and the same time, we see our Lord forgiving sins, reading men's thoughts, and healing a paralytic. He that could do such things, and do them with such perfect ease and authority, must indeed be very God. Power like this was never possessed by man.

Let us mark, firstly, in this passage, **what pains men will take about an object when they are in earnest.** The friends of a man, sick with the palsy, desired to bring him to Jesus that he might be cured. At first they were unable to do it, because of the crowd by which our Lord was surrounded. What, then, did they do? "They went upon the house-top, and let him down through the tiling, with his couch, into the midst before Jesus." At once their object was gained. Our Lord's attention was drawn to their sick friend, and he

was healed. By pains, and labor, and perseverance, his friends succeeded in obtaining for him the mighty blessing of a complete cure.

The importance of pains and diligence, is a truth that meets our eyes on every side. In every calling, and vocation, and trade, we see that great effort is one prominent secret of success. It is not by luck or accident that men prosper, but by hard working. Fortunes are not made without trouble and attention, by bankers and merchants. Practice is not secured without diligence and study, by lawyers and physicians. The principle is one with which the children of this world are perfectly familiar. It is one of their favorite maxims, that there are "no gains without pains."

Let us thoroughly understand that pains and diligence are just as essential to the well-being and prosperity of our souls as of our bodies. In all our endeavors to draw near to God, in all our approaches to Christ, there ought to be the same determined earnestness which was shown by this sick man's friends. We must allow no difficulties to check us, and no obstacle to keep us back from anything which is really for our spiritual good. Specially must we bear this in mind in the matter of regularly reading the Bible, hearing the Gospel, keeping the Sabbath holy, and private prayer. On all these points we must beware of laziness and an excuse-making spirit. Necessity must be the mother of invention. If we cannot find means of keeping up these habits in one way, we must in another. But we must settle in our minds, that *the thing shall be done*. The

health of our soul is at stake. Let the crowd of difficulties be what it may, we must get through it. If the children of this world take so much pains about a corruptible crown, we ought to take far more pains about one that is incorruptible.

Why is it that so many people take no pains in religion? How is it that they can never find time for praying, Bible reading and hearing the Gospel? What is the secret of their continual string of excuses for neglecting means of grace? How is it that the very same men who are full of zeal about money, business, pleasure, or politics, will take no trouble about their souls? The answer to these questions is short and simple. These men are not in earnest about salvation. They have no sense of spiritual disease. They have no consciousness of requiring a Spiritual Physician. They do not feel that their souls are in danger of dying eternally. They see no use in taking trouble about religion. In darkness like this thousands live and die. Happy indeed are they who have found out their peril, and count all things loss if they may only win Christ, and be found in Him!

Let us mark, secondly, **the kindness and compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ.** Twice in this passage we see Him speaking most graciously to the poor sufferer who was brought before Him. At first He addressed to him those marvelous and heart-cheering words, “Friend, your sins are forgiven.” Afterwards He adds words, which in point of comfort, must have been second only to the blessing of forgiveness. “Arise,” He says, “and take up your couch, and go into

your house." First He assures him that his soul is healed. Then He tells him that his body is cured, and sends him away rejoicing.

Let us never forget this part of our Lord's character. Christ's loving-kindness to His people never changes, and never fails. It is a deep well of which no one ever found the bottom. It began from all eternity, before they were born. It chose, called, and quickened them when they were dead in trespasses and sins. It drew them to God and changed their character, and put a new will in their minds, and a new song in their mouths. It has borne with them in all their waywardness and shortcomings. It will never allow them to be separated from God. It will flow ever forward, like a mighty river, through the endless ages of eternity. Christ's love and mercy must be a sinner's plea when he first begins his journey. Christ's love and mercy will be his only plea when he crosses the dark river and enters home. Let us seek to know this love by inward experience, and prize it more. Let it constrain us more continually to live, not to ourselves, but to Him who died for us and rose again.

Let us mark, lastly, **our Lord Jesus Christ's perfect knowledge of the thoughts of men.** We read that when the Scribes and Pharisees began to reason secretly among themselves, and privately charge our Lord with blasphemy, He knew what they were about and put them to an open shame. It is written, that "He knew what they were thinking."

It should be a daily and habitual reflection with us that we can keep nothing secret from Christ. To Him apply the words of Paul, "all

things are naked and opened to the eyes of him with whom we have to do." (Heb. 4:13.) To Him belong the solemn expressions of the 139th Psalm—the Psalm which every Christian should often study. There is not a word in our mouths, nor an imagination in our hearts, but Jesus knows it altogether. (Psalm 139:4.)

How many searching's of heart this mighty truth ought to awaken within us! Christ ever sees us! Christ always knows us! Christ daily reads and observes our acts, words and thoughts! The recollection of this should alarm the wicked and drive them from their sins! Their wickedness is not hidden, and will one day be fearfully exposed, except they repent. It should frighten hypocrites out of their hypocrisy. They may deceive man, but they are not deceiving Christ. It should quicken and comfort all sincere believers. They should remember that a loving Master is looking at them, and should do all as in His sight. Above all, they should feel that, however mocked and slandered by the world, they are fairly and justly measured by their Savior's eye. They can say, "You, Lord, who know all things, know that I love You." (John 21:17.)

Notes on 5:17-26

19. Lowered him on his mat through the tiles. In order to understand this, we must remember the construction of houses in the countries where our Lord preached. It was, and is now, a common practice to construct them with a flat roof and a small square or courtyard in the middle of the building. Access was obtained to the roof by an outside staircase, so a person could go up to the roof without entering the

house.

Our Lord appears to have been preaching and teaching in the courtyard, under cover of the tiling projecting from one of the sides. The friends of the paralytic man were unable to make their way into the courtyard because of the crowd; so they carried him up the staircase outside the building and so reached the flat roof of the house. Then they removed that part of the tiling which was above our Lord and let down their friend in his bed, by ropes, into the courtyard below.

26. Everyone was amazed. Literally, “Amazement took them all.” The word used for “amazement” is the same that is translated in three places as “a trance” (Acts 10:10; 11:5; 22:17). It is a word used concerning the highest sort of admiration or wonder.

“We have seen remarkable things today.” This is the only place in the New Testament where the word translated “remarkable” is used. It is literally “paradoxes”—things contrary to all common opinion and ordinary experiences.

Luke 5:27-32

THE CALLING OF MATTHEW

The verses we have now read, ought to be deeply interesting to every one who knows the value of an immortal soul, and desires salvation. They describe the conversion and experience of one of Christ’s earliest disciples. We also, are all by nature born in sin, and

need conversion. Let us see what we know of the mighty change. Let us compare our own experience with that of the man whose case is here described, and by comparison learn wisdom.

We are taught, in this passage, **the power of Christ's calling grace.** We read that our Lord called a tax-collector named Levi to become one of His disciples. This man belonged to a class who were a very proverb for wickedness among the Jews. Yet even to him our Lord says, "Follow me." We read furthermore, that such mighty influence on Levi's heart accompanied our Lord's words, that although "sitting at his tax booth," when called, he at once "left all, rose up, followed" Christ, and became a disciple.

We must never despair of any one's salvation, so long as he lives, after reading a case like this. We must never say of anyone that he is too wicked, or too hardened, or too worldly to become a Christian. No sins are too many, or too bad, to be forgiven. No heart is too hard or too worldly to be changed. He who called Levi still lives, and is the same that He was 1800 years ago. With Christ nothing is impossible.

How is it with ourselves? This, after all, is the grand question. Are we waiting, and delaying, and hanging back, under the idea that the cross is too heavy, and that we can never serve Christ? Let us cast such thoughts away at once and forever. Let us believe that Christ can enable us by His Spirit to give up all, and come out from the world. Let us remember that He who called Levi never changes. Let us take up the cross boldly, and go forward.

We are taught, secondly, in this passage, that **conversion is a cause of joy to a true believer.** We read, that when Levi was converted, he made a "great feast in his own house." A feast is made for laughter and merriment. (Eccles. 10:19.) Levi regarded the change in himself as an occasion of rejoicing, and wished others to rejoice with him.

We can easily imagine that Levi's conversion was a cause of grief to his worldly friends. They saw him giving up a profitable calling, to follow a new teacher from Nazareth! They doubtless regarded his conduct as a grievous piece of folly, and an occasion for sorrow rather than joy. They only looked at his temporal losses by becoming a Christian. Of his spiritual gains they knew nothing. And there are many like them. There are aways thousands of people who, if they hear of a relation being converted, consider it rather a misfortune. Instead of rejoicing, they only shake their heads and mourn.

Let us, however, settle it in our minds that Levi did right to rejoice, and if we are converted, let us rejoice likewise. Nothing can happen to a man which ought to be such an occasion of joy, as his conversion. It is a far more important event than being married, or coming of age, or being made a nobleman, or receiving a great fortune. It is the birth of an immortal soul! It is the rescue of a sinner from hell! It is a passage from life to death! It is being made a king and priest for evermore! It is being provided for, both in time and eternity! It is adoption into the noblest and richest of all families, the family of God!

Let us not heed the opinion of the world in this matter. They speak evil of things which they know not. Let us, with Levi, consider every fresh conversion as a cause for great rejoicing. Never ought there to be such joy, gladness, and congratulation, as when our sons, or daughters, or brethren, or sisters, or friends, are born again and brought to Christ. The words of the prodigal's father should be remembered— "It was fit that we should make merry and be glad— for this your brother was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found." (Luke 15:32.)

We are taught, thirdly, in this passage, that **converted souls desire to promote the conversion of others.** We are told that when Levi was converted, and had made a feast on the occasion, he invited "a great company of tax-collectors" to share it. Most probably these men were his old friends and companions. He knew well what their souls needed, for he had been one of them. He desired to make them acquainted with that Savior who had been merciful to himself. Having found mercy, he wanted them also to find it. Having been graciously delivered from the bondage of sin, he wished others also to be set free.

This feeling of Levi will always be the feeling of a true Christian. It may be safely asserted that there is no grace in the man who cares nothing about the salvation of his fellow men. The heart which is really taught by the Holy Spirit, will always be full of love, charity, and compassion. The soul which has been truly called of God, will

earnestly desire that others may experience the same calling. A converted man will not wish to go to heaven alone.

How is it with ourselves in this matter? Do we know anything of Levi's spirit after his conversion? Do we strive in every way to make our friends and relatives acquainted with Christ? Do we say to others, as Moses to Hobab, "Come with us, and we will do you good?" (Num. 10:29.) Do we say as the Samaritan woman, "Come, see a man that told me all that ever I did?" Do we cry to our brethren as Andrew did to Simeon, "We have found the Christ?" These are very serious questions. They supply a most searching test of the real condition of our souls. Let us not shrink from applying it. There is not enough of a missionary spirit among Christians. It should not satisfy us to be safe ourselves. We ought also to try to do good to others. All cannot go to the heathen, but every believer should strive to be a missionary to his fellow men. Having received mercy, we should not hold our peace.

We are taught, lastly, in this passage, **one of the chief objects of Christ's coming into the world.** We have it in the well-known world, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

This is that great lesson of the Gospel which, in one form or another, we find continually taught in the New Testament. It is one which we can never have too strongly impressed upon our minds. Such is our natural ignorance and self-righteousness in religion, that we are constantly losing sight of it. We need to be frequently reminded, that Jesus did not come merely as a teacher, but as the Savior of that which was utterly lost, and that those only can receive

benefit from Him who will confess that they are ruined, bankrupt, hopeless, miserable sinners.

Let us use this mighty truth, if we never used it before. Are we sensible of our own wickedness and sinfulness? Do we feel that we are unworthy of anything but wrath and condemnation? Then let us understand that we are the very people for whose sake Jesus came into the world. If we feel ourselves righteous, Christ has nothing to say to us. But if we feel ourselves sinners, Christ calls us to repentance. Let not the call be made in vain.

Let us go on using this mighty truth, if we have used it in time past. Do we find our own hearts weak and deceitful? Do we often feel that "when we would do good, evil is present with us?" (Rom. 7:21.) It may be all true, but it must not prevent our resting on Christ. He "came in to the world to save sinners," and if we feel ourselves such, we have warrant for applying to, and trusting in Him to our life's end. One thing only let us never forget—Christ came to call us *to repentance,* and not to sanction our continuing in sin.

Notes on 5:27-32

27. A tax collector by the name of Levi. The person called Levi here is called Matthew in St. Matthew's Gospel and Levi in St. Mark's. It is almost universally agreed that it is one and the same person—Matthew the apostle. Like some others in the Bible, he had two names.

29. A great banquet. The word translated banquet is only used here and in Luke 14:13. It means a kind of large reception banquet, such

as only wealthy people could give and at which the guests were numerous. The worldly sacrifice which Levi made in becoming Christ's disciple was probably greater than that made by any of the other apostles.

32. "Call . . . to repentance." Let it be carefully noted here, as well as elsewhere, that our Lord's call to sinners is not a bare call to become his disciples but a call to repentance.

Stella, the Spanish annotator, remarks on this verse, "You must not understand from this that Christ found some who were righteous. For the sentence of Paul is true: 'All have sinned.' Christ calls these scribes and Pharisees righteous, not because they were really so, but only according to the common estimation and appearance of them."

LUKE 5:33-39

FASTING

We should observe in these verses, that **men may disagree on the lesser points of religion, while they agree on its weightier matters.** We have this brought out in the alleged difference between the disciples of John the Baptist, and the disciples of Christ. The question was put to our Lord, "Why do the disciples of John fast often, and make prayers, and likewise the disciples of the Pharisees, but your eat and drink?"

We cannot suppose that there was any essential difference between the doctrines held by these two parties of disciples. The teaching of John the Baptist was doubtless clear and explicit upon all

the main points necessary to salvation. The man who could say of Jesus, “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world,” was not likely to teach his followers anything contrary to the Gospel. His teaching of course lacked the fullness and perfection of his divine Master’s teaching, but it is absurd to suppose that it contradicted it. Nevertheless there were points of practice on which his disciples differed from those of Christ. Agreeing, as they doubtless did, about the necessity of repentance, and faith, and holiness, they disagreed about such matters as fasting, eating, drinking, and manner of public devotion. One in heart, and hope, and aim, as they were about the weightier matters of inward religion, they were not entirely of one mind about outward matters.

We must make up our minds to see differences of this kind among Christians so long as the world stands. We may regret them much, because of the handle they give to an ignorant and prejudiced world. But they will exist, and are one of the many evidences of our fallen condition. About church government, about the manner of conducting public worship, about fasts and feasts, and saint’s days, and ceremonials, Christians have never been entirely of one mind, even from the days of the apostles. On all these points the holiest and ablest servants of God have arrived at different conclusions. Argument, reasoning, persuasion, persecution, have all alike proved unable to produce unity.

Let us, however, bless God that there are many points on which all true servants of God are thoroughly agreed. About sin and

salvation, about repentance, and faith, and holiness, there is a mighty unity among all believers, of every name, and nation, and people, and tongue. Let us make much of these points in our own personal religion. These, after all, are the principal things which we shall think of in the hour of death, and the day of judgment. On other matters we must agree to differ. It will signify little at the last day what we thought about fasting, and eating, and drinking, and ceremonies. Did we repent, and bring forth fruits fit for repentance? Did we behold the Lamb of God by faith, and receive Him as our Savior? All, of every church, who are found right on these points, will be saved. All, of every church, who are found wrong on these points, will be lost for evermore.

We should observe, secondly, in these verses, **the name by which our Lord Jesus Christ speaks of Himself.** Twice He calls Himself "the Bridegroom."

The name "bridegroom," like every name applied to our Lord in the Bible, is full of instruction. It is a name peculiarly comforting and encouraging to all true Christians. It teaches the deep and tender love with which Jesus regards all sinners of mankind, who believe in Him. Weak, and unworthy, and short-coming as they are in themselves, He feels towards them a tender affection, even as a husband does towards his wife. It teaches the close and intimate *UNION,* which exists between Jesus and believers. It is something far nearer than the union of king and subject, master and servant, teacher and scholar, shepherd and sheep. It is the closest of all

unions, the union of husband and wife, the union of which it is written, “what God has joined together, let no man put asunder.”

Above all, the name teaches that entire *PARTICIPATION* of all that Jesus is and has, which is the privilege of every believer. Just as the husband gives to his wife his name, makes her partaker of his property, home, and dignity, and undertakes all her debts and liabilities, so does Christ deal with all true Christians. He takes on Himself all their sins. He declares that they are a part of Himself, and that he who hurts them hurts Him. He gives them, even in this world, such good things as pass man’s understanding. And He promises that in the next world they shall sit with Him on His throne, and go out from His presence no more.

If we know anything of true and saving religion, let us often rest our souls on this name and office of Christ. Let us remember daily, that the weakest of Christ’s people are cared for with a tender care that passes knowledge, and that whoever hurts them is hurting the apple of Christ’s eye. In this world we may be poor and contemptible, and laughed at because of our religion. But if we have faith, we are precious in the sight of Christ. The Bridegroom of our soul will one day plead our cause before the whole world.

We should observe, lastly, in these verses, **how gently and tenderly Christ would have His people deal with young and inexperienced Christians.** He teaches us this lesson by two parables, drawn from the affairs of daily life. He shows the folly of sewing “new cloth on an old garment,” or of putting “new wine into

old bottles." In like manner, He would have us know, there is a lack of harmony between a new dispensation and an old one. It is vain to expect those who have been trained and taught under one system, to become immediately used to another system. On the contrary, they must be led on by degrees, and taught as they are able to bear.

The lesson is one which all true Christians would do well to lay to heart, and none perhaps so much as Christian ministers and Christian parents. Forgetfulness of it often does much harm to the cause of truth. The hard judgments and unreasonable expectations of old disciples have often driven back and discouraged young beginners in the school of Christ.

Let us settle it in our minds, that grace must have a beginning in every believer's heart, and that we have no right to say a man has no grace, because it does not come to full ripeness at once. We do not expect a child to do the work of a full-grown man, though he may one day, if he lives long enough. We mast not expect a learner of Christianity to show the faith, and love, and knowledge of an old soldier of the cross. He may become by and bye a mighty champion of the truth. But at first we must give him time. There is great need of wisdom in dealing with young people about religion, and, generally speaking, with all young disciples. Kindness, and patience, and gentleness, are of the first importance. We must not try to pour in the new wine too quickly, or it will run over. We must take them by the hand and lead them on gently. We must beware of frightening, or hurrying them, or pressing them on too fast. If they have only got

hold of the main principles of the Gospel, let us not set them down as godless, because of a few lesser matters. We must bear with much weakness and infirmity, and not expect to find old heads on young shoulders, or ripe Christian experience in those who are only babes. There was deep wisdom in Jacob's saying, "If men should over-drive them one day, all the flock will die." (Gen. 33:13.)

Notes on 5:33-39

35. "In those days they will fast." The complete absence of any direct command to keep fasts in the church of Christ, either in the Acts of the Apostles or in the letters of the New Testament, and especially in the letters to Timothy and Titus, makes it clear that the matter is one which should be handled with caution and on which everyone must be persuaded in his own mind.

Luke – Chap. 6

Luke 6:1-5

JESUS AND THE SABBATH

We should notice, in this passage, **what excessive importance hypocrites attach to trifles.** We are told that, "One Sabbath day as Jesus was walking through some grainfields, his disciples broke off heads of wheat, rubbed off the husks in their hands, and ate the grains." At once the hypocritical Pharisees found fault, and charged them with committing a sin. They said, "Why do you that which is

not lawful to do on the Sabbath days?" The mere act of plucking the heads of wheat of course they did not find fault with. It was an action sanctioned by the Mosaic law. (Deut. 23:25.) The supposed fault with which they charged the disciples, was the breach of the fourth commandment. They had done work on the Sabbath, by taking and eating a handful of food.

This exaggerated zeal of the Pharisees about the Sabbath, we must remember, did not extend to other plain commandments of God. It is evident from many expressions in the Gospels, that these very men, who pretended such strictness on one little point, were more than lax and indifferent about other points of infinitely greater importance. While they stretched the commandment about the Sabbath beyond its true meaning, they openly trampled on the tenth commandment, and were notorious for covetousness. (Luke 16:14.) But this is precisely the character of the hypocrite. To use our Lord's illustration, in some things he makes fuss about straining out of his cup a gnat, while in other things he can swallow a camel. (Matt. 23:24.)

It is a bad symptom of any man's state of soul, when he begins to put the second things in religion in the first place, and the first things in the second, or the things ordained by man above the things ordained by God. Let us beware of falling into this state of mind. There is something sadly wrong in our spiritual condition, when the only thing we look at in others is their outward Christianity, and the

principal question we ask is, whether they worship in our communion, and use our ceremonial, and serve God in our way.

Do they repent of sin? Do they believe on Christ? Are they living holy lives? These are the chief points to which our attention ought to be directed. The moment we begin to place anything in religion before these things, we are in danger of becoming as thorough Pharisees as the accusers of the disciples.

We should notice, secondly, in this passage, **how graciously our Lord Jesus Christ pleaded the cause of His disciples, and defended them against their accusers.** We are told that He answered the cavils of the Pharisees with arguments by which they were silenced, if not convinced. He did not leave His disciples to fight their battle alone. He came to their rescue, and spoke for them.

We have in this fact a cheering illustration of the work that Jesus is ever doing on behalf of His people. There is one, we read in the Bible, who is called "the accuser of the brethren, who accuses them day and night," even Satan, the prince of this world. (Rev. 12:10.) How many grounds of accusation we give him, by reason of our infirmity! How many charges he may justly lay against us before God! But let us thank God that believers "have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous," who is ever maintaining the cause of His people in heaven, and continually making intercession for them. Let us take comfort in this cheering thought. Let us daily rest our souls on the recollection of our great Friend in heaven. Let

our morning and evening prayer continually be, “Answer for me, answer for me, O Lord my God.”

We should notice, lastly, in these verses, **the clear light which our Lord Jesus Christ throws on the real requirements of the fourth commandment.** He tells the hypocritical Pharisees, who pretended to such strictness in their observance of the Sabbath, that the Sabbath was never intended to prevent works of necessity. He reminds them how David himself, when suffering from hunger, took and ate that show-bread, which ought only to be eaten by the priests, and how the act was evidently allowed of God, because it was an act of necessity. And He argues from David’s case, that He who permitted His own temple rules to be infringed, in cases of necessity, would doubtless allow work to be done on His own Sabbath days, when it was work for which there was really a need.

We should weigh carefully the nature of our Lord Jesus Christ’s teaching about the observance of the Sabbath, both here and in other places. We must not allow ourselves to be carried away by the common notion that the Sabbath is a mere Jewish ordinance, and that it was abolished and done away by Christ. There is not a single passage of the Gospels which proves this. In every case where we find our Lord speaking upon it, He speaks against the false views of it, which were taught by the Pharisees, but not against the day itself. He cleanses and purifies the fourth commandment from the man-made additions by which the Jews had defiled it, but never declares that it was not to bind Christians. He shows that the seventh day’s rest was

not meant to prevent works of necessity and mercy, but He says nothing to imply that it was to pass away, as a part of the ceremonial law.

We live in days when anything like strict Sabbath observance is loudly denounced, in some quarters, as a remnant of Jewish superstition. We are boldly told by some people, that to keep the Sabbath holy is legal, and that to enforce the fourth commandment on Christians, is going back to bondage. Let it suffice us to remember, when we hear such things, that assertions are not proofs, and that vague talk like this has no confirmation in the word of God. Let us settle it in our minds, that the fourth commandment has never been repealed by Christ, and that we have no more right to break the Sabbath day, under the Gospel, than we have to murder and to steal.

The architect who repairs a building, and restores it to its proper use, is not the destroyer of it, but the preserver. The Savior who redeemed the Sabbath from Jewish traditions, and so frequently explained its true meaning, ought never to be regarded as the enemy of the fourth commandment. On the contrary, He has “magnified it, and made it honorable.”

Let us cling to our Sabbath, as the best safeguard of our Country’s religion. Let us defend it against the assaults of ignorant and mistaken men, who would gladly turn the day of God into a day of business and pleasure. Above all, let us each strive to keep the day holy ourselves. Much of our spiritual prosperity depends, under God, on the manner in which we employ our Sundays.

Notes on 6:1-5

5. "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath." Here Son of Man means what it always means in the New Testament, the Lord Jesus Christ himself. The words Lord of the Sabbath were not meant to imply that our Lord, by virtue of his divine authority, would alter, abrogate, or water down the law of the fourth commandment. They mean that Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath—to deliver it from Jewish traditions, to protect it from superstitious views of its observance, and to show the true spirit and manner in which it was always intended to be kept.

LUKE 6:6-11

THE WITHERED HAND HEALED

These verses contain another example of our Lord Jesus Christ's mode of dealing with the Sabbath question. Once more we find Him coming into collision with the vain traditions of the Pharisees, about the observance of the fourth commandment. Once more we find Him clearing the day of God from the rubbish of human traditions, and placing its requirements on the right foundation.

We are taught in these verses, **the lawfulness of doing works of mercy on the Sabbath day.** We read that before all the Scribes and Pharisees, our Lord healed a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath. He knew that these enemies of all righteousness were watching to see whether He would do it, in order that they might "find an accusation against Him." He boldly asserts the right of doing such works of mercy, even on the day when it is said, "you shall do no

manner of work." He openly challenges them to show that such a work was contrary to the law. "I will ask you one thing," He says, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good, or to do evil? to save life or to destroy?" To this question His enemies were unable to find an answer.

The principle here laid down, is one of wide application. The fourth commandment was never meant to be so interpreted, as to inflict injury on man's body. It was intended to admit of adaptation to that state of things which sin has brought into the world. It was not meant to forbid showing kindness on the Sabbath to the afflicted, or attending to the needs of the sick. We may drive in a carriage to minister comfort to the dying. We may stay away from public worship, in order to fetch a doctor, or be useful in a sick room. We may visit the fatherless and widow in trouble. We may preach, and teach, and instruct the ignorant. These are works of mercy. We may do them, and yet keep the Sabbath holy. They are not breaches of God's law.

One thing, however, we must carefully remember. We must take heed that we do not abuse the liberty which Christ has given us. It is in this direction that our danger chiefly lies in modern times. There is little risk of our committing the error of the Pharisees, and keeping the Sabbath more strictly than God intended. The thing to be feared is the general disposition to neglect the Sabbath, and to rob it of that honor which it ought to receive. Let us take heed to ourselves in this matter. Let us beware of making God's day a day for visiting,

feasting, journeying, and pleasure parties. These are not works of necessity or mercy, whatever a self-willed and unbelieving world may say. The person who spends his Sundays in such ways as these, is sinning a great sin, and proving himself entirely unprepared for the great rest in heaven.

We are taught, secondly, in these verses, **the perfect knowledge that our Lord Jesus Christ possesses of men's thoughts.** We see this in the language used about Him, when the Scribes and Pharisees were watching Him. We read that "He knew their thoughts."

Expressions like this are among the many evidences of our Lord's divinity. It belongs to God only to read hearts. He who could discern the secret intents and imaginations of others, must have been more than man. No doubt He was man like ourselves in all things, sin only excepted. This we may freely grant to the Socinian, who denies the divinity of Christ. The texts the Socinian quotes, in proof of our Lord's manhood, are texts which we believe and hold as fully as himself. But there are other plain texts in Scripture which prove that our Lord was God as well as man. Of such texts the passage before us is one. It shows that Jesus was "God over all, blessed forever." (Rom. 9:5.)

Let the remembrance of our Lord's perfect knowledge always exercise a humbling influence upon our souls. How many vain thoughts, and worldly imaginations, pass through our minds every hour, which man's eye never see! What are our own thoughts at this

moment? What have they been this very day, while we have been reading, or listening to this passage of Scripture? Would they bear public examination? Would we want others to know all that passes in our mind? These are serious questions, and deserve serious answers. Whatever we may think of them, it is a certain fact that Jesus Christ is hourly reading our hearts. Truly we ought to humble ourselves before Him, and cry daily, "Who can tell how often he offends?"— "Cleanse me from secret faults." "God be merciful to me a sinner!"

We are taught, lastly, in these verses, **the nature of the first act of faith, when a soul is converted to God.** The lesson is conveyed to us in a striking manner, by the history of the cure which is here described. We read that our Lord said to the man whose hand was withered, "Stretch forth your hand." The command, at first sight, seems unreasonable, because the man's obedience was apparently impossible. But the poor sufferer was not stopped by any doubts or reasonings of this kind. At once we read that he made the attempt to stretch forth his hand, and, in making it, was cured. He had faith enough to believe that He who bade him stretch forth his hand, was not mocking him, and ought to be obeyed. And it was precisely in this act of implicit obedience, that he received a blessing. "His hand was completely restored!"

Let us see in this simple history, the best answer to those doubts, and hesitations, and questionings, by which anxious inquirers often perplex themselves, in the matter of coming to Christ. "How can they believe?" they ask us— "How can they come to Christ? How can they

lay hold on the hope set before them?" The best answer to all such inquiries, is to bid men do as he did who had the withered hand. Let them not stand still reasoning, but act. Let them not torment themselves with metaphysical speculations, but cast themselves, just as they are, on Jesus Christ. So doing, they will find their course made clear. How, or in what manner, we may not be able to explain. But we may boldly make the assertion, that in the act of striving to draw near to God, they shall find God drawing near to them, but that if they deliberately sit still, they must never expect to be saved.

LUKE 6:12-19

CHOOSING OF THE 12 APOSTLES

These verses describe the appointment of our Lord Jesus Christ's twelve apostles. That appointment was the beginning of the Christian ministry. It was the first ordination, and an ordination conducted by the Great Head of the Church Himself. Since the day when the events here recorded took place, there have been many thousand ordinations. Myriads of bishops, elders, and deacons have been called to the office of the ministry, and often with far more pomp and splendor than we read of here. But never was there so solemn an ordination as this. Never were men ordained who have done so much for the church and the world as these twelve apostles.

Let us observe, firstly, in these verses, that **when our Lord ordained His first ministers, He did it after much prayer.** We read that He "went out into a mountain to pray, and continued

all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, He called unto Him His disciples, and of them He chose twelve, whom also He named apostles."

We need not doubt that there is a deep significance in this special mention of our Lord's praying upon this occasion. It was intended to be a perpetual lesson to the Church of Christ. It was meant to show the great importance of prayer and intercession on behalf of ministers, and particularly at the time of their ordination. Those to whom the responsible office of ordaining is committed, should pray that they may "lay hands suddenly on no man." Those who offer themselves for ordination, should pray that they may not take up work for which they are unfit, and not run without being sent. The lay members of the Church, not least, should pray that none may be ordained, but men who are inwardly moved by the Holy Spirit. Happy are those ordinations, in which all concerned have the mind that was in Christ, and come together in a prayerful spirit!

Do we desire to help forward the cause of pure and undefiled religion in the world? Then let us never forget to pray for ministers, and especially for young men about to enter the ministry. The progress of the Gospel, under God, will always depend much on the character and conduct of those who profess to preach it. An unconverted minister can never be expected to do good to souls. He cannot teach properly what he does not feel experimentally. From such men let us pray daily that the Church may be delivered. Converted ministers are God's special gift. Man cannot create them.

If we would have good ministers, we must remember our Lord's example, and pray for them. Their work is heavy. Their responsibility is enormous. Their strength is small. Let us see that we support them, and hold up their hands by our prayers. In this, and in too many other cases, the words of James are often sadly applicable, "You have not, because you ask not." (James 4:2.) We do not ask God to raise up a constant supply of converted young men to fill our pulpits, and God chastises our neglect by withholding them.

Let us observe, secondly, **how little we are told of the worldly position of the first ministers of the Christian Church.** Four of them, we know, were fishermen. One of them, at least, was a tax-collector. Most of them, probably, were Galileans. Not one of them, so far as we can see from the New Testament, was great, or rich, or noble, or highly connected. Not one was a Pharisee, or Scribe, or Priest, or Ruler, or Elder among the people. All were, apparently, "unlearned and ignorant men." (Acts 4:13.) All were poor.

There is something deeply instructive in the fact which is now before us. It shows us that our Lord Jesus Christ's kingdom was entirely independent of help from this world. His Church was not built by might, or by power, but by the Spirit of the living God. (Zech. 4:6.) It supplies us with an unanswerable proof of the divine origin of Christianity. A religion which turned the world upside down, while its first preachers were all poor men, must needs have been from heaven. If the apostles had possessed money to give their hearers, or

been followed by armies to frighten them, an infidel might well deny that there was anything astonishing in their success. But the poverty of our Lord's disciples cuts away such arguments from beneath the infidel's feet. With a doctrine most unpalatable to the natural heart—with nothing whatever to bribe or compel obedience—a few lowly Galileans shook the world, and changed the face of the Roman empire. One thing only can account for this. The Gospel of Christ, which these men proclaimed, was the truth of God.

Let us remember these things, if we ever strive to do any work for Christ, and beware of leaning on an arm of flesh. Let us watch against the secret inclination, which is natural to all, to look to money, or learning, or high patronage, or great men's support, for success. It we want to do good to souls, we must not look first to the powers of this world. We should begin where the Church of Christ began. We should seek pastors filled with the Holy Spirit.

Let us observe, lastly, in these verses, that **one whom our Lord chose to be an apostle, was a false disciple and a traitor.** That man was Judas Iscariot.

We cannot for a moment doubt, that in choosing Judas Iscariot, our Lord Jesus knew well what He was doing. He who could read hearts, certainly saw from the beginning that, notwithstanding his profession of piety, Judas was a graceless man, and would one day betray Him. Why then did He appoint him to be an apostle? The question is one which has perplexed many. Yet it admits of a satisfactory answer. Like everything which our Lord did, it was done

advisedly, deliberately, and with deep wisdom. It conveyed lessons of high importance to the whole Church of Christ.

The choice of Judas was meant to teach ministers humility. They are not to suppose that ordination necessarily conveys grace, or that once ordained they cannot err. On the contrary, they are to remember, that *one ordained by Christ Himself was a wretched hypocrite*. Let the minister who thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall.

Again, the choice of Judas was meant to teach the lay-members of the Church, not to make idols of ministers. They are to esteem them highly in love for their work's sake, but they are not to bow down to them as infallible, and honor them with an unscriptural honor. They are to remember that ministers may be successors of Judas Iscariot, as well as of Peter and Paul. The name of Judas should be a standing warning to "cease from man." Let no man glory in men. (1 Cor. 3:21.)

Finally, our Lord's choice of Judas was meant to teach the whole church, that it must not expect to see a perfectly pure communion in the present state of things. The wheat and the tares—the good fish and the bad—will always be found side by side, until the Lord comes again. It is vain to look for perfection in visible churches. We shall never find it. A Judas was found even among the apostles. Converted and unconverted people will always be found mixed together in all congregations.

Notes on 6:12-19

12. Spent the night praying to God. Isidore Clarius in his orations on St. Luke, published in Venice in 1565, has some striking remarks on the disgraceful contrast between the way in which the apostles were called to their office after a night spent in prayer and the way in which ecclesiastical offices were filled in Italy in his own day. He exposes the system of jobbing, nepotism, corruption, and covetousness which universally prevailed on such occasions and enters a faithful protest against it.

16. Judas Iscariot. One reason our Lord chose a traitor to be an apostle was that the choice finally supplied a powerful indirect evidence of the purity, blamelessness, and faultlessness of our Lord's behavior and ministry. When our Lord was accused before the high priest and Pontius Pilate, if anything could be proved against him, the traitor Judas Iscariot was exactly the witness who could have proved it. The mere fact that Judas never came forward to give evidence against our Lord is a convincing evidence that nothing could be proved against him.

LUKE 6:20-26

BLESSINGS AND WOES

The discourse of our Lord, which we have now begun, resembles, in many respects, His well-known Sermon on the Mount. The resemblance, in fact, is so striking that many have concluded that Luke and Matthew are reporting one and the same discourse, and that Luke is giving us, in an abridged form, what Matthew reports at

length. There seems no sufficient ground for this conclusion. The occasions on which the two discourses were delivered, were entirely different. Our Lord's repetition of the same great lesson, in almost the same words, on two different occasions, is nothing extraordinary. It is unreasonable to suppose that none of His mighty teachings were ever delivered more than once. In the present case, the repetition is very significant. It shows us the great and deep importance of the lessons which the two discourses contain.

Let us first notice in these verses, **who are those whom the Lord Jesus pronounced BLESSED.** The list is a remarkable and startling one. It singles out those who are "poor," and those who "hunger"—those who "weep," and those who are "hated" by man. These are the people to whom the great Head of the Church says, "Blessed are you!"

We must take good heed that we do not misunderstand our Lord's meaning, when we read these expressions. We must not for a moment suppose that the mere fact of being poor, and hungry, and sorrowful, and hated by man, will entitle any one to lay claim to an interest in Christ's blessing. The poverty here spoken of, is a poverty accompanied by grace. The need is a need entailed by faithful adherence to Jesus. The afflictions are the afflictions of the Gospel. The persecution is persecution for the Son of Man's sake. Such need, and poverty, and affliction, and persecution, were the inevitable consequences of faith in Christ, at the beginning of Christianity. Thousands had to give up everything in this world, because of their

belief in Jesus. It was their case which Jesus had specially in view in this passage. He desired to supply them, and all who suffer like them for the Gospel's sake, with special comfort and consolation.

Let us notice, secondly, in these verses, **who are those to whom our Lord addresses the solemn words, "WOE unto you."** Once more we read expressions which at first sight seem most extraordinary. "Woe unto you that are rich! Woe unto you that are full! Woe unto you that laugh! Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you!" Stronger and more cutting sayings than these cannot be found in the New Testament.

Here, however, no less than in the preceding verses, we must take care that we do not misapprehend our Lord's meaning. We are not to suppose that the possession of riches, and a rejoicing spirit, and the good word of man, are necessarily proofs that people are not Christ's disciples. Abraham and Job were rich. David and Paul had their seasons of rejoicing. Timothy was one who "had a good report from those that were outside." All these, we know, were true servants of God. All these were blessed in this life, and shall receive the blessing of the Lord in the day of His appearing.

Who then, are the people to whom our Lord says, "Woe unto you?" They are the men who refuse to seek treasure in heaven, because they love the good things of this world better, and will not give up their money, if need requires, for Christ's sake. They are the men who prefer the joys and so-called happiness of this world, to joy and peace in believing, and will not risk the loss of the one in order to

gain the other. They are those who love the praise of man more than the praise of God, and will turn their backs on Christ, rather than not keep in with the world. These are the kind of men whom our Lord had in view when He pronounced the solemn words, “Woe, woe unto you.” He knew well that there were thousands of such people among the Jews—thousands who, notwithstanding His miracles and sermons, would love the world better than Him. He knew well that there would always be thousands of such in His professing Church—thousands who, though convinced of the truth of the Gospel, would never give up anything for its sake. To all such He delivers a dreadful warning. “Woe, woe unto you!”

One mighty lesson stands out plainly on the face of these verses. May we all lay it to heart, and learn wisdom! That lesson is the utter contrariety between the mind of Christ, and the common opinions of mankind; the entire variance between the thoughts of Jesus, and the prevailing thoughts of the world. The conditions of life which the world reckons desirable, are the very conditions upon which the Lord pronounces “woes.” Poverty, and hunger, and sorrow, and persecution, are the very things which man labors to avoid. Riches, and fullness, and merriment, and popularity, are precisely the things which men are always struggling to attain. When we have said all, in the way of qualifying, explaining, and limiting our Lord’s words, there still remain two sweeping assertions, which flatly contradict the current doctrine of mankind. The state of life which our Lord blesses, the world cordially dislikes. The people to whom our Lord says, “woe unto you,” are the very people whom the world admires,

praises, and imitates. This is a dreadful fact. It ought to raise within us great searching's of heart.

Let us leave the whole passage with honest self-inquiry and self-examination. Let us ask ourselves what we think of the wonderful declarations that it contains. Can we subscribe to what our Lord says? Are we of one mind with Him? Do we really believe that poverty and persecution, endured for Christ's sake, are positive blessings? Do we really believe that riches and worldly enjoyments, and popularity among men, when sought for more than salvation, or preferred in the least to the praise of God, are a certain curse? Do we really think that the favor of Christ, with trouble and the world's ill word, is better worth having than money, and merriment, and a good name among men, without Christ?

These are most serious questions, and deserve a most serious answer. The passage before us is eminently one which tests the reality of our Christianity. The truths it contains, are truths which no unconverted man can love and receive. Happy are those who have found them truths by experience, and can say "amen" to all our Lord's declarations. Whatever men may please to think, those whom Jesus blesses are blessed, and those whom Jesus does not bless will be cast out for evermore.

Notes on 6:20-26

22. "Exclude you." This Greek word, according to Suicer, is especially applied to ecclesiastical excommunication.

26. "Woe to you when all men speak well of you." Let these words be

carefully noted. Few of our Lord's sayings are more flatly contradictory to the common opinion of the church and the world than this. What is more common in the world than the love of everyone's praise? To be universally popular is a most unsatisfactory symptom, and one of which a minister of Christ should always be afraid. It may well make him doubt whether he is faithfully doing his duty and honestly declaring all the counsel of God.

LUKE 6:27-38

LOVE FOR ENEMIES

The teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ, in these verses, is confined to one great subject. That subject is Christian love and charity. Charity, which is the grand characteristic of the Gospel—charity, which is the bond of perfectness—charity, without which a man is nothing in God's sight—charity is here fully expounded and strongly enforced. Well would it have been for the Church of Christ, if its Master's precept in this passage had been more carefully studied and more diligently observed!

In the first place, our Lord explains **the nature and extent of Christian charity.** The disciples might ask, WHOM are we to love? He bids them "love their enemies, do good to those who hate them, bless those who curse them, and pray for those who despitefully use them." Their love was to be like His own towards sinners—unselfish, and uninfluenced by any hope of return.

What was to be the MANNER of this love? the disciples might ask. It was to be self-sacrificing and self-denying. “Unto him that smites you on the one cheek offer also the other.” “Him that takes away your cloak, forbid not to take your coat also.” They were to give up much, and endure much, for the sake of showing kindness and avoiding strife. They were to forego even their rights, and submit to wrong, rather than awaken angry passions and create quarrels. In this they were to be like their Master, long-suffering, meek, and lowly of heart.

In the second place, our Lord lays down **a golden principle for the settlement of doubtful cases.** He knew well that there will always be occasions when the line of duty towards our neighbor is not clearly defined. He knew how much self-interest and private feelings will sometimes dim our perceptions of right and wrong. He supplies us with a precept for our guidance in all such cases, of infinite wisdom; a precept which even infidels have been compelled to admire. “As you would that men should do to you, you do also to them likewise.” To do to others as they do to us, and return evil for evil, is the standard of the heathen. To behave to others as we should like others to behave to us, whatever their actual behavior may be, this should be the mark at which the Christian should aim. This is to walk in the steps of our blessed Savior. If He had dealt with the world as the world dealt with Him, we would all have been ruined forever in hell.

In the third place, our Lord points out to His disciples **the necessity of their having a HIGHER STANDARD OF DUTY to their neighbor than the children of this world.** He reminds them that to love those who love them, and do good to those who do good to them, and lend to those of whom they hope to receive, is to act no better than "the sinner" who knows nothing of the Gospel. The Christian must be altogether another style of man. His feelings of love, and his deeds of kindness, must be like his Master's—free and gratuitous. He must let men see that he loves others from higher principles than the ungodly do, and that his charity is not confined to those from whom he hopes to get something in return. Anybody can show kindness and charity, when he hopes to gain something by it. But such charity should never content a Christian. The man who is content with it, ought to remember that his practice does not rise an inch above the level of an old Roman or Greek idolater.

In the fourth place, our Lord shows His disciples that **in discharging their duty to their neighbors, they should look to the example of God.** If they called themselves "children of the Highest," they should consider that their Father is "kind to the unthankful and the evil," and they should learn from Him to be merciful, even as He is merciful. The extent of God's unacknowledged mercies to man can never be reckoned up. Every year he pours benefits on millions who do not honor the hand from which they come, or thank the Giver of them. Yet every year these benefits are continued. "Seed time and harvest, summer and winter, never cease." His mercy endures forever. His loving-kindness is

unwearied. His compassions fail not. So ought it to be with all who profess themselves to be His children. Thanklessness and ingratitude should not make them slack their hands from works of love and mercy. Like their Father in heaven, they should never be tired of doing good.

In the last place, our Lord assures His disciples that **the practice of the high standard of charity He recommends shall bring its own REWARD.** "Judge not," He says, "and you shall not be judged—condemn not, and you shall not be condemned—forgive, and you shall be forgiven—give, and it shall be given unto you." And He concludes with the broad assertion, "With the same measure that you mete out, shall it be measured to you again." The general meaning of these words appears to be, that no man shall ever be a loser, in the long run, by deeds of self-denying charity, and patient patience love. At times he may seem to get nothing by his conduct. He may appear to reap nothing but ridicule, contempt, and injury. His kindness may sometimes tempt men to impose on him. His patience and forbearance may be abused. But at the last he will always be found a gainer—often, very often, a gainer in this life—certainly, most certainly, a gainer in the life to come.

Such is the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ about charity. Few of His sayings are so deeply heart-searching as those we have now been considering. Few passages in the Bible are so truly humbling as these eleven verses.

How little of the style of charity which our Lord recommends is to be seen, either in the world or in the Church! How common is an angry, passionate spirit, a morbid sensitiveness about what is called *honor,* and a readiness to quarrel on the least occasion! How seldom we see men and women who love their enemies, and do good hoping for nothing again, and bless those that curse them, and are kind to the unthankful and evil! Truly we are reminded here of our Lord's words, "Narrow is the way which leads unto life, and few there be that find it." (Matt. 7:13.)

How happy the world would be, if Christ's precepts were strictly obeyed! The chief causes of half the sorrows of mankind, are selfishness, strife, unkindness, and lack of love. Never was there a greater mistake than to suppose that vital Christianity interferes with human happiness. It is not having too much religion, but too little, that makes people gloomy, wretched, and miserable. Wherever Christ is best known and obeyed, there will always be found most real joy and peace.

Would we know anything by experience of this blessed grace of charity? Then let us seek to be joined to Christ by faith, and to be taught and sanctified by His Spirit. We do not gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles. We cannot have flowers without roots, or fruit without trees. We cannot have the fruit of the Spirit, without vital union with Christ, and a new creation within. Such as are not born again can never really love in the manner that Christ enjoins.

Notes on 6:27-38

28. “Pray for those who mistreat you.” The behavior recommended here is beautifully exemplified in the case of our Lord praying for those who crucified him and Stephen praying for those who stoned him (Luke 23:34; Acts 7:60).

29-30. “If someone strikes you on one cheek . . .” The precepts of these two verses must be interpreted with scriptural qualifications. They are strong proverbial forms of expressing a great principle. If we were to press an extreme literal interpretation on them, we would be encouraging theft, burglary, violence, and murder. The earth would be given into the hands of the wicked.

On the one hand, our Lord did not mean to forbid the repression of crime or to declare the office of magistrate and policeman unlawful. Nor did he mean to pronounce all war unlawful or to prohibit the punishment of evildoers and disturbers of the peace and order of society.

On the other hand, it is evident that our Lord condemns everything along the lines of a revengeful, pugnacious, litigious, or quarrelsome spirit. He forbids everything like dueling or fighting between individuals for the settlement of private wrongs. He commends forbearance, patience, and long-suffering under injuries and insults. He would have us concede much, submit to much, and put up with much rather than cause strife. (See Romans 12:18-21.) To return blow for blow and to repay anger with anger is the behavior of a dog or a heathen, but not of a Christian.

33. “Even ‘sinners’ do that.” Quesnel remarks on this verse, “A person ought to tremble with fear if beside the external part of his

religion he finds nothing in his life but what may be found in a Turk or a heathen."

LUKE 6:39-45

A TREE AND ITS FRUIT

We learn, in the first place, from these verses, **the great danger of listening to false religious teachers.** Our Lord compares such teachers and their hearers to the blind leading the blind, and asks the reasonable question, "Shall they not both fall into the ditch?" He goes on to confirm the importance of His warning by declaring, that "the disciple is not above his master," and the scholar cannot be expected to know more than his teacher. If a man will hear unsound instruction, we cannot expect him to become otherwise than unsound in the faith himself.

The subject which our Lord brings before us here deserves far more attention than it generally receives. The amount of evil which unsound religious teaching has brought on the Church in every age is incalculable. The loss of souls which it has occasioned is fearful to contemplate. A teacher who does not know the way to heaven himself, is not likely to lead his hearers to heaven. The man who hears such a teacher runs a fearful risk himself of being lost eternally. "If the blind lead the blind both must fall into the ditch."

If we would escape the danger against which our Lord warns us, we must not neglect to prove the teaching that we hear by the holy

Scriptures. We must not believe things merely because ministers say them. We must not suppose, as a matter of course, that ministers can make no mistakes. We must call to mind our Lord's words on another occasion, "Beware of false prophets." (Matt. 7:15.) We must remember the advice of Paul and John— "Prove all things." "Try the spirits whether they are of God." (1 Thess. 5:21; 1 John 4:1.) With the Bible in our hands, and the promise of guidance from the Holy Spirit to all who seek it, we shall be without excuse if our souls are led astray. The blindness of ministers is no excuse for the darkness of the people. The man who from indolence, or superstition, or affected humility, refuses to distrust the teaching of the minister whom he finds set over him, however unsound it may be, will at length share his minister's portion. If people will trust blind guides, they must not be surprised if they are led to the pit.

We learn, secondly, from these verses, that **those who reprove the sins of others should strive to be of blameless life.** Our Lord teaches us this lesson by a practical saying. He shows the unreasonableness of a man finding fault with "a speck," or trifling thing in a brother's eye, while he himself has "a beam," or some large and formidable object sticking in his own eye.

The lesson must doubtless be received with suitable and scriptural qualifications. If no man is to teach or preach to others, until he himself is faultless, there could be no teaching or preaching in the world. The erring would never be corrected, and the wicked would never be reproved. To put such a sense as this on our Lord's

words, brings them into collision with other plain passages of Scripture.

The main object of our Lord Jesus appears to be to impress on ministers and teachers THE IMPORTANCE OF CONSISTENCY OF LIFE. The passage is a solemn warning not to contradict by our lives, what we have said with our lips. The office of the preacher will never command attention unless he practices what he preaches. Episcopal ordination, university degrees, high-sounding titles, a loud profession of doctrinal purity, will never procure respect for a minister's sermon, if his congregation sees him cleaving to ungodly habits.

But there is much here which we shall all do well to remember. The lesson is one which many besides ministers should seriously consider. All heads of families and masters of households, all parents, all teachers of schools, all tutors, all managers of young people—should often think of the "speck" and the "beam." All such should see in our Lord's words the mighty lesson, that nothing influences others so much as consistency. Let the lesson be treasured up and not forgotten.

We learn, lastly, from these verses, that **there is only one satisfactory test of a man's religious character.** That test is his conduct and conversation.

The words of our Lord on this subject are clear and unmistakable. He draws an illustration from a tree, and lays down the broad

principle, “every tree is known by his own fruit.” But our Lord does not stop here. He proceeds further to show that a man’s conversation is one indication of his state of heart. “Of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.” Both these sayings are deeply important. Both should be stored up among the leading maxims of our practical Christianity.

Let it be a settled principle in our religion that when a man brings forth no fruits of the Spirit, he has not the Holy Spirit within him. Let us resist as a deadly error the common idea, that all baptized people are born again, and that all members of the Church, as a matter of course, have the Holy Spirit. One simple question must be our rule. What fruit does a man bring forth? Does he repent? Does he believe with the heart on Jesus? Does he live a holy life? Does he overcome the world? Habits like these are what Scripture calls “fruit.” When these “fruits” are lacking, it is profane to talk of a man having the Spirit of God within him.

Let it be a settled principle again in our religion, that when a man’s general conversation is ungodly, his heart is graceless and unconverted. Let us not give way to the vulgar notion, that no one can know anything of the state of another’s heart, and that although men are living wickedly, they have got good hearts at the bottom. Such notions are flatly contradictory to our Lord’s teaching. Is the general tone of a man’s communication carnal, worldly, irreligious, godless, or profane? Then let us understand that this is the state of

his heart. When a man's tongue is extensively wrong, it is absurd, no less than unscriptural, to say that his heart is right.

Let us close this passage with solemn self-inquiry, and use it for the trial of our own state before God. What fruits are we bringing forth in our lives? Are they, or are they not, fruits of the Spirit? What kind of evidence do our words supply as to the state of our hearts? Do we talk like men whose hearts are "right in the sight of God?"—There is no evading the doctrine laid down by our Lord in this passage. Conduct is the grand test of character. Words are one great evidence of the condition of the heart.

Notes on 6:39-45

39. "Can a blind man lead a blind man?" This is a warning against following unsound religious teachers.

40. "A student is not above his teacher." This verse is often taken to be a description of all believers in this world and is paralleled with such sayings as "If they persecuted me, they will persecute you"; "If they kept my saying, they would have kept your saying." But I feel unable to interpret the verse in this way. It is good thought but not the sense of this passage. The true meaning, I believe, must be sought in connection with the preceding verse. There our Lord uses a parable to issue a warning about false teachers. He had been comparing them with blind guides and shows that if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit. He then seems to foresee the common objection that it does not follow because our teachers go astray that we, too, will go astray. "Beware of that delusion," he

seems to say; “disciples must not be expected to see more clearly than their teachers. The pupil will become as perfect as his master, but not more so. He will certainly copy his errors and reproduce his faults. If you choose to follow blind guides, do not wonder if you never get beyond them and if you share in their final ruin.”

LUKE 6:46-49

THE WISE AND THE FOOLISH BUILDERS

It has been said, with much truth, that no sermon should conclude without some personal application to the consciences of those who hear it. The passage before us is an example of this rule, and a confirmation of its correctness. It is a solemn and heart-searching conclusion of a most solemn discourse.

Let us mark, in these verses, **what an old and common sin is profession without practice.** It is written that our Lord said, “Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” The Son of God Himself had many followers, who pretended to honor Him by calling Him Lord, but yielded no obedience to His commandments.

The evil which our Lord exposes here, has always existed in the Church of God. It was found six hundred years before our Lord’s time, in the days of Ezekiel— “My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to listen to your words, but they do not put them into practice. With their mouths they express devotion, but

their hearts are greedy for unjust gain." (Ezek. 33:31.) It was found in the primitive Church of Christ, in the days of James. "Be doers of the word," he says, "and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves." (James 1:22.) It is a disease which has never ceased to prevail all over Christendom. It is a soul-ruining plague, which is continually sweeping away crowds of Gospel-hearers down the broad way to destruction. Open sin, and avowed unbelief, no doubt slay their thousands. But profession without practice slays its tens of thousands.

Let us settle it in our minds, that no sin is so foolish and unreasonable as the sin which Jesus here denounces. Common sense alone might tell us that the name and form of Christianity can profit us nothing, so long as we cleave to sin in our hearts, and live unchristian lives. Let it be a fixed principle in our religion, that obedience is the only sound evidence of saving faith, and that the talk of the lips is worse than useless, if it is not accompanied by sanctification of the life. The man in whose heart the Holy Spirit really dwells, will never be content to sit still, and do nothing to show his love to Christ.

Let us mark, secondly, in these verses, **what a striking picture our Lord draws of the religion of the man who not only hears Christ's sayings, but DOES Christ's will.** He compares him to one who "built a house, and dug deep, and laid the foundation on a rock."

Such a man's religion may cost him much. Like the house built on a rock, it may entail on him pains, labor, and self-denial. To lay aside pride and self-righteousness, to crucify the rebellious flesh, to put on the mind of Christ, to take up the cross daily, to count all things but loss for Christ's sake—all this may be hard work. But, like the house built on the rock, such religion will stand. The streams of affliction may beat violently upon it, and the floods of persecution dash fiercely against it, but it will not give way. The Christianity which combines good profession and good practice, is a building that will not fall.

Let us mark, lastly, in these verses, **what a mournful picture our Lord draws of the religion of the man who hears Christ's sayings, but does not obey them.** He compares him to one who, "without a foundation, built a house upon the earth."

Such a man's religion may look well for a season. An ignorant eye may detect no difference between the possessor of such a religion, and a true Christian. Both may worship in the same Church. Both may use the same ordinances. Both may profess the same faith. The outward appearance of the house built on the rock, and the house without any solid foundation, may be much the same. But the day of trial and affliction is the test which the religion of the mere outward professor cannot stand. When storm and tempest beat on the house which has no foundation, the walls which looked well in sunshine and fair weather, are sure to come to the ground. The Christianity which consists of merely hearing religion taught, without doing

anything, is a building which must finally fall. Great indeed will be the ruin! There is no loss like the loss of a soul.

This passage of Scripture is one which ought to call up in our minds peculiarly solemn feelings. The pictures it presents, are pictures of things which are daily going on around us. On every side we shall see thousands building for eternity, on a mere outward profession of Christianity—striving to shelter their souls under false refuges—contenting themselves with a name to live, while they are dead, and with a form of godliness without the power. Few indeed are the builders upon rocks, and great is the ridicule and persecution which they have to endure! Many are the builders upon sand, and mighty are the disappointments and failures which are the only result of their work! Surely, if ever there was a proof that man is fallen and blind in spiritual things, it may be seen in the fact that the majority of every generation of baptized people, persist in building on sand.

What is the foundation on which we ourselves are building? This, after all, is the question that concerns our souls. Are we upon the rock, or are we upon the sand? We love perhaps to hear the Gospel. We approve of all its leading doctrines. We assent to all its statements of truth about Christ and the Holy Spirit, about justification and sanctification, about repentance and faith, about conversion and holiness, about the Bible and prayer. But what are we *doing?* What is the daily practical history of our lives, in public and

private, in the family and in the world? Can it be said of us, that we not only hear Christ's sayings, but that we also do them?

The hour comes, and will soon be here, when questions like these must be asked and answered, whether we like them or not. The day of sorrow and bereavement, of sickness and death, will make it plain whether we are on the rock, or on the sand. Let us remember this betimes, and not trifle with our souls. Let us strive so to believe and so to live, so to hear Christ's voice and so to follow Him, that when the flood arises, and the streams beat over us, our house may stand and not fall.

Notes on 6:46-49

48. "He is like a man building a house." The object of the parable is not to teach the doctrine of justification but the folly of Christian profession unaccompanied by Christian practice and the certain ruin to which such profession must lead if persisted in. That Christ is the true Rock on which we must build our hopes, and that there is no other rock on which we can stand, is abundantly taught elsewhere. But it is not the lesson of the passage before us. The passage is a warning against antinomianism. Let us not forget that.

49. "But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice . . ." The clear words of John Bunyan when he describes Talkative in The Pilgrim's Progress are an admirable commentary on this verse:

The soul of religion is the practical part. "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows

in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27). This Talkative is not aware of. He thinks that hearing and saying will make a good Christian, and thus he deceives his own soul. Hearing is but the sowing of the seed. Talking is not sufficient to prove that fruit is indeed in the heart and life. Let us assure ourselves, that at the day of doom men shall be judged according to their fruits. It will not then be said, Did you believe? but, Were you a doer, or talker only? And accordingly they shall be judged. The end of the world is compared to our harvest; and you know men at harvest regard nothing but fruit.

Luke – Chap. 7

LUKE 7:1-10

THE FAITH OF THE CENTURION

These verses describe the miraculous cure of a sick man. A centurion, or officer in the Roman army, applies to our Lord on behalf of his servant, and obtains what he requests. A greater miracle of healing than this, is nowhere recorded in the Gospels. Without even seeing the sufferer, without touch of hand or look of eye, our Lord restores health to a dying man by a single word. He speaks, and the sick man is cured. He commands, and the disease departs. We read of no prophet or apostle, who wrought miracles in this manner. We see here the finger of God!

We should notice in these verses **the KINDNESS of the centurion.** It is a part of his character which appears in three ways. We see it in his treatment of his servant. He cares for him tenderly when sick, and takes pains to have him restored to health. We see it again in his feeling towards the Jewish people. He did not despise them as other Gentiles commonly did. The elders of the Jews bear this strong testimony, “He loves our nation.” We see it lastly in his liberal support of the Jewish place of worship at Capernaum. He did not love Israel “in word and tongue only, but in deed.” The messengers he sent to our Lord supported their petition by saying, “He has built a synagogue for us.”

Now where did the centurion learn this kindness? How can we account for one who was a heathen by birth, and a soldier by profession, showing such a spirit as this? Habits of mind like these were not likely to be gathered from heathen teaching, or promoted by the society of a Roman camp. Greek and Latin philosophy would not recommend them. Tribunes, consuls, prefects and emperors would not encourage them. There is but one account of the matter. The centurion was what he was “by the grace of God.” The Spirit had opened the eyes of his understanding, and put a new heart within him. His knowledge of divine things no doubt was very dim. His religious views were probably built on a very imperfect acquaintance with the Old Testament Scriptures. But whatever light from above he had, it influenced his life, and one result of it was the kindness which is recorded in this passage.

Let us learn a lesson from the centurion's example. Let us, like him, show kindness to everyone with whom we have to do. Let us strive to have an eye ready to see, and a hand ready to help, and a heart ready to feel, and a will ready to do good to all. Let us be ready to weep with those who weep, and rejoice with those who rejoice. This is one way to recommend our religion, and make it beautiful before men. Kindness is a grace that all can understand. This is one way to be like our blessed Savior. If there is one feature in His character more notable than another, it is His unwearied kindness and love. This is one way to be happy in the world, and see good days. Kindness always brings its own reward. The kind person will seldom be without friends.

We should notice, secondly, in this passage, **the HUMILITY of the centurion.** It appears in his remarkable message to our Lord when He was not far from his house— "I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof—neither thought I myself worthy to come unto you." Such expressions are a striking contract to the language used by the elders of the Jews. "He is worthy," said they, "for whom you should do this." "I am not worthy," says the good centurion, "that you should enter under my roof."

Humility like this is one of the strongest evidences of the indwelling of the Spirit of God. We know nothing of humility by nature, for we are all born proud. To convince us of sin, to show us our own vileness and corruption, to put us in our right place, to make us lowly and self-abased—these are among the principal works which

the Holy Spirit works in the soul of man. Few of our Lord's sayings are so often repeated as the one which closes the parable of the Pharisee and Tax-collector— "Every one that exalts himself shall be abased, and he that humbles himself shall be exalted." (Luke 18:14.) To have great gifts, and do great works for God, is not given to all believers. But all believers ought to strive to be clothed with humility.

We should notice, thirdly, in this passage, **the centurion's FAITH.** We have a beautiful example of it in the request that he made to our Lord— "Just say the word, and my servant shall be healed." He thinks it needless for our Lord to come to the place where his servant lay dying. He regards our Lord as one possessing authority over diseases, as complete as his own authority over his soldiers, or a Roman Emperor's authority over himself. He believes that a word of command from Jesus is sufficient to send sickness away. He asks to see no sign or wonder. He declares his confidence that Jesus is an almighty Master and King, and that diseases, like obedient servants, will at once depart at His orders.

Faith like this was indeed rare when the Lord Jesus was upon earth. "Show us a sign from heaven," was the demand of the sneering Pharisees. To see something sensational was the great desire of the multitudes who crowded after our Lord. No wonder that we read the remarkable words, "Jesus marveled at him," and said unto the people, "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." None ought to have been so believing as the children of those who were led through the wilderness, and brought into the promised land. But the

last was first and the first last. The faith of a Roman soldier proved stronger than that of the Jews.

Let us not forget to walk in the steps of this blessed spirit of faith which the centurion here exhibited. Our eyes do not yet behold the book of life. We see not our Savior pleading for us at God's right hand. But have we the word of Christ's promises? Then let us rest on it and fear nothing. Let us not doubt that every word that Christ has spoken shall be made good. The word of Christ is a sure foundation. He that leans upon it shall never be confounded. Believers shall all be found pardoned, justified, and glorified at the last day. "Jesus says so," and therefore it shall be done.

We should notice, finally, in these verses, **the advantage of being connected with godly families.** We need no clearer proof of this than the case of the centurion's servant. We see him cared for in sickness. We see him restored to health through his master's intercession. We see him brought under Christ's notice through his master's faith. Who can tell but the issue of the whole history, was the conversion and salvation of the man's soul? It was a happy day for that servant, when he first took service in such a household!

Well would it be for the Church, if the benefits of connection with the "household of faith," were more frequently remembered by professing Christians. Often, far too often, a Christian parent will hastily place his son in a position where his soul can get no good, for the sake of mere worldly advantage. Often, far too often, a Christian servant will seek a new place where religion is not valued, for the

sake of a little more wages. These things ought not so to be. In all our moves, our first thought should be the interest of our souls. In all our settlements, our chief desire should be to be connected with godly people. In all our purposes and planning, for ourselves or our children, one question should ever be uppermost in our minds—"What shall it profit to gain the whole world, and lose our own souls?" Good situations, as they are called, are often godless situations, and ruin to all eternity those who take them.

Notes on 7:1-10

2. A centurion's servant. The centurion here must have been a Gentile. We learn this from our Lord's words, "I have not found such great faith even in Israel" (verse 9).

3. The centurion . . . sent some elders of the Jews. Bishop Hall notes, "He is unworthy to be well served that will not sometimes wait on his followers."

7. "Say the word." The Portuguese commentator Barradius has some striking remarks on these words spoken by the centurion. He says, "This is a peculiar attribute of God's, to be able to do all things by a word and a command. 'He spoke and they were made. . . . He commanded and they were created' (Psalm 148:5). Read the book of Genesis. You will see the world created by the Word of God: 'God said, Let there be light, and there was light.' 'God said, Let there be a firmament,' and a firmament was made." He then shows from a quotation from Augustine how all the created beings in existence, whether kings or angels or seraphim, cannot create so much as an ant. But when God says, "Let the world be made," at once it is made

through a word. And he concludes, “Well therefore does the centurion say, ‘Say in a word only, and my servant shall be healed.’”

9. Jesus . . . was amazed at him. There are two occasions where it is recorded that our Lord Jesus Christ was amazed, once here and once in Mark 6:6. It is remarkable that in one case he is described as marveling at faith and in the other at unbelief. Bishop Hall, like Burkitt after him, observes, “What can be more wonderful than to see Christ wonder? Let it teach us to place our admiration where Christ placed his. Let us be more affected with the least measure of grace in a good man than with all the gaieties and glories of a great man.” Our Lord did not wonder at the gorgeous and beautiful buildings of the Jewish temple. But he did marvel at faith.

LUKE 7:11-17

JESUS RAISES A WIDOW’S SON

The wondrous event described in these verses, is only recorded in Luke’s Gospel. It is one of the three great instances of our Lord restoring a dead person to life, and, like the raising of Lazarus and the ruler’s daughter, is rightly regarded as one of the greatest miracles which He wrought on earth. In all three cases, we see an exercise of divine power. In each we see an indisputable proof that the Prince of Peace is stronger than the king of terrors, and that though death, the last enemy, is mighty, he is not as mighty as the sinner’s Friend.

We learn from these verses, **what sorrow SIN has brought into the world.** We are told of a funeral at Nain. All funerals are mournful things, but it is difficult to imagine a funeral more mournful than the one here described. It was the funeral of a young man, and that young man the only son of his mother, and that mother a widow. There is not an item in the whole story, which is not full of misery. And all this misery, be it remembered, was brought into the world by sin. God did not create it at the beginning, when He made all things "very good." Sin is the cause of it all. "Sin entered into the world" when Adam fell, "and death by sin." (Rom. 5:12.)

Let us never forget this great truth. The world around us is full of sorrow. Sickness, and pain, and infirmity, and poverty, and labor, and trouble, abound on every side. From one end of the world to the other, the history of families is full of lamentation, and weeping, and mourning, and woe. And whence does it all come? Sin is the fountain and root to which all must be traced. There would neither have been tears, nor tares, nor illness, nor deaths, nor funerals in the earth, if there had been no sin. We must bear this state of things patiently. We cannot alter it. We may thank God that there is a remedy in the Gospel, and that this present life is not all. But in the meantime, let us lay the blame at the right door. Let us lay the blame on sin.

How much we ought to hate sin! Instead of loving it, cleaving to it, dallying with it, excusing it, playing with it, we ought to hate it with a deadly hatred. Sin is the great murderer, and thief, and pestilence, and nuisance of this world. Let us make no peace with it.

Let us wage a ceaseless warfare against it. It is “the abominable thing which God hates.” Happy is he who is of one mind with God, and can say, I “abhor that which is evil.” (Rom. 12:9.)

We learn, secondly, from these verses, **how deep is the COMPASSION of our Lord Jesus Christ’s heart.** We see this beautifully brought out in His behavior at this funeral in Nain. He meets the mournful procession, accompanying the young man to his grave, and is moved with compassion at the sight. He waits not to be applied to for help. His help appears to have been neither asked for nor expected. He saw the weeping mother, and knew well what her feelings must have been, for He had been born of a woman Himself. At once He addressed her with words alike startling and touching He “said unto her, Weep not.” A few more seconds, and the meaning of His words became plain. The widow’s son was restored to her alive. Her darkness was turned into light, and her sorrow into joy.

Our Lord Jesus Christ never changes. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. His heart is still as compassionate as when He was upon earth. His sympathy with sufferers is still as strong. Let us bear this in mind, and take comfort in it. There is no friend or comforter who can be compared to Christ. In all our days of darkness, which must needs be many, let us first turn for consolation to Jesus the Son of God. He will never fail us, never disappoint us, never refuse to take interest in our sorrows. He lives, who made the widow’s heart sing for joy in the gate of Nain. He lives, to receive all laboring and heavy-laden ones, if they will only come to Him by

faith. He lives, to heal the broken-hearted, and be a Friend that sticks closer than a brother. And He lives to do greater things than these one day. He lives to come again to His people, that they may weep no more at all, and that all tears may be wiped from their eyes.

We learn, lastly, from these verses, **the almighty POWER of our Lord Jesus Christ.** We can ask no proof of this more striking than the miracle which we are now considering. He gives back life to a dead man with a few words. He speaks to a cold corpse, and at once it becomes a living person. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, the heart, the lungs, the brain, the senses, again resume their work and discharge their duty. "Young man," He cried, "I say unto you arise." That voice was a voice mighty in operation. At once "he that was dead sat up and began to speak."

Let us see in this mighty miracle **a pledge of that solemn event, the general resurrection.** That same Jesus who here raised one dead person, shall raise all mankind at the last day. "The hour comes in the which all that are in the grave shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; those who have done good unto the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation." (John 5:28, 29.) When the trumpet sounds and Christ commands, there can be no refusal or escape. All must appear before His bar in their bodies. All shall be judged according to their works.

Let us see, furthermore, in this mighty miracle, **a lively emblem of Christ's power to quicken the dead in sins.** In Him is life.

He quickens whom He will. (John 5:21.) He can raise to a new life souls that now seem dead in worldliness and sin. He can say to hearts that now appear corrupt and lifeless, “Arise to repentance, and live in the service of God.” Let us never despair of any soul. Let us pray for our children, and faint not. Our young men and our young women may long seem traveling on the way to ruin. But let us pray on. Who can tell but He that met the funeral at the gates of Nain may yet meet our unconverted children, and say with almighty power, “Young man, arise!” With Christ nothing is impossible.

Let us leave the passage with a solemn recollection of those things which are yet to happen at the last day. We read that “there came a fear on all,” at Nain, when the young man was raised. What then shall be the feelings of mankind when all the dead are raised at once? The unconverted man may well fear that day. He is not prepared to meet God. But the true Christian has nothing to fear. He may lay himself down and sleep peacefully in his grave. In Christ He is complete and safe, and when he rises again he shall see God’s face in peace.

Notes on 7:11-17

13. When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her. Poole’s remarks on these words are worth reading: “None moved our Lord on behalf of the widow, neither do we read that she herself spoke to him. But our Savior’s compassion was moved at the sight of her sorrows, and consideration of her loss. It is observable that our Savior performed his healing miracles: firstly, sometimes in response

to a request from the person wishing to be healed; secondly, sometimes in response to a request from a friend of the sick person; and, third, sometimes from his own initiative." The leper was healed (Luke 5:12) in response to his own personal request, the centurion's servant (Luke 7:1ff.) in response to the pleading of his master; and the widow's son was raised without anyone asking on his behalf.

15. Began to talk. This fact is mentioned in order to show beyond doubt that the young man was really restored to life. Where there is speech, there must be life.

Let it be observed that we have no record about anything that was ever said or thought by those who were miraculously raised from the dead. Their experience and knowledge are wisely withheld from us.

17. This news about Jesus spread. Poole remarks, "The people here saw his divine power manifestly exerted; for the keys of the clouds, the womb, and the grave, are those keys which their teachers had taught them were kept in God's hand alone."

LUKE 7:18-23

JESUS AND JOHN THE BAPTIST

The message which John the Baptist sent to our Lord, in these verses, is peculiarly instructing, when we consider the circumstances under which it was sent. John the Baptist was now a prisoner in the hands of Herod. "He heard in the prison the works of Christ." (Matt. 11:2.) His life was drawing to a close. His opportunities of active usefulness were ended. A long imprisonment, or a violent death, were the only prospects before him. Yet even in these dark days, we

see this holy man maintaining his old ground, as a witness to Christ. He is the same man that he was when he cried, “Behold the Lamb of God.” To testify of Christ, was his continual work as a preacher at liberty. TO SEND MEN TO CHRIST, was one of his last works as a prisoner in chains.

We should mark, in these verses, **the wise fore-thought which John exhibited about his disciples, before he left the world.** He sent some of them to Jesus, with a message of inquiry—“Are you he that should come, or do we look for another?” He doubtless calculated that they would receive such an answer as would make an indelible impression on their minds. And he was right. They got an answer in deeds, as well as words, an answer which probably produced a deeper effect than any arguments which they could have heard from their master’s lips.

We can easily imagine that John the Baptist must have felt much anxiety about the future course of his disciples. He knew their ignorance and weakness in the faith. He knew how natural it was for them to regard the disciples of Jesus with feelings of jealousy and envy. He knew how likely it was that petty party-spirit would creep in among them, and make them keep aloof from Christ when their own master was dead and gone. Against this unhappy state of things he makes provision, as far as possible, while he is yet alive. He sends some of them to Jesus, that they may see for themselves what kind of teacher He is, and not reject Him unseen and unheard. He takes care to supply them with the strongest evidence that our Lord was indeed

the Messiah. Like his divine Master, having loved his disciples, he loved them to the end. And now, perceiving that he must soon leave them, he strives to leave them in the best of hands. He does his best to make them acquainted with Christ.

What an instructive lesson we have here for ministers, and parents, and heads of families—for all, in short, who have anything to do with the souls of others! We should endeavor, like John the Baptist, to provide for the future spiritual welfare of those we leave behind when we die. We should often remind those who we cannot always be with them. We should often urge them to beware of the broad way, when we are taken from them, and they are left alone in the world. We should spare no pains to make all, who in any way look up to us, acquainted with Christ. Happy are those ministers and parents, whose consciences can testify on their death-beds, that they have told their hearers and children to go to Jesus and follow Him!

We should mark, secondly, in these verses, **the peculiar answer which the disciples of John received from our Lord.** We are told that "in the same hour He cured many of their infirmities and plagues." And then, "He said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things you have seen and heard." He makes no formal declaration that he is the Messiah that was to come. He simply supplies the messengers with facts to repeat to their master, and sends them away. He knew well how John the Baptist would employ these facts. He would say to his disciples, "Behold in him who worked these miracles, the prophet greater than Moses. This is he

whom you must hear and follow, when I am dead. This is indeed the Christ."

Our Lord's reply to John's disciples, contains a great practical lesson, which we shall do well to remember. It teaches us that the right way to test the value of Churches and ministers, is to examine the works they do for God, and the fruits they bring forth. Would we know whether a Church is true and trust-worthy? Would we know whether a minister is really called of God, and sound in the faith? We must apply the old rule of Scripture, "You shall know them by their fruits." As Christ would be known by His works and doctrine, so must true Churches of Christ, and true ministers of Christ. When the dead in sin are not quickened, and the blind are not restored to sight, and the poor have no glad tidings proclaimed to them, we may generally suspect that Christ's presence is lacking. Where He is, He will be seen and heard. Where He is, there will not only be profession, forms, ceremonies, and a show of religion. There will be actual, visible work in hearts and lives.

We should mark, lastly, in these verses, **the solemn warning which our Lord gave to John's disciples.** He knew the danger in which they were. He knew that they were disposed to question His claim to be the Messiah, because of His lowly appearance. They saw no signs of a king about Him, no riches, no royal apparel, no guards, no courtiers, and no crown. They only saw a man, to all appearance poor as any one of themselves, attended by a few fishermen and publicans. Their pride rebelled at the idea of such a one as this being

the Christ! It seemed incredible! There must be some mistake! Such thoughts as these, in all probability, passed through their minds. Our Lord read their hearts, and dismissed them with a searching caution. “Blessed,” He said, “is he that is not offended in me.”

The warning is one that is just as needful now as it was when it was delivered. So long as the world stands, Christ and His Gospel will be a stumbling-block to many. To hear that we are all lost and guilty sinners, and cannot save ourselves—to hear that we must give up our own righteousness, and trust in One who was crucified between two thieves—to hear that we must be content to enter heaven side by side with publicans and harlots, and to owe all our salvation to free grace, this is always offensive to the natural man. Our proud hearts do not like it. We are offended.

Let the caution of these verses sink down deeply into our memories. Let us take heed that we are not offended. Let us beware of being stumbled, either by the humbling doctrines of the Gospel, or the holy practice which it enjoins on those who receive it. Secret pride is one of the worst enemies of man. It will prove at last to have been the ruin of thousands of souls. Thousands will be found to have had the offer of salvation, but to have rejected it. They did not like the terms. They would not stoop to “enter in at the strait gate.” They would not humbly come as sinners to the throne of grace. In a word, they were offended. And then will appear the deep meaning in our Lord’s words, “Blessed is he who shall not be offended in me.”

Notes on 7:18-23

21. Diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits. Let it be noted that evil spirits are mentioned here as an affliction distinct from any bodily ailments. Bishop Pearce remarks, "We may conclude that evil spirits are thought of by St. Luke (who speaks of illnesses with more accuracy than the other evangelists), as things different from any disorders of the body included in the two former words."

22. "The good news is preached to the poor." That this was a sign of the Messiah's appearing is seen in Isaiah's words, "Once more the humble will rejoice in the LORD; the needy will rejoice in the Holy One of Israel" (Isaiah 29:19). Contempt for the poor as ignorant and despicable appears to have been very common in the times of the Gospel (see John 7:49; 9:34; James 2:24). Concern and tender interest about the souls of the poor as souls which would live as long as the souls of rich men was a distinguishing feature of our Lord's ministry and of that of his apostles. It is always an evil sign of the state of the church when the spiritual needs of poor people are neglected and the rich man's way to heaven is made smoother than the way of the poor.

LUKE 7:24-30

JESUS' TESTIMONY TO JOHN THE BAPTIST

The first point that demands our notice in this passage, is **the tender care which Jesus takes of the characters of His faithful servants.** He defends the reputation of John the Baptist, as soon as his messengers were departed. He saw that the people

around him were apt to think lightly of John, partly because he was in prison, partly because of the inquiry which his disciples had just brought. He pleads the cause of His absent friend in warm and strong language. He bids His hearers dismiss from their minds their unworthy doubts and suspicions about this holy man. He tells them that John was no wavering and unstable character, a mere reed shaken by the wind. He tells them that John was no mere courtier and hanger-on about king's palaces, though circumstances at the end of his ministry had brought him into connection with king Herod. He declares to them that John was "much more than a prophet," for he was a prophet who had been the subject of prophecy himself. And he winds up his testimony by the remarkable saying, that "among those that are born of woman there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist."

There is something deeply touching in these sayings of our Lord on behalf of his absent servant. The position which John now occupied as Herod's prisoner was widely different from that which he occupied at the beginning of his ministry. At one time he was the best-known and most popular preacher of his day. There was a time when "there went out to him Jerusalem and all Judea—and were baptized in Jordan." (Matt. 3:5.) Now he was an obscure prisoner in Herod's hands, deserted, friendless, and with nothing before him but death. But the lack of man's favor is no proof that God is displeased. John the Baptist had one Friend who never failed him and never forsook him—a Friend whose kindness did not ebb and flow like

John's popularity, but was always the same. That Friend was our Lord Jesus Christ.

There is comfort here for all believers who are suspected, slandered, and falsely accused. Few are the children of God who do not suffer in this way, at some time or other. The accuser of the brethren knows well that character is one of the points in which he can most easily wound a Christian. He knows well that slanders are easily called into existence, greedily received and propagated, and seldom entirely silenced. Lies and false reports are the chosen weapons by which he labors to injure the Christian's usefulness, and destroy his peace. But let all who are assaulted in their characters rest in the thought that they have an Advocate in heaven who knows their sorrows. That same Jesus who maintained the character of His imprisoned servant before a Jewish crowd, will never desert any of His people. The world may frown on them. Their names may be cast out as evil by man. But Jesus never changes, and will one day plead their cause before the whole world.

The second point which demands our attention in these verses is, **the vast superiority of the privileges enjoyed by believers under the New Testament, compared to those of believers under the Old.** This is a lesson which appears to be taught by one expression used by our Lord respecting John the Baptist. After commending his graces and gifts, He adds these remarkable words, "He that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than John."

Our Lord's meaning in using this expression appears to be simply this. He declares that the religious light of the least disciple who lived after His crucifixion and resurrection, would be far greater than that of John Baptist, who died before those mighty events took place. The weakest believing hearer of Paul would understand things, by the light of Christ's death on the cross, which John the Baptist could never have explained. Great as that holy man was in faith and courage, the humblest Christian would, in one sense, be greater than he. Greater in grace and works he certainly could not be. But beyond doubt he would be greater in privileges and knowledge.

Such an expression as this should teach all Christians to be deeply thankful for Christianity. We have probably very little idea of the wide difference between the religious knowledge of the best-instructed Old Testament believer and the knowledge of one familiar with the New Testament. We little know how many blessed truths of the Gospel were at one time seen through a glass darkly, which now appear to us plain as noon-day. Our very familiarity with the Gospel makes us blind to the extent of our privileges. We can hardly realize at this time how many glorious verities of our faith were brought out in their full proportions by Christ's death on the cross, and were never unveiled and understood until His blood was shed.

The hopes of John the Baptist and Paul were undoubtedly one and the same. Both were led by one Spirit. Both knew their sinfulness. Both trusted in the Lamb of God. But we cannot suppose that John could have given as full an account of the way of salvation

as Paul. Both looked at the same object of faith. But one saw it afar off, and could only describe it generally. The other saw it close at hand, and could describe the reason of his hope particularly. Let us learn to be more thankful. *The child who knows the story of the cross, possesses a key to religious knowledge which patriarchs and prophets never enjoyed.*

The last point which demands our attention in these verses is, **the solemn declaration which it makes about man's power to injure his own soul.** We read that "The Pharisees and Scribes rejected the counsel of God against themselves." The meaning of these words appears to be simply this, that they rejected God's offer of salvation. They refused to avail themselves of the door of repentance which was offered to them by John the Baptist's preaching. In short they fulfilled to the very letter the words of Solomon— "You have set at nothing all my counsel and would have none of my reproof." (Prov. 1:25.)

That every man possesses a power to ruin himself forever in hell is a great foundation truth of Scripture, and a truth which ought to be continually before our minds. Impotent and weak as we all are for everything which is good, we are all naturally potent for that which is evil. By continued impenitence and unbelief, by persevering in the love and practice of sin, by pride, self-will, laziness, and determined love of the world, we may bring upon ourselves everlasting destruction. And if this takes place, we shall find that we have no one to blame but ourselves. God has "no pleasure in the death of him that

dies." (Ezek. 18:32.) Christ is "willing to gather" men to His bosom, if they will only be gathered. (Matt. 23:37.) The fault will lie at man's own door. Those who are lost will find that they have "lost than own souls." (Mark 8:36.)

What are we doing ourselves? This is the chief question that the passage should suggest to our minds. Are we likely to be lost or saved? Are we in the way towards heaven or hell? Have we received into our hearts that Gospel which we hear? Do we really live by that Bible which we profess to believe? Or are we daily traveling towards the pit, and ruining our own souls? It is a painful thought that the Pharisees are not the only people who "reject the counsel of God." There are thousands of people called Christians who are continually doing the very same thing.

LUKE 7:31-35

JESUS EXPOSES THE UNREASONABLENESS OF UNBELIEF

We learn, in the first place, from these verses, that **the hearts of unconverted men are often desperately perverse as well as wicked.**

Our Lord brings out this lesson in a remarkable comparison, describing the generation of men among whom He lived while He was on earth. He compares them to children. He says, that children at play were not more wayward, perverse, and hard to please, than the Jews of His day. Nothing would satisfy them. They were always

finding fault. Whatever ministry God employed among them, they took exception to it. Whatever messenger God sent among them, they were not pleased. First came John the Baptist, living a retired, ascetic, self-denying life. At once the Jews said, “he has a devil.” After him the Son of Man came, eating and drinking, and adopting habits of social life like the ordinary run of men. At once the Jews accused Him of being “a gluttonous man, and a wine bibber.” In short, it became evident that the Jews were determined to receive no message from God at all. Their pretended objections were only a cloak to cover over their hatred of God’s truth. What they really disliked was, not so much God’s ministers, as God Himself.

Perhaps we read this account with wonder and surprise. We think that never were men so wickedly unreasonable as these Jews were. But are we sure that their conduct is not continually repeated among Christians? Do we know that the same thing is continually going on around us at the present day? Strange as it may seem at first sight, the generation which will neither “dance” when their companions “pipe,” nor “lament” when they “mourn,” is only too numerous in the Church of Christ. Is it not a fact that many who strive to serve Christ faithfully, and walk closely with God, find their neighbors and relations always dissatisfied with their conduct? No matter how holy and consistent their lives may be, they are always thought wrong. If they withdraw entirely from the world, and live, like John the Baptist, a retired and ascetic life, the cry is raised that they are exclusive, narrow-minded, sour-spirited, and righteous overmuch. If, on the other hand, they go much into society, and endeavor as far as

they can to take interest in their neighbor's pursuits, the remark is soon made that they are no better than other people, and have no more real religion than those who make no profession at all. Treatment like this is only too common. Few are the decided Christians who do not know it by bitter experience. The servants of God in every age, whatever they do, are blamed.

The plain truth is, that the natural heart of man hates God. The carnal mind is enmity against God It dislikes His law, His Gospel, and His people. It will always find some excuse for not believing and obeying. The doctrine of repentance is too strict for it! The doctrine of faith and grace is too easy for it! John the Baptist goes too much out of the world! Jesus Christ goes too much into the world! And so the heart of man excuses itself for sitting still in its sins. All this must not surprise us. We must make up our minds to find unconverted people as perverse, unreasonable, and hard to please as the Jews of our Lord's time.

We must give up the vain idea of trying to please everybody. The thing is impossible, and the attempt is mere waste of time. We must be content to walk in Christ's steps, and let the world say what it likes. Do what we will we shall never satisfy it, or silence its ill-natured remarks. It first found fault with John the Baptist, and then with his blessed Master. And it will go on caviling and finding fault with that Master's disciples, so long as one of them is left upon earth.

We learn, secondly, from these verses, that **the wisdom of God's ways is always recognized and acknowledged by**

those who are wise-hearted.

This is a lesson which is taught in a sentence of somewhat obscure character— “Wisdom is justified by all her children.” But it seems difficult to extract any other meaning from the words, by fair and consistent interpretation. The idea which our Lord desired to impress upon us appears to be, that though the vast majority of the Jews were hardened and unreasonable, there were some who were not—and that though multitudes saw no wisdom in the ministry of John the Baptist and Himself, there were a chosen few who did. Those few were the “children of wisdom.” Those few, by their lives and obedience, declared their full conviction that God’s ways of dealing with the Jews were wise and right, and that John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus were both worthy of all honor. In short, they “justified” God’s wisdom; and so proved themselves truly wise.

This saying of our Lord about the generation among whom He lived, describes a state of things which will always be found in the Church of Christ. In spite of the cavils, sneers, objections, and unkind remarks with which the Gospel is received by the majority of mankind, there will always be some in every country who will assent to it, and obey it with delight. There will never be lacking a “little flock” which hears the voice of the Shepherd gladly, and counts all His ways right.

The children of this world may mock at the Gospel, and pour contempt on the lives of believers. They may count their practice madness, and see no wisdom nor beauty in their ways. But God will

take care that He has a people in every age. There will be always some who will assert the perfect excellence of the doctrines and requirements of the Gospel, and will "justify the wisdom" of Him who sent it. And these, however much the world may despise them, are they whom Jesus calls wise. They are "wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus." (2 Tim. 3:15.)

Let us ask ourselves, as we leave this passage, whether we deserve to be called children of wisdom? Have we been taught by the Spirit to know the Lord Jesus Christ? Have the eyes of our understanding been opened? Have we the wisdom that comes from above? If we are truly wise, let us not be ashamed to confess our Master before men. Let us declare boldly that we approve the whole of His Gospel, all its doctrines and all its requirements. We may find few with us and many against us. The world may laugh at us, and count our wisdom no better than folly. But such laughter is but for a moment. The hour comes when the few who have confessed Christ, and justified His ways before men, shall be confessed and "justified" by Him before His Father and the angels.

Notes on 7:31-35

35. "Wisdom is proved right by all her children." I believe the right interpretation is to think of the children as the truly wise, the elect, the believers, the people who are really taught by God. By them, as one commentator has stated, "The wisdom of God's ways is always justified, whatever others may like to think about it. They assent to them, approve of them, and regard them as being entirely right."

LUKE 7:36-50

JESUS ANOINTED BY A SINFUL WOMAN

The deeply interesting narrative contained in these verses, is only found in the Gospel of Luke. In order to see the full beauty of the story, we should read, in connection with it, the eleventh chapter of Matthew. We shall then discover the striking fact, that the woman whose conduct is here recorded, most likely owed her conversion to the well-known words, “Come unto me all you that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.” That wondrous invitation, in all human probability, was the saving of her soul, and gave her that sense of peace for which we see her so grateful. A full offer of free pardon is generally God’s chosen instrument for bringing the chief of sinners to repentance.

We see in this passage that **men may show some outward respect to Christ, and yet remain unconverted.** The Pharisee before us is a case in point. He showed our Lord Jesus Christ more respect than many did. He even “desired Him that He would eat with him.” Yet all this time he was profoundly ignorant of the nature of Christ’s Gospel. His proud heart secretly revolted at the sight of a poor contrite sinner being allowed to wash our Lord’s feet. And even the hospitality he showed appears to have been cold and niggardly. Our Lord Himself says, “You gave me no water for my feet; you gave me no kiss; my head with oil you did not anoint.” In short, in all that the Pharisee did, there was one great defect. There was outward civility, but there was no heart-love.

We shall do well to remember the case of this Pharisee. It is quite possible to have a decent form of religion, and yet to know nothing of the Gospel of Christ—to treat Christianity with respect, and yet to be utterly blind about its cardinal doctrines—to behave with great correctness and propriety at Church, and yet to hate justification by faith, and salvation by grace, with a deadly hatred. Do we really feel affection toward the Lord Jesus? Can we say, "Lord, you know all things, you know that I love you?" Have we cordially embraced His whole Gospel? Are we willing to enter heaven side by side with the chief of sinners, and to owe all our hopes to free grace? These are questions which we ought to consider. If we cannot answer them satisfactorily, we are in no respect better than Simon the Pharisee; and our Lord might say to us, "I have something to tell you."

We see, in the next place, in this passage, that **grateful love is the secret of doing much for Christ.** The penitent woman, in the story before us, showed far more honor to our Lord than the Pharisee had done. She "stood at His feet behind Him weeping." She "washed His feet with tears." She "wiped them with the hair of her head." She "kissed His feet, and anointed them with costly ointment." No stronger proofs of reverence and respect could she have given, and the secret of her giving such proofs, was love. She loved our Lord, and she thought nothing too much to do for Him. She felt deeply grateful to our Lord, and she thought no mark of gratitude too costly to bestow on Him.

More “doing” for Christ is the universal demand of all the Churches. It is the one point on which all are agreed. All desire to see among Christians, more good works, more self-denial, more practical obedience to Christ’s commands. But what will produce these things? Nothing, nothing but love. There never will be more done for Christ until there is more hearty love to Christ Himself. The fear of punishment, the desire of reward, the sense of duty, are all useful arguments, in their way, to persuade men to holiness. But they are all weak and powerless, until a man loves Christ. Once let that mighty principle get hold of a man, and you will see his whole life changed.

Let us never forget this. However much the world may sneer at “feelings” in religion, and however false or unhealthy religious feelings may sometimes be, the great truth still remains behind, that *feeling* is the secret of doing. The heart must be engaged for Christ, or the hands will soon hang down. The affections must be enlisted into His service, or our obedience will soon stand still. It will always be the *loving* workman who will do most in the Lord’s vineyard.

We see, lastly, in this passage, that **a sense of having our sins forgiven is the mainspring and life-blood of love to Christ.** This, beyond doubt, was the lesson which our Lord wished Simon the Pharisee to learn, when He told him the story of the two debtors. “One owed his creditor five hundred pence, and the other fifty.” Both had “nothing to pay,” and both were forgiven freely. And then came the searching question— “Which of them will love him most?” Here was the true explanation, our Lord told Simon, of the deep love

which the penitent woman before Him had displayed. Her many tears, her deep affection, her public reverence, her action in anointing His feet, were all traceable to one cause. She had been much forgiven, and so she loved much.

Her love was the effect of her forgiveness—not the cause—the consequence of her forgiveness, not the condition, the result of her forgiveness, not the reason—the fruit of her forgiveness, not the root. Would the Pharisee know why this woman showed so much love? It was because she felt much forgiven. Would he know why he himself had shown his guest so little love? It was because he felt under no obligation—had no consciousness of having obtained forgiveness—had no sense of debt to Christ.

Forever let the mighty principle laid down by our Lord in this passage, abide in our memories, and sink down into our hearts. It is one of the great corner-stones of the whole Gospel. It is one of the master-keys to unlock the secrets of the kingdom of God. The only way to make men holy, is to teach and preach free and full forgiveness through Jesus Christ. The secret of being holy ourselves, is to know and feel that Christ has pardoned our sins. Peace with God is the only root that will bear the fruit of holiness.

Forgiveness must go before sanctification. We shall do nothing until we are reconciled to God. This is the first step in religion. We must work from life, and not for life. Our best works before we are justified are little better than SPLENDID SINS. We must live by faith in the Son of God, and then, and not until then, we shall walk in His

ways. The heart which has experienced the pardoning love of Christ, is the heart which loves Christ, and strives to glorify Him.

Let us leave the passage with a deep sense of our Lord Jesus Christ's amazing mercy and compassion to the chief of sinners. Let us see in his kindness to the woman, of whom we have been reading, an encouragement to any one, however bad he may be, to come to Him for pardon and forgiveness. That word of His shall never be broken, "Him that comes unto me I will in no wise cast out." Never, never need any one despair of salvation, if he will only come to Christ.

Let us ask ourselves, in conclusion, What we are doing for Christ's glory? What kind of lives are we living? What proof are we making of our love to Him which loved us, and died for our sins? These are serious questions. If we cannot answer them satisfactorily, we may well doubt whether we are forgiven. The hope of forgiveness which is not accompanied by love in the life is no hope at all. The man whose sins are really cleansed away will always show by his ways that he loves the Savior who cleansed them.

Notes on 7:36-50

36. One of the Pharisees. We know nothing about this Pharisee except his name, Simon.

38. Stood behind him at his feet. To understand this we must remember that in the country where our Lord ministered, people did not sit down to meals as we do but reclined or lay at full length on couches, with their feet stretched out behind them. In this way it

would be easy for this woman to do what she did our Lord's feet. Poured perfume on them. Ointments and oils were used in eastern countries to an extent we can hardly understand. The excessive heat of the climate made it almost a necessity, to preserve the skin from cracking (see Psalm 104:15).

48. "Your sins are forgiven." We are not, of course, to suppose that these words mean that the woman's sins were now forgiven for the first time. Such an interpretation would be totally contradictory to the story of the two debtors. The woman was actually forgiven before she came to Christ during that meal. But she now received a public and authoritative declaration of it before many witnesses, as a reward for her open expression of love and gratitude. Before, she had hope through grace. Now, she received the assurance of hope.

50. "Your faith has saved you." Let it be observed that it is not said, "Your love has saved you." Here, as in every other part of the New Testament, faith is put forward as the key to salvation. By faith the woman received our Lord's invitation to "Come to me . . . and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). By faith she embraced that invitation and, embracing it, threw off her sins under which she had been so long laboring and heavy-laden. By faith she boldly came to the Pharisee's house and confessed by her behavior that she had found rest in Christ. Her faith worked through love and bore precious fruit. However, it was not love but faith that saved her soul.

Luke – Chap. 8

LUKE 8:1-3

Let us mark, in these verses, **our Lord Jesus Christ's unwearied diligence in doing good.** We read that "He went throughout every city and village, preaching and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God." We know the reception that He met with in many places. We know that while some believed, many believed not. But man's unbelief did not move our Lord, or hinder His working. He was always "about His Father's business." Short as His earthly ministry was in point of duration, it was long when we consider the work that it comprised.

Let the diligence of Christ be an example to all Christians. Let us follow in His steps, however far we may come short of His perfection. Like Him, let us labor to do good in our day and generation, and to leave the world a better world than we found it. It is not for nothing that the Scripture says expressly— "He that abides in him ought himself also so to walk even as he walked." (1 John 2:6.)

Time is undoubtedly short. But much is to be done with time, if it is well economized and properly arranged. Few have an idea how much can be done in twelve hours, if men will stick to their business and avoid idleness and frivolity. Then let us, like our Lord, be diligent, and "redeem the time."

Time is undoubtedly short. But it is the only season in which Christians can do any active work of mercy. In the world to come there will be no ignorant to instruct, no mourners to comfort, no spiritual darkness to enlighten, no distress to relieve, no sorrow to make less. Whatever work we do of this kind must be done on this side of the grave. Let us awake to a sense of our individual responsibility. Souls are perishing, and time is flying! Let us resolve, by God's grace, to do something for God's glory before we die. Once more let us remember our Lord's example, and, like Him, be diligent and "redeem the time."

Let us mark, secondly, in these verses, **the power of the grace of God, and the constraining influence of the love of Christ.** We read that among those who followed our Lord in his journeyings, were "certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities."

We can well imagine that the difficulties these holy women had to face in becoming Christ's disciples were neither few nor small. They had their full share of the contempt and scorn which was poured on all followers of Jesus by the Scribes and Pharisees. They had, besides, many a trial from the hard speeches and hard usage which any Jewish woman who thought for herself about religion would probably have to undergo. But none of these things moved them. Grateful for mercies received at our Lord's hands, they were willing to endure much for His sake. Strengthened inwardly, by the renewing power of the Holy Spirit, they were enabled to cleave to

Jesus and not give way. And nobly they did cleave to Him to the very end!

It was *not* a woman who sold the Lord for thirty pieces of silver. They were *not* women who forsook the Lord in the garden and fled. It was *not* a woman who denied Him three times in the high priest's house. But they *were* women who wailed and lamented when Jesus was led forth to be crucified. They *were* women who stood to the last by the cross. And they *were* women who were first to visit the grave "where the Lord lay." Great indeed is the power of the grace of God!

Let the recollection of these women encourage all the *daughters of Adam* who read of them, to take up the cross and to follow Christ. Let no sense of weakness, or fear of falling away, keep them back from a decided profession of religion. The mother of a large family, with limited means, may tell us that she has no time for religion. The wife of an ungodly husband may tell us that she dares not take up religion. The young daughter of worldly parents may tell us that it is impossible for her to have any religion. The maid-servant in the midst of unconverted companions, may tell us that in her place a person cannot follow religion.

But they are all wrong, quite wrong. With Christ nothing is impossible. Let them think again, and change their minds. Let them begin boldly in the strength of Christ, and trust Him for the consequences. The Lord Jesus never changes. He who enabled "many women" to serve Him faithfully while He was on earth, can

enable women to serve Him, glorify Him, and be His disciples at the present day.

Let us mark lastly, in these verses, **the peculiar privilege which our Lord grants to His faithful followers.** We read that those who accompanied Him in His journeyings, "ministered to him of their substance." Of course He needed not their help. "All the beasts of the forest were his, and the cattle upon a thousand hills." (Psalm 50:10.) That mighty Savior who could multiply a few loaves and fish into food for thousands, could have called forth food from the earth for His own sustenance, if He had thought fit. But He did not do so, for two reasons.

One reason was, that He would show us that He was man like ourselves in all things, sin only excepted, and that He lived the life of faith in His Father's providence. The other reason was, that by allowing His followers to minister to Him, He might prove their love, and test their regard for Himself. *True love will count it a pleasure to give anything to the object loved. False love will often talk and profess much, but do and give nothing at all.*

This matter of "ministering to Christ" opens up a most important train of thought, and one which we shall do well to consider. The Lord Jesus Christ is continually providing His Church at the present day. No doubt it would be easy for Him to convert the Chinese or Hindus in a moment, and to call grace into being with a word, as He created light on the first day of this world's existence. But He does not do so. He is pleased to work by means. He condescends to use

the agency of missionaries, and the foolishness of man's preaching, in order to spread His Gospel. And by so doing, He is continually proving the faith and zeal of the churches. He lets Christians be fellow workers with Him, that He may prove who has a will to "minister" and who has none. He lets the spread of the Gospel be carried on by subscriptions, contributions, and religious Societies, that He may prove who are the covetous and unbelieving, and who are the truly "rich towards God." In short, the visible Church of Christ may be divided into two great parties, those who "minister" to Christ, and those who do not.

May we all remember this great truth and prove our own selves! While we live we are all upon our trial. Our lives are continually showing whose we are, and whom we serve, whether we love Christ or whether we love the world. Happy are they who know something of "ministering to Christ of their substance!" It is a thing which can still be done, though we do not see Him with our eyes. Those words which describe the proceedings of the Judgment day are very solemn, "I was an hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink." (Matt. 25:42.)

Notes on 8:1-3

3. Joanna the wife of Cuza. Cuza was a person holding high and responsible office. Susanna. This is the only place in which we find this woman mentioned. Of her past or subsequent life we know nothing.

Helping to support them out of their own means. Maldonatus, in

commenting on this, quotes an enlightening passage from Jerome: “It was a Jewish custom, and from the ancient habit of the nation it was thought a blameless custom, for women to supply to their instructors food and clothing from their substance.”

LUKE 8:4-15

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

The parable of the sower, contained in these verses, is reported more frequently than any parable in the Bible. It is a parable of universal application. The things it relates are continually going on in every congregation to which the Gospel is preached. The four kinds of hearts it describes are to be found in every assembly which hears the word. These circumstances should make us always read the parable with a deep sense of its importance. We should say to ourselves, as we read it— “This concerns me. My heart is to be seen in this parable. I, too, am here.”

The passage itself requires little explanation. In fact, the meaning of the whole picture is so fully explained by our Lord Jesus Christ, that no exposition of man can throw much additional light on it. The parable is preeminently a parable of caution, and caution about a most important subject—the way of hearing the word of God. It was meant to be a warning to the apostles, not to expect too much from hearers. It was meant to be a warning to all ministers of the Gospel, not to look for too great results from sermons. It was meant, not least, to be a warning to hearers, to take heed how they hear.

Preaching is an ordinance of which the value can never be overrated in the Church of Christ. But it should never be forgotten, that there must not only be good preaching, but good hearing.

The first caution that we learn from the parable of the sower, is **to beware of the devil when we hear the Word.** Our Lord tells us that the hearts of some hearers are like "the wayside." The seed of the Gospel is plucked away from them by the devil almost as soon as it is sown. It does not sink down into their consciences. It does not make the least impression on their minds.

The devil, no doubt, is everywhere. That malicious spirit is unwearied in his efforts to do us harm. He is ever watching for our halting, and seeking occasion to destroy our souls. But nowhere perhaps is the devil so active as in a congregation of Gospel-hearers. Nowhere does he labor so hard to stop the progress of that which is good, and to prevent men and women being saved. From him come wandering thoughts and roving imaginations—listless minds and dull memories—sleepy eyes and fidgety nerves, weary ears and distracted attention. In all these things Satan has a great hand. People wonder where they come from, and marvel how it is that they find sermons so dull, and remember them so badly! They forget the parable of the sower. They forget the devil.

Let us take heed that we are not way-side hearers. Let us beware of the devil. We shall always find him at Church. He never stays away from public ordinances. Let us remember this, and be upon our guard. Heat, and cold, and draughts, and damp, and wet, and rain,

and snow, are often dreaded by Church goers, and alleged as reasons for not going to Church. But there is one enemy whom they ought to fear more than all these things together. That enemy is Satan.

The second caution that we learn from the parable of the sower, is to **beware of resting on mere temporary impressions when we have heard the word.** Our Lord tells us that the hearts of some hearers are like ROCKY ground. The seed of the word springs up immediately, as soon as they hear it, and bears a crop of joyful impressions, and pleasurable emotions. But these impressions, unhappily, are only on the surface. There is no deep and abiding work done in their souls. And hence, so soon as the scorching heat of temptation or persecution begins to be felt, the little bit of religion which they seemed to have attained, withers and vanishes away.

Feelings, no doubt, fill a most important office in our personal Christianity. Without them there can be no saving religion. Hope, and joy, and peace, and confidence, and resignation, and love, and fear, are things which must be felt, if they really exist. But it must never be forgotten that there are religious affections, which are spurious and false, and spring from nothing better than animal excitement. It is quite possible to feel great pleasure, or deep alarm, under the preaching of the Gospel, and yet to be utterly destitute of the grace of God. The tears of some hearers of sermons, and the extravagant delight of others, are no certain marks of conversion. We may be warm admirers of favorite preachers, and yet remain nothing better than stony-ground hearers. Nothing should content us but a

deep, humbling, self-mortifying work of the Holy Spirit, and a heart-union with Christ.

The third caution contained in the parable of the sower is to **beware of the cares of this world.** Our Lord tells us that the hearts of many hearers of the word are like thorny ground. The seed of the word, when sown upon them, is choked by the multitude of other things, by which their affections are occupied. They have no objection to the doctrines and requirements of the Gospel. They even wish to believe and obey them. But they allow the things of earth to get such hold upon their minds, that they leave no room for the word of God to do its work. And hence it follows that however many sermons they hear, they seem nothing bettered by them. A weekly process of truth-stifling goes on within. They bring no fruit to perfection.

The things of this life form one of the greatest dangers which beset a Christian's path. The money, the pleasures, the daily business of the world, are so many traps to catch souls. Thousands of things, which in themselves are innocent, become, when followed to excess, little better than soul-poisons, and helps to hell. Open sin is not the only thing that ruins souls. In the midst of our families, and in the pursuit of our lawful callings, we have need to be on our guard. Unless we watch and pray, these temporal things may rob us of heaven, and smother every sermon we hear. We may live and die thorny-ground hearers.

The last caution contained in the parable of the sower, is to **beware of being content with any religion which does not bear FRUIT in our lives.** Our Lord tells us that the hearts of those who hear the word aright, are like good ground. The seed of the Gospel sinks down deeply into their wills, and produces practical results in their faith and practice. They not only hear with pleasure, but act with decision. They repent. They believe. They obey.

Forever let us bear in mind that this is the only religion that saves souls. Outward profession of Christianity, and the formal use of Church ordinances and sacraments, never yet gave man a good hope in life, or peace in death, or rest in the world beyond the grave. There must be fruits of the Spirit in our hearts and lives, or else the Gospel is preached to us in vain. Those only who bear such fruits, shall be found at Christ's right hand in the day of His appearing.

Let us leave the parable with a deep sense of the danger and responsibility of all hearers of the Gospel. There are four ways in which we may hear, and of these four only one is right. There are three kinds of hearers whose souls are in imminent peril. How many of these three kinds are to be found in every congregation! There is only one class of hearers which is right in the sight of God. And what are we? Do we belong to that one?

Finally, let us leave the parable with a solemn recollection of the duty of every faithful preacher to divide his congregation, and give to each class his portion. The clergyman who ascends his pulpit every Sunday, and addresses his congregation as if he thought every one

was going to heaven, is surely not doing his duty to God or man. His preaching is flatly contradictory to the parable of the sower.

Notes on 8:4-15

5. "A farmer went out to sow his seed." It is highly probable that in this parable our Lord describes something which was actually going on in the sight of everybody. Many of our Lord's parables, we must remember, were spoken in the open air, and the images in many cases were borrowed from things that everyone could see. Hence our Lord's lessons could be seen as well as heard.

10. "'Though seeing, they may not see.'" This is a quotation from Isaiah 6:9. It is noteworthy that hardly any passage in the Old Testament is so frequently quoted in the New Testament as this. It is found six times, in Matthew 13:14-15, Mark 4:12, John 12:40; Acts 28:26, Romans 11:8, and here. On each occasion it refers to the same subject—the hardened and unbelieving state of mind in which the Jews were.

11. "The seed is the word of God." Let us observe here that the word is means "signifies" or "represents," according to the Hebrew way of speaking. It is important to remember this, because it throws light on the well-known words used by our Lord at the appointment of the Lord's Supper, "This is my body. This is my blood."

13. "Fall away." The Greek word here is the one we derive our word apostasy from.

LUKE 8:16-21

A LAMP ON A STAND

These verses form a practical application of the famous parable of the sower. They are intended to nail and clench in our minds the mighty lesson which that parable contains. They deserve the especial attention of all true-hearted hearers of the Gospel of Christ.

We learn, firstly, from these verses, that **spiritual knowledge ought to be diligently used.** Our Lord tells us that it is like a lighted candle, utterly useless, when covered with a bushel, or put under a bed—only useful when set upon a candlestick, and placed where it can be made serviceable to the wants of men.

When we hear this lesson, let us first think of *OURSELVES*. The Gospel which we possess was not given us only to be admired, talked of, and professed—but to be practiced. It was not meant merely to reside in our intellect, and memories, and tongues—but to be seen is our lives. Christianity is a talent committed to our charge, and one which brings with it great responsibility. We are not in darkness like the heathen. A glorious light is put before us. Let us take heed that we use it. While we have the light let us walk in the light. (John 12:35.)

But let us not only think of ourselves. Let us also think of *OTHERS*. There are millions in the world who have no spiritual light at all. They are without God, without Christ, and without hope. (Ephes. 2:12.) Can we do nothing for them? There are thousands around us, in our own land, who are unconverted and dead in sins, seeing nothing and knowing nothing aright. Can we do nothing for them? These are questions to which every true Christian ought to

find an answer. We should strive, in every way, to spread our religion. **The highest form of selfishness is that of the man who is content to go to heaven alone.** The truest charity is to endeavor to share with others every spark of religious light we possess ourselves, and so to hold up our own candle that it may give light to every one around us. Happy is that soul, which, as soon as it receives light from heaven, begins to think of others as well as itself! No candle which God lights was ever meant to burn alone.

We learn, secondly, from these verses, **the great importance of right hearing.** The words of our Lord Jesus Christ ought to impress that lesson deeply on our hearts. He says, "Take heed how you hear."

The degree of benefit which men receive from all the means of grace depends entirely on the way in which they use them. Private PRAYER lies at the very foundation of religion; yet the mere formal repetition of a set of words, when "the heart is far away," does good to no man's soul. Reading the BIBLE is essential to the attainment of sound Christian knowledge; yet the mere formal reading of so many chapters as a task and duty, without a humble desire to be taught of God, is little better than a waste of time. Just as it is with praying and Bible reading, so it is with hearing. It is not enough that we go to Church and hear sermons. We may do so for fifty years, and "be nothing bettered, but rather worse." "Take heed," says our Lord, "**how** you hear."

Would anyone know how to hear aright? Then let him lay to heart three simple rules. For one thing, we must hear with FAITH, believing implicitly that every word of God is true, and shall stand. The word in old time did not profit the Jews, “not being mixed with faith in those who heard it.” (Heb. 4:2.)—For another thing, we must hear with REVERENCE, remembering constantly that the Bible is the book of God. This was the habit of the Thessalonians. They received Paul’s message, “not as the word of men, but the word of God.” (1 Thess. 2:13.)—Above all, we must bear with PRAYER, praying for God’s blessing before the sermon is preached, praying for God’s blessing again when the sermon is over. Here lies the grand defect of the hearing of many. They ask no blessing, and so they have none. The sermon passes through their minds like water through a leaky vessel, and leaves nothing behind.

Let us bear these rules in mind every Sunday morning, before we go to hear the Word of God preached. Let as not rush into God’s presence careless, reckless, and unprepared, as if it mattered not in what way such work was done. Let us carry with us faith, reverence, and prayer. If these three are our companions, we shall hear with profit, and return with praise.

We learn, finally, from these verses, **the great privileges of those who hear the word of God and DO it.** Our Lord Jesus Christ declares that He regards them as his “mother and his brethren.”

The man who hears the word of God, and does it, is the true Christian. He hears the call of God to repent and be converted, and he obeys it. He ceases to do evil, and learns to do well. He puts off the old man, and puts on the new. He hears the call of God to believe on Jesus Christ for justification, and he obeys it. He forsakes his own righteousness, and confesses his need of a Savior. He receives Christ crucified as his only hope, and counts all things loss for the knowledge of Him. He hears the call of God to be holy, and he obeys it. He strives to mortify the deeds of his body, and to walk after the Spirit. He labors to lay aside every weight, and the sin that so easily besets him. This is true vital Christianity. All men and women who are of this character are true Christians.

Now the TROUBLES of all who "hear the word of God and do it" are neither few nor small. The world, the flesh, and the devil continually vex them. They often groan, being burdened. (2 Cor. 5:4.) They often find the cross heavy, and the way to heaven rough and narrow. They often feel disposed to cry with Paul, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:24.)

Let all such take comfort in the words of our Lord Jesus Christ which we are now considering. Let them remember that the Son of God himself regards them as his own near relations! Let them not heed the laughter, and mockery, and persecution of this world. The woman of whom Christ says, "She is my mother," and the man of whom Christ says, "He is my brother," have no cause to be ashamed.

LUKE 8:22-25

JESUS CALMS THE STORM

The event in our Lord's life described in these verses is related three times in the Gospels. Matthew, Mark, and Luke were all inspired to record it. This circumstance should teach us the importance of the event, and should make us "give the more heed" to the lessons it contains.

We see, firstly, in these verses, that **our Lord Jesus Christ was really man as well as God.** We read that as he sailed over the Lake of Gennesaret in a ship with his disciples, "he fell asleep." Sleep, we must be all aware, is one of the conditions of our natural constitution as human beings. Angels and spirits require neither food nor refreshment. But flesh and blood, to keep up a healthy existence, must eat, and drink, and sleep. If the Lord Jesus could be weary, and need rest, He must have had two natures in one person—a human nature as well as a divine.

The truth now before us is full of deep consolation add encouragement for all true Christians. The one Mediator, in whom we are bid to trust, has been Himself "partaker of flesh and blood." The mighty High Priest, who is living for us at God's right hand, has had personal experience of all the sinless infirmities of the body. He has himself hungered, and thirsted, and suffered pain. He has himself endured weariness, and sought rest in sleep. Let us pour out our hearts before him with freedom, and tell Him our least troubles

without reserve. He who made atonement for us on the cross is one who "can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities." (Heb. 4:15.) To be weary of working for God is sinful, but to be wearied and worn in doing God's work is no sin at all. Jesus himself was weary, and Jesus slept.

We see, secondly, in these verses, **what fears and anxiety may assault the hearts of true disciples of Christ.** We read, that "when a storm of wind came down on the lake," and the boat in which our Lord was sailing was filled with water, and in jeopardy, His companions were greatly alarmed. "They came to Him and awoke Him, saying, Master, Master, we perish." They forgot, for a moment, their Master's never-failing care for them in time past. They forgot that with Him they must be safe, whatever happened. They forgot everything but the sight and sense of present danger, and, under the impression of it, could not even wait until Christ awoke. It is only too true that sight, and sense, and feeling, make men very poor theologians.

Facts like these are sadly humbling to the pride of human nature. It ought to lower our self-conceit and high thoughts to see what a poor creature is man, even at his best estate—but facts like these are deeply instructive. They teach us what to watch and pray against in our own hearts. They teach of what we must make up our minds to find in other Christians. We must be moderate in our expectations. We must not suppose that men cannot be believers if they sometimes exhibit great weakness, or that men have no grace because they are

sometimes overwhelmed with fears. Even Peter, James, and John, could cry, “Master, Master, we perish.”

We see, thirdly, in these verses, *how great is the power of our Lord Jesus Christ*. We read that when His disciples awoke Him in the storm, “He arose, and rebuked the wind, and the raging of the waters, and they ceased, and there was a calm.” This was, no doubt, a mighty miracle. It needed the power of Him who brought the flood on the earth in the days of Noah, and in due season took it away—who divided the Red Sea and the river Jordan into two parts, and made a path for His people through the waters—who brought the locusts on Egypt by an east wind, and by a west wind swept them away. (Exod. 10:13, 19.) No power short of this could in a moment turn a storm into a calm. “To speak to the winds and waves” is a common proverb for attempting that which is impossible. But here we see Jesus speaking, and at once the winds and waves obey! As man He had slept. As God He stilled the storm.

It is a blessed and comfortable thought, that **all this almighty power of our Lord Jesus Christ is engaged on behalf of His believing people.** He has undertaken to save every one of them to the uttermost, and He is “mighty to save.” The trials of His people are often many and great. The devil never ceases to make war against them. The rulers of this world frequently persecute them. The very heads of the Church, who ought to be tender shepherds, are often bitterly opposed to the truth as it is in Jesus. Yet, notwithstanding all this, Christ’s people shall never be entirely forsaken. Though severely

harassed, they shall not be destroyed. Though cast down, they shall not be cast away. At the darkest time let true Christians rest in the thought, that "greater is He who is for them than all those who are against them." The winds and waves of political and ecclesiastical trouble may beat fiercely over them, and all hope may seem taken away. But still let them not despair. There is One living for them in heaven who can make these winds and waves to cease in a moment. The true Church, of which Christ is the Head, shall never perish. Its glorious Head is almighty, and lives for evermore, and His believing members shall all live, also, and reach home safe at last. (John 14:19.)

We see, lastly, in these verses, **how needful it is for Christians to keep their faith ready for use.** We read that our Lord said to His disciples when the storm had ceased, and their fears had subsided, "Where is your faith?" Well might He ask that question! Where was the profit of believing, if they could not believe in the time of need? Where was the real value of faith, unless they kept it in active exercise? Where was the benefit of trusting, if they were to trust their Master in sunshine only, but not in storms?

The lesson now before us is one of deep practical importance. To have true saving faith is one thing. To have that faith always ready for use is quite another. Many receive Christ as their Savior, and deliberately commit their souls to Him for time and eternity, who yet often find their faith sadly failing when something unexpected happens, and they are suddenly tried. These things ought not so to

be. We ought to pray that we may have a stock of faith ready for use at a moment's notice, and may never be found unprepared. The highest style of Christian is the man who lives like Moses, "seeing Him who is invisible." (Heb. 11:27.) That man will never be greatly shaken by any storm. He will see Jesus near him in the darkest hour, and blue sky behind the blackest cloud.

Notes on 8:22-25

23. A squall came down on the lake. Lake Gennesaret is prone to such storms. It lies very low and is surrounded on almost all sides by high hills. Sudden gusts of wind are consequently very common.

LUKE 8:26-36

THE DEMON POSSESSED MAN

The well-known narrative which we have now read, is carefully recorded by all of the first three Gospel-writers. It is a striking instance of our Lord's complete dominion over the prince of this world. We see the great enemy of our souls for once completely vanquished—the "strong man" foiled by One stronger than he, and the lion spoiled of his prey.

Let us mark, first, in this passage, **the miserable condition of those over whom the devil reigns.** The picture brought before us is a frightful one. We are told that when our Lord arrived in the country of the Gadarenes, there met Him "a certain man which had devils long time, and wore no clothes, neither abode in any house,

but in the tombs." We are also told that although he had been "bound with chains and in fetters, he broke the bands, and was driven of the devil into the wilderness." In short, the case seems to have been one of the most aggravated forms of demoniacal possession. The unhappy sufferer was under the complete dominion of Satan, both in body and soul. So long as he continued in this state, he must have been a burden and a trouble to all around him. His mental faculties were under the direction of a "legion" of devils. His bodily strength was only employed for his own injury and shame. A more pitiable state for mortal man to be in, it is difficult to conceive.

Cases of bodily possession by Satan, like this, are, to say the least, very rarely met with in modern times. Yet we must not, on this account, forget that the devil is continually exercising a fearful power over many hearts and souls. He still urges many, in whose hearts he reigns, into self-dishonoring and self-destroying habits of life. He still rules many with a rod of iron—goads them on from vice to vice, and from profligacy to profligacy—drives them far from decent society, and the influence of respectable friends, plunges them into the lowest depths of wickedness—makes them little better than self-murderers—and renders them as useless to their families, the Church, and the world, as if they were dead, and not alive. Where is the faithful minister who could not put his finger on many such cases? What truer account can be given of many a young man, and many a young woman, than that they seem possessed of devils? It is vain to shut our eyes to facts. Demoniacal possession of men's bodies

may be comparatively rare. But many, unhappily, are the cases in which the devil appears completely to possess men's souls.

These things are fearful to think upon. Fearful is it to see to what a wreck of body and mind Satan often brings young people! Fearful is it to observe how he often drives them out of the reach of all good influence, and buries them in a wilderness of bad companions and loathsome sins! Fearful, above all, is it to reflect that yet a little while Satan's slaves will be lost forever, and in hell! There often remains only one thing that can be done for them. They can be named before Christ in prayer. He that came to the country of the Gadarenes, and healed the miserable demoniac there, still lives in heaven, and pities sinners. The worst slave of Satan in England is not beyond a remedy. Jesus may yet take compassion on him, and set him free.

Let us mark, secondly, in these verses, **the absolute power which the Lord Jesus Christ possesses over Satan.** We are told that he "commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man," whose miserable condition we have just heard described. At once the unhappy sufferer was healed. The "many devils" by whom he had been possessed were compelled to leave him. Nor is this all. Cast forth from their abode in the man's heart, we see these malignant spirits beseeching our Lord that He would "not torment" them, or "command them to go out into the deep," and so confessing His supremacy over them. Mighty as they were, they plainly felt themselves in the presence of One mightier than themselves. Full of

malice as they were, they could not even hurt the “swine” of the Gadarenes until our Lord granted them permission.

Our Lord Jesus Christ’s dominion over the devil should be a cheering thought to all true Christians. Without it, indeed, we might well despair of salvation. To feel that we have ever near us an invisible spiritual enemy, laboring night and day to compass our destruction, would be enough to crush our every hope, if we did not know a Friend and Protector. Blessed be God! The Gospel reveals such a One. The Lord Jesus is stronger than that “strong man armed,” who is ever warring against our souls. The Lord Jesus is able to deliver us from the devil. He proved his power over him frequently when upon earth. He triumphed over him gloriously on the cross. He will never let him pluck any of His sheep out of His hand. He will one day bruise him under our feet, and bind him in the prison of hell. (Rom. 16:20; Rev. 20:1, 2.) Happy are they who hear Christ’s voice and follow Him! Satan may vex them, but he cannot really hurt them! He may bruise their heel, but he cannot destroy their souls. They shall be “more than conquerors” through Him who loved them. (Rom 8:37.)

Let us mark, finally, **the wonderful change which Christ can work in Satan’s slaves.** We are told that the Gadarenes “found the man out of whom the devil was departed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind.” That sight must indeed have been strange and astonishing! The man’s past history and condition, no doubt, were well known. He had probably been a

nuisance and a terror to all the neighborhood. Yet here, in one moment, a complete change had come over him. Old things had passed away, and all things had become new. The power by which such a cure was wrought must indeed have been almighty. When Christ is the physician nothing is impossible.

One thing, however, must never be forgotten. Striking and miraculous as this cure was, it is not really more wonderful than every case of decided conversion to God. Marvelous as the change was which appeared in this demoniac's condition when healed, it is not one whit more marvelous than the change which passes over every one who is born again, and turned from the power of Satan to God. Never is a man in his right mind until he is converted, or in his right place until he sits by faith at the feet of Jesus, or rightly clothed until he has put on the Lord Jesus Christ. Have we ever considered what real conversion to God is? It is nothing else than the miraculous release of a captive, the miraculous restoration of a man to his right mind, the miraculous deliverance of a soul from the devil.

What are we ourselves? This, after all, is the grand question which concerns us. Are we bondsmen of Satan or servants of God? Has Christ made us free, or does the devil yet reign in our hearts? Do we sit at the feet of Jesus daily? Are we in our right minds? May the Lord help us to answer these questions aright!

Notes on 8:26-36

27. A demon-possessed man. Let it suffice to believe implicitly that demon possession of the entire person—body, mind, and spirit—was

an undeniable fact during our Lord's earthly ministry, and all attempts to explain away the instances of this in the Gospels by calling them epilepsy, lunacy, and the like are utterly unsatisfactory. For the rest, what we cannot completely understand, we must be content to believe.

That there is such a thing as satanic possession now, though comparatively a rare thing, is held by many able doctors who are specialists in this field. Disease of the mind, or madness, is always a very mysterious subject. It is highly probable that Satan has far more to do with it than we think.

30. "Legion." This is a well-known name for a division of troops in the Roman army, consisting of 5,000 or 6,000 men. The word is used here to convey a great number.

LUKE 8:37-40

We see in this passage two requests made to our Lord Jesus Christ. They were widely different one from the other, and were offered by people of widely different character. We see, moreover, how these requests were received by our Lord Jesus Christ. In either case the request received a most remarkable answer. The whole passage is singularly instructive.

Let us observe, in the first place, that **the Gadarenes besought our Lord to depart from them, and their request was granted.** We read these painfully solemn words— "Then all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, because they were overcome with fear. So he got into the boat and

left." Now why did these unhappy men desire the Son of God to leave them? Why, after the amazing miracle of mercy which had just been wrought among them, did they feel no wish to know more of Him who wrought it? Why, in a word, did they become their own enemies, forsake their own mercies, and shut the door against the Gospel? There is but one answer to these questions. The Gadarenes loved the world, and the things of the world, and were determined not to give them up. They felt convinced, in their own consciences, that they could not receive Christ among them and keep their sins, and their sins they were resolved to keep. They saw, at a glance, that there was something about Jesus with which their habits of life would never agree, and having to choose between the new ways and their own old ones, they refused the new and chose the old.

And why did our Lord Jesus Christ grant the request of the Gadarenes, and leave them? He did it in judgment, to testify His sense of the greatness of their sin. He did it in mercy to His Church in every age, to show how great is the wickedness of those who willfully reject the truth. It seems an eternal law of His government, that those who obstinately refuse to walk in the light shall have the light taken from them. Great is Christ's patience and long-suffering! His mercy endures forever. His offers and invitations are wide, and broad, and sweeping, and universal. He gives every church its day of grace and time of visitation. (Luke 19:44.) But if men persist in refusing His counsel, He has nowhere promised to persist in forcing it upon them. People who have the Gospel, and yet refuse to obey it, must not be surprised if the Gospel is removed from them. Hundreds

of churches, and parishes, and families, are at this moment in the state of the Gadarenes. They said to Christ, “Depart from us,” and He has taken them at their word. They were joined to idols, and are now “let alone.” (Job 21:14; Hosea 4:17.)

Let us take heed that we do not sin the sin of the Gadarenes. Let us beware lest by coldness, and inattention, and worldliness, we drive Jesus from our doors, and compel Him to forsake us entirely. Of all sins which we can sin, this is the most sinful. Of all states of soul into which we can fall, none is so fearful as to be “let alone.” Let it rather be our daily prayer that Christ may never leave us to ourselves. The old wreck, high and dry on the sand-bank, is not a more wretched sight than the man whose heart Christ has visited with mercies and judgments, but has at last ceased to visit, because He was not received. The barred door is a door at which Jesus will not always knock. The Gadarene mind must not be surprised to see Christ leaving it and going away.

Let us observe, in the second place, that **the man out of whom the devils were departed, besought our Lord that he might be with Him, but his request was not granted.** We read that Jesus sent him away, saying, “Return to your own house, and show how great things God has done unto you.”

We can easily understand the request that this man made. He felt deeply grateful for the amazing mercy which he had just received in being cured. He felt full of love and warm affection toward Him, who had so wonderfully and graciously cured him. He felt that he could

not see too much of Him, be too much in His company, cleave to Him too closely. He forgot everything else under the influence of these feelings. Family, relations, friends, home, house, country, all seemed as nothing in his eyes. He felt that he cared for nothing but to be with Christ. And we cannot blame him for his feelings. They may have been tinged with something of enthusiasm and inconsideration. There may have been about them a zeal not according to knowledge. In the first excitement of a newly felt cure, he may not have been fit to judge what his future line of life should be. But excited feelings in religion are far better than no feelings at all. In the petition he made, there was far more to praise than to blame.

But why did our Lord Jesus Christ REFUSE to grant this man's request? Why, at a time when he had few disciples, did He send this man away? Why, instead of allowing him to take place with Peter and James and John, did He bid him return to his own house? Our Lord did what He did in infinite wisdom. He did it for the benefit of the man's own soul. He saw it was more for his good to be a witness for the Gospel at home than a disciple abroad. He did it in mercy to the Gadarenes. He left among them one standing testimony of the truth of His own divine mission. He did it, above all, for the perpetual instruction of His whole church. He would have us know that there are various ways of glorifying Him, that He may be honored in private life as well as in the apostolic office, and that the first place in which we should witness for Christ is our own house.

There is a lesson of deep experimental wisdom in this little incident, which all true Christians would do well to lay to heart. That lesson is our own utter ignorance of what position is good for us in this world, and the necessity of submitting our own wills to the will of Christ. The place that we wish to fill is not always the place that is best for us. The line of life that we want to take up, is not always that which Christ sees to be most for the benefit of our souls. The place that we are obliged to fill is sometimes very distasteful, and yet it may be needful to our sanctification. The position we are compelled to occupy may be very disagreeable to flesh and blood, and yet it may be the very one that is necessary to keep us in our right mind. It is better to be sent away from Christ's bodily presence, by Christ Himself, than to remain in Christ's bodily presence without His consent.

Let us pray for the spirit of "contentment with such things as we have." Let us be fearful of choosing for ourselves in this life without Christ's consent, or moving in this world, when the pillar of cloud and fire is not moving before us. Let us ask the Lord to choose everything for us. Let our daily prayer be, "Give me what you will. Place me where you will. Only let me be Your disciple and abide in You."

Notes on 8:37-40

37. Asked Jesus to leave them. They saw the loss of their pigs with deep concern. They cared more about this than about saving a soul. There are thousands like them. Tell them about the success of

missionaries and the conversion of souls at home or abroad, and they hear it with indifference, if not with a sneer. But if you tell them about the loss of property or a change in the exchange rate, they become animated. Truly the generation of the Gadarenes is not yet extinct!

39. “Return home.” Let us note here that a literal following of Christ and a literal forsaking of relations, friends, and homes are not essential for salvation. It may be necessary for some people, on some occasions, under certain circumstances. But it is clear from what happened to Legion that it is not necessary for everyone.

LUKE 8:41-48

A SICK WOMAN HEALED

How much misery and trouble sin has brought into the world! The passage we have just read affords a melancholy proof of this. First we see a distressed father in bitter anxiety about a dying daughter. Then we see a suffering woman, who has been afflicted twelve years with an incurable disease. And these are things which sin has sown broad-cast over the whole earth! These are but patterns of what is going on continually on every side. These are evils which God did not create at the beginning, but man has brought upon himself by the fall. There would have been no sorrow and no sickness among Adam’s children, if there had been no sin.

Let us see in the case of the woman here described, **a striking picture of the condition of many souls.** We are told that she

had been afflicted with a wearing disease for “twelve years,” and that she “had spent all her living upon physicians,” and that she could not be “healed of any.” The state of many a sinner’s heart is placed before us in this description as in a mirror. Perhaps it describes ourselves.

There are men and women in most congregations who have felt their sins deeply, and been sorely afflicted by the thought that they are not forgiven and not fit to die. They have desired relief and peace of conscience, but have not known where to find them. They have tried many false remedies, and found themselves “nothing bettered, but rather worse.” They have gone the round of all the forms of religion, and wearied themselves with every imaginable man-made device for obtaining spiritual health. But all has been in vain. Peace of conscience seems as far off as ever. The wound within appears a fretting, intractable sore, which nothing can heal. They are still wretched, still unhappy, still thoroughly discontented with their own state. In short, like the woman of whom we read today, they are ready to say, “There is no hope for me. I shall never be saved.”

Let all such take comfort in the miracle which we are now considering. Let them know that “there is balm in Gilead,” which can cure them, if they will only seek it. There is one door at which they have never knocked, in all their efforts to obtain relief. There is one Physician to whom they have not applied, who never fails to heal. Let them consider the conduct of the woman before us in her necessity. When all other means had failed, she went to Jesus for help. Let them go and do likewise.

Let us see, secondly, in the conduct of the woman before us, **a striking picture of the first beginnings of saving faith and its effect.** We are told that she "came behind" our Lord, and "touched the hem of His garment, and immediately her bleeding stopped." The act appeared a most simple one, and utterly inadequate to produce any great result. But the effect of that act was most marvelous! In an instant the poor sufferer was healed. The relief that many physicians had failed to give in "twelve years," was obtained in one moment. It was but one touch, and she was well!

It is hard to conceive a more lively image of the experience of many souls than the history of this woman's cure. Hundreds could testify that, like her, they long sought spiritual help from physicians of no value, and wearied their souls by using remedies which brought no cure. At last, like her, they heard of One who healed laboring consciences, and forgave sinners, "without money and without price," if men would only come to Him by faith. The terms sounded too good to be credible. The tidings sounded too good to be true. But, like the woman before us, they resolved to try. They came to Christ by faith, with all their sins, and to their amazement at once found relief. And now they feel more comfort and hope than they ever felt before. The burden seems rolled off their backs. The weight seems taken off their minds. Light seems breaking in on their hearts. They begin to "rejoice in hope of the glory of God." (Rom. 5:2.) And all, they would tell us, is owing to one simple thing. They came to Jesus just as they were. They touched Him by faith, and were healed.

Forever let it be engraved on our hearts that faith in Christ is the grand secret of peace with God. Without it we shall never find inward rest, whatever we may do in religion. Without it we may go to services daily and receive the Lord's Supper every week—we may give our goods to the poor, and our bodies to be burned, we may fast and wear sackcloth, and live the lives of hermits— all this we may do, and be miserable after all. One true believing touch of Christ is worth all these things put together. The pride of human nature may not like it! But it is true! Thousands will rise up at the last day and testify that they never felt comfort of soul until they came to Christ by faith, and were content to cease from their own works, and be saved wholly and entirely by His grace.

Let us see, lastly, in this passage, **how much our Lord desires that those who have received benefit from Him should confess Him before men.** We are told that He did not allow this woman, whose case we have been reading, to retire from the crowd unnoticed. He enquired "who had touched Him." He enquired again, until the woman came forward and "declared" her case before all the people. And then came the gracious words, "Daughter, be of good comfort. Your faith has made you whole."

Confession of Christ is a matter of great importance. Let this never be forgotten by true Christians. The work that we can do for our blessed Master is little and poor. Our best endeavors to glorify Him are weak and full of imperfections. Our prayers and praises are sadly defective. Our knowledge and love are miserably small. But do

we feel within that Christ has healed our souls? Then can we not confess Christ before men? Can we not plainly tell others that Christ has done everything for us—that we were dying of a deadly disease, and were cured—that we were lost, and are now found, that we were blind, and now see? Let us do this boldly, and not be afraid. Let us not be ashamed to let all men know what Jesus has done for our souls.

Our Master loves to see us doing so. He likes His people not to be ashamed of His name. It is a solemn saying of Paul, "If you shall confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved." (Rom. 10:9.) It is a still more solemn saying of Christ Himself, "Whoever shall be ashamed of me and my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed." (Luke 9:26.)

Notes on 8:41-48

42. Was dying. "At the point of death."

43. Subject to bleeding. In order to appreciate this woman's condition and the greatness of the miracle recorded here, we should read Leviticus 15:19. This shows that the woman was ceremonially unclean and would want to avoid all publicity.

45. "Master." Only St. Luke uses this word in the New Testament. Literally it means, "one who is set over anything to care for it." It is a title of respect and an acknowledgment of authority.

LUKE 8:49-56

JAIRUS' DAUGHTER RAISED FROM THE DEAD

The verses we have now read, contain one of the three great instances which the Holy Spirit has thought fit to record of our Lord restoring a dead person to life. The other two instances are those of Lazarus and the widow's son at Nain. There seems no reason to doubt that our Lord raised others beside these three. But these three cases are specially described as patterns of His almighty power. One was a young girl, who had just breathed her last. One was a young man, who was being carried to his burial. One was a man, who had already lain four days in the grave. In all three cases alike we see life at once restored at Christ's command.

Let us notice, in the verses before us, **how universal is the dominion which death holds over the sons of men.** We see him coming to a rich man's house, and tearing from him the desire of his eyes with a stroke. "There came one from the ruler of the synagogue's house, saying to him, Your daughter is dead." Such tidings as these are the bitterest cups which we have to drink in this world. Nothing cuts so deeply into man's heart as to part with beloved ones, and lay them in the grave. Few griefs are so crushing and heavy as the grief of a parent over an only child.

Death is indeed a cruel enemy! He makes no distinction in his attacks. He comes to the rich man's hall, as well as to the poor man's cottage. He does not spare the young, the strong, and the beautiful, any more than the old, the infirm, and the grey-haired. Not all the gold of Australia, nor all the skill of doctors, can keep the hand of

death from our bodies, in the day of his power. When the appointed hour comes, and God permits him to smite, our worldly schemes must be broken off, and our darlings must be taken away and buried out of our sight.

These thoughts are melancholy, and few like to hear of them. The subject of death is one that men blink, and refuse to look at. “All men think all men mortal but themselves.” But why should we treat this great reality in this way? Why should we not rather look the subject of death in the face, in order that when our turn comes we may be prepared to die? Death will come to our houses, whether we like it or not. Death will take each of us away, despite our dislike to hearing about it. Surely it is the part of a wise man to get ready for this great change. Why should we not be ready? There is one who can deliver us from the fear of death. (Heb. 2:15.) Christ has overcome death, and “brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel.” (2 Tim. 1:10.) He that believes on Him has everlasting life, and though he were dead yet shall he live. (John 6:47; 11:25.) Let us believe in the Lord Jesus, and then death will lose his sting. We shall then be able to say with Paul, “To me to die is gain.” (Phil. 1:21.)

Let us notice, secondly, in the verses before us, that **faith in Christ’s love and power is the best remedy in time of trouble.** We are told that when Jesus heard the tidings, that the ruler’s daughter was dead, He said to him, “Fear not, believe only, and she shall be made whole.” These words, no doubt, were spoken with immediate reference to the miracle our Lord was going to

perform. But we need not doubt that they were also meant for the perpetual benefit of the Church of Christ. They were meant to reveal to us the grand secret of comfort in the hour of need. That secret is to exercise faith, to fall back on the thought of Christ's loving heart and mighty hand—in one word, to believe.

Let a petition for more faith form a part of all our daily prayers. As ever we would have peace, and calmness, and quietness of spirit, let us often say, "Lord, increase our faith." A hundred painful things may happen to us every week in this evil world, of which our poor weak minds cannot see the reason. Without faith we shall be constantly disturbed and cast down. Nothing will make us cheerful and tranquil but an abiding sense of Christ's love, Christ's wisdom, Christ's care over us, and Christ's providential management of all our affairs. Faith will not sink under the weight of evil tidings. (Psalm. 112:7.) Faith can sit still and wait for better times. Faith can see light even in the darkest hour, and a needs-be for the heaviest trial. Faith can find room to build Ebenezers under any circumstances, and can sing songs in the night in any condition. "He that believes shall not make haste." "You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is staid on you." (Isa. 28:16; 26:3.) Once more let the lesson be engraved on our minds. If we would travel comfortably through this world, we must "believe."

Let us notice, finally, in these verses, **the almighty power which our Lord Jesus Christ possesses even over death.** We are told that He came to the house of Jairus and turned the

mourning into joy. He took by the hand the breathless body of the ruler's daughter, "and called saying, My child, arise." At once by that all-powerful voice life was restored. "Her spirit came again, and she arose immediately."

Let us take comfort in the thought that there is a limit to death's power. The king of terrors is very strong. How many generations he has mowed down and swept into the dust! How many of the wise and strong, and fair, he has swallowed down and snatched away in their prime! How many victories he has won, and how often he has written "vanity of vanities," on the pride of man! Patriarchs, and kings, and prophets, and apostles, have all in turn been obliged to yield to him. They have all died. But thanks be unto God, there is one stronger than death. There is one who has said, "O death! will be your plague —O grave! will be your destruction!" (Hosea 13:14.) That One is the Friend of sinners, Christ Jesus the Lord. He proved His power frequently when He came to the earth the first time, in the house of Jairus, by the tomb of Bethany, in the gate of Nain. He will prove to all the world when He comes again. "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." (1 Cor. 15:26.) "The earth shall cast out the dead." (Isa. 26:19.)

Let us leave the passage with the consoling thought, that the things which happened in Jairus' house are a type of good things to come. The hour comes and will soon be here, when the voice of Christ shall call all His people from their graves, and gather them together to part no more. Believing husbands shall once more see

believing wives. Believing parents shall once more see believing children. Christ shall unite the whole family in the great home in heaven, and all tears shall be wiped from all eyes.

Notes on 8:49-56

51. Peter, John and James. These three apostles were three times singled out from the rest of the twelve and allowed to be with our Lord on special occasions. They were with him during his transfiguration, in the garden of Gethsemane, and during this miracle. None of the apostles had such a clear revelation of our Lord's divinity, our Lord's humanity, and our Lord's power and compassion toward the sorrowful and sinful.

55. Give her something to eat. This would be proof positive that her body really was alive again and that her parents saw no vision, but real flesh and blood. It is the same evidence which our Lord gave his disciples after his own rising from the dead (see Luke 24:41-43).

Luke – Chap. 9

LUKE 9:1-6

JESUS SENDS OUT THE 12 APOSTLES

These verses contain our Lord's instructions to His twelve apostles, when He sent them forth the first time to preach the Gospel. The passage is one which throws much light on the work of Christian ministers in every age. No doubt the miraculous power which the apostles possessed, made their position very unlike that of any other body of men in the Church. No doubt, in many respects, they stood alone, and had no successors. Yet the words of our Lord in this place must not be confined entirely to the apostles. They contain deep wisdom for Christian teachers and preachers, for all time.

Let us observe, that **the commission to the apostles contained special reference to the devil and bodily sickness.** We read that Jesus gave them "authority over all devils, and to cure diseases."

We see here, as in a glass, two of the principal parts of the Christian minister's business. We must not expect him to cast out evil spirits, but we may fairly expect him to "resist the devil and all his works," and to keep up a constant warfare against the prince of this world. We must not expect him to work miraculous cures, but we

may expect him to take a special interest in all sick people, to visit them, sympathize with them, and help them, if needful, as far as he can. The minister who neglects the sick members of his flock is no true pastor. He must not be surprised if people say that he cares for the fleece of his sheep more than for their health. The minister who allows drunkenness, blasphemy, uncleanness, fighting, reveling, and the like, to go on among his congregation unreproved, is omitting a plain duty of his office. He is not warring against the devil. He is no true successor of the apostles.

Let us observe, secondly, that **one of the principal works which the apostles were commissioned to take up was preaching.** We read that our Lord "sent them to preach the kingdom of God," and that "they went through the towns preaching the Gospel."

The importance of preaching, as a means of grace, might easily be gathered from this passage, even if it stood alone. But it is but one instance, among many, of the high value which the Bible everywhere sets upon preaching. It is, in fact, God's chosen instrument for doing good to souls. By it sinners are converted, inquirers led on, and saints built up. A preaching ministry is absolutely essential to the health and prosperity of a visible church. The pulpit is the place where the chief victories of the Gospel have always been won, and no Church has ever done much for the advancement of true religion in which the pulpit has been neglected. Would we know whether a minister is a truly apostolical man? If he is, he will give the best of his

attention to his sermons. He will labor and pray to make his preaching effective, and he will tell his congregation that he looks to preaching for the chief results on souls. The minister who exalts the sacraments, or forms of the Church, above preaching, may be a zealous, earnest, conscientious, and respectable minister; but his zeal is not according to knowledge. He is not a follower of the apostles.

Let us observe, thirdly, that **our Lord charges His apostles, when He sends them forth, to study simplicity of habits, and contentment with such things as they have.** He bids them "take nothing for their journey, neither staffs, nor bag, neither bread nor money; neither have two coats apiece. And whatever house you enter into, there abide, and thence, depart." In part, these instructions apply only to a peculiar period. There came a day when our Lord Himself bade every one who had "no sword, to sell his garment and buy one." (Luke 22:36.) But, in part, these instructions contain a lesson for all time. The spirit of these verses is meant to be remembered by all ministers of the Gospel.

The leading idea which the words convey is, a warning against worldliness and luxurious habits. Well would it be for the world and the Church if the warning had been more carefully heeded! From no quarter has Christianity received such damage as it has from the hands of its own teachers. On no point have its teachers erred so much, and so often, as in the matter of personal worldliness and luxury of life. They have often destroyed, by their daily lives, the whole work of their lips. They have given occasion to the enemies of

religion to say, that they love ease, and money, and good things, far more than souls. From such ministers may we pray daily that the Church may be delivered! They are a living stumbling-block in the way to heaven. They are helpers to the cause of the devil, and not of God. The preacher whose affections are set on money, and dress and feasting, and pleasure-seeking, has clearly mistaken his vocation. He has forgotten his Master's instructions. He is not an apostolic man.

Let us observe, lastly, that **our Lord prepares His disciples to meet with unbelief and impenitence in those to whom they preached.** He speaks of those "who will not receive them" as a class which they must expect to see. He tells them how to behave, when not received, as if it was a state of things to which they must make up their mind.

All ministers of the Gospel would do well to read carefully this portion of our Lord's instructions. All missionaries, and district visitors, and Sunday-school teachers, would do well to lay it to heart. Let them not be cast down if their work seems in vain, and their labor without profit. Let them remember that the very first preachers and teachers whom Jesus employed were sent forth with a distinct warning that not all would believe. Let them work on patiently, and sow the good seed without fainting. Duties are theirs. Results are God's. Apostles may plant and water. The Holy Spirit alone can give spiritual life. The Lord Jesus knows what is in the heart of man. He does not despise his laborers because little of the seed they sow bears

fruit. The harvest may be small. But every laborer shall be rewarded according to his work.

Notes on 9:1-6

1. The Twelve. Note that Judas Iscariot, the false apostle and traitor, was one of those twelve whom our Lord sent out to preach and heal the sick. We should not be surprised to see unconverted men preaching and being ministers of the Gospel. Our Lord allowed one such person to be among his apostles to show that we must expect to see the evil and good mixed together in this world. The highest ecclesiastical office and dignity afford no proof that a man has the grace of God.

3. "Bag." This was a small bag in which to carry provisions.

LUKE 9:7-11

THE APOSTLES RETURN

Let us mark, in this passage, **the power of a bad conscience.** We are told that "when Herod the tetrarch heard of all that was done by our Lord, he was perplexed." He said, "John have I beheaded, but who is this?" Great and powerful as Herod was, the tidings of our Lord's ministry called his sins to remembrance, and disturbed him even in his royal palace. Surrounded as he was by everything which is considered to make life enjoyable, the report of another preacher of righteousness filled him with alarm. The recollection of his own wickedness in killing John the Baptist flashed on his mind. He knew he had done wrong. He felt guilty, self-condemned, and self-

dissatisfied. Faithful and true is that saying of Solomon's, "The way of transgressors is hard." (Prov. 13:15.) Herod's sin had found him out. The prison and the sword had silenced John the Baptist's tongue, but they could not silence the voice of Herod's inward man. God's truth can neither be silenced, nor bound, nor killed.

Conscience is a most powerful part of our natural constitution. It cannot save our souls. It never leads a man to Christ. It is often blind, and ignorant, and misdirected. Yet conscience often raises a mighty testimony against sin in the sinner's heart, and makes him feel that "it is an evil and a bitter thing" to depart from God. Young people ought especially to remember this, and, remembering it, to take heed to their ways. Let them not flatter themselves that all is right, when their sins are past, and done, and forgotten by the world. Let them know that conscience can bring up each sin before the eyes of their minds, and make it bite like a serpent. Millions will testify at the last day that Herod's experience was their own. Conscience called old sins from their graves, and made them walk up and down in their hearts. In the midst of seeming happiness and prosperity they were inwardly miserable and distressed. Happy are they who have found the only cure for a bad conscience! Nothing will ever heal it but the blood of Christ.

Let us mark, secondly, **the importance to Christians of occasional privacy and retirement.** We are told, that when the apostles returned from their first ministerial work, our Lord "took them and went aside privately into a desert place." We cannot doubt

that this was done with a deep meaning. It was meant to teach the great lesson that those who do public work for the souls of others, must be careful to make time for being alone with God.

The lesson is one which many Christians would do well to remember. Occasional retirement, self-inquiry, meditation, and secret communion with God, are absolutely essential to spiritual health. The man who neglects them is in great danger of a fall. To be always preaching, teaching, speaking, writing, and working public works, is, unquestionably, a sign of zeal. But it is not always a sign of zeal according to knowledge. It often leads to untoward consequences. We must make time occasionally for sitting down and calmly looking within, and examining how matters stand between our own selves and Christ. The omission of the practice is the true account of many a backsliding which shocks the Church, and gives occasion to the world to blaspheme. Many could say with sorrow, in the words of Canticles, "They made me keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard have I not kept." (Cant. 1:6.)

Let us mark, lastly, in this passage, **our Lord Jesus Christ's readiness to receive all who come to Him.** We are told, that when the multitude followed Him into the desert, where He had retired, "he received them, and spoke unto them of the kingdom of God, and healed those who had need of healing." Unmannerly and uninvited as this intrusion on his privacy seems to have been, it met with no rebuff from our Lord. He was always more ready to give

instruction than people were to ask it, and more willing to teach than people were to be taught.

But the incident, trifling as it may seem, exactly tallies with all that we read in the Gospels of the gentleness and compassion of Christ. We never see Him dealing with people according to their deserts. We never find Him scrutinizing the motives of His hearers, or refusing to allow them to learn of Him, because their hearts were not right in the sight of God. His ear was always ready to hear, and His hand to work, and His tongue to preach. None that came to Him were ever cast out. Whatever they might think of His doctrine, they could never say that Jesus of Nazareth was "an austere man."

Let us remember this in all our dealings with Christ about our own souls. We may draw near to Him with boldness, and open our hearts to Him with confidence. He is a Savior of infinite compassion and loving-kindness. He will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax. The secrets of our spiritual life may be such as we would not have our dearest friends know. The wounds of our consciences may be deep and sore, and require most delicate handling. But we need not fear anything, if we commit all to Jesus, the Son of God. We shall find that His kindness is unbounded. His own words shall be found abundantly true— "I am meek and lowly of heart, and you shall find rest to your souls." (Matt. 11:29.)

Let us remember this, finally, in our dealing with other people, if we are called upon to give them help about their souls. Let us strive to walk in the steps of Christ's example, and, like Him, to be kind,

and patient, and always willing to aid. The ignorance of young beginners in religion is sometimes very provoking. We are apt to be wearied of their instability, and fickleness, and halting between two opinions. But let us remember Jesus, and not be weary. He "received all," spoke to all, and did good to all. Let us go and do likewise. As Christ deals with us, so let us deal one with another.

Notes on 9:7-11

7. Raised from the dead. Resurrection from the dead was believed by the Jews. The idea that the Jews, before Christ, knew nothing of a resurrection or another life is utterly untenable.

10. They withdrew by themselves. Cecil says, "I do not know how some Christians can make so little of recollection and retirement. I am obliged to withdraw myself regularly, and to say to my heart, What are you doing? Where are you going?"

LUKE 9:12-17

JESUS FEEDS THE FIVE THOUSAND

The miracle described in these verses is more frequently related in the Gospels than any that our Lord wrought. There is no doubt a meaning in this repetition. It is intended to draw our special attention to the things which it contains.

We see, for one thing, in these verses, **a striking example of our Lord Jesus Christ's DIVINE POWER.** He feeds an assembly of five thousand men with five loaves and two fish. He

makes a scanty supply of food, which was barely sufficient for the daily needs of Himself and His disciples, satisfy the hunger of a company as large as a Roman legion. There could be no mistake about the reality and greatness of this miracle. It was done publicly, and before many witnesses. The same power which at the beginning made the world out of nothing, caused food to exist, which before had not existed. The circumstances of the whole event made deception impossible. Five thousand hungry men would not have agreed that they were "all filled," if they had not received real food. "Twelve baskets full of fragments" would never have been taken up, if real material loaves and fish had not been miraculously multiplied. Nothing, in short, can explain the whole transaction, but the finger of God. The same hand which sent manna from heaven in the wilderness to feed Israel, was the hand which made five loaves and two fish supply the needs of five thousand men.

The miracle before us is one among many proofs that with Christ nothing is impossible. The Savior of sinners is Almighty. He "calls those things which be not as though they were." (Rom. 4:17.) When He wills a thing, it shall be done. When He commands a thing, it shall come to pass. He can create light out of darkness, order out of disorder, strength out of weakness, joy out of sorrow, and food out of nothing at all. Forever let us bless God that it is so! We might well despair, when we see the corruption of human nature, and the desperate hardness and unbelief of man's heart, if we did not know the power of Christ. "Can these dry bones live? Can any man or woman be saved? Can any child, or friend of ours ever become a true

Christian? Can we ourselves ever win our way through to heaven?"—Questions like these could never be answered, if Jesus was not Almighty. But thanks be to God, Jesus has all power in heaven and earth. He lives in heaven for us, able to save to the uttermost, and therefore we may hope.

We see, for another thing, in these verses, **a striking emblem of Christ's ability to supply the spiritual needs of mankind.** The whole miracle is a picture. We see in it, as in a mirror, some of the most important truths of Christianity. It is, in fact, a great acted parable of the glorious Gospel.

What is that multitude which surrounded our Lord in the wilderness; poor and helpless, and destitute of food? It is a figure of mankind. We are a company of poor sinners, in the midst of a wicked world, without strength, or power to save ourselves, and severely in danger of perishing from spiritual famine.

Who is that gracious Teacher who had compassion on this starving multitude in the wilderness, and said to His disciples, "Give them something to eat?" It is Jesus Himself, ever full of pity, ever kind, ever ready to show mercy, even to the unthankful and the evil. And He is not altered. He is just the same today as He was eighteen hundred years ago. High in heaven at the right hand of God, He looks down on the vast multitude of starving sinners, who cover the face of the earth. He still pities them, still cares for them, still feels for their helplessness and need. And He still says to His believing followers, "Behold this multitude, give them something to eat."

What is that wonderful provision which Christ miraculously made for the famishing multitude before Him? It is a figure of the Gospel. Weak and contemptible as that Gospel appears to many, it contains “enough and to spare” for the souls of all mankind. Poor and despicable as the story of a crucified Savior seems to the wise and prudent, it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believes. (Rom. 1:16.)

What are those disciples who received the loaves and fish from Christ’s hand, and carried them to the multitude, until all were filled? They are a figure of all faithful preachers and teachers of the Gospel. Their word is simple, and yet deeply important. They are appointed to set before men the provision that Christ has made for their souls. Of their own invention they are not commissioned to give anything. All that they convey to men, must be from Christ’s hands. So long as they faithfully discharge this office, they may confidently expect their Master’s blessing. Many, no doubt, will always refuse to eat of the food that Christ has provided. But if ministers offer the bread of life to men faithfully, the blood of those who are lost will not be required at their hands.

What are we doing ourselves? Have we discovered that this world is a wilderness, and that our souls must be fed with bread from heaven, or die eternally? Happy are they who have learned this lesson, and have tasted by experience, that Christ crucified is the true bread of life! The heart of man can never be satisfied with the things of this world. It is always empty, and hungry, and thirsty, and

dissatisfied, until it comes to Christ. It is only they who hear Christ's voice, and follow Him, and feed on Him by faith, who are "filled."

Notes on 9:12-17

17. Twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. Our Lord disapproves of waste. If "the great Housekeeper of the world," Burkitt says, "is so particular about saving fragments, what account will they give on the day of judgment who think nothing of wasting time, money, health, and strength, in the service of sin and the world?"

Brentius's words are worth noting: "The whole of John chapter six is the true explanation of the use of this miracle. Christ is the bread of life, and he who eats of him will live forever."

LUKE 9:18-22

PETER'S CONFESSION OF CHRIST

Let us notice in this passage, **the variety of opinions about our Lord Jesus Christ, which prevailed during His earthly ministry.** We are told that some said that He was John the Baptist—some that He was Elijah—and some that one of the old prophets was risen again. One common remark applies to all these opinions. All were agreed that our Lord's doctrine was not like that of the Scribes and Pharisees. All saw in Him a bold witness against the evil that was in the world.

Let it never surprise us, to find the same variety of opinions about Christ and His Gospel in our own times. God's truth disturbs the spiritual laziness of men. It obliges them to think. It makes them begin to talk, and reason, and speculate, and invent theories to account for its spread in some quarters, and its rejection in others. Thousands in every age of the Church spend their lives in this way, and never come to the point of drawing near to God. They satisfy themselves with a miserable round of gossip about this preacher's sermons, or that writer's opinions. They think "this man goes too far," and "that man does not go far enough." Some doctrines they approve, and others they disapprove. Some teachers they call "sound," and others they call "unsound." They cannot quite make up their own minds what is true, or what is right. Year rolls on after year, and finds them in the same state—talking, criticizing, fault-finding, speculating, but never getting any further—hovering like the moth round religion, but never settling down like the bee, to feed on its treasures. They never boldly lay hold of Christ. They never set themselves heartily to the great business of serving God. They never take up the cross and become thorough Christians. And at last, after all their talking, they die in their sins, unprepared to meet God.

Let us not be content with a religion of this kind. It will not save us to talk and speculate, and exchange opinions about the Gospel. The Christianity that saves, is a thing personally grasped, personally experienced, personally felt, and personally possessed. There is not the slightest excuse for stopping short in talk, opinion, and speculation. The Jews of our Lord's time might have found out, if

they had been honest inquirers, that Jesus of Nazareth was neither John the Baptist, nor Elijah, nor an old prophet, but the Christ of God. The speculative Christian of our own day, might easily satisfy himself on every point which is needful to salvation, if he would really, candidly, and humbly seek the teaching of the Spirit. The words of our Lord are weighty and solemn, "If any man will do God's will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God." (John 7:17.) Honest, practical obedience, is one of the keys of the gate of knowledge.

Let us notice, secondly, in this passage, **the singular knowledge and faith displayed by the Apostle Peter.** We read, that when our Lord said to His disciples, "Whom do you say that I am? Peter answering, said, the Christ of God."

This was a noble confession, and one of which, in these days, we can hardly realize the full value. To estimate it aright we should place ourselves in the position of our Lord's disciples. We should call to mind that the great, and wise, and learned of their own nation, saw no beauty in their Master, and would not receive Him as the Messiah. We should recollect that they saw no royal dignity about our Lord—no crown—no army—no earthly dominion. They saw nothing but a poor man, who often had no place in which to lay his head. And yet it was at this time, and under these circumstances, that Peter boldly declares his belief that Jesus is the Christ of God Truly, this was a great faith! It was mingled, no doubt, with much of ignorance and imperfection. But such as it was, it was a faith that

stood alone. He that had it was a remarkable man, and far in advance of the age in which he lived.

We should pray frequently that God would raise up more Christians of the stamp of the apostle Peter. Erring, and unstable, and ignorant of his own heart as he sometimes proved, that blessed apostle was in some respects one in ten thousand. He had faith, and zeal, and love to Christ's cause, when almost all Israel was unbelieving and cold. We need more men of this sort. We need men who are not afraid to stand alone, and to cleave to Christ when the many are against Him. Such men, like Peter, may err sadly at times, but in the long run of life will do more good than any. Knowledge, no doubt, is an excellent thing; but knowledge without zeal and warmth will never do much for the world.

Let us notice, thirdly, in this passage, **our Lord's prediction of His own coming death.** We read that He said, "The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third day." These words, as we read them now, sound simple and plain; but there lie beneath the surface of them two truths which ought to be carefully remembered.

For one thing, our Lord's prediction shows us that His death upon the cross was the voluntary act of His own free will. He was not delivered up to Pilate and crucified because He could not help it, and had no power to crush His enemies. His death was the result of the eternal counsels of the blessed Trinity. He had undertaken to suffer

for man's sin, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God. He had engaged to bear our sins, as our Substitute and Surety, and He bore them willingly in His own person on the tree. He saw Calvary and the cross before Him all the days of His ministry. He went up to them willingly, knowingly, and with full consent, that He might pay our debts in His own blood. His death was not the death of a mere weak son of man, who could not escape; but the death of One who was very God of very God, and had undertaken to be punished in our stead.

For another thing, our Lord's prediction shows us the blinding effect of PREJUDICE on men's minds. Clear and plain as His words now seem to us, His disciples did not understand them. They heard as though they heard not. They could not understand that Messiah was to be "cut off." They could not receive the doctrine that their own Master must die. And hence, when His death really took place, they were amazed and confounded. Often as He had told them of it, they had never realized it as a fact.

Let us watch and pray against prejudice. Many a zealous man has been grievously misled by it, and has pierced himself through with many sorrows. Let us beware of allowing traditions, old preconceived notions, unsound interpretations, baseless theories in religion, to find root in our hearts. There is but one test of truth "What says the Scripture?" Before this let every prejudice go down.

Notes on 9:18-22

21. Jesus strictly warned them not to tell this to anyone. There is a

time to be silent as well as to speak. Our Lord knew that the public proclamation of him as Messiah would make him be captured before his time.

LUKE 9:23-27

THE TEST OF DISCIPLESHIP

These words of our Lord Jesus Christ contain three great lessons for all Christians. They apply to all ranks and classes without exception. They are intended for every age and time, and for every branch of the visible church.

We learn, for one thing, **the absolute necessity of daily self-denial.** We ought every day to crucify the flesh, to overcome the world, and to resist the devil. We ought to keep under our bodies, and bring them into subjection. We ought to be on our guard, like soldiers in an enemy's country. We ought to fight a daily battle, and war a daily warfare. The command of our Master is clear and plain—"If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."

Now what do we know of all this? Surely this is a question which ought to be asked. A little formal church-going, and a decent attendance at a place of worship, can never be the Christianity of which Christ speaks in this place. Where is our self-denial? Where is our daily carrying of the cross? Where is our following of Christ? Without a religion of this kind we shall never be saved. A crucified

Savior will never be content to have a self-pleasing, self-indulging, worldly-minded people. No self-denial—no real grace! No cross—no crown! “Those who are Christ’s,” says Paul, “have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts.” (Gal. 5:24.) “Whoever will save his life,” says the Lord Jesus, “shall lose it; but whoever will lose his life for My sake shall save it.”

We learn, for another thing, from our Lord’s words in this passage, **the unspeakable value of the soul. A** question is asked, which admits of only one answer— “And how do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose or forfeit your own soul in the process?” The possession of the whole world, and all that it contains, would never make a man happy. Its pleasures are false and deceptive. Its riches, rank, and honors, have no power to satisfy the heart. So long as we have not got them they glitter, and sparkle, and seem desirable. The moment we have them we find that they are empty bubbles, and cannot make us feel content. And, worst of all, when we possess this world’s good things, to the utmost bound of our desire, we cannot keep them. Death comes in and separates us from all our property forever. Naked we came upon earth, and naked we go forth, and of all our possessions we can carry nothing with us. Such is the world, which occupies the whole attention of thousands! Such is the world, for the sake of which millions are every year destroying their souls!

The loss of the soul is the heaviest loss that can befall a man. The worst and most painful of diseases—the most distressing bankruptcy

of fortune—the most disastrous shipwrecks—are a mere scratch of a pin compared to the loss of a soul. All other losses are bearable, or but for a short time, but the loss of the soul is for evermore. It is to lose God, and Christ, and heaven, and glory, and happiness, to all eternity. It is to be cast away forever, helpless and hopeless in hell!

What are we doing ourselves? Are we losing our souls? Are we, by willful neglect or by open sin—by sheer carelessness and idleness, or deliberate breach of Gods law—compassing our own destruction? These questions demand an answer. The plain account of many professing Christians is this, that they are daily sinning against the sixth commandment. They are murdering their own souls!

We learn, in the last place, from our Lord's words, **the guilt and danger of being ashamed of Christ and His words.** We read that He says— "Whoever shall be ashamed of Me and My words, of Him shall the Son of Man be ashamed when He shall come in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels."

There are many ways of being ashamed of Christ. We are guilty of it whenever we are afraid of letting men know that we love His doctrines, His precepts, His people, and His ordinances. We are guilty of it whenever we allow the fear of man to prevail over us, and to keep us back from letting others see that we are decided Christians. Whenever we act in this way, we are denying our Master, and committing a great sin.

The wickedness of being ashamed of Christ is very great. It is a proof of unbelief. It shows that we care more for the praise of men whom we can see, than that of God whom we cannot see. It is a proof of ingratitude. It shows that we fear confessing Him before man who was not ashamed to die for us upon the cross. Wretched indeed are they who give way to this sin. Here, in this world, they are always miserable. A bad conscience robs them of peace. In the world to come they can look for no comfort. In the day of judgment they must expect to be disowned by Christ to all eternity, if they will not confess Christ for a few years upon earth.

Let us resolve never to be ashamed of Christ. Of sin and worldliness we may well be ashamed. Of Christ and His cause we have no right to be ashamed at all. Boldness in Christ's service always brings its own reward. The boldest Christian is always the happiest man.

Notes on 9:23-27

23. "Take up his cross." Campbell remarks, "Everyone condemned by the Romans to crucifixion was compelled to carry the cross on which he was to be suspended, to the place of execution. In this manner our Lord was treated."

26. "When he comes." Three kinds of glory are mentioned here which accompany the second coming of Christ—his own, the Father's, and the glory of the angels.

27. "Not taste death before they see the kingdom of God." The correct interpretation of this verse is the one which links it to the

Transfiguration. It views the glorious vision of the kingdom which the Transfiguration supplied as the fulfillment of the promise of this verse.

LUKE 9:28-36

THE TRANSFIGURATION

The event described in these verses, commonly called "the transfiguration," is one of the most remarkable in the history of our Lord's earthly ministry. It is one of those passages which we should always read with peculiar thankfulness. It lifts a corner of the veil which hangs over the world to come, and throws light on some of the deepest truths of our religion.

In the first place, this passage shows us **something of the glory which Christ will have at His second coming.** We read that "the fashion of His countenance was altered, and His clothing was white and glistering," and that the disciples who were with Him "saw His glory."

We need not doubt that this marvelous vision was meant to encourage and strengthen our Lord's disciples. They had just been hearing of the cross and passion, and the self-denial and sufferings to which they must submit themselves, if they would be saved. They were now cheered by a glimpse of the "glory that should follow," and the reward which all faithful servants of their Master would one day

receive. They had seen their Master's day of weakness. They now saw, for a few minutes, a pattern and specimen of His future power.

Let us take comfort in the thought, that there are good things laid up in store for all true Christians, which shall make ample amends for the afflictions of this present time. Now is the season for carrying the cross, and sharing in our Savior's humiliation. The crown, the kingdom, the glory, are all yet to come. Christ and His people are now, like David in the cave of Adullam, despised, and lightly esteemed by the world. There seems no form or loveliness in Him, or in His service. But the hour comes, and will soon be here, when Christ shall take to Himself His great power and reign, and put down every enemy under His feet. And then the glory which was first seen for a few minutes, by three witnesses on the Mount of Transfiguration, shall be seen by all the world, and never hidden to all eternity.

In the second place, this passage shows us *the* **safety of all true believers who have been removed from this world.** We are told that when our Lord appeared in glory, Moses and Elijah were seen with Him, standing and speaking with Him. Moses had been dead nearly fifteen hundred years. Elijah had been taken up by a whirlwind from the earth more than nine hundred years before this time. Yet here these holy men were seen once more alive, and not only alive, but in glory!

Let us take comfort in the blessed thought that there is a resurrection and a life to come. All is not over, when the last breath is

drawn. There is another world beyond the grave. But, above all, let us take comfort in the thought, that until the day dawns, and the resurrection begins, the people of God are safe with Christ. There is much about their present condition, no doubt, which is deeply mysterious. Where is their local habitation? What knowledge have they of things on earth? These are questions we cannot answer. But let it suffice us to know that Jesus is taking care of them, and will bring them with Him at the last day. He showed Moses and Elijah to His disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration, and He will show us all who have fallen asleep in Him, at His second advent. Our brethren and sisters in Christ are in good keeping. They are not lost, but gone before us.

In the third place, this passage shows us that **the Old Testament saints in glory take a deep interest in Christ's atoning death.** We are told that when Moses and Elijah appeared in glory with our Lord on the Mount of Transfiguration, they "talked with Him." And what was the subject of their conversation? We are not obliged to make conjectures and guesses about this. Luke tells us, "they spoke of His decease, which He should accomplish at Jerusalem." They knew the meaning of that death. They knew how much depended on it. Therefore they "talked" about it.

It is a grave mistake to suppose that holy men and women under the Old Testament knew nothing about the sacrifice which Christ was to offer up for the sin of the word. Their light, no doubt, was far less clear than ours. They saw things afar off and indistinctly, which we

see, as it were, close at hand. But there is not the slightest proof that any Old Testament saint ever looked to any other satisfaction for sin, but that which God promised to make by sending Messiah. From Abel downwards the whole company of old believers appear to have been ever resting on a promised sacrifice, and a blood of almighty efficacy yet to be revealed. From the beginning of the world there has never been but one foundation of hope and peace for sinners—the death of an Almighty Mediator between God and man. That foundation is the center truth of all revealed religion. It was the subject of which Moses and Elijah were seen speaking when they appeared in glory. They spoke of the atoning death of Christ.

Let us take heed that this death of Christ is the ground of all our confidence. Nothing else will give us comfort in the hour of death and the day of judgment. Our own works are all defective and imperfect. Our sins are more in number than the hairs of our heads. (Psalm 40:12.) Christ dying for our sins, and rising again for our justification, must be our only plea, if we wish to be saved. Happy is that man who has learned to cease from his own works, and to glory in nothing but the cross of Christ! If saints in glory see in Christ's death so much beauty, that they must needs talk of it, how much more ought sinners on earth!

In the last place, the passage shows us **the immense distance between Christ and all other teachers whom God has given to man.** We are told that when Peter, "not knowing what he said," proposed to make three tabernacles on the mount, one for Jesus, one

for Moses, and one for Elijah, as if all three deserved equal honor, this proposal was at once rebuked in a remarkable way— "There came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son, hear Him." That voice was the voice of God the Father, conveying both reproof and instruction. That voice proclaimed to Peter's ear that however great Moses and Elijah might be, there stood One before him far greater than they. They were but servants; He was the King's Son. They were but stars; He was the Sun. They were but witnesses; He was the Truth.

Forever let that solemn word of the Father ring in our ears, and give the key-note to our religion. Let us honor ministers for their Master's sake. Let us follow them so long as they follow Christ. But let it be our principal aim to hear Christ's voice, and follow Him wherever He goes. Let some talk, if they will, of the voice of the Church. Let others be content to say, "I hear this preacher, or that clergyman." Let us never be satisfied unless the Spirit witnesses within us that we hear Christ Himself, and are His disciples.

Notes on 9:28-36

29. As he was praying. We are told that it was as our Lord was praying at his baptism that the Holy Spirit came down and the Father's voice was heard. So also prayer ushers in the great vision of glory here.

Bishop Hall remarks: "Behold how Christ entered on all his great works, with prayers in his mouth. When he was about to start his great work of his humiliation in his passion, he went into the garden

to pray. When he is to start his great work of exaltation in his transfiguration, he went up the mountain to pray. He was taken up from his knees to both. O noble example of piety and devotion to us."

30. Moses and Elijah. Moses represents the law, and Elijah the prophets. Both unite in acknowledging and recognizing Christ, about whom the law and the prophets testify.

It is also highly probable that they were meant to be types and emblems of the saints who will appear with Christ in glory at his second coming. Moses is the type of those who are dead and will be raised at the Lord's coming. Elijah is the type of those who are alive and are caught up to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

31. His departure. This expression is remarkable. Literally it means his "exodus." It is used by St. Peter to speak about his own death (2 Peter 1:15). It is also remarkable that in Acts 13:24 we have a Greek word used for our Lord's "coming" to take the office of a Savior which might be translated literally his "entrance." Both expressions are singularly applicable to him who came into the world and was made flesh and after doing the work he came to do left the world and went to the Father. The beginning of his ministry was a coming or an entrance, his death an exodus or departure.

32. Were very sleepy. The same disciples who slept during a vision of glory were also found sleeping during the Savior's agony in the garden of Gethsemane. Flesh and blood does indeed need to be changed before it can enter heaven.

33. "It is good for us to be here." Archbishop Usher remarks, "When Peter saw Moses and Elijah with Christ in his transfiguration, though he had but a glimpse of glory, yet he says, 'It is good for us to be

here.' But, oh, how infinitely good will it be for us to be in heaven. How shall we then be wrapt up with glory, when we will be forever with the Lord!"

35. "Listen to him." Calvin writes, "We are placed under his tuition alone, and commanded from him alone to seek the doctrine of salvation, to depend on and listen to One—to adhere to One—in a word, as the terms import, to hearken to One only."

LUKE 9:37-45

THE HEALING OF A BOY WITH AN EVIL SPIRIT

The event described in these verses took place immediately after the transfiguration. The Lord Jesus, we should remark, did not tarry long on the Mount of Olives. His communion with Moses and Elijah was very short. He soon returned to His accustomed work of doing good to a sin-stricken world. In His life on earth, to receive honor and have visions of glory was the exception. To minister to others, to heal all who were oppressed by the devil, to do acts of mercy to sinners, was the rule. Happy are those Christians who have learned of Jesus to live for others more than for themselves, and who understand that it is "more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:35.)

We have first, in these verses, **an example of what a parent should do when he is troubled about his children.** We are told of a man in severe distress about his only son. This son was possessed by an evil spirit, and grievously tormented by him, both in

body and soul. In his distress the father makes application to our Lord Jesus Christ for relief. “Master,” he says, “I beseech You, look upon my son—for he is my only child.”

There are many Christian fathers and mothers at this day who are just as miserable about their children as the man of whom we are reading. The son who was once the “desire of their eyes,” and in whom their lives were bound up, turns out a spendthrift, a profligate, and a companion of sinners. The daughter who was once the flower of the family, and of whom they said, “This girl shall be the comfort of our old age,” becomes self-willed, worldly minded, and a lover of pleasure more than a lover of God. Their hearts are well near broken. The iron seems to enter into their souls. The devil appears to triumph over them, and rob them of their choicest jewels. They are ready to cry, “I shall go to the grave sorrowing. What good shall my life do to me?”

Now what should a father or mother do in a case like this? They should do as the man before us did. They should go to Jesus in prayer, and cry to Him about their child. They should spread before that merciful Savior the tale of their sorrows, and entreat Him to help them. Great is the power of prayer and intercession! The child of many prayers shall seldom be cast away. God’s time of conversion may not be ours. He may think fit to prove our faith by keeping us long waiting. But so long as a child lives, and a parent prays, we have no right to despair about that child’s soul.

We have, secondly, in these verses, **an example of Christ's readiness to show mercy to young people.** We are told in the case before us, that the prayer of the afflicted parent was graciously granted. He said to him, "Bring your son here." And then "He rebuked the unclean spirit, and healed the child, and delivered him again to his father." We have many similar cases in the Gospels. The daughter of Jairus, the nobleman's son at Capernaum, the daughter of the Canaanitish woman, the widow's son at Nain, are all instances of our Lord's interest in those who are young. The young are exactly those whom the devil labors to lead captive and make His own. The young seem to have been exactly the people whom our Lord took a special delight in helping. Three He plucked out of the very jaws of death. Two, as in the case before us, He rescued from the complete dominion of the devil.

There is a meaning in facts like these. They are not recorded without a special purpose. They are meant to encourage all who try to do good to the souls of the young. They are meant to remind us that young men and young women are special objects of interest to Christ. They supply us with an antidote to the common idea that it is useless to press religion on the attention of young people. Such an idea, let us remember, comes from the devil and not from Christ. He who cast out the evil spirit from the child before us, still lives, and is still mighty to save. Let us then work on, and try to do good to the young. Whatever the world may think, Jesus is well pleased.

We have, lastly, in these verses, an example of **the spiritual ignorance which may be found even in the hearts of good men.** We are told that our Lord said to His disciples, "The Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men." They had heard the same thing from His lips little more than a week before. But now, as then, the words seemed lost upon them. They heard as though they heard not. They could not realize the fact that their Master was to die. They could not realize the great truth that Christ was to be "cut off" before He was to reign, and that this cutting off was a literal death upon the cross. It is written, "They understood not this saying"— "it was hidden from them," "they perceived it not."

Such slowness of understanding may surprise us much at this period of the world. We are apt to forget the power of early habits of thought, and national prejudices, in the midst of which the disciples had been trained. "The *throne* of David," says a great divine, "did so fill their eyes that they could not see the *cross*." Above all, we forget the enormous difference between the position we occupy who know the history of the crucifixion and the Scriptures which it fulfilled, and the position of a believing Jew who lived before Christ died and the veil was rent in twain. Whatever we may think of it, the ignorance of the disciples should teach us two useful lessons, which we shall all do well to learn.

For one thing, let us learn that men may understand spiritual things very feebly, and yet be true children of God. The head may be very dull when the heart is right. Grace is far better than gifts, and

faith than knowledge. If a man has faith and grace enough to give up all for Christ's sake, and to take up the cross and follow Him, he shall be saved in spite of much ignorance. Christ shall own him at the last day.

Finally, let us learn to bear with ignorance in others, and to deal patiently with beginners in religion. Let us not make men offenders for a word. Let us not set our brother down as having no grace, because he does not exhibit clear knowledge. Has he faith in Christ? Does he love Christ? These are the principal things. If Jesus could endure so much weakness in His disciples, we may surely do likewise.

Notes on 9:37-45

38. "My only child." Let us remember that the daughter of Jairus, whom our Saviour raised from the dead, was an only daughter and the widow's son at Nain an only son. These things are worth noticing. St. Luke is the only Gospel writer who specially mentions them.

LUKE 9:46-50

WHO WILL BE THE GREATEST

The verses we have now read contain two most important warnings. They are directed against two of the commonest evils which are to be found in the Church of Christ. He who gave them knew well what was in the heart of man. Well would it have been for

the Church of Christ, if His words in this passage had received more attention!

In the first place, the Lord Jesus gives us **a warning against pride and self-conceit.** We are told that "there arose a reasoning among the disciples which of them should be the greatest." Astonishing as it may seem, this little company of fishermen and publicans was not beyond the plague of a self-seeking and ambitious spirit. Filled with the vain notion that our Lord's kingdom was to appear immediately, they were ready to wrangle about their place and precedency in it. Each thought his own claim the strongest. Each thought his own deserts and right to honor most unquestionable. Each thought that whatever place was assigned to his brethren, a principal place ought to be assigned to himself. And all this happened in the company of Christ Himself, and under the noon-tide blaze of His teaching. Such is the heart of man.

There is something very instructive in this fact. It ought to sink down deeply into the heart of every Christian reader. Of all sins there is none against which we have such need to watch and pray, as pride. It is a pestilence that walks in darkness, and a sickness that destroys at noon-day. No sin is so deeply rooted in our nature. It cleaves to us like our skin. Its roots never entirely die. They are ready, at any moment, to spring up, and exhibit a most pernicious vitality. No sin is so senseless and deceitful. It can wear the garb of humility itself. It can lurk in the hearts of the ignorant, the ungifted, and the poor, as well as in the minds of the great, the learned, and the rich. It is a

quaint and homely saying, but only too true, that no pope has ever received such honor as pope “self.”

Let a prayer for humility and the spirit of a little child, form part of our daily supplications. Of all creatures none has so little right to be proud as man, and of all men none ought to be so humble as the Christian. Is it really true that we confess ourselves to be “miserable sinners,” and daily debtors to mercy and grace? Are we the followers of Jesus, who was “meek and lowly of heart,” and “made himself of no reputation” for our sakes? Then let that same mind be in us which was in Christ Jesus. Let us lay aside all high thoughts and self-conceit. In lowliness of mind, let us esteem others better than ourselves. Let us be ready, on all occasions, to take the lowest place. And let the words of our Savior ring in our ears continually, “He that is least among you all the same shall be great.”

In the second place, our Lord Jesus Christ gives us **a warning against a bigoted and illiberal spirit. A**s in the preceding verses, so here, the occasion of the warning is supplied by the conduct of His own disciples. We read that John said to Him, “Master, we saw one casting out devils in your name—and we forbade him, because he follows not with us.” Who this man was, and why he did not associate with the disciples, we do not know. But we do know that he was doing a good work in casting out devils, and that he was doing what he did in the name of Christ. And yet John says, “we forbade him.” Very striking is the reply which the Lord at

once gave him— “Forbid him not—for he that is not against us is for us.”

The conduct of John and the disciples on this occasion is a curious illustration of the sameness of human nature, in every age. Thousands, in every period of Church history, have spent their lives in copying John’s mistake. They have labored to stop every man who will not work for Christ in their way, from working for Christ at all. They have imagined, in their petty self-conceit, that no man can be a soldier of Christ, unless he wears their uniform, and fights in their regiment. They have been ready to say of every Christian who does not see everything with their eyes, “Forbid him! Forbid him! for he follows not with us.”

The solemn remark of our Lord Jesus Christ, on this occasion, demands our special notice. He pronounces no opinion upon the conduct of the man of whom John speaks. He neither praises nor blames him for following an independent course, and not working with His disciples. He simply declares that he must not be forbidden, and that those who work the same kind of work that we do, should be regarded not as enemies, but allies. “He that is not against us is for us.”

The principle laid down in this passage is of great importance. A right understanding of it will prove most useful to us in these latter days. The divisions and varieties of opinion which exist among Christians are undeniably very great. The schisms and separations which are continually arising about Church-government, and modes

of worship, are very perplexing to tender consciences. Shall we approve those divisions? We cannot do so. Union is strength. The disunion of Christians is one cause of the slow progress of vital Christianity. Shall we denounce, and hold up to public reprobation, all who will not agree to work with us, and to oppose Satan in our way? It is useless to do so. Hard words never yet made men of one mind. Unity was never yet brought about by force. What then ought we to do? We must leave alone those who do not agree with us, and wait quietly until God shall think fit to bring us together. Whatever we may think of our divisions, the words of our Lord must never be forgotten— "Forbid them not."

The plain truth is, that we are all too ready to say, "We are the men, and wisdom shall die with us." (Job 12:2.) We forget that no individual Church on earth has an absolute monopoly of all wisdom, and that people may be right in the main, without agreeing with us. We must learn to be thankful if sin is opposed, and the Gospel preached, and the devil's kingdom pulled down, though the work may not be done exactly in the way we like. We must try to believe that men may be true-hearted followers of Jesus Christ, and yet for some wise reason may be kept back from seeing all things in religion just as we do. Above all, we must praise God if souls are converted, and Christ is magnified—no matter who the preacher may be, and to what Church he may belong. Happy are those who can say with Paul, "If Christ be preached, I rejoice, yes and will rejoice," (Phil. 1:18.) and with Moses, "Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the Lord's

people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his Spirit upon them all!" (Num. 11:29.)

LUKE 9:51-56

SAMARITAN OPPOSITION

Let us notice in these verses, **the steady determination with which our Lord Jesus Christ regarded His own crucifixion and death.** We read that "when the time was come that He should be received up, He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem." He knew full well what was before Him. The betrayal, the unjust trial, the mockery, the scourging, the crown of thorns, the spitting, the nails, the spear, the agony on the cross—all, all were doubtless spread before His mind's eye, like a picture. But He never flinched for a moment from the work that He had undertaken. His heart was set on paying the price of our redemption, and going even to the prison of the grave, as our surety. He was full of tender love towards sinners. It was the desire of His whole soul to procure for them salvation. And so, "for the joy set before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame." (Heb. 12:2.)

Forever let us bless God that we have such a ready and willing Savior. Forever let us remember that as He was ready to suffer, so He is always ready to save. The man that comes to Christ by faith should never doubt Christ's willingness to receive Him. The mere fact that the Son of God willingly came into the world to die, and willingly suffered, should silence such doubts entirely. All the unwillingness is

on the part of man, not of Christ. It consists in the ignorance, and pride, and unbelief, and half-heartedness of the sinner himself. But there is nothing lacking in Christ.

Let us strive and pray that the same mind may be in us which was in our blessed Master. Like Him, let us be willing to go anywhere, do anything, suffer anything when the path of duty is clear, and the voice of God calls. Let us set our faces steadfastly to our work, when our work is plainly marked out, and drink our bitter cups patiently, when they come from a Father's hand.

Let us notice, secondly, in these verses, **the unusual conduct of two of the apostles, James and John.** We are told that a certain Samaritan village refused to show hospitality to our Lord. "They did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem." And then we read of a strange proposal which James and John made. "They said, Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, even as Elijah did?"

Here was zeal indeed, and zeal of a most plausible kind—zeal for the honor of Christ! Here was zeal, justified and supported by a scriptural example, and that the example of no less a prophet than Elijah! But it was not a zeal according to knowledge. The two disciples, in their heat, forgot that circumstances alter cases, and that the same action which may be right and justifiable at one time, may be wrong and unjustifiable at another. They forgot that punishments should always be proportioned to offences, and that to destroy a

whole village of ignorant people for a single act of discourtesy, would have been both unjust and cruel. In short, the proposal of James and John was a wrong and inconsiderate one. They meant well, but they greatly erred.

Facts like this in the Gospels are carefully recorded for our learning. Let us see to it that we mark them well, and treasure them up in our minds. It is possible to have much zeal for Christ, and yet to exhibit it in most unholy and unchristian ways. It is possible to mean well and have good intentions, and yet to make most grievous mistakes in our actions. It is possible to imagine that we have Scripture on our side, and to support our conduct by scriptural quotations, and yet to commit serious errors. It is as clear as daylight, from this and other cases related in the Bible, that it is not enough to be zealous and *well-meaning*. Very grave faults are frequently committed with good intentions. From no quarter perhaps has the Church received so much injury as from ignorant but well-meaning men.

We must seek to have knowledge as well as zeal. Zeal without knowledge is an army without a general, and a ship without a rudder. We must pray that we may understand how to make a right application of Scripture. The word is no doubt "a light to our feet, and a lantern to our path." But it must be the word rightly handled, and properly applied.

Let us notice, lastly, in these verses, **what a solemn rebuke our Lord gives to persecution carried on under color of**

religion. We are told that when James and John made the strange proposal on which we have just been dwelling, “He turned and rebuked them, and said, You know not what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them.” Uncourteous as the Samaritan villagers had been, their conduct was not to be resented by violence. The mission of the Son of man was to do good, when men would receive Him, but never to do harm. His kingdom was to be extended by patient continuance in well doing, and by meekness and gentleness in suffering, but never by violence and severity.

No saying of our Lord’s, perhaps, has been so totally overlooked by the Church of Christ as that which is now before us. Nothing can be imagined more contrary to the will of Christ than the religious wars and persecutions which disgrace the annals of Church history. Thousands and tens of thousands have been put to death for their religion’s sake all over the world. Thousands have been burned, or shot, or hanged, or drowned, or beheaded, in the name of the Gospel, and those who have slain them have actually believed that they were doing God service! Unhappily, they have only shown their own ignorance of the spirit of the Gospel, and the mind of Christ.

Let it be a settled principle in our minds, that whatever men’s errors may be in religion, we must never persecute them. Let us, if needful, argue with them, reason with them, and try to show them a more excellent way. But let us never take up the “carnal” weapon to promote the spread of truth. Let us never be tempted, directly or

indirectly, to persecute any man, under pretense of the glory of Christ and the good of the Church. Let us rather remember, that the religion which men profess from fear of death, or dread of penalties, is worth nothing at all, and that if we swell our ranks by fear and threatening, in reality we gain no strength. “The weapons of our warfare,” says Paul, “are not carnal.” (2 Cor. 10:4.) The appeals that we make must be to men’s consciences and wills. The arguments that we use must not be sword, or fire, or prison, but doctrines, and precepts, and texts. It is a quaint and homely saying, but as true in the Church as it is in the army, that “one volunteer is worth ten men who have been pressed into service.”

Notes on 9:51-56

54. James and John. There is something very remarkable about the spirit exhibited by these two disciples on this occasion. It shows that it was not without good reason that our Lord called them Boanerges (which means “Sons of Thunder,” Mark 3:17) when he first appointed them. It shows us also the gradual transforming power of the grace of God in John’s character. Three times we have sins against love recorded in the Gospels as committed by John. Once we find him and his brother asking to sit at Christ’s right and left hand in his kingdom and to be preferred before all the other apostles. Once we find him forbidding a man to drive out devils because he did not follow the apostles. Here we find him showing a fierce and cruel spirit against the Samaritan villagers for not receiving our Lord. Yet this was the apostle who proved at last most remarkable for preaching love and charity. No change is too great for the Lord to

work.

56. “Call fire down from heaven.” Bengel remarks that we should compare the behavior of these two disciples with “the fact that when Jesus prayed on the cross, using words from Psalms 22 and 31, he did not pray against his enemies, but for them.”

LUKE 9:57-62

THE COST OF FOLLOWING JESUS

The passage of Scripture we have just read is a very remarkable one. It contains three short sayings of peculiar solemnity, addressed by our Lord Jesus Christ to three different people. We know nothing of the names of those people. We know nothing of the effect which our Lord’s words produced upon them. But we need not doubt that each was addressed in the way which his character required, and we may be sure that the passage is specially intended to promote self-inquiry.

The first of these sayings was addressed to **one who offered to be a disciple unconditionally, and of his own accord.** “Lord,” said this man, “I will follow you wherever you go”—That offer sounded well. It was a step in advance of many. Thousands of people heard our Lord’s sermons who never thought of saying what this man said. Yet he who made this offer was evidently speaking without thought. He had never considered what belonged to discipleship. He had never counted the cost. And hence he needed the grave reply which his offer called forth— “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air

have nests, but the Son of man has not where to lay his head." He must weigh well what he was taking in hand. He must not suppose that Christ's service was all pleasure and smooth sailing. Was he prepared for this? Was he ready to "endure hardness?" (2 Tim. 2:3.) If not, he had better withdraw his application to be a disciple.

Let us learn from our Lord's words on this occasion, that He would have all who profess and call themselves Christians reminded that they must carry the cross. They must lay their account to be despised, and afflicted, and tried, like their Master. He would have no man enlisted on false pretenses. He would have it distinctly understood that there is a battle to be fought, and a race to be run—a work to be done, and many hard things to be endured—if we propose to follow Him. Salvation He is ready to bestow, without money and without price. Grace by the way, and glory in the end, shall be given to every sinner who comes to Him. But He would not have us ignorant that we shall have deadly enemies—the world, the flesh, and the devil, and that many will hate us, slander us, and persecute us, if we become His disciples. He does not wish to discourage us, but He does wish us to know the truth.

Well would it have been for the Church if our Lord's warning had been more frequently pondered! Many a man begins a religious life, full of warmth and zeal, and by and bye loses all his first love, and turns back again to the world. He liked the new uniform, and the bounty money, and the name of a Christian soldier. He never considered the watching, and warring, and wounds, and conflicts,

which Christian soldiers must endure. Let us never forget this lesson. It need not make us afraid to begin serving Christ, but it ought to make us begin carefully, humbly, and with much prayer for grace. If we are not ready to take part in the afflictions of Christ, we must never expect to share His glory.

The second of our Lord's sayings is addressed to **one whom Jesus invited to follow Him.** The answer He received was a very remarkable one. "Lord," said the man, "allow me first to go and bury my father." The thing he requested was in itself harmless. But the time at which the request was made was unseasonable. Affairs of far greater importance than even a father's funeral demanded the man's immediate attention. There would always be plenty of people ready and fit to take charge of a funeral. But there was at that moment a pressing need of laborers to do Christ's work in the world. And hence the man's request drew from our Lord the solemn reply— "Let the dead bury their dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God."

Let us learn, from this saying, to beware of allowing family and social duties to interfere with our duty to Christ. Funerals, and marriages, and visits of courtesy, and the like, unquestionably are not in themselves sinful. But when they are allowed to absorb a believer's time, and keep him back from any plain religious duty, they become a snare to his soul. That the children of the world, and the unconverted, should allow these kind of things to occupy all their time and thoughts is not astonishing. They know nothing higher, and better, and more important. "Let the dead bury their dead." But the

heirs of glory, and children of the King of kings, should be men of a different stamp. They should declare plainly, by their conduct, that the world to come is the great reality which fills their thoughts. They should not be ashamed to let men see that they have no time either to rejoice or to sorrow like others who have no hope. (1 Thess. 4:13.) Their Master's work waits for them, and their Master's work must have the chief place in their hearts. They are God's priests in the world, and, like the priests of old, their mourning must be kept carefully within bounds, (Lev. 21:1.) "Weeping," says an old divine, "must not hinder working," and mourning must not be allowed to run into excess.

The third of our Lord's sayings in this passage was addressed to **one who volunteered to follow Him, but marred the grace of His offer by interposing a request.** "Lord," he said, "I will follow you; but let me first go bid them farewell which are at home at my house." The answer he received shows plainly that the man's heart was not yet thoroughly engaged in Christ's service, and that he was therefore unfit to be a disciple. "Jesus said unto him, No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

We learn from this saying that it is impossible to serve Christ with a divided heart. If we are looking back to anything in this world we are not fit to be disciples. Those who look back, like Lot's wife, want to go back. Jesus will not share His throne with anyone—no, not with our dearest relatives. He must have all our heart, or none. No doubt

we are to honor father and mother, and love all around us. But when love to Christ and love to relatives come in collision, Christ must have the preference. We must be ready, like Abraham, if needs be, to come out from kindred and father's house for Christ's sake. We must be prepared in case of necessity, like Moses, to turn our backs even on those who have brought us up, if God calls us, and the path is plain.

Such decided conduct may entail sore trials on our affections. It may crush our hearts to go contrary to the opinions of those we love. But such conduct may sometimes be positively necessary to our salvation, and without it, when it becomes necessary, we are unfit for the kingdom of God. The good soldier will not allow his heart to be entangled too much with his home. If he daily gives way to unmanly repining's about those he has left behind him, he will never be fit for a campaign. His present duties—the watching, the marching, the fighting—must have the principal place in his thoughts. So must it be with all who would serve Christ. They must beware of softness spoiling their characters as Christians. They must endure hardness, as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. (2 Tim. 2:3.)

Let us leave the whole passage with many searching's of heart. The times are undoubtedly much changed since our Lord spoke these words. Not many are called to make such real sacrifices for Christ's sake as when Christ was upon earth. But the heart of man never changes. The difficulties of salvation are still very great. The atmosphere of the world is still very unfavorable to spiritual religion.

There is still need for thorough, unflinching, whole-hearted decision, if we would reach heaven. Let us aim at nothing less than this decision, Let us be willing to do anything, and suffer anything, and give up everything for Christ's sake. It may cost us something for a few years, but great will be the reward in eternity.

Notes on 9:57-62

60. "Let the dead bury their own dead." The first "dead" here means spiritually dead, and the second "dead" means naturally dead. The meaning is clear. Funerals may be safely left to those who, being without spiritual life themselves, attach importance to all ceremonies and customs belonging to this life and are sure to go to them.

62. "Fit for service in the kingdom of God." Fit means literally, "well-placed" or "well-disposed." It implies that a person wanting to go home to take leave of his friends is not rightly disposed for gospel work, any more than a person looking behind him is rightly placed for plowing.

Looking at the whole passage, note that both the second and third people have the great fault of desiring to do something "first" (verses 59, 61) before doing Christ's work.

Luke – Chap. 10

LUKE 10:1-7

JESUS SENDS OUT THE SEVENTY-TWO

The verses before us relate a circumstance which is not recorded by any Gospel writer except Luke. That circumstance is our Lord's appointment of seventy disciples to go before Him, in addition to the twelve apostles. We do not know the names of any of these disciples. Their subsequent history has not been revealed to us. But the instructions with which they are sent forth are deeply interesting, and deserve the close attention of all ministers and teachers of the Gospel.

The first point in our Lord's charge to the seventy disciples is **the importance of prayer and intercession.** This is the leading thought with which our Lord opens His address. Before He tells His ambassadors what to do, He first bids them to pray. "Ask the Lord of the harvest that He would send forth laborers into his harvest."

Prayer is one of the best and most powerful means of helping forward the cause of Christ in the world. It is a means within the reach of all who have the Spirit of adoption. Not all believers have money to give to missions. Very few have great intellectual gifts, or extensive influence among men. But all believers can pray for the success of the Gospel—and they ought to pray for it daily. Many and marvelous are the answers to prayer which are recorded for our learning in the Bible. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." (James 5:16.) Prayer is one of the principal weapons which the minister of the Gospel ought to use. To be a true successor of the apostles, he must give himself to prayer as well as to the ministry of the word. (Acts 6:4.) He must not only use the sword

of the Spirit, but pray always, with all prayer and supplication. (Eph. 6:17,18.) This is the way to win a blessing on his own ministry. This, above all, is the way to procure helpers to carry on Christ's work. Colleges may educate men. Bishops may ordain them. Patrons may give them livings. But God alone can raise up and send forth "laborers" who will do work among souls. For a constant supply of such laborers let us daily pray.

The second point in our Lord's charge to the seventy disciples, is **the perilous nature of the work in which they were about to be engaged.** He does not keep back from them the dangers and trials which are before them. He does not enlist them under false pretenses, or prophesy smooth things, or promise them unvarying success. He tells them plainly what they must expect. "Behold," He says, "I send you forth as lambs among wolves."

These words, no doubt, had a special reference to the life-time of those to whom they were spoken. We see their fulfillment in the many persecutions described in the Acts of the Apostles. But we must not conceal from ourselves that the words describe a state of things which may be seen at this very day. So long as the Church stands believers must expect to be like "lambs among wolves." They must make up their minds to be hated, and persecuted, and ill treated, by those who have no real religion. They must look for no favor from unconverted people, for they will find none. It was a strong but a true saying of Martin Luther, that "Cain will murder Abel, if he can, to the very end of the world." "Marvel not," says John, "if the world hates

you." "All that will live godly in Jesus Christ," says Paul, "shall suffer persecution." (1 John 3:13; 2 Tim. 3:12.)

The third point in our Lord's charge to the seventy disciples is, **the thorough devotion to their work which He enjoined upon them.** They were to abstain even from the appearance of covetousness, or love of money, or luxury— "Carry neither purse, nor bag, nor shoes." They were to behave like men who had no time to waste on the empty compliments and conventional courtesies of the world— "Salute no man by the way."

These remarkable words must, doubtless be interpreted with some qualification. The time came when our Lord Himself, at the end of His ministry, said to the disciples, "He that has a purse let him take it, and likewise his bag." (Luke 22:36.) The apostle Paul was not ashamed to use salutations. The apostle Peter expressly commands us to "be courteous." (1 Pet. 3:8.) But still, after every deduction and qualification, there remains a deep lesson beneath these words of our Lord, which ought not to be overlooked. They teach us that ministers and teachers of the Gospel should beware of allowing the world to eat up their time and thoughts, and to hinder them in their spiritual work. They teach us that care about money, and excessive attention to what are called "the courtesies of life," are mighty snares in the way of Christ's laborers, and snares into which they must take heed lest they fall.

Let us consider these things. They concern ministers especially, but they concern all Christians more or less. Let us strive to show the

men of the world that we have no time for their mode of living. Let us show them that we find life too precious to be spent in perpetual feasting, and visiting, and calling, and the like, as if there were no death, or judgment, or life to come. By all means let us be courteous. But let us not make the courtesies of life an idol, before which everything else must bow down. Let us declare plainly that we seek a country beyond the grave, and that we have no time for that incessant round of eating, and drinking, and dressing, and civility, and exchange of compliments, in which so many try to find their happiness, but evidently try in vain. Let our principle be that of Nehemiah, "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down." (Neh. 6:3.)

The fourth point in our Lord's charge to the seventy disciples is **the simple-minded and contented spirit which He bade them to exhibit.** Wherever they tarried, in traveling about upon their Master's business, they were to avoid the appearance of being fickle, changeable, delicate livers, or hard to please about food and lodging. They were to "eat and drink such things" as were given them. They were not to "go from house to house."

Instructions like these no doubt have a primary and special reference to the ministers of the Gospel. They are the men above all who, in their style of living, ought to be careful to avoid the spirit of the world. Simplicity in food and household arrangements, and readiness to put up with any accommodation, so long as health can be preserved uninjured, should always be the mark of the "man of

God." Once let a preacher get the reputation of being fond of eating and drinking and worldly comforts, and his ministerial usefulness is at an end. The sermon about "things unseen" will produce little effect when the life preaches the importance of the "things that are seen."

But we ought not to confine our Lord's instructions to ministers alone. They ought to speak loudly to the consciences of all believers, of all who are called by the Holy Spirit and made priests to God. They ought to remind us of **the necessity of simplicity and unworldliness in our daily life.** We must beware of thinking too much about our meals, and our furniture, and our houses, and all those many things which concern the life of the body. We must strive to live like men whose first thoughts are about the immortal soul. We must endeavor to pass through the world like men who are not yet at home, and are not overmuch troubled about the fare they meet with on the road and at the inn. Blessed are they who feel like pilgrims and strangers in this life, and whose best things are all to come!

Notes on 10:1-7

2. "Send out." The Greek word here literally means "to throw out" or "send out with a degree of force." It implies that nothing but God's powerful and constraining call will ever move men to become laborers in the gospel harvest.

5. "Peace to this house." This is probably a common Jewish greeting; see 1 Samuel 25:6; Psalm 122:7-8.

7. "The worker deserves his wages." This is a proverb. It is

remarkable for being the only expression in the Gospels which is quoted in the letters of the New Testament (see 1 Timothy 5:18).

LUKE 10:8-16

These verses comprise the second part of our Lord Jesus Christ's charge to the seventy disciples. Its lessons, like those of the first part, have a special reference to ministers and teachers of the Gospel. But they contain truths which deserve the serious attention of all members of the Church of Christ.

The first point we should notice in these verses is **the simplicity of the tidings which our Lord commanded some of His first messengers to proclaim.** We read that they were commissioned to say, "The kingdom of God is come near unto you."

These words we should probably regard as the key-note to all that the seventy disciples said. We can hardly suppose that they said nothing else but this single sentence. The words no doubt implied far more to a Jewish hearer at the time when they were spoken, than they convey to our minds at the present day. To a well instructed Israelite, they would sound like an announcement that the times of Messiah had come—that the long promised Savior was about to be revealed—that the "desire of all nations" was about to appear. (Hag. 2:7.) All this is unquestionably true. Such an announcement suddenly made by seventy men, evidently convinced of the truth of what they said, traveling over a thickly peopled country, could hardly

fail to draw attention and excite inquiry. But still the message is peculiarly and strikingly simple.

It may be doubted whether the modern way of teaching Christianity, as a general rule, is sufficiently simple. It is a certain fact that deep reasoning and elaborate arguments are not the weapons by which God is generally pleased to convert souls. *Simple plain statements, boldly and solemnly made, and made in such a manner that they are evidently felt and believed by him who makes them, seem to have the most effect on hearts and consciences.* Parents and teachers of the young, ministers and missionaries, Scripture-readers and district visitors, would all do well to remember this. We need not be so anxious as we often are about fencing, and proving, and demonstrating, and reasoning, out the doctrines of the Gospel. Not one soul in a hundred was ever brought to Christ in this fashion. We need more simple, plain, solemn, earnest, affectionate statements of simple Gospel truths. We may safely leave such statements to work and take care of themselves. They are arrows from God's own quiver, and will often pierce hearts which have not been touched by the most eloquent sermon.

The second point we should notice in these verses is **the great sinfulness of those who reject the offers of Christ's Gospel.** Our Lord declares that it shall be "more tolerable at the last day for Sodom," than for those who receive not the message of His disciples. And He proceeds to say that the guilt of Chorazin and Bethsaida, cities in Galilee, where He had often preached and worked miracles,

but where the people had nevertheless not repented, was greater than the guilt of Tyre and Sidon.

Declarations like these are peculiarly dreadful. They throw light on some truths which men are very apt to forget. They teach us that all will be judged according to their spiritual light, and that from those who have enjoyed most religious privileges, most will be required. They teach us the exceeding hardness and unbelief of the human heart. It was possible to hear Christ preach, and to see Christ's miracles, and yet to remain unconverted. They teach us, not least, that man is responsible for the state of his own soul. Those who reject the Gospel, and remain impenitent and unbelieving, are not merely objects of pity and compassion, but deeply guilty and blameworthy in God's sight. God called, but they refused. God spoke to them, but they would not regard. The condemnation of the unbelieving will be strictly just. Their blood will be upon their own heads. The Judge of all the earth will do right.

Let us lay these things to heart, and beware of unbelief. It is not open sin and flagrant profligacy alone which ruin souls. We have only to sit still and do nothing, when the Gospel is pressed on our acceptance, and we shall find ourselves one day in the pit. We need not run into any excess of riot. We need openly oppose true religion. We have only to remain cold, careless, indifferent, unmoved, and unaffected, and our end will be in hell. This was the ruin of Chorazin and Bethsaida. And this, it may be feared, will be the ruin of

thousands, as long as the world stands. No sin makes less noise, but none so surely damns the soul, as unbelief.

The last point that we should notice in these verses is **the honor which the Lord Jesus is pleased to put upon His faithful ministers.** We see this brought out in the words with which He concludes His charge to the seventy disciples. He says to them, "He that hears you hears me, and he that despises you despises me, and he that despises me despises Him that sent me."

The language here used by our Lord is very remarkable, and the more so when we remember that it was addressed to the seventy disciples, and not to the twelve apostles. The lesson it is intended to convey is clear and unmistakable. It teaches us that *ministers are to be regarded as Christ's messengers and ambassadors to a sinful world*. So long as they do their work faithfully, they are worthy of honor and respect for their Master's sake. Those who despise them, are not despising them so much as their Master. Those who reject the terms of salvation which they are commissioned to proclaim, are doing an injury not so much to them as to their King. When Hanun, king of Ammon, ill-used the ambassadors of David, the insult was resented as if it had been done to David himself. (2 Sam. 10:1-19.)

Let us remember these things, in order that we may form a right estimate of the position of a minister of the Gospel. The subject is one on which error abounds. On the one side the minister's office is regarded with idolatrous and superstitious reverence. On the other side it is often regarded with ignorant contempt. Both extremes are

wrong. Both errors arise from forgetfulness of the plain teaching of Scripture. The minister who does not do Christ's work faithfully, or deliver Christ's message correctly, has no right to look for the respect of the people.

But the minister who declares all the counsel of God, and keeps back nothing that is profitable, is one whose words cannot be disregarded without great sin. He is on the King's business. He is a herald. He is an ambassador. He is the bearer of a flag of truce. He brings the glad tidings of terms off peace. To such a man the words of our Lord will prove strictly applicable. The rich may trample on him. The wicked may hate him. The pleasure-lover may be annoyed at him. The covetous may be vexed by him. But he may take comfort daily in His Master's words, "He that despises you despises me." The last day will prove that these words were not spoken in vain.

Notes on 10:8-16

16. "He who listens to you listens to me." There is probably no stronger language than this in the New Testament about the dignity of a faithful minister's office and the guilt incurred by those who refuse to hear his message.

LUKE 10:17-20

We learn, from this passage, **how ready Christians are to be puffed up with success.** It is written, that the seventy returned from their first mission with joy, "saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through your name." There was much false fire in

that joy. There was evidently self-satisfaction in that report of achievements. The whole tenor of the passage leads us to this conclusion. The remarkable expression which our Lord uses about Satan's fall from heaven, was most probably meant to be a caution. He read the hearts of the young and inexperienced soldiers before Him. He saw how much they were lifted up by their first victory. He wisely checks them in their undue exultation. He warns there against pride.

The lesson is one which all who work for Christ should mark and remember. Success is what all faithful laborers in the Gospel field desire. The minister at home and the missionary abroad, the district visitor and the city missionary, the tract distributor and the Sunday-school teacher, all alike long for success. All long to see Satan's kingdom pulled down, and souls converted to God. We cannot wonder. The desire is right and good.

Let it, however, never be forgotten, that the time of success is a time of danger to the Christian's soul. The very hearts that are depressed when all things seem against them are often unduly exalted in the day of prosperity. Few men are like Samson, and can kill a lion without telling others of it. (Judges 14:6.) No wonder that Paul says of a bishop, that he ought not to be "a novice, lest being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil." (1 Tim. 3:6.) *Most of Christ's laborers probably have as much success as their souls can bear.*

Let us pray much for humility, and especially for humility in our days of peace and success. When everything around us seems to prosper, and all our plans work well—when family trials and sicknesses are kept from us, and the course of our worldly affairs runs smooth—when our daily crosses are light, and all within and without like a morning without clouds—then, then is the time when our souls are in danger! Then is the time when we have need to be doubly watchful over our own hearts. Then is the time when seeds of evil are sown within us by the devil, which may one day astound as by their growth and strength.

There are few Christians who can carry a *full* cup with a steady hand. There are few whose souls prosper in their days of uninterrupted success. We are all inclined to sacrifice to our net, and burn incense to our own drag. (Hab. 1:16.) We are ready to think that our own might and our own wisdom have procured us the victory. The caution of the passage before us ought never to be forgotten. In the midst of our triumphs, let us cry earnestly, "Lord, clothe us with humility."

We learn, for another thing, from these verses, that **gifts, and power of working miracles, are very inferior to grace.** It is written that our Lord said to the seventy disciples, "In this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven." It was doubtless an honor and a privilege to be allowed to cast out devils. The disciples were right to be thankful. But it was a far higher privilege to be converted and

pardoned men, and to have their names written in the register of saved souls.

The distinction here drawn between grace and gifts is one of deep importance, and often and sadly overlooked in the present day. GIFTS, such as mental vigor, vast memory, striking eloquence, ability in argument, power in reasoning, are often unduly valued by those who possess them, and unduly admired by those who possess them not. These things ought not so to be. Men forget that gifts without grace save no one's soul, and are the characteristic of Satan himself.

GRACE, on the contrary, is an everlasting inheritance, and, lowly and despised as its possessor may be, will land him safe in glory. He that has gifts without grace is dead in sins, however splendid his gifts may be. But he that has grace without gifts is alive to God, however unlearned and ignorant he may appear to man. And "a living dog is better than a dead lion." (Eccles. 9:4.)

Let the religion which we aim to possess be a religion in which grace is the main thing. Let it not content us to be able to speak eloquently, or preach powerfully, or reasonably, or argue cleverly, or profess loudly, or talk fluently. Let it not satisfy us to know the whole system of Christian doctrines, and to have texts and words at our command. These things are all well in their way. They are not to be undervalued. They have their use. But these things are not the grace of God, and they will not deliver us from hell. Let us never rest until we have the witness of the Spirit within us that we are "washed, and

sanctified, and justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of God." (1 Cor. 6:11.) Let us seek to know that "our names are written in heaven," and that we are really one with Christ and Christ in us.

Let us strive to be "epistles of Christ known and read of all men," and to show by our humility, and charity, and faith, and spiritual-mindedness, that we are the children of God. This is true religion. These are the real marks of saving Christianity. Without such marks, a man may have abundance of gifts and turn out nothing better than a follower of Judas Iscariot, the false apostle, and go at last to hell. With such marks, a man may be like Lazarus, poor and despised upon earth, and have no gifts at all. But his name is written in heaven, and Christ shall own him as one of His people at the last day.

Notes on 10:17-20

18. "I saw Satan fall." Cyprian, Jerome, Gregory, Bede, Erasmus, and Pellican consider that our Lord's intention was to warn the disciples against vainglory: "Be not puffed up because the devils are subject to you. Remember that Satan fell through pride, as I myself saw."

20. "Your names are written in heaven." This means that "you are registered in heaven as citizens of God's kingdom, as people who are chosen to salvation through Christ, pardoned, accepted, and saved." It is the same as St. Paul's saying, "whose names are written in the book of life" (Philippians 4:3). See also Daniel 12:1; Revelation 13:8; 20:12. We find the opposite expression in Jeremiah 17:13, "those who turn away from you will be written in the dust."

LUKE 10:21-24

There are five remarkable points in these verses which deserve the attention of all who wish to be well-instructed Christians. Let us take each of the five in order.

We should observe, in the first place, **the one instance on record of our Lord Jesus Christ rejoicing.** We read, that in "that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit." Three times we are told in the Gospels that our Lord Jesus Christ wept. Once only we are told that He rejoiced.

And what was the cause of our Lord's joy? It was the conversion of souls. It was the reception of the Gospel by the weak and lowly among the Jews, when the "wise and prudent" on every side were rejecting it. Our blessed Lord no doubt saw much in this world to grieve Him. He saw the obstinate blindness and unbelief of the vast majority of those among whom He ministered. But when He saw a few poor men and women receiving the glad tiding of salvation, even His heart was refreshed. He saw it and was glad.

Let all Christians mark our Lord's conduct in this matter, and follow His example. They find little in the world to cheer them. They see around them a vast multitude walking in the broad way that leads to destruction, careless, hardened, and unbelieving. They see a few here and there, and only a few, who believe to the saving of their souls. But let this sight make them thankful. Let them bless God that any at all are converted, and that any at all believe. We do not realize

the sinfulness of man sufficiently. We do not reflect that the conversion of any soul is a miracle—a miracle as great as the raising of Lazarus from the dead. Let us learn from our blessed Lord to be more thankful. There is always some blue sky as well as black clouds, if we will only look for it. Though only a few are saved, we should find reason for rejoicing. *It is only through free grace and undeserved mercy that any are saved at all.*

We should observe, secondly, **the sovereignty of God in saving sinners.** We read that our Lord says to His Father, "You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them unto babes." The meaning of these words is clear and plain. There are some from whom salvation is "hidden." There are others to whom salvation is "revealed."

The truth here laid down is deep and mysterious. "It is as high as heaven—what can we do? It is as deep as hell—what do we know?" Why some around us are converted and others remain dead in sins, we cannot possibly explain. Why England is a Christian country and China buried in idolatry, is a problem we cannot solve. We only know that it is so. We can only acknowledge that the words of our Lord Jesus Christ supply the only answer that mortal man ought to give—"Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in your sight."

Let us, however, never forget that God's sovereignty does not destroy man's responsibility. That same God who does all things according to the counsel of His own will, always addresses us as accountable creatures, as beings whose blood will be on their own

heads if they are lost. We cannot understand all His dealings. We see in part and know in part. Let us rest in the conviction that the judgment day will clear up all, and that the Judge of all will not fail to do right. In the mean time, let us remember that God's offers of salvation are free, wide, broad, and unlimited, and that "in our doings that will of God is to be followed which we have expressly declared unto us in the Word of God." (*17th Article of Church of England*.) If truth is hidden from some and revealed to others, we may be sure that there is a cause.

We should observe, thirdly, **the character of those from whom truth is hidden, and of those to whom truth is revealed.** We read that our Lord says, "You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them unto babes."

We must not gather from these words a wrong lesson. We must not infer that any people on earth are naturally more deserving of God's grace and salvation than others. All are alike sinners, and merit nothing but wrath and condemnation. We must simply regard the words as stating a fact. The wisdom of this world often makes people proud, and increases their natural enmity to Christ's Gospel. The man who has no pride of knowledge, or fancied morality, to fall back on, has often fewest difficulties to get over in coming to the knowledge of the truth. The publicans and sinners are often the first to enter the kingdom of God, while the Scribes and Pharisees stand outside.

Let us learn from these words to beware of self-righteousness. Nothing so blinds the eyes of our souls to the beauty of the Gospel as the vain, delusive idea, that we are not so ignorant and wicked as some, and that we have got a character which will bear inspection. Happy is that man who has learned to feel that he is “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” (Rev. 3:17.) To see that we are bad, is the first step towards being really good. To feel that we are ignorant is the first beginning of all saving knowledge.

We should observe, in the fourth place, **the majesty and dignity of our Lord Jesus Christ.** We read that He said, “My Father has given me authority over everything. No one really knows the Son except the Father, and no one really knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.” These are the words of one who was very God of very God, and no mere man. We read of no patriarch, or prophet, or apostle, or saint, of any age, who ever used words like these. They reveal to our wondering eyes a little of the mighty majesty of our Lord’s nature and person. They show Him to us, as the Head over all things, and King of kings— “all things are delivered to me of my Father.” They show Him as one distinct from the Father, and yet entirely one with Him, and knowing Him in an unspeakable manner. “No man knows who the Son is but the Father—and who the Father is but the Son.” They show Him, not least, as the Mighty Revealer of the Father to the sons of men, as the God who pardons iniquity, and loves sinners for His Son’s sake— “no one really knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”

Let us repose our souls confidently on our Lord Jesus Christ. He is one who is "mighty to save." Many and weighty as our sins are, Christ can bear them all. Difficult as is the work of our salvation, Christ is able to accomplish it. If Christ was not God as well as man we might indeed despair. But with such a Savior as this we may begin boldly, and press on hopefully, and await death and judgment without fear. Our help is laid on one that is mighty. (Psalm 89:19.) Christ over all, God blessed forever, will not fail any one that trusts in Him.

Let us observe, finally, **the peculiar privileges of those who hear the Gospel of Christ.** We read that our Lord said to His disciples, "Blessed are the eyes which see the things that you see. For I tell you that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which you see, and have not seen them, and to hear those things which you hear, and have not heard them."

The full significance of these words will probably never be understood by Christians until the last day. We have probably a most faint idea of the enormous advantages enjoyed by believers who have lived since Christ came into the world, compared to those of believers who died before Christ was born. The difference between the knowledge of an Old Testament saint and a saint in the apostles' days is far greater than we conceive. It is the difference of twilight and noon-day, of winter and summer, of the mind of a child and the mind of a full-grown man. No doubt the Old Testament saints looked to a coming Savior by faith, and believed in a resurrection and a life

to come. But the coming and death of Christ unlocked a hundred Scriptures which before were closed, and cleared up scores of doubtful points which before had never been solved. In short, "the way into the holiest was not made manifest, while the first tabernacle was standing." (Heb. 9:8.) *The humblest Christian believer understands things which David and Isaiah could never explain.*

Let us leave the passage with a deep sense of our own debt to God and of our great responsibility for the full light of the Gospel. Let us see that we make a good use of our many privileges. Having a full Gospel, let us beware that we do not neglect it. It is a weighty saying, "To whomsoever much is given, of them will much be required." (Luke 12:48.)

Notes on 10:21-24

21. "Little children." These were the fishermen and tax collectors and other poor and uneducated Jews who became our Lord's disciples and followed him when the majority of the nation would not believe.

22. "All things have been committed to me . . ."Here "all things" means all power both in heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18), all judgment (John 1:18), and power over all flesh to give eternal life (John 17:2). This includes power to raise the dead and to pass judgment on people according to their deeds and secret thoughts, a power and wisdom which are plainly divine, and consequently the divine nature from which these attributes are inseparable. This is an argument for the divinity of Christ.

LUKE 10:25-28

THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN

We should notice in this passage, **the solemn question which was addressed to our Lord Jesus Christ.** We are told that a certain lawyer asked Him, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" The motive of this man was evidently not right. He only asked this question to "tempt" our Lord, and to provoke Him to say something on which His enemies might lay hold. Yet the question he propounded was undoubtedly one of the deepest importance.

It is a question which deserves the principal attention of every man, woman, and child on earth. We are all sinners—dying sinners, and sinners going to be judged after death. "How shall our sins be pardoned? With which shall we come before God? How shall we escape the damnation of hell? Where shall we flee from the wrath to come? What must we do to be saved?"—These are inquiries which people of every rank ought to put to themselves, and never rest until they find an answer.

It is a question which unhappily few care to consider. Thousands are constantly inquiring, "What shall we eat? What shall we drink? With what shall we be clothed? How can we get money? How can we enjoy ourselves? How can we prosper in the world?" Few, very few, will ever give a moment's thought to the salvation of their souls. They hate the subject. It makes them uncomfortable. They turn from it and put it away. Faithful and true is that saying of our Lord's, "Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads unto destruction, and many there be that go in thereat." (Matt. 7:13.)

Let us not be ashamed of putting the lawyer's question to our own souls. Let us rather ponder it, think about it, and never be content until it fills the first place in our minds. Let us seek to have the witness of the Spirit within us, that we repent us truly of sin, that we have a lively faith in God's mercy through Christ, and that we are really walking with God. This is the character of the heirs of eternal life. These are they who shall one day receive the kingdom prepared for the children of God.

We should notice, secondly, in this passage, **the high honor which our Lord Jesus Christ places on the Bible.** He refers the lawyer at once to the Scriptures, as the only rule of faith and practice. He does not say in reply to his question— "What does the Jewish Church say about eternal life? What do the Scribes, and Pharisees, and priests think? What is taught on the subject in the traditions of the elders?"—He takes a far simpler and more direct course. He sends his questioner at once to the writings of the Old Testament— "What is written in the law? How read you it?"

Let the principle contained in these words, be one of the foundation principles of our Christianity. Let the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible, be the rule of our faith and practice. Holding this principle we travel upon the king's highway. The road may sometimes seem narrow, and our faith may be severely tried, but we shall not be allowed greatly to err. Departing from this principle we enter on a pathless wilderness. There is no telling what

we may be led to believe or do. Forever let us bear this in mind. Here let us cast anchor. Here let us abide.

It matters nothing who says a thing in religion, whether an ancient father, or a modern Bishop, or a learned divine. Is it in the Bible? Can it be proved by the Bible? If not, it is not to be believed. It matters nothing how beautiful and clever sermons or religious books may appear. Are they in the smallest degree contrary to Scripture? If they are, they are rubbish and poison, and guides of no value. What says the Scripture? This is the only rule, and measure, and gauge of religious truth. "To the law and to the testimony," says Isaiah, "if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." (Isaiah 8:20.)

We should notice, lastly, in this passage, **the clear knowledge of duty to God and man, which the Jews in our Lord's time possessed.** We read that the lawyer said, in reply to our Lord's question, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." That was well spoken. A clearer description of daily practical duty could not be given by the most thoroughly instructed Christian in the present day. Let not this be forgotten.

The words of the lawyer are very instructive in two points of view. They throw a strong light on two subjects, about which many mistakes abound. For one thing, they show us how great were the privileges of religious knowledge which the Jews enjoyed under the

Old Testament, compared to the heathen world. A nation which possessed such principles of duty as those now before us, was immeasurably in advance of Greece and Rome. For another thing, the lawyer's words show us *how much clear head-knowledge a person may possess, while his heart is full of wickedness*. Here is a man who talks of loving God with all his soul, and loving his neighbor as himself, while he is actually "tempting" Christ, and trying to do Him harm, and, anxious to justify himself and make himself out a charitable man! Let us ever beware of this kind of religion. Clear knowledge of the head, when accompanied by determined impenitence of heart, is a most dangerous state of soul. "If you know these things," says Jesus, "happy are you if you do them." (John 13:17.)

Let us not forget, in leaving this passage, to apply the high standard of duty which it contains, to our own hearts, and to prove our own selves. Do we love God with all our heart, and soul, and strength, and mind? Do we love our neighbor as ourselves? Where is the person that could say with perfect truth, "I do?" Where is the man that ought not to lay his hand on his mouth, when he hears these questions? Verily we are all guilty in this matter! The best of us, however holy we may be, come far short of perfection. Passages like this, should teach us our need of Christ's blood and righteousness. To Him we must go, if we would ever stand with boldness at the bar of God. From Him we must seek grace, that the love of God and man may become ruling principles of our lives. In Him we must abide,

that we may not forget our principles, and that we may show the world that by them we desire to live.

Notes on 10:25-28

26. "How do you read it?" Let the following quotation from Quesnel, the Roman Catholic writer, be observed: "Jesus Christ himself refers us to God's law, though he was truth itself, and could give souls holy instruction. In vain do we seek after other lights and ways besides those which we find there. It is the Spirit of God who dictated the law and made it the rule of our life. It is injurious to God for us either not to study it, or to prefer the thoughts of man before it. The first question which will be put to a Christian at God's tribunal will be to this effect: 'What is written in the law? What have you read in the Gospel? What use have you made thereof?' What answer can that person return who has not so much as read it, though he has sufficient ability and opportunity to do it?"

LUKE 10:29-37

These words contain the well-known parable of the good Samaritan. In order to understand the drift of this parable, we must carefully remember the occasion on which it was spoken. It was spoken in reply to the question of a certain lawyer, who asked, "who is my neighbor?" Our Lord Jesus Christ answers that question by telling the story we have just read, and winds up the narrative by an appeal to the lawyer's conscience. Let these things not be forgotten. *The object of the parable is to show the nature of true charity and brotherly love.* To lose sight of this object, and discover deep

allegories in the parable, is to trifle with Scripture, and deprive our souls of most valuable lessons.

We are taught, first, in this parable, **how rare and uncommon is true brotherly love.** This is a lesson which stands out prominently on the face of the narrative before our eyes. Our Lord tells us of a traveler who fell among thieves, and was left naked, wounded, and half dead on the road. He then tells us of a priest and a Levite, who, one after the other, came traveling that way, and saw the poor wounded man, but gave him no help. Both were men, who from their religious office and profession, ought to have been ready and willing to do good to one in distress. But both, in succession, were too selfish, or too unfeeling to offer the slightest assistance. They doubtless reasoned with themselves, that they knew nothing of the wounded traveler—that he had perhaps got into trouble by his own misconduct—that they had no time to stop to help him—and that they had enough to do to mind their own business, without troubling themselves with strangers. And the result was, that one after the other, they both "passed by on the other side."

We have in this striking description, an exact picture of what is continually going on in the world. Selfishness is the leading characteristic of the great majority of mankind. That cheap charity which costs nothing more than a trifling subscription or contribution, is common enough. But that self-sacrificing kindness of heart, which cares not what trouble is entailed, so long as good can be done, is a grace which is rarely met with. There are still thousands

in trouble who can find no friend or helper. And there are still hundreds of “priests and Levites” who see them, but “pass by on the other side.”

Let us beware of expecting much from the kindness of man. If we do, we shall certainly be disappointed. The longer we live the more clearly we shall see that *few people care for others except from interested motives*, and that unselfish, unselfish, pure brotherly love, is as scarce as diamonds and rubies. How thankful we ought to be that the Lord Jesus Christ is not like man! His kindness and love are unfailing. He never disappoints any of His friends. Happy are they who have learned to say, “My soul, wait only upon God; my expectation is from Him.” (Psalm 62:5.)

We are taught, secondly, in this parable, **who they are to whom we should show kindness, and whom we are to love as neighbors.** We are told that the only person who helped the wounded traveler, of whom we are reading, was a certain Samaritan. This man was one of a nation who had “no dealings” with the Jews. (John 4:9.), He might have excused himself by saying that the road from Jerusalem to Jericho was through the Jewish territory, and that cases of distress ought to be cared for by the Jews. But he does nothing of the sort. He sees a man stripped of his clothing, and lying half dead. He asks no questions, but at once has compassion on him. He makes no difficulties, but at once gives aid. And our Lord says to us, “Go and do you likewise.”

Now, if these words mean anything, a Christian ought to be ready to show kindness and brotherly love to everyone that is in need. Our kindness must not merely extend to our families, and friends, and relations. We must love all men, and be kind to all, whenever occasion requires. We must beware of an excessive strictness in scrutinizing the past lives of those who need our aid. Are they in real trouble? Are they in real distress? Do they really need help? Then, according to the teaching of this parable, we ought to be ready to assist them.

We should regard the whole world as our parish, and the whole race of mankind as our neighbors. We should seek to be the friend of every one who is oppressed, or neglected, or afflicted, or sick, or in prison, or poor, or an orphan, or a heathen, or a slave, or an idiot, or starving, or dying. We should exhibit such world-wide friendship, no doubt, wisely, discreetly, and with good sense, but of such friendship we never need be ashamed. The ungodly may sneer at it as extravagance and fanaticism. But we need not mind that. To be friendly to all men in this way, is to show something of the mind that was in Christ.

We are taught, lastly, in this parable, **after what manner, and to what extent we are to show kindness and love to others.** We are told that the Samaritan's compassion towards the wounded traveler was not confined to feelings and passive impressions. He took much trouble to give him help. He acted as well as felt. He spared no pains or expense in befriending him. Stranger as the man

was, he went to him, bound up his wounds, set him on his own beast, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. Nor was this all. On the morrow he gave the host of the inn money, saying, “Take care of him, and whatever you spend more, when I come again I will repay you.” And our Lord says to each of us, “Go and do likewise.”

The lesson of this part of the parable is plain and unmistakable. The kindness of a Christian towards others should not be in word and in tongue only, but in deed and in truth. His love should be a practical love, a love which entails on him self-sacrifice and self-denial, both in money, and time, and trouble. His charity should be seen not merely in his talking, but his acting—not merely in his profession, but in his practice. He should think it no misspent time to work as hard in doing good to those who need help, as others work in trying to get money. He should not be ashamed to toil as much to make the misery of this world rather smaller, as those toil who hunt or shoot all day long. He should have a ready ear for every tale of sorrow, and a ready hand to help every one in affliction, so long as he has the power. Such brotherly love the world may not understand. The returns of gratitude which such love meets with may be few and small. But to show such brotherly love, is to walk in the steps of Christ, and to reduce to practice the parable of the good Samaritan.

And now let us leave the parable with grave thoughts and deep searching’s of heart. How few Christians seem to remember that such a parable was ever written! What an enormous amount of stinginess, and baseness, and ill-nature, and suspicion there is to be seen in the

Church, and that even among people who repeat the creed and go to the Lord's table! How seldom we see a man who is really kind, and feeling, and generous, and liberal and good-natured, except to himself and his children! Yet the Lord Jesus Christ spoke the parable of the good Samaritan, and meant it to be remembered.

What are we ourselves? Let us not forget to put that question to our hearts. What are we doing, each in our own station, to prove that this mighty parable is one of the rules of our daily life? What are we doing for the heathen, at home and abroad? What are we doing to help those who are troubled in mind, body, or estate? There are many such in this world. There are always some near our own door. What are we doing for them? Anything, or nothing at all? May God help us to answer these questions! *The world would be a happier world if there was more practical Christianity*.

Notes on 10:29-37

29. He wanted to justify himself. This detail reveals the true character of the teacher of the law. He was a self-righteous man and flattered himself that he could earn the eternal life he had inquired about by his own efforts.

30. "From Jerusalem to Jericho." The road between these two places passed through a wild and rocky country and was notorious for being infested by robbers. On this account, Jerome says, it was called, "the bloody way."

31. "A priest." Jericho was a city specially appointed for the residence of priests and Levites. No less than 12,000 of them, according to

Lightfoot, lived there. They had to attend the temple in Jerusalem on monthly rotations.

LUKE 10:38-42

MARTHA AND MARY

The little history which these verses contain, is only recorded in the Gospel of Luke. So long as the world stands, the story of Mary and Martha will furnish the Church with lessons of wisdom which ought never to be forgotten. Taken together with the eleventh chapter of John's Gospel, it throws a most instructive light on the inner life of the family which Jesus loved.

Let us observe, for one thing, **how different the characters and personalities of true Christians may be.** The two sisters of whom we read in this passage were faithful disciples. Both had believed. Both had been converted. Both had honored Christ when few gave Him honor. Both loved Jesus, and Jesus loved both of them. Yet they were evidently women of very different turn of mind. Martha was active, stirring, and impulsive, feeling strongly, and speaking out all she felt. Mary was quiet, still, and contemplative, feeling deeply, but saying less than she felt. Martha, when Jesus came to her house, rejoiced to see Him, and busied herself with preparing a suitable refreshment. Mary, also, rejoiced to see Him, but her first thought was to sit at His feet and hear His word. Grace reigned in both hearts, but each showed the effects of grace at different times, and in different ways.

We shall find it very useful to ourselves to remember this lesson. We must not expect all believers in Christ to be exactly like one another. We must not set down others as having no grace, because their experience does not entirely tally with our own. The sheep in the Lord's flock have each their own peculiarities. The trees in the Lord's garden are not all precisely alike. All true servants of God agree in the principal things of religion. All are led by one Spirit. All feel their sins, and all trust in Christ. All repent, all believe, and all are holy. But in minor matters they often differ widely. Let not one despise another on this account. There will be Marthas and there will be Marys in the Church until the Lord comes again.

Let us observe, for another thing, **what a snare to our souls the cares of this world may be, if allowed to take up too much attention.** It is plain from the tone of the passage before us, that Martha allowed her anxiety to provide a suitable entertainment for the Lord, to carry her away. Her excessive zeal for temporal provisions, made her forget, for a time, the things of her soul. "She was cumbered about much serving." By and bye her conscience pierced her when she found herself alone serving tables, and saw her sister sitting at Jesus' feet and hearing His word. Under the pressure of a conscience ill at ease, her temper became ruffled, and the 'old Adam' within broke out into open complaint. "Lord," she said, "do not you care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Bid her therefore that she help me."

In so saying, this holy woman sadly forgot what she was, and to whom she was speaking. She brought down on herself a solemn rebuke, and had to learn a lesson which probably made a lasting impression. Alas! “how great a matter a little fire kindles.” The beginning of all this was a little over-anxiety about the innocent household affairs of this world!

The fault of Martha should be a perpetual warning to all Christians. If we desire to grow in grace, and to enjoy soul-prosperity, we must beware of the cares of this world. Except we watch and pray, they will insensibly eat up our spirituality, and bring leanness on our souls. It is not open sin, or flagrant breaches of God’s commandments alone, which lead men to eternal ruin. It is far more frequently an excessive attention to things in themselves lawful, and the being “cumbered about much serving.” It seems so right to provide for our own! It seems so proper to attend to the duties of our station! It is just here that our danger lies. Our families, our business, our daily callings, our household affairs, our interaction with society, all, all may become snares to our hearts, and may draw us away from God. We may go down to the pit of hell from the very midst of lawful things.

Let us take heed to ourselves in this matter. Let us watch our habits of mind jealously, lest we fall into sin unawares. If we love life, we must hold the things of this world with a very loose hand, and beware of allowing anything to have the first place in our hearts, excepting God. Let us mentally write “poison” on all temporal good

things. Used in moderation they are blessings, for which we ought to be thankful. Permitted to fill our minds, and trample upon holy things, they become an inevitable curse. Profits and pleasures are dearly purchased, if in order to obtain them we thrust aside eternity from our thoughts, abridge our Bible-reading, become careless hearers of the Gospel, and shorten our prayers. A little earth upon the fire within us will soon make that fire burn low.

Let us observe, for another thing, **what a solemn rebuke our Lord Jesus Christ gave to His servant Martha.** Like a wise physician He saw the disease which was preying upon her, and at once applied the remedy. Like a tender parent, He exposed the fault into which His erring child had fallen, and did not spare the chastening which was required. "Martha, Martha," He said, "you are anxious and troubled about many things—but one thing is needful." Faithful are the wounds of a friend! That little sentence was a precious balm indeed! It contained a volume of practical divinity in a few words.

"One thing is needful." How true that saying! The longer we live in the world, the more true it will appear. The nearer we come to the grave, the more thoroughly we shall assent to it. Health, and money, and lands, and rank, and honors, and prosperity, are all well in their way. But they cannot be called *needful*. Without them thousands are happy in this world, and reach glory in the world to come. The "many things" which men and women are continually struggling for, are not

really necessaries. The grace of God which brings salvation is the one thing needful.

Let this little sentence be continually before the eyes of our minds. Let it check us when we are ready to murmur at earthly trials. Let it strengthen us when we are tempted to deny our Master on account of persecution. Let it caution us when we begin to think too much of the things of this world. Let it quicken us when we are disposed to look back, like Lot's wife. In all such seasons, let the words of our Lord ring in our ears like a trumpet, and bring us to a right mind. "One thing is needful." If Christ is ours, we have all and abound.

We should observe, lastly, **what high commendation our Lord Jesus Christ pronounced on Mary's choice.** We read that He said, "Mary has chosen that good part, which shall not be taken from her." There was a deep meaning in these words. They were spoken not only for Mary's sake, but for the sake of all Christ's believing people in every part of the world. They were meant to encourage all true Christians to be single-eyed and whole-hearted—to follow the Lord fully, and to walk closely with God, to make soul-business immeasurably their first business, and to think comparatively little of the things of this world.

The true Christian's portion is the grace of God. This is the "good part" which he has chosen, and it is the only portion which really deserves the name of "good." It is the only good thing which is substantial, satisfying, real, and lasting. It is good in sickness and

good in health—good in youth and good in age, good in adversity and good in prosperity—good in life and good in death, good in time and good in eternity. No circumstance and no position can be imagined in which it is not good for man to have the grace of God.

The true Christian's possession shall never be taken from him. He alone, of all mankind, shall never be stripped of his inheritance. Kings must one day leave their palaces. Rich men must one day leave their money and lands. They only hold them until they die. But the poorest saint on earth has a treasure of which he will never be deprived. The grace of God, and the favor of Christ, are riches which no man can take from him. They will go with him to the grave when he dies. They will rise with him in the resurrection morning, and be his to all eternity.

What do we know of this "good part" which Mary chose? Have we chosen it for ourselves? Can we say with truth that it is ours? Let us never rest until we can. Let us "choose life," while Christ offers it to us without money and without price. Let us seek treasure in heaven, lest we awake to find that we are paupers for evermore.

Notes on 10:38-42

42. "What is better." This is a general expression and should be interpreted in the light of Mary's behavior when her sister accused her. Mary chose what was for the benefit of her soul. She was seeking more grace. She was striving after closer communion with God and his Christ. This was the portion which she preferred to everything else and to which she was willing for a time to postpone all earthly

care. Those who seek such a portion will never be disappointed. Their treasure will never be taken from them.

Luke – Chap. 11

LUKE 11:1-4

JESUS' TEACHING ON PRAYER

These verses contain the prayer commonly called the Lord's Prayer. Few passages of Scripture perhaps are so well known as this. The most benighted Roman Catholic can tell us that there is a prayer called "Pater Noster." The most ignorant English child has heard something about "Our Father."

The importance of the Lord's Prayer appears in the simple fact, that our Lord Jesus Christ delivered it twice with very slight variations. He who never spoke a word without good reason, has thought fit to teach us this prayer upon two distinct occasions. Twice the Lord God wrote the ten commandments on tables of stone. (Deut. 9:10; 10:4.) Twice the Lord Jesus delivered the Lord's Prayer.

The occasion of the Lord's Prayer being delivered a second time, in the verses before us, is full of interest. It appears that "one of the disciples" said, "Lord, teach us to pray." The answer to that request was the well-known prayer which we are now considering. Who this "disciple" was we do not know. What he did will be remembered as

long as the world stands. Happy are those who partake of his feelings, and often cry, “Lord, teach me to pray.”

The substance of the Lord’s Prayer is a mine of spiritual treasure. To expound it fully in a work like this, is manifestly impossible. The prayer, on which volumes have been written, does not admit of being handled properly in a few pages. For the present it must suffice us to notice its leading divisions, and to mark the leading trains of thought which it should suggest to us for private meditation.

The first division of the Lord’s Prayer respects **the God whom we worship.** We are taught to approach Him as our Father in heaven—our Father no doubt as our Creator, but specially as our Father reconciled to us in Christ Jesus—our Father whose dwelling is “in heaven,” and whom no temple on earth can contain. We then make mention of three great things—our Father’s name, our Father’s kingdom, and our Father’s will.

We are taught to pray that the name of God may be sanctified—“Hallowed be your name.” In using these words, we do not mean that God’s NAME admits of degrees of holiness, or that any prayers of ours can make it more holy than it is. But we declare our hearty desire that God’s character, and attributes, and perfection, may be more known, and honored, and glorified by all His intelligent creatures. In fact, it is the very petition which the Lord Jesus Himself puts up on another occasion, “Father, glorify your name.” (John 12:28.)

We are next taught to pray that God's KINGDOM may come—"Your kingdom come." In so saying, we declare our desire that the usurped power of Satan may speedily be cast down—that all mankind may acknowledge God as their lawful King, and that the kingdoms of this world may become in fact, as they are in promise, the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ. The final setting up of this kingdom has been long predicted, even from the day of Adam's fall. The whole creation groans in expectation of it. The last prayer in the Bible points to it. The canon of Scripture almost closes with the words, "Come Lord Jesus." (Rev. 11:15; Gen. 3:15; Rom. 8:22; Rev. 22:20.)

We are taught, thirdly, to pray that God's WILL may be done—"Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." In so saying, we express our longing desire that the number of God's converted and obedient people on earth may greatly increase, that His enemies, who hate His laws, may be diminished and brought low, and that the time may speedily arrive when all men shall do their willing service to God on earth, even as all the angels do in heaven. (Hab. 2:14; Heb. 8:11.)

Such is the first division of the Lord's Prayer. Its marvelous fullness and deep importance cannot be overrated. Blessed indeed are those Christians who have learned that God's name is far more honorable than that of any earthly potentate; God's kingdom the only kingdom that shall stand forever—and God's law the rule to which all laws ought to be conformed! The more these things are understood

and believed in a land, the happier that land will be. The days when all acknowledge these things will be the “days of heaven upon earth.”

The second division of the Lord’s Prayer respects **our own daily needs.** We are taught to make mention of two things which we need every day. These two things are, one of them temporal, and the other spiritual. One of them is “bread.” The other is “forgiveness of sins.”

We are taught to ask for BREAD— “Give us this day our daily bread.” Under this word “bread,” no doubt, is included everything which our bodies can require. We acknowledge our entire dependence upon God for life, and breath, and all things. We ask Him to take charge of us, and provide for us in all that concerns this world. It is the prayer of Solomon under another form, “Feed me with food convenient for me.” (Prov. 30:8.)

We are taught to ask, in the next place, for FORGIVENESS— “Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone that is indebted to us.” In so saying, we confess that we are fallen, guilty, and corrupt creatures, and in many things offend daily. We make no excuse for ourselves. We plead nothing in our own behalf. We simply ask for the free, full, gracious mercy of our Father in Christ Jesus. And we accompany the petition by the only profession which the whole Lord’s Prayer contains. We profess that we “forgive every one that is indebted to us.”

The combined simplicity and richness of the second division of the Lord’s Prayer can never be sufficiently admired. How soon the

words are spoken! And yet how much the words take in! Daily bread and daily mercy are by far the first and principal things that mortal man needs. He is the rich man who possesses them. He is the wise man who is not ashamed to pray for them every day. The child of God, no doubt, is fully justified before God, and all things are working for his good. But it is the life of true faith to apply daily for fresh supplies for all our needs. Though the promises are all ours, our Father likes His children to remind Him of them. Though washed, we need daily to wash our feet. (John 13:10.)

The third division of the Lord's Prayer respects **our daily dangers.** We are taught to make mention of two things which we ought to fear every day, and which we must expect to meet with as long as we are in this world. One of these things is "temptation." The other is "evil."

We are taught to pray against TEMPTATION— "Lead us not into temptation." We do not mean by this expression that God is the author of evil, or that He tempts man to sin. (James 1:13.) But we entreat Him who orders all things in heaven and earth, and without whom nothing can happen, so to order the course of our lives that we may not be tempted above what we can bear. We confess our weakness and readiness to fall. We entreat our Father to preserve us from trials, or else to make a way for us to escape. We ask that our feet may be kept, and that we may not bring discredit on our profession and misery on our souls.

We are taught, lastly, to pray against EVIL— “Deliver us from evil.” We include under the word evil, everything that can hurt us, either in body or soul, and especially every weapon of that great author of evil, the devil. We confess that ever since the fall, the world “lies in the wicked one.” (1 John 5:19.) We confess that evil is in us, and about us, and near us, and on every side, and that we have no power to deliver ourselves from it. We apply to the strong for strength. We cast ourselves on Him for protection. In short, we ask what our Savior Himself asked for us, when He said, “I pray not that you should take them out of the world, but that you should keep them from the evil one.” (John 17:15.)

Such is the last division of the Lord’s Prayer. In real importance it is not a whit inferior to the two other divisions, which we have already considered. It leaves man precisely in the position which he ought to occupy. It puts in his mouth the language of humility. The most dangerous state in which we can be, is not to know and feel our spiritual danger.

And now let us use the Lord’s Prayer for the trial of our own state before God. Its words have probably passed over our lips thousands of times. But have we really felt it? Do we really desire its petitions to be granted? Is God really our Father? Are we born again, and made His children by faith in Christ? Do we care much for His name and will? Do we really wish the kingdom of God to come? Do we feel our need of daily temporal mercies, and of daily pardon of sin? Do we

fear falling into temptation? Do we dread evil above all things? These are serious questions. They deserve serious consideration.

Let us strive to make the Lord's Prayer our model and pattern in all our approaches to God. Let it suggest to us the sort of things which we should pray for and pray against. Let it teach us the relative place and proportion which we should give to each subject in our prayers. The more we ponder and examine the Lord's Prayer, the more instructive and suggestive shall we find it to be.

Notes on 11:1-4

1. One day Jesus was praying. We see here another instance of our Lord's diligence in private prayer.

2. "Father." Chrysostom and Augustine both remark that to address God as Father is peculiar to the New Testament dispensation and that the Old Testament saints never use the expression. The remark is undoubtedly true but requires fencing with cautions. We must be careful not to suppose that the Old Testament saints were destitute of the Holy Spirit, as some say, and were not born again. To say that God was in no sense the Father of Old Testament believers would be going much too far. He is the Father of all who are saved by Christ, and without Christ no one was ever saved.

"Our" (NIV margin). The word our at the beginning of the Lord's Prayer should not be overlooked. It teaches believers that in all their prayers, they should think of others as well as themselves. They should remember all of the members of Christ's mystical body as their brethren and sisters in the Lord.

"Your name." To appreciate the meaning of this word, we should note the many places that it comes in the Psalms (Psalm 22:22; 29:2; 52:9; 115:1; 140:13). In all these cases, and in many others, the idea is evidently that of God's revealed character and attributes.

"May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (including NIV margin). To see the full beauty of this prayer, we should read the description of angels in Psalm 103:20-21. Heaven is the only place now where God's will is done perfectly, constantly, unhesitatingly, cheerfully, immediately, and without asking any questions.

3. "Give us each day our daily bread." The literal meaning appears to be: "Give us for the day, or day by day, the bread which is sufficient for our substance." Some think that the words should be translated, "our super-substantial bread," thinking that it refers to the bread in the Lord's Supper. This is a most unlikely and improbable sense.

4. "Forgive us our sins." This expression answers those who say that the believer should never ask for pardon of sins. One text like this is worth a hundred arguments. The Lord Jesus bids us do it, and therefore it ought to be done.

LUKE 11:5-13

PARABLE OF THE IMPORTUNATE FRIEND

In these verses our Lord Jesus Christ instructs us about prayer. The subject is one which can never be too strongly pressed on our attention. *Prayer lies at the very root of our practical Christianity*. It is part of the daily business of our religious life. We have reason to

thank God, that upon no point has our Lord Jesus Christ spoken so fully and frequently as upon prayer.

We learn for one thing, from these verses, **the importance of perseverance in prayer.** This lesson is conveyed to us in the simple parable, commonly called the "Friend at Midnight." We are there reminded what man can obtain from man by dint of importunity. Selfish and indolent as we naturally are, we are capable of being roused to exertion by continual asking. The man who would not give three loaves at midnight for friendship's sake, at length gave them to save himself the trouble of being further entreated. The application of the parable is clear and plain. *If importunity succeeds so well, between man and man, how much more may we expect it to obtain mercies when used in prayer to God.*

The lesson is one which we shall do well to remember. It is far more easy to begin a habit of prayer than to keep it up. Myriads of professing Christians are regularly taught to pray when they are young, and then gradually leave off the practice as they grow up. Thousands take up a habit of praying for a little season, after some special mercy or special affliction, and then little by little become cold about it, and at last lay it aside. The secret thought comes stealing over men's minds, that "it is no use to pray." They see no visible benefit from it. They persuade themselves that they get on just as well without prayer. Laziness and unbelief prevail over their hearts, and at last they altogether "restrain prayer before God." (Job 15:4.)

Let us resist this feeling, whenever we feel it rising within us. Let us resolve by God's grace, that however poor and feeble our prayers may seem to be, we will pray on. It is not for nothing that the Bible tells us so frequently, to "watch unto prayer," to "pray without ceasing," to "continue in prayer," to "pray always and not to faint," to be "instant in prayer." These expressions all look one way. They are all meant to remind us of a danger and to quicken us to a duty.

The time and way in which our prayers shall be answered are matters which we must leave entirely to God. But that every petition which we offer in faith shall certainly be answered, we need not doubt. Let us lay our matters before God again and again, day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year. The answer may be long in coming, as it was in the cases of Hannah and Zachariah. (1 Sam. 1:27; Luke 1:13.) But though it tarry, let us pray on and wait for it. At the right time it will surely come and not tarry.

We learn, for another thing, from these verses, **how wide and encouraging are the promises which the Lord Jesus holds out to prayer.** The striking words in which they are clothed are familiar to us if any are in the Bible— "Ask, and you shall receive; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." The solemn declaration which follows, appears intended to make assurance doubly sure— "Everyone that asks receives, and he that seeks finds, and to him that knocks it shall be opened." The heart-searching argument which concludes the passage, leaves faithlessness and unbelief without excuse— "If you being evil, know

how to give good gifts unto your children—how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him."

There are few promises in the Bible so broad and unqualified as those contained in this wonderful passage. The last in particular deserves especial notice. The Holy Spirit is beyond doubt the greatest gift which God can bestow upon man. Having this gift, we have all things—life, light, hope and heaven. Having this gift we have God the Father's boundless love, God the Son's atoning blood, and full communion with all three Persons of the blessed Trinity. Having this gift, we have grace and peace in the world that now is, glory and honor in the world to come. And yet this mighty gift is held out by our Lord Jesus Christ as a gift to be obtained by prayer! "Your heavenly Father shall give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him."

There are few passages in the Bible which so completely strip the unconverted man of his common excuses as this passage. He says he is "weak and helpless." But does he ask to be made strong? He says he is "wicked and corrupt." But does he seek to be made better? He says he "can do nothing of himself." But does he knock at the door of mercy, and pray for the grace of the Holy Spirit? These are questions to which many, it may be feared, can make no answer. They are what they are, because they have no real desire to be changed. They have not, because they ask not. They will not come to Christ, that they may have life; and therefore they remain dead in trespasses and sins.

And now, as we leave the passage, let us ask ourselves whether we know anything of real prayer? Do we pray at all? Do we pray in the

name of Jesus, and as needy sinners? Do we know what it is to "ask," and "seek," and "knock," and wrestle in prayer, like men who feel that it is a matter of life or death, and that they must have an answer? Or are we content with saying over some old form of words, while our thoughts are wandering, and our hearts far away? Truly we have learned a great lesson when we have learned that "saying prayers" is not praying!

If we do pray, let it be a settled rule with us, never to leave off the habit of praying, and never to shorten our prayers. *A man's state before God may always be measured by his prayers.* Whenever we begin to feel careless about our private prayers, we may depend upon it, there is something very wrong in the condition of our souls. There are breakers ahead. We are in imminent danger of a shipwreck.

Notes on 11:5-13

6. "On a journey." To understand the arrival of a friend at midnight, we must remember that in hot countries people often travel by night and rest during the day.

7. "My children are with me in bed." The family of a poor man in eastern climates often all sleep in one common sleeping chamber. The meaning here is: "We have all retired to our sleeping chamber. We are all in bed."

8. Persistence (KJV, importunity). This is the only place in the New Testament where this word is used. It could be translated "shamelessness." It signifies a constant asking and entreating in spite of rebuffs, like the asking of an impudent beggar.

12. “Egg . . . scorpion.” Large kinds of scorpions, when coiled and rolled up, had a white body not unlike an egg.
13. “Though you are evil.” Let this expression be noted. It is one of those which show the natural wickedness of man. He is by nature evil (Genesis 6:5).
I cannot leave this passage without expressing my own dissent from the allegorical significance which the Fathers and other commentators have given to many of the words here. I cannot agree with Augustine that the three loaves represent the Trinity, man’s food and life, or faith, hope, and charity, nor that the “fish” represents faith or the “egg” hope.
Most parables are intended to convey one great lesson. Even those in which almost every part has a meaning, such as the ten virgins and the prodigal son, require to be handled with great caution. In the parable of the friend at midnight I am unable to see any warrant for searching out far-fetched allegorical meanings. We must beware of what the words of Scripture can be twisted and strained and wrested into meaning.

LUKE 11:14-20

JESUS AND BEELZEBUB

The connection between these verses and those which immediately precede them, is striking and instructive. In the preceding verses, our Lord Jesus Christ had been showing the power and importance of prayer. In the verses before us, he delivers a man from a ‘mute’ devil. The miracle is evidently intended to throw fresh

light on the lesson. The same Savior who encourages us to pray, is the Savior who destroys Satan's power over our members, and restores our tongues to their proper use.

Let us notice, firstly, in these verses, **the variety of ways in which Satan exhibits his desire to injure man.** We read of a 'mute' devil. Sometimes in the Gospel we are told of an "unclean" devil. Sometimes we are told of a raging and violent devil. Here we are told of one under whose influence the unhappy person possessed by him became "mute." Many are the devices of Satan. It is foolish to suppose that he always works in the same manner. One thing only is the common mark of all his operations—*he delights to inflict injury and do harm*.

There is something very instructive in the case before us. Do we suppose, because bodily possession by Satan is not so glaringly manifest as it once was, that the great enemy is less active in doing mischief than he used to be? If we think so we have much to learn. Do we suppose that there is no such thing as the influence of a "mute" devil in the present day? If we do, we had better think again. What shall we say of those who never speak to God, who never use their tongues in prayer and praise, who never employ that organ which is a man's "glory," in the service of Him who made it? What shall we say, in a word, of those who can speak to every one but God? What can we say but that Satan has despoiled them of the truest use of a tongue? What ought we to say but that they are possessed with a "mute devil?" The prayerless man is dead while he lives. His

members are rebels against the God who made them. The “mute devil” is not yet extinct.

Let us watch and pray that we may never be given over to the influence of a mute spirit. Thanks be to God, that same Jesus still lives, who can make the deaf to hear and the mute to speak! To Him let us flee for help. In Him let us abide. It is not enough to avoid open profligacy, and to keep clear of glaring sins. It is not enough to be moral, and proper, and respectable in our lives. All this is negative goodness, and nothing more. Is there anything positive about our religion? Do we yield our members as instruments of righteousness to God? (Rom. 6:13.) Having eyes, do we see God’s kingdom? Having ears, do we hear Christ’s voice? Having a tongue, do we use it for God’s praise? These are very serious inquiries. The number of people who are deaf and mute before God is far greater than many suppose.

Let us notice, secondly, in these verses, **the amazing power of prejudice over the hearts of unconverted men.** We read, that when our Lord cast out the mute spirit, there were some who said, “He casts out devils through Beelzebub, the chief of the devils.” They could not deny the miracle. They then refused to allow that it was wrought by divine power. The work before their eyes was plain and indisputable. They then attempted to discredit the character of Him who did it, and to blacken His reputation by saying that he was in league with the devil.

The state of mind here described is a most formidable disease, and one unhappily not uncommon. There are never lacking men who

are determined to see no good in the servants of Christ, and to believe all manner of evil about them. Such men appear to throw aside their common sense. They refuse to listen to evidence, or to attend to plain arguments. They seem resolved to believe that whatever a Christian does must be wrong, and whatever he says must be false! If he does right at any time, it must be from corrupt motives! If he speaks truth, it must be with sinister views! If he does good works, it is from selfish reasons! If he casts out devils, it is through Beelzebub! Such prejudiced men are to be found in many a congregation. They are the severest trials of the ministers of Christ. No wonder that Paul said, "Pray that we may be delivered from unreasonable as well as wicked men." (2 Thess. 3:2.)

Let us strive to be of a fair, and honest, and candid spirit in our judgment of men and things in religion. Let us be ready to give up old and cherished opinions the moment that anyone can show us a "more excellent way." The honest and good heart is a great treasure. (Luke 8:15.) A prejudiced spirit is the very jaundice of the soul. It affects a man's mental eyesight, and makes him see everything in an unnatural color. From such a spirit may we pray to be delivered!

Let us notice, lastly, in these verses, **the great evil of religious divisions.** This is a truth which our Lord impresses on us in the answer He gives to His prejudiced enemies. He shows the folly of their charge that He cast out devils by Beelzebub. He quotes the proverbial saying that "a house divided against itself falls." He infers the absurdity of the idea that Satan would cast out Satan, or the devil

cast out his own agents. And in so doing, He teaches Christians a lesson which they have been mournfully slow to learn in every age of the church. That lesson is the sin and folly of needless divisions.

Religious divisions of some kind there must always be, so long as false doctrine prevails, and men will cleave to it. What communion can there be between light and darkness? How can two walk together except they be agreed? What unity can there be where there is not the unity of the Spirit? Division and separation from those who adhere to false and unscriptural doctrine is a duty and not a sin.

But there are divisions of a very different kind, which are deeply to be deplored. Such, for example, are divisions between men who agree on main points—divisions about matters not needful to salvation—divisions about forms and ceremonies, and ecclesiastical arrangements upon which Scripture is silent. Divisions of this kind are to be avoided and discouraged by all faithful Christians. The existence of them is a melancholy proof of the fallen state of man, and the corruption of his understanding as well as his will. They bring scandal on religion, and weakness on the church. “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation.”

What are the best remedies against needless divisions? A humble spirit, a readiness to make concessions, and an enlightened acquaintance with holy Scripture. We must learn to distinguish between things in religion which are essential, and things which are not essential—things which are needful to salvation, and things which are not needful, things which are of first rate importance, and

things which are of second rate importance. On the one class of things we must be stiff and unbending as the oak tree— "If any man preach any other Gospel than that which we have preached, let him be accursed." (Gal. 1:8.)—On the other we may be yielding and compliant as the willow, "I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some." (1 Cor. 9:22.)

To draw such clear distinctions requires no small practical wisdom. But such wisdom is to be had for the asking. "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God." (James 1:5.) When Christians keep up needless divisions they show themselves more foolish than Satan himself.

Notes on 11:14-20

15. "Beelzebub." The meaning of this name is said to be "Lord of flies." Beelzebub is mentioned as "the God of Ekron" in 2 Kings 1:3 ("BaalZebub," NIV). For what reason so peculiar a name was given to the chief of the demons is a question which has never been fully settled.

19. "They will be your judges." This means, "They will condemn your supposition that I cast out devils by Beelzebub as unreasonable and absurd. They will be witnesses that demons are not cast out by demons but by the power of God."

20. "Then the kingdom of God has come to you." The argument here appears to be this: "If these miracles which I work are really worked by the finger of God, and I am clearly proved by them to be one sent from God, then, whether you will allow it or not, the times of the

Messiah have arrived. The kingdom of God has come down on you unawares, and these miracles are signs that it is so." This gave our Lord's enemies a dilemma. Either they must deny that our Lord cast out demons, which they could not do, or else they must admit that their own sons cast out demons by the power of Beelzebub, which they would not do.

LUKE 11:21-26

The subject of these words of Christ is mysterious, but deeply important. They were spoken concerning Satan and his agency. They throw light on the power of Satan, and the nature of his operations. They deserve the close attention of all who would fight the Christian warfare with success. Next to his friends and allies, a soldier ought to be well acquainted with his enemies. We ought not to be ignorant of Satan's devices.

Let us observe in these verses **what a fearful picture our Lord draws of Satan's power.** There are four points in His description, which are peculiarly instructive.

Christ speaks of Satan as a "STRONG man." The strength of Satan has been only too well proved by his victories over the souls of men. He who tempted Adam and Eve to rebel against God, and brought sin into the world—he who has led captive the vast majority of mankind, and robbed them of heaven; that evil one is indeed a mighty foe. He who is called the "Prince of this world," is not an enemy to be despised. The devil is very strong.

Christ speaks of Satan as a “strong man, fully ARMED.” Satan is well supplied with defensive armor. He is not to be overcome by slight assaults, and feeble exertions. He that would overcome him must put forth all his strength. “This kind goes not out but by prayer and fasting.” And Satan is also well supplied with offensive weapons. He is never at a loss for means to injure the soul of man. He has snares of every kind, and devices of every description. He knows exactly how every rank, and class, and age, and nation, and people can be assailed with most advantage. The devil is well armed.

Christ speaks of man’s heart as being Satan’s “palace.” The natural heart is the favorite abode of the evil one, and all its faculties and powers are his servants, and do his will. He sits upon the throne which God ought to occupy, and governs the inward man. The devil is the “spirit that works in the children of disobedience.” (Ephes. 2:2.)

Christ speaks of Satan’s “goods being at PEACE.” So long as a man is dead in trespasses and sin, so long his heart is at ease about spiritual things. He has no fear about the future. He has no anxiety about his soul. He has no dread of falling into hell. All this is a FALSE PEACE no doubt. It is a sleep which cannot last, and from which there must be one day a dreadful waking. But there is such a peace beyond question. Thoughtless, stolid, reckless insensibility about eternal things is one of the worst symptoms of the devil reigning over a man’s soul.

Let us never think lightly of the devil. That common practice of idle jesting about Satan which we may often mark in the world, is a great evil. A prisoner must be a very hardened man who jests about the executioner and the gallows. The heart must be in a very bad state, when a man can talk with levity about hell and the devil.

Let us thank God that there is One who is stronger even than Satan. That One is the Friend of sinners, Jesus the Son of God. Mighty as the devil is, he was overcome by Jesus on the cross, when He triumphed over him openly. Strong as the devil is, Christ can pluck his captives out of his hands, and break the chains which bind them. May we never rest until we know that deliverance by experience, and have been set free by the Son of God!

Let us observe, for another thing, in these verses, **how strongly our Lord teaches the impossibility of neutrality.** He says, "he that is not with me, is against me; and he that gathers not with me, scatters."

The principle laid down in these words should be constantly remembered by all who make any profession of decided religion. We all naturally love an easy Christianity. We dislike collisions and separation. We like, if possible, to keep in with both sides. We fear extremes. We dread being righteous overmuch. We are anxious not to go too far. Such thoughts as these are full of peril to the soul. Once allowed to get the upper hand, they may do us immense harm. Nothing is so offensive to Christ as lukewarmness in religion. To be utterly dead and ignorant, is to be an object of pity as well as blame.

But to know the truth and yet "halt between two opinions," is one of the chief of sins.

Let it be the settled determination of our minds that we will serve Christ with all our hearts, if we serve Him at all. Let there be no reserve, no compromise, no half-heartedness, no attempt to reconcile God and mammon in our Christianity. Let us resolve, by God's help, to be "with Christ," and "gather" by Christ's side, and allow the world to say and do what it will. It may cost us something at first. It will certainly repay us in the long run. Without decision there is no happiness in religion. He that follows Jesus most fully, will always follow Him most comfortably. Without decision in religion, there is no usefulness to others. The half-hearted Christian attracts none by the beauty of his life, and wins no respect from the world.

Let us observe, finally, in these verses, **how dangerous it is to be content with any change in religion short of thorough conversion to God.** This is a truth which our Lord teaches by an dreadful picture of one from whom a devil has been cast forth, but into whose heart the Holy Spirit has not entered. He describes the evil spirit, after his expulsion, as seeking rest and finding none. He describes him planning a return to the heart which he once inhabited, and carrying his plan into execution—He describes him finding that heart empty of any good, and, like a house "swept and garnished" for his reception. He describes him as entering in once more, with seven spirits worse than himself, and once more making

it his abode. And He winds up all by the solemn saying, “the last state of that man is worse than the first.”

We must feel in reading these fearful words, that Jesus is speaking of things which we faintly comprehend. He is lifting a corner of the veil which hangs over the unseen world. His words, no doubt, illustrate the state of things which existed in the Jewish nation during the time of His own ministry. But the main lesson of his words, which concerns us, is the danger of our own individual souls. They are *a solemn warning to us, never to be satisfied with religious reformation without heart conversion.*

There is no safety except in ‘thorough Christianity’. To lay aside open sin is nothing, unless grace reigns in our hearts. To cease to do evil is a small matter, if we do not also learn to do well. The house must not only be swept and whitewashed. A new tenant must be introduced, or else the leprosy may yet appear again in the walls. The outward life must not only be garnished with the formal trappings of religion. The power of vital religion must be experienced in the inward man. The devil must not only be cast out. The Holy Spirit must take his place. Christ must dwell in our hearts by faith. We must not only be moralized, but spiritualized. We must not only be reformed, but born again.

Let us lay these things to heart. Many professing Christians, it may be feared, are deceiving themselves. They are not what they once were, and so they flatter themselves, they are what they ought to be. They are no longer sabbath-breaking, daring sinners, and so

they dream that they are Christians. They see not that they have only changed one kind of devil for another. They are governed by a decent, Pharisaic devil, instead of an audacious, riotous, unclean devil. But the tenant within is the devil still. And their last end will be worse than their first. From such an end may we pray to be delivered!

Whatever we are in religion, let us be thorough. Let us not be houses swept and garnished, but uninhabited by the Spirit. Let us not be potsherds covered with silver, fair on the outside, but worthless on the inside. Let our daily prayer be, "Search me, O God—and see whether there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." (Psalm 139:24.)

Notes on 11:21-26

22. "Someone stronger." This refers to our Lord, the great conqueror of Satan. There is a probable reference to Isaiah 53:12. John the Baptist calls our Lord "one more powerful than I" in Mark 1:7 and Luke 3:16. In both these places the Greek is the same as it is here.

22. "Divides up the spoils." Ford quotes Bishop Reynolds: "God makes

use of that art, wealth, power, learning, wisdom, intellect, which Satan used against Christ's kingdom, as instruments and ornaments for the Gospel; as, when a magazine is taken in war, the general makes use of those arms which were ranged against him, for his own service."

23. "He who is not with me is against me." Our Lord is exposing the

awful danger of many of his Jewish hearers, who had been a little roused by John the Baptist and seemed likely to receive Christ when he appeared. And yet when he did appear, they hung back and pretended to be troubled with doubts and so continued neutral and undecided.

24. “Seeking rest.” What an awful expression! It shows the restless, untiring craving to do mischief and inflict harm on God’s creatures, which seems at present a special attribute of the Devil during the period that he is allowed to do evil.

“I will return to the house I left.” This is another awful expression! How many men and women are being daily watched by the Devil, who is plotting mischief against them while they, in their folly, never dream about what Satan is doing.

26. “Seven other spirits.” The number seven is often used in Scripture proverbially, to indicate a great increase in number or size or intensity. Thus Psalm 119:164; Proverbs 24:16; Matthew 18:21; Daniel 3:19.

The final condition of that man is worse than the first. Ford quotes a striking sentence from Cowper’s Letters on this subject: “I have observed that when a man who once seemed a Christian has put off that character, and resumed his old one, he loses, together with the grace which he seemed to possess, the most amiable parts of the character that he resumes. The best features of his natural face seem to be struck out, that after having worn religion only as a mask, he may make a more disgusting appearance than he did before he assumed it.”

The story of the evil spirit admits of a threefold application. First, it

describes the history of the Jewish nation before Christ came on earth. Second, it describes the Gentile churches since the time Christ was on this earth. Third, above all, the passage describes the state of individuals who are content with reformation without conversion. This is a sense which should never be lost sight of. Historical and prophetical interpretations are useful, but they must not be allowed to overlay and bury the lessons that concern each one of us.

LUKE 11:27-32

THE SIGN OF JONAH

A woman is brought before us in this passage of Scripture of whose name and history we know nothing. We read that, as our Lord spoke, "A certain woman of the company lifted up her voice and said unto him, Blessed is the mother that gave you birth." At once our Lord founds on her remark a great lesson. His perfect wisdom turned every incident within His reach to profit.

We should observe in these verses **how great are the privileges of those who hear and keep God's word.** They are regarded by Christ with as much honor as if they were His nearest relatives. It is more blessed to be a believer in the Lord Jesus than it would have been to have been one of the family in which He was born after the flesh. It was a greater honor to the Virgin Mary herself to have Christ dwelling in her heart by faith, than to have been the mother of Christ, and to have nursed Him on her bosom.

Truths like these we are generally very slow to receive. We are apt to fancy that to have seen Christ, and heard Christ, and lived near Christ, and been a relative of Christ according to the flesh, would have had some mighty effect upon our souls. We are all naturally inclined to attach great importance to a religion of sight, and sense, and touch, and eye, and ear. We love a physical, tangible, material Christianity, far better than one of faith. And we need reminding that seeing is not always believing. Thousands saw Christ continually, while He was on earth, and yet clung to their sins. Even His brethren at one time "did not believe in him." (John 7:5.) A mere fleshly knowledge of Christ saves no one. The words of Paul are very instructive— "Though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more." (2 Cor. 5:16.)

Let us learn from our Lord's words before us that the highest privileges our souls can desire are close at hand, and within our reach, if we only believe. We need not idly wish that we had lived near Capernaum, or near by Joseph's house at Nazareth. We need not dream of a deeper love and a more thorough devotion if we had really pressed Christ's hand, or heard Christ's voice, or been numbered among Christ's relatives. All this could have done nothing more for us than simple faith can do now. Do we hear Christ's voice and follow Him? Do we take Him for our only Savior and our only Friend, and forsaking all other hopes, cleave only unto Him? If this be so, all things are ours. We need no higher privilege. We can have no higher, until Christ comes again. No man can be nearer and dearer to Jesus than the man who simply believes.

We should observe, secondly, in these verses, **the desperate unbelief of the Jews in our Lord's time.** We are told that though they "gathered thick together" to hear Christ preach, they still professed to be waiting for a sign. They pretended to need more evidence before they believed. Our Lord declares that the Queen of Sheba and the men of Nineveh would put the Jews to shame at the last day. The Queen of Sheba had such faith that she traveled a vast distance in order to hear the wisdom of Solomon. Yet Solomon, with all his wisdom, was an erring and imperfect king. The Ninevites had such faith that they believed the message which Jonah brought from God, and repented. Yet even Jonah was a weak and unstable prophet. The Jews of our Lord's time had far higher light and infinitely clearer teachings than either Solomon or Jonah could supply. They had among them the King of kings, the Prophet greater than Moses. Yet the Jews neither repented nor believed!

Let it never surprise us to see unbelief abounding, both in the church and in the world. So far from wondering that there have been men like Hobbes, and Paine, and Rousseau, and Voltaire, we ought rather to wonder that such men have been so few. So far from marveling that the vast majority of professing Christians remain unaffected and unmoved by the preaching of the Gospel, we ought to marvel that any around us believe at all. Why should we wonder to see that old disease which began with Adam and Eve infecting all their children? Why should we expect to see more faith among men and women now than was seen in our Lord's time? The enormous

amount of unbelief and hardness on every side may well grieve and pain us. But it ought not to cause surprise.

Let us thank God if we have received the gift of faith. It is a great thing to believe all the Bible. We do not sufficiently realize the corruption of human nature. We do not see the full virulence of the disease by which all Adam's children are infected, and the small number of those who are saved. Have we faith, however weak and small? Let us praise God for the privilege. Who are we that God should have made us to differ?

Let us watch against UNBELIEF. The root of it often lies within us even after the tree is cut down. Let us guard our faith with a godly jealousy. It is the shield of the soul. It is the grace above all others which Satan labors to overthrow. Let us hold it fast. Blessed are those who believe!

We should observe, lastly, in these verses, **how our Lord Jesus Christ testifies to the truth of a resurrection, and a life to come.** He speaks of the queen of the south, whose name and dwelling-place are now alike unknown to us. He says "she shall rise up in the judgment." He speaks of the men of Nineveh, a people who have passed away from the face of the earth. He says of them also, "they shall rise up."

There is something very solemn and instructive in the language which our Lord here uses. It reminds us that this world is not all, and that the life which man lives in the body on earth is not the only life

of which we ought to think. The kings and queens of olden time are all to live again one day, and to stand before the bar if God. The vast multitudes who once swarmed round the palaces of Nineveh are all to come forth from their graves, and to give an account of their works. To our eyes they seem to have passed away forever. We read with wonder of their empty halls, and talk of them as a people who have completely perished. Their dwelling-places are a desolation. Their very bones are dust. But to the eye of God they all live still. The queen of the south and the men of Nineveh will all rise again. We shall yet see them face to face.

Let the truth of the resurrection be often before our minds. Let the life to come be frequently before our thoughts. All is not over when the grave receives its tenant, and man goes to his 'long home'. Other people may dwell in our houses, and spend our money. Our very names may soon be forgotten. But still all is not over! Yet a little time and we shall all live again. "The earth shall cast out the dead." (Isaiah 26:19.) Many, like Felix, may well tremble when they think of such things. But men who live by faith in the Son of God, like Paul, should lift up their heads and rejoice.

Notes on 11:27-32

30. "The sign of Jonah." The three days and nights during which Jonah was in the fish's belly and his coming out alive are undoubtedly the main point here. They were a type of our Lord being in the grave and rising again on the third day. The mighty fact of the resurrection is unquestionably the main point in this type.

31. “The Queen of the South.” In this as well as in other passages, we should not fail to remark that our Lord speaks of the story of Jonah as a true story and of Jonah himself and the Queen of Sheba as real people. The modern theory which says that the events of the Old Testament are nothing better than amusing fables finds no countenance in the New Testament.

LUKE 11:33-36

THE LAMP OF THE BODY

We learn from these words of the Lord Jesus, **the importance of making a good use of religious light and privileges.** We are reminded of what men do when they light a candle. They do not “put it in a hidden place,” under a bushel measure. They place it on a candlestick, that it may be serviceable and useful by giving light.

When the Gospel of Christ is placed before a man’s soul, it is as if God offered to him a lighted candle. It is not sufficient to hear it, and assent to it, and admire it, and acknowledge its truth. It must be received into the heart, and obeyed in the life. Until this takes place the Gospel does him no more good than if he were an African heathen, who has never heard the Gospel at all. A lighted candle is before him, but he is not turning it to account. The guilt of such conduct is very great. God’s light neglected will be a heavy charge against many at the last day.

But even when a man professes to value the light of the Gospel he must take care that he is not selfish in the use of it. He must endeavor to reflect the light on all around him. He must strive to make others acquainted with the truths which he finds good for himself. He must let his light so shine before men, that they may see whose he is and whom he serves, and may be induced to follow his example, and join the Lord's side. He must regard the light which he enjoys as a loan, for the use of which he is accountable. He must strive to hold his candle in such a way, that many may see it, and as they see it, admire and believe.

Let us take heed to ourselves that we do not neglect our light. The sin of many in this matter is far greater than they suppose. Thousands flatter themselves that their souls are not in a very bad state, because they abstain from gross and glaring acts of wickedness, and are decent and respectable in their outward lives. But are they neglecting the Gospel when it is offered to them? Are they coolly sitting still year after year, and taking no decided steps in the service of Christ? If this be so, let them know that their guilt is very great in the sight of God. To have the light and yet not walk in the light, is of itself a great sin. It is to treat with contempt and indifference the King of kings.

Let us beware of selfishness in our religion, even after we have learned to value the light. We should labor to make all men see that we have found "the pearl of great price," and that we want them to find it as well as ourselves. A man's religion may well be suspected,

when he is content to go to heaven alone. The true Christian will have a large heart. If a parent, he will long for the salvation of his children. If a master, he will desire to see his servants converted. If a landlord, he will want his tenants to come with him into God's kingdom. This is healthy religion! The Christian who is satisfied to burn his candle alone, is in a very weak and sickly state of soul.

We learn, secondly, from these verses, **the value of a single and undivided heart in religion.** This is a lesson which our Lord illustrates from the office of the eye in the human body. He reminds us that when the eye is "single," or 'thoroughly healthy', the action of the whole body is influenced by it. But when, on the contrary, the eye is evil or diseased, it affects the physical comfort and activity of the whole man. In an eastern country, where eye diseases are painfully common, the illustration is one which would be particularly striking.

But when can it be truly said that a man's heart is single in religion? What are the MARKS of a single heart? The question is one of deep importance. Well would it be for the church and the world if single hearts were more common.

The single heart is a heart which is not only changed, converted, and renewed; but thoroughly, powerfully, and habitually under the influence of the Holy Spirit. It is a heart which abhors all compromises, all luke-warmness, all halting between two opinions in religion. It sees one mighty object—the love of Christ dying for sinners. It has one mighty aim—to glorify God and do His will. It has one mighty desire, to please God and be commended by Him.

Compared with such objects, aims, and desires, the single heart knows nothing worthy to be named. The praise and favor of man are nothing. The blame and disapprobation of man are trifles light as air. “One thing I desire—one thing I do—one thing I live for,” this is the language of the single heart. (Psalm. 27:4.; Luke 10:42; Philip. 3:13.) Such were the hearts of Abraham, and Moses, and David, and Paul, and Luther, and Latimer. They all had their weaknesses and infirmities. They erred no doubt in some things. But they all had this grand peculiarity. They were men of one thing. They had single hearts. They were unmistakably “men of God.”

The BLESSINGS of a single heart in religion are almost incalculable. He who has it, does good by wholesale. He is like a light-house in the midst of a dark world. He reflects light on hundreds whom he knows nothing of. “His whole body is full of light.” His Master is seen through every window of his conversation and conduct. His grace shines forth in every department of his behavior. His family, his servants, his relations, his neighbors, his friends, his enemies, all see the bias of his character, and all are obliged to confess, whether they like it or not, that his religion is a real and influential thing.

And not least, the man of a single heart finds a rich reward in the inward experience of his own soul. He has food to eat the world knows not of. He has a joy and peace in believing to which many indolent Christians never attain. His face is toward the sun, and so his heart is seldom cold.

Let us pray and labor that we may have a single eye and a whole heart in our Christianity. If we have a religion, let us have a thorough one. If we are Christians, let us be decided. Inward peace and outward usefulness are at stake in this matter. Our eye must be single, if our whole body is to be full of light.

Notes on 11:33-36

33. "No one lights a lamp and puts it in a place where it will be hidden." This verse is a rebuke to the unbelieving Jews, who had the light but would not use it, and a warning to our Lord's disciples, who believed in the light, that they should not keep it hidden away.

35. "See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness." The meaning of this verse appears to be, "Take care that the faculty in you which should be the eye of the soul does not become dimmed and obscured by sin, sloth, or unbelief, so that it becomes useless as if it were in complete darkness. Take care, in case by hardening your heart against the light of my Gospel, you become utterly callous and are given over to a reprobate mind."

It must be remembered that the expression is parabolic and figurative. It must not be so strained that it is made to say that man naturally has inner light which can save his soul.

LUKE 11:37-44

JESUS PRONOUNCES 3 WOES ON THE PHARISEES

Let us notice in this passage, **our Lord Jesus Christ's readiness, when needful, to go into the company of the**

unconverted. We read that a certain Pharisee invited Jesus to eat with him. The man was evidently not one of our Lord's disciples. Yet we are told that "Jesus went in and reclined at the table."

The conduct of our Lord on this occasion, as on others, is meant to be an example to all Christians. Christ is our pattern as well as our propitiation. There are evidently times and occasions when the servant of Christ must mix with the ungodly and the children of this world. There may be seasons when it may be a duty to hold social dealings with them, to accept their invitations, and sit down at their tables. *Nothing, of course, must induce the Christian to be a partaker in the sins or frivolous amusements of the world.* But he must not be uncourteous. He must not entirely withdraw himself from the society of the unconverted, and become a hermit or an ascetic. He must remember that good may be done in the private room as well as in the pulpit.

One qualification, however, should never be forgotten, when we act upon our Lord's example in this matter. *Let us take heed that we go down into the company of the unconverted in the same spirit in which Christ went.* Let us remember His boldness in speaking of the things of God. He was always "about His Father's business." Let us remember His faithfulness in rebuking sin. *He spared not even the sins of those that entertained Him*, when His attention was publicly called to them. Let us go into company in the same frame of mind, and our souls will take no harm. If we feel that we dare not imitate

Christ in the company which we, are invited to join, we may be sure that we had better stay at home.

Let us notice, secondly, in this passage, **the foolishness which accompanies hypocrisy in religion.** We are told that the Pharisee with whom our Lord dined marveled that our Lord "had not first washed before dinner." He thought, like most of his order, that there was something unholy in not doing it, and that the neglect of it was a sign of moral impurity. Our Lord points out the absurdity of attaching such importance to the mere cleansing of the body, while the cleansing of the heart is overlooked. He reminds His host that God looks at the inward part of as, the hidden man of the heart, far more than at our skins. And He asks the searching question, "Did not He that made that which is outside, make that which is inside also?" The same God who formed our poor dying bodies, is the God who gave us a heart and soul.

Forever let us bear in mind that the state of our hearts is the principal thing that demands our attention, if we would know what we are in religion. Bodily washings, and fasting's, and gestures, and postures, and self-imposed mortifications of the flesh, are all utterly useless if the heart is wrong. External devoutness of conduct, a grave face, and a bowed head, and a solemn countenance, and a loud amen, are all abominable in God's sight, so long as our hearts are not washed from their wickedness, and renewed by the Holy Spirit. Let this caution never be forgotten.

The idea that men can be devout before they are converted, is a grand delusion of the devil, and one against which we all need to be on our guard. There are two Scriptures which are very weighty on this subject. In one it is written, “Out of the heart are the issues of life.” (Prov. 4:23.) In the other it is written, “Man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” (1 Sam. 16:7.) There is a question which we should always ask ourselves in drawing near to God, whether in public or private. We should say to ourselves, “Where is my heart?”

Let us notice, thirdly, in this passage, **the gross inconsistency which is often exhibited by hypocrites in religion.** We read that our Lord says to the Pharisees, “Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God.” They carried to an extreme their zeal to pay tithes for the service of the temple—and yet they neglected the plainest duties towards God and their neighbors. They were scrupulous to an extreme about small matters in the ceremonial law; and yet they were utterly regardless of the simplest first principles of justice to man and love toward God. In the one direction they were rigidly careful to do even more than was needful. In the other direction they would do nothing at all. In the secondary things of their religion they were downright zealots and enthusiasts. But in the great primary things they were no better than the heathen.

The conduct of the Pharisees in this matter, unhappily, does not stand alone. There have never been lacking religious professors who have exalted the second things of Christianity far above the first, and in their zeal for the second things have finally neglected the first things entirely. There are thousands at the present day who make a great ado about daily services, and keeping Lent, and frequent communion, and turning to the east in churches, and a gorgeous ceremonial, and intoning public prayers—but never get any further. They know little or nothing of the great practical duties of humility, charity, meekness, spiritual-mindedness, Bible reading, private devotion, and separation from the world. They plunge into every gaiety with greediness. They are to be seen at every worldly assembly and revel, at the race, the opera, the theater, and the ball. They exhibit nothing of the mind of Christ in their daily life. What is all this but walking in the steps of the Pharisees? Well says the wise man, "There is no new thing under the sun." (Eccles. 1:9.) The generation which tithed mint but passed over "judgment and the love of God," is not yet extinct.

Let us watch and pray that we may observe a scriptural proportion in our religion. Let us beware of putting the second things out of their place, and so by degrees losing sight of the first entirely. Whatever importance we attach to the ceremonial part of Christianity, let us never forget its great practical duties. The religious teaching which inclines us to pass them over, has something about it which is radically defective.

Let us notice, lastly, **the falseness and hollowness which characterize the 'religious hypocrite'.** We read that our Lord compared the Pharisees to "unmarked graves, which men walk over without knowing it." Even so these boasting teachers of the Jews were inwardly full of corruption and uncleanness, to an extent of which their deluded hearers had no conception.

The picture here drawn is painful and disgusting. Yet the accuracy and truthfulness of it have often been proved by the conduct of hypocrites in every age of the church. What shall we say of, the lives of monks and nuns, which were exposed at the time of the Reformation? Thousands of so called "holy" men and women were found to be sunk in every kind of wickedness.

What shall we say of the lives of some of the leaders of sects and heresies who have professed a peculiarly pure standard of doctrine? Not infrequently the very men who have promised to others liberty have turned out to be themselves "servants of corruption." *The morbid anatomy of human nature is a loathsome study*. Hypocrisy and unclean living have often been found side by side.

Let us leave the whole passage with a settled determination to watch and pray against hypocrisy in religion. Whatever we are as Christians, let us be real, thorough, genuine and sincere. Let us abhor all disguise and pretense, and masquerading in the things of God, as that which is utterly loathsome in Christ's eyes. We may be weak, and erring, and frail, and come far short of our aims and

desires. But at any rate, if we profess to believe in Christ, let us be true.

Notes on 11:37-44

41. "But give what is inside." Literally, the Greek says: "But rather give the things that are inside." So the sense is: "Give first the offering of the inner man. Give your heart, your affections, and your will to God as your primary concern, and then all your other actions will flow from a right heart, and your sacrifices and offerings will be acceptable to God." (Compare Romans 12:1; Psalm 51:7; 2 Corinthians 8:5.)

42. "Woe to you." Here, as in other places, our Lord's stern and severe language should be noted. Nothing seems so odious in his eyes as hypocrisy.

LUKE 11:45-54

JESUS PRONOUNCES 3 WOES ON THE SCRIBES

The passage before us is an example of our Lord Jesus Christ's faithful dealing with the souls of men. We see Him without fear or favor rebuking the sins of the Jewish expounders of God's law. That false charity which calls it "unkind" to say that any one is in error, finds no encouragement in the language used by our Lord. He calls things by their right names. He knew that acute diseases need severe remedies. He would have us know that the truest friend to our souls, is not the man who is always "speaking smooth things," and agreeing with everything we say, but the man who tells us the most truth.

We learn, firstly, from our Lord's words, **how great is the sin of professing to teach others what we do not practice ourselves.** He says to the lawyers, "You laden men with burdens grievous to be borne, while you yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers." They required others to observe wearisome ceremonies in religion which they themselves neglected. They had the impudence to lay yokes upon the consciences of other men, and yet to grant exemptions from these yokes for themselves. In a word, they had one set of measures and weights for their hearers, and another set for their own souls.

The stern reproof which our Lord here administers, should come home with special power to certain classes in the church. It is a word in season to all teachers of young people. It is a word to all masters of families and heads of households. It is a word to all fathers and mothers. Above all, it is a word to all clergymen and ministers of religion. Let all such mark well our Lord's language in this passage. Let them beware of telling others to aim at a standard which they do not aim at themselves. Such conduct, to say the least, is gross inconsistency.

Perfection, no doubt, is unattainable in this world. If nobody is to lay down rules, or teach, or preach, until he is faultless himself, the whole fabric of society would be thrown into confusion. But we have a right to expect 'some agreement' between a man's words and a man's work—between his teaching and his doing—between his preaching and his practice. One thing at all events is very certain. *No*

lessons produce such effects on men as those which the teacher illustrates by his own daily life. Happy is he who can say with Paul, "Those things which you have heard and seen in me, do." (Philip.4:9.)

We learn, secondly, from our Lord's words, **how much more easy it is to admire dead saints than living ones.** He says to the lawyers, "You build the sepulchers of the prophets, and your fathers killed them." They professed to honor the memory of the prophets, while they lived in the very same ways which the prophets had condemned! They openly neglected their advice and teaching, and yet they pretended to respect their graves!

The practice which is here exposed has never been without followers in spirit, if not in the letter. Thousands of wicked men in every age of the church have tried to deceive themselves and others by loud professions of admiration for the saints of God after their decease. By so doing they have endeavored to ease their own consciences, and blind the eyes of the world. They have sought to raise in the minds of others the thought, "If these men love the memories of the good so dearly they must surely be of one heart with them." They have forgotten that even a child can see that "dead men tell no tales," and that to admire men when they can neither reprove us by their lips, nor put us to shame by their lives, is a very cheap admiration indeed.

Would we know what a man's religious character really is? Let us inquire what he thinks of true Christians while they are yet alive.

Does he love them, and cleave to them, and delight in them, as the excellent of the earth? Or does he avoid them, and dislike them, and regard them as fanatics, and enthusiasts, and extreme, and righteous overmuch? The answers to these questions are a pretty safe test of a man's true character. When a man can see no beauty in living saints, but much in dead ones, his soul is in a very rotten state. The Lord Jesus has pronounced his condemnation. He is a hypocrite in the sight of God.

We learn, thirdly, from our Lord's words, **how surely a reckoning day for persecution will come upon the persecutors.** He says that the "blood of all the prophets shall be required."

There is something peculiarly solemn in this statement. The number of those who have been put to death for the faith of Christ in every age of the world, is exceedingly great. Thousands of men and women have laid down their lives rather than deny their Savior, and have shed their blood for the truth. At the time they died they seemed to have no helper. Like Zachariah, and James, and Stephen, and John the Baptist, and Ignatius, and Huss, and Hooper, and Latimer, they died without resistance. They were soon buried and forgotten on earth, and their enemies seemed to triumph utterly.

But their deaths were not forgotten in heaven. Their blood was had in remembrance before God. The persecutions by Herod, and Nero, and Diocletian, and bloody Mary, and Charles IX, are not forgotten. There shall be a great judgement one day, and then all the

world shall see that “precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.” (Psalm 116:15.)

Let us often look forward to the judgment day. There are many things going on in the world which are trying to our faith. The frequent triumphing of the wicked is perplexing. The frequent depression of the godly is a problem that appears hard to solve. But it shall all be made clear one day. The great white throne and the books of God shall put all things in their right places. The tangled maze of God’s providence shall be unraveled. All shall be proved to a wondering world to have been “well done.” Every tear that the wicked have caused the godly to shed shall be reckoned for. Every drop of righteous blood that has been spilled shall at length be required.

We learn, lastly, from our Lord’s words, **how great is the wickedness of keeping back others from religious knowledge.** He says to the lawyers, “You have taken away the key of knowledge—you entered not in yourselves, and those that were entering in you hindered.”

The sin here denounced is awfully common. The guilt of it lies at far more doors than at first sight many are aware. It is the sin of the Romish priest who forbids the poor man to read his Bible. It is the sin of the unconverted Protestant minister who warns his people against “extreme views,” and sneers at the idea of conversion. It is the sin of the ungodly, thoughtless husband who dislikes his wife becoming “serious.” It is the sin of the worldly-minded mother who

cannot bear the idea of her daughter thinking of spiritual things, and giving up theaters and balls. All these, wittingly or unwittingly, are bringing down on themselves our Lord's emphatic "woe." They are hindering others from entering heaven!

Let us pray that this dreadful sin may never be ours. Whatever we are ourselves in religion, let us dread discouraging others, if they have the least serious concern about their souls. Let us never check any of those around us in their religion, and specially in the matter of reading the Bible, hearing the Gospel, and private prayer. Let us rather cheer them, encourage them, help them, and thank God if they are better than ourselves. "Deliver me from blood-guiltiness," was a prayer of David's. (Psalm 51:14.) It may be feared that the blood of relatives will be heavy on the heads of some at the last day. They saw them about to "enter" the kingdom of God, and they "hindered" them.

Notes on 11:45-54

45. One of the experts in the law. These people studied God's law. We generally find them with the teachers of the law and the Pharisees in the Gospels.

46. "Load people down with burdens." These burdens included many trifling rules laid down by these teachers of the law, which they said needed to be kept if people were to be saved. Chemnitius notes the similarity between these Jewish teachers and the Roman Catholic priests, who lined the way to heaven with a long list of things to be observed—penances, pilgrimages, fasting's, flagellations,

confessions, and the like.

50. “This generation.” Both here and in the following verse, it seems probable that the word generation means nation or people, as in Matthew 24:34. It is certain that most people who were alive when our Lord said these things must have died when the great inquisition for blood took place at the destruction of Jerusalem nearly forty years later.

52. “You have taken away the key to knowledge.” Baxter remarks on this verse, “This is just the description of a wicked clergyman.”

Luke – Chap. 12

LUKE 12:1-7

WARNINGS AND ENCOURAGEMENTS

The words which begin this chapter are very striking when we consider its contents. We are told that "a crowd of many thousands had gathered, so that they were trampling on one another." And what does our Lord do? In the hearing of this multitude He delivers warnings against false teachers, and denounces the sins of the times in which he lived unsparingly, unflinchingly, and without partiality. This was true charity. This was doing the work of a physician. This was the pattern which all His ministers were intended to follow. Well would it have been for the church and the world if the ministers of Christ had always spoken out as plainly and faithfully as their Master used to do! Their own lives might have been made more uncomfortable by such a course of action. But they would have saved far more souls.

The first thing that demands our attention in these verses is **Christ's warning against hypocrisy.** He says to His disciples, "Beware you of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy."

This is a warning of which the importance can never be overrated. It was delivered by our Lord more than once, during His earthly

ministry. It was intended to be a standing caution to His whole church in every age, and in every part of the world. It was meant to remind us that the principles of the Pharisees are deeply ingrained in human nature, and that Christians should be always on their guard against them. Pharisaism is a subtle leaven which the natural heart is always ready to receive. It is a leaven which once received into the heart infects the whole character of a man's Christianity. Of this leaven, says our Lord, in words that should often ring in our ears—of this leaven, beware!

Let us ever nail this caution in our memories, and bind it on our hearts. The plague is about us on every side. The danger is at all times. What is the essence of Romanism, and semi-Romanism, and formalism, and sacrament-worship and church-adorning, and ceremonialism? What is it all but the leaven of the Pharisees under one shape or another? The Pharisees are not extinct. Pharisaism lives still.

If we would not become Pharisees, let us cultivate a 'heart religion'. Let us realize daily that the God with whom we have to do, looks far below the outward surface of our profession, and that He measures us by the state of our hearts. Let us be real and true in our Christianity. Let us abhor all part-acting, and affectation, and semblance of devotion, put on for public occasions, but not really felt within. It may deceive man, and get us the reputation of being very religious, but it cannot deceive God. "There is nothing covered that

shall not be revealed." Whatever we are in religion, let us never wear a cloak or a mask.

The second thing that demands our attention in these verses is **Christ's warning against the fear of man.** "Be not afraid," He says, "of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do." But this is not all. He not only tells us whom we ought not to fear, but of whom we ought to be afraid. "Fear him," He says, "who after he has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say unto you, fear him." The manner in which the lesson is conveyed is very striking and impressive. Twice over the exhortation is enforced. "Fear him," says our Lord— "yes, I say unto you, fear him."

The fear of man is one of the greatest obstacles which stand between the soul and heaven. "What will men say of me? What will they think of me? What will they do to me? "—How often these little questions have turned the balance against the soul, and kept men bound hand and foot by sin and the devil! Thousands would never hesitate a moment to storm a breach or face a lion, who dare not face the laughter of relatives, neighbors, and friends. Now if the fear of man has such influence in these times, how much greater must its influence have been in the days when our Lord was upon earth! If it be hard to follow Christ through ridicule and ill-natured words, how much harder must it have been to follow Him through prisons, beatings, scourging's, and violent deaths! All these things our Lord Jesus knew well. No wonder that He cries, "Be not afraid."

But what is the best remedy against the fear of man? How are we to overcome this powerful feeling, and break the chains which it throws around us? There is no remedy like that which our Lord recommends. We must supplant the fear of man by a higher and more powerful principle—the fear of God. We must look away from those who can only hurt the body to Him who has all dominion over the soul. We must turn our eyes from those who can only injure us in the life that now is, to Him who can condemn us to eternal misery in the life to come. Armed with this mighty principle, we shall not play the coward. Seeing Him that is invisible, we shall find the lesser fear melting away before the greater, and the weaker before the stronger.

"I fear God," said Colonel Gardiner, "and therefore there is no one else that I need fear." It was a noble saying of martyred Bishop Hooper, when a Roman Catholic urged him to save his life by recanting at the stake— "Life is sweet and death is bitter. But eternal life is more sweet, and eternal death is more bitter."

The last thing that demands our attention in these verses, is **Christ's encouragement to persecuted believers.** He reminds them of God's providential care over the least of His creatures— "Not one sparrow is forgotten before God." He goes on to assure those who the same Fatherly care is engaged on behalf of each one of themselves— "The very hairs of your head are all numbered." *Nothing whatever, whether great or small, can happen to a believer, without God's ordering and permission.*

The providential government of God over everything in this world is a truth of which the Greek and Roman philosophers had no conception. It is a truth which is specially revealed to us in the word of God. Just as the telescope and microscope show us that there is order and design in all the works of God's hand, from the greatest planet down to the least insect, so does the Bible teach us that there is wisdom, order, and design in all the events of our daily life. There is no such thing as "chance," "luck," or "accident" in the Christian's journey through this world. All is arranged and appointed by God. And all things are "working together" for the believer's good. (Rom. 8:28.)

Let us seek to have an abiding sense of God's hand in all that befalls us, if we profess to be believers in Jesus Christ. Let us strive to realize that a Father's hand is measuring out our daily portion, and that our steps are ordered by Him. A daily practical faith of this kind, is one grand secret of happiness, and a mighty antidote against murmuring and discontent. We should try to feel in the day of trial and disappointment, that all is right and all is well done. We should try to feel on the bed of sickness that there must be a "needs be." We should say to ourselves, "God could keep away from me these things if He thought fit. But He does not do so, and therefore they must be for my advantage. I will lie still, and bear them patiently. I have 'an everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure.' (2 Sam. 23:5.) What pleases God shall please me."

Notes on 12:1-7

1. Jesus began to speak. Note that the following discourse contains many sayings which were spoken on other occasions. It is clear that our Lord repeated the same words in different places and taught the same lessons on different occasions. All teachers repeat their lessons over and over again, to fix the lesson in their hearers' minds. It is absurd to suppose that our Lord Jesus Christ did not do so.

"Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees." This warning reminds the church to be on guard against formalism and hypocrisy. Few warnings have been so much needed and so often overlooked.

4. "Those who kill the body ….". The distinction between body and soul, and the separate existence of the soul after the body is dead, are clearly brought out in this passage. The use which martyrs have often made of this verse as they were killed is a striking and remarkable fact in church history.

5. "Fear him . . . has power . . . into hell." The reality and fearfulness of hell stand out awfully on the face of this verse. There is a hell after death. The state of the wicked person after this life is not annihilation. There is a hell which ought to be feared. There is a just God who will firmly throw into hell the obstinately impenitent and unbelieving.

6. "Not one of them is forgotten by God." God's providential care over all his creatures is taught in this verse and the next one. Nothing was too little for God to create. Nothing is too little for God to preserve. Nothing that concerns God's people is too little for him to manage or for them to bring before him in prayer.

LUKE 12:8-12

We are taught, firstly, in these verses, that *we* **must confess Christ upon earth, if we expect Him to own us as His saved people at the last day.** We must not be ashamed to let all men see that we believe in Christ, and serve Christ, and love Christ, and care more for the praise of Christ than for the praise of man.

The duty of confessing Christ is incumbent on all Christians in every age of the Church. Let us never forget that. It is not for martyrs only, but for all believers, in every rank of life. It is not for great occasions only, but for our daily walk through an evil world. The rich man among the rich, the laborer among laborers, the young among the young, the servant among servants—each and all must be prepared, if they are true Christians, to confess their Master. It needs no blowing a trumpet. It requires no noisy boasting. It needs nothing more than using the daily opportunity. But one thing is certain—if a man loves Jesus, he ought not to be ashamed to let people know it.

The difficulty of confessing Christ is undoubtedly very great. It never was easy at any period. It never will be easy as long as the world stands. It is sure to entail on us laughter, ridicule, contempt, mockery, enmity, and persecution. The wicked dislike to see any one better than themselves. The world which hated Christ will always hate true Christians. But whether we like it or not, whether it be hard or easy, our course is perfectly clear. In one way or another Christ must be confessed.

The grand motive to stir us up to bold confession is forcibly brought before us in the words which we are now considering. Our Lord declares, that if we do not confess Him before men, He will "not confess us before the angels of God" at the last day. He will refuse to acknowledge us as His people. He will disown us as cowards, faithless, and deserters. He will not plead for us. He will not be our Advocate. He will not deliver us from the wrath to come. He will leave us to reap the consequences of our cowardice, and to stand before the bar of God helpless, defenseless, and unforgiven.

What a dreadful prospect is this! How much turns on this one hinge of "confessing Christ before men!" Surely we ought not to hesitate for a moment. To doubt between two such alternatives is the height of folly. For us to deny Christ or be ashamed of His Gospel, may get us a little of man's good opinion for a few years, though it will bring us no real peace. But for Christ to deny us at the last day will be ruin in hell to all eternity! Let us cast away our cowardly fears. Come what will, let us confess Christ.

We are taught, secondly, in these verses, that **there is such a thing as an unpardonable sin.** Our Lord Jesus Christ declares that "unto him that blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven."

These dreadful words must doubtless be interpreted with scriptural qualification. We must never so expound one part of Scripture as to make it contradict another. Nothing is impossible with God. The blood of Christ can cleanse away all sin. The very chief

of sinners have been pardoned in many instances. These things must never be forgotten. Yet notwithstanding all this, there remains behind a great truth which must not be evaded. There is such a thing as a sin "which shall not be forgiven."

The sin to which our Lord refers in this passage appears to be the sin of deliberately rejecting God's truth with the heart, while the truth is clearly known with the head. It is a combination of light in the understanding and determined wickedness in the will. It is the very sin into which many of the Scribes and Pharisees appear to have fallen, when they rejected the ministry of the Spirit after the day of Pentecost, and refused to believe the preaching of the apostles. It is a sin into which, it may be feared, many constant hearers of the Gospel nowadays fall, by determined clinging to the world. And worst of all, it is a sin which is commonly accompanied by utter deadness, hardness, and insensibility of heart. *The man whose sins will not be forgiven, is precisely the man who will never seek to have them forgiven*. This is exactly the root of his dreadful disease. He might be pardoned, but he will not seek to be pardoned. He is Gospel-hardened and "twice dead." His conscience is "seared with a hot iron." (1 Tim. 4:2.)

Let us pray that we may be delivered from a cold, speculative, unsanctified head-knowledge of Christianity. It is a rock on which thousands make shipwreck to all eternity. No heart becomes so hard as that on which the light shines, but finds no admission. The same fire which melts the wax hardens the clay. Whatever light we have let

us use it. Whatever knowledge we possess, let us live fully up to it. To be an ignorant heathen, and bow down to idols and stones, is bad enough. But to be called a Christian, and know the theory of the Gospel, and yet cleave to sin and the world with the heart, is to be a candidate for the worst and lowest place in hell. It is to be as like as possible to the devil.

We are taught, lastly, in this passage, that **Christians need not be over anxious as to what they shall say, when suddenly required to speak for Christ's cause.**

The promise which our Lord gives on this subject has a primary reference, no doubt, to public trials like those of Paul before Felix and Festus. It is a promise which hundreds in similar circumstances have found fulfilled to their singular comfort. The lives of many of the Reformers, and others of God's witnesses, are full of striking proofs that the Holy Spirit can teach Christians what to say in time of need.

But there is a secondary sense, in which the promise belongs to all believers, which ought not be overlooked. Occasions are constantly arising in the lives of Christians, when they are suddenly and unexpectedly called upon to speak on behalf of their Master, and to render a reason of their hope. The home circle, the family fireside, the society of friends, the communion with relatives, the very business of the world, will often furnish such sudden occasions. On such occasions the believer should fall back on the promise now before us. It may be disagreeable, and especially to a young

Christian, to be suddenly required to speak before others of religion, and above all if religion is attacked. But let us not be alarmed, and flurried, or cast down, or excited. If we remember the promise of Christ, we have no cause to be afraid.

Let us pray for a good memory about Bible promises. We shall find it an inestimable comfort. There are far more, and far wider promises laid down in Scripture for the comfort of Christ's people, than most of Christ's people are aware of. There are promises for almost every position in which we can be placed, and every event that can befall us. Among other promises, let us not forget that one which is now before us. We are sometimes called upon to go into company which is not congenial to us, and we go with a troubled and anxious heart. We fear saying what we ought not to say, and not saying what we ought. At such seasons, let us remember this blessed promise, and put our Master in remembrance of it also. So doing He will not fail us or forsake us. A mouth shall be given to us and wisdom to speak rightly— "The Holy Spirit shall teach us" what to say.

Notes on 12:8-12

10. "Everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man . . ." This verse is deep and mysterious. The distinction between speaking a word against the Son of Man and blaspheming against the Holy Spirit should not be overlooked. The explanation is probably something of this kind: the sin against the Son of Man was committed by those who did not know Christ to be the Messiah and

did not receive him or obey him but rejected him and crucified him. Doubtless many of those who sinned in this way were pardoned, as, for example, on the Day of Pentecost after Peter preached. The sin against the Holy Spirit was committed by those who, after the Day of Pentecost and the outpouring of the Spirit and the full proclamation of the Gospel, persisted in unbelief and obstinate impenitence and were given over to a reprobate mind. These especially grieved the Spirit and resisted his work. That this was the state of many of the Jews appears from several places in the Acts, and especially Acts 28:25-28. See also 1 Thessalonians 2:15-16.

LUKE 12:13-21

PARABLE OF THE RICH FOOL

The passage we have read now affords a singular instance of man's readiness to bring the things of this world into the midst of his religion. We are told that a certain hearer of our Lord asked Him to assist him about his temporal affairs. "Master," he said, "speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me." He probably had some vague idea that Jesus was going to set up a kingdom in this world, and to reign upon earth. He resolves to make an early application about his own pecuniary matters. He entreats our Lord's arbitration about his earthly inheritance. Other hearers of Christ might be thinking of a portion in the world to come. This man was one whose chief thoughts evidently ran upon this present life.

How many hearers of the Gospel are just like this man! How many are incessantly planning and scheming about the things of time, even under the very sound of the things of eternity! The natural heart of man is always the same. Even the preaching of Christ did not arrest the attention of all His hearers. *The minister of Christ in the present day must never be surprised to see worldliness and inattention in the midst of his congregation*. The servant must not expect his sermons to be more valued than his Master's.

Let us mark in these verses what **a solemn warning our Lord pronounces against covetousness.** "He said unto them, take heed and beware of covetousness."

It would be vain to decide positively which is the most common sin in the world. It would be safe to say that there is none, at any rate, to which the heart is more prone, than covetousness. It was this sin which helped to cast down the angels who fell. They were not content with their first estate. They coveted something better. It was this sin which helped to drive Adam and Eve out of paradise, and bring death into the world. Our first parents were not satisfied with the things which God gave them in Eden. They coveted, and so they fell. It is a sin which, ever since the fall, has been the productive cause of misery and unhappiness upon earth. Wars, quarrels, strifes, divisions, envyings, disputes, jealousies, hatreds of all sorts, both public and private, may nearly all be traced up to this fountain-head.

Let the warning which our Lord pronounces, sink down into our hearts, and bear fruit in our lives. Let us strive to learn the lesson

which Paul had mastered, when he says, “I have learned in whatever state I am therewith to be content.” (Phil. 4:11.) Let us pray for a thorough confidence in God’s superintending providence over all our worldly affairs, and God’s perfect wisdom in all His arrangements concerning us. If we have little, let us be sure that it would be not good for us to have much. If the things that we have are taken away, let us be satisfied that there is a needs be. Happy is he who is persuaded that whatever is, is best, and has ceased from vain wishing, and become “content with such things as he has.” (Hebrews 13:5.)

Let us mark, secondly, in these verses, **what a withering exposure our Lord makes of the folly of worldly-mindedness.** He draws the picture of a rich man of the world, whose mind is wholly set on earthly things. He paints him scheming and planning about his property, as if he was master of his own life, and had but to say, “I will do a thing,” and it would be done. And then he turns the picture, and shows us God requiring the worldling’s soul, and asking the heart-searching question, “Whose shall these things be which you have provided?” “Folly,” he bids us learn, nothing less than “folly,” is the right word by which to describe the conduct of the man who thinks of nothing but his money. The man who “lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God,” is the man whom God declares to be a “fool.”

It is a dreadful thought that the character which Jesus brings before us in this parable, is far from being uncommon. Thousands in

every age of the world have lived continually doing the very things which are here condemned. Thousands are doing them at this very day. They are laying up treasure upon earth, and thinking of nothing but how to increase it. They are continually adding to their hoards, as if they were to enjoy them forever, and as if there was no death, no judgment, and no world to come. And yet these are the men who are called clever, and prudent, and wise! These are the men who are commended, and flattered, and held up to admiration! Truly the Lord sees not as man sees! The Lord declares that rich men who live only for this world are "fools."

Let us pray for rich men. Their souls are in great danger. "Heaven," said a great man on his death-bed, "is a place to which few kings and rich men come." Even when converted, the rich carry a great weight, and run the race to heaven under great disadvantages. The possession of money has a most hardening effect upon the conscience. We never know what we may do when we become rich. "The love of money is the root of all evil. While some have coveted after it, they have erred from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." (1 Tim. 6:10.) Poverty has many disadvantages. But *riches destroy far more souls than poverty!*

Let us mark, lastly, in these verses, **how important it is to be rich towards God.** This is true wisdom. This is true providing for time to come. This is genuine prudence. The wise man is he who does not think only of earthly treasure, but of treasure in heaven.

When can it be said of a man, that he is rich towards God? Never until he is rich in grace, and rich in faith, and rich in good works! Never until he has applied to Jesus Christ, and bought of him gold tried in the fire! (Rev. 3:18.) Never until he has a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens! Never until he has a name inscribed in the book of life, and is an heir of God and a joint heir with Christ! Such a man is truly rich. His treasure is incorruptible. His bank never breaks. His inheritance fades not away. Man cannot deprive him of it. Death cannot snatch it out of his hands. All things are his already—life, death, things present, and things to come. (1 Cor. 3:22.) And best of all, what he has now is nothing to what he will have hereafter.

Riches like these are within reach of every sinner who will come to Christ and receive them. May we never rest until they are ours! To obtain them may cost us something in this world. It may bring on us persecution, ridicule, and scorn. But let the thought console us, that the Judge of all says, "You are rich." (Rev. 2:9.) The true Christian is the only man who is really wealthy and wise.

Notes on 12:13-21

15. "Be on your guard against all kinds of greed." Latimer's sermon on this text starts by repeating the words three times, and then he says, "And what if I should say nothing else?"

18. "'My barns.'" Note that the rich man says "my" barns, "my" grain, "my" goods with all the self-sufficiency and petty importance of one who knows only his own will and has no master other than his own

selfishness.
19.. "'I'll say to myself.'" Basil remarks, "If this man had only had the sense of a hog, what other thing could have been said?"
20. "Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?" The argument here seems to be similar to that found in Ecclesiastes 5:15 and Psalm 39:6. A person cannot possess his property a moment after he is dead. Grace is the only lasting possession.
21. "Not rich toward God." Many millionaires are paupers before God. They are not rich either in grace or faith or good works.

LUKE 12:22-31

WARNINGS ABOUT WORRY

We have in these verses **a collection of striking arguments against over-anxiety about the things of this world.**

At first sight they may seem to some minds simple and common place. But the more they are pondered, the more weighty will they appear. An abiding recollection of them would save many Christians an immense amount of trouble.

Christ bids us consider the RAVENS. "They neither sow nor reap. They have neither storehouse nor barn. But God feeds them." Now if the Maker of all things provides for the needs of birds, and orders things so that they have a daily supply of food, we ought surely not to fear that He will let His spiritual children starve.

Christ bids us look at the LILIES. “They toil not, they spin not; Yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.” Now if God every year provides these flowers with a fresh supply of living leaves and blossoms, we surely ought not to doubt His power and willingness to furnish His believing servants with all needful clothing.

Christ bids us remember that a Christian man should be ashamed of being as anxious as a heathen. The “pagan world” may well be anxious about food, and clothing, and the like. They are sunk in deep ignorance, and know nothing of the real nature of God. But the man who can say of God, “He is my Father,” and of Christ, “He is my Savior,” ought surely to be above such anxieties and cares. A clear faith should produce a light heart.

Finally, Christ bids us think of the perfect knowledge of God. “Our Father knows that we have need” of food and clothing. That thought alone ought to make us content. All our needs are perfectly known to the Lord of heaven and earth. He can relieve those needs, whenever He sees fit. He will relieve them, whenever it is good for our souls.

Let the four arguments now adduced sink deep into our hearts, and bear fruit in our lives. Nothing is more common than an anxious and troubled spirit, and nothing so mars a believer’s usefulness, and diminishes his inward peace. Nothing, on the contrary, glorifies God so much as *a cheerful spirit in the midst of temporal troubles*. It carries a reality with it which even the worldly can understand. It

commends our Christianity, and makes it beautiful in the eyes of men. Faith, and faith only, will produce this cheerful spirit. The man who can say boldly, “The Lord is my shepherd,” is the man who will be able to add, “I shall not lack.” (Psalm. 23:1.)

We have, secondly, in these verses, **a high standard of living commended to all Christians.** It is contained in a short and simple injunction, “Seek the kingdom of God.” We are not to give our principal thoughts to the things of this world. We are not so to live as if we had nothing but a body. We are to live like beings who have immortal souls to be lost or saved—a death to die—a God to meet—a judgment to expect—and an eternity in heaven or in hell awaiting us.

When can we be said to “seek the kingdom of God?” We do so when we make it the chief business of our lives to secure a place in the number of saved people—to have our sins pardoned, our hearts renewed, and ourselves made fit for the inheritance of the saints in light. We do so when we give a primary place in our minds to the interests of God’s kingdom—when we labor to increase the number of God’s subjects—when we strive to maintain God’s cause, and advance God’s glory in the world.

The kingdom of God is the only kingdom worth laboring for. All other kingdoms shall, sooner or later, decay and pass away. The statesmen who raise them are like men who build houses of cards, or children, who make palaces of sand on the sea shore. The wealth which constitutes their greatness is as liable to melt away as the snow in spring. The kingdom of God is the only kingdom which shall

endure forever. Happy are they who belong to it, love it, live for it, pray for it, and labor for its increase and prosperity. Their labor shall not be in vain. May we give all diligence to make our calling into this kingdom sure! May it be our constant advice to children, relatives, friends, servants, neighbors, “Seek the kingdom!” Whatever else you seek, “Seek first the kingdom of God!”

We have, lastly, in these verse, **a marvelous promise held out to those who seek the kingdom of God.** Our Lord Jesus declares, “All these things shall be added unto you.”

We must take heed that we do not misunderstand the meaning of this passage. We have no right to expect that the Christian tradesman, who neglects his business under pretense of zeal for God’s kingdom, will find his trade prosper, and his affairs do well. To place such a sense upon the promise would be nothing less than fanaticism and enthusiasm. It would encourage slothfulness in business, and give occasion to the enemies of God to blaspheme.

The man to whom the promise before us belongs, is the Christian who gives to the things of God their right order and their right place. He does not neglect the worldly duties of his station, but he regards them as of infinitely less importance than the requirements of God. He does not omit due attention to his temporal affairs, but he looks on them as of far less moment than the affairs of his soul. In short, he aims in all his daily life to put God first and the world second—to give the second place to the things of his body, and the first place to

the things of his soul. This is the man to whom Jesus says, “All these things shall be added unto you.”

But how is the promise fulfilled? The answer is short and simple. The man who seeks first God’s kingdom shall never lack anything that is for his good. He may not have so much health as some. He may not have so much wealth as others. He may not have a richly spread table, or royal dainties. But he shall always have enough. “Bread shall be given him. His water shall be sure.” (Isaiah 33:16.) “All things shall work together for good to those who love God.” (Rom. 8:28.) “No good thing will the Lord withhold from those who walk uprightly.” (Psalm 84:11.) “I have been young,” said David, “and now am old, yet never have I seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging their bread.” (Psalm 37:25.)

Notes on 12:22-31

24. “Ravens.” Ravens are especially mentioned in Psalm 147:9 and Job 38:41 as objects of God’s care. In the story of Elijah, the Holy Spirit shows us the ravens providing for others as well as providing for themselves (1 Kings 17:6).

LUKE 12:32-40

WATCHFULNESS

Let us mark **what a gracious word of consolation this passage contains for all true believers.** The Lord Jesus knew well the hearts of His disciples. He knew how ready they were to be

filled with fears of every description—fears because of the fewness of their number—fears because of the multitude of their enemies, fears because of the many difficulties in their way—fears because of their sense of weakness and unworthiness. He answers these many fears with a single golden sentence— "Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

Believers are a "little flock." They always have been, ever since the world began. Professing servants of God have sometimes been very many. Baptized people at the present day are a great company. But true Christians are very few. It is foolish to be surprised at this. It is vain to expect it will be otherwise until the Lord comes again. "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leads unto life, and few there be that find it." (Matt. 7:14.)

Believers have a glorious "kingdom" awaiting them. Here upon earth they are often mocked and ridiculed, and persecuted, and, like their Master, despised and rejected of men. But "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed." "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall you also appear with him in glory." (Rom. 8:18. Coloss. 3:4.)

Believers are tenderly loved by God the Father. It is "the Father's good pleasure" to give them a kingdom. He does not receive them grudgingly, unwillingly, and coldly. He rejoices over them as members of His beloved Son in whom He is well pleased. He regards them as His dear children in Christ. He sees no spot in them. Even now, when He looks down on them from heaven, in the midst of their

infirmities, He is well pleased, and hereafter, when presented before His glory, He will welcome them with exceeding joy. (Jude 24.)

Are we members of Christ's little flock? Then surely we ought not to be afraid. There are given to us exceeding great and precious promises. (2 Pet. 1:4.) God is ours, and Christ is ours. Greater are those that are for us than all that are against us. The world, the flesh, and the devil, are mighty enemies. But with Christ on our side we have no cause to fear.

Let us mark, secondly, **what a striking exhortation these verses contain to seek treasure in heaven.** "Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys." But this is not all. A mighty, heart-searching principle is laid down to enforce the exhortation. "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

The language of this charge is doubtless somewhat figurative. Yet the meaning of it is clear and unmistakable. We are to sell—to give up anything, and deny ourselves anything which stands in the way of our soul's salvation. We are to give—to show charity and kindness to every one, and to be more ready to spend our money in relieving others, than to hoard it for our own selfish purposes. We are to provide ourselves treasures in heaven, to make sure that our names are in the book of life—to lay hold of eternal life—to lay up for ourselves evidences which will bear the inspection of the day of judgment.

This is true wisdom. This is real prudence. The man who does well for himself is the man who gives up everything for Christ's sake. He makes the best of bargains. He carries the cross for a few years in this world, and in the world to come has everlasting life. He obtains the best of possessions. He carries his riches with him beyond the grave. He is rich in grace here, and he is rich in glory hereafter. And, best of all, what he obtains by faith in Christ he never loses. It is "that good part which is never taken away."

Would we know what we are ourselves? Let us see whether we have treasure in heaven, or whether all our good things are here upon earth. Would we know what our treasure is? Let us ask ourselves what we love most? This is the true test of character. This is the pulse of our religion. It matters little what we say, or what we profess, or what preaching we admire, or what place of worship we attend. What do we love? On what are our affections set? This is the great question. "Where our treasure is there will our hearts be also."

Let us mark, lastly, **what an instructive picture these verses contain of the frame of mind which the true Christian should endeavor to keep up.** Our Lord tells us that we ought to be "like men that wait for their Lord." We ought to live like servants who expect their Master's return, fulfilling our duties in our several stations, and doing nothing which we would not like to be found doing when Christ comes again.

The standard of life which our Lord has set up here is an exceedingly high one—so high, indeed, that many Christians are apt

to flinch from it, and feel cast down. And yet there is nothing here which ought to make a believer afraid. Readiness for the return of Christ to this world implies nothing which is impossible and unattainable. It requires no angelic perfection. It requires no man to forsake his family, and retire into solitude. It requires nothing more than the life of repentance, faith, and holiness.

The man who is living the life of faith in the Son of God is the man whose "loins are girded," and whose "light is burning." Such a man may have the care of kingdoms on him, like Daniel—or be a servant in a Nero's household, like some in Paul's time. All this matters nothing. If he lives looking unto Jesus, he is a servant who can "open to Him immediately." Surely it is not too much to ask Christians to be men of this kind. Surely it was not for nothing that our Lord said, "The Son of Man comes at an hour when you do not think."

Are we ourselves living as if we were ready for the second coming of Christ? Well would it be if this question were put to our consciences more frequently. It might keep us back from many a false step in our daily life. It might prevent many a backsliding. The true Christian should not only believe in Christ, and love Christ. He should also look and long for Christ's appearing. If he cannot say from his heart, "Come, Lord Jesus," there must be something wrong about his soul.

Notes on 12:32-40

32. "Your Father has been pleased." Our Lord lays special stress in

this passage on the fatherly relationship of God with all believers as an antidote to too much anxiety.

33.. “Sell your possessions.” This expression, if not confined to the apostles, but applied generally to all believers, must evidently be interpreted with some scriptural limitation. There is nothing in the Acts of the Apostles or in the New Testament letters which shows that believers in the early church were expected to sell all their property as soon as they were converted. On the contrary, St. Peter’s words to Ananias seem to show that it was quite optional for converts to sell their property or keep it (Acts 5:4; see also 1 Timothy 5:8).

35. “Keep your lamps burning.” Marriages often took place in the evening. It was the duty of the servants to meet the wedding party with lighted torches. This verse exhorts us to be always ready to meet the Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, at his second coming.

37. “He will dress himself to serve.” This is perhaps one of the most wonderful promises made to believers in the New Testament. It must probably be interpreted figuratively. It means that there is no limit to the honor and glory which the Lord Jesus will bestow on those who are ready to meet him at his second coming.

39. “What hour the thief was coming.” This teaches that the day of the Lord will “come like a thief in the night” (1 Thessalonians 5:2) and that there is no safety for Christians except constant readiness for it.

LUKE 12:41-48

We learn from these verses, **the importance of doing, in our Christianity.** Our Lord is speaking of His own second coming. He is comparing His disciples to servants waiting for their master's return, who have each their own work to do during His absence. "Blessed," He says, "is that servant, whom his master, when he comes, shall find so *doing*."

The warning has doubtless a primary reference to ministers of the Gospel. They are the stewards of God's mysteries, who are specially bound to be found "doing," when Christ comes again. But the words contain a further lesson, which all Christians would do well to consider. That lesson is, the immense importance of a working, practical, diligent, useful religion.

The lesson is one which is greatly needed in the churches of Christ. We hear a great deal about people's intentions, and hopes, and wishes, and feelings, and professions. It would be well if we could hear more about people's practice. It is not the servant who is found wishing and professing, but the servant who is found "doing" whom Jesus calls "blessed."

The lesson is one which many, unhappily, shrink from giving, and many more shrink from receiving. We are gravely told that to talk of "working," and "doing," is 'legalistic', and brings Christians into bondage! Remarks of this kind should never move us. They savor of ignorance or perverseness. The lesson before us is not about justification, but about sanctification—not about faith, but about holiness. The point is not *what a man should do to be saved*—but

what ought a saved man to do! The teaching of Scripture is clear and express upon this subject, A saved man ought to be "careful to maintain good works." (Tit. 3:8.) The desire of a true Christian ought to be, to be found "doing."

If we love life, let us resolve by God's help, to be "doing" Christians. This is to be like Christ. He "went about doing good." (Acts 10:38.) This is to be like the apostles, they were men of deeds even more than of words. This is to glorify God— "Herein is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit." (John 15:8.) This is to be useful to the world— "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father in heaven." (Matt. 5:16.)

We learn, secondly, from these verses, **the dreadful danger of those who neglect the duties of their calling.** Of such our Lord declares, that they shall be "cut in pieces, and their portion appointed with the unbelievers." These words no doubt apply especially to the ministers and teachers of the Gospel. Yet we must not flatter ourselves that they are confined to them. They are probably meant to convey a lesson to all who fill offices of high responsibility. It is a striking fact that when Peter says at the beginning of the passage, "are you telling this parable to us, or to all?" our Lord gives him no answer. Whoever occupies a position of trust, and neglects his duties, would do well to ponder this passage, and learn wisdom.

The language which our Lord Jesus uses about slothful and unfaithful servants, is peculiarly severe. Few places in the Gospels contain such strong expressions as this. It is a vain delusion to suppose that the Gospel speaks nothing but "smooth things." The same loving Savior who holds out mercy to the uttermost to the penitent and believing, never shrinks from holding up the judgments of God against those who despise His counsel. Let no man deceive us on this subject. There is a hell for such an one as goes on still in his wickedness, no less than a heaven for the believer in Jesus. There is such a thing as "the wrath of the Lamb." (Rev. 6:16.)

Let us strive so to live, that whenever the heavenly Master comes, we may be found ready to receive Him. Let us watch our hearts with a godly jealousy, and beware of the least symptom of unreadiness for the Lord's appearing. Specially let us beware of any rising disposition to lower our standard of Christian holiness—to dislike people who are more spiritually-minded than ourselves, and to conform to the world. The moment we detect such a disposition in our hearts, we may be sure that our souls are in great peril. The Christian professor who begins to persecute God's people, and to take pleasure in worldly society, is on the high road to ruin.

We learn, lastly, from these verses, that **the greater a man's religious light is, the greater is his guilt if he is not converted.** The servant which "knew his master's will, but did it not, shall be beaten with many stripes." "Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required."

The lesson of these words is one of wide application. It demands the attention of many classes. It should come home to the conscience of every British Christian. His judgment shall be far more strict than that of the heathen who never saw the Bible. It should come home to every Protestant who has the liberty to read the Scriptures. His responsibility is far greater than that of the priest-ridden Romanist, who is debarred from the use of God's word. It should come home to every hearer of the Gospel. If he remains unconverted he is far more guilty than the inhabitant of some dark parish, who never hears any teaching but a sort of semi-heathen morality. It should come home to every child and servant in religious families. All such are far more blameworthy, in God's sight, than those who live in houses where there is no honor paid to the word of God and prayer. Let these things never be forgotten. *Our judgment at the last day will be according to our light and opportunities.*

What are we doing ourselves with our religious knowledge? Are we using it wisely, and turning it to good account? Or are we content with the barren saying, "We know it—we know it," and secretly flattering ourselves that the knowledge of our Lord's will makes us better than others, while that will is not done? Let us beware of mistakes. The day will come, when knowledge unimproved will be found the most perilous of possessions. Thousands will awake to find that they are in a lower place than the most ignorant and idolatrous heathen. Their knowledge not used, and their light not followed, will only add to their condemnation.

Notes on 12:41-48

42. "Wise manager." Paul uses this word (1 Corinthians 4:1) to describe the office of a minister. It would seem to show that ministers are primarily pointed at in our Lord's teaching in this parable.

48. "Entrusted with much." Our Lord lays down here a great principle in his kingdom as an appropriate conclusion to his parable. Baxter remarks on this verse: "Great gifts are to be used with great diligence; and great trusts, and powers, and charges, are rather to be feared than sought. Little do the conquerors of the world, or those who strive for church preferments, believe and consider what duty, or what deep damnation, they labor for."

LUKE 12:49-53

NOT PEACE BUT DIVISION

The sayings of the Lord Jesus in these five verses are particularly weighty and suggestive. They unfold truths which every true Christian would do well to mark and digest. They explain things in the Church, and in the world, which at first sight are hard to be understood.

We learn for one thing from these verses **how thoroughly the heart of Christ was set on finishing the work which He came into the world to do.** He says, "I have a baptism to undergo"—a baptism of suffering, of wounds, of agony, of blood, and of death. Yet none of these things moved Him. He adds, "How am I

straitened until this baptism is accomplished!" The prospect of coming trouble did not deter Him for a moment. He was ready and willing to endure all things in order to provide eternal redemption for His people. Zeal for the cause He had taken in hand was like a burning fire within Him. To advance His Father's glory, to open the door of life to a lost world, to provide a fountain for all sin and uncleanness by the sacrifice of Himself, were continually the uppermost thoughts of His mind. He was pressed in spirit until this mighty work was finished.

Forever let us bear in mind that all Christ's sufferings on our behalf were endured willingly, voluntarily, and of His own free choice. They were not submitted to patiently merely because He could not avoid them. They were not borne without a murmur merely because He could not escape them. He lived a humble life for thirty-three years merely because He loved to do so. He died a death of agony with a willing and a ready mind. Both in life and death He was carrying out the eternal counsel whereby God was to be glorified and sinners were to be saved. He carried it out with all His heart, mighty as the struggle was which it entailed upon His flesh and blood. He delighted to do God's will. He was straitened until it was accomplished.

Let us not doubt that the heart of Christ in heaven is the same that it was when He was upon earth. He feels as deep an interest now about the salvation of sinners as He did formerly about dying in their stead. Jesus never changes. He is the same yesterday, and today, and

forever. There is in Him an infinite willingness to receive, pardon, justify, and deliver the souls of men from hell. Let us strive to realize that willingness, and learn to believe it without doubting, and repose on it without fear. It is a certain fact, if men would only believe it, that Christ is far more willing to save us than we are to be saved.

Let the zeal of our Lord and Master be an example to all His people. Let the recollection of His burning readiness to die for us be like a glowing coal in our memories, and constrain us to live to Him, and not to ourselves. Surely the thought of it should waken our sleeping hearts, and warm our cold affections, and make us anxious to redeem the time, and do something for His Praise. A zealous Savior ought to have zealous disciples.

We learn, for another thing, from these verses, **how useless it is to expect universal peace and harmony from the preaching of the Gospel.** The disciples, like most Jews of their day, were probably expecting Messiah's kingdom immediately to appear. They thought the time was at hand when the wolf would lie down with the lamb, and men would not hurt or destroy any more. (Isaiah 11:9.) Our Lord saw what was in their hearts, and checked their untimely expectations with a striking saying— "do you think that I have come to send peace on earth? I tell you, No, but rather division."

There is something at first sight very startling in this saying. It seems hard to reconcile it with the song of angels, which spoke of "peace on earth" as the companion of Christ's Gospel. (Luke 2:14.) Yet startling as the saying sounds, it is one which facts have proved

to be literally true. Peace is undoubtedly the result of the Gospel wherever it is believed and received. But wherever there are hearers of the Gospel who are hardened, impenitent, and determined to have their sins, the very message of peace becomes the cause of division. Those who live after the flesh will hate those that live after the Spirit. Those who are resolved to live for the world will always be wickedly affected towards those that are resolved to serve Christ. We may lament this state of things, but we cannot prevent it. Grace and nature can no more amalgamate than oil and water. So long as men are disagreed upon first principles in religion, there can be no real cordiality between them. So long as some men are converted and some are unconverted, there can be no true peace.

Let us beware of unscriptural expectations. If we expect to see people of one heart and one mind, before they are converted, we shall continually be disappointed. Thousands of well-meaning people now-a-days are continually crying out for more “unity” among Christians. To attain this they are ready to sacrifice almost anything, and to throw overboard even sound doctrine, if, by so doing, they can secure peace. Such people would do well to remember that even gold may be bought too dear, and that peace is useless if purchased at the expense of truth. Surely they have forgotten the words of Christ, “I came not to send peace but division.”

Let us never be moved by those who charge the Gospel with being the cause of strife and divisions upon earth. Such men only show their ignorance when they talk in this way. It is not the Gospel which

is to blame, but the corrupt heart of man. It is not God's glorious remedy which is in fault, but the diseased nature of Adam's race, which, like a self-willed child, refuses the medicine provided for its cure. So long as some men and women will not repent and believe, and some will, there must needs be division. To be surprised at it is the height of folly. The very existence of division is one proof of Christ's foresight, and of the truth of Christianity.

Let us thank God that a time is coming when there shall be no more divisions on earth, but all shall be of one mind. That time shall be when Jesus, the Prince of Peace, comes again in person, and puts down every enemy under His feet. When Satan is bound, when the wicked are separated from the righteous, and cast down to their own place, then, and not until then, will be perfect peace. For that blessed time let us wait, and watch, and pray. The night is far spent. The day is at hand. Our divisions are but for a little season. Our peace shall endure to eternity.

Notes on 12:49-53

49. "I have come to bring fire." I think this refers to persecutions, afflictions, dissensions, and strifes which were to accompany the introduction of the Gospel into the world. Fire is often used as a sign of trouble and affliction in Scripture. See Psalm 66:12; Isaiah 43:2. "To bring fire" was often used in the Old Testament to express the idea of sending trouble and affliction. See Lamentations 1:13; Ezekiel 39:6; Hosea 8:14; Amos 2:2, 5.

50. "A baptism." This baptism, clearly, is not of water or of the Holy

Spirit but of suffering. It is the same baptism of which our Lord said to James and John, “You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with” (Mark 10:39).

LUKE 12:54-59

The first thing which this passage teaches us is **the duty of noticing the signs of the times.** The Jews in our Lord’s days neglected this duty. They shut their eyes against events occurring in their own day of the most significant character. They refused to see that prophecies were being fulfilled around those who were bound up with the coming of Messiah, and that Messiah Himself must be in the midst of them. The scepter had departed from Judah, and the lawgiver from between his feet. The seventy weeks of Daniel were fulfilled. (Gen. 49:10. Dan. 9:24.) The ministry of John the Baptist had excited attention from one end of the land to the other. The miracles of Christ were great, undeniable, and notorious. But still the eyes of the Jews were blinded. They still obstinately refused to believe that Jesus was the Christ. And hence they drew from our Lord the question— “How is it that you do not discern this time?”

It becomes the servants of God, in every age, to observe the public events of their own day, and to compare them with the predictions of unfulfilled prophecy. There is nothing commendable in an ignorant indifference to contemporary history. The true Christian should rather watch the career of governments and nations with a jealous watchfulness, and hail with gladness the slightest indication of the day of the Lord being at hand. The Christian who cannot see the

hand of God in history, and does not believe in the gradual movement of all kingdoms towards the final subjection of all things to Christ, is as blind as the Jew.

Have we no signs of the times to observe? The question is soon answered. The history of the last seventy years is full of events which demand the prayerful attention of every servant of Christ. The things that have happened within these seventy years ought to send us to our watch towers, and raise in us great searchings of heart. The rise and progress of a missionary spirit among all Protestant Churches—the wide-spread interest felt about the Jews—the evident decay of the Mohammedan power—the shaking of all the kingdoms of Europe by the French Revolution—the extraordinary spread of knowledge and education—the astonishing revival of Romanism—the steady growth of the most subtle forms of infidelity—all these are facts which cannot be denied, and facts which ought to speak loudly to every well-informed Christian. Surely they deserve to be called signs of our times.

Let us remember the words of our Lord in the passage before us, and not err after the manner of the Jews. Let us not be blind, and deaf, and insensible to all that God is doing, both in the Church and in the world. The things of which we have just been reminded are surely not without meaning. They have not come on the earth by chance or by accident, but by the appointment of God. We ought not to doubt that they are a call to watchfulness, and to preparation for the day of God. May we all have an ear to hear, and a heart to

understand! May we not sleep as do many, but watch and discern our time! It is a solemn saying in the book of Revelation— "If therefore you shall not watch, I will come on you as a thief, and you shall not know what hour I will come upon you." (Rev. 3:3.)

The second thing which this passage teaches us, is **the immense importance of seeking reconciliation with God before it is too late.** This is a lesson which our Lord illustrates by a parable or comparison. He compares us to a man on his way to a magistrate with an adversary, in consequence of a difference or dispute, and describes the course which such a man ought to take. Like him, we are upon our way to the presence of a Judge. We shall all stand at the bar of God. Like him, we have an adversary. The holy law of God is against us, and contrary to us, and its demands must be satisfied. Like him, we ought to give diligence to get our case settled, before it comes before the Judge. We ought to seek pardon and forgiveness before we die. Like him, if we let our opportunity slip, the judgment will go against us, and we shall be cast into the prison of hell. Such appears to be the meaning of the parable in the passage before us. It in a vivid picture of the care which men ought to take in the great matter of reconciliation with God.

Peace with God is by far the first thing in religion. We are born in sin, and children of wrath. We have no natural love towards God. The carnal mind is enmity against God. It is impossible that God can take pleasure in us. "The wicked his soul hates." (Psalm. 11:5.) The chief and foremost desire of everyone who professes to have any

religion, should be to obtain reconciliation. Until this is done, nothing is done. We have got nothing worth having in Christianity, until we have peace with God. The law brings us in guilty. The judgment is sure to go against us. Without reconciliation, the end of our Life's journey will be hell.

Peace with God is the principal thing which the Gospel of Christ offers to the soul. Peace and pardon stand in the forefront of its list of privileges, and are tendered freely to everyone that believes on Jesus. There is One who can deliver us from the adversary. Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believes. Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us. Christ has blotted out the handwriting that was against us, and has taken it out of the way, nailing it to His cross. Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. The claims of our adversary are all satisfied by Christ's blood. God can now be just, and yet the justifier of every one that believes on Jesus. A full atonement has been made. The debt has been completely paid. The Judge can say, "Deliver them, I have found a ransom." (Job 33:24.)

Let us never rest until we know and feel that we are reconciled to God. Let it not content us to go to Church, use means of grace, and be reckoned Christians, without knowing whether our sins are pardoned, and our souls justified. Let us seek to know that we are one with Christ, and Christ in us—that our iniquities are forgiven, and our sins covered. Then, and then only, may we lie down in peace,

and look forward to judgment without fear. The time is short. We are traveling on to a day when our lot for eternity must be decided. Let us give diligence that we may be found safe in that day. The souls that are found without Christ shall be cast into a hopeless prison.

Notes on 12:54-59

56. "You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and sky." Our Lord's argument appears to be that the signs of his coming as the true Messiah were so clearly visible that it required no more discernment to see them than it did to forecast heat or rain from looking at the sky and winds. If the Jews would honestly and impartially consider the signs of their times, they could not avoid the conclusion that Christ was the Messiah. The truth was that they were not honest in their inquiries but prejudiced and unbelieving. He therefore calls them "hypocrites."

59. "You will not get out until . . ." This means, "You will never get out at all."

Luke – Chap. 13

LUKE 13:1-5

REPENT OR PERISH

The murder of the Galileans, mentioned in the first verse of this passage, is an event of which we know nothing certain. The motives of those who told our Lord of the event, we are left to conjecture. At

any rate, they gave Him an opportunity of speaking to them about their own souls, which He did not fail to employ. He seized the event, as His manner was, and made a practical use of it. He bade His informants look within, and think of their own state before God. He seems to say, "What though these Galileans did die a sudden death? What is that to you? Consider your own ways. Except you repent, you shall all likewise perish."

Let us observe, for one thing, in these verses, **how much more ready people are to talk of the deaths of others than their own.** The death of the Galileans, mentioned here, was probably a common subject of conversation in Jerusalem and all Judea. We can well believe that all the circumstances and particulars belonging to it were continually discussed by thousands who never thought of their own latter end. It is just the same in the present day. A murder—a sudden death—a shipwreck, or a railway accident, will completely occupy the minds of a neighborhood, and be in the mouth of every one you meet. And yet these very people dislike talking of their own deaths, and their own prospects in the world beyond the grave. Such is human nature in every age. *In religion, men are ready to talk of anybody's business rather than their own.*

The state of our own souls should always be our first concern. It is eminently true that *real Christianity will always begin at home.* The converted man will always think first of his own heart, his own life, his own deserts, and his own sins. Does he hear of a sudden death? He will say to himself, "Should I have been found ready, if this had

happened to me?" Does he hear of some dreadful crime, or deed of wickedness? He will say to himself, "Are my sins forgiven? and have I really repented of my own transgressions?" Does he hear of worldly men running into every excess of sin? He will say to himself, "Who has made me to differ? What has kept me from walking in the same road, except the free grace of God?"

May we ever seek to be men of this frame of mind! Let us take a kind interest in all around us. Let us feel tender pity and compassion for all who suffer violence, or are removed by sudden death. But let us never forget to look at home, and to learn wisdom for ourselves from all that happens to others.

Let us observe, for another thing, in these verses, **how strongly our Lord lays down the universal necessity of repentance.** Twice He declares emphatically, "Except you repent, you shall all likewise perish."

The truth here asserted, is one of the foundations of Christianity. "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." All of us are born in sin. We are fond of sin, and are naturally unfit for friendship with God. Two things are absolutely necessary to the salvation of every one of us. We must repent, and we must believe the Gospel. Without repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ, no man can be saved.

The nature of true repentance is clearly and unmistakably laid down in holy Scripture. It begins with *knowledge* of sin. It goes on to

work *sorrow* for sin. It leads to *confession* of sin before God. It shows itself before man by a thorough *breaking off* from sin. It results in producing a habit of deep *hatred* for all sin. Above all, it is inseparably connected with lively faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Repentance like this is the characteristic of all true Christians.

The necessity of repentance to salvation will be evident to all who search the Scriptures, and consider the nature of the subject. Without it there is no forgiveness of sins. There never was a pardoned man who was not also a penitent. There never was one washed in the blood of Christ who did not feel, and mourn, and confess, and hate his own sins. Without it there can be no fitness for heaven. We could not be happy if we reached the kingdom of glory with a heart loving sin. The company of saints and angels would give us no pleasure. Our minds would not be in tune for an eternity of holiness. Let these things sink down into our hearts. We must repent as well as believe, if we hope to be saved.

Let us leave the subject with the solemn inquiry—Have we ourselves repented? We live in a Christian land. We belong to a Christian Church. We have Christian ordinances and means of grace. We have heard of repentance with the hearing of the ear, and that hundreds of times. But have we ever repented? Do we really know our own sinfulness? Do our sins cause us any sorrow? Have we cried to God about our sins, and sought forgiveness at the throne of grace? Have we ceased to do evil, and broken off from our bad habits? Do we cordially and heartily hate everything that is evil? These are

serious questions. They deserve serious consideration. The subject before us is no light matter. Nothing less than life—eternal life—is at stake! If we die impenitent, and without a new heart, we had better never have been born.

If we never yet repented, let us begin without delay. For this we are accountable. “Repent you, and be converted,” were the words of Peter to the Jews who had crucified our Lord. (Acts 3:19.) “Repent and pray,” was the charge addressed to Simon Magus when he was in the “gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity.” (Acts 8:22.) There is everything to encourage us to begin. Christ invites us. Promises of Scripture are held out to us. Glorious declarations of God’s willingness to receive us abound throughout the word. “There is joy in heaven over one sinner that repents.” Then let us arise and call upon God. Let us repent without delay.

If we have already repented in time past, let us go on repenting to the end of our lives. There will always be sins to confess and infirmities to deplore, so long as we are in the body. Let us repent more deeply, and humble ourselves more thoroughly, every year. Let every returning birthday find us hating sin more, and loving Christ more. He was a wise old saint who said, “I hope to carry my repentance to the very gate of heaven.”

Notes on 13:1-5

2. “Worse sinners.” Clearly, our Lord’s informants believed that these sudden deaths were special judgments and that if someone died suddenly, he must have committed some special sin. Our Lord

corrects this false view. It is not right to believe that God is angry with a man because he removes him suddenly from the world.

4. "The tower in Siloam fell." We know nothing about the details of this event.

3, 5. "Unless you repent." The repetition of this sentence shows the general importance of repentance and the great need in which the Jews in particular stood of it. Ford quotes a saying of Philip Henry's which is worth reading: "Some people do not like to hear much about repentance. But I think it is so necessary, that if I should die in the pulpit, I would wish to die preaching about repentance; and if I should die out of the pulpit, I would wish to die practicing it."

LUKE 13:6-9

THE BARREN FIG TREE

The parable we have now read is peculiarly humbling and heart-searching. The Christian who can hear it and not feel sorrow and shame as he looks at the state of Christendom, must be in a very unhealthy state of soul.

We learn first from this passage that **where God gives spiritual privileges He expects proportionate returns.**

Our Lord teaches this lesson by comparing the *Jewish Church* of His day to a "fig tree planted in a vineyard." This was exactly the position of Israel in the world. They were separated from other nations by the Mosaic laws and ordinances, no less than by the

situation of their land. They were favored with revelations of God, which were granted to no other people. Things were done for them that were never done for Egypt, or Nineveh, or Babylon, or Greece, or Rome. It was only just and right that they should bear fruit to God's praise. It might reasonably be expected that there would be more faith, and penitence, and holiness, and godliness in Israel than among the heathen. This is what God looked for. The owner of the fig tree "came seeking fruit."

But we must look beyond the Jewish Church if we mean to get the full benefit of the parable before us. We must look to the *Christian churches*. They have light, and truth, and doctrines, and precepts, of which the heathen never hear. How great is their responsibility! Is it not just and right that God should expect from them "fruit?"

We must look to *our own hearts*. We live in a land of Bibles, and liberty, and Gospel preaching. How vast are the advantages we enjoy compared to the Chinese and Hindoo! Never let us forget that God expects from us "fruit."

These are solemn truths. Few things are so much forgotten by men as *the close connection between privilege and responsibility*. We are all ready enough to eat the fat and drink the sweet, and bask in the sunshine of our position both as Christians and Englishmen—and even to spare a few pitying thoughts for the half naked savage who bows down to stocks and stones. But we are very slow to remember that we are accountable to God for all we enjoy; and that to whomsoever much is given, of them much will be required. Let us

awake to a sense of these things. We are the most favored nation upon earth. We are in the truest sense “a fig tree planted in a vineyard.” Let us not forget that the great Master looks for “fruit.”

We learn, secondly, from this passage, that **it is a most dangerous thing to be unfruitful under great religious privileges.**

The manner in which our Lord conveys this lesson to us is deeply impressive. He shows us the owner of the barren fig tree complaining that it bore no fruit— “These three years I come seeking fruit and find none.” He describes him as even ordering the destruction of the tree as a useless cumberer of the ground— “Cut it down; why cumbers it the ground?” He brings in the dresser of the vineyard pleading for the fig tree, that it may be spared a little longer— “Lord, let it alone this year also.” And He concludes the parable by putting these dreadful words into the vinedresser’s mouth— “If it bears fruit, well—and if not, then after that you shall cut it down.”

There is a plain warning here to all professing churches of Christ. If their ministers do not teach sound doctrine, and their members do not live holy lives, they are in imminent peril of destruction. God is every year observing them, and taking account of all their ways. They may abound in ceremonial religion. They may be covered with the leaves of forms, and services, and ordinances. But if they are destitute of the fruits of the Spirit, they are reckoned useless cumberers of the ground. Except they repent, they will be cut down. It was so with the Jewish Church forty years after our Lord’s

ascension. It has been so since with the African Churches. It will be so yet with many others, it may be feared, before the end comes. The axe is lying near the root of many an unfruitful Church. The sentence will yet go forth, “Cut it down.”

There is a plainer warning still in the passage for all ‘unconverted professing Christians’. There are many in every congregation who hear the Gospel, who are literally hanging over the brink of the pit. They have lived for years in the best part of God’s vineyard, and yet borne no fruit. They have heard the Gospel preached faithfully for hundreds of Sundays, and yet have never embraced it, and taken up the cross, and followed Christ. They do not perhaps run into open sin. But they do nothing for God’s glory. There is nothing positive about their religion. Of each of these the Lord of the vineyard might say with truth, “I come these many years seeking fruit on this tree and find none. Cut it down. It cumbers the ground.”

There are myriads of respectable professing Christians in this plight. They have not the least idea how near they are to destruction. Never let us forget that to be content with sitting in the congregation and hearing sermons, while we bear no fruit in our lives, is conduct which is most offensive to God. It provokes Him to cut us off suddenly, and that without remedy.

We learn, lastly, from this parable, **what an infinite debt we all owe to God’s mercy and Christ’s intercession.** It seems impossible to draw any other lesson from the earnest pleading of the dresser of the vineyard— “Lord, let it alone this year also.” Surely we

see here, as in a glass, the loving kindness of God, and the mediation of Christ.

Mercy has been truly called the darling attribute of God. Power, justice, purity, holiness, wisdom, unchangeableness, are all parts of God's character, and have all been manifested to the world in a thousand ways, both in His works and in His word. But if there is one part of His perfections which He is pleased to exhibit to man more clearly than another, beyond doubt that part is mercy. He is a God that "delights in mercy." (Micah 7:18.)

Mercy founded on the mediation of a coming Savior, was the cause why Adam and Eve were not cast down to hell, in the day that they fell. Mercy has been the cause why God has borne so long with this sin-laden world, and not come down to judgment. Mercy is even now the cause why unconverted sinners are so long spared, and not cut off in their sins. We have probably not the least conception how much we all owe to God's long-suffering. The last day will prove that all mankind were debtors to God's mercy, and Christ's mediation. Even those who are finally lost will discover to their shame, that it was "of the Lord's mercies they were not consumed" long before they died. As for those who are saved, covenant-mercy will be all their plea.

And now are we fruitful or unfruitful? This, after all, is the question that concerns us most. What does God see in us year after year? Let us take heed so to live that He may see in us fruit.

Notes on 13:6-9

8. “Sir, leave it alone.” Euthymius and Theophylact consider that the interceding vineyard-dresser is an emblem of Christ himself. Matthew Henry says correctly that “had it not been for Christ’s intercession, the whole world would have been cut down.”

LUKE 13:10-17

A CRIPPLED WOMAN HEALED

We see in these verses **a striking example of diligence in the use of means of grace.** We are told of a “woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could not straiten up.” We know not who this woman was. Our Lord’s saying that she was “a daughter of Abraham,” would lead us to infer that she was a true believer. But her name and history are hidden from us. This only we know, that when Jesus was “teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath,” this woman was there. Sickness was no excuse with her for tarrying from God’s house. In spite of suffering and infirmity, she found her way to the place where the day and the word of God were honored, and where the people of God met together. And truly she was blessed in her deed! She found a rich reward for all her pains. She came sorrowing, and went home rejoicing.

The conduct of this suffering Jewess may well put to shame many a strong and healthy professing Christian. How many in the full enjoyment of bodily vigor, allow the most frivolous excuses to keep

them away from the house of God! How many are constantly spending the whole Sunday in idleness, pleasure-seeking, or business, and scoffing and sneering at those who “keep the Sabbath holy!” How many think it a great matter if they attend the public worship of God once on Sunday, and regard a second attendance as a needless excess of zeal akin to fanaticism! How many find religious services a weariness while they attend them, and feel relieved when they are over! How few know anything of David’s spirit, when he said, “I was glad when they said to me, Let us go into the house of the Lord.” “How lovely are your tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts!” (Psalm 122:1; Psalm 84:1.)

Now what is the explanation of all this? What is the reason why so few are like the woman of whom we read this day? The answer to these questions is short and simple. The most have no heart for God’s service. They have no delight in God’s presence or God’s day. “The carnal mind is enmity against God.” The moment a man’s heart is converted, these pretended difficulties about attending public worship vanish away. The new heart finds no trouble in keeping the Sabbath holy. Where there is a will there is always a way.

Let us never forget that our feelings about Sundays are sure tests of the state of our souls. The man who can find no pleasure in giving God one day in the week, is manifestly unfit for heaven. Heaven itself is nothing but an eternal Sabbath. If we cannot enjoy a few hours in God’s service once a week in this world, it is plain that we could not enjoy an eternity in His service in the world to come. Happy are

those who walk in the steps of her of whom we read today! They shall find Christ and a blessing while they live, and Christ and glory when they die.

We see, secondly, in these verses, **the almighty power of our Lord Jesus Christ.** We are told that when He saw the suffering woman of whom we are reading, “He called her to Him, and said unto her, Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity. And He laid His hands on her.” That touch was accompanied by miraculous healing virtue. At once a disease of eighteen years’ standing gave way before the Lord of Life. “Immediately she was made straight and glorified God.”

We need not doubt that this mighty miracle was intended to supply hope and comfort to sin-diseased souls. With Christ nothing is impossible. He can soften hearts which seem hard as the nether mill-stone. He can bend stubborn wills which “for eighteen years” have been set on self-pleasing, on sin, and the world. He can enable sinners who have been long poring over earthly things, to look upward to heaven, and see the kingdom of God. Nothing is too hard for the Lord. He can create, and transform, and renew, and break down, and build, and quicken, with irresistible power. He lives, who formed the world out of nothing, and He never changes.

Let us hold fast this blessed truth, and never let it go. Let us never despair about our own salvation. Our sins may be countless. Our lives may have been long spent in worldliness and folly. Our youth may have been wasted in soul-defiling excesses, of which we are

lamentably ashamed. But are we willing to come to Christ, and commit our souls to Him? If so, there is hope. He can heal us thoroughly, and say, “you are loosed from your infirmity.”

Let us never despair about the salvation of others so long as they are alive. Let us name them before the Lord night and day, and cry to Him on their behalf. We may perhaps have relatives whose case seems desperate because of their wickedness. But it is not really so. There are no incurable cases with Christ. If He were to lay His healing hand on them, they would be “made straight, and glorify God.” Let us pray on, and faint not. That saying of Job is worthy of all acceptation— “I know that you can do everything.” (Job 42:2.) Jesus is “able to save to the uttermost.”

We see, lastly, in these verses, **the right observance of the Sabbath day asserted and defended by our Lord Jesus Christ.** The ruler of the synagogue in which the infirm woman was healed, found fault with her as a breaker of the Sabbath. He drew down upon himself a stern but just rebuke— “You hypocrite, does not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or his donkey from the stall, and lead him away to watering?” If it was allowable to attend to the needs of beasts on the Sabbath, how much more to human creatures! If it was no breach of the fourth commandment to show kindness to oxen and donkeys, much less to show kindness to a daughter of Abraham.

The principle here laid down by our Lord is the same that we find elsewhere in the Gospels. He teaches us that the command to “do no

work" on the Sabbath, was not intended to prohibit works of necessity and mercy. The Sabbath was made for man's benefit, and not for his hurt. It was appointed to promote man's best and highest interests, and not to debar him of anything that is really for his good. It requires nothing but what is reasonable and wise. It forbids nothing that is really necessary to man's comfort.

Let us pray for a right understanding of the law of the Sabbath. Of all the commandments that God has given, none is more essential to the happiness of man, and none is so frequently misrepresented, abused, and trampled under foot. Let us lay down for ourselves two special rules for the observance of the Sabbath. For one thing let us do no work which is not absolutely needful. For another, let us keep the day "holy," and give it to God. From these two rules let us never swerve. Experience shows that there is the closest connection between Sabbath sanctification and healthy Christianity.

Notes on 13:10-17

11. Crippled by a spirit. The nature of this woman's disease we are left to conjecture. It seems to have been some illness mysteriously connected with possession by an unclean spirit and caused by it. There is no other instance precisely like it in the New Testament.

12. He called her forward. Our Lord performed this miracle without being asked. The widow at Nain is another example of this. In both instances the person to whom kindness was shown was a woman.

If our Lord does so much for a person when unsolicited, how much more will he do for those who call upon him in prayer.

14. “Six days for work.” The bitterness and sarcasm of this unhappy speech are very remarkable. This is often the case with unconverted people. The nearer the kingdom of God comes to them, the more bitter and angry they become.

16. “A daughter of Abraham.” This expression certainly appears to me to make it highly probable that this woman whom our Lord healed was a true believer. When Zacchaeus was converted, our Lord said the man was “a son of Abraham” (Luke 19:9). To think of this expression as only meaning a “daughter of Abraham according to natural descent—a Jewess” seems to me a tame and unsatisfactory interpretation.

“Whom Satan has kept bound.” This is a remarkable expression. It appears that Satan is permitted to inflict bodily illness and disease. See Job 1—2 and 1 Corinthians 5:5.

LUKE 13:18-21

PARABLES OF THE MUSTARD SEED, AND THE YEAST

There is a peculiar interest belonging to the two parables contained in these verses. We find them twice delivered by our Lord, and at two distinct periods in His ministry. This fact alone should make us give the more earnest heed to the lessons which the parables convey. They will be found rich both in prophetical and experimental truths.

The parable of the mustard seed is intended **to show the progress of the Gospel in the WORLD.**

The BEGINNINGS of the Gospel were exceedingly small. It was like “a mustard seed cast into the garden.” It was a religion which seemed at first so feeble, and helpless, and powerless, that it could not live. Its first founder was One who was poor in this world, and ended His life by dying the death of a malefactor on the cross. Its first adherents were a little company, whose number probably did not exceed a thousand when the Lord Jesus left the world. Its first preachers were a few fishermen and publicans, who were, most of them, unlearned and ignorant men. Its first starting point was a despised corner of the earth, called Judea, a petty tributary province of the vast empire of Rome. Its first doctrine was eminently calculated to call forth the enmity of the natural heart. Christ crucified was to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness. Its first movements brought down on its friends persecution from all quarters. Pharisees and Sadducees, Jews and Gentiles, ignorant idolaters and self-conceited philosophers, all agreed in hating and opposing Christianity. It was a sect everywhere spoken against. These are no empty assertions. They are simple historical facts, which no one can deny. If ever there was a religion which was a little grain of seed at its beginning, that religion was the Gospel.

But the PROGRESS of the Gospel, after the seed was once cast into the earth, was great, steady and continuous. The grain of mustard seed “grew and became a great tree.” In spite of persecution, opposition, and violence, Christianity gradually spread and increased. Year after year its adherents became more numerous.

Year after year idolatry withered away before it. City after city, and country after country, received the new faith. Church after church was formed in almost every quarter of the earth then known. Preacher after preacher rose up, and missionary after missionary came forward to fill the place of those who died.

Roman emperors and heathen philosophers, sometimes by force and sometimes by argument, tried in vain to check the progress of Christianity. They might as well have tried to stop the tide from flowing, or the sun from rising. In a few hundred years, the religion of the despised Nazarene—the religion which began in the upper chamber at Jerusalem—had overrun the civilized world. It was professed by nearly all Europe, by a great part of Asia, and by the whole northern part of Africa. The prophetic words of the parable before us were literally fulfilled. The grain of mustard seed "became a great tree; and the birds of the air lodged in the branches of it." The Lord Jesus said it would be so. And so it came to pass.

Let us learn from this parable *never to despair of any work for Christ, because its first beginnings are feeble and small.* A single minister in some large neglected town-district—a single missionary amid myriads of savage heathen—a single reformer in the midst of a fallen and corrupt church—each and all of these may seem at first sight utterly unlikely to do any good. To the eye of man, the work may appear too great, and the instrument employed quite unequal to it. Let us never give way to such thoughts. Let us remember the parable before us and take courage. When the line of duty is plain,

we should not begin to count numbers, and confer with flesh and blood. We should believe that one man with the living seed of God's truth on his side, like Luther or Knox, may turn a nation upside down. If God is with him, none shall stand against him. In spite of men and devils, the seed that he sows shall become a great tree.

The parable of the leaven is intended **to show the progress of the Gospel in the heart of a BELIEVER.**

The first beginnings of the work of grace in a sinner are generally exceedingly small. It is like the mixture of leaven with a lump of dough. A single sentence of a sermon, or a single verse of Holy Scripture—a word of rebuke from a friend, or a casual religious remark overheard—a tract given by a stranger, or a trifling act of kindness received from a Christian, some one of these things is often the starting-point in the life of a soul. The first actings of the spiritual life are often small in the extreme—so small, that for a long time they are not known except by him who is the subject of them, and even by him not fully understood. A few serious thoughts and prickings of conscience—a desire to pray really and not formally—a determination to begin reading the Bible in private—a gradual drawing towards means of grace—an increasing interest in the subject of religion—a growing distaste for evil habits and bad companions, these, or some of them, are often the first symptoms of grace beginning to move the heart of man. They are symptoms which worldly men may not perceive, and ignorant believers may despise, and even old Christians may mistake. Yet they are often the first

steps in the mighty business of conversion. They are often the "leaven" of grace working in a heart.

The work of grace once begun in the soul will never stand still. It will gradually "leaven the whole lump." Like leaven once introduced, it can never be separated from that with which it is mingled. Little by little it will influence the conscience, the affections, the mind, and the will, until the whole man is affected by its power, and a thorough conversion to God takes place. In some cases no doubt the progress is far quicker than in others. In some cases the result is far more clearly marked and decided than in others. But wherever a real work of the Holy Spirit begins in the heart, the whole character is sooner or later leavened and changed. The tastes of the man are altered. The whole bias of his mind becomes different. "Old things pass away, and all things become new." (2 Cor. 5:17.) The Lord Jesus said that it would be so, and all experience shows that so it is.

Let us learn from this parable never to "despise the day of small things" in religion. (Zec. 4:10.) The soul must creep before it can walk, and walk before it can run. If we see any sign of grace beginning in a brother, however feeble, let us thank God and be hopeful. The leaven of grace once planted in his heart, shall yet leaven the whole lump. "He that begins the work, will perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ." (Phil. 1:6.)

Let us ask ourselves whether there is any work of grace in our own hearts. Are we resting satisfied with a few vague wishes and convictions? Or do we know anything of a gradual, growing,

spreading, increasing, leavening process going on in our inward man? Let nothing short of this content us. The true work of the Holy Spirit will never stand still. It will leaven the whole lump.

Notes on 13:18-21

Commentators have found many allegories in this parable: the mustard seed as Christ himself; the birds of the air as the corruption that came into Christ's church; the yeast as false teaching. I am quite unable to see the correctness in any of this. These two parables are meant to convey one great truth—the small beginning of grace in a heart, and the influence which it gradually acquires over the whole character. To this view let us adhere.

LUKE 13:22-30

THE NARROW DOOR

We see in these verses **a remarkable question asked.** We are told that a certain man said to our Lord, "Are there few that be saved?"

We do not know *who* this enquirer was. He may have been a self-righteous Jew, trained to believe that there was no hope for the uncircumcised, and no salvation for any but the children of Abraham. He may have been an idle trifler with religion, who was ever wasting his time on curious and speculative questions. In any case, we must all feel that he asked a question of deep and momentous importance.

He that desires to know the number of the saved, in the present dispensation, need only turn to the Bible, and his curiosity will be satisfied. He will read in the sermon on the mount these solemn words, “Strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leads unto life, and few there be that find it.” (Matt. 7:14.)—He has only to look around him, and compare the ways of the many with the word of God, and he will soon come to the conclusion, if he is an honest man, that the saved are few. It is a dreadful conclusion. Our souls naturally turn away from it. But Scripture and facts alike combine to shut us up to it. Salvation to the uttermost is offered to men. All things are ready on God’s part. Christ is willing to receive sinners. But sinners are not willing to come to Christ. And hence few are saved.

We see, secondly, in these verses, **a striking exhortation given.** We are told that when our Lord Jesus Christ was asked whether few would be saved, He said, “Strive to enter in at the strait gate.” He addressed these words to the whole company of His hearers. He thought it not good to gratify the curiosity of his questioner by a direct reply. He chose rather to press home on him, and all around him, their own immediate duty. In minding their own souls, they would soon find the question answered. In striving to enter in at the strait gate they would soon see whether the saved were many or few.

Whatever others may do in religion the Lord Jesus would have us know that our duty is clear. The gate is strait. The work is great. The enemies of our souls are many. We must be up and doing. We are to

wait for nobody. We are not to inquire what other people are doing, and whether many of our neighbors, and relatives, and friends are serving Christ. The unbelief and indecision of others will be no excuse at the last day. We must never follow a multitude to do evil. If we go to heaven alone, we must resolve that by God's grace we will go. Whether we have many with us or a few, the command before us is plain— "Strive to enter in."

Whatever others may think in religion, the Lord Jesus would have us know, that we are responsible for exertion. We are not to sit still in sin and worldliness, waiting for the grace of God. We are not to go on still in our wickedness, sheltering ourselves under the vain plea that we can do nothing until God draws us. We are to draw near to Him in the use of the means of grace. How we can do it is a question with which we have nothing to do. It is in obedience that the knot will be untied. The command is express and unmistakable— "Strive to enter in."

We see, thirdly, in these verses, **a day of dreadful solemnity described.** We are told of a time when "the master of the house shall rise and shut the door," when some shall "sit down in the kingdom of God," and others be "shut out" for evermore. About the meaning of these words there can be no doubt. They describe the second coming of Christ and the day of judgment.

A day is coming on the earth when the patience of God towards SINNERS shall have an end. The door of mercy, which has been so long open, shall at last be shut. The fountain opened for all sin and

uncleanness shall at length be closed. The throne of grace shall be removed, and the throne of judgment shall be set up in its place. The great assize of the world shall begin. All that are found impenitent and unbelieving shall be thrust out forever from God's presence. Men shall find that there is such a thing as "the wrath of the Lamb." (Rev. 6:16.)

A day is coming when BELIEVERS in Christ shall receive a full reward. The Master of the great house in heaven shall call His servants together, and give to each a crown of glory that fades not away. They shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and rest forever from warfare and work. They shall be shut in with Christ, and saints, and angels, in the kingdom of heaven, and sin, and death, and sorrow, and the world, and the devil, shall be eternally shut out. Men shall see at last that "To him that sows righteousness there is a sure reward." (Prov. 11:18.)

We see, lastly, in these verses, **a heart-searching prophecy delivered.** Our Lord tells us that in the day of His second coming, "Many will seek to enter in at the strait gate, and shall not be able." They will "knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us," but will find no admission. They will even plead earnestly, that "they have eaten and drunk in Christ's presence, and that he has taught in their streets." But their plea will be unavailing. They will receive the solemn answer, "I don't know you. Go away, all you who do evil." Religious profession, and formal knowledge of Christ will save none who have served sin and the world.

There is something peculiarly striking in our Lord's language in this prophecy. It reveals to us the dreadful fact, that men may *see what is right when it is too late for them to be saved*. There is a time coming when many will repent too late, and believe too late—sorrow for sin too late, and begin to pray too late—be anxious about salvation too late, and long for heaven too late. Myriads shall wake up in another world, and be convinced of truths which on earth they refused to believe. Earth is the only place in God's creation where there is any infidelity. Hell itself is nothing but truth known too late.

The recollection of this passage should help us to set a right estimate on things around us. Money, and pleasure, and rank, and greatness, occupy the first place now in the world. Praying, and believing, and holy living, and acquaintance with Christ, are despised, and ridiculed, and held very cheap. But there is a change coming one day! The last shall be first, and the first last. For that change let us be prepared.

And now let us ask ourselves whether we are among the many or among the few? Do we know anything of striving and warring against sin, the world, and the devil? Are we ready for the Master's coming to shut the door? The man who can answer these questions satisfactorily is a true Christian.

Notes on 13:22-30

24. "Try to enter." The Greek word gives us our English word agonize. It implies great exertion and conflict. See Colossians 4:12; 1

Timothy 6:12.

Many “will try to enter and will not be able to.” This time seems to me, most plainly, to be on the last day, when the door of mercy is shut forever. The whole context shows this, and the language used is parallel to that in the parable of the wise and foolish virgins (Matthew 25:11).

27. “Away from me, all you evildoers!” The similarity between this expression and Matthew 25:41 appears to show clearly that the time described is the second coming of Christ and the judgment day.

30. “There are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last.” This is a proverb which was literally fulfilled when the Gospel was first preached, and it has often been fulfilled since, both in churches and individuals. The Jews who were first became last, and the Gentiles who were last became first.

LUKE 13:31-35

JESUS’ SORROW OVER JERUSALEM

Let us learn from these verses, **how entirely our times are in God’s hands.** Our Lord Jesus Christ teaches us this lesson by His reply to those who bade Him depart, because Herod would kill Him. He said, “I cast out devils, and I do cures today and tomorrow.” His time was not yet come for leaving the world. His work was not yet finished. Until that time came it was not in the power of Herod to hurt Him. Until that work was finished no weapon forged against Him could prosper.

There is something in our Lord's words which demands the attention of all true Christians. There is a frame of mind exhibited to us which we should do well to copy. Our Lord, no doubt, spoke with a prophetic foresight of coming things. He knew the time of His own death, and He knew that this time was not yet come. Foreknowledge like this, of course, is not granted to believers in the present day. But still there is a lesson here which we ought not to overlook. We ought, in a certain measure, to aim at having the mind that was in Christ Jesus. We ought to seek to possess a spirit of calm, unshaken confidence about things to come. We should study to have a heart "not afraid of evil tidings," but quiet, steady, and trusting in the Lord. (Psalm 112:7.)

The subject is a delicate one, but one which concerns our happiness so much that it deserves consideration. We are not intended to be idle fatalists, like the Muhammadans, or cold, unfeeling statues, like the Stoics. We are not to neglect the use of means, or to omit all prudent provision for the unseen future. To neglect means is fanaticism, and not faith. But still, when we have done all, we should remember, that though DUTIES are ours, EVENTS are God's. We should therefore endeavor to leave things to come in God's hands, and not to be over-anxious about health, or family, or money, or plans.

To cultivate this frame of mind would add immensely to our peace. How many of our cares and fears are about things which never come to pass! Happy is that man who can walk in our Lord's steps,

and say, “I shall have what is good for me. I shall live on earth until my work is done, and not a moment longer. I shall be taken when I am ripe for heaven, and not a minute before. All the powers of the world cannot take away my life, until God permits. All the physicians of earth cannot preserve it, when God calls me away.”

Is there anything beyond the reach of man in this spirit? Surely not. Believers have a covenant ordered in all things and sure. The very hairs of their heads are numbered. Their steps are ordered by the Lord. All things are working together for their good. When they are afflicted, it is for their profit. When they are sick, it is for some wise purpose. All things are said to be theirs, life, death, things present, and things to come. (2 Sam. 23:5; Matt. 10:30; Psalm 37:23; Rom. 8:28; Heb. 12:10; John 11:4; 1 Cor. 3:22.)

There is no such thing as chance, luck, or accident, in the life of a believer. There is but one thing needful, in order to make a believer calm, quiet, unruffled, undisturbed in every position, and under every circumstance. That one thing is faith in active exercise. For such faith let us daily pray. Few indeed know anything of it. The faith of most believers is very fitful and spasmodic. It is for lack of steady, constant faith, that so few can say with Christ, “I must proceed on my way today and tomorrow, and not die until my work is done.”

Let us learn, for another thing, from these verses, **how great is the compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ towards sinners.** We see this brought out in a most forcible manner by our Lord’s language about Jerusalem. He knew well the wickedness of that city.

He knew what crimes had been committed there in times past. He knew what was coming on Himself, at the time of His crucifixion. Yet even to Jerusalem He says, “How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.”

It grieves the Lord Jesus Christ to see sinners going on still in their wickedness. “As I live,” are His words, “I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked.” (Ezek. 33:11.) Let all unconverted people remember this. It is not enough that they grieve parents, and ministers, and neighbors, and friends. There is one higher than all these, whom they deeply grieve by their conduct. They are daily grieving Christ.

The Lord Jesus is willing to save sinners. “He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” He would have all men saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.” (2 Pet 3:9; 1 Tim. 2:4.) This is a mighty principle of the Gospel, and one which severely perplexes narrow-minded and shallow theologians. But what says the Scripture? The words before us, no less than the texts just quoted, are distinct and express. “I would have gathered your children,” says Christ, “but you were not willing.” The will of poor hardened unbelieving man, and not the will of Christ, is the cause why sinners are lost for evermore. Christ “would” save them, but they were not willing.

Let the truth before us sink down into our hearts, and bear fruit in our lives. Let us thoroughly understand that if we die in our sins

and go to hell, our blood will be upon our own heads. We cannot lay the blame on God the Father, nor on Jesus Christ the Redeemer, nor on the Holy Spirit the Comforter. The promises of the Gospel are wide, broad, and general. The readiness of Christ to save sinners is unmistakably declared. If we are lost, we shall have none to find fault with but ourselves. The words of Christ will be our condemnation—"You will not come unto me, that you might have life." (John 5:40.)

Let us take heed, with such a passage as this before us, that we are not more systematic than Scripture. It is a serious thing to be "wise above that which is written." Our SALVATION is wholly of God. Let that never be forgotten. None but the elect shall be finally saved. "No man can come unto Christ except the Father draws him." (John 6:44.) But our RUIN, if we are lost, will be wholly of ourselves. We shall reap the fruit of our own choice. We shall find that we have lost our own souls. Linked between these two principles lies truth which we must maintain firmly, and never let go. There is doubtless deep mystery about it. Our minds are too feeble to understand it now. But we shall understand it all hereafter. God's sovereignty and man's responsibility shall appear perfectly harmonious one day. In the meantime, whatever we doubt, let us never doubt Christ's infinite willingness to save.

Notes on 13:31-35

32. "Today . . . tomorrow . . . the third day." I think this probably signifies a short space of time: "I am yet a little time with you, and during that time I shall continue my work, notwithstanding Herod's

threats. And at the end of that time, and not before, I will finish my course by death." A similar way of speaking occurs in Hosea 6:2.

"I will reach my goal" (KJV: "I shall be perfected"). This is a remarkable expression. In the Greek it is in the present tense. The meaning seems to be, "I shall be perfected by my death: I shall finish the work which I came to do." The same word is applied to our Lord in Hebrews 2:10 and Hebrews 5:9.

33. "I must keep going." This seems to mean, "I must continue in the course I have begun. I must go on as I have hitherto."

34. "O Jerusalem . . ." This remarkable passage is found in St. Matthew's Gospel (Matthew 23:37) at the very end of our Lord's ministry, in almost the same words. I cannot see any satisfactory explanation for this except that our Lord must have used the same words twice about Jerusalem in the course of his ministry.

"I have longed . . . but you were not willing." The Greek word in both these phrases is derived from the same word and is stronger than our English translation "wish" (KJV). It is literally, "I willed, and ye willed not!"

Few passages in the Bible throw the responsibility of the loss of the soul so distinctly on those who are lost: "Would I have . . . ye would not!" (KJV). Two wills are expressly mentioned: the will of Christ to do good, and the will of man to refuse good when offered.

35. "You will not see me again." I strongly support the view of the commentators who think that our Lord's words here are not yet fulfilled and that they refer to the last times, when the Jews after their last tribulation will look on him whom they pierced and will believe, at the time of his second coming in glory.

The triumphant entry into Jerusalem was a faint type, no doubt, of the honor which Christ will one day see in Jerusalem. But the Jewish nation, as a nation, never saw our Lord nor honored him as the Messiah during the whole time of his first coming. But “Look, he is coming with clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him” (Revelation 1:7).

Luke – Chap. 14

LUKE 14:1-6

JESUS AT A PHARISEE’S HOUSE

Let us mark in this passage, **how our Lord Jesus Christ accepted the hospitality of those who were not His disciples.** We read that “He went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees to eat bread.” We cannot reasonably suppose that this Pharisee was a friend of Christ. It is more probable that he only did what was customary for a man in his position. He saw a stranger teaching religion, whom some regarded as a prophet, and he invited Him to eat at his table. The point that most concerns us, is this, that when the invitation was given it was accepted.

If we want to know how our Lord carried Himself at a Pharisee’s table, we have only to read attentively the first twenty-four verses of this chapter. We shall find Him the same there that He was elsewhere, always about His Father’s business. We shall see Him first

defending the true observance of the Sabbath-day—then expounding the nature of true humility—then urging on His host the character of true hospitality—and finally delivering that most relevant and striking parable—the parable of the great supper. And all this is done in the most wise, and calm, and dignified manner. The words are all words in season. The speech is "always with grace, seasoned with salt." (Coloss. 4:6.) The perfection of our Lord's conduct appears on this, as on all other occasions. He always said the right thing, at the right time, and in the right way. He never forgot, for a moment, who He was and where He was.

The example of Christ in this passage deserves the close attention of all Christians, and specially of ministers of the Gospel. It throws strong light on some most difficult points—our communion with unconverted people—the extent to which we should carry it—the manner in which we should behave when we are with them. Our Lord has left us a pattern for our conduct in this chapter. It will be our wisdom to endeavor to walk in His steps.

We ought not to withdraw entirely from all communion with unconverted people. It would be cowardice and indolence to do so, even if it were possible. It would shut us out from many opportunities of doing good. But we ought to go into their society moderately, watchfully, and prayerfully, and with a firm resolution to carry our Master and our Master's business with us.

The house from which Christ is deliberately excluded is not the house at which Christians ought to receive hospitalities, and keep up

intimacy. The extent to which we should carry our communion with the unconverted, is a point which each believer must settle for himself. Some can go much further than others in this direction, with advantage to their company, and without injury to themselves. “Every man has his proper gift.” (1 Cor. 7:7.) There are two questions which we should often put to ourselves, in reference to this subject. “Do I, in company, spend all my time in light and worldly conversation? Or do I endeavor to follow, however feebly, the example of Christ?” The society in which we cannot answer these questions satisfactorily, is society from which we had better withdraw. So long as we go into company as Christ went to the Pharisee’s house, we shall take no harm.

Let us mark, secondly, in this passage, **how our Lord was watched by His enemies.** We read that when He went to eat bread on the Sabbath day, in the house of a Pharisee, “they watched Him.”

The circumstance here recorded, is only a type of what our Lord was constantly subjected to, all through His earthly ministry. The eyes of His enemies were continually observing Him. They watched for His halting, and waited eagerly for some word or deed on which they could lay hold and build an accusation. Yet they found none. Our blessed Lord was ever holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from evil. Perfect indeed must that life have been, in which the bitterest enemy could find no flaw, or blemish, or spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing!

He that desires to serve Christ must make up his mind to be "watched" and observed, no less than His Master. He must never forget that the eyes of the world are upon him, and that the wicked are looking narrowly at all his ways. Specially ought he to remember this when he goes into the society of the unconverted. If he makes a slip there, in word or deed, and acts inconsistently, be may rest assured it will not be forgotten.

Let us endeavor to live daily as in the sight of a holy God. So living, it will matter little how much we are "watched" by an ill-natured and malicious world. Let us exercise ourselves to have a conscience void of offence toward God and man, and to do nothing which can give occasion to the Lord's enemies to blaspheme. The thing is possible. By the grace of God it can be done. The haters of Daniel were obliged to confess, "we shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God." (Dan. 6:5.)

Let us mark, lastly, in this passage, **how our Lord asserts the lawfulness of doing works of mercy on the Sabbath day.** We read that he healed a man who had the dropsy on the Sabbath day, and then said to the lawyers and Pharisees, "Which of you shall have a donkey or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not immediately pull him out on the Sabbath day?" This was a home-thrust, which could not be fended off. It is written, "They could not answer Him."

The qualification which our Lord here puts on the requirements of the fourth commandment, is evidently founded on Scripture,

reason, and common sense. The Sabbath was made for man, for his benefit, not for his injury, for his advantage, not for his hurt. The interpretation of God's law respecting the Sabbath was never intended to be strained so far as to interfere with charity, kindness, and the real needs of human nature. All such interpretations only defeat their own end. They require that which fallen man cannot perform, and thus bring the whole commandment into disrepute. Our Lord saw this clearly, and labored throughout His ministry to restore this precious part of God's law to its just position.

The principle which our Lord lays down about Sabbath observance needs carefully fencing with cautions. The right to do works of *necessity* and *mercy* is fearfully abused in these latter days. Thousands of Christians appear to have trampled down the hedge, and burst the bounds entirely with respect to this holy day. They seem to forget that though our Lord repeatedly explains the requirements of the fourth commandment, He never struck it out of the law of God, or said that it was not binding on Christians at all.

Can any one say that Sunday traveling, except on very rare emergencies, is a work of *mercy*? Will any one tell us that Sunday trading, Sunday dinner parties, Sunday excursion-trains on railways, Sunday deliveries of letters and newspapers, are works of *mercy*? Have servants, and shop-men, and engine-drivers, and coachmen, and clerks, and porters, no souls? Do they not need rest for their bodies and time for their souls, like other men? These are serious questions, and ought to make many people think.

Whatever others do, let us resolve to "keep the Sabbath holy." God has a controversy with the churches about Sabbath desecration. It is a sin of which the cry goes up to heaven, and will be reckoned for one day. Let us wash our hands of this sin, and have nothing to do with it. If others are determined to rob God, and take possession of the Lord's Day for their own selfish ends, let us not be partakers in their sins.

LUKE 14:7-14

PLACES OF HONOR

Let us learn from these verses **the value of humility.** This is a lesson which our Lord teaches in two ways. Firstly, He advises those who are bidden to a wedding to "sit down in the lowest place." Secondly, He backs up His advice by declaring a great principle, which frequently fell from His lips— "Whoever exalts himself shall be abased, and he that humbles himself shall be exalted."

Humility may well be called the queen of the Christian graces. To know our own sinfulness and weakness, and to feel our need of Christ, is the very beginning of saving religion. It is a grace which has always been the distinguishing feature in the character of the holiest saints in every age. Abraham, and Moses, and Job, and David, and Daniel, and Paul, were all eminently humble men. Above all, it is a grace within the reach of every true Christian. All have not money to give away. All have not time and opportunities for working directly for Christ. All have not gifts of speech, and tact, and knowledge, in

order to do good in the world. But all converted men should labor to adorn the doctrine they profess by humility. If they can do nothing else, they can strive to be humble.

Would we know the root and spring of humility? One word describes it. The root of humility is right *knowledge*. The man who really knows himself and his own heart—who knows God and His infinite majesty and holiness—who knows Christ, and the price at which he was redeemed—that man will never be a proud man. He will count himself, like Jacob, unworthy of the least of all God's mercies. He will say of himself, like Job, "I am vile." He will cry, like Paul, "I am chief of sinners." (Genes. 32:10; Job 40:4; 1 Tim. 1:15.) He will think anything good enough for him. In lowliness of mind be will esteem every one else to be better than himself. (Philip. 2:3.) Ignorance—nothing but sheer ignorance—ignorance of self, of God, and of Christ, is the real secret of pride. From that miserable self-ignorance may we daily pray to be delivered! He is the wise man who knows himself—and he who knows himself, will find nothing within to make him proud.

Let us learn, secondly, from these verses, **the duty of caring for the poor.** Our Lord teaches this lesson in a peculiar manner. He tells the Pharisee who invited Him to his feast, that, when he made "a dinner or a supper," he ought not to "call his friends," or relatives, or rich neighbors. On the contrary, He says, "When you make a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind."

The precept contained in these words must evidently be interpreted with considerable limitation. It is certain that our Lord did not intend to forbid men showing any hospitality to their relatives and friends. It is certain that He did not mean to encourage a useless and profuse expenditure of money in giving to the poor. To interpret the passage in this manner would make it contradict other plain Scriptures. Such interpretations cannot possibly be correct.

But when we have said this, we must not forget that the passage contains a deep and important lesson. We must be careful that we do not limit and qualify that lesson until we have pared it down and refined it into nothing at all. The lesson of the passage is plain and distinct. The Lord Jesus would have us care for our poorer brethren, and help them according to our power. He would have us know that it is a solemn duty never to neglect the poor, but to aid them and relieve them in their time of need.

Let the lesson of this passage sink down deeply into our hearts. "The poor shall never cease out of the land." (Deut. 15:11.) A little help conferred upon the poor judiciously and in season, will often add immensely to their happiness, and take away immensely from their cares, and promote good feeling between class and class in society. This help it is the will of Christ that all His people who have the means should he willing and ready to bestow. That stingy, calculating spirit, which leads some people to talk of "the work-house," and condemn all charity to the poor, is exceedingly opposed to the mind of Christ. It is not for nothing that our Lord declares that

He will say to the wicked in the day of judgment, “I was a hungry and you gave me no food—I was thirsty and you gave me no drink.” It is not for nothing that Paul writes to the Galatians, “All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.” (Matt. 25:42. Gal. 2:10.)

Let us learn, lastly, from these verses, **the great importance of looking forward to the resurrection of the dead.** This lesson stands out in a striking manner in the language used by our Lord on the subject of showing charity to the poor. He says to the Pharisee who entertained Him, “The poor cannot repay you—you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”

There is a resurrection after death. Let this never be forgotten. The life that we live here in the flesh is not all. The visible world around us is not the only world with which we have to do. All is not over when the last breath is drawn, and men and women are carried to their long home in the grave. The trumpet shall one day sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible. All that are in the graves shall hear Christ’s voice and come forth—those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of damnation. This is one of the great foundation truths of the Christian religion. Let us cling to it firmly, and never let it go.

Let us strive to live like men who believe in a resurrection and a life to come, and desire to be always ready for another world. So living, we shall look forward to death with calmness. We shall feel that there remains some better portion for us beyond the grave. So

living, we shall take patiently all that we have to bear in this world. Trial, losses, disappointments, ingratitude, will affect us little. We shall not look for our reward here. We shall feel that all will be rectified one day, and that the Judge of all the earth will do right. (Gen. 18:25.)

But how can we bear the thought of a resurrection? What shall enable us to look forward to a world to come without alarm? Nothing can do it, but faith in Christ. Believing on Him, we have nothing to fear. Our sins will not appear against us. The demands of God's law will be found completely satisfied. We shall stand firm in the great day, and none shall lay anything to our charge. (Rom. 8:33.) Worldly men like Felix, may well tremble when they think of a resurrection. But believers, like Paul, may rejoice.

Notes on 14:7-14

11. "Everyone who exalts himself." There is hardly any saying of our Lord's which is said more frequently as this sentence about humility.

14. "You will be repaid." These words deserve special attention. They confirm the doctrine of a reward according to deeds, though not on account of deeds, on the judgment day.

Our Lord is probably speaking here about the general judgment; the importance of deeds as an evidence of faith is the truth which he seeks to impress on our minds.

"The resurrection of the righteous." This is a remarkable expression. I cannot think our Lord uses it in deference to a commonly held belief among the Jews, that the resurrection was the special privilege

of the righteous. It seems to me far more probable that our Lord refers to the first resurrection, spoken about in the first section of Revelation 20. There is a resurrection which only the righteous will take part in—a resurrection which will be the special privilege of the righteous and will precede that of the wicked.

LUKE 14:15-24

PARABLE OF THE GREAT BANQUET

The verses before us contain one of our Lord's most instructive parables. It was spoken in consequence of a remark made by one who was sitting at table with Him in a Pharisee's house. "Blessed," said this man, "is he that shall eat the feast in the kingdom of God." The object of this remark we are left to conjecture. It is likely that he who made it was one of that class of people who wish to go to heaven, and like to hear good things talked of, but never get any further. Our Lord takes occasion to remind him and all the company, by means of the parable of the great supper, that men may have the kingdom of God offered to them, and yet may willingly neglect it, and be lost forever.

We are taught, firstly, in this parable, that **God has made a great provision for the salvation of men's souls.** This is the meaning of the words, "a certain man made a great banquet, and invited many." This is the Gospel.

The Gospel contains a full supply of everything that sinners need in order to be saved. We are all naturally starving, empty, helpless, and ready to perish. Forgiveness of all sin, and peace with God, justification of the person, and sanctification of the heart—grace by the way, and glory in the end—are the gracious provision which God has prepared for the wants of our souls. There is nothing that sin-laden hearts can wish, or weary consciences require, which is not spread before men in rich abundance in Christ. Christ, in one word, is the sum and substance of the "great supper." "I am the bread of life." "Him that comes unto me shall never hunger, and he that believes on me shall never thirst." "My flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed." "He that eats my flesh and drinks my blood, has eternal life." (John 6:35-55, 56.)

We are taught, secondly, in this parable, **that the offers and invitations of the Gospel are most broad and liberal.** We read that he who made the supper "sent his servant at the time of the banquet to say to those who were invited, Come for all things are now ready."

There is nothing lacking on God's part for the salvation of man. If man is not saved, the fault is not on God's side. The Father is ready to receive all who come to Him by Christ. The Son is ready to cleanse all from their sins who apply to Him by faith. The Spirit is ready to come to all who ask for Him. There is an infinite willingness in God to save man, if man is only willing to be saved.

There is the fullest warrant for sinners to draw near to God by Christ. The word “Come,” is addressed to all without exception. Are men laboring and heavy-laden? “Come unto me,” says Jesus, “and I will give you rest.” Are men thirsting? “If any man thirst,” says Jesus, “let him come unto me and drink.” Are men poor and hungry? “Come,” says Jesus, “buy wine and milk without money and without price.” No man shall ever be able to say that he had no encouragement to seek salvation. That word of the Lord shall silence every objector— “Him that comes to me, I will in no wise cast out.”

We are taught, thirdly, in this parable, that **many who receive Gospel invitations refuse to accept them.** We read that when the servant announced that all things were ready, those who were invited “all with one consent began to make excuse.” One had one trivial excuse, and another had another. In one point only all were agreed—they would not come.

We have in this part of the parable a vivid picture of the reception which the Gospel is continually meeting with wherever it is proclaimed. Thousands are continually doing what the parable describes. They are invited to come to Christ, and they will not come. It is not ignorance of religion that ruins most men’s souls. It is lack of will to use knowledge; or love of this present world. *It is not open profligacy that fills hell.* It is excessive attention to things which in themselves are lawful. It is not avowed dislike to the Gospel which is so much to be feared. It is that procrastinating, excuse-making spirit, which is always ready with a reason why Christ cannot be served

today. Let the words of our Lord on this subject sink down into our hearts. Infidelity and immorality, no doubt, slay their thousands. But decent, plausible, smooth-spoken *excuses* slay their tens of thousands. No excuse can justify a man in refusing God's invitation, and not coming to Christ.

We are taught, lastly, in this parable, that **God earnestly desires the salvation of souls, and would have all means used to procure acceptance for His Gospel.** We read that when those who were first invited to the supper refused the invitation, "the master of the house said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets, and bring in here the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind." We read that when this was done, and there was yet room, "the master said unto his servant, Go out into the high ways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled."

The meaning of these words can admit of little dispute. They surely justify us in asserting the exceeding love and compassion of God towards sinners. His patience is inexhaustible. If some will not receive the truth, He will have others invited in their stead. His pity for the lost is no pretended and imaginary thing. He is infinitely willing to save souls. Above all, the words justify every preacher and teacher of the Gospel in employing all possible means to awaken sinners, and turn them from their sins. If they will not come to us in public, we must visit them in private. If they will not attend our

preaching in the congregation, we must be ready to preach from house to house.

We must even not be ashamed to use a *gentle violence*. We must be instant in season, out of season. (2 Tim. 4:2.) We must deal with many an unconverted man, as one who is half-asleep, half out of his mind, and not fully conscious of the state he is in. We must press the Gospel on his notice again and again. We must cry aloud and spare not. We must deal with him as we would with a man about to commit suicide. We must try to snatch him as a brand from the burning. We must say, "I cannot—I will not—I dare not let you go on ruining your own soul." The men of the world may not understand such earnest dealing. They may sneer at all zeal and fervor in religion as fanaticism. But the "man of God," who desires to do the work of an evangelist, will heed little what the world says. He will remember the words of our parable. He will "compel men to come in."

Let us leave this parable with serious self-inquiry. It ought to speak to us in the present day. To us this invitation of the Gospel is addressed as well as to the Jews. To us the Lord is saying constantly, "Come unto the supper—Come unto me." Have we accepted His invitation? Or are we practically saying, "I cannot come." If we die without having come to Christ, we had better never have been born.

Notes on 14:15-24

18. "Began to make excuses." The various excuses which those who were invited made are types of the various worldly reasons with which men excuse themselves from accepting the offer of Christ's

Gospel. Note that everything mentioned is in itself innocent and lawful.

21. "The poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame." These words primarily describe the Gentiles, who were in this miserable condition when compared with the Jews. Second, they describe sinners to whom the Gospel is offered, all who see their sins and acknowledge their own spiritual need and poverty.

22. "There is still room." This seems to show that there is a greater willingness on God's part to save sinners than there is on the part of sinners to be saved. More grace is given than there are hearts willing to receive it.

LUKE 14:25-35

THE COST OF BEING A DISCIPLE

We learn, firstly, from this passage, that **true Christians must be ready, if need be, to give up everything for Christ's sake.** This is a lesson which is taught in very remarkable language. Our Lord says, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple."

This expression must doubtless be interpreted with some qualification. We must never explain any text of Scripture in such a manner as to make it contradict another. Our Lord did not mean us to understand that it is the duty of Christians to hate their relatives. This would have been to contradict the fifth commandment. He only

meant that those who follow Him must love Him with a deeper love even than their nearest and dearest relatives, or their own lives. He did not mean that it is an essential part of Christianity to quarrel with our relatives and friends. But He did mean that if the claims of our relatives and the claims of Christ come into collision, the claims of relatives must give way. *We must choose rather to displease those we love most upon earth, than to displease Him who died for us on the cross.*

The demand which our Lord makes upon us here is peculiarly stringent and heart-searching. Yet it is a wise and a necessary one. Experience shows, both in the church at home, and in the mission-field abroad, that the greatest foes to a man's soul are sometimes those of his own house. It sometimes happens that the greatest hindrance in the way of an awakened conscience, is the opposition of relatives and friends. Ungodly fathers cannot bear to see their sons "taking up new views" of religion. Worldly mothers are vexed to see their daughters unwilling to enter into the gaieties of the world. A collision of opinion takes place frequently, as soon as grace enters into a family. And then comes the time when the true Christian must remember the spirit of our Lord's words in this passage. *He must be willing to offend his family, rather than offend Christ*.

The line of duty in such cases is doubtless very painful. It is a heavy cross to disagree with those we love, and especially about spiritual things. But if this cross be laid upon us, we must remember that firmness and decision are true kindness. It can never be true

love to relatives to do wrong, in order to please them. And, best of all, firmness accompanied by gentleness and consistency, in the long run of life, often brings its own reward. Thousands of Christians will bless God at the last day, that they had relatives and friends who chose to displease them rather than Christ. That very decision was the first thing that made them think seriously, and led finally to the conversion of their souls.

We learn secondly, from this passage, that **those who are thinking of following Christ should be warned to "count the cost."** This is a lesson which was intended for the multitudes who followed our Lord without thought and consideration, and was enforced by examples drawn from building and from war. It is a lesson which will be found useful in every age of the church.

It costs something to be a true Christian. Let that never be forgotten. To be a mere nominal Christian, and go to church, is cheap and easy work. But to hear Christ's voice, and follow Christ, and believe in Christ, and confess Christ, requires much self-denial. It will cost us our sins, and our self-righteousness, and our ease, and our worldliness. All—all must be given up. We must fight an enemy who comes against us with twenty thousand followers. We must build a tower in troublous times. Our Lord Jesus Christ would have us thoroughly understand this. He bids us "count the cost."

Now, why did our Lord use this language? Did He wish to discourage men from becoming His disciples? Did He mean to make the gate of life appear more narrow than it is? It is not difficult to

find an answer to these questions. Our Lord spoke as He did to prevent men following Him lightly and inconsiderately, from mere carnal feeling or temporary excitement, who in time of temptation would fall away. He knew that nothing does so much harm to the cause of true religion as backsliding, and that nothing causes so much backsliding as enlisting disciples without letting them know what they take in hand. He had no desire to swell the number of His followers by admitting soldiers who would fail in the hour of need. For this reason He raises a warning voice. He bids all who think of taking service with Him count the cost before they begin.

Well would it be for the Church and the world if the ministers of Christ would always remember their Master's conduct in this passage. Often—far too often—people are built up in self-deception, and encouraged to think they are converted when in reality they are not converted at all. Feelings are supposed to be faith. Convictions are supposed to be grace. These things ought not so to be. By all means let us encourage the first beginnings of religion in a soul. But never let us urge people forward without telling them what true Christianity entails. Never let us hide from them the battle and the toil. Let us say to them "come with us"—but let us also say, "count the cost."

We learn, lastly, from this passage, **how miserable is the condition of backsliders and apostates.** This is a lesson which is intimately connected with the preceding one. The necessity of "counting the cost" is enforced by a picture of the consequences of

neglecting to do so. The man who has once made a profession of religion, but has afterwards gone back from it, is like salt which has "lost its savor." Such salt is comparatively useless. "It is neither fit for the land, nor fit for the ash-heap—but men cast it out." Yet the state of that salt is a lively emblem of the state of a backslider. No wonder that our Lord said, "He that has ears to hear let him hear."

The truth which our Lord brings out in this place is very painful, but very useful and needful to be known. No man, be it remembered, is in so dangerous a state as he who has once known the truth and professed to love it, and has afterwards fallen away from his profession, and gone back to the world. You can tell such a man nothing that he does not know. You can show him no doctrine that he has not heard. He has not sinned in ignorance like many. He has gone away from Christ with his eyes open. He has sinned against a known, and not an unknown God. His case is well near desperate. All things are possible with God. Yet it is written, "It is impossible for those who were once enlightened—if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance." (Heb. 6:4-6.)

Let us ponder these things well. The subject is one which is not sufficiently considered. Let us never be afraid of beginning to serve Christ. But let us begin seriously, thoughtfully, and with a due consideration of the step we take. And having once begun, let us pray for grace that we may persevere, and never fall away.

Notes on 14:25-35

26. "Comes to me and does not hate." The word hate in this verse

must clearly be taken comparatively. The following quotation from Pearce deserves reading: “Besides the proof from Matthew 10:37, that the word ‘hate’ here means ‘love less,’ it may be added that in Matthew 6:24 the word ‘hate’ is used in the same way. Also, when we read in Romans 9:13, ‘Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated,’ the meaning is that I have loved Jacob more than Esau. That this is no arbitrary interpretation of the word ‘hate,’ but one agreeable to the Hebrew idiom, appears from what is said in Genesis 29:30-31, where Leah being ‘hated’ is explained by Rachel being loved more than Leah. See also Deuteronomy 21:15-17.”

34. “Loses its saltiness.” This striking and solemn saying about the salt that “loses its saltiness” is found on three occasions in the Gospels (see also Matthew 5:13; Mark 9:50). The sinfulness of sins against light and knowledge and the possibility of being given over to a reprobate mind are fearful points to ponder. People seem to forget that there is such a thing as an unpardonable sin, and that if salt has once lost is saltiness, it cannot be seasoned again.

The Bible teaches that no sinner is so unlikely to be saved as the person who after making a strong spiritual profession of faith falls away and returns to the world. There is no heart so unlikely to be changed as the heart which once professed to love the Gospel but later becomes cold and indifferent.

Luke – Chap. 15

LUKE 15:1-10

THE PARABLES OF THE LOST SHEEP, AND THE LOST COIN

The chapter which begins with these verses is well known to Bible readers if any is in the Scriptures. Few chapters perhaps have done more good to the souls of men. Let us take heed that it does good to us.

We should first observe in these verses, **the striking testimony which was borne to our Lord by His enemies.** We read that when "all the publicans and sinners drew near to hear Him, the Scribes and Pharisees murmured, saying, This man receives sinners, and eats with them."

These words were evidently spoken with surprise and scorn, and not with pleasure and admiration. These ignorant guides of the Jews could not understand a preacher of religion having anything to do with wicked people! Yet their words worked for good. The very saying which was meant for a reproach was adopted by the Lord Jesus as a true description of His office. It led to His speaking three of the most instructive parables which ever fell from His lips.

The testimony of the Scribes and Pharisees was strictly and literally true. The Lord Jesus is indeed one that "receives sinners." He receives them to pardon them, to sanctify them, and to make them fit for heaven. It is His special office to do so. For this end He came into the world. He came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. He came into the world to save sinners. What He was

upon earth He is now at the right hand of God, and will be to all eternity. He is emphatically the sinner's Friend.

Have we any sense of sin? Do we feel bad, and wicked, and guilty, and deserving of God's anger? Is the remembrance of our past lives bitter to us? Does the recollection of our past conduct make us ashamed? Then we are the very people who ought to apply to Christ, just as we are, pleading nothing of our own, making no useless delay. Christ will receive us graciously, pardon us freely, and give us eternal life. He is One that "receives sinners." Let us not be lost for lack of applying to Him that we may be saved.

We should observe, secondly, in these verses, **the remarkable figures under which our Lord describes His own love towards sinners.** We read that in reply to the taunting remark of His enemies He spoke three parables—the parables of the lost sheep, the lost piece of silver, and the prodigal son. The first two of these parables are now before us. All three are meant to illustrate one and the same truth. They all throw strong light on *Christ's willingness to save sinners*.

Christ's love is an *active, working love*. Just as the shepherd did not sit still bewailing his lost sheep, and the woman did not sit still bewailing her lost money, so our blessed Lord did not sit still in heaven pitying sinners. He left the glory which He had with the Father, and humbled Himself to be made in the likeness of man. He came down into the world to seek and save that which was lost. He never rested until He had made atonement for our transgressions,

brought in everlasting righteousness, provided eternal redemption, and opened a door of life to all who are willing to be saved.

Christ's love is a *self-denying love*. The shepherd brought his lost sheep home on his own shoulders rather than leave it in the wilderness. The woman lighted a candle, and swept the house, and searched diligently, and spared no pains, until she found her lost money. And just so did Christ not spare Himself, when he undertook to save sinners. "He endured the cross, despising the shame." He "laid down His life for His friends." Greater love than this cannot be shown. (John 15:13. Heb. 12:2.)

Christ's love is a *deep and mighty love*. Just as the shepherd rejoiced to find his sheep, and the woman to find her money, so does the Lord Jesus rejoice to save sinners. It is a real pleasure to Him to pluck them as brands from the burning. It was His "food and drink," when upon earth, to finish the work which He came to do. He felt straitened in spirit until it was accomplished. It is still His delight to show mercy. He is far more willing to save sinners than sinners are to be saved.

Let us strive to know something of this love of Christ. It is a love that truly passes knowledge. It is unspeakable and unsearchable. It is that on which we must wholly rest our souls, if we would have peace in time, and glory in eternity. If we take comfort in *our own love* to Christ, we are building on a sandy foundation. But if we lean on Christ's love to us, we are on a rock.

We should observe, lastly, in these verses, **the wide encouragement which our Lord holds out to repentance.** We read these striking words, “Joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repents.” We read the same thought again after a few verses—“There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repents.” The thing is doubled, to make doubt impossible. The idea is repeated, in order to meet man’s unbelief.

There are deep things in these sayings, beyond doubt. Our poor weak minds are little able to understand how the perfect joy of heaven can admit of increase. But one thing, at any rate, stands out clearly on the face of these expressions. There is an infinite willingness on God’s part to receive sinners. However wicked a man may have been, in the day that he really turns from his wickedness and comes to God by Christ, God is well-pleased. God has no pleasure in the death of him that dies, and God has pleasure in true repentance.

Let the man who is afraid to repent, consider well the verses we are now looking at, and be afraid no more. There is nothing on God’s part to justify his fears. An open door is set before him. A free pardon awaits him. “If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9.)

Let the man who is ashamed to repent, consider these verses, and cast shame aside. What though the world mocks and jests at his repentance? While man is mocking, angels are rejoicing. The very

change which sinners call foolishness, is a change which fills heaven with joy.

Have we repented ourselves? This, after all, is the principal question which concerns us. What shall it profit us to know Christ's love, if we do not use it? "If you know these things, happy are you if you do them." (John 13:17.)

Notes on 15:1-10

1. Tax collectors and "sinners." No Gospel writer gives so many instances of our Lord's mercy to sinners as St. Luke. It is correctly thought that this was done to encourage Gentile converts, for whom his Gospel was especially written. Observe, in addition to this chapter, Luke 19:10; 23:34. These passages are all unique to St. Luke.

2. "This man welcomes sinners." These words are the key to the whole chapter. A constant recollection of them throws light on the interpretation of all three parables which follow. The Pharisees found fault with our Lord for welcoming sinners. Our Lord replies, in effect, that the thing which they found fault with was the very thing he came on earth to do, and a thing that he was not ashamed of. He came to do for sinners what the shepherd did for his lost sheep, the woman for her lost money, and the father for the prodigal son. As for his grumbling enemies, they were like the elder brother of the prodigal son.

I am sure that keeping this verse in mind will help us make a correct interpretation of the whole chapter and will save us from the many strange explanations which have been given to it. All three parables

have a common message. They all exhibit the love and mercy of Christ toward sinners. I agree with Bengel that the lost sheep represents the stupid, foolish sinner, the lost piece of money the sinner completely ignorant about himself, and the younger son the willful sinner. But I also think that the love which goes after the sheep, seeks the money, and runs to meet the prodigal is intended to show the love of Christ.

4. "Suppose one of you." The main point of this parable is the deep, self-sacrificing love of Christ toward sinners and the delight he takes in saving them. The beautiful and appropriate images chosen in the parable are very striking. Our Lord speaks of himself in John 10 as "the good shepherd." Isaiah says, "We all, like sheep, have gone astray" (Isaiah 53:6).

7. "One sinner." Those who are depressed in their preaching and teaching by apparent lack of success should often think about this phrase, and the parallel one in verse 10. The value of one soul is not thought about enough.

"Ninety-nine righteous persons." I think this means people who think themselves righteous and just, like the Pharisees, and fancy they need no repentance. This is confirmed by Luke 5:32; 16:15; 18:9; Matthew 9:13; Mark 2:17.

LUKE 15:11-24

PARABLE OF THE LOST SON

The parable before us is commonly known as the parable of "the prodigal son." It may be truly called a mighty spiritual picture.

Unlike some of our Lord's parables, it does not convey to us one great lesson only, but many. Every part of it is peculiarly rich in instruction.

We see, firstly, in this parable, **a man following the natural bent of his own heart.** Our Lord shows us a "younger son" making haste to set up for himself, going far away from a kind father's house, and "wasting his substance in riotous living."

We have in these words a faithful portrait of the mind with which we are all born. This is our likeness. We are all naturally proud and self-willed. We have no pleasure in fellowship with God. We depart from Him, and go afar off. We spend our time, and strength, and faculties, and affections, on things that cannot profit. The covetous man does it in one fashion; the slave of lusts and passions in another; the lover of pleasure in another. In one point only are all agreed. Like sheep, we all naturally "go astray, and turn every one to his own way." (Isaiah. 53:6.) In the younger son's first conduct we see the natural heart.

He that knows nothing of these things has yet much to learn. He is spiritually blind. The eyes of his understanding need to be opened. The worst ignorance in the world is not to know ourselves. Happy is he who bas been delivered from the kingdom of darkness, and been made acquainted with himself! Of too many it may be said, "They know not, neither will they understand. They walk on in darkness." (Psalm 82:5.)

We see, secondly, in this parable, **man finding out that the ways of sin are hard, by bitter experience.** Our Lord shows us the younger son spending all his property and reduced to poverty—obliged to take service and "feed swine"—so hungry that he is ready to eat swine's food—and cared for by none.

These words describe a common case. Sin is a hard master, and the servants of sin always find it out, sooner or later, to their cost. Unconverted people are never really happy. Under a profession of high spirits and cheerfulness, they are often ill at ease within. Thousands of them are sick at heart, dissatisfied with themselves, weary of their own ways, and thoroughly uncomfortable. "There be many that say, who will show us any good." "There is no peace, says my God, to the wicked." (Psalm. 4:6. Isaiah 57:21.)

Let this truth sink down into our hearts. It is a truth, however loudly unconverted people may deny it. "The way of transgressors is hard." (Prov. 13:15.) The secret wretchedness of natural man is exceedingly great. There is a famine within, however much they may try to conceal it. They are "in need." He that "sows to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption." No wonder that Paul said, "What profit had you in those things whereof you are now ashamed?" (Gal. 6:8. Rom. 6:21.)

We see, thirdly, in this parable, **man awaking to a sense of his natural state, and resolving to repent.** Our Lord tells us that the younger son "came to himself and said, how many servants of my father have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with

hunger? I will arise and go to my father, and say unto him, Father, I have sinned."

The thoughts of thousands are vividly painted in these words. Thousands have reasoned in this way, and are saying such things to themselves every day. And we must be thankful when we see such thoughts arise. Thinking is not change of heart, but it may be the beginning of it. Conviction is not conversion, but it is one step, at any rate, in a right direction. The ruin of many people's souls is simply this, that they never think at all.

One caution, however, must always be given. Men must beware that they do not stop short in "thinking." Good thoughts are all very well, but they are not saving Christianity. If the younger son had never got beyond thinking, he might have kept from home to the day of his death.

We see, fourthly, in this parable, **man turning to God with true repentance and faith.** Our Lord shows us the younger son leaving the far country where he was, and going back to his father's house, carrying into practice the good intentions he had formed, and unreservedly confessing his sin. "He arose and went."

These words are a life-like outline of true repentance and conversion. The man in whose heart a true work of the Holy Spirit has begun, will never be content with thinking and resolving. He will break off from sin. He will come out from its fellowship. He will cease to do evil. He will learn to do well. He will turn to God in

humble prayer. He will confess his iniquities. He will not attempt to excuse his sins. He will say with David, “I acknowledge my transgression.” He will say with the tax-collector, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” (Psalm 51:3. Luke 18:13.)

Let us beware of any repentance, falsely so called, which is not of this character. Action is the very life of “repentance unto salvation.” Feelings, and tears, and remorse, and wishes, and resolutions, are all useless, until they are accompanied by action and a change of life. In fact they are worse than useless. Insensibly they sear the conscience and harden the heart.

We see, fifthly, in this parable, **the penitent man received readily, pardoned freely, and completely accepted with God.** Our Lord shows us this, in this part of the younger son’s history, in the most touching manner. We read that “he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate.’”

More deeply affecting words than these, perhaps, were never written. To comment on them seems almost needless. It is like gilding refined gold, and painting the lily. They show us in great

broad letters the infinite love of the Lord Jesus Christ towards sinners. They teach how infinitely willing He is to receive all who come to Him, and how complete, and full, and immediate is the pardon which He is ready to bestow. “By Him all who believe are justified from all things.” “He is plenteous in mercy.” (Acts 13:39. Psalm 86:5.)

Let this boundless mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ be engraved deeply in our memories, and sink into our minds. Let us never forget that He is One “that receives sinners.” With Him and His mercy sinners ought to begin, when they first begin to desire salvation. On Him and His mercy saints must live, when they have been taught to repent and believe. “The life which I live in the flesh,” says Paul, “I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” (Gal. 2:20.)

Notes on 15:11-24

11. “There was a man who had two sons.” I believe that the younger son is a type of all unconverted sinners and that his return to his father’s house was a sign of true repentance. I believe that the father’s kind reception of his son represents the Lord Jesus Christ’s kindness and love to sinners who come to him and the free and full pardon which he bestows on them. I believe that the elder son was meant to be a type of all narrow-minded, self-righteous people in every age of the church, and especially of the scribes and Pharisees, who muttered at our Lord’s receiving sinners (verse 2). These, I believe, are the general lessons of the parable. I can go no further

than this in interpreting it.

15. To feed pigs. Our Lord was speaking to Jews, who regarded pigs, because of the law of Moses, as unclean animals. This detail would probably indicate to Jews how degraded the younger son had become.

16. The pods that the pigs were eating. These pods were most probably fruit from the carob tree, which were often used to feed pigs but were very unsuitable for human consumption.

17. He came to his senses. It has often been said about this phrase that a person must come to himself before he comes to God.

18. "Against heaven and against you." This is a confession of sin against God and man. It is one of the places in Scripture where "heaven," the place where God dwells, is used for God himself. (See Daniel 4:26; Matthew 21:25.)

20. A long way off . . . ran . . . kissed. These three expressions are deeply touching. They bring out, in strong relief, the difficulty with which a sinner turns to Christ and the readiness and willingness of Christ to receive him.

22. "'A ring.'" This was a mark of honor, confidence, and distinction. (See Genesis 41:42; Esther 3:10; James 2:2.)

23. "'The fattened calf.'" This was kept for a special occasion, such as a sacrifice or a feast.

24. "'Was dead and is alive again.'" Although this is part of the parable, our Lord's words here also describe the life of the prodigal son before his repentance and the change when he repented. The one state was death; the other was life.

LUKE 15:25-32

These verses form the conclusion of the parable of the prodigal son. They are far less well known than the verses which go before them. But they were spoken by the same lips which described the younger son's return to his father's house. Like everything which those lips spoke, they will be found deeply profitable.

We are taught, firstly, in this passage, **how unkind and ill-natured are the feelings of self-righteous men towards sinners.**

This is a lesson which our Lord conveys to us by describing the conduct of the "elder brother" of the prodigal son. He shows him to us "angry" and finding fault because of the rejoicings over his brother's return. He shows him complaining that his father treated the returning prodigal too well, and that he himself had not been treated as well as his merits deserved. He shows him utterly unable to share in the joy which prevailed when his younger brother came home, and giving away to ill-natured and envious thoughts. It is a painful picture, but a very instructive one.

For one thing, this elder brother is an exact picture of the *Jews* of our Lord's times. They could not bear the idea of their 'Gentile' younger brother being made partaker of their privileges. They would gladly have excluded him from God's favor. They steadily refused to see that the Gentiles were to be fellow-heirs and partakers of Christ

with themselves. In all this they were precisely acting the part of the "elder brother."

For another thing, the elder brother is an exact type of the *Scribes and Pharisees* of our Lord's times. They objected that our Lord received sinners and ate with them. They murmured because He opened the door of salvation to publicans and harlots. They would have been better pleased if our Lord had confined His ministry to them and their party, and had left the ignorant and sinful entirely alone. Our Lord saw this state of things clearly; and never did He paint it with such graphic power as in the picture of the "elder brother."

Last, but not least, the elder brother is an exact type of a large class in *the Church of Christ* in the present day. There are thousands on every side who dislike a free, full, unfettered Gospel to be preached. They are always complaining that ministers throw the door too wide open, and that the doctrine of grace tends to promote licentiousness. Whenever we come across such people, let us remember the passage we are now considering. Their voice is the voice of the "elder brother."

Let us beware of this spirit infecting our own heart. It arises partly from *ignorance*. Men begin by not seeing their own sinfulness and unworthiness, and then they fancy that they are much better than others, and that nobody is worthy to be put by their side. It arises partly from lack of *charity*. Men are lacking in kind feeling towards others, and then they are unable to take pleasure when

others are saved. Above all, it arises from a thorough misunderstanding of the true nature of gospel forgiveness. The man who really feels that we all stand by grace and are all debtors, and that the best of us has nothing to boast of, and has nothing which he has not received—such a man will not be found talking like the "elder brother."

We are taught, secondly, in this passage, that **the conversion of any soul ought to be an occasion of joy to all who see it.** Our Lord shows us this by putting the following words into the mouth of the prodigal's father— "We had to celebrate this happy day. For your brother was dead and has come back to life! He was lost, but now he is found!"

The lesson of these words was primarily meant for the Scribes and Pharisees. If their hearts had been in a right state, they would never have murmured at our Lord for receiving sinners. They would have remembered that the worst of publicans and sinners were their own brethren, and that *if they themselves were different, it was grace alone that had made the difference*. They would have been glad to see such helpless wanderers returning to the fold. They would have been thankful to see them plucked as brands from the burning, and not cast away forever. Of all these feelings, unhappily, they knew nothing. Wrapped in their own self-righteousness they murmured and found fault, when in reality they ought to have thanked God and rejoiced.

The lesson is one which we shall all do well to lay to heart. Nothing ought to give us such true pleasure as the conversion of souls. It makes angels rejoice in heaven. It ought to make Christians rejoice on earth. What if those who are converted were lately the vilest of the vile? What if they have served sin and Satan for many long years, and wasted their substance in riotous living? It matters nothing. “Has grace come into their hearts? Are they truly penitent? Have they come back to their father’s house? Are they new creatures in Christ Jesus? Are the dead made alive and the lost found?”

These are the only questions we have any right to ask. If they can be answered satisfactorily we ought to rejoice and be glad. Let the worldly, if they please, mock and sneer at such conversions. Let the self-righteous, if they will, murmur and find fault, and deny the reality of all great and sudden changes. But let the Christian who reads the words of Christ in this chapter, remember them and act upon them. Let him thank God and be merry. Let him praise God that one more soul is saved. Let him say, “this my brother was dead and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.”

What are our own feelings on the subject? This after all is the question that concerns us most. The man who can take deep interest in politics, or field-sports, or money-making, or farming, but none in the conversion of souls, is no true Christian. He is himself “dead” and must be made “alive again.” He is himself “lost” and must be “found.”

Notes on 15:25-32

25. “The older son.” The older son represents the Pharisees. The unkindness, moroseness, and self-sufficiency of the older son are the exact type of spirit shown by those who find fault with our Lord for showing kindness to tax collectors and sinners.

28. “Became angry.” Anyone who thinks that the older son was a good man should note these words. It is the counterpart of the mutterings of the teachers of the law and the Pharisees at the beginning of the chapter.

“Pleaded with him.” The father’s kindness is revealed again here. He might have rebuked his ill-natured son. He only pleads with him.

30. “Prostitutes.” This is the first time we learn of this aspect of the younger son’s profligacy. It may possibly have been true, but it is evidently brought out here in an uncharitable way and contemptuous manner.

32. “We had to celebrate.” Whatever the older son might say, he could not deny two great facts: his brother, who a short time ago had been as good as dead, was alive again; he was lost, but now he is found. In the light of these facts, all envious thoughts should have disappeared. It was right to celebrate and be glad.

Luke – Chap. 16

LUKE 16:1-12

THE PARABLE OF THE SHREWD MANAGER

The passage we have now read is a difficult one. There are knots in it which perhaps will never be untied, until the Lord comes again. We might reasonably expect that a book written by inspiration, as the Bible is, would contain things hard to be understood. The fault lies not in the book, but in our own feeble understandings. If we learn nothing else from the passage before us, let us learn humility.

Let us beware, in the first place, **that we do not draw from these verses lessons which they were never meant to teach.**

The steward, whom our Lord describes, is not set before us as a pattern of morality. He is distinctly called the "unjust steward." The Lord Jesus never meant to sanction dishonesty, and unfair dealing between man and man. This steward cheated his master, and broke the eighth commandment. His master was struck with his cunning and forethought, when he heard of it, and "commended" him, as a shrewd and far-seeing man. But there is no proof that his master was pleased with his conduct. Above all, there is not a word to show that the man was praised by Christ. In short, in his treatment of his master, the steward is a beacon to be avoided, and not a pattern to be followed.

The caution, now laid down, is very necessary. Commercial dishonesty is unhappily very common in these latter days. Fair dealing between man and man is increasingly rare. Men do things in the way of business, which will not stand the test of the Bible. In "making haste to be rich," thousands are continually committing actions which are not strictly innocent. (Prov. 28:20.)

Sharpness and smartness, in bargaining, and buying, and selling, and pushing trade, are often covering over things that ought not to be. The generation of "the unjust steward" is still a very large one. Let us not forget this. Whenever we do to others what we would not like others to do to us, we may be sure, whatever the world may say, that we are wrong in the sight of Christ.

Let us observe, in the second place, that one principal lesson of the parable before us, is **the wisdom of providing against coming evil.**

The conduct of the unjust steward, when he received notice to give up his place, was undeniably skillful. Dishonest as he was in striking off from the bills of debtors anything that was due to his master, he certainly by so doing made for himself friends. Wicked as he was, he had an eye to the future. Disgraceful as his measures were, he provided well for himself. He did not sit still in idleness, and see himself reduced to poverty without a struggle. He schemed, and planned, and contrived, and boldly carried his plans into execution. And the result was that when he lost one home he secured another.

What a striking contrast between the steward's conduct about his earthly prospects, and the conduct of most men about their souls! In this general point of view, and in this only, the steward sets us all an example which we should do well to follow. Like him, we should look far forward to things to come. Like him, we should provide against the day when we shall have to leave our present habitation. Like him, we should secure "a house in heaven," which may be our home, when

we put off our earthly tabernacle of the body. (2 Cor. 5:1.) Like him we should use all means to provide for ourselves everlasting habitations.

The parable, in this point of view, is deeply instructive. It may well raise within us great searchings of heart. The diligence of worldly men about the things of time, should put to shame the coldness of professing Christians about the things of eternity. The zeal and pertinacity of men of business in compassing sea and land to get earthly treasures, may well reprove the slackness and indolence of believers about treasures in heaven. The words of our Lord are indeed weighty and solemn, "The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light." May these words sink into our hearts and bear fruit in our lives!

Let us notice, lastly, in this passage, **the remarkable expressions which our Lord uses about little things, in close connection with the parable of the unjust steward.** We read that He said, "He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much—and he that is unjust in the least, is unjust also in much."

Our Lord here teaches us the great importance of strict faithfulness about "little things." He guards us against supposing that such conduct about money as that of the unjust steward, ought ever to be considered a light and trifling thing among Christians. He would have us know that "little things" are the best test of character —and that unfaithfulness about "little things" is the symptom of a

bad state of heart. He did not mean, of course, that honesty about money can justify our souls, or put away sin. But He did mean that dishonesty about money is a sure sign of a heart not being "right in the sight of God." The man who is not dealing honestly with the gold and silver of this world, can never be one who has true riches in heaven. "If you have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?"

The doctrine laid down by our Lord in this place, deserves most serious consideration in the present day. An idea appears to prevail in some men's minds, that true religion may be separated from common honesty, and that soundness about matters of doctrine may cover over swindling and cheating in matters of practice! Against this wretched idea our Lord's words were a plain protest. Against this idea let us watch and be on our guard. Let us contend earnestly for the glorious doctrines of salvation by grace, and justification by faith. But let us never allow ourselves to suppose that true religion sanctions any trifling with the second table of the law. Let us never forget for a moment, that true faith will always be known by its fruits. We may be very sure that where there is no honesty, there is no grace.

Notes on 16:1-12

1. Told his disciples. In interpreting this parable, we should carefully observe to whom it was addressed. It was not spoken to the teachers of the law and Pharisees, like the previous three parables, but to his disciples. They had heard a lesson for the proud and self-righteous;

now they hear a lesson for themselves.

The rich man and the manager and the master's debtors do not appear to me to be allegorical people. I view them as actors in the story which our Lord is telling. I do not think that they were intended to represent any particular people.

8. "The people of this world." This means worldly people, the opposite of people of light, who are godly people. These latter are the people who follow the light and walk in the light (see John 12:36; Ephesians 5:8).

9. "Friends." "Use your money with an eye to the future, as the manager did his. Spend your money in such a way that your expenditure will be a friend to you, and not a witness against you in another world."

I leave this verse with two words of caution. First, we must not suppose that through using money we can purchase God's favor and pardon for our sins. Heaven is not to be bought. Second, we must not close our eyes against the teaching of this verse. The verse plainly teaches that a right use of our money in the world, from the right motives, will be for our benefit in the world to come. It will not justify us; it will not save us from God's judgment, any more than good deeds can do this. But it does provide evidence about grace which will befriend our souls. There is such a thing as laying up treasure in heaven (Matthew 6:20) and laying up treasure for ourselves as "a firm foundation for the coming age" (1 Timothy 6:19).

LUKE 16:13-18

SERVING TWO MASTERS

These verses teach us, firstly, **the uselessness of attempting to serve God with a divided heart.** Our Lord Jesus Christ says, "No servant can serve two masters—for either he will hate the one and love the other—or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

The truth here propounded by our Lord appears, at first sight, too obvious to admit of being disputed. And yet the very attempt which is here declared to be useless is constantly being made by many in the matter of their souls. Thousands on every side are continually trying to do the thing which Christ pronounces impossible. They are endeavoring to be friends of the world and friends of God at the same time. Their consciences are so far enlightened, that they feel they must have some religion. But their affections are so chained down to earthly things, that they never come up to the mark of being true Christians. And hence they live in a state of constant discomfort. They have too much religion to be happy in the world, and they have too much of the world in their hearts to be happy in their religion. In short, they waste their time in laboring to do that which cannot be done. They are striving to "serve God and mammon."

He that desires to be a happy Christian, will do well to ponder our Lord's sayings in this verse. There is perhaps no point on which the experience of all God's saints is more uniform than this, that *decision* is the secret of comfort in Christ's service. It is the half-hearted Christian who brings up an evil report of the good land. The more

thoroughly we give ourselves to Christ, the more sensibly shall we feel within "the peace of God which passes all understanding." (Phil. 4:7.) The more entirely we live, not to ourselves, but to Him who died for us, the more powerfully shall we realize what it is to have "joy and peace in believing." (Rom. 15:13.) If it is worthwhile to serve Christ at all, let us serve Him with all our heart, and soul, and mind and strength. Life, eternal life, after all, is the matter at stake, no less than happiness. If we cannot make up our minds to give up everything for Christ's sake, we must not expect Christ to own us at the last day. He will have all our hearts or none. "Whoever will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." (James 4:4) The end of undecided and half-hearted Christians will be to be cast out forever.

These verses teach us, secondly, **how widely different is the estimate set on things by man from that which is set on things by God.** Our Lord Jesus Christ declares this in a severe rebuke which he addresses to the covetous Pharisees who derided Him. He says, "You are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knows your hearts—for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God."

The truth of this solemn saying appears on every side of us. We have only to look round the world and mark the things on which most men set their affections, in order to see it proved in a hundred ways. Riches, and honors, and rank, and pleasure, are the chief objects for which the greater part of mankind are living. Yet these are the very things which God declares to be "vanity," and of the love of

which He warns us to beware! Praying, and Bible-reading, and holy living, and repentance, and faith, and grace, and communion with God, are things for which few care at all. Yet these are the very things which God in His Bible is ever urging on our attention! The disagreement is glaring, painful, and appalling. What God calls good, that man calls evil! What God calls evil, that man calls good!

Whose words, after all, are true? Whose estimate is correct? Whose judgment will stand at the last day? By whose standard will all be tried, before they receive their eternal sentence? Before whose bar will the current opinions of the world be tested and weighed at last? These are the only questions which ought to influence our conduct; and to these questions the Bible returns a plain answer. The counsel of the Lord, it alone shall stand forever. The word of Christ, it alone shall judge man at the last day. By that word let us live. By that word let us measure everything, and every person in this evil world. It matters nothing what man thinks. "What says the Lord?"—It matters nothing what it is fashionable or customary to think. "Let God be true, and every man a liar." (Rom. 3:4.) The more entirely we are of one mind with God, the better we are prepared for the judgment day. To love what God loves, to hate what God hates, and to approve what God approves, is the highest style of Christianity. The moment we find ourselves honoring anything which in the sight of God is lightly esteemed, we may be sure there is something wrong in our souls.

These verses teach us, lastly, **the dignity and sanctity of the law of God.** Our Lord Jesus Christ declares that "it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than for one tittle of the law to fail."

The honor of God's holy law was frequently defended by Christ during the time of His ministry on earth. Sometimes we find Him defending it against man-made additions, as in the case of the fourth commandment. Sometimes we find Him defending it against those who would lower the standard of its requirements, and allow it to be transgressed, as in the case of the law of marriage. But never do we find Him speaking of the law in any terms but those of respect. He always "magnified the law and made it honorable." (Isaiah 43:21.) Its 'ceremonial' part was a type of His own gospel, and was to be fulfilled to the last letter. Its 'moral' part was a revelation of God's eternal mind, and was to be perpetually binding on Christians.

The honor of God's holy law needs continually defending in the present day. On few subjects does ignorance prevail so widely among professing Christians. Some appear to think that Christians have nothing to do with the law—that its moral and ceremonial parts were both of only temporary obligation—and that the daily sacrifice and the ten commandments were both alike put aside by the gospel. Some on the other hand think that the law is still binding on us, and that we are to be saved by obedience to it, but that its requirements are lowered by the gospel, and can be met by our imperfect obedience. Both these views are erroneous and unscriptural. Against both let us be on our guard.

Let us settle it in our minds that "the law is good if man uses it lawfully." (1 Tim. 1:8.) It is intended to show us God's holiness and our sinfulness—to convince us of sin and to lead us to Christ—to show us how to live after we have come to Christ, and to teach us what to follow and what to avoid. He that so uses the law will find it a true friend to his soul. The establishes Christian will always say, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man." (Rom. 7:22.)

Notes on 16:13-18

13. "Devoted to the one and despise the other." This probably means that the person will love one more than the other.

16. "The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John." This verse probably means something like this: "You make your boast about the law and the prophets, you Pharisees, and you do well to honor them. But you forget that the dispensation of the law and prophets was only intended to pave the way for the better dispensation of the kingdom of God, which was to be ushered in by John the Baptist. That dispensation has come. John the Baptist has appeared. The kingdom of God is among you. While you are ignorantly deriding me and my teaching, multitudes of tax collectors and sinners are making their way into the kingdom. Your boasting is not good. With all your professed zeal for the law and the prophets, you are utterly blind to that kingdom into which the law and the prophets were meant to guide you."

17. The chain of thought here is probably this: "Think not because I say that the law and the prophets have introduced a better dispensation, the kingdom of God, that I count the law and the

prophets of no value. On the contrary, I tell you that they are of eternal dignity and obligation. They have paved the way to a clearer revelation, but they have not been set aside."

18. We must take care not to misinterpret the words about divorce and remarriage in this verse. It is perfectly clear from another passage that our Lord allowed divorce in cases of adultery (Matthew 5:32). The act of adultery dissolves the marriage tie and makes those who were one become two again. Neither here nor elsewhere can I see that our Lord regards the remarriage of someone who has been divorced because of fornication as adultery. It is divorce for frivolous reasons which he denounces and marriage after such frivolous divorce which he pronounces to be adultery.

LUKE 16:19-31

THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS

The parable we have now read, in one respect stands alone in the Bible. It is the only passage of Scripture which describes *the feelings of the unconverted after death.* For this reason, as well as for many others, the parable deserves especial attention.

We learn, firstly, from this parable, that**a man's worldly condition is no test of his state in the sight of God.** The Lord Jesus describes to us two men, of whom one was very rich, and the other very poor. The one "fared sumptuously every day." The other was a mere "beggar," who had nothing that he could call his own. And yet of these two the poor man had grace, and the rich had none.

The poor man lived by faith, and walked in the steps of Abraham. The rich man was a thoughtless, selfish worldling, dead in trespasses and sins.

Let us never give way to the common idea that men are to be valued according to their income, and that the man who has most money is the one who ought to be the most highly esteemed. There is no authority for this notion in the Bible. The general teaching of Scripture is flatly opposed to it. “Not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble are called.” (1 Cor. 1:26.) “Let not the rich man glory in his riches. But let him that glories glory in this, that he knows and understands me.” (Jer. 9:24.) *Wealth is no mark of God’s favor. Poverty is no mark of God’s displeasure.* Those whom God justifies and glorifies are seldom the rich of this world. It we would measure men as God measures them, we must value them according to their grace.

We learn, secondly, from this parable, **that death is the common end to which all classes of mankind must come.** The trials of the “beggar,” and the sumptuous faring of the “rich man,” alike ceased at last. There came a time when both of them died. “All go to one place.” (Eccles. 3:20.)

Death is a great fact that all acknowledge, but very few seem to realize. Most men eat, and drink, and talk, and plan, as if they were going to live upon earth forever. The true Christian must be on his guard against this spirit. “He that would live well,” said a great divine, “should often think of his last day, and make it his company-

keeper." Against murmuring, and discontent, and envy, in the state of poverty—against pride, and self-sufficiency, and arrogance, in the possession of wealth, there are few better antidotes than the remembrance of death. "The beggar died," and his bodily wants were at an end. "The rich man died," and his feasting was stopped for evermore.

We learn, thirdly, from this parable, **that the souls of believers are specially cared for by God in the hour of death.** The Lord Jesus tells us that when the beggar died he "was carried by angels to Abraham's bosom."

There is something very comforting in this expression. We know little or nothing of the state and feelings of the dead. When our own last hour comes, and we lie down to die, we shall be like those who journey into an unknown country. But it may satisfy us to know that all who fall asleep in Jesus are in good keeping. They are not houseless, homeless wanderers between the hour of death and the day of resurrection. They are at rest in the midst of friends, with all who have had like faith with Abraham. They have no lack of anything. And, best of all, Paul tells us they are "with Christ." (Phil. 1:23.)

We learn, fourthly, from this parable, **the reality and eternity of hell.** The Lord Jesus tells us plainly, that after death the rich man was "in hell—tormented with fire." He gives us a fearful picture of his longing for a drop of "water to cool his tongue," and of "the gulf" between him and Abraham, which could not be passed. There are few

more dreadful passages perhaps in the whole Bible than this. And He from whose lips it came, be it remembered, was one who delighted in mercy!

The certainty and endlessness of the future punishment of the wicked, are truths which we must hold fast and never let go. From the day when Satan said to Eve, "You shall not surely die," there never have been lacking men who have denied them. Let us not be deceived. There is a hell for the impenitent, as well as a heaven for believers. There is a wrath to come for all who "obey not the Gospel of Christ." (2 Thess. 1:8.) From that wrath let us flee betimes to the great hiding-place, Jesus Christ the Lord. If men find themselves "in torment" at last, it will not be because there was no way to escape.

We learn, fifthly, from this parable, that **unconverted men find out the value of a soul, after death, when it is too late.** We read that the rich man desired Lazarus might be sent to his five brethren who were yet alive, "lest they also should come to the place of torment." While he lived he had never done anything for their spiritual good. They had probably been his companions in worldliness, and, like him, had neglected their souls entirely. When he is dead he finds out too late the folly of which they had all been guilty, and desires that, if possible, they might be called to repentance.

The change that will come over the minds of unconverted men after death is one of the most fearful points in their future condition. They will see, and know, and understand a hundred things to which

they were obstinately blind while they were alive. They will discover that, like Esau, they have bartered away eternal happiness for a mere mess of pottage. There is no infidelity, or skepticism, or unbelief after death. It is a wise saying of an old divine, that "hell is nothing more than truth known too late."

We learn, lastly, from this parable, that **the greatest miracles would have no effect on men's hearts, if they will not believe God's Word.** The rich man thought that "if one went to his brethren from the dead they would repent." He argued that the sight of one who came from another world must surely make them feel, though the old familiar words of Moses and the prophets had been heard in vain. The reply of Abraham is solemn and instructive— "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead."

The principle laid down in these words is of deep importance. The Scriptures contain all that we need to know in order to be saved, and a messenger from the world beyond the grave could add nothing to them. It is not 'more evidence' that is needed in order to make men repent, but more heart and will to make use of what they already know.

The 'dead' could tell us nothing more than the Bible contains, if they rose from their graves to instruct us. After the first novelty of their testimony was worn away, we would care no more for their words than the words of any other.

This wretched waiting for something which we have not, and neglect of what we already have, is the ruin of thousands of souls. Faith, simple faith in the Scriptures which we already possess, is the first thing needful to salvation. The man who has the Bible, and can read it, and yet waits for more evidence before he becomes a decided Christian, is deceiving himself. Except he awakens from his delusion he will die in his sins.

Notes on 16:19-31

19. I believe the parable was specially intended by our Lord for the benefit of the Pharisees, to whom he was speaking when he delivered it. I believe that our Lord's main aim was to rebuke the selfishness, worldliness, lack of charity, and general forgetfulness of responsibilities of which the Pharisees were guilty and to expose the fearful end to which their unbelief and neglect of their own Scriptures were rapidly bringing them.

"Dressed in purple." Purple was a particularly rich and expensive dye, and clothes dyed with it were only worn by the rich and noble. Lydia was a "dealer in purple cloth" (Acts 16:14).

21. "The dogs came and licked his sores." Some have thought that this increased Lazarus' misery, and the dogs made his suffering worse. I cannot see this. To me it implies that the dogs cared for Lazarus more than men did. It was an act of kindness.

22. "To Abraham's side" (KJV: "bosom"). This is most probably a proverbial expression. It signifies the place of rest and safety to which all believing Jews were carried after death. Abraham was the father of the faithful and the head of the whole Jewish family, and to

be with him after death implied happiness. See Matthew 8:11.

23. “In hell, where he was in torment.” In interpreting this and several of the following verses, we must take care to remember that we are reading a parabolic narrative.

26. “‘A great chasm has been fixed.’” This verse clearly teaches, if words mean anything, that there is no hope of deliverance from hell for those who die in sin. Once in hell, men are in hell forever. The doctrines of purgatory or of a limited duration of punishment cannot be reconciled with this text.

31. “‘If someone rises from the dead.’” Let the striking fact be noted that another man called Lazarus did rise from the dead, and yet the Jews stayed unbelieving. Above all, remember that Christ himself rose from the dead, and yet the Jewish nation would not believe.

Luke – Chap. 17

LUKE 17:1-4

STUMBLING BLOCKS

We are taught for one thing in these verses, **the great sinfulness of putting stumbling-blocks in the way of other men’s souls.** The Lord Jesus says, “Woe unto him through whom offences come! It were better for him that a mill-stone were hung about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones.”

When do men make others stumble? When do they cause "offences" to come? They do it, beyond doubt, whenever they persecute believers, or endeavor to deter them from serving Christ. But this, unhappily, is not all. Professing Christians do it whenever they bring discredit on their religion by inconsistencies of temper, of word, or of deed. We do it whenever we make our Christianity unlovely in the eyes of the world, by conduct not in keeping with our profession. The world may not understand the doctrines and principles of believers. But the world is very keen-sighted about their practice.

The sin against which our Lord warns us was the sin of David. When he had broken the seventh commandment, and taken the wife of Uriah to be his wife, the prophet Nathan said to him, "You have given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme." (2 Sam. 12:14.) It was the sin which Paul charges on the Jews, when he says, "the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you." (Rom. 2:24.) It is the sin of which he frequently entreats Christians to beware— "Give no offence, neither to the Jews nor to the Gentiles, nor to the Church of God." (1 Cor. 10:32.)

The subject is a deeply searching one. The sin which our Lord brings before us is unhappily very common. The inconsistencies of professing Christians too often supply the men of the world with an excuse for neglecting religion altogether. An inconsistent believer, whether he knows it or not, is daily doing harm to souls. His life is a positive injury to the Gospel of Christ.

Let us often ask ourselves whether we are doing good or harm in the world. We cannot live to ourselves, if we are Christians. The eyes of many will always be upon us. Men will judge by what they see, far more than by what they hear. If they see the Christian contradicting by his practice what he professes to believe, they are justly stumbled and offended. For the world's sake, as well as for our own, let us labor to be eminently holy. Let us endeavor to make our religion beautiful in the eyes of men, and to adorn the doctrine of Christ in all things. Let us strive daily to lay aside every weight, and the sin which most easily besets us, and so to live that men can find no fault in us, except concerning the law of our God. Let us watch jealously over our tempers and tongues, and the discharge of our social duties. Anything is better than doing harm to souls. The cross of Christ will always give offence. Let us not increase that offence by carelessness in our daily life. The natural man cannot be expected to love the Gospel. But let us not disgust him by inconsistency.

We are taught, for another thing, in these verses, **the great importance of a forgiving spirit.** The Lord Jesus says, "if your brother sins against you, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him—and if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to you, saying, I repent, forgive him."

There are few Christian duties which are so frequently and strongly dwelt upon in the New Testament as this of 'forgiving injuries'. It fills a prominent place in the Lord's prayer. The only profession we make in all that prayer, is that of forgiving "those who

trespass against us." It is a test of being forgiven ourselves. The man who cannot forgive his neighbor the few trifling offences he may have committed against him, can know nothing experimentally of that free and full pardon which is offered no by Christ. (Matt. 18:35; Ephes. 4:32.)

Not least, it is one leading mark of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The presence of the Spirit in the heart may always be known by the fruits He causes to be brought forth in the life. Those fruits are both active and passive. The man who has not learned to bear and forbear, to put up with much and look over much, is not born of the Spirit. (1 John 3:14; Matt. 5:44, 45.)

The doctrine laid down by our Lord in this place is deeply humbling. It shows most plainly the wide contrariety which exists between the ways of the world and the Gospel of Christ. Who does not know that pride, and arrogance, and high-mindedness, and readiness to take offence, and implacable determination never to forget and never to forgive, are common among baptized men and women? Thousands will go to the Lord's table, and even profess to love the Gospel, who fire up in a moment at the least appearance of what they call "offensive" conduct, and make a quarrel out of the merest trifles. Thousands are perpetually quarreling with all around them, always complaining how ill other people behave, and always forgetting that their own quarrelsome disposition is the spark which causes the flame.

One general remark applies to all such people. They are making their own lives miserable and showing their unfitness for the kingdom of God. An unforgiving and quarrelsome spirit is the surest mark of an unregenerate heart. What says the Scripture? “Whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are you not carnal, and walk as men?” (1 Cor. 3:3; 1 John 3:18-20; 4:20.)

Let us leave the whole passage with jealous self-inquiry. Few passages ought to humble Christians so much, and to make them feel so deeply their need of the blood of atonement, and the mediation of Christ. How often we have given offence, and caused others to stumble! How often we have allowed unkind, and angry, and revengeful thoughts to nestle undisturbed in our hearts! These things ought not so to be. The more carefully we attend to such practical lessons as this passage contains, the more shall we recommend our religion to others, and the more inward peace shall we find in our own souls.

Notes on 17:1-4

1. Jesus said to his disciples. A great teacher like our Lord has an undoubted right to open up entirely new subjects at his discretion. Perhaps this is the case here.

2. “A millstone tied around his neck.” This is a proverbial expression. Anything is better than to give offense to believers and make them stumble.

“These little ones.” These are believers. They are God’s children and are tenderly cared for by the Father, like little infants in a man’s

family. See Mark 9:42. It is probable that our Lord pointed to some of the weak and unestablished followers who accompanied him and the twelve apostles. There are always many who are “infants in Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:1).

4. “Seven times in a day.” Here, as in other places, “seven” must be taken indefinitely. It means “very frequently,” “very often.” See also 1 Samuel 2:5; Ruth 4:15; Isaiah 4:1; Psalm 12:6; Micah 5:5.

LUKE 17:5-10

UNWORTHY SERVANTS

Let us notice, in these verses, **the important request which the apostles made.** They said unto the Lord, “Increase our faith.”

We know not the secret feelings from which this request sprung. Perhaps the hearts of the apostles failed within them, as they heard one weighty lesson after another fall from our Lord’s lips. Perhaps the thought rose up in their minds, “Who is sufficient for these things? Who can receive such high doctrines? Who can follow such a lofty standard of practice?” These, however, are only conjectures. One thing, at any rate, is clear and plain. The request which they made was most deeply important— “Increase our faith.”

Faith is the root of saving religion. “He that comes unto God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” (Heb. 11:6.) It is the hand by which the soul lays hold on Jesus Christ, and is united to Him, and saved. It is the secret of all

Christian comfort, and spiritual prosperity. According to a man's faith will be his peace, his hope, his strength, his courage, his decision, and his victory over the world. When the apostles made request about faith, they did wisely and well.

Faith is a grace which admits of degrees. It does not come to full strength and perfection as soon as it is planted in the heart by the Holy Spirit. There is "little" faith and "great" faith. There is "weak" faith and "strong" faith. Both are spoken of in the Scriptures. Both are to be seen in the experience of God's people. The more faith a Christian has the more happy, holy, and useful will he be. To promote the growth and progress of faith should be the daily prayer and endeavor of all who love life. When the apostles said, "increase our faith," they did well.

Have we any faith at all? This, after all, is the first question which the subject should raise in our hearts. Saving faith is not mere repetition of the creed, and saying, "I believe in God the Father—and in God the Son, and in God the Holy Spirit." Thousands are weekly using these words, who know nothing of real believing. The words of Paul are very solemn, "All men have not faith." (2 Thess. 3:2.) True faith is not natural to man. It comes down from heaven. It is the gift of God.

If we have any faith let us pray for more of it. It is a bad sign of a man's spiritual state when he is satisfied to live on old stock, and does not hunger and thirst after growth in grace. Let a prayer for more faith form part of our daily devotions. Let us covet earnestly

the best gifts. We are not to despise “the day of small things” in a brother’s soul, but we are not to be content with it in our own.

Let us notice, for another thing, in these verses, **what a heavy blow our Lord gives to self-righteousness.** He says to His apostles, “When you shall have done all these things which are commanded you, say we are unprofitable servants—we have done that which was our duty to do.”

We are all naturally proud and self-righteous. We think far more highly of ourselves, our deserts, and our character, than we have any right to do. Self-righteousness is a subtle disease, which manifests itself in a hundred different ways. Most men can see it in other people. Few will allow its presence in themselves. Seldom will a man be found, however wicked, who does not secretly flatter himself that there is somebody else worse than he is. Seldom will a saint be found who is not at seasons tempted to be satisfied and pleased with himself. There is such a thing as a pride which wears the cloak of humility. There is not a heart upon earth which does not contain a piece of the Pharisee’s character.

To give up self-righteousness is absolutely needful to salvation. He that desires to be saved must confess that there is no good thing in him, and that he has no merit, no goodness, no worthiness of his own. He must be willing to renounce his own righteousness, and to trust in the righteousness of another, even Christ the Lord. Once pardoned and forgiven, we must travel the daily journey of life under a deep conviction that we are “unprofitable servants.” At our best we

only do our duty, and have nothing to boast of. And even when we do our duty, it is not by our own power and might that we do it, but by the strength which is given to us from God. Claim upon God we have none. Right to expect anything from God we have none. Worthiness to deserve anything from God we have none. All that we have we have received. All that we are we owe to God's sovereign, distinguishing grace.

What is the true cause of self-righteousness? How is it that such a poor, weak, erring creature as man can ever dream of deserving anything at God's hands? It all arises from ignorance. The eyes of our understandings are naturally blinded. We see neither ourselves, nor our lives, nor God, nor the law of God, as we ought. Once let the light of grace shine into a man's heart, and the reign of self-righteousness is over. The roots of pride may remain, and often put forth bitter shoots. But the reign of pride is broken when the Spirit comes into the heart, and shows the man himself and God. The true Christian will never trust in his own goodness. He will say with Paul, "I am the chief of sinners." "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Tim. 1:15; Gal. 6:14.)

Notes on 17:5-10

6. "A mustard seed." This is a proverbial expression for something very small and insignificant in size.

"Say to the mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted.'" This is a proverbial expression, apparently common among the Jews for doing great deeds and overcoming evidently insuperable difficulties. See 1

Corinthians 13:2. Major remarks, “When the Jews intended to extol any of their doctors, they said of him that he plucked up mountains by the roots.”

8. “Get yourself ready” (KJV: “gird thyself”). The clothes people wore in the East were generally loose and flowing. Before doing anything that required physical exertion, they first of all had to gird up the loins or tie the garments tightly around the waist after gathering them up.

10. “‘Unworthy servants.’” The contrast between what we must say about ourselves (“We are unworthy servants”) and what Christ will be graciously pleased to say on the last day (Matthew 25:21, 34-40) is very striking.

LUKE 17:11-19

TEN HEALED OF LEPROSY

Let us mark, firstly, in this passage, **how earnestly men can cry for help when they feel their need of it.** We read that “as our Lord entered into a certain village there met him ten men that were lepers.” It is difficult to conceive any condition more thoroughly miserable than that of men afflicted with leprosy. They were cast out from society. They were cut off from all communion with their fellows. The men described in the passage before us appear to have been truly sensible of their wretchedness. They “stood afar off;”—but they did not stand idly doing nothing. “They lifted up their voices and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.” They felt acutely the deplorable state of their bodies. They found words to express their

feelings. They cried earnestly for relief when a chance of relief appeared in sight.

The conduct of the ten lepers is very instructive. It throws light on a most important subject in practical Christianity, which we can never understand too well. That subject is PRAYER.

How is it that many never pray at all? How is it that many others are content to repeat a form of words, but never pray with their hearts? How is it that dying men and women, with souls to be lost or saved, can know so little of real, hearty, business-like prayer? The answer to these questions is short and simple. The bulk of mankind have no sense of sin. They do not feel their spiritual disease. They are not conscious that they are lost, and guilty, and hanging over the brink of hell. When a man finds out his soul's ailment, he soon learns to pray. Like the leper, he finds words to express his need. He cries for help.

How is it, again, that many true believers often pray so coldly? What is the reason that their prayers are so feeble, and wandering, and lukewarm, as they frequently are? The answer once more is very plain. Their sense of need is not so deep as it ought to be. They are not truly alive to their own weakness and helplessness, and so they do not cry fervently for mercy and grace. Let us remember these things. Let us seek to have a constant and abiding sense of our real necessities. If saints could only see their souls as the ten afflicted lepers saw their bodies, they would pray far better than they do.

Let us mark, secondly, in these verses, **how help meets men in the path of obedience.** We are told that when the lepers cried to our Lord, He only replied, “Go show yourselves to the priests.” He did not touch them and command their disease to depart. He prescribed no medicine, no washing, no use of outward material means. Yet healing power accompanied the words which He spoke. Relief met the afflicted company as soon as they obeyed His command. “It came to pass that as they went they were cleansed.”

A fact like this is doubtless intended to teach us knowledge. It shows us the wisdom of simple, childlike obedience to every word which comes from the mouth of Christ. It does not become us to stand still, and reason, and doubt, when our Master’s commands are plain and unmistakable. If the lepers had acted in this way, they would never have been healed. We must read the Scriptures diligently. We must try to pray. We must attend on the public means of grace. All these are duties which Christ requires at our hands, and to which, if we love life, we must attend, without asking vain and critical questions. It is just in the path of unhesitating obedience that Christ will meet and bless us. “If any man will do His will he shall know of the doctrine.” (John 7:17.)

Let us mark, lastly, in these verses **what a rare thing is thankfulness.** We are told that of all the ten lepers whom Christ healed, there was only one who turned back and gave Him thanks. The words that fell from our Lord’s lips upon this occasion are very solemn— “Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine?”

The lesson before us is humbling, heart-searching, and deeply instructive. The best of us are far too like the nine lepers. We are more ready to pray than to praise, and more disposed to ask God for what we have not, than to thank Him for what we have. Murmurings, and complainings, and discontent abound on every side of us. Few indeed are to be found who are not continually hiding their *mercies* under a bushel, and setting their *needs* and trials on a hill. These things ought not so to be. But all who know the church and the world must confess that they are true. The wide-spread thanklessness of Christians is the disgrace of our day. It is a plain proof of our little humility.

Let us pray for a daily thankful spirit. It is the spirit which God loves and delights to honor. David and Paul were eminently thankful men. It is the spirit which has marked all the brightest saints in every age of the church. M'Cheyne, and Bickersteth, and Haldane Stewart, were always full of praise. It is the spirit which is the very atmosphere of heaven. Angels and "just men made perfect" are always blessing God. It is the spirit which is the source of happiness on earth. If we would be anxious for nothing, we must make our requests known to God not only with prayer and supplication, but with thanksgiving. (Phil. 4:6.)

Above all, let us pray for a deeper sense of our own sinfulness, guilt, and undeserving. This, after all, is the true secret of a thankful spirit. It is the man who daily feels his debt to grace, and daily remembers that in reality he deserves nothing but hell—this is the

man who will be daily blessing and praising God. *Thankfulness is a flower which will never bloom well excepting upon a root of deep humility!*

Notes on 17:11-19

12. They stood at a distance. Lepers were thought of as outcasts and were not allowed to live with other people. See Leviticus 13:46.

14. "Go, show yourselves to the priests." Leviticus 13—14 explains this. The priests were appointed by God to judge all leprous cases and to decide whether the leper was clean or unclean, cured or uncured. See also Deuteronomy 24:8.

A Jewish leper would see from the command of our Lord a hint that he would hear good news when he showed himself to the priests.

15. One of them . . . came back, praising God. Burgon has the following apt quotation: "The nine were already healed, and going off to the priests so that they could be restored to society: but the first thoughts of the Samaritan are turned to his deliverer. He had forgotten all, in the sense of God's mercy and of his own unworthiness."

LUKE 17:20-25

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

We are taught, firstly, in this passage that **the kingdom of God is utterly unlike the kingdoms of this world.** The Lord Jesus tells the Pharisees that "it comes not with observation." He meant by this that its approach and presence were not to be marked by

outward signs of dignity. Those who expected to observe anything of this kind would be disappointed. They would wait and watch for such a kingdom in vain, while the real kingdom would be in the midst of them without their knowing it. “Behold,” He says, “the kingdom of God is within you.”

The expression which our Lord here uses describes exactly the beginning of His spiritual kingdom. It began in a manger at Bethlehem, without the knowledge of the great, the rich, and the wise. It appeared suddenly in the temple at Jerusalem, and no one but Simeon and Anna recognized its King. It was received thirty years after by none but a few fishermen and publicans in Galilee. The rulers and Pharisees had no eyes to see it. The King came to His own, and His own received Him not. All this time the Jews professed to be waiting for the kingdom. But they were looking in the wrong direction. They were waiting for signs which they had no warrant for expecting. The kingdom of God was actually in the midst of them! Yet they could not see it!

The literal kingdom which Christ shall set up one day will begin in some respects very like His spiritual one. It will not be accompanied by the signs, and marks, and outward manifestations which many are expecting to see. It will not be ushered in by a period of universal peace and holiness. It will not be announced to the Church by such unmistakable warnings, that everybody will be ready for it, and prepared for its appearing. It shall come suddenly, unexpectedly, and without note of warning to the immense majority

of mankind. The Simeons and Annas will be as few in the last day as they were at the beginning of the Gospel. The most shall awake one day, like men out of sleep, and find, to their surprise and dismay, that the kingdom of God is actually come.

We shall do well to lay these things to heart, and ponder them well. The vast majority of men are utterly deceived in their expectations with respect to the kingdom of God. They are waiting for signs which will never appear. They are looking for indications which they will never discover. They are dreaming of universal conversion. They are fancying that missionaries, and ministers, and schools, will change the face of the world before the end comes. Let us beware of such mistakes. Let us not sleep as do others. The kingdom of God will be upon men much sooner than many expect. "It comes not with observation."

We are taught, secondly, in this passage, that **the second coming of Jesus Christ will be a very SUDDEN event.** Our Lord describes this by a striking figure. He says, "For the Son of Man in his day will be like the lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other."

The second personal advent of Christ is the real fulfillment of these words. Of the precise day and hour of that advent we know nothing. But whenever it may take place, one thing at least is clear—it will come on the Church and the world suddenly, instantaneously, and without previous notice. The whole tenor of Scripture points this

way. It shall be “in such an hour as you do not think.” It shall come “as a thief in the night.” (Matt. 24:44; 1 Thess. 5:2.)

This suddenness of Christ’s second advent is a solemn thought. It ought to make us study a continual preparedness of mind. Our hearts’ desire and endeavor should be to be always ready to meet our Lord. Our life’s aim should be to do nothing, and say nothing, which could make us ashamed if Christ were suddenly to appear. “Blessed,” says the apostle John, “is he who watches, and keeps his garments.” (Rev. 16:15.) Those who denounce the doctrine of the second advent as speculative, fanciful, and unpractical, would do well to reconsider the subject. The doctrine was not so regarded in the days of the apostles. In their eye’s patience, hope, diligence, moderation, personal holiness, were inseparably connected with an expectation of the Lord’s return. Happy is the Christian who has learned to think with them! To be ever looking for the Lord’s appearing is one of the best helps to a close walk with God.

We are taught, lastly, in this passage, that **there are two personal comings of Christ revealed to us in Scripture.** He was appointed to come the first time in weakness and humiliation, to suffer and to die. He was appointed to come the second time in power and great glory, to put down all enemies under His feet, and to reign. At the first coming He was to be “made sin for us,” and to bear our sins upon the cross. At the second coming He was to appear without sin, for the complete salvation of His people. (2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 9:28.) Of both these comings our Lord speaks expressly in the

verses before us. Of the first He speaks when He says that the Son of Man “must suffer and be rejected.” Of the second He speaks when He says the Son of Man “will be like the lightning, which flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other.”

To see these two comings of Christ distinctly is of great importance to a right understanding of Scripture. The disciples, and all the Jews of our Lord’s time, appear to have seen only one personal advent. They expected a Messiah who would come to REIGN, but not one who would come to SUFFER. The majority of Christians, in like manner, appear to see only one personal advent. They believe that Christ came the first time to suffer. But they seem unable to understand that Christ is coming a second time to reign. Both parties have got hold of the truth, but neither, unhappily, has embraced the whole truth. Both are more or less in error, and the Christian’s error is only second in importance to that of the Jew.

He that strives to be a well-instructed and established Christian, must keep steadily before his mind both the advents of Jesus Christ. Clear views of the subject are a great help to the profitable reading of the Bible. Without them we shall constantly find statements in prophecy which we can neither reconcile with other statements, nor yet explain away. Jesus coming in person the first time to suffer, and Jesus coming in person the second time to reign, are two landmarks of which we should never lose sight. We stand between the two. Let us believe that both are real and true.

Notes on 17:20-25

20. The “kingdom” which our Lord speaks about here evidently includes both his present spiritual kingdom and his future glorious kingdom.

24. “The lightning.” Our Lord declares that his second coming, when it does take place, will be so sudden, so clearly marked, and so unmistakable that true believers will immediately recognize it as the coming of their king. It will not be a slow, gradual event. It will come on us in a moment.

25. “Rejected by this generation.” I am strongly disposed to think that both here and in Luke 21:32, Mark 13:30, and Matthew 24:34 the word translated generation means the nation or people of the Jews, and not merely the people who were living when our Lord spoke.

LUKE 17:26-37

The subject of these verses is one of peculiar solemnity. It is the second advent of our Lord Jesus Christ. That great event, and the things immediately connected with it, are here described by our Lord’s own lips.

We should observe, for one thing, in these verses, **what a fearful picture our Lord gives of the state of the professing Church at His second coming.** We are told that as it was in the “days of Noah,” and in the “days of Lot,” “so shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed.” The character of those days we are not left to conjecture. We are told distinctly, that men were entirely

taken up with eating, drinking, marrying, buying, selling, planting, building—and would attend to nothing else. The flood came at last in Noah's day, and drowned all except those who were in the ark. The fire fell from heaven at last in Lot's day, and destroyed all except Lot, his wife, and his daughters. And our Lord declares most plainly that like things will happen when He comes again at the end of the world. "When they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction comes upon them." (1 Thess. 5:3.)

It is hard to imagine a passage of Scripture which more completely overthrows the common notions that prevail among men about Christ's return. The world will not be converted when Jesus comes again. The earth will not be full of the knowledge of the Lord. The reign of peace will not have been established. The millennium will not have begun. These glorious things will come to pass *after* the second advent, but not before. If words have any meaning, the verses before us show that the earth will be found full of wickedness and worldliness in the day of Christ's appearing. The unbelievers and the unconverted will be found very many. The believers and the godly, as in the days of Noah and Lot, will be found very few.

Let us take heed to ourselves, and beware of the spirit of the world. It is not enough to do as others, and buy, and sell, and plant, and build, and eat, and drink, and marry, as if we were born for nothing else. Exclusive attention to these things may ruin us as thoroughly as open sin. We must come out from the world and be separate. We must dare to be singular. We must escape for our lives

like Lot. We must flee to the ark like Noah. This alone is safety. Then, and then only, we shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger, and avoid destruction when the Son of man is revealed. (Zeph. 2:3.)

We should observe, for another thing, in these verses, **what a solemn warning our Lord gives us against unsound profession.** He says to us, in immediate connection with the description of His second advent, "Remember Lot's wife."

Lot's wife went far in religious profession. She was the wife of a "righteous man." She was connected through him with Abraham, the father of the faithful. She fled with her husband from Sodom in the day when he escaped for his life by God's command. But Lot's wife was not really like her husband. Though she fled with him, she had left her heart behind her. She wilfully disobeyed the strict injunction which the angel had laid upon her. She looked back towards Sodom, and was at once struck dead. She was turned into a pillar of salt, and perished in her sins. "Remember" her, says our Lord— "Remember Lot's wife."

Lot's wife is meant to be a beacon and a warning to all professing Christians. It may be feared that many will be found like her in the day of Christ's second advent. There are many in the present day who go a certain length in religion. They conform to the outward ways of Christian relatives and friends. They speak the "language of Canaan." They use all the outward ordinances of religion. But all this time their souls are not right in the sight of God. The world is in their hearts, and their hearts are in the world. And by and bye, in the day

of sifting, their unsoundness will be exposed to all the world. Their Christianity will prove rotten at the core. The case of Lot's wife will not stand alone.

Let us remember Lot's wife, and resolve to be real in our religion. Let us not profess to serve Christ for no higher motive than to please husbands, or wives, or masters, or ministers. A mere formal religion like this will never save our souls. Let us serve Christ for His own sake. Let us never rest until we have the true grace of God in our hearts, and have no desire to look back to the world.

We should observe, lastly, in these verses, **what a dreadful separation there will be in the professing Church when Christ comes again.** Our Lord describes this separation by a very striking picture. He says, "In that night there shall be two people in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left. Two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left."

The meaning of these expressions is clear and plain. The day of Christ's second advent shall be the day when good and evil, converted and unconverted, shall at length be divided into two distinct bodies. The visible Church shall no longer be a mixed body. The wheat and the tares shall no longer grow side by side. The good fish and the bad shall at length be sorted into two bodies. The angels shall come forth, and gather together the godly, that they may be rewarded; and leave the wicked behind to be punished.

"Converted or unconverted?" will be the only subject of enquiry. It will matter nothing that people have worked together, and slept together, and lived together for many years. They will be dealt with at last according to their religion. Those members of the family who have loved Christ, will be taken up to heaven; and those who have loved the world, will be cast down to hell. Converted and unconverted shall be separated for evermore when Jesus comes again.

Let us lay to heart these things. He that loves his relatives and friends is specially bound to consider them. If those whom he loves are true servants of Christ, let him know that he must cast in his lot with them, if he would not one day be parted from them forever. If those whom he loves are yet dead in trespasses and sins, let him know that he must work and pray for their conversion, lest he should be separated from them by and bye to all eternity. Life is the only time for such work. Life is fast ebbing away from us all. Partings, and separations, and the breaking up of families are at all times painful things. But all the separations that we see now are nothing compared to those which will ha seen when Christ comes again.

Notes on 17:26-37

26. "As it was in the days of Noah." The whole passage applies exclusively to the second personal coming of Christ, when he will come to set up his glorious kingdom. To apply the conclusion of this chapter, as many do, to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans appears to me an unwarrantable and violent straining of Scripture.

31. “On that day no one who is on the roof of his house . . .” Our Lord teaches his disciples that his own second coming in glory will not be a time of ease for everybody, as the Jews thought, but a time of trial of people’s religion, a sifting and separation of the visible church. It will be ushered in by a time of such tribulation and suffering that none but those who are sitting loose to the world and are ready to give up everything for Christ’s sake will come out of it unscathed.

37. “The vultures will gather.” This is a dark and mysterious saying and has greatly perplexed the commentators. That it refers to the well-known power of the vulture to discern carcasses, whether by eye or by smell, is allowed by all. But when we come to the precise application of the saying, we find great variety of opinions. My opinion, looking at the context, is that the eagles are more likely to be signs of the angels who will be used at our Lord’s second coming than anything else. Verse 36 speaks about the separation between the just and the unjust which will take place at our Lord’s appearing. In that separation we are specifically told that angels will be used (Matthew 13:49). Is it too much then to conjecture that our Lord’s simple meaning is that wherever his body is, his professing church, there the angels will gather together at the last day and separate the wicked from the just in order to give to each his appointed place?

Luke – Chap. 18

LUKE 18:1-8

THE PARABLE OF THE PERSISTENT WIDOW

The object of the parable before us, is explained by Christ Himself. To use the words of an old divine, “The key hangs at the door.” “He spoke a parable to this end; that men ought always to pray, and not to give up.” These words, be it remembered, are closely connected with the solemn doctrine of the second advent, with which the preceding chapter concludes. It is prayer without fainting, during the long weary intervals between the first and second advents, which Jesus is urging His disciples to keep up. In that interval we ourselves are standing. The subject therefore is one which ought to possess a special interest in our eyes.

These verses teach us firstly, **the great importance of perseverance in prayer.** Our Lord conveys this lesson by telling the story of a friendless widow, who obtained justice from a wicked magistrate, by dint of sheer importunity. “Though I fear not God, nor regard man,” said the unjust judge, “yet because this widow troubles me, I will see that she gets justice, lest by her continual coming she weary me.” Our Lord Himself supplies the application of the parable — “And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off?” If importunity obtains so much from a wicked man, how much more will it obtain for the children of God from the Righteous Judge, their Father in heaven!

The subject of PRAYER ought always to be interesting to Christians. Prayer is the very life-breath of true Christianity. Here it

is that religion begins. Here it flourishes. Here it decays. Prayer is one of the first evidences of conversion. (Acts 9:11.) Neglect of prayer is the sure road to a fall. (Matt. 26:40, 41.) Whatever throws light on the subject of prayer is for our soul's health.

Let it then be engraved deeply in our minds, that it is far more easy to begin a habit of prayer than it is to keep it up. The fear of death—some temporary piercings of conscience—some excited feelings, may make a man begin praying, after a fashion. But to go on praying requires faith. We are apt to become weary, and to give way to the suggestion of Satan, that "it is of no use." And then comes the time when the parable before us ought to be carefully remembered. We must recollect that our Lord expressly told us "always to pray and not to faint."

Do we ever feel a secret inclination to hurry our prayers, or shorten our prayers, or become careless about our prayers, or omit our prayers altogether? Let us be sure, when we do, that it is a direct temptation from the devil. He is trying to sap and undermine the very citadel of our souls, and to cast us down to hell. Let as resist the temptation, and cast it behind our backs. Let us resolve to pray on steadily, patiently, perseveringly, and let us never doubt that it does us good. However long the answer may be in coming, still let us pray on. Whatever sacrifice and self-denial it may cost us, still let us pray on, "pray always"— "pray without ceasing"—and "continue in prayer." (1 Thess. 5:17. Coloss. 4:2.) Let us arm our minds with this

parable, and while we live, whatever we make time for, let us make time for prayer.

These verses teach us, secondly, that **God has an elect people upon earth, who are under His special care.** The Lord Jesus declares that God will "avenge His own elect, who cry day and night unto Him." "I tell you," He says, "that He will avenge them speedily."

Election is one of the deepest truths of Scripture. It is clearly and beautifully stated in the seventeenth Article of the Church of England. It is "the everlasting purpose of God, whereby, before the foundations of the world were laid, He has decreed by His counsel, secret to us, to deliver from curse and damnation, those whom He has chosen in Christ out of mankind, and to bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation." This testimony is true. This is "sound speech which cannot be condemned." (Titus 2:8.)

Election is a truth which should call forth praise and thanksgiving from all true Christians. Except God had chosen and called them, they would never have chosen and called on Him. Except He had chosen them of His own good pleasure, without respect to any goodness of theirs, there would never have been anything in them to make them worthy of His choice. The worldly and the carnal-minded may rail at the doctrine of election. The false professor may abuse it, and turn the "grace of God into lasciviousness." (Jude 4.) But the believer who knows his own heart will ever bless God for election. He will confess that without election there would be no salvation.

But what are the marks of election? By what tokens shall a man know whether he is one of God's elect? These marks are clearly laid down in Scripture. Election is inseparably connected with faith in Christ, and conformity to His image. (Rom. 8:29, 30.) It was when Paul saw the working "faith," and patient "hope," and laboring "love" of the Thessalonians, that he knew their "election of God." (1 Thess. 1:3, 4.) Above all, we have a plain mark, described by our Lord, in the passage before us. God's elect are a people who "cry unto Him night and day." They are essentially a praying people. No doubt there are many people whose prayers are formal and hypocritical. But one thing is very clear—a prayerless man must never be called one of God's elect. Let that never be forgotten.

These verses teach us, lastly, that **true faith will be found very scarce at the end of the world.** The Lord Jesus shows this, by asking a very solemn question, "When the Son of Man comes, shall He find faith on the earth?"

The question before us is a very humbling one. It shows the uselessness of expecting that all the world will be converted before Christ comes again. It shows the foolishness of supposing that all people are "good," and that though differing in outward matters, they are all right at heart, and all going to heaven. Such notions find no countenance in the text before us.

Where is the use, after all, of ignoring facts under our own eyes, facts in the world—facts in the churches—facts in the congregations we belong to—facts by our own doors and firesides? Where is faith to

be seen? How many around us really believe what the Bible contains? How many live as if they believed that Christ died for them, and that there is a judgment, a heaven, and a hell? These are most painful and serious inquiries. But they demand and deserve an answer.

Have we faith ourselves? If we have, let us bless God for it. It is a great thing to believe all the Bible. It is matter for daily thankfulness if we feel our sins, and really trust in Jesus. We may be weak, frail, erring, short-coming sinners. But do we believe? That is the grand question. If we believe, we shall be saved. But he that believes not, shall not see life, and shall die in his sins. (John 3:36; 8:24.)

Notes on 18:1-8

1. Should always pray. This does not mean that a person should be constantly performing the act of prayer. It means that a person should constantly keep up the habit of prayer and endeavor to be always in a prayerful frame of mind.

2. "In a certain town." My own impression is that the parable was meant simply to describe the duty of individual believers during the whole period of the present dispensation and to encourage them to persevering prayer by holding out the hope that God will at length, when things seem at the worst, plead their cause.

3. "A widow." The helpless and friendless condition of a widow in the East in Bible times should be remembered. See Exodus 22:22; Deuteronomy 10:18; Job 29:13; 1 Kings 17:9, 12.

7. "Who cry out to him day and night." This is doubtless a proverbial

expression signifying a habit of continual prayer.
8. “He will see that they get justice.” This sentence points to the second coming of Christ. To us it seems long delayed. But a thousand years in God’s sight are but as one day (2 Peter 3:8).
There is doubtless an implied lesson here, that persevering prayer is the secret of keeping up faith. Augustine says, “When faith fails, prayer dies. In order to pray, then, we must have faith; and that our faith fail not, we must pray. Faith pours forth prayer; and the pouring forth of the heart in prayer gives steadfastness to faith.”

LUKE 18:9-14

PARABLE OF THE PHARISEE AND THE TAX COLLECTOR

The parable we have now read is closely connected with the one which immediately precedes it. The parable of the persevering widow teaches the value of importunity in prayer. The parable of the Pharisee and tax-collector teaches the *spirit* which should pervade our prayers. The first parable encourages us to pray and faint not. The second parable reminds us how and in what manner we ought to pray. Both should be often pondered by every true Christian.

Let us notice, firstly, **the sin against which our Lord Jesus Christ warns us in these verses.** There is no difficulty in finding out this. Luke tells us expressly, that “He spoke this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.” The sin which our Lord denounces is “self-righteousness.”

We are all naturally self-righteous. It is the family-disease of all the children of Adam. From the highest to the lowest we think more highly of ourselves than we ought to do. We secretly flatter ourselves that we are not so bad as some, and that we have something to recommend us to the favor of God. “Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness.” (Prov. 20:6.) We forget the plain testimony of Scripture, “In many things we offend all.” “There is not a just man upon earth, that does good and sins not”— “What is man that he should be clean, or he that is born of a woman that he should be righteous?” (James 3:2. Eccles. 7:20. Job 15:14.)

The true cure for self-righteousness is self-knowledge. Once let the eyes of our understanding be opened by the Spirit, and we shall talk no more of our own goodness. Once let us see what there is in our own hearts, and what the holy law of God requires, and self-conceit will die. We shall lay our hand on our mouths, and cry with the leper, “Unclean, unclean.” (Levit. 13:45.)

Let us notice, secondly, in these verses, **the prayer of the Pharisee, which our Lord condemns.** We read that he said, “God, I thank you that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax-collector. I fast twice in the week. I give tithes of all I possess.”

One great defect stands out on the face of this prayer—a defect so glaring that even a child might mark it. It exhibits no sense of sin and need. It contains no confession and no petition—no acknowledgment of guilt and emptiness—no supplication for mercy and grace. It is a

mere boasting recital of fancied merits, accompanied by an uncharitable reflection on a brother sinner. It is a proud, high-minded profession, destitute alike of penitence, humility, and charity. In short, it hardly deserves to be called a prayer at all.

No state of soul can be conceived so dangerous as that of the Pharisee. Never are men's bodies in such desperate plight, as when disease and insensibility set in. Never are men's hearts in such a hopeless condition, as when they are not sensible of their own sins. He that would not make shipwreck on this rock, must beware of measuring himself by his neighbors. What does it signify that we are more moral than "other men?" We are all vile and imperfect in the sight of God. "If we contend with Him, we cannot answer him one in a thousand." (Job 9:3.) Let us remember this. In all our self-examination let us not try ourselves by comparison with the standard of men. Let us look at nothing but the requirements of God. He that acts on this principle will never be a Pharisee.

Let us notice, thirdly, in these verses, **the prayer of the tax-collector, which our Lord commends.** That prayer was in every respect the very opposite of that of the Pharisee. We read that he "stood afar off, and smote upon his breast, and said, God be merciful to me a sinner." Our Lord Himself stamps this short prayer with the seal of His approbation. He says, "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other." The excellence of the Tax-collector's prayer consists in five points, each of which deserves attention.

1. For one thing, it was *a real petition*. A prayer which only contains thanksgiving and profession, and asks nothing, is essentially defective. It may be suitable for an angel, but it is not suitable for a sinner.

2. For another thing, it was *a direct personal prayer*. The tax-collector did not speak of his neighbors, but himself. Vagueness and generality are the great defects of most men's religion. To get out of "we," and "our," and "us," into "I," and "my," and "me," is a great step toward heaven.

3. For another thing, it was *a humble prayer*—a prayer which put self in the right place. The tax-collector confessed plainly that he was a sinner. This is the very "A B C" of saving Christianity. We never begin to be good until we can feel and say that we are bad.

4. For another thing, it was a prayer in which *mercy was the chief thing desired*, and faith in God's covenant mercy, however weak, displayed. Mercy is the first thing we must ask for in the day we begin to pray. Mercy and grace must be the subject of our daily petitions at the throne of grace until the day we die.

5. Finally, the Tax-collector's prayer was *one which came from his heart*. He was deeply moved in uttering it. He smote upon his breast, like one who felt more than be could express. Such prayers are the prayers which are God's delight. A broken and a contrite heart He will not despise. (Psalm 51:17.)

Let these things sink down into our hearts. He that has learned to feel his sins has great reason to be thankful. We are never in the way of salvation until we know that we are lost, ruined, guilty, and helpless. Happy indeed is he who is not ashamed to sit by the side of the tax-collector! When our experience tallies with his, we may hope that we have found a place in the school of God.

Let us notice, lastly, in these verses, **the high praise which our Lord bestows on humility.** He says, "Every one that exalts himself shall be abased, and he that humbles himself shall be exalted."

The principle here laid down is so frequently found in the Bible, that it ought to be deeply engraved in our memories. Three times we find our Lord using the words before us in the Gospels, and on three distinct occasions. Humility, He would evidently impress upon us, is among the first and foremost graces of the Christian character. It was a leading grace in Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David, Job, Isaiah, and Daniel. It ought to be a leading grace in all who profess to serve Christ. All the Lord's people have not gifts or money. All are not called to preach, or write, or fill a prominent place in the church. But all are called to be humble. One grace at least should adorn the poorest and most unlearned believer. That grace is humility.

Let us leave the whole passage with a deep sense of the great encouragement it affords to all who feel their sins, and cry to God for mercy in Christ's name. Their sins may have been many and great. Their prayers may seem weak, faltering, unconnected, and poor. But

let them remember the tax-collector, and take courage. That same Jesus who commended his prayer is sitting at the right hand of God to receive sinners. Then let them hope and pray on.

Notes on 18:9-14

11. "Stood up and prayed about himself." It is wrong to think that there was anything wrong in standing to pray. Standing was as common a position for prayer as kneeling among the Jews; see Matthew 6:5; Mark 11:25; 2 Chronicles 6:12.

12. "'I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'" A more miserable and defective righteousness than this Pharisee's, it is hard to conceive. His negative goodness consisted in not being as bad as some people. His positive goodness consisted in fasting and paying tithes with excessive scrupulosity. We do not hear a word about heart-holiness.

13. "'A sinner.'" Literally, "the sinner." That is, "the great sinner."

"Everyone who exalts himself . . ." The truth of this great principle is illustrated throughout the Bible. Pharaoh, Goliath, Haman, Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar, Herod are all cases in point.

LUKE 18:15-17

JESUS AND LITTLE CHILDREN

Let us observe, for one thing, in this passage, *how ignorantly people are apt to treat children, in the matter of their souls*. We read that there were some who "brought their little children to Jesus so he could touch them and bless them, but the disciples told them not to

bother him." They thought most probably that it was mere waste of their Master's time, and that little children could derive no benefit from being brought to Christ. They drew from our Lord a solemn rebuke. We read that "Jesus called them unto Him, and said, Allow the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not."

The ignorance of the disciples does not stand alone. On few subjects, perhaps, shall we find such strange opinions in the churches, as on the subject of the souls of children. Some think that children ought to be baptized, as a matter of course, and that if they die unbaptized they cannot be saved. Others think that children ought not to be baptized, but can give no satisfactory reason why they think so. Some think that all children are regenerate by virtue of their baptism. Others seem to think that children are incapable of receiving any grace, and that they ought not to be enrolled in the Church until they are grown up. Some think that children are naturally innocent, and would do no wickedness unless they learned it from others. Others think that it is no use to expect them to be converted when young, and that they must be treated as unbelievers until they come to years of discretion. All these opinions appear to be errors, in one direction or another. All are to be deprecated, for all lead to many painful mistakes.

We shall do well to get hold of some settled scriptural principles about the spiritual condition of children. To do so may save us much perplexity, and preserve us from grave false doctrine.

The souls of young children are evidently precious in God's sight. Both here and elsewhere there is plain proof that Christ cares for them no less than for grown-up people. The souls of young children are capable of receiving grace. They are born in sin, and without grace cannot be saved. There is nothing, either in the Bible or experience, to make us think that they cannot receive the Holy Spirit, and be justified, even from their earliest infancy. The baptism of young children seems agreeable to the general tenor of Scripture, and the mind of Christ in the passage before us. If Jewish children were not too young to be circumcised in the Old Testament dispensation, it is exceedingly hard to understand why Christian children should be too young to be baptized under the Gospel. Thousands of children, no doubt, receive no benefit from baptism. But the duty of baptizing them remains the same. The minds of young children are not unequal to receiving religious impressions. The readiness with which their minds receive the doctrines of the Gospel, and their consciences respond to them, is matter of fact well known to all who have anything to do with teaching. Last, but not least, the souls of children are capable of salvation, however young they may die. To suppose that Christ will admit them into His glorified Church, and yet maintain that He would not have them in His professing Church on earth, is an inconsistency which can never be explained.

These points deserve calm consideration. The subject is unquestionably difficult, and one on which good men disagree. But in every perplexity about it we shall find it good to return again and

again to the passage before us. It throws a strong light on the position of children before God. It shows us in general terms the mind of Christ.

Let us observe, for another thing, in this passage, **the strong declaration which our Lord Jesus Christ makes about little children.** He says, “Of such is the kingdom of God.”

The meaning of these words no doubt is a matter of dispute. That they were not meant to teach that children are born sinless and innocent, is abundantly clear from other parts of Scripture. “That which is born of the flesh is flesh.” (John 3:6.) A threefold lesson is probably contained in our Lord’s words. To that threefold lesson we shall do well to take heed.

“Like such as little children,” all saints of God should strive to live. Their simple faith and dependence on others—their unworldliness and indifference to earthy treasures—their comparative humility, harmlessness, and freedom from deceit—are points in which they furnish believers with an excellent example. Happy is he who can draw near to Christ and the Bible in the spirit of a little child!

“Out of such as little children,” the Church of God on earth ought to be constantly recruited. We should not be afraid to bring them to baptism even in their earliest infancy, and to dedicate them to Christ from the beginning of their days. Useless and formal as baptism

often is, it is an ordinance appointed by Christ Himself. Those who use it with prayer and faith may confidently look for a blessing.

"Of such as little children," the kingdom of God in glory will be largely composed. The salvation of all who die in infancy may confidently be expected. Though sin has abounded, grace has much more abounded. (Rom. 5:20.) The number of those in the world who die before they "know good from evil" is exceedingly great. It is surely not too much to believe that a very large proportion of the glorified inhabitants of heaven will be found at length to be little children.

Let us leave the whole passage with a deep sense of the value of children's souls, and with a settled resolution to "put on the mind of Christ" in all our dealings with them. Let us regard children as a most important part of Christ's professing Church, and a part which the great Head of the Church does not like to see neglected. Let us train them from their earliest infancy in godly ways, and sow the seed of Scripture truth in their minds, with strong confidence that it will one day bear fruit.

Let us believe that they think more, and feel more, and consider more, than at first sight appears; and that the Spirit is often working in them, as really and truly as in older people. Above all, let us often name them before Christ in prayer, and ask Him to take them under His special charge. He never changes. He is always the same. He cared for boys and girls when He was upon earth. Let us not doubt that He cares for them at the right hand of God in heaven.

Notes on 18:15-17

15. Babies. These were children of the youngest and tenderest age. It is the same word used in Luke 1:41, 44; 2:12, 16; 1 Peter 2:2. It is impossible to interpret the word to mean young people who have come to years of discretion.

16. "The kingdom of God belongs to such as these." Bearing in mind the preceding verses and the subsequent verses, it seems probable that the principal idea in our Lord's mind was to set before us the beauty of a humble and childlike spirit and to commend such a spirit to his disciples for imitation.

LUKE 18:18-27

THE RICH RULER

The story we have now read is three times reported in the Gospels. Matthew, Mark and Luke were all moved by the Holy Spirit to record the history of the rich man who came to Christ. This fact should be noticed. It shows us that there are lessons before us which demand special attention. When God would impress on Peter his duty towards the Gentiles, He sent him a vision which was repeated "three times." (Acts 10:16.)

We learn, firstly, from these verses, **to what lengths men may go in self-ignorance.** We are told of "a certain ruler," who asked our Lord what he should "do to inherit eternal life." Our Lord knew the ruler's heart, and gave him the answer which was most likely to bring to light the real state of his soul. He reminds him of the ten

commandments. He recites some of the principal requirements of the second table of the law. At once the spiritual blindness of the inquirer was detected. “All these,” said the man, “I have kept from my youth up.” An answer more full of darkness and self-ignorance it is impossible to conceive! He who made it could have known nothing rightly, either about himself, or God, or God’s law.

Does the case of this rich ruler stand alone? Do we suppose there are none like him at the present day? If we do, we are greatly deceived. There are thousands, it may be feared, in all our congregations, who have not the least idea of the spiritual nature of God’s law, and consequently know nothing of their own sinfulness. They do not see that God requires “truth in the inward parts,” and that we may break commandments in our heart and thoughts, even when we do not break them in outward actions. (Psalm 51:6. Matt. 5:21-28.) To be delivered from such blindness is one of the first things needful to our salvation. The eyes of our understandings must be enlightened by the Holy Spirit. (Ephes. 1:18.) We must learn to know ourselves. No man really taught of the Spirit will ever talk of having “kept all God’s commandments from his youth.” He will rather cry with Paul, “The law is spiritual, but I am carnal.” “I know that in me dwells no good thing.” (Rom. 7:14-18.)

We learn, secondly, from these verses, **what harm one master-sin may do to a soul.** The desires which the rich ruler expressed were right and good. He wanted “eternal life.” There seemed at first sight no reason why he should not be taught the way

of God, and become a disciple. But there was one thing, unhappily, which be loved better than “eternal life.” That thing was his money. When invited by Christ, to give up all that he had on earth, and seek treasure in heaven, he had not faith to accept the invitation. The love of money was his master-sin.

Shipwrecks like this are sadly common in the Church of Christ. Few are the ministers who could not put their finger on many cases like that of the man before us. Many are ready to give up everything for Christ’s sake, excepting one darling sin, and for the sake of that sin are lost for evermore. When Herod heard John the Baptist, he “heard him gladly and did many things.” But there was one thing he could not do. He could not part with Herodias. That one thing cost Herod his soul. (Mark 6:20.)

There must be no reserve in our hearts, if we would receive anything at Christ’s hands. We must be willing to part with anything, however dear it may be, if it stands between us and our salvation. We must be ready to cut off the right hand and pluck out the right eye, to make any sacrifice, and to break any idol. Life, we must remember, eternal life is at stake! One leak neglected, is enough to sink a mighty ship. One besetting sin, obstinately clung to, is enough to shut a soul out of heaven. The love of money, secretly nourished in the heart, is enough to bring a man, in other respects moral and irreproachable, down to the pit of hell.

We learn, thirdly, from these verses, **how great is the difficulty of a rich man being saved.** Our Lord declares this in

the solemn comment which He makes on the ruler's case— "How hard it is for rich people to get into the Kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God!"

The truth which our Lord lays down in this place, is one which we may see confirmed on every side. Our own eyes will tell us that *grace and riches seldom go together*. "Not many mighty, not many noble, are called." (1 Cor. 1:26.) It is plain matter of fact, that comparatively few rich men are to be found in the way of life. For one thing, riches incline their possessors to pride, self-will, self-indulgence, and love of the world. For another thing, the rich man is seldom dealt with faithfully about his soul. He is generally flattered and fawned upon. "The rich has many friends." (Prov. 14:20.) Few people have the courage to tell him the whole truth. His good points are grossly exaggerated. His bad points are glossed over, palliated, and excused. The result is, that while his heart is choked up with the things of the world, his eyes are blinded to his own real condition. What right have we to wonder is a rich man's salvation is a hard thing?

Let us beware of envying rich men and coveting their possessions. We little know what we might come to if our desires were granted. Money, which thousands are constantly wanting and longing for—money, which many make their god—money keeps myriads of souls out of heaven! "Those who will be rich fall into temptation and a snare." Happy is he who has learned to pray, "Give me neither

poverty nor riches," and is really "content with such things as he has." (1 Tim. 6:9; Prov. 30:8; Heb. 13:5.)

We learn, lastly, from these verses, **how mighty is the power of God's grace.** We see this in the words which our Lord addressed to those who heard Him speaking of the rich man's danger. They said, "who then can be saved?" Our Lord's reply is broad and full—"The things which are impossible with men are possible with God." By grace a man may serve God and reach heaven in any condition of life.

The word of God contains many striking instances in illustration of this doctrine. Abraham, and David, and Hezekiah, and Jehoshaphat, and Josiah, and Job, and Daniel, were all great and rich. Yet they all served God and were saved. They all found grace sufficient for them, and overcame the temptations by which they were surrounded. Their Lord and Master still lives, and what He did for them He can do for others. He can give power to rich Christians to follow Christ in spite of their riches, as well as He did to rich Jews.

Let us beware of allowing ourselves to suppose that our own salvation is impossible, because of the hardness of our position. It is too often a suggestion of the devil and our own lazy hearts. We must not give way to it. It matters not where we live, so long as we are not following a sinful calling. It matters not what our income may be, whether we are burdened with riches, or pinched with poverty. *Grace*, and not *place*, is the hinge on which our salvation turns. Money will not keep us out of heaven if our hearts are right before

God. Christ can make us more than conquerors. Christ can enable us to win our way through every difficulty. “I can do all things,” said Paul, “through Christ who strengthens me.” (Philip. 4:13.)

Notes on 18:18-27

22. “Sell everything you have and give to the poor.” Our Lord prescribed according to the disease before him. This was a case of desperate and idolatrous love of money. There was only one remedy: “Sell all, and distribute it.” Like St. Paul and his companions on board ship, he must throw overboard his cargo if he is to save his life (see Acts 27:18).

25. “It is easier for a camel . . .” This proverb was probably familiar to our Lord’s hearers. The camel was the largest animal the Jews were used to, and a camel going through the eye of a needle, according to some rabbinical writings, signified a thing absolutely impossible. Michaelis says that a similar proverb, about an elephant passing through a needle’s eye, is used in India.

27. “What is impossible with men . . .” This is a proverb, but its application is clear. The salvation of a rich man is possible with God’s grace.

LUKE 18:28-34

JESUS PREDICTS HIS DEATH

Let us observe, firstly, in these verses, **what a glorious and satisfying promise our Lord holds out to all believers who make sacrifices for His sake.** He says, “There is no man that has

left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive many times as much in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting."

The promise before us is a very peculiar one. It does not refer to the believer's reward in another world, and the crown of glory which fades not away. It refers distinctly to the life that now is. It is spoken of "this present time."

The "many times as much" of the promise must evidently be taken in a *spiritual* sense. The meaning is, that the believer shall find in Christ a full equivalent for anything that he is obliged to give up for Christ's sake. He shall find such peace, and hope, and joy, and comfort, and rest, in communion with the Father and the Son, that his losses shall be more than counterbalanced by his gains. In short, the Lord Jesus Christ shall be more to him than property, or relatives, or friends.

The complete fulfillment of this wonderful promise has been often seen in the experience of God's saints. Hundreds could testify in every age of the church, that when they were obliged to give up everything for the kingdom of God's sake, their losses were amply supplied by Christ's grace. They were kept in perfect peace, staying their souls on Jesus. (Isaiah. 26:3.) They were enabled to glory in tribulation, and to take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in distresses for Christ's sake (Rom. 5:3. 2 Cor. 12:10.) They were enabled in the darkest hour to rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory, and to count it an honor to suffer

shame for their Master's name. (1 Pet. 1:8. Acts 5:41.) The last day will show that in poverty and in exile—in prisons and before judgment seats—in the fire and under the sword—the words of Christ before us have repeatedly been made good. Friends have often proved faithless. Royal promises have often been broken. Riches have made themselves wings. But Christ's engagements have never been known to fail.

Let us grasp this promise firmly. Let us go forward in the way of life with a firm conviction that it is a promise which is the property of all God's people. Let us not give way to doubts and fears because of difficulties that cross our path. Let us press onward with a strong persuasion, that if we lose anything for Christ's sake, Christ will make it up to us even in this present world. What believers need is more daily practical faith in Christ's words. The well of living water is always near us, as we travel through the wilderness of this world. Yet for lack of faith we often fail to see it, and faint by the way. (Gen. 21:19.)

Let us observe, secondly, in these verses, **the clear and plain prediction which our Lord makes about His own death.** We see Him telling the disciples that He would be "delivered to the Gentiles, mocked, spitefully entreated, spitted on, scourged, and put to death."

The importance of our Lord's death appears in the frequency with which He foretold it, and referred to it during His life. He knew well that it was the principal end for which He came into the world. He

was to give His life a ransom for many. He was to make His soul an offering for sin, and to bear our transgressions in His own body on the tree. He was to give His body and blood for the life of the world. Let us seek to be of the same mind with Christ in our estimate of His death. Let our principal thoughts about Jesus be inseparably bound up with His crucifixion. The corner-stone of all truth concerning Christ is this—that "While we were yet sinners, He died for us." (Rom. 5:8.)

The love of our Lord Jesus Christ towards sinners is strikingly shown in His steady purpose of heart to die for them. All through His life He knew that He was about to be crucified. There was nothing in His cross and passion which He did not foresee distinctly even to the minutest particular, long before it came upon Him. He tasted all the well-known bitterness of 'anticipated suffering'. Yet He never swerved from His path for a moment. He was straitened in spirit until He had finished the work He came to do. (Luke 12:50.) Such love passes knowledge. It is unspeakable—unsearchable. We may rest on that love without fear. If Christ so loved us before we thought of Him, He will surely not cease to love us after we have believed.

The calmness of our Lord Jesus Christ in the prospect of certain death ought to be a pattern to all His people. Like Him, let us drink the bitter cup which our Father gives us, without a murmur, and say, "not my will but yours be done." The man that has faith in the Lord Jesus has no reason to be afraid of the grave. "The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who

gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Cor. 15:56, 57.) The grave is no longer what it once was. It is the place where the Lord lay. If the great Head of the body looked forward to the grave with calmness, much more may all His believing members. For them He has overcome death. The king of terrors at the worst is a conquered foe.

Let us observe, lastly, in these verses, **the slowness of the disciples to understand Christ's death.** We find that when our Lord described His coming sufferings, the disciples "didn't understand a thing he said. Its significance was hidden from them, and they failed to grasp what he was talking about." We read such passages as these, perhaps, with a mixture of pity and surprise. We wonder at the darkness and blindness of these Jews. We marvel that in the face of plain teaching, and in the light of plain types of the Mosaic law, the sufferings of Messiah should have been lost sight of in His glory, and His cross hidden behind His crown.

But are we not forgetting that the vicarious death of Christ has always been a stumbling-block and an offence to proud human nature? Do we not know that even now after Christ has arisen from the dead and ascended into glory, the doctrine of the cross is still foolishness to many, and that Christ's substitution for us on the cross is a truth which is often denied, rejected and refused? Before we wonder at these first weak disciples for not understanding our Lord's words about His death, we should do well to look around us. It may

humble us to remember that thousands of *so-called* Christians neither understand nor value Christ's death at the present day.

Let us look well to our own hearts. We live in a day when false doctrines about Christ's death abound on every side. Let us see that Christ crucified is really the foundation of our own hopes, and that Christ's atoning death for sin is indeed the whole life of our souls. Let us beware of adding to Christ's sacrifice on the cross, as the Roman Catholic does. Its value was infinite. It admits of no addition. Let us beware of taking away from Christ's sacrifice, as the Socinian does. To suppose that the Son of God only died to leave us an example of self-denial, is to contradict a hundred plain texts of Scripture. Let us walk in the old paths. Let us say with Paul, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Gal. 6:14.)

Notes on 18:28-34

28. "We have left all." It has often been noted that Peter and his fellow disciples had left little or nothing for Christ's sake. A few boats and fishing nets were probably all their worldly goods amounted to. Yet it must never be forgotten that a poor man's "all" is as dear to him as the rich man's palace. He knows nothing higher or better. In giving up everything for Christ's sake, he makes the greatest sacrifice in his power.

32-33. "He will be handed over to the Gentiles . . ." The following passage from Doddridge is worth reading: "This prediction is a strong instance of the spirit of prophecy exerted by our Lord. It was more probable that he would be privately killed, or stoned to death

by a crowd. And when he was delivered back to the Jews by Pilate, with permission to judge him according to their law, it is amazing that he was not stoned. But all was done that the Scriptures might be fulfilled."

LUKE 18:35-43

THE BLIND BEGGAR

The miracle described in these verses is rich in instruction. It was one of the great works which witnessed that Christ was sent of the Father. (John 5:36.) But this is not all. It contains also some lively patterns of spiritual things which deserve attentive study.

We see, for one thing, in this passage, **the importance of diligence in the use of means.** We are told of "a certain blind man who sat by the wayside begging." He sought the place where his pitiful condition was most likely to attract notice. He did not sit lazily at home, and wait for relief to come to him. He placed himself by the road-side, in order that travelers might see him and give him help. The story before us shows the wisdom of his conduct. Sitting by the wayside, he heard that "Jesus was passing by." Hearing of Jesus he cried for mercy, and was restored to sight. Let us mark this well! If the blind man had not sat by the wayside that day, he might have remained blind to the hour of his death.

He that desires salvation should remember the example of this blind man. He must attend diligently on every means of grace. He

must be found regularly in those places where the Lord Jesus is specially present. He must sit by the wayside, wherever the word is read and the Gospel preached, and God's people assemble together. To expect grace to be put into our hearts, if we sit idling at home on Sundays, and go to no place of worship, is presumption and not faith. It is true that "God will have mercy on whom He will have mercy;"—but it is no less true that He ordinarily has mercy on those who use means. It is true that Christ is sometimes "found of those who seek Him not;"—but it is also true that He is always found of those who really seek Him. The Sabbath breaker, the Bible-neglecter, and the prayerless man are forsaking their own mercies, and digging graves for their own souls. They are not sitting "by the wayside."

We see, for another thing, in this passage, **an example of our duty in the matter of prayer.** We are told that when this blind man heard that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by, he "cried, saying, Jesus, you Son of David, have mercy on me." We are told further, that when some rebuked him and bade him hold his peace, he would not be silenced. "He only cried so much the more." He felt his need, and found words to tell his story. He was not to be stopped by the rebukes of people who knew nothing of the misery of blindness. His sense of wretchedness made him go on crying. And his importunity was amply rewarded. He found what he sought. That very day he received sight.

What the blind man did on behalf of his bodily ailment, it is surely our bounden duty to do on behalf of our souls. Our need is far

greater than his. The disease of sin is far more grievous than the lack of sight. The tongue that can find words to describe the necessities of the body, can surely find words to explain the needs of the soul. Let us begin praying if we never prayed yet. Let us pray more heartily and earnestly, if we have prayed in times past. Jesus, the Son of David, is still passing by, and not far from every one of us. Let us cry to Him for mercy, and allow nothing to stop our crying. Let us not go down to the pit speechless and silent, without so mach as a cry for help. None will be so excuseless at the last day as baptized men and women who never tried to pray.

We see, for another thing, in this passage, **an encouraging instance of Christ's kindness and compassion.** We are told that when the blind man continued crying for mercy, our Lord "stood and commanded him to be brought unto Him." He was going up to Jerusalem to die, and had weighty matters on His mind, but He found time to stop to speak kindly to this poor sufferer. Then Jesus asked the man, "What do you want me to do for you?" "Lord," he pleaded, "I want to see!" At once we are told, "Jesus said unto him, receive your sight; your faith has saved you." That faith perhaps was weak, and mixed with much imperfection. But it had made the man cry to Jesus, and go on crying in spite of rebukes. So coming with faith, our blessed Lord did not cast him out. The desire of his heart was granted, and "immediately he received sight."

Passages like these in the Gospels are intended for the special comfort of all who feel their sins and come to Christ for peace. Such

people may be sensible of much infirmity in all their approaches to the Son of God. Their faith may be very feeble—their sins many and great—their prayers very poor and stammering—their motives far short of perfection. But after all, do they really come to Christ with their sins? Are they really willing to forsake all other confidence, and commit their souls to Christ's hands? If this be so, they may hope and not be afraid. That same Jesus still lives who heard the blind man's cry, and granted his request. He will never go back from His own words, "Him that comes to me, I will in no wise cast out." (John 6:37.)

We see, lastly, in this passage, **a striking example of the conduct which becomes one who has received mercy from Christ.** We are told that when the blind man was restored to sight, "he followed Jesus, glorifying God." He felt deeply grateful. He resolved to show his gratitude by becoming one of our Lord's followers and disciples. Pharisees might cavil at our Lord. Sadducees might sneer at His teaching. It mattered nothing to this new disciple. He had the witness in himself that Christ was a Master worth following. He could say, "I was blind, and now I see." (John 9:25.)

Grateful love is the true spring of real obedience to Christ! Men will never take up the cross and confess Jesus before the world, and live to Him, until they feel that they are indebted to Him for pardon, peace, and hope. The ungodly are what they are, because they have no sense of sin, and no consciousness of being under any special obligation to Christ. The godly are what they are, because they love

Him who first loved them, and washed them from sin in His own blood. Christ has healed them, and therefore they follow Christ.

Let us leave the passage with solemn self-inquiry. If we would know whether we have any part or lot in Christ, let us look at our lives. Whom do we follow? What are the great ends and objects for which we live? The man who has a real hope in Jesus, may always be known by the general bias of his life.

Notes on 18:35-43

35. As Jesus approached Jericho. Matthew speaks of two blind men. Mark and Luke only mention one. There were doubtless two blind people healed. Mark and Luke, however, only mention one person because he was probably the man best known in Jericho. Mark tells us that his name was Bartimaeus.

38. "Son of David." This expression is remarkable because the previous verse informs us that the blind man was told that "Jesus of Nazareth" was passing by. To call our Lord the "Son of David" was a sign of faith and showed that the blind man had some idea that Jesus was the Messiah. When the Pharisees were asked whose Son Christ would be, they replied at once, "The son of David" (Matthew 22:42). Our Lord's fame as a mighty worker of miracles had probably reached the blind man's ears and made him believe that the person who could do such great miracles must be the one sent from God.

41. "I want to see." Both here and in the next two verses the Greek word literally means, "look up" or "see again."

Luke – Chap. 19

LUKE 19:1-10

THE CONVERSION OF ZACCHAEUS

These verses describe the conversion of a soul. Like the stories of Nicodemus, and the Samaritan woman, the story of Zacchaeus should be frequently studied by Christians. The Lord Jesus never changes. What He did for the man before us, He is able and willing to do for any one of ourselves.

We learn, firstly, from these verses, that **no one is too bad to be saved, or beyond the power of Christ's grace.** We are told of a wealthy tax-collector becoming a disciple of Christ. A more unlikely event we cannot well imagine! We see the "camel passing through the eye of a needle," and the "rich man entering the kingdom of God." We behold a plain proof that "all things are possible with God." We see a covetous tax-gatherer transformed into a liberal Christian!

The door of hope which the Gospel reveals to sinners, is very wide open. Let us leave it open as we find it Let us not attempt in narrow-minded ignorance, to shut it. We should never be afraid to maintain that Christ is "able to save to the uttermost," and that the vilest of sinners may be freely forgiven if they will only come to Him. We

should offer the Gospel boldly to the worst and wickedest, and say, “There is hope. Only repent and believe. Though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson they shall be as wool.” (Isaiah. 1:18.) Such doctrine may seem to worldly people foolishness and licentiousness. But such doctrine is the Gospel of Him who saved Zacchaeus at Jericho. Hospitals discharge many cases as incurable. But there are no incurable cases under the Gospel. Any sinner may be healed, if he will only come to Christ.

We learn, secondly, from these verses, **how little and insignificant are the things on which a soul’s salvation often turns.** We are told that Zacchaeus “sought to see who Jesus was; and could not, because he was little of stature.” Curiosity, and nothing but curiosity, appears to have been the motive of his mind. That curiosity once roused, Zaccheus was determined to gratify it. Rather than not see Jesus he ran on before along the road, and “climbed up into a tree.” Upon that little action, so far as man’s eyes can see, there hinged the salvation of his soul. Our Lord stopped under the tree, and said When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” From that very moment Zacchaeus was an altered man. That very night he lay down a Christian.

We must never “despise the day of small things.” (Zech. 4:10.) We must never reckon anything little that concerns the soul. The ways by which the Holy Spirit leads men and women to Christ are wonderful

and mysterious. He is often beginning in a heart a work which shall stand to eternity, when a looker-on observes nothing remarkable.

In every work there must be a beginning, and in spiritual work that beginning is often very small. Do we see a careless brother beginning to use means of grace, which in time past he neglected? Do we see him coming to Church and listening to the Gospel after a long course of Sabbath-breaking? When we see such things let us remember Zaccheus and be hopeful. Let us not look coldly on him because his motives are at present very poor and questionable. Let us believe that it is far better to hear the Gospel out of mere curiosity, than not to hear it at all. Our brother is with Zaccheus in the tree! For anything we know he may go further. Who can tell but that he may one day receive Christ joyfully?

We learn, thirdly, from these verses, **Christ's free compassion towards sinners, and Christ's power to change hearts.** A more striking instance than that before us it is impossible to conceive. Unasked, our Lord stops and speaks to Zaccheus. Unasked, He offers Himself to be a guest in the house of a sinner. Unasked, He sends into the heart of a tax-collector the renewing grace of the Spirit, and puts him that very day among the children of God. (Jerem. 3:19.)

It is impossible, with such a passage as this before as, to exalt too highly the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. We cannot maintain too strongly that there is in Him an infinite readiness to receive, and an infinite ability to save sinners. Above all, we cannot hold too firmly

that salvation is not of works, but of grace. If ever there was a soul sought and saved, without having done anything to deserve it, that soul was the soul of Zaccheus.

Let us grasp these doctrines firmly and never let them go. Their price is above rubies. Grace, free grace, is the only thought which gives men rest in a dying hour. Let us proclaim these doctrines confidently to every one to whom we speak about spiritual things. Let us bid them come to Jesus Christ, just as they are, and not wait in the vain hope that they can make themselves fit and worthy to come. Not least, let us tell them that Jesus Christ waits for them, and would come and dwell in their poor sinful hearts, if they would only receive Him. "Behold," He says, "I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him and sup with him and he with me." (Rev. 3:20.)

We learn, lastly, from these verses, that **converted sinners will always give evidence of their conversion.** We are told that Zaccheus "stood, and said unto the Lord, the half of my goods I give unto the poor; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold." There was *reality* in that speech. There was unmistakable proof that Zaccheus was a new creature. When a wealthy Christian begins to distribute his riches, and an extortioner begins to make restitution, we may well believe that old things have passed away, and all things become new. (2 Cor. 5:17.) There was *decision* in that speech. "I give," says Zaccheus— "I restore." He does not speak of future intentions. He does not say, "I

will," but "I do." Freely pardoned, and raised from death to life, Zaccheus felt that he could not begin too soon to show whose he was and whom he served.

He that desires to give proof that he is a believer, should walk in the steps of Zaccheus. Like him, let him thoroughly renounce the sins which have formerly most easily beset him. Like him, let him follow the Christian graces which he has formerly most habitually neglected. In any case a believer should so live that all may know that he is a believer. Faith that does not purify the heart and life, is not faith at all. Grace that cannot be seen, like light—and tasted, like salt, is not grace, but hypocrisy. *The man who professes to know Christ and trust Him, while he cleaves to sin and the world, is going down to hell with a lie in his right hand.* The heart that has really tasted the *grace of Christ*, will instinctively hate sin.

Let us turn from the whole passage with the last verse ringing in our ears— "The Son of man came to seek and save that which is lost." It is as a Savior, more than as a Judge, that Christ desires to be known. Let us see that we know Him as such. Let us take heed that our souls are saved. Once saved and converted, we shall say, "What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits?" (Psalm 116:12.) Once saved, we shall not complain that self-denial, like that of Zaccheus, is a grievous requirement.

Notes on 19:1-10

2. The link between the story of Zacchaeus and the preceding chapter should not be overlooked. The difficulty of a rich man's salvation had

been strongly set out there. The Holy Spirit now proceeds to show us, by the example of Zacchaeus, that nothing is impossible with God.

4. Climbed a sycamore-fig tree. The ridicule that such an action would bring on Zacchaeus should be remembered. A wealthy tax collector climbing up a tree, after running along a road, to see a religious teacher would doubtless call forth mockery from all who saw him. Yet this detail, trifling as it seems, throws light on Zacchaeus' character. He was someone who did not care about man's opinion. He wanted to see Christ, and he would not be stopped.

5. "I must stay at your house today." It should be noted that this is the only place in the Gospels where our Lord goes to be a guest uninvited. This is a very important point. Christ sometimes comes to those who do not seek him (Isaiah 65:1).

Our Lord's complete knowledge is clearly shown here. Not only did he know the name of the man in the tree but the state of his heart (compare John 1:48).

6. He came down at once and welcomed him gladly. It is precisely at this point that the conversion of Zacchaeus seems to have taken place. The unexpected condescension of such a famous teacher of religion in offering to be a tax collector's guest was made the means by which the Spirit changed that man's heart. Nothing is so frequently found to turn the hearts of great sinners as the unexpected and undeserved news that Christ loves them and cares for their souls. These tidings have often broken and melted hearts of stone.

7. Began to mutter. The Greek word here is only used in one other place in the New Testament (Luke 15:2). It is there used in precisely

the same connection, to describe the feeling shown by self-righteous Pharisees upon seeing Christ receive sinners.

LUKE 19:11-27

PARABLE OF THE TEN MINAS

The occasion of our Lord speaking the parable before us, is clear and plain. It was intended to correct the false expectations of the disciples on the subject of Christ's kingdom. It was a prophetical sketch of things present and things to come, which ought to raise solemn thoughts in the minds of all professing Christians.

We see, for one thing, in this parable, **the present position of our Lord Jesus Christ.** He is compared to "a certain nobleman, who went into a far country, to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return."

When the Lord Jesus left the world, He ascended up into heaven as a conqueror, leading captivity captive. He is there sitting at the right hand of God, doing the work of a High Priest for His believing people, and ever making intercession for them. But He will not sit there always. He will come forth from the holy of holies to bless His people. He will come again with power and glory to put down every enemy under His feet, and to set up His universal kingdom on earth. At present "we see not all things put under Him." The devil is the "prince of this world." (Heb. 2:8; John 14:30.) But the present state

of things shall be changed one day. When Christ returns, the kingdoms of the world shall become His.

Let these things sink down into our minds. In all our thoughts about Christ, let us never forget His second advent. It is well to know that He lived for us, and died for us, and rose again for us, and intercedes for us. But it is also well to know that He is soon coming again.

We see, for another thing, in this parable, **the present position of all professing Christians.** Our Lord compares them to servants who have been left in charge of money by an absent master, with strict directions to use that money well. They are to "occupy until He comes."

The countless privileges which Christians enjoy, compared to the heathen, are "pounds" given to them by Christ, for which they must one day give account. We shall not stand side by side in the judgment day with the African and Chinese, who never heard of the Bible, the Trinity, and the crucifixion. The most of us, it may be feared, have little idea of the extent of our responsibility. To whomsoever much is given, of them much will be required.

Are we "occupying?" Are we living like men who know to whom they are indebted, and to whom they must one day give account? This is the only life which is worthy of a reasonable being. The best answer we can give to those who invite us to plunge into worldliness and frivolity, is the Master's commandment which is before us. Let

us tell them that we cannot consent, because we look for the coming of the Lord. We would gladly be found "occupying" when He comes.

We see, for another thing, in this parable, **the certain reckoning which awaits all professing Christians.** We are told that when the master returned, he "commanded his servants to be called, that he might know how much every man had gained."

There is a day coming when the Lord Jesus Christ shall judge His people, and give to every one according to His works. The course of this world shall not always go on as it does now. Disorder, confusion, false profession, and unpunished sin, shall not always cover the face of the earth. The great white throne shall be set up. The Judge of all shall sit upon it. The dead shall be raised from their graves. The living shall all be summoned to the bar. The books shall be opened. High and low, rich and poor, gentle and simple, all shall at length give account to God, and shall all receive an eternal sentence.

Let the thought of this judgment exercise an influence on our hearts and lives. Let us wait patiently when we see wickedness triumphing in the earth. The time is short. There is one who sees and notes down all that the ungodly are doing. "There be higher than they." (Eccles. 5:8.) Above all, let us live under an abiding sense, that we shall stand one day at the judgment seat of Christ. Let us "judge ourselves," that we be not condemned of the Lord. It is a weighty saying of James, "So speak, and so do, as those who shall be judged by the law of liberty." (1 Cor. 11:31. James 2:12.)

We see, for another thing, in this parable, **the certain reward of all true Christians.** Our Lord tells us that those who are found to have been faithful servants shall receive honor and dignity. Each shall receive a reward proportioned to his diligence. One shall be placed "over ten cities," and another "over five."

The people of God receive little apparent recompense in this present time. Their names are often cast out as evil. They enter the kingdom of God through much tribulation. Their good things are not in this world. The gain of godliness does not consist in earthly rewards, but in inward peace, and hope, and joy in believing. But they shall have an abundant recompense one day. They shall receive wages far exceeding anything they have done for Christ. They shall find, to their amazement, that for everything they have done and borne for their Master, their Master will pay them a hundred-fold.

Let us often look forward to the good things which are yet to come. The "sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed." (Rom. 8:18.) Let the thought of that glory cheer us in every time of need, and sustain us in every dark hour. Many, no doubt, are "the afflictions of the righteous." One great receipt for bearing them patiently is to "have respect, like Moses, to the recompense of the reward." (Psalm 34:19. Heb. 11:26.)

We see, lastly, in this parable, **the certain exposure of all unfaithful Christians at the last day**. We are told of one servant who had done nothing with his master's money, but had laid it up in

a piece of cloth. We are told of his useless arguments in his own defense, and of his final ruin, for not using the knowledge which he confessedly possessed. There can be no mistake as to the people he represents. He represents the whole company of the ungodly; and his ruin represents their miserable end in the judgment day.

Let us never forget the end to which all ungodly people are coming. Sooner or later, the unbeliever and the impenitent will be put to shame before the whole world, stripped of the means of grace and hope of glory, and cast down to hell. There will be no escape at the last day. False profession and formality will fail to abide the fire of God's judgment. Grace, and grace alone, shall stand. Men will discover at last, that there is such a thing as "the wrath of the Lamb." The excuses with which so many content their consciences now, shall prove unavailing at the bar of Christ. The most ignorant shall find that they had knowledge enough to be their condemnation. The possessors of buried talents and misused privileges will discover at last that it would have been good for them never to have been born.

These are solemn things. Who shall stand in the great day when the Master requires an account of "His pounds?" The words of Peter will form a fitting conclusion to the whole parable, "Seeing that you look for such things, be diligent that you may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless." (2 Pet. 3:14.)

Notes on 19:11-27

11. A parable. There is a great similarity between this parable and that of the talents in Matthew. Yet they are not the same. They were

evidently spoken at different times and differ in one important respect—namely, the sums of money given to the servants. In Matthew the servants receive different sums. In Luke all receive the same.

14. "'We don't want this man to be our king.'" Theophylact remarks about the striking resemblance between this part of the parable and the cry of the Jews when Christ was before Pilate. They were asked, "Shall I crucify your king?" They answered, "We have no king but Caesar." They said, "Away with him! Crucify him!"

15. "He was made king." This part of the parable describes the second coming of Jesus Christ. The kingdom for which we pray in the Lord's Prayer is not yet come.

16. "'Your mina.'" The humility of a true Christian is seen here. The servant does not say, "By my skill I have earned," but "Your mina has earned." We have nothing to boast of. All that we have, we have received.

17. "'Take charge of ten cities.'" The servant who had turned one mina into ten was put in charge of ten cities, and the servant who had turned one into five was put in charge of five cities; each was rewarded according to his diligence. The doctrine of reward according to deeds seems to stand out here as well as in other places in Scripture. Our title to heaven is all of grace. Our degree of glory in heaven will be in proportion to our deeds. Every person will receive his own reward according to his own labor.

Henry remarks, "There are degrees of glory in heaven. Every vessel will be alike full, but not alike large. And the degree of glory there will be according to the degrees of usefulness here." (See 1

Corinthians 3:8.)

21. "'You are a hard man.'" Unkind thoughts about God are a common mark of all unconverted people. They start by misrepresenting him and then try to excuse themselves for not loving and serving him.

27. In leaving the parable let us not forget that it shows us three kinds of people. First, there are open opposers of Christ and the Gospel. Such were the Jews who refused to receive our Lord. Such are all pagans today.

Second, there are faithful Christians. Such are all who make good use of the Gospel, for their own good and for God's glory.

Third, there are the unfaithful, formal Christians who have Christianity but make no real use of it. Of these it should be always noted that the parable does not charge them with being open enemies of Christ or open breakers of God's commandments. But they keep it "laid away in a piece of cloth" (verse 20). They have a great gift from God and make no use of it. This will prove at last their eternal ruin.

LUKE 19:28-40

Let us mark, for one thing, in these verses, **the perfect knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.** We see Him sending two of His disciples to a village, and telling them that they would find at the entrance of it, "a colt tied, whereon yet never man sat." We see Him describing what they would see and hear, with as much confidence as if the whole transaction had been previously arranged.

In short, He speaks like one to whom all things were naked and open, like one whose eyes were in every place—like one who knew things unseen as well as things seen.

An attentive reader will observe the same thing in other parts of the Gospel. We are told in one place that "He knew the thoughts" of His enemies. We are told in another, that "He knew what was in man." We are told in another, that "He knew from the beginning who they were that believed not and who should betray Him." (Luke 6:8; John 2:25; John 6:64.) Knowledge like this is the peculiar attribute of God. Passages like these are meant to remind us, that "the man Christ Jesus" is not only man. He is also "God blessed forever." (Rom. 9:5.)

The thought of Christ's perfect knowledge should alarm sinners and awaken them to repentance. The great Head of the Church knows them and all their doings. The Judge of all sees them continually, and marks down all their ways. There is "no darkness where the workers of iniquity can hide themselves." (Job 34:22.) If they go into the secret chamber the eyes of Christ are there. If they privately scheme villainy and plot wickedness, Christ knows it and observes it. If they speak secretly against the righteous, Christ hears. They may deceive men all their life long, but they cannot deceive Christ. A day comes when God "will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to the Gospel." (Rom. 2:16.)

The thought of Christ's perfect knowledge should comfort all true-hearted Christians, and quicken them to increased diligence in

good works. The Master's eye is always upon them. He knows where they dwell, and what are their daily trials, and who are their companions. There is not a word in their mouths, or a thought in their hearts, but Jesus knows it altogether. Let them take courage when they are slandered, misunderstood, and misrepresented by the world. It matters nothing so long as they can say, "You, Lord, who know all things, know that I love you." (John 21:17.) Let them walk on steadily in the narrow way, and not turn aside to the right hand or the left. When sinners entice them, and weak brethren say, "Spare yourself," let them reply, "My Master is looking at me. I desire to live and move as in the sight of Christ."

Let us mark, for another thing, in this passage, **the public visibility of our Lord's last entry into Jerusalem.** We are told of His riding in on a donkey, like a king visiting his capital, or a conqueror returning in triumph to his native land. We read of a "multitude of disciples" surrounding Him as He rode into the city, "rejoicing and praising God with a loud voice." The whole history is strikingly unlike the general tenor of our Lord's life. On other occasions, we see Him withdrawing from public observation, retiring into the wilderness, charging those whom He healed to tell no man what was done. On the present occasion all is changed. Reserve is completely thrown aside. He seems to court public notice. He appears desirous that all should see Him, and should mark, note, and observe what He did.

The reasons of our Lord's conduct at this crisis of His ministry, at first sight, may appear hard to discover. On calm reflection they are clear and plain. He knew that the time had come when He was to die for sinners on the cross. His work as the great Prophet, so far as His earthly ministry was concerned, was almost finished and completed. His work as the sacrifice for sin and substitute for sinners, remained to be accomplished. Before giving Himself up as a sacrifice, He desired to draw the attention of the whole Jewish nation to Himself. The Lamb of God was about to be slain. The great sin-offering was about to be killed. It was fit that the eyes of all Israel should be fixed upon Him. This great thing was not to be done in a corner.

Forever let us bless God that the death of our Lord Jesus Christ was so widely known and so public an event. Had He been suddenly stoned in some popular tumult, or privately beheaded like John the Baptist in prison, there never would have been lacking Jewish and Gentile unbelievers, who would have denied that the Son of God had died at all. The wisdom of God so ordered events that such a denial was rendered impossible. Whatever men may think of the doctrine of Christ's atoning death, they can never deny *the fact* that Christ died. Publicly He rode into Jerusalem a few days before His death. Publicly He was seen and heard in the city until the day that He was betrayed. Publicly He was brought before the High Priests and Pilate, and condemned. Publicly He was led forth to Calvary, and nailed to the cross. The corner-stone and crowning-event in our Lord's ministry was His death for sinners. Of all the events of His ministry, that death was the one most public, and the one witnessed by the

greatest number of Jews. And that death was the "life of the world." (John 6:51.)

Let us leave the whole passage with the cheering reflection, that the joy of Christ's disciples at His entry into Jerusalem, when He came to be crucified, will prove as nothing compared to the joy of His people when He comes again to reign. That first joy was soon broken off and exchanged for sorrow and bitter tears. The second joy shall be a joy for evermore. That first joy was often interrupted by the bitter sneers of enemies, who were plotting mischief. The second joy shall be liable to no such crude interruptions. Not a word shall be said against the King when He comes to Jerusalem the second time. "Before Him every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that He is Lord." (Phil. 2:11.)

Notes on 19:28-40

30. "You will find a colt tied there." Note that the public entry into Jerusalem which we read about here is one of the few events in our Lord's life which all four Gospel writers relate. There is evidently an importance about it as a step in our Lord's earthly ministry which we should not overlook.

40. "The stones will cry out." This is a proverb. If men did not rejoice at Christ's coming, even inanimate nature would cry in shame.

LUKE 19:41-48

JESUS WEEPING OVER JERUSALEM

We learn, firstly, from these verses, **how great is the tenderness and compassion of Christ towards sinners.** We are told that when He came near Jerusalem for the last time, "He beheld the city and wept over it." He knew well the character of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Their cruelty, their self-righteousness, their stubbornness, their obstinate prejudice against the truth, their pride of heart were not hidden from Him. He knew well what they were going to do to Himself within a very few days—His unjust judgment, His delivery to the Gentiles, His sufferings, His crucifixion, were all spread out distinctly before His mind's eye. And yet knowing all this, our Lord pitied Jerusalem! "He beheld the city and wept over it."

We err greatly if we suppose that Christ cares for none but His own believing people. He cares for all. His heart is wide enough to take an interest in all mankind. His compassion extends to every man, woman, and child on earth. He has a love of 'general pity' for the man who is going on still in wickedness, as well as a love of 'special affection' for the sheep who hear His voice and follow Him. He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. Hardened sinners are fond of making excuses for their conduct. But they will never be able to say that Christ was not merciful, and was not ready to save.

We know but little of true Christianity, if we do not feel a deep concern about the souls of unconverted people. A lazy indifference about the spiritual state of others, may doubtless save us much

trouble. To care nothing whether our neighbors are going to heaven or hell, is no doubt the way of the world. But a man of this spirit is very unlike David, who said, “rivers of waters run down my eyes, because men keep not your law.” He is very unlike Paul, who said, “I have great heaviness and continual sorrow of heart for my brethren.” (Psalm 119:136; Rom. 9:2.) Above all, he is very unlike Christ. If Christ felt tenderly about wicked people, the disciples of Christ ought to feel likewise.

We learn, secondly, from these verses, that **there is a religious ignorance which is sinful and blameworthy.** We read that our Lord denounced judgments on Jerusalem, “because she knew not the time of her visitation.” She might have known that the times of Messiah had fully come, and that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah. But she would not know. Her rulers were willfully ignorant. They would not calmly examine evidences, and impartially consider great plain facts. Her people would not see “the signs of the times.” Therefore judgment was soon to come upon Jerusalem to the uttermost. Her willful ignorance left her without excuse.

The principle laid down by our Lord in this place is deeply important. It contradicts an opinion which is very common in the world. It teaches distinctly that all ignorance is not excusable, and that when men might know truth, but refuse to know it, their guilt is very great in the sight of God. There is a degree of knowledge for which all are responsible, and if from indolence or prejudice we do not attain that knowledge, the lack of it will ruin our souls.

Let us impress this great principle deeply on our own hearts. Let us urge it diligently on others, when we speak to them about religion. Let us not flatter ourselves that ignorance will excuse every one who dies in ignorance, and that he will be pardoned because he knew no better! Did he live up to the light he had? Did he use every means for attaining knowledge? Did he honestly employ every help within his reach, and search industriously after wisdom? These are grave questions. If a man cannot answer them, he will certainly be condemned in the judgment day. A willful ignorance will never be allowed as a plea in a man's favor. On the contrary, it will rather add to his guilt.

We learn, thirdly, from these verses, that **God is sometimes pleased to give men special opportunities and invitations.** We are told by our Lord, that Jerusalem "knew not the day of her visitation." Jerusalem had a special season of mercy and privilege. The Son of God Himself visited her. The mightiest miracles that man had ever seen were wrought around her. The most wonderful preaching that ever was heard was preached within her walls. The days of our Lord's ministry were days of the clearest calls to repentance and faith that ever any city received. They were calls so marked, peculiar, and unlike any previous calls Jerusalem had received, that it seemed impossible they should be disregarded. But they were disregarded! And our Lord declares that this disregard was one of Jerusalem's principal sins.

The subject before us is a deep and mysterious one. It requires careful stating and delicate handling, lest we should make one scripture contradict another. There seems no doubt that churches, nations, and even individuals are sometimes visited with special manifestations of God's presence, and that their neglect of such manifestations is the turning point in their spiritual ruin. Why this should take place in some cases and not in others we cannot tell. Facts, plain facts in history and biography, appear to prove that it is so. The last day will probably show the world, that there were seasons in the lives of many who died in sin, when God drew very near to them, when conscience was peculiarly alive, when there seemed but a step between them and salvation. Those seasons will probably prove to have been what our Lord calls their "day of visitation." The neglect of such seasons will probably be at last, one of the heaviest charges against their souls.

Deep as the subject is, it should teach men one practical lesson. That lesson is the immense importance of not stifling convictions, and not quenching the workings of conscience. He that resists the voice of conscience may be throwing away his last chance of salvation. That warning voice may be God's "day of visitation." The neglect of it may fill up the measure of a man's iniquity, and provoke God to let him alone forever.

We learn, lastly, from these verses, **how much Christ disapproves of the profanation of holy things.** We read that He cast the buyers and sellers out of the temple, and told them that

they had made God's house "a den of thieves." He knew how formal and ignorant the ministers of the temple were. He knew how soon the temple and its services were to be destroyed, the veil to be rent, and the priesthood to be ended. But He would have us know that a reverence is due to every place where God is worshiped. The reverence He claimed for the temple, was not for the temple as the house of sacrifice, but as "the house of prayer."

Let us remember this conduct and language of our Lord, whenever we go to a place of public worship. Christian churches no doubt are not like the Jewish temples. They have neither altars, priesthood, sacrifices, nor symbolical furniture. But they are places where God's word is read, where Christ is present, and where the Holy Spirit works on souls. These facts ought to make us grave, reverent, solemn and decorous, whenever we enter them. The man who behaves as carelessly in a church as he would in an inn, or a private dwelling, has yet much to learn. He has not the "mind of Christ."

Notes on 19:41-48

41. He wept over it. Wordsworth remarks, "Christ here proves his twofold nature, by shedding tears as man for what he foretold as God."

43. "The days will come . . ." The predictions of this and the next verse were fulfilled literally at the siege of Jerusalem under Titus. Not one word failed.

44. "The time of God's coming to you." Poole remarks: "God's

visitations are either for wrath, or mercy: for wrath, Exodus 32:34; for mercy, Jeremiah 29:10. It is plain that our Saviour uses the term here in its latter, not its former sense; and that by God's visitation is meant his visiting them by the prophets, John the Baptist, and himself."

45. Then he entered the temple area. Jerome considers our Lord's cleansing of the temple to be his greatest miracle.

46. "It is written . . ." All reformation of abuses in churches should be built on God's Word.

47. Every day he was teaching at the temple. The link between this verse and the previous verse should not be overlooked. Our Lord had just called the temple "'the house of prayer.'" Yet he proceeds to show, by his own example, that it is to be the house of teaching as well as praying.

Luke – Chap. 20

Luke 20:1-8

THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS QUESTIONED

Let us notice, firstly, in this passage, **the demand which the chief Priests and scribes made upon our Lord.** "Tell us," they said, "by what authority you do these things? and who gave you this authority?"

The spirit which prompted this demand is too evident to be mistaken. These men hated and envied Christ. They saw His influence increasing. They saw their own power waning. They resolved, if possible, to stop the progress of this new teacher; and the point on which they made their assault was His authority. His mighty works they ought to have examined. His teaching they ought, in all fairness, to have compared with their own Scriptures. But they refused to take either one course or the other. They preferred to call in question His commission.

Every true-hearted Christian who tries to do good in the world, must make up his mind to be treated like his Master. He must never be surprised to find, that the self-righteous and the worldly-minded dislike His ways. The lawfulness of his proceedings will be constantly called in question. He will be regarded as meddlesome, disorderly, and self-conceited, a pestilent fellow, and a troubler of Israel. (Acts 24:5; 1 Kings 18:17.) Scripture-readers, district-visitors, lay-agents, and unordained missionaries, are specially liable to meet with such treatment. And worst of all they will often meet with enemies, where they ought to find friends.

Let all who are attacked by the world for trying to do good, take comfort in the thought that they are only drinking of the cup which Christ drank. Their Master in heaven sympathizes with them. Let them work on patiently, and believe that, if they are faithful, their work will speak for itself. The world's opposition is sure to attend every really good work. If the servants of Christ are to cease from

every movement which the world calls in question, they will soon come to an entire stand-still. If we are to wait until the world approves our plans, and is satisfied with the propriety of our efforts, we shall never do anything on earth.

Let us notice, secondly, in this passage, **the manner in which our Lord speaks of John the Baptist's ministry.** He refers those who questioned His authority, to John's constant and unvarying testimony to Himself. "Ought they not to remember how John had spoken of Him as the Lamb of God—as One whose shoe-latchets he was not worthy to bear—as One who had the fan in His hand, and had the Spirit without measure? Ought they not to recollect that they and all Jerusalem had gone out to John's baptism, and confessed that John was a prophet? Yet John had always told them plainly that Christ was the Messiah! Surely, if they were honest they would not come now to demand His authority. If they really believed John to be a prophet sent from God, they were bound to believe that Jesus was the Christ."

It may reasonably be doubted whether the importance of John the Baptist's ministry is generally understood by Christians. The brightness of our Lord's history overshadows the history of His forerunner, and the result is that John's baptism and preaching do not receive the attention which they deserve. Yet it should never be forgotten, that the ministry of the Baptist was the only New Testament ministry foretold in the Old Testament, excepting that of Christ. It was a ministry which produced an immense effect on the

Jewish mind and aroused the expectation of Israel from one end of Palestine to the other. Above all, it was a ministry which made the Jews without excuse in their rejection of Christ, when Christ appeared. They could not say that they were taken by surprise when our Lord began to preach. Their minds had been thoroughly prepared for His appearing. To see the full sinfulness of the Jews, and the entire justice of the judgments which came on them after crucifying our Lord, we must remember the ministry of John the Baptist.

However little man may esteem the work of faithful ministers there is One in heaven who sees it, and keeps account of all their labor. However little their proceedings may be understood, and however much they may be slandered and misrepresented, the Lord Jesus Christ writes all their doings in His book. He lives who testified to the importance of John the Baptist's ministry when John was dead and buried. He will yet testify to the toil of every one of His faithful servants at the last day. In the world they may have tribulation and disappointment. But they are not forgotten by Christ.

Let us notice, lastly, in this passage, **the falsehood of which our Lord's enemies were guilty.** In reply to our Lord's question whether John's baptism was from heaven or of men, "they answered that they did not know." This was a downright untruth. They could have told, but they would not. They knew that if they said what they really believed they would condemn themselves. If they confessed

that John was a prophet sent from God, they would be guilty of a gross inconsistency in not believing his testimony about Christ.

Falsehoods like this, it may be feared, are only too common among unconverted men. Thousands will say anything rather than acknowledge themselves to be in the wrong. Lying is just one of the sins to which the human heart is most naturally inclined, and one of the commonest sins in the world. Gehazi, Ananias, and Sapphira have more followers and imitators than Peter and Paul. The number of lies which are constantly told by men, to save their own credit, and to cover over their own wickedness, is probably far greater than we are aware.

The true servant of Christ will do well to remember these things as he travels through this world. He must not believe all he hears, and especially in the matter of religion. He must not suppose that unconverted men really believe in their own hearts all that they say. They often feel more than they appear to feel. They often say things against religion and religious people, which they secretly know to be untrue. They often know the Gospel is true, but have not the courage to confess it. They often know the Christians life is right, but are too proud to say so. The chief priests and scribes are not the only people who deal dishonestly in religion, and say what they know to be false. Then let the servant of Christ go patiently on his way. Those who are now his enemies, will one day confess that he was right, though they used to cry loudly that he was wrong.

Notes on 20:1-8

4. "From heaven." This means "from God." See Daniel 4:26; Luke 15:18, 21.

6. "All the people will stone us." Grotius remarks, "They had themselves accustomed the people to this violence. When they could not legally convict their enemies, they incited the people to stone them. It was called the judgment of zeal." See John 10:31; Acts 14:19.

LUKE 20:9-19

THE PARABLE OF THE TENANTS

The parable we have now read, is one of the very few which are recorded more than once by the Gospel writers. Matthew, Mark, and Luke, all give it at full length. This three-fold repetition is alone sufficient to point out the importance of its contents.

The parable, no doubt, was specially intended for the Jews to whom it was addressed. But we must not confine its application to them. It contains lessons which should be remembered in all churches of Christ as long as the world stands.

In the first place, the parable shows us **the deep corruption of human nature.** The conduct of the wicked "farmers" is a vivid representation of man's dealings with God. It is a faithful picture of the history of the Jewish church. In spite of privileges, such as no nation ever had, in the face of warnings such as no people ever received, the Jews rebelled against God's lawful authority, refused to

give Him His rightful dues, rejected the counsel of His prophets, and at length crucified His only-begotten Son.

It is a no less faithful picture of the history of all the Gentile churches. Called as they were out of heathen darkness by infinite mercy, they have done nothing worthy of the vocation with which they were called. On the contrary, they have allowed false doctrines and wicked practices to spring up rankly among them, and have crucified Christ afresh. It is a mournful fact that in hardness, unbelief, superstition, and self-righteousness—the Christian churches, as a whole, are little better than the Jewish church of our Lord's time. Both are described with painful correctness in the story of the wicked farmers. In both we may point to countless privileges misused, and countless warnings despised.

Let us often pray that we may thoroughly understand the sinfulness of man's heart. Few of us, it may be feared, have the least conception of the strength and virulence of the spiritual disease with which we are born. Few entirely realize that "the carnal mind is enmity against God," and that unconverted human nature, if it had the power, would cast its Maker down from His throne. The behavior of the farmers before us, whatever we may please to think, is only a picture of what every natural man would do to God, if he only could. To see these things is of great importance. *Christ is never fully valued, until sin is clearly seen. We must know the depth and malignity of our disease, in order to appreciate the great Physician.*

In the second place, this parable **shows us the amazing patience and patience of God.** The conduct of the "owner of the vineyard" is a vivid representation of God's dealings with man. It is a faithful picture of His merciful dealings with the Jewish church. Prophet after prophet was sent to warn Israel of his danger. Message after message was repeatedly sent, notwithstanding insults and injuries heaped on the messengers.

It is a no less faithful picture of His gracious treatment of the Gentile churches. For eighteen hundred years He has suffered their hurtful manners. They have repeatedly tried Him by false doctrines, superstitions, and contempt of His word, Yet He has repeatedly granted them seasons of refreshing, raised up for them holy ministers and mighty reformers, and not cut them off, notwithstanding all their persecutions. The churches of Christ have no right to boast. They are debtors to God for innumerable mercies, no less than the Jews were in our Lord's time. They have not been dealt with according to their sins, nor rewarded according to their iniquities.

We should learn to be more thankful for God's mercy. We have probably little idea of the extent of our obligations to it, and of the number of gracious messages which the Lord of the vineyard is constantly sending to our souls. The last day will unfold to our wondering eyes a long list of unacknowledged kindnesses, of which while we lived we took no notice.

Mercy we shall find was indeed God's darling attribute. "He delights in mercy." (Micah 7:18.) Mercies before conversion, mercies after conversion, mercies at every step of their journey on earth, will be revealed to the minds of saved saints, and make them ashamed of their own thanklessness. Sparing mercies, providential mercies, mercies in the way of warnings, mercies in the way of sudden visitations, will all be set forth in order before the minds of lost sinners, and confound them by the exhibition of their own hardness and unbelief. We shall all find that God was often speaking to us when we did not hear, and sending us messages which we did not regard. Few texts will be brought out so prominently at the last day as that of Peter— "The Lord is patient toward us, not willing that any should perish." (2 Peter 3:9.)

In the last place, this parable shows us **the severity of God's judgments when they fall on obstinate sinners.** The punishment of the wicked farmers is a vivid representation of God's final dealings with such as go on still in wickedness. At the time when our Lord spoke this parable, it was a prophetical picture of the approaching ruin of the Jewish church and nation. The vineyard of the Lord in the land of Israel, was about to be taken from its unfaithful tenants. Jerusalem was to be destroyed. The temple was to be burned. The Jews were to be scattered over the earth.

At the present time, it may be feared, it is a mournful picture of things yet to come on the Gentile churches in the latter days. The judgments of God will yet fall on unbelieving Christians, as they fell

on unbelieving Jews. The solemn warning of Paul to the Romans will yet receive an accomplishment— "If you continue not in God's goodness, you also shall be cut off." (Rom. 11:22.)

We must never flatter ourselves that God cannot be angry. He is indeed a God of infinite grace and compassion. But it is also written, that He is "a consuming fire." (Heb. 12:29.) His spirit will not always strive with men. (Gen. 6:3.) There will be a day when His patience will come to an end, and when He will arise to dreadfully judge the earth. Happy will they be who are found hidden in the ark, in the day of the Lord's anger! Of all wrath, none can be conceived so dreadful as "the wrath of the Lamb." The man on whom the "stone cut out without hands" falls at His second coming, will indeed be crushed to powder. (Dan. 2:34, 35.)

Do we know these things, and do we live up to our knowledge? The chief priests and elders, we are told, "perceived that this parable was spoken against them." But they were too proud to repent, and too hardened to turn from their sins. Let us beware of doing likewise.

Notes on 20:9-19

9. He went on to tell the people this parable. The parable itself is a remarkable combination of figure, history, and prophecy. Cyril calls it "the history of Israel in a compendium." The parable of the sower, the parable of the mustard seed, and the parable of the wicked farmers are the only parables which are three times recorded in the Gospels.

"A vineyard." The vineyard is used parabolically in Isaiah: "The

vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the house of Israel" (5:7). Here it seems to mean the land of Judea and the special privileges of the Jewish nation.

13. "'My son, whom I love.'" This part of the parable can be interpreted only in one way. The Lord Jesus speaks about himself and the treatment which he was on the point of receiving at the hands of the priests and elders. He knew that as he spoke, they were already plotting his death and saying, "Let's kill him" (verse 14).

16. "He will come and kill." Here the parable passes into prophecy. Our Lord predicts the destruction of Jerusalem, the scattering of the Jews, and the calling of the Gentiles to enjoy their privileges.

17. "'The stone.'" This means Christ. Though rejected by those who called themselves leaders and builders in the Jewish church, it was prophesied that he would become the capstone. And as it was foretold, so it would be. See Psalm 118:22.

LUKE 20:20-26

PAYING TAXES TO CAESAR

Let us mark, for one thing, in this passage, the cloak of goodness under which some of our Lord's enemies approached Him. We read that they "sent forth spies, who pretended to be honest men." We read further that they attempted to trick Him by flattering words—"Teacher, we know that you speak and teach what is right and are not influenced by what others think. You sincerely teach the ways of God." These words sounded well. An ignorant bystander would have said, "These are sincere inquirers after truth!" But all was hollow and

unreal. It was the wolf putting on the sheep's clothing, under the vain idea of deceiving the shepherd. "Their words were smoother than butter," yet there was "war in their hearts." (Psalm 55:21.)

The true servant of Christ must expect to meet people of this description, as long as the world stands. There never will be lacking those, who from selfish or sinister motives will profess with their lips to love Christ, while in heart they deny Him. There will always be some, who "by good words and fair speeches," will attempt to deceive the heart of the simple. The union of "burning lips and a wicked heart," is far from uncommon. There are probably few congregations which do not contain some of those whom Solomon likens to "potsherds, covered with silver dross." (Rom. 16:18. Prov. 26:23.)

He that would not be often deceived in this wicked world, must carefully remember these things. We must exercise a wise caution as we travel through life, and not play the part of the "simple who believes every word." (Prov. 14:15.) We must not lightly put confidence in every new religious volunteer, nor hastily take it for granted that all people are good who talk like good men. Such caution at first sight may appear narrow-minded and uncharitable. But the longer we live the more shall we find that it is needful. We shall discover by experience that all is not gold that glitters, and all are not true Christians who make a loud profession of Christianity. The *language* of Christianity is precisely that part of religion which a false Christian finds it most easy to attain. The walk of a man's daily life, and not the talk of his lips, is the only safe test of his character.

Let us mark, for another thing, in these verses, **the consummate wisdom of our Lord's answer to His enemies.** We read that a most difficult and subtle question was proposed to Him for solution. "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" It was a question eminently calculated to entangle anyone who attempted to answer it. If our Lord had replied that it was not lawful to pay tribute to Caesar, He would have been accused to Pilate as a rebel against the Roman power. If our Lord had replied that it was lawful to pay tribute to Caesar, He would have been denounced to the people as regardless of the rights and privileges of the Jewish nation. An answer which would not involve our Lord in difficulties, seemed at first sight impossible to be found. But He who is truly called "the wisdom of God," found an answer which silenced His adversaries. He bade them show Him a Roman coin. He asked them whose image and superscription was on that Roman coin? "They answered and said, Caesar's." At once our Lord made that Roman coin the groundwork of a reply, at which even His enemies were obliged to marvel. "Render," He said, "unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's, and unto God the things which be God's."

They were to "render to CAESAR the things which were Caesar's." Their own lips had just confessed that Caesar had a certain temporal authority over them. They used the money which Caesar had coined. It was a lawful tender between man and man. They probably had no objection to receive gifts and payments in Roman coin. They must not therefore pretend to say that all payments to Caesar were unlawful. By their own admission he exercised some dominion over

them. Let them obey that dominion in all temporal things. If they did not refuse to use Caesar's coin, let them not refuse to pay Caesar's temporal dues.

They were to "render to GOD the things which were God's." There were many dues which God required at their hands which they might easily pay, if they were inclined. Honor, love, obedience, faith, fear, prayer, spiritual worship, were payments to God which they might daily make, and payments with which the Roman government did not interfere. They could not say that Caesar made such payments impossible. Let them see to it that they gave to God His dues in spiritual things, as well as to Caesar his dues in temporal things. There was no necessity for collision between the demands of their temporal and their heavenly sovereign. In temporal things, let them obey the powers, under whose authority they allowed themselves to be. In spiritual things let them do as their forefathers had done, and obey God.

The principles laid down by our Lord in this well-known sentence are deeply instructive. Well would it have been for the peace of the world, if they had been more carefully weighed and more wisely applied!

The attempts of the civil power in some countries to control men's consciences by intolerant interference, and the attempts of the church in other countries to interfere with the action of the civil power, have repeatedly led to strifes, wars, rebellions, and social disorder. The injuries which the cause of true religion has received

from morbid scrupulosity on one side; and servile compliance to state demands on the other, have been neither few nor small. Happy is he who has attained to a sound mind on the whole subject! To distinguish rightly between the things of Caesar, and the things of God, and to pay to each their real dues regularly, habitually, and cheerfully, is a great help towards a quiet and peaceable life.

Let us often pray that we may have wisdom from above, in order to answer rightly, when perplexing questions are put to us. The servant of Christ must expect a portion like his Master. He must count it no strange thing, if the wicked and worldly-minded endeavor to "entangle him in his talk," and to provoke him to speak unadvisedly with his lips. In order to be prepared for such occasions let him often ask the Lord Jesus for the gift of sound wisdom and a discreet tongue. In the presence of those who watch for our halting, it is a great thing to know what to say and how to say it, when to be silent, and when to speak. Blessed be God, He who silenced the chief priests and scribes by His wise answers, still lives to help His people and has all power to help them. But He loves to be entreated.

Notes on 20:20-26

22. "Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" The question our Lord's enemies posed was done so cleverly that it seemed that he had to reply to an impossible dilemma. Whatever answer he gave, it seemed that he would offend one of the two parties. He must either offend the friends of the Roman supremacy or offend the zealots among the Jews.

23. Their duplicity. This Greek word is found only five times in the New Testament. It is the same word used to describe Satan's "cunning" in tempting Eve (2 Corinthians 11:3).
25. "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's . . ." Our Lord probably had in view two parties among his hearers. One party was that of the Jewish zealots. To them he said, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's." The other party was that of the worldly Herodians. To them he said, "Give to God what is God's."

LUKE 20:27-40

RESURRECTION AND MARRIAGE

We see in these verses **what an old thing unbelief is.** We are told that "there came to our Lord certain of the Sadducees, who deny that there is any resurrection." Even in the Jewish Church, the Church of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, the Church of Moses, and Samuel, and David, and the prophets—we find that there were bold, avowed, unblushing skeptics. If infidelity like this existed among God's peculiar ? If these things existed in a green tree, what must have been the condition of the dry?

We must never be surprised when we hear of infidels, deists, heretics and free-thinkers rising up in the Church, and drawing away disciples after them. We must not count it a rare and a strange thing. It is only one among many proofs that man is a fallen and corrupt being. Since the day when the devil said to Eve "you shall not surely die," and Eve believed him, there never has been wanting a constant

succession of forms of unbelief. There is nothing new about any of the modern theories of infidelity. There is not one of those who is not an old disease under a new name. They are all mushrooms which spring up spontaneously in the hot-bed of human nature. It is not in reality an astonishing thing that there should rise up so many who call in question the truth of the Bible. The marvel is rather, that in a fallen world the sect of the Sadducees should be so small.

Let us take comfort in the thought that in the long run of years the truth will always prevail. Its advocates may often be feeble, and their arguments very weak. But there is an inherent strength in the cause itself which keeps it alive. Bold infidels like Porphyry, and Julian, and Hobbes, and Hume, and Voltaire, and Paine arise from time to time and make a stir in the world. But they produce no lasting impression. They pass away like the Sadducees and go to their own place. The great evidences of Christianity remain like the Pyramids, unshaken and unmoved. The "gates of hell" shall never prevail against Christ's truth. (Matt. 16:18.)

We see, secondly, in these verses, **what a favorite weapon of skeptics is a 'supposed case'.** We are told that the Sadducees brought to our Lord a difficulty arising out of the case of a woman who had married seven brothers in succession. They professed a desire to know "whose wife of the seven" the woman would be in the resurrection. The intention of the inquiry is clear and plain. They wished to pour contempt on the whole doctrine of a life to come. The case itself is one which we cannot suppose had really arisen. It seems

the highest probability that it was a story invented for the occasion, in order to raise a difficulty and found an argument.

Reasoning of this kind will often meet us, if we are thrown into company with people of a skeptical turn of mind. Some imaginary difficulty or complication, and that connected probably with some fancied state of things in the world to come, will often prove the stronghold of an unbeliever. “He cannot understand it! He cannot reconcile it! It seems to him revolting and absurd! It offends his common sense!”—Such is the language which is often used.

Reasoning of this kind should never shake us for a moment. For one thing, we have nothing to do with ‘supposed and imaginary cases’. It will be time enough to discuss them when they really arise. Enough for us to talk and argue about facts as they are. For another thing, it is mere waste of time to speculate about difficulties connected with a state of existence in a world to come. We know so little of anything beyond the visible world around us, that we are very poor judges of what is possible or not possible in the unseen world. A thousand things beyond the grave must necessarily be unintelligible to us at present. In the meantime it is our wisdom to wait patiently. What we don’t know now, we shall know hereafter.

We see, thirdly, in these verses, **something of the true character of the saints’ existence in the world to come.** We read that our Lord said to the Pharisees, “But that is not the way it will be in the age to come. For those worthy of being raised from the dead won’t be married then. And they will never die again. In these

respects they are like angels. They are children of God raised up to new life."

Two things are abundantly clear from this description, respecting the saints in glory. For one thing, their happiness is not a carnal happiness, but a spiritual one. "They neither marry nor are given in marriage." The glorified body shall be very unlike what it is now. It shall no longer be a clog and a hindrance to the believer's better nature. It shall be a fit habitation for a glorified soul. For another thing, their happiness shall he eternal. "They can die no more." No births shall be needed, to supply the constant waste caused by death. Weakness, and sickness, and disease, and infirmity, shall be no more at all. The curse shall be clean removed. Death himself shall die.

The nature of what we call "heaven" is a subject which should often engage our thoughts. Few subjects in religion are so calculated to show the utter folly of unconverted men, and the dreadful danger in which they stand. A heaven where all the joy is spiritual, would surely be no heaven to an unconverted soul! Few subjects are so likely to cheer and animate the mind of a true Christian. The holiness and spiritual-mindedness which he follows after in this life will be the very atmosphere of his eternal abode. The cares of family relationships shall no longer distract his mind. The fear of death shall no longer bring him into bondage. Then let him press on and bear his cross patiently. *Heaven will make amends for all.*

We see, lastly, in these verses, **the antiquity of belief in a resurrection.** Our Lord shows that it was the belief of Moses. "That

the dead are raised, even Moses showed at the burning bush."

Faith in a resurrection and a life to come has been to universal belief of all God's people from the beginning of the world. Abel, and Enoch, and Noah, and Abraham and all the Patriarchs, were men who looked forward to a better inheritance than they had here below. "They looked for a city which had foundations." "They desired a better country, that is, a heavenly one." (Heb. 11:10-16.)

Let us anchor our own souls firmly on this great foundation truth, "that we shall all rise again." Whatever ancient or modern Sadducees may say, let us believe firmly that we are not made like the beasts that perish, and that there shall be "a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust." (Acts 24:15.) The recollection of this truth will cheer us in the day of trial, and comfort us in the hour of death. We shall feel that though earthly prosperity fail us, there is a life to come where there is no change. We shall feel that though worms destroy our body, yet in the flesh we shall see God. (Job 19:26.) We shall not lie always in the grave. Our God is "not a God of the dead, but of the living."

Notes on 20:27-40

28. "The man must marry the widow." The law of Moses referred to here (Deuteronomy 25:5) ought to be carefully studied and compared with Leviticus 18:16.

34. "The people of this age." This does not refer to unconverted people but simply to people who are living on earth.

Christ'

LUKE 20:41-47

WHOSE SON IS CHRIST

Let us observe in this passage, **what striking testimony to Christ's divinity the book of Psalms contains.** We read that after patiently replying to the attacks of His enemies, our Lord in turn propounds a question to them. He asks them to explain an expression in the hundred and tenth Psalm, where David speaks of the Messiah as his Lord. To this question the Scribes could find no answer. They did not see the mighty truth, that Messiah was to be God as well as man, and that while as man He was to be David's son, as God He was to be David's Lord. Their ignorance of Scripture was thus exposed before all the people. Professing themselves to be instructors of others and possessors of the key of knowledge, they were proved unable to explain what their own Scriptures contained. We may well believe that of all the defeats which our Lord's malicious enemies met with, none galled them more than this. Nothing so abashes the pride of man, as to be publicly proved ignorant of that which he fancies is his own peculiar department of knowledge.

We have probably little idea how much deep truth is contained in the book of Psalms. No part of the Bible perhaps is better known in the letter, and none so little understood in the spirit. We err greatly if we suppose that it is nothing but a record of David's feelings, of David's experience, David's praises, and David's prayers. The hand that held the pen was generally David's. But the subject matter was

often something far deeper and higher than the history of the son of Jesse.

The book of Psalms, in a word, is a book full of Christ—Christ suffering—Christ in humiliation—Christ dying—Christ rising again—Christ coming the second time—Christ reigning over all. Both the advents are here—the advent in suffering to bear the cross—the advent in power to wear the crown. Both the kingdoms are here—the kingdom of grace, during which the elect are gathered—the kingdom of glory, when every tongue shall confess that Jesus is Lord. Let us always read the Psalms with a peculiar reverence. Let us say to ourselves as we read, "A greater than David is here."

The remark now made, applies more or less to all the Bible. There is a fullness about the whole Book, which is a strong proof of its inspiration. The more we read it, the more it will seem to contain. All other books become threadbare, if they are constantly read. Their weak points, and their shallowness become every year more apparent. The Bible alone seems broader, and deeper, and fuller, the oftener it is studied. We have no need to look for allegorical and mystical meanings. The fresh truths that will constantly spring up before our eyes, are simple, plain, and clear. Of such truths the Bible is an inexhaustible mine. Nothing can account for this, but the great fact, that the Bible is the word, not of man, but of God.

Let us observe, secondly, in this passage, **how abominable is hypocrisy in the eyes of Christ.** We are told that in the presence of all the people He said unto His disciples— "Beware of these

teachers of religious law! For they love to parade in flowing robes and to have everyone bow to them as they walk in the marketplaces. And how they love the seats of honor in the synagogues and at banquets. But they shamelessly cheat widows out of their property, and then, to cover up the kind of people they really are, they make long prayers in public."

This was a bold and remarkable warning. It was a public denunciation, we must remember, of men who "sat in Moses' seat," and were the recognized teachers of the Jewish people. It teaches us clearly that there may be times when the sins of people in high religious places make it a positive duty to protest publicly against them. It shows us that it is possible to speak out, and yet not to "speak evil of dignities."

No sin seems to be regarded by Christ as more sinful than hypocrisy. None certainly drew forth from His lips such frequent, strong, and withering condemnation, during the whole course of His ministry. He was ever full of mercy and compassion for the chief of sinners. "Fury was not in Him" when He saw Zaccheus, the penitent thief, Matthew the tax-collector, Saul the persecutor, and the woman in Simon's house. But when He saw Scribes and Pharisees wearing a mere cloak of religion, and pretending to great outward sanctity, while their hearts were full of wickedness, His righteous soul seems to have been full of indignation. Eight times in one chapter (Matt. 23.) we find Him saying, "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites."

Let us not forget that the Lord Jesus never changes. He is the same yesterday, and today, and forever. Whatever else we are in religion let us be true. However feeble on faith, and hope, and love, and obedience may be, let us see to it that they are real, genuine, and sincere. Let us abhor the very idea of play-acting and mask-wearing in our Christianity. At any rate let us be thorough. It is a striking fact that the very first piece of armor which Paul recommends to the Christian soldier is "truth." "Stand therefore," he says, "having your loins girt about with truth." (Eph. 6:14.)

Let us observe, lastly, in this passage, that **there will be degrees of condemnation and misery in hell.** The words of our Lord are distinct and express. He says of those who live and die hypocrites, "these shall receive greater damnation."

The subject opened up in these words is a deeply painful one. The reality and eternity of future punishment are among the great foundation truths of revealed religion, which it is hard to think upon without a shudder. But it is well to have all that the Bible teaches about heaven and hell firmly fixed on our minds. The Bible teaches distinctly that there will be degrees of glory in heaven. It teaches with no less distinctness, both here and elsewhere, that there will be degrees of misery in hell.

Who, after all, are those who will finally receive condemnation? This is the practical point that concerns us most. All who will not come to Christ—all who know not God and obey not the Gospel—all who refuse to repent, and go on still in wickedness, all such will be

finally condemned. They will reap according as they have sown. God wills not their eternal ruin. But if they will not hear His voice, they must die in their sins. But who among those who are condemned will receive the heaviest condemnation? It will not fall on heathens who never heard the truth. It will not fall on ignorant and neglected Englishmen, for whose souls, however sunk in profligacy, no man cared. It will fall on those who had great light and knowledge, but made no proper use of it. It will fall on those who professed great sanctity and religiousness, but in reality clung to their sins. In one word, the hypocrite will have the lowest place in hell. These are dreadful things. But they are true.

Notes on 20:41-47

41. "How is it that they say the Christ is the Son of David?" Note that Christ was called "Son of David" by sick people as they called out to our Lord to cure them. They meant more than appears at first sight. The expression was tantamount to a confession that our Lord was the Messiah.

46. "Love to be greeted." This expression is explained in Matthew 23:7-10. The teachers of the law loved to be called by honorable titles such as, "Rabbi," "Father," "Master," and "Teacher" in public. Men often profess a desire to magnify their office when in truth they want to magnify themselves.

47. "They devour widows' houses." This probably means that the teachers of the law, under the pretense of charity, took charge of the property of widows and pretended to manage it for them. But instead

of managing it honestly and faithfully, they embezzled it and privately used it for their own interests.

Luke – Chap. 21

LUKE 21:1-4

THE WIDOW'S OFFERING

We learn, for one thing, from these verses, **how keenly our Lord Jesus Christ observes the things that are done upon earth.** We read that "He looked up and saw the rich men casting their gifts into the treasury. And He saw also a certain poor widow casting in two pennies." We might well suppose that our Lord's mind at this season would have been wholly occupied with the things immediately before Him. His betrayal, His unjust judgment, His cross, His passion, His death, were all close at hand; and He knew it. The approaching destruction of the temple, the scattering of the Jews, the long period of time before His second advent, were all things which were spread before His mind like a picture. It was but a few moments ago he spoke of them. And yet at a time like this we find Him taking note of all that is going on around Him! He thinks it not beneath Him to observe the conduct of a "certain poor widow."

Let us remember, that the Lord Jesus never changes. The thing that we read of in the passage before us is the thing that is going on all over the world. "The eyes of the Lord are in every place." (Prov.

15:3.) Nothing is too little to escape His observation. No act is too trifling to be noted down in the book of His remembrance. The same hand that formed the sun, moon, and stars, was the hand that formed the tongue of the gnat and the wing of the fly with perfect wisdom. The same eye that sees the council-chambers of kings and emperors, is the eye that notices all that goes on in the laborer's cottage. "All things are naked and opened to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." (Heb. 4:13.) He measures littleness and greatness by a very different measure from the measure of man. Events in our own daily life, to which we attach no importance, are often very grave and serious matters in Christ's sight. Actions and deeds in the weekly history of a poor man, which the great of this world think trivial and contemptible, are often registered as weighty and important in Christ's books. He lives who marked the gift of one "poor widow" as attentively as the gifts of many "rich men."

Let the believer of low degree take comfort in this mighty truth. Let him remember daily that his Master in heaven takes account of everything that is done on earth, and that the lives of cottagers are noticed by Him as much as the lives of kings. The acts of a poor believer have as much dignity about them as the acts of a prince. The little contributions to religious objects which the laborer makes out of his scanty earnings, are as much valued in God's sight as a ten thousand dollar check from a noble. To know this thoroughly is one great secret of contentment. To feel that Christ looks at what a man *is,* and not at what a man *has,* will help to preserve us from envious and murmuring thoughts. Happy is he who has learned to say with

David, “I am poor and needy; but the Lord thinks upon me.” (Psalm 40:17.)

We learn, for another thing, from these verses, **who they are whom Christ reckons most liberal in giving money to religious purposes.** We read that He said of her who cast in two mites into the treasury, “She has cast in more than all the others. All these of their abundance have cast in unto the offerings of God—but she, out of her poverty has cast in all that she had to live on.” These words teach us that Christ looks at something more than the mere amount of men’s gifts in measuring their liberality. He looks at the proportion which their gifts bear to their property. He looks at the degree of self-denial which their giving entails upon them. He would have us know that *some people appear to give much to religious purposes who in God’s sight give very little, and that some appear to give very little who in God’s sight give very much.*

The subject before us is peculiarly heart-searching. On no point perhaps do professing Christians come short so much as in the matter of giving money to God’s cause. Thousands, it may be feared, know nothing whatever of “giving” as a Christian duty. The little giving that there is, is confined entirely to a select few in the churches. Even among those who give, it may be boldly asserted, that the poor generally give far more in proportion to their means than the rich. These are plain facts which cannot be denied. The experience of all who collect for religious societies and Christian charities, will testify that they are correct and true.

Let us judge ourselves in this matter of giving, that we may not be judged and condemned at the great day. Let it be a settled principle with us to watch against stinginess, and whatever else we do with our money, to give regularly and habitually to the cause of God. Let us remember, that although Christ's work does not depend on our money, yet Christ is pleased to test the reality of our grace by allowing us to help Him. If we can not find it in our hearts to give anything to Christ's cause, we may well doubt the reality of our faith and charity. Let us recollect that our use of the money God has given us, will have to be accounted for at the last day. The "Judge of all" will be He who noticed the widow's mite. Our incomes and expenditures will be brought to light before an assembled world. If we prove in that day to have been rich toward ourselves, but poor toward God, it would be good if we had never been born. Not least, let us look round the world and ask where are the men that were ever ruined by liberal giving to godly purposes, and who ever found himself really poorer by lending to the Lord? We shall find that the words of Solomon are strictly true— "There is one that scatters and yet increases; and there is one that withholds more than is fit, and it tends to poverty." (Prov. 11:24.)

Finally, **let us pray for rich men**, who as yet know nothing of the luxury of "giving," that their riches may not be their ruin. Hundreds of charitable and religious movements are standing still continually for lack of funds. Great and effectual doors are open to the church of Christ for doing good all over the world, but for lack of money few can be sent to enter in by them. Let us pray for the Holy

Spirit to come down on all our congregations, and to teach all our worshipers what to do with their money. Of all people on earth, none ought to be such liberal givers as Christians. All that they have, they owe to the free gift of God. Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Gospel, the Bible, the means of grace, the hope of glory, all are undeserved, incomparable *gifts,* which millions of heathen never heard of. The possessors of such gifts ought surely to be "ready to distribute" and "willing to give." A giving Savior ought to have giving disciples. Freely we have received—freely we ought to give. (1 Tim. 6:18; Matt. 10:8.)

Notes on 21:1-4

1. The rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. Major says, "In the second court of the temple, in the court of the women, were fixed thirteen chests, with inscriptions, directing to what use the offerings in each were allotted. Into one of these the widow put her two very small copper coins. This court was therefore called 'the treasury' (John 8:20). These offerings were made at the three great feasts, as tithes and dues, and to fulfill the precept, 'no man should appear before the Lord empty-handed'" (Deuteronomy 16:16: see also Exodus 23:15; 2 Kings 12:9).

4. "Put in all she had to live on." A person so poor as the widow would from necessity have to live from hand to mouth and own no property or capital except what she received on a daily basis.

LUKE 21:5-9

SIGNS OF THE END OF THE AGE

Let us notice in this passage, **our Lord Jesus Christ's words about the temple at Jerusalem.** We read that some spoke of it, "how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts." They praised it for its outward beauty. They admired its size, its architectural grandeur, and its costly decorations. But they met with no response from our Lord. We read that he said, "As for these things which you behold, the days will come in the which there shall not be left one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down."

These words were a striking prophecy. How strange and startling they must have sounded to Jewish ears, an English mind can hardly conceive. They were spoken of a building which every Israelite regarded with almost idolatrous veneration. They were spoken of a building which contained the ark, the holy of holies, and the symbolical furniture formed on a pattern given by God Himself. They were spoken of a building associated with most of the principal names in Jewish history; with David, Solomon, Hezekiah, Josiah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezra, and Nehemiah. They were spoken of a building toward which every devout Jew turned his face in every quarter of the world, when he offered up his daily prayers. (1 Kings 8:44; Jonah 2:4; Dan. 6:10.)

But they were words spoken advisedly. They were spoken in order to teach us the mighty truth that *the true glory of a place of worship does not consist in outward ornaments*. "The Lord sees not as man sees." (1 Sam. 16:7.) Man looks at the outward appearance of a building. The Lord looks for spiritual worship, and the presence of

the Holy Spirit. In the temple at Jerusalem these things were utterly lacking, and therefore Jesus Christ could take no pleasure in it.

Professing Christians will do well to remember our Lord's words in the present day. It is fit and right beyond doubt that buildings set apart for Christian worship, should be worthy of the purpose for which they are used. Whatever is done for Christ ought to be well done. The house in which the Gospel is preached, and the Word of God read, and prayer offered up, ought to lack nothing that can make it lovely and substantial.

But let it never be forgotten that the material part of a Christian Church is by far the least important part of it. The fairest combinations of marble, and stone and wood, and painted glass, are worthless in God's sight, unless there is truth in the pulpit and grace in the congregation. The dens and caves in which the early Christians used to meet, were probably far more beautiful in the eyes of Christ than the noblest cathedral that was ever reared by man. The temple in which the Lord Jesus delights most, is a broken and contrite heart, renewed by the Holy Spirit.

Let us notice for another thing in this passage, **our Lord Jesus Christ's solemn warning against deception.** His striking words about the temple drew from His disciples an important question—"Master, when shall these things be? and what sign will there be, when these things shall come to pass?" Our Lord's reply to that question was long and full. And it began with a pointed caution, "Take heed that you be not deceived."

The position which this caution occupies is very remarkable. It stands in the forefront of a prophecy of vast extent and universal importance to all Christians—a prophecy reaching from the day in which it was delivered, to the day of the second advent—a prophecy revealing matters of the most tremendous interest both to Jews and Gentiles—and a prophecy of which a large portion remains to be fulfilled. And the very first sentence of this wondrous prophecy is a caution against deception, “Take heed that you be not deceived.”

The necessity of this caution has been continually proved in the history of the Church of Christ. On no subject perhaps have divines made so many mistakes as in the interpretation of unfulfilled prophecy. On no subject have they shown so completely the weakness of man’s intellect, and confirmed so thoroughly the words of Paul, “We see through a glass darkly—we know in part.” (1 Cor. 13:12.) Dogmatism, positiveness, controversial bitterness, obstinacy in maintaining untenable positions, rash assertions and speculations, have too often brought discredit on the whole subject of the prophetical Scriptures, and caused the enemies of Christianity to blaspheme. There are only too many books on prophetical interpretation, on the title-pages of which might be justly written, “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?”

Let us learn from our Lord’s warning words to pray for a humble, teachable spirit, whenever we open the pages of unfulfilled prophecy. Here, if anywhere, we need the heart of a little child, and the prayer “open my eyes.” (Psalm 119:18.) Let us beware, on the one side, of

that lazy indifference which turns away from all prophetical Scripture, on account of its difficulties. Let us beware, on the other side, of that dogmatical and arrogant spirit, which makes men forget that they are students, and talk as confidently as if they were prophets themselves. Above all, let us read prophetical Scripture with a thorough conviction that the study carries with it a blessing, and that more light may be expected on it every year. The promise remains in full force, "Blessed is he that reads." At the time of the end, the vision shall be unsealed. (Rev. 13; Dan. 12:9.)

Notes on 21:5-9

5. Beautiful stones. The enormous size of the stones which Herod used to build the temple at its last restoration is especially mentioned by Josephus. He says that "many of them were about twenty-five cubits in length, eight in height, and twelve in breadth." A cubit was about twenty-two inches.

Gifts. Tacitus, the Roman historian, and Josephus, the Jewish writer, both mention the enormous riches contained in the temple, consisting chiefly of offerings given by pious people or by rulers who wanted to pay respect to the building. In particular there was a golden vine given by Herod, with clusters of grapes as tall as a man. Many of these offerings were suspended in the portico of the temple, so that everyone could see them.

6. "Not one stone will be left on another." These words were literally fulfilled when Titus took Jerusalem.

LUKE 21:10-19

We should notice, for one thing, in this passage, **Christ's prediction concerning the nations of the world.** He says, "Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom—and great earthquakes shall be in diverse places, and famines and pestilences—and fearful sights, and great signs shall there be from heaven."

These words no doubt received a partial fulfillment in the days when Jerusalem was taken by the Romans, and the Jews were led into captivity. It was a season of unparalleled desolation to Judea, and the countries round about Judea. The last days of the Jewish dispensation were wound up by a struggle which for bloodshed, misery, and tribulation, has never been equaled since the world began.

But the words before us have yet to receive a more complete accomplishment. They describe the time which shall immediately precede the second advent of Jesus Christ. The "time of the end" shall be a time of war, and not of universal peace. The Christian dispensation shall pass away like the Jewish one, amid wars, tumults, and desolation, amid a general crash of empires and kingdoms, such as the eyes of man have never yet seen.

A thorough understanding of these things is of great importance to our souls. Nothing is so calculated to chill the heart and dampen the faith of a Christian as indulgence in unscriptural expectations. Let us dismiss from our minds the vain idea that nations will ever give up wars entirely, before Jesus Christ comes again. So long as the

devil is the prince of this world, and the hearts of the many are unconverted, so long there must be strife and fighting. There will be no universal peace before the second advent of the Prince of peace. Then, and then only, men shall "learn war no more." (Isaiah 2:4.)

Let us cease to expect that missionaries and ministers will ever convert the world, and teach all mankind to love one another. They will do nothing of the kind. They were never intended to do it. They will call out a witnessing people who shall serve Christ in every land, but they will do no more. The bulk of mankind will always refuse to obey the Gospel. The nations will always go on quarreling, wrangling, and fighting. The last days of the earth shall be its worst days. The last war shall be the most fearful and terrible war that ever desolated the earth.

The duty of the true Christian is clear and plain. Whatever others do, he must give all diligence to make his own calling and election sure. While other are occupied in national conflicts and political speculations, he must steadily seek first the kingdom of God. So doing he shall feel his feet upon a rock when the foundations of the earth are out of course, and the kingdoms of this earth are going to ruin. He shall be like Noah, safe within the ark. He shall be "hidden in the day of the Lord's anger." (Zeph. 2:3.)

We should notice, for another thing, in this passage, **Christ's prediction concerning His own disciples.** He does not prophesy smooth things, and promise them an uninterrupted course of temporal comfort. He says that they shall be "persecuted," put in

“prison,” “brought before kings and rulers,” “betrayed,” “put to death,” and “hated of all men for His name’s sake.”

The words of this prophecy were doubtless intended to apply to every age of the Church of Christ. They began to be fulfilled in the days of the apostles. The book of Acts supplies us with many an instance of their fulfillment. They have been repeatedly fulfilled during the last eighteen hundred years. Wherever there have been disciples of Christ, there has always been more or less persecution. They will yet receive a more full accomplishment before the end comes. The last tribulation will probably be marked by special violence and bitterness. It will be a “great tribulation.” (Rev. 7:14.)

Let it be a settled principle in our minds that the true Christian must always enter the kingdom of God “through much tribulation.” (Acts 14:22.) His best things are yet to come. This world is not our home. If we are faithful and decided servants of Christ, the world will certainly hate us, as it hated our Master. In one way or another grace will always be persecuted. No consistency of conduct, however faultless, no kindness and amiability of character, however striking, will exempt a believer from the world’s dislike, so long as he lives. It is foolish to be surprised at this. It is mere waste of time to murmur at it. It is a part of the cross, and we must bear it patiently. The children of Cain will hate the children of Abel, as long as the earth continues. “Marvel not, my brethren,” says John, “if the world hates you.” “If you were of the world,” says our Lord, “the world would love his own; but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you

out of the world, therefore the world hates you." (1 John 3:13; John 15:18, 19.)

We should notice, lastly, in this passage, **Christ's gracious promise to His disciples.** He says, "but not a hair of your head shall perish." Our blessed Lord knew well the hearts of His disciples. He saw that the prophecy He had just spoken might well make them faint. He supplies them with a cheering word of encouragement—"Not a hair of your head shall perish."

The promise before us is wide and comprehensive, and one which is the property of all believers in every age. A literal interpretation of it is clearly impossible. It cannot apply to the bodies of disciples. To say that would be contradictory to the notorious fact that James and other of the apostles died violent deaths. A figurative interpretation must evidently be placed upon the words. They form a great proverbial saying. They teach us that whatever sufferings a disciple of Christ may go through, his *best things* can never be injured. His life is hidden with Christ in God. His treasure in heaven can never be touched. His soul is beyond the reach of harm. Even his vile body shall be raised again, and made like his Savior's glorious body at the last day.

If we know anything of true religion let us lean back on the words of the glorious promises in every time of need. If we believe in Christ, let us rest in the comfortable thought that Christ has pledged His word that we shall not perish. We may lose much by serving Christ, but we shall never lose our souls. The world may deprive a believer of

property, friends, country, home, liberty, health, and life. It has done so in innumerable cases from the days of Stephen to the present time. The roll of the noble army of martyrs is a very long one. But one thing the world cannot do to any believer. It cannot deprive him of his interest in Christ's love. It cannot break the union between Christ and his soul. Surely it is worth while to be a thorough-going believer! "I am persuaded," says Paul, "that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate me from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom. 8:38-39.)

Notes on 21:10-19

11. "Great earthquakes, famines and pestilences." These visitations from God were said to be especially frequent and severe in the last days of the Jewish dispensation. In particular, thousands died from famine and pestilence in Jerusalem during the siege, before the city was taken.

"Fearful events and great signs from heaven." The following note of Bishop Pearce deserves reading. "Josephus has given us a very particular account of the prodigies of this kind which preceded the destruction of Jerusalem. He speaks of a flaming sword seen over the city, and of a comet which appeared there for twelve months. He mentions a light, which for half an hour, shone so bright in the night between the temple and the altar, that it seemed as if it was midday. He takes notice also, of what eye-witnesses told him, that chariots and armed troops were seen fighting in the sky on certain days. He

adds, that on the day of Pentecost, when the priests entered into the inner temple, they heard a great noise and voice like a multitude, crying out, 'Let us leave here.' The substance of this account is also given by Tacitus, the Roman historian."

There seems no reason to doubt the correctness of Josephus' report. As an unconverted Jew he had no motive for confirming statements contained in the Gospels.

13. "This will result in your being witnesses to them." This seems to mean, "sufferings of the Christians will prove evidence about the truth of Christianity."

14. This was not intended to encourage ministers to neglect sermon preparation. It was spoken for the comfort of persecuted Christians. It was fulfilled in the Acts of the Apostles, as well as in the trials of many martyrs in modern times.

17. "All men will hate you because of me." This shows that universal popularity is not a thing that Christians should covet or greatly value, should it come to them. The Christian about whom everyone speaks well can hardly be a faithful person.

LUKE 21:20-24

THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM

The subject of the verses before us is the taking of Jerusalem by the Romans. It was fit and right that this great event, which wound up the Old Testament dispensation, should be specially described by our Lord's mouth. It was fitting that the last days of that holy city, which had been the seat of God's presence for so many centuries,

should receive a special notice in the greatest prophecy which was ever delivered to the Church.

We should mark in this passage, **our Lord Jesus Christ's perfect knowledge.** He gives us a fearful picture of the miseries which were coming on Jerusalem. Forty years before the armies of Titus encompassed the city, the dreadful circumstances which would attend the siege are minutely described. The distress of weak and helpless women—the slaughter of myriads of Jews—the final scattering of Israel in captivity among all nations—the treading down of the holy city by the Gentiles for eighteen hundred years, are things which our Lord narrates with as much particularity as if He saw them with His own eyes.

Foreknowledge like this is a special attribute of God. Of ourselves we "know not what a day may bring forth." (Prov. 27:1.) To say what will happen to any city or kingdom in forty years from the present time, is far beyond the power of man. The words in Isaiah are very solemn— "I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done." (Isa. 46:10.) He who could speak with authority of things to come, as our Lord did in this place, must have been very God as well as very man.

The true Christian should continually keep in mind this perfect knowledge of Christ. Past things, present things, and things to come, are all naked and open to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. The recollection of the sins of youth may well make us humble. The

sense of present weakness may make us anxious. The fear of trials yet to come may make our hearts faint. But it is a strong consolation to think that Christ knows all. For past, present, and future things we may safely trust Him. Nothing can ever happen to us that Christ has not known long ago.

We should mark, secondly, in this passage, **our Lord's words about flight in time of danger.** He says respecting the days preceding the siege of Jerusalem, "Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains; and let those who are in the midst of it depart out; and let not those who are in the countries enter thereunto."

The lesson of these words is very instructive. They teach us plainly that there is nothing cowardly or unworthy of a Christian in endeavoring to escape from danger. There is nothing unbecoming our high vocation in a diligent use of means in order to secure our safety. To meet death patiently and courageously, if it comes on us in the path of God's providence, is a duty incumbent on every believer. But to court death and suffering, and rush needlessly into danger, is the part of the fanatic and enthusiast, not of the wise disciple of Christ. It is those who use all means which God has placed within their reach, who may confidently expect God's protection. There is a wide difference between presumption and faith.

We should mark, thirdly, in this passage, **our Lord's words about vengeance.** He says, with reference to the siege of Jerusalem, "These are the days of vengeance (punishment), that all things which are written may be fulfilled."

There is something peculiarly dreadful in this expression. It shows us that the sins of the Jewish nation had been long noted down in the book of God's remembrance. The Jews by their unbelief and impenitence, had been treasuring up wrath against themselves for many hundred years. The anger of God, like a pent-up river, had been silently accumulating for ages. The fearful tribulation which attended the siege of Jerusalem, would only be the outburst of a thunderstorm which had been gradually gathering since the days of the kings. It would only be the fall of a sword which had been long hanging over Israel's head.

The lesson of the expression is one which we shall do well to lay to heart. We must never allow ourselves to suppose that the conduct of wicked men or nations is not observed by God. All is seen, and all is known; and a reckoning day will certainly arrive at last. It is a mighty truth of Scripture, that "God requires that which is past." (Eccles. 3:15.) In the days of Abraham "the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet full," and four hundred years passed away before they were punished. Yet punishment came at last, when Joshua and the twelve tribes of Israel took possession of Canaan. God's "sentence against an evil work" is not always executed speedily, but it does not follow that it will not be executed at all. The wicked may flourish for many years "like a green bay-tree," but his latter end will be that his sin will find him out. (Gen. 15:16; Eccles. 8:11; Psalm 37:35.)

We should mark, lastly, in this passage, **our Lord's words about the times of the Gentiles.** We read that He said,

“Jerusalem shall be trodden down by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.”

A fixed period is here foretold, during which Jerusalem was to be given over into the hands of Gentile rulers, and the Jews were to have no dominion over their ancient city. A fixed period is likewise foretold which was to be the time of the Gentiles’ visitation, the time during which they were to enjoy privileges, and occupy a position something like that of Israel in ancient days. Both periods are one day to end. Jerusalem is to be once more restored to its ancient inhabitants. The Gentiles, because of their hardness and unbelief, are to be stripped of their privileges and endure the just judgments of God. But the times of the Gentiles are not yet run out. We ourselves are living within them at the present day.

The subject before us is a very affecting one, and ought to raise within us great searching’s of heart. While the nations of Europe are absorbed in political conflicts and worldly business, the sands in their hour-glass are ebbing away. While Governments are disputing about secular things, and Parliaments can hardly condescend to find a place for religion in their discussions, their days are numbered in the sight of God. Yet a few years, and “the times of the Gentiles will be fulfilled.” Their day of visitation will be past and gone. Their misused privileges will be taken away. The judgments of God shall fall on them. They shall be cast aside as vessels in which God has no pleasure. Their dominion shall crumble away, and their vaunted institutions shall fall to pieces. The Jews shall be restored. The Lord

Jesus shall come again in power and great glory. The kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ, and the "times of the Gentiles" shall come to an end.

Happy is he who knows these things and lives the life of faith in the Son of God! He is the man, and he only, who is ready for the great things coming on the earth, and the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ. The kingdom to which he belongs, is the only kingdom which shall never be destroyed. The King whom he serves, is the only King whose dominion shall never be taken away. (Dan 2:44; 7:14.)

Notes on 21:20-24

20. "When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies." The following facts of history are well worth noting. They show in a remarkable way how the words of our Lord in this verse came about. It appears that three years before the siege of Jerusalem by Titus, the Roman army under Cestius unaccountably and without any apparent reason withdrew again, although the city might have been easily taken. This made a large number of the inhabitants of Jerusalem take fright and flee the city as soon as the Roman army withdrew. In the words of Josephus, "They swam away, as from a ship about to sink." Among those who escaped were Christians, some of them going to Pella and some to Mount Libanus. The result of this was that when the last great war, under Vespasian and Titus, broke out shortly afterwards, the Christians almost entirely escaped its desolation.

21. "Flee to the mountains." Major remarks, "These were the mountains to the north-east of Jerusalem, toward the source of the

Jordan, the territories of Agrippa. He continued faithful to the Romans, and so the Christians avoided the destruction which overtook Judea."

24. "They will fall by the sword." Josephus records that 110,000 Jews died by sword or famine during the siege of Jerusalem.

"Taken as prisoners to all the nations." Josephus records that 97,000 Jews were taken away as prisoners. Most of them were sent as slaves into Egypt or dispersed over the provinces of the Roman Empire, to be thrown to the wild beasts in the amphitheaters.

The theme of this part of our Lord's great prophecy is his own second coming to judge the world. The strong wording in the passage appears inappropriate to any event less important than this. To confine these words to the capture of Jerusalem by the Romans is to unnaturally strain the language of Scripture.

LUKE 21:25-33

THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

The subject of this portion of our Lord's great prophecy is His own second coming to judge the world. The strong expressions of the passage appear inapplicable to any event less important than this. To confine the words before us, to the taking of Jerusalem by the Romans, in an unnatural straining of Scripture language.

We see, firstly, in this passage, **how terrible will be the circumstances accompanying the second advent of Christ.** Our Lord tells us that "there will be signs in the sun, moon and stars.

On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory."

This is a singularly dreadful picture. It may not be easy perhaps to attach a precise meaning to every part of it. One thing however, is abundantly plain. The second coming of Christ will be attended by everything which can make it alarming to the senses and heart of man. If the giving of the law at Sinai was so terrible that even Moses said, "I exceedingly fear and quake," the return of Christ when He comes to earth in power and great glory shall be much more terrible. If the hardy Roman soldiers "became as dead men," when an angel rolled the stone away and Christ rose again, how much greater will the terror be when Christ shall return to judge the world. No wonder that Paul said, "Knowing the terrors of the Lord we persuade men." (Heb. 12:21; Matt. 28:4; 2 Cor. 5:11.)

The thoughtless and impenitent man may well tremble when he hears of this second advent of Christ. What will he do when worldly business is suddenly stopped and the precious things of the world are made worthless? What will he do when the graves on every side are opening, and the trumpet is summoning men to judgment? What will he do when that same Jesus whose Gospel he has so shamefully neglected shall appear in the clouds of heaven, and put down every enemy under His feet? Surely he will call on the rocks to fall on him

and on the hills to cover him. (Hosea 10:8.) But he will call in vain for help, if he has never called on Christ before. Happy will they be in that day who have fled beforehand from the wrath to come, and been washed in the blood of the Lamb!

We see, secondly, in this passage, **how complete will be the security of true Christians at the second advent of Christ.** We read that our Lord said to His disciples, "When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draws near."

However terrible the signs of Christ's second coming may be to the impenitent, they need not strike terror into the heart of the true believer. They ought rather to fill him with joy. They ought to remind him that his complete deliverance from sin, the world and the devil, is close at hand, and that he shall soon bid an eternal farewell to sickness, sorrow, death and temptation. The very day when the unconverted man shall lose everything, shall be the day when the believer shall enter on his eternal reward. The very hour when the worldly man's hopes shall perish, shall be the hour when the believer's hope shall be exchanged for joyful certainty and full possession.

The servant of God should often look forward to Christ's second advent. He will find the thought of that day a cordial to sustain him under all the trials and persecutions of this present life. "Yet a little while," let him remember, "and he that shall come will come and will not tarry." The words of Isaiah shall be fulfilled, "The Lord God shall

wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall be taken away from off all the earth." One sure receipt for a patient spirit is to expect little from this world, and to be ever "waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Heb. 10:37. Isaiah. 25:8. 1 Cor. 1:7.)

We see, thirdly, in this passage, **how needful it is to watch the signs of the times in the prospect of the second advent of Christ.** Our Lord teaches this lesson by a parable— "Notice the fig tree, or any other tree. When the leaves come out, you know without being told that summer is near. Just so, when you see the events I've described taking place, you can be sure that the Kingdom of God is near." The disciples ignorantly supposed that Messiah's kingdom would be ushered in by universal peace. Our Lord, on the contrary, tells those who the signs which shall immediately precede it shall be wars, confusions, perplexity, and distress.

The general duty which these words should teach us is very plain. We are to observe carefully the public events of the times in which we live. We are not to be absorbed in politics, but we are to mark political events. We are not to turn prophets ourselves, but we are to study diligently the signs of our times. So doing, the day of Christ will not come upon us entirely unawares.

Are there any signs in our own day? Are there any circumstances in the world around us which specially demand the believer's attention? Beyond doubt there are very many. The drying up of the Turkish empire—the revival of the Romish church—the awakened

desire of the Protestant churches to preach the Gospel to the heathen—the general interest in the state of the Jews—the universal shaking of governments and established institutions—the rise and progress of the subtlest forms of infidelity—all, all are signs peculiar to our day. All should make us remember our Lord's words about the fig-tree. All should make us think of the text, "Behold, I come quickly." (Rev. 22:7.)

We see, lastly, in this passage, **how certain it is that all our Lord's predictions about the second advent will be fulfilled.** Our Lord speaks as if He foresaw the unbelief and incredulity of man on this mighty subject. He knew how ready people would be to say "Improbable! impossible! The world will always go on as it has done." He arms His disciples against the infection of this skeptical spirit by a very solemn saying. "Heaven and earth shall pass away—but my words shall not pass away."

We shall do well to remember this saying, whenever we are thrown into the company of those who sneer at unfulfilled prophecy. The sneers of unbelievers must not be allowed to shake our faith. If God has said a thing He will certainly bring it to pass, and the probability or possibility of it are matters which need not trouble us for a moment. That Christ should come again in power to judge the world and reign, is not half so improbable as it was that Christ should come to suffer and die. If He came the first time, much more may we expect that He will come the second time. If he came to be nailed to the cross, much more may we expect that He will come in

glory and wear the crown. He has said it, and He will do it. “His words shall not pass away.”

Let us turn from the study of these verses with a deep conviction that the second advent of Christ is one of the leading truths of Christianity. Let the Christ in whom we believe be not only the Christ who suffered on Calvary, but the Christ who is coming again in person to judge the earth.

Notes on 21:25-33

26 “Men will faint from terror.” Schleusner says this signifies “to become not dead, but as if dead.”

27. “See the Son of Man coming.” I think these words can only be interpreted in one way. They describe a literal personal coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, who ascended in a cloud before the eyes of the disciples from Mount Olivet (Acts 1:9-12).

28. “Your redemption.” The word redemption is used here in the same sense that it is used in Romans 8:23; Ephesians 1:14; 4:30. It signifies that full and complete redemption of the believer which will be accomplished when his body is raised again, and soul and body are once more united. From the guilt and power of sin believers are redeemed already; but from all the humbling consequences of sin they will not be completely redeemed until Jesus comes again and calls them from their graves at the last day.

32. “This generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.” I think that the best way to interpret this is to say that “this generation” means the Jewish nation. They had been

spoken of by our Lord in this prophecy; their captivity and scattering had been plainly predicted. The disciples might naturally wonder how such a prediction could be reconciled with the many promises of glory to Israel in the Old Testament prophets. Our Lord answers their thoughts by declaring that this nation, the Jewish people as a separate people, will not pass away. Though cast down, they would not be destroyed. Though scattered, they will one day be gathered together again before everything is fulfilled.

Of course, the correctness of this view turns entirely on the question of whether the Greek word translated generation will honestly bear the sense of "nation" or "people." My own belief is that it will bear that sense and that it does really bear it in many places in the New Testament, such as Matthew 11:16; 12:39; 23:36; Luke 11:50-51; Acts 2:40; Philippians 2:15.

LUKE 21:34-38

WATCH AND PRAY

These verses form the practical conclusion of our Lord Jesus Christ's great prophetical discourse. They supply a striking answer to those who condemn the study of unfulfilled prophecy as speculative and unprofitable. It would be difficult to find a passage more practical, direct, plain, and heart-searching than that which is now before our eyes.

Let us learn from these verses, the spiritual danger to which even the holiest believers are exposed in this world. Our Lord says to His

disciples, “Watch out! Don’t let me find you living in careless ease and drunkenness, and filled with the worries of this life. Don’t let that day catch you unaware, as in a trap.” These words are exceedingly startling. They were not addressed to carnal-minded Pharisees, or skeptical Sadducees, or worldly Herodians. They were addressed to Peter, James, and John, and the whole company of the Apostles. They were addressed to men who had given up everything for Christ’s sake, and had proved the reality of their faith by loving obedience and steady adhesion to their Master. Yet even to them our Lord holds out the peril of surfeiting, and drunkenness, and worldliness! Even to them He says, “Watch out!”

The exhortation before us should teach us the immense importance of humility. There is no sin so great but a great saint may fall into it. There is no saint so great but he may fall into a great sin. Noah escaped the pollutions of the world before the flood; and yet he was afterwards overtaken by drunkenness. Abraham was the father of the faithful; and yet through unbelief he said falsely that Sarah was his sister. Lot did not take part in the horrible wickedness of Sodom; and yet he afterwards fell into foul sin in the cave. Moses was the meekest man on earth; and yet he so lost self-control that he spoke angrily and unadvisedly. David was a man after God’s own heart; and yet he plunged into most heinous adultery. These examples are all deeply instructive. They all show the wisdom of our Lord’s warning in the passage before us. They teach us to be “clothed with humility.” “Let him that thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall.” (1 Pet. 5:5; 1 Cor. 10:12.)

The exhortation before us should teach us furthermore the great importance of an unworldly spirit. The “cares of this life” are placed side by side with surfeiting and drunkenness. Excess in eating and drinking is not the only excess which injures the soul. There is an excessive anxiety about the innocent things of this life, which is just as ruinous to our spiritual prosperity, and just as poisonous to the inner man. Never, never let us forget that we may make spiritual shipwreck on lawful things, as really and truly as on open vices. Happy is he who has learned to hold the things of this world with a loose hand, and to believe that seeking first the kingdom of God, “all other things shall be added to him!” (Matt. 6:33.)

Let us learn secondly from these verses, **the exceeding suddenness of our Lord’s second coming.** We read that “as a trap shall it come on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth.” As a trap falling suddenly on an animal, and catching it in a moment—as the lightning flash shining suddenly in heaven, before the thunder is heard—as a thief coming suddenly in the night, and not giving notice that he will come—so sudden, so instantaneous will the second advent of the Son of man be.

The precise date of our Lord Jesus Christ’s return to this world has been purposely withheld from us by God. “Of that day and hour knows no man.” On one point however all the teaching of Scripture about it is clear and unmistakable. Whenever it shall take place, it shall be a most sudden and unexpected event. The business of the world shall be going on as usual. As in the days of Sodom, and the

days before the flood, men shall be “eating and drinking, marrying and given in marriage.” Few, even among true believers, shall be found completely alive to the great fact, and living in a state of thorough expectation. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, the whole course of the world shall be stopped. The King of kings shall appear. The dead shall be raised. The living shall be changed. Unbelief shall wither away. Truth shall be known by myriads too late. The world with all its trifles and shadows shall be thrust aside. Eternity with all its dreadful realities shall begin. All this shall begin at once, without notice, without warning, without note of preparation. “As a trap shall it come on the face of the whole earth.”

The servant of God must surely see that there is only one state of mind which becomes the man who believes these things. That state is one of perpetual preparedness to meet Christ. The Gospel does not call on us to retire from earthly callings, or neglect the duties of our stations. It does not bid us retire into hermitages, or live the life of a monk or a nun. But it does bid us to live like men who expect their Lord to return. Repentance toward God, faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, and holiness of conversation, are the only true habitual preparedness required. The Christian who knows these things by experience, is the man who is always ready to meet his Lord.

Let us learn, lastly, from these verses, **the special duties of believers in the prospect of the second advent of Christ.** Our Lord sums up these duties under two great heads. One of these two is watchfulness. The other is prayer. “Watch therefore,” He says, “and

pray always." We are to "watch." We are to live on our guard like men in an enemy's country. We are to remember that evil is about us, and near us, and in us—that we have to contend daily with a treacherous heart, an ensnaring world, and a busy devil. Remembering this, we must put on the whole armor of God, and beware of spiritual drowsiness. "Let us not sleep as do others," says Paul, "but let us watch and be sober." (1 Thess. 5:6.)

We are to "pray always." We are to keep up a constant habit of real, business-like prayer. We are to speak with God daily, and hold daily communion with Him about our souls. We are to pray specially for grace to lay aside every weight, and to cast away everything which may interfere with readiness to meet our Lord. Above all, we are to watch our habits of devotion with a godly jealousy, and to beware of hurrying over or shortening our prayers.

Let us leave the whole passage with a hearty determination, by God's help, to action what we have been reading. If we believe that Christ is coming again, let us get ready to meet Him. "If we know there things, happy are we if we do them." (John 13:17.)

Luke – Chap. 22

LUKE 22:1-13

THE LAST SUPPER

The chapter which opens with these verses, begins Luke's account of *our Lord's sufferings and death*. No part of the Gospels is so important as this. The death of Christ was the life of the world. No part of our Lord's history is so fully given by all the gospel writers as this. Only two of them describe the circumstances of Christ's birth. All four dwell minutely on Christ's death. And of all the four, no one supplies us with such full and interesting details as Luke.

We see, firstly, in these verses, **that high offices in the church do not preserve the holders of them from great blindness and sin.** We read that "the chief priests and scribes sought how they might kill Jesus."

The first step in putting Christ to death, was taken by the religious teachers of the Jewish nation. The very men who ought to have welcomed the Messiah, were the men who conspired to kill Him. The very pastors who ought to have rejoiced at the appearing of the Lamb of God, had the chief hand in slaying Him. They sat in Moses' seat. They claimed to be "guides of the blind," and "lights of those who were in darkness." (Rom. 2:19.) They belonged to the tribe

of Levi. They were, most of them, in direct succession and descent from Aaron. Yet they were the very men who crucified the Lord of glory! With all their boasted knowledge, they were far more ignorant than the few Galilean fishermen who followed Christ.

Let us beware of attaching an excessive importance to ministers of religion because of their office. Ordination and office confer no exemption from error. The greatest heresies have been sown, and the greatest practical abuses introduced into the church by ordained men. Respect is undoubtedly due to high official position. Order and discipline ought not to be forgotten. The teaching and counsel of regularly appointed teachers ought not to be lightly refused. But there are limits beyond which we must not go. We must never allow the blind to lead us into the ditch. We must never allow modern chief priests and scribes to make us crucify Christ afresh. We must test all teachers by the unerring rule of the Word of God. It matters little who says a thing in religion—but it matters greatly what it is that is said. Is it scriptural? Is it true? This is the only question. "To the law and to the testimony—if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." (Isaiah 8:20.)

We see, secondly, in these verses, **how far men may fall after making a high profession.** We read that the second step toward our Lord's crucifixion, was the treachery of one of the twelve apostles — "Then entered Satan into Judas Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve." These words are peculiarly dreadful. To be tempted by Satan is bad enough. To be sifted, buffeted, led captive by him is

truly terrible. But when Satan "enters into a man," and dwells in him, the man becomes indeed a child of hell.

Judas Iscariot ought to be a standing beacon to the church of Christ. This man, be it remembered, was one of our Lord's chosen apostles. He followed our Lord during the whole course of His ministry. He forsook all for Christ's sake. He heard Christ preach and saw Christ's miracles. He preached himself. He spoke like the other apostles. There was nothing about him to distinguish him from Peter, James, and John. He was never suspected of being unsound at heart. And yet this man turns out at length a hypocrite, betrays his Master, helps his enemies to deliver Him up to death, and dies himself "the son of perdition." (John 17:12.) These are fearful things. But they are true.

Let the recollection of Judas Iscariot constrain every professing, Christian to pray much for humility. Let us often say, "Search me, O God, and know my heart—try me, and know my thoughts." (Psalm. 139:23.) At best we have but a faint conception of the deceitfulness of our hearts. The lengths to which men may go in religion, and yet be without grace, is far greater than we suppose.

We see, thirdly, in these verses, **the enormous power of the love of money.** We are told that when Judas went to the chief priests and offered to betray his Master, they "agreed to give him money." That little sentence reveals the secret of this wretched man's fall. He was fond of money, He had doubtless heard our Lord's solemn warning, "Take heed and beware of covetousness." (Luke

12:15.) But he had either forgotten it, or given it no heed. Covetousness was the rock on which he made shipwreck. Covetousness was the ruin of his soul.

We need not wonder that Paul called the love of money "the root of all evil." (1 Tim. 6:10.) The history of the church is full of mournful proofs, that it is one of the choicest weapons of Satan for corrupting and spoiling professors of religion. Gehazi, Ananias and Sapphira are names which naturally occur to our minds. But of all proofs, there is none so melancholy as the one before us. For money a chosen apostle sold the best and most loving of Masters! For money Judas Iscariot betrayed Christ!

Let us watch and pray against the love of money. It is a subtle disease, and often far nearer to us than we suppose. A poor man is just as liable to it as a rich man. It is possible to love money without having it, and it is possible to have it without loving it. Let us be "content with such things as we have." (Heb. 13:5.) We never know what we might do if we became suddenly rich. It is a striking fact, that there is only one prayer in all the Book of Proverbs, and that one of the three petitions in that prayer, is the wise request— "Give me neither poverty nor riches." (Prov. 30:8.)

We see, lastly, in these verses, **the close connection between our Lord Jesus Christ's death and the Feast of the Passover.** Four times we are reminded here that the evening before His crucifixion was the time of the great Jewish feast. It was "the day when the Passover lamb must be killed."

We cannot doubt that the time of our Lord's crucifixion was overruled by God. His perfect wisdom and controlling power arranged that the Lamb of God should die, at the very time when the Passover-lamb was being slain. The death of Christ was the fulfillment of the Passover. He was the true sacrifice to which every Passover-lamb had been pointing for 1500 years. What the death of the lamb had been to Israel in Egypt, His death was to be to sinners all over the world. The safety which the blood of the Passover-lamb had provided for Israel, His blood was to provide far more abundantly for all that believed in Him.

Let us never forget the sacrificial character of Christ's death. Let us reject with abhorrence the modern notion that it was nothing more than a mighty instance of self-sacrifice and self-denial. It was this no doubt—but it was something far higher, deeper, and more important than this. It was a propitiation for the sins of the world. It was an atonement for man's transgression. It was the killing of the true Passover Lamb, through whose death destruction is warded off from sinners believing on Him. "Christ our Passover Lamb," says Paul, "is sacrificed for us." (1 Cor. 5:7.) Let us grasp that truth firmly, and never let it go.

Notes on 22:1-13

3. Then Satan entered Judas. Calvin remarks on these words: "Though Satan drives us every day to crime, and reigns in us when he hurries us into a course of extraordinary wickedness, yet he is said to enter into the reprobate when he takes possession of all their senses,

overthrows the fear of God, extinguishes the light of reason, and destroys every feeling of shame."

10. "A man carrying a jar of water will meet you." Here, as in other places, we should note our Lord's perfect knowledge. He mentions a number of circumstances in this and the following verses with as much minuteness and precision as if the whole transaction had been previously arranged. And the disciples found things exactly as he had said they would.

LUKE 22:14-23

THE LAST SUPPER

These verses contain Luke's account of the institution of the Lord's supper. It is a passage which every true Christian will always read with deep interest. How astonishing it seems that an ordinance, so beautifully simple at its first appointment, should have been obscured and mystified by man's inventions! What a painful proof it is of human corruption, that some of the bitterest controversies which have disturbed the Church, have been concerning the table of the Lord. Great indeed is the ingenuity of man, in perverting God's gifts! The ordinance that should have been for his wealth is too often made an occasion of falling.

We should notice, for one thing in these verses, **that the principal object of the Lord's supper was to remind Christians of Christ's death for sinners.** In appointing the Lord's supper, Jesus distinctly tells His disciples that they were to do

what they did, “in remembrance of him.” In one word, the Lord’s supper is not a sacrifice. It is eminently a commemorative ordinance.

The bread that the believer eats, at the Lord’s table, is intended to remind him of Christ’s body given to death on the cross for his sins. The wine that he drinks is intended to remind him of Christ’s blood shed to make atonement for his transgressions. The whole ordinance was meant to keep fresh in his memory the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, and the satisfaction which that sacrifice made for the sin of the world. The two elements of bread and wine were intended to preach Christ crucified as our substitute under lively emblems. They were to be a visible sermon, appealing to the believer’s senses, and teaching the old foundation-truth of the Gospel, that Christ’s death on the cross is the life of man’s soul.

We shall do well to keep steadily in view this simple view of the Lord’s supper. That a special blessing is attached to a worthy use of it, as well to the worthy use of every ordinance appointed by Christ, there is of course no doubt. But that there is any other means by which Christians can eat Christ’s body, and drink Christ’s blood excepting by faith, we must always steadily deny. He that comes to the Lord’s table with faith in Christ, may confidently expect to have his faith increased by receiving the bread and wine. But he that comes without faith has no right to expect a blessing. Empty he comes to the ordinance and empty he will go away.

The less mystery and obscurity we attach to the Lord’s supper, the better will it be for our souls. We should reject with abhorrence the

unscriptural notion that there is any oblation or sacrifice in it—that the substance of the bread and wine is at all changed—or that the mere formal act of receiving the sacrament can do any good to the soul.

We should cling firmly to the great principle laid down at its institution, that it is eminently a commemorative ordinance, and that reception of it without faith and a thankful remembrance of Christ's death can do us no good. The words of the Church Catechism are wise and true— "It was ordained for the continual remembrance of the sacrifice of the death of Christ." The declaration of the Articles is clear and distinct— "The means whereby the body of Christ is received and taken in the supper, is faith." The exhortation of the Prayer-Book points out the only way in which we can feed on Christ — "Feed on Him in your hearts by faith with thanksgiving." Last, but not least, the caution of the Homily is most instructive— "Let us take heed, lest of the memory it be made a sacrifice."

We should notice, for another thing, in these verses, that **the observance of the Lord's Supper is a duty binding on all true Christians.** The words of our Lord on this point are direct and emphatic— "Do this in remembrance of me." To suppose, as some do, that these words are only an injunction to the apostles and all ministers to administer the Lord's Supper to others, is a thoroughly unsatisfactory interpretation. The obvious sense of the words is a general precept to all disciples.

The command before us is overlooked to a fearful extent. Myriads of members of Christian churches never go to the Lord's table. They would be ashamed perhaps to be known as open breakers of the ten commandments. Yet they are not ashamed of breaking a plain command of Christ! They appear to think there is no great sin in not being communicants. They seem utterly unconscious that if they had lived in the days of the apostles they would not have been reckoned Christians at all.

The subject no doubt is one on which we must beware of mistakes. It is not, of course, to be desired that every baptized person should receive the Lord's Supper as a mere matter of form. It is an ordinance which was intended for the living, and not for the dead in sins. But when we see vast numbers of church-goers never going to the Lord's table, and no way ashamed of their neglect of the sacrament, it is clear that there is something very wrong in the state of the churches. It is a sign either of wide-spread ignorance, or of callous indifference to a divine precept. When such multitudes of baptized people habitually break a command of Christ, we cannot doubt that Christ is displeased.

What are we doing ourselves? This, after all, is the point that concerns us. Do we stay away from the Lord's Supper under a vague notion that there is no great necessity for receiving it? If we hold such an opinion, the sooner we give it up the better. A plain precept of God's own Son is not to be trifled with in this way. Do we stay away from the Lord's Supper because we are not fit to be

communicants? If we do, let us thoroughly understand that we are not fit to die. Unfit for the Lord's table, we are unfit for heaven, and unprepared for the judgment day, and not ready to meet God! Surely this is a most serious state of things. But the words before us are clear and explicit. Christ gives us a plain command. If we willfully disobey it, we are in danger of ruining our souls. If we are not fit to obey it, we ought to repent without delay.

Let us notice, lastly, **WHO were the communicants at the first appointment of the Lord's Supper.** They were not all holy. They were not all believers. Luke informs us that the traitor, Judas Iscariot, was one of them. The words of our Lord admit of no other fair interpretation. "Behold," He says, "the hand of him that betrays me is with me on the table."

The lesson of these words is deeply important. They show us that we must not regard all communicants as true believers and sincere servants of Christ. The evil and good will be found side by side even at the Lord's Supper. No discipline can possibly prevent it. They show us furthermore that it is foolish to stay away from the Lord's Supper because some communicants are unconverted, or to leave a church because some of its members are unsound. The wheat and the tares will grow together until the harvest. Our Lord himself tolerated a Judas at the first communion that ever took place. The servant of God must not pretend to be more exclusive than his Master. Let him see to his own heart, and leave others to answer for themselves to God.

And now, if we are not communicants, let us ask ourselves, as we leave this passage, “Why are we not? What satisfactory reason can we possibly give for neglecting a plain command of Christ?” May we never rest, until we have looked this inquiry in the face! If we are communicants, let us take heed that we receive the sacrament worthily. “The sacraments have a wholesome effect and operation in those only, who worthily receive them.” Let us often enquire whether we repent, and believe, and strive to live holy lives. So living we need not be afraid, to eat of that bread and drink of that cup, which the Lord has commanded to be received.

Notes on 22:14-23

15. “Before I suffer.” Alford remarks that this is the only place in the Gospels where this absolute use of the word “suffer” is found.

16. “Until it finds fulfillment.” This means that our Lord would never eat this Passover again. Macknight observes, “The particle ‘until,’ both here and in verse 18, does not imply that after the accomplishment of the salvation of men our Lord was to eat the Passover. It is a Hebrew expression, signifying that the thing mentioned was no more to be done forever. So it is said in Samuel, ‘Until the day Samuel died, he did not go to see Saul again’ (1 Samuel 15:35). That is, he saw him no more at all.”

19. “This is my body.” It is almost needless to remark that the Protestant view of these words is the only satisfactory one: “This represents and is an emblem of my body.” To a Jewish ear the expression would be simple and intelligible. There is no word in the Syriac or Hebrew which expresses “to signify or represent.” (See

Genesis 40:12; Daniel 7:24; Revelation 1:20; John 15:1-5.)

"Do this." The Roman Catholics struggle hard to make these words mean, "Offer up this sacrifice" and to show that the words were especially intended to be confined to priests consecrating the bread and wine and offering it up as a sacrifice in the Mass. That idea will not bear calm examination. The natural meaning of the words is a command addressed to all disciples: "Practice this," "Do what I have just shown you," "Keep up the ordinance I have just appointed," "Break, take, eat this bread in all ages, in remembrance of me."

20. "This cup is the new covenant." It is clear that a "cup" is not literally a covenant or testament. The Roman Catholic who contends that in the former verse, where our Lord says, "This is my body" he meant, "This is my literal body, really and truly" will find it hard to explain our Lord's meaning here. The Protestant view that in both cases our Lord meant "this bread represents my body" and "this cup represents the new covenant which is ratified by my blood" is the only rational and satisfactory view.

If our Lord had really meant that what he gave his disciples was literally his "blood," it seems impossible to understand the calmness with which they received this announcement. There were all Jews, and as Jews they had all been taught from infancy that to eat blood was a great sin. They obviously understood the words as Protestants do now. (See Leviticus 3:17; 7:26.)

21. "The hand of him who is going to betray me." Clearly Judas Iscariot was at the first Lord's Supper. Burkitt remarks, "Nothing is more ordinary than for unholy people to press into the holy ordinances of God what they have no right to. Yet their presence

pollutes the ordinance only to themselves."
22. "Woe to that man who betrays him." Augustine remarks, "God is said to will things, in the way of permission, which he does not will in the way of approbation."
Bishop Hall says, "It is the greatest praise of God's wisdom that he can turn the sins of man to his own glory."

LUKE 22:24-30

WHO IS THE GREATEST?

Let us observe, in this passage, how firmly pride and love of preeminence can stick to the hearts of Christian men. We are told that "There was a dispute among the disciples, as to which of them should be considered the greatest." The strife was one which had been rebuked by our Lord on a former occasion. The ordinance which the disciples had just been receiving, and the circumstances under which they were assembled, made the strife peculiarly inappropriate. And yet at this very season, the last quiet time they could spend with their Master before His death, this little flock begins a dispute, as to who should be the greatest! Such is the heart of man, ever weak, ever deceitful, ever ready, even at its best times, to turn aside to what is evil.

The sin before us is a very old one. Ambition, self-esteem, and self-conceit lie deep at the bottom of all men's hearts, and often in the hearts where they are least suspected. Thousands imagine that they are humble, who cannot bear to see an equal more honored and

favored than themselves. Few indeed can be found who rejoice heartily in a neighbor's promotion over their own heads. The quantity of envy and jealousy in the world is a glaring proof of the prevalence of pride. Men would not envy a brother's advancement if they had not a secret thought that their own merit was greater than his.

Let us live on our guard against this sore disease, if we make any profession of serving Christ. The harm that it has done to the Church of Christ is far beyond calculation. Let us learn to take pleasure in the prosperity of others, and to be content with the lowest place for ourselves. The rule given to the Philippians should be often before our eyes— "In lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves." The example of John the Baptist is a bright instance of the spirit at which we should aim. He said of our Lord, "He must increase, but I must decrease." (Phil. 2:3; John 3:30.)

Let us observe, secondly, in this passage, **the striking account which our Lord gives of true Christian greatness.** He tells His disciples that the worldly standard of greatness was the exercise of 'lordship and authority'. "But you," He says, "shall not be so. He that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that serves." And then He enforces this principle by the mighty fact of His own example— "I am among you as he that serves."

Usefulness in the world and Church—a humble readiness to do anything, and put our hands to any good work—a cheerful willingness to fill any post, however lowly, and discharge any office,

however unpleasant, if we can only promote happiness and holiness on earth—these are the true tests of Christian greatness. The hero in Christ's army is not the man who has rank, and title, and dignity, and chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him. It is the man who looks not on his own things, but the things of others. It is the man who is kind to all, tender to all, thoughtful for all, with a hand to help all, and a heart to feel for all. It is the man who spends and is spent to make the vice and misery of the world less, to bind up the broken-hearted, to befriend the friendless, to cheer the sorrowful, to enlighten the ignorant, and to raise the poor. This is the truly great man in the eyes of God. The world may ridicule his labors and deny the sincerity of his motives. But while the world is sneering, God is pleased. This is the man who is walking most closely in the steps of Christ.

Let us follow after greatness of this sort, if we desire to prove ourselves Christ's servants. Let us not be content with clear head-knowledge, and loud lip-profession, and keen insight into controversy, and fervent zeal for the interests of our own party. Let us see that we minister to the needs of a sin-burdened world, and do good to bodies and souls. Blessed be God! the greatness which Christ commended is within the reach of all. All have not learning, or gifts, or money. But all can minister to the happiness of those around them, by passive or by active graces. All can be useful, and all can be kind. There is a grand reality in constant kindness. It makes the men of the world think.

Let us observe, thirdly, in this passage, **our Lord's gracious commendation of His disciples.** He said to them, "You have remained true to me in my time of trial." There is something very striking in these words of praise. We know the weakness and infirmity of our Lord's disciples during the whole period of His earthly ministry. We find Him frequently reproving their ignorance and lack of faith. He knew full well that within a few hours they were all going to forsake Him. But here we find Him graciously dwelling on one good point in their conduct, and holding it up to the perpetual notice of His Church. They had been faithful to their Master, notwithstanding all their faults. Their hearts had been right, whatever had been their mistakes. They had clung to Him in the day of His humiliation, when the great and noble were against Him. They had "remained true to Him in His time of trial."

Let us rest our souls on the comfortable thought that the mind of Christ is always the same. If we are true believers, let us know that He looks at our graces more than at our faults, that He pities our infirmities, and that He will not deal with us according to our sins. Never had a master such poor, weak servants as believers are to Christ—but never had servants such a compassionate and tender Master as Christ is to believers! Surely we cannot love Him too well. We may come short in many things. We may fail in knowledge and courage, and faith, and patience. We may stumble many times. But one thing let us always do. Let us love the Lord Jesus with heart, and soul, and mind, and strength. Whatever others do, let us "remain true to Him," and cleave to Him with purpose of heart. Happy is he

who can say with Peter, however humbled and ashamed, “Lord, you know that I love you.” (John 21:15.)

Let us observe, lastly, **what a glorious promise our Lord holds out to His faithful disciples.** He says, “I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father has appointed unto me; that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

These words were our Lord’s parting legacy to His little flock. He knew that in a few hours His ministry among them would be ended. He winds it up by a wonderful declaration of good things laid up in store for them. We may not perhaps see the full meaning of every part of the promise. Enough for us to know that our Lord promised His eleven faithful ones—glory, honor, and rewards, far exceeding anything they had done for Him. They had gone a little way with Him, like Barzillai with David, and done a little for Him. He assures them that they shall have in another world a recompense worthy of a king.

Let us leave the whole passage with the cheering thought that the wages which Christ will give to his believing people will be far out of proportion to anything they have done for Him. Their tears will be found in His bottle. Their least desires to do good will be found recorded. Their weakest efforts to glorify Him sill be found written in His book of remembrance. Not a cup of cold water shall miss its reward.

Notes on 22:24-30

30. “Sit on thrones, judging.” This “judging” probably means that the apostles will have a preeminent place in the government of Israel after Christ has come again and the Jews have been restored to their own land. It is clear that the word “judge” in many places in the Bible means nothing more than “ruling or governing” and has no reference to passing a judicial sentence.

“The twelve tribes of Israel.” The “twelve tribes” are mentioned four times in the New Testament—here and in Matthew 19:28; Acts 26:7; and James 1:1. It is clear that although the ten tribes never came back from captivity, they were regarded in New Testament times as still existing, distinct and separate, not lost and mingled with other nations. We should not doubt that they still exist today and will one day be seen again by the world.

LUKE 22:31-38

SIMON PETER

We learn, from these verses, **what a fearful enemy the devil is to believers.** We read that “the Lord said, Simon, Simon, Satan has desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat.” He was near Christ’s flock, though they saw him not. He was longing to accomplish their ruin, though they knew it not. The wolf does not crave the blood of the lamb more than the devil desires the destruction of souls.

The personality, activity, and power of the devil are not sufficiently thought of by Christians. This is he who brought sin into the world at the beginning, by tempting Eve. This is he who is described in the book of Job as "going to and fro in the earth, and walking up and down in it." This is he whom our Lord calls "the prince of this world," a "murderer," and a "liar." This is he whom Peter compares to a "roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." This is he whom John speaks of as "the accuser of the brethren." This is he who is ever working evil in the churches of Christ, catching away good seed from the hearts of hearers, sowing tares amid the wheat, stirring up persecutions, suggesting false doctrines, and fomenting divisions. The world is a snare to the believer. The flesh is a burden and a clog. But there is no enemy so dangerous as that restless, invisible, experienced enemy, the devil.

If we believe the Bible, let us not be ashamed to believe that there is a devil. *It is an dreadful proof of the hardness and blindness of unconverted men, that they can jest and speak lightly of Satan.*

If we profess to have any real religion, let us be on our guard against the devil's devices. The enemy who overthrew David and Peter, and assaulted Christ Himself, is not an enemy to be despised. He is very subtle. He has studied the heart of man for six thousand years. He can approach us under the garb of an "angel of light." We have need to watch and pray, and put on the whole armor of God. It is a blessed promise, that if we resist him he will flee from us. It is a still more blessed thought, that when the Lord comes, He will bruise

Satan under our feet, and bind him in chains. (James 4:7; Rom. 16:20.)

We learn, secondly, in these verses, **one great secret of a believer's perseverance in the faith.** We read that our Lord said to Peter, "I have prayed for you that your faith fail not." It was owing to Christ's intercession that Peter did not entirely fall away.

The continued existence of grace in a believer's heart is a great standing miracle. His enemies are so mighty, and his strength is so small—the world is so full of snares, and his heart is so weak—that it seems at first sight impossible for him to reach heaven. The passage before us explains his safety. He has a mighty Friend at the right hand of God, who ever lives to make intercession for him. There is a watchful Advocate, who is daily pleading for him, seeing all his daily necessities, and obtaining daily supplies of mercy and grace for his soul. His grace never altogether dies, because Christ always lives to intercede. (Heb. 7:25.)

If we are true Christians, we shall find it essential to our comfort in religion to have clear views of Christ's priestly office and intercession. Christ lives, and therefore our faith shall not fail. Let us beware of regarding Jesus only as one who died for us. Let us never forget that He is alive for evermore. Paul bids us specially remember that He is risen again, and is at the right hand of God, and also makes intercession for us. (Rom. 8:34.) The work that He does for His people is not yet over. He is still appearing in the presence of God for them, and doing for their souls what He did for Peter. His

present life for them is just as important as His death on the cross eighteen hundred years ago. Christ lives, and therefore true Christians “shall live also.”

We learn, thirdly, from these verses, **the duty incumbent on all believers who receive special mercies from Christ.** We read that our Lord said to Peter, “So when you have repented and turned to me again, strengthen and build up your brothers.” It is one of God’s peculiar attributes, that He can bring good out of evil. He can cause the weaknesses and infirmities of some members of His Church to work together for the benefit of the whole body of His people. He can make the fall of a disciple the means of fitting him to be the strengthener and upholder of others.

Have we ever fallen, and by Christ’s mercy been raised to newness of life? Then surely we are just the men who ought to deal gently with our brethren. We should tell them from our own experience what an evil and bitter thing is sin. We should caution them against trifling with temptation. We should warn them against pride, and presumption, and neglect of prayer. We should tell them of Christ’s grace and compassion, if they have fallen. Above all, we should deal with them humbly and meekly, remembering what we ourselves have gone through.

Well would it be for the Church of Christ, if Christians were more ready to good works of this kind! There are only too many believers who in discussion add nothing to their brethren. They seem to have no Savior to tell of, and no story of grace to report. They chill the

hearts of those they meet, rather than warm them. They weaken rather than strengthen. These things ought not so to be. The words of the apostle ought to sink down into our minds, “Having received mercy, we faint not. We believe, and therefore we speak.” (2 Cor. 4:1, 13.)

We learn, lastly, from these verses, **that the servant of Christ ought to use all reasonable means in doing his Master’s work.** We read that our Lord said to His disciples, “He that has a purse, let him take it, and likewise his bag; and he that has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one.”

It is safest to take these remarkable words in a proverbial sense. They apply to the whole period of time between our Lord’s first and second advents. Until our Lord comes again, believers are to make a diligent use of all the faculties which God has implanted in them. They are not to expect miracles to be worked, in order to save them trouble. They are not to expect bread to fall into their mouths, if they will not work for it. They are not to expect difficulties to be surmounted, and enemies to be overcome, if they will not wrestle, and struggle and take pains. They are to remember that it is “the hand of the diligent which makes rich.” (Prov. 10:4.)

We shall do well to lay to heart our Lord’s words in this place, and to act habitually on the principle which they contain. Let us labor, and toil, and give, and speak, and act, and write for Christ, as if all depended on our exertions. And yet let us never forget that success depends entirely on God’s blessing! To expect success by our own

“purse” and “sword” is pride and self-righteousness. But to expect success without the “purse and sword” is presumption and fanaticism. Let us do as Jacob did when he met his brother Esau. He used all innocent means to conciliate and appease him. But when he had done all, he spent all night in prayer. (Gen. 32:1-24.)

Notes on 22:31-38

32. “I have prayed for you.” This is an example of our Lord’s office as intercessor for his people. What he did for Peter, when Peter knew nothing of his danger, he is daily and hourly doing for all who believe in his name.

“That your faith may not fail.” Note that faith is the root of the whole Christian character, and the part which Satan especially works to overthrow. In the temptation of Eve, of Peter, and of our Lord himself, the assault was in each case directed against the same point, and the object sought was to produce unbelief.

“When you have turned back.” Burkitt remarks, “This conversion was not from a state of sin: Peter was so converted before; but it was from an act of sin into which he should lapse and relapse.”

“Strengthen your brothers.” Alford says that the Greek word for strengthen here is twice used by Peter in his two letters, and the word “steadfastness,” which is also used, is directly derived from it (1 Peter 5:10; 2 Peter 1:12; 3:17).

37. “It is written: . . . this must be fulfilled in me.” When our Lord refers to his impending crucifixion, he does not merely speak of it as his “death.” He especially describes it as being “‘numbered with the transgressors.’” This reminds us that the main purpose of his death

was not to be an example of self-denial but to be a substitute for us, a sacrifice for us, to become sin for us, and to be made a curse for us.
38. “Here are two swords.” “That is enough.” The disciples did not understand our Lord here. Our Lord, seeing their dullness of understanding, dismisses the subject. The disciples took his words about the swords literally, but he was talking figuratively. If they could not see his meaning now, they would later. At present he said “enough” and for wise reasons would say no more.

LUKE 22:39-46

JESUS PRAYS ON THE MOUNT OF OLIVES

The verses before us contain Luke’s account of our Lord’s agony in the garden. It is a passage of Scripture which we should always approach with peculiar reverence. The history which it records is one of the “deep things of God.” While we read it, the words of Exodus should come across our minds, “Put off your shoes from off your feet; the place whereon you stands is holy ground.” (Exod. 3:5.)

We see, firstly, in this passage, **an example of what believers ought to do in time of trouble.** The great Head of the Church Himself supplies the pattern. We are told that when He came to the Mount of Olives, the night before He was crucified, “He knelt down and prayed.”

It is a striking fact, that both the Old and New Testaments give one and the same receipt for bearing trouble. What does the book of

Psalms say? “Call upon me in the time of trouble—I will deliver you.” (Psalm 50:15.) What does the apostle James say? “Is any afflicted? let him pray.” (James v. 13.) Prayer is the remedy which Jacob used, when he feared his brother Esau. Prayer is the remedy which Job used when property and children were suddenly taken from him. Prayer is the remedy which Hezekiah used when Sennacherib’s threatening letter arrived. And prayer is the remedy which the Son of God Himself was not ashamed to use in the days of His flesh. In the hour of His mysterious agony He “prayed.”

Let us take care that we use our Master’s remedy, if we want comfort in affliction. Whatever other means of relief we use, let us pray. The first Friend we should turn to ought to be God. The first message we should send ought to be to the throne of grace. No depression of spirits must prevent us. No crushing weight of sorrow must make us speechless. It is a prime device of Satan, to supply the afflicted man with false reasons for keeping silence before God. Let us beware of the temptation to brood sullenly over our wounds. If we can say nothing else, we can say, “I am oppressed—undertake for me.” (Isaiah. 38:14.)

We see, secondly, in these verses, **what kind of prayers a believer ought to make to God in time of trouble.** Once more the Lord Jesus Himself affords a model to His people. We are told that He said, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me—nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done.” He who spoke these words, we must remember, had two distinct natures in one Person.

He had a human will as well as a divine. When He said, “Not my will be done,” He meant that will which He had as a man, with a body, flesh and blood, like our own.

The language used by our blessed Master in this place shows exactly what should be the spirit of a believer’s prayer in his distress. Like Jesus, he should tell his desires openly to his heavenly Father, and spread His wishes unreservedly before Him. But like Jesus, he should do it all with an entire submission of will to the will of God. He should never forget that there may be wise and good reasons for His affliction. He should carefully qualify every petition for the removal of crosses with the saving clause, “If you are willing.” He should wind up all with the meek confession, “Not my will, but yours be done.”

Submission of will like this is one of the brightest graces which can adorn the Christian character. It is one which a child of God ought to aim at in everything, if he desires to be like Christ. But at no time is such submission of will so needful as in the day of sorrow, and in nothing does it shine so brightly as in a believer’s prayers for relief. He who can say from his heart, when a bitter cup is before him, “Not my will, but yours be done,” has reached a high position in the school of God.

We see, thirdly, in these verses, **an example of the exceeding guilt and sinfulness of sin.** We are meant to learn this in Christ’s agony and bloody sweat, and all the mysterious distress of body and

mind which the passage describes. The lesson at first sight may not be clear to a careless reader of the Bible. But the lesson is there.

How can we account for the deep agony which our Lord underwent in the garden? What reason can we assign for the intense suffering, both mental and bodily, which He manifestly endured? There is only one satisfactory answer. It was caused by the burden of a world's imputed sin, which then began to press upon Him in a peculiar manner. He had undertaken to be "sin for us"—to be "made a curse for us"—and to allow our iniquities to be laid on Himself. (2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13; Isaiah. 53:6.) It was the enormous weight of these iniquities which made Him suffer agony. It was the sense of a world's guilt pressing Him down which made even the eternal Son of God sweat great drops of blood, and called from Him "strong crying and tears." The cause of Christ's agony was man's sin. (Heb. 5:7.)

We must beware jealously of the modern notion that our blessed Lord's life and death were nothing more than a great example of self-sacrifice. Such a notion throws darkness and confusion over the whole Gospel. It dishonors the Lord Jesus, and represents Him as less resigned in the day of death than many a modern martyr. We must cling firmly to the old doctrine that Christ was "bearing our sins," both in the garden and on the cross. No other doctrine can ever explain the passage before us, or satisfy the conscience of guilty man.

Would we see the sinfulness of sin in its true colors? Would we learn to hate sin with a godly hatred? Would we know something of the intense misery of souls in hell? Would we understand something

of the unspeakable love of Christ? Would we comprehend Christ's ability to sympathize with those that are in trouble? Then let the agony in the garden come often into our minds. The depth of that agony may give us some idea of our debt to Christ.

We see, lastly, in these verses, **an example of the feebleness of the best of saints.** We are told that while our Lord was in agony, His disciples fell asleep. In spite of a plain injunction to pray, and a plain warning against temptation the flesh overcame the spirit. While Christ was sweating great drops of blood, His apostles slept!

Passages like these are very instructive. We ought to thank God that they have been written for our learning. They are meant to teach us humility. When apostles can behave in this way, the Christian who thinks he stands should take heed lest he fall. They are meant to reconcile believers to death, and make them long for that glorious body which they will have when Christ returns. Then, and not until then, shall we be able to wait upon God without bodily weariness, and to serve Him day and night in His temple.

Notes on 22:39-46

39. Went out as usual. There was one particular place on the Mount of Olives to which our Lord was in the habit of going, which was well-known to his disciples, including Judas Iscariot. So Judas, although it was night, could lead our Lord's enemies to the exact place where his Master was.

40. "Pray that you will not fall into temptation." To be assaulted by temptation is one thing, but to enter into it is quite another. We

cannot avoid the attack, but we are not obliged to give way to it. We cannot prevent temptation coming to us, but it is our own fault if we fall to it.

42. “This cup.” Doddridge says about this word, “It was customary among the ancients to assign to each guest at a feast a particular cup, as well as a dish, and by the kind and quantity of the liquor contained in it, the respect of the entertained was expressed. Hence the word ‘cup’ came in general to signify a portion assigned, whether of pleasure or sorrow.” (See Psalm 11:6 [KJV]; 73:10 [KJV]: 75:8; Isaiah 51:17; Jeremiah 25:15; Matthew 20:23.)

“Not my will, but yours be done.” At no period in our Lord’s earthly ministry does the reality of his manhood come out so clearly as in his agony in the garden and his death on the cross. As man, he endured temptation for us and overcame Satan; as man he showed the intensity of his sufferings by bloody sweat, strong crying, and tears; as man he was thirsty on the cross and said, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” The infinite merit of his passion unquestionably arose from the inseparable union of his Godhead and his manhood. But the nature which is most prominently brought before us in his passion is his nature as man.

43. An angel from heaven appeared. This verse gives additional proof that our Lord was really man. As man, he was for a little time “made a little lower than the angels” (Hebrews 2:9). As man, he condescended to receive comfort from angelic ministry. As man, he was willing to receive an expression of sympathy from angels which the weakness of his disciples prevented them from giving.

44. In anguish. Hundreds of martyrs have suffered the most painful

deaths without any such demonstrations of mental and bodily agony as are here recorded in the case of our Lord. How are we to account for this? How are we to explain the remarkable circumstance that our Lord appears to have felt more distressed than many a martyr has done at the prospect of being burned alive or even when at the stake?

The only satisfactory explanation of Christ's intense agony is the old doctrine of imputed sin. He had come to die for our sins. His death was a vicarious death. As our substitute he was about to bear our iniquities, to suffer for us, and to pay our debts to God with his own blood. He was about to be counted a sinner and be punished, that we might be counted righteous and be delivered from punishment. This sin of the world began to be laid on him in a special way in the garden. He was being made a curse for us by bearing our sins. This was the principal reason for his agony and bloody sweat. The words of Isaiah were being fulfilled (see Isaiah 53:6, 10).

The following quotations on this most important subject are worth reading.

Baxter says, "This agony was not from the fear of death, but from the deep sense of God's wrath against sin, which he as our sacrifice was to bear, in greater pain than mere dying, which his servants often bear with peace."

Sir Matthew Hale, quoted by Ford, says, "Christ stood under the imputation of all our sins; and though he was personally innocent, yet judicially and by way of imputation, he was the greatest offender that ever was. As our Lord was pleased to be our representative in bearing our sins, and to stand in our stead, so all these affections and motions of his soul did bear the same conformity as if acted by us. As

he put on the person of the sinner, so he put on the same sorrow, the same shame, the same trembling, under the apprehension of the wrath of his Father, that we must have done. And as an imputed sin drew with it the obligation to punishment, so it did by necessary consequences raise all those storms and compassions in the soul of Christ as it would have done in the person of a sinner, sin only excepted."

LUKE 22:47-53

JESUS ARRESTED

We should learn, for one thing, from these verses, that **the worst and most wicked acts may be done under a show of love to Christ.** We read that when the traitor Judas brought the enemies of Christ to take Him, he betrayed Him "with a kiss." He made a pretense of affection and respect, at the very moment when he was about to deliver his Master into the hands of his deadliest enemies.

Conduct like this, unhappily, is not without its parallels. The pages of history record many an instance of enormous wickedness wrought out and perfected under the garb of religion. The name of God has too often been pressed into the service of persecution, treachery, and crime. When Jezebel would have Naboth killed, she ordered a "fast to be proclaimed," and false witnesses to accuse him of "blaspheming God and the king." (1 Kings 21:9-10.) When Count de Montfort led a crusade against the Albigenses, he ordered them to be murdered and pillaged, as an act of service to Christ's Church.

When the Spanish Inquisition tortured and burned suspected heretics, they justified their abominable dealings by a profession of zeal for God's truth. The false apostle Judas Iscariot has never lacked successors and imitators. There have always been men ready to betray Christ with a kiss, and willing to deliver the Gospel to its enemies under a show of respect.

Conduct like this, we need not doubt, is utterly abominable in the sight of God. To injure the cause of religion under any circumstances is a great sin, but to injure it while we pretend to show kindness is the blackest of crimes. To betray Christ at any time is the very height of wickedness, but to betray Him with a kiss, proves a man to have become a very child of hell.

We should learn, for another thing, from these verses, that **it is much easier to fight a little for Christ, than to endure hardness and go to prison and death for His sake.** We read that when our Lord's enemies drew near to take Him, one of His disciples "smote the servant of the high priest, and cut off his right ear." Yet the zeal of that disciple was very short-lived. His courage soon died away. The fear of man overcame him. By and bye when our Lord was led away prisoner, he was led away alone. The disciple who was so ready to fight and smite with the sword, had actually forsaken his Master and fled!

The lesson before us is deeply instructive. To suffer patiently for Christ is far more difficult than to work actively. To sit still and endure calmly, is far more hard than to stir about and take part in

the battle. ‘Crusaders’ will always be found more numerous than ‘Martyrs’. The passive graces of religion are far more rare and precious than the active graces. *Work* for Christ may be done from many spurious motives—from excitement, from emulation, from party-spirit, or from love of praise. *Suffering* for Christ will seldom be endured from any but one motive. That motive is the grace of God.

We shall do well to remember these things in forming our estimate of the comparative grace of professing Christians. We err greatly if we suppose that those who do public work, and preach, and speak, and write, and fill the eyes of the Church, are those who are most honorable in God’s sight. Such men are often far less esteemed by Him than some poor unknown believer, who has been lying for years on his back, enduring pain without a murmur. Their public efforts perhaps will prove at last to have brought less glory to Christ than his patience, and to have done less good than his prayers.

The grand test of grace is patient suffering. “I will show Saul,” said the Lord Jesus, “what great things he shall suffer for my name.” (Acts 9:16.) Peter, we may be sure, did far less good when he drew his sword and cut off a man’s ear, than he did when be stood calmly before the council as a prisoner, and said, “We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” (Acts 4:20.)

We should learn, lastly, from these verses, that **the time during which evil is permitted to triumph is fixed and limited by**

God. We read that our Lord said to His enemies when they took Him, “This is your hour and the power of darkness.”

The sovereignty of God over everything done upon earth is absolute and complete. The hands of the wicked are bound until He allows them to work. They can do nothing without His permission. But this is not all. The hands of the wicked cannot stir one moment before God allows them to begin, and cannot stir one moment after God commands them to stop. The very worst of Satan’s instruments are ‘working in chains’. The devil could not touch Job’s property or person until God allowed him. He could not prevent Job’s prosperity returning, when God’s designs on Job were accomplished. Our Lord’s enemies could not take and slay him, until the appointed “hour” of His weakness arrived. Nor yet could they prevent His rising again, when the hour came in which He was declared the Son of God with power, by His resurrection from the dead. (Rom. 1:4.) When He was led forth to Calvary, it was “their hour.” When He rose victorious from the grave, it was His.

The verses before us throw light on the history of believers in ages gone by, from the time of the apostles down to the present day. They have often been severely oppressed and persecuted, but the hand of their enemies has never been allowed entirely to prevail. The “hour” of their trials has generally been succeeded by a season of light. The triumph of their enemies has never been entire and complete. They have had their “hour,” but they have had no more. After the persecution about Stephen, came the conversion of Paul. After the

martyrdom of John Huss, came the German Reformation. After the Marian persecution, came the establishment of English Protestantism. The longest night has had its morning. The sharpest winters have been followed by spring. The heaviest storms have been changed for blue sky.

Let us take comfort in these words of our Lord, in looking forward to our own future lives. If we are followers of Christ, we shall have an "hour" of trial, and it may be a long hour too. But we may rest assured that the darkness shall not last one moment longer than God sees fit for us. In His good time it shall vanish away. "At evening time there shall be light."

Finally, let us take comfort in these words of our Lord, in looking forward to the future history of the Church and the world. Clouds and darkness may gather round the ark of God. Persecutions and tribulations may assail the people of God. The last days of the Church and world will probably be their worst days. But the "hour" of trial, however grievous, will have an end. Even at the worst we may boldly say, "The night is far spent and the day is at hand." (Rom. 13:12.)

Notes on 22:47-53

51. He touched the man's ear and healed him. There are several remarkable things about this miracle. It is the only instance in the Gospels of our Lord healing a fresh wound caused by external violence. It is a striking instance of a miracle worked on an enemy, unasked for, without faith in the heart of the person healed, and without any apparent thankfulness for the cure. It is an

extraordinary proof of the wickedness and hardness of our Lord's enemies that so wonderful a miracle as this could be wrought without any effect being produced on them. Some think that in the darkness the miracle was not seen by anyone except those immediately around Malchus.

LUKE 22:54-62

PETER DISOWNS JESUS

The verses we have now read describe the fall of the apostle Peter. It is a passage which is deeply humbling to the pride of man, but singularly instructive to true Christians. The fall of Peter has been a beacon to the Church, and has probably preserved myriads of souls from destruction. It is a passage which supplies strong proof that the Bible is inspired and Christianity is from God. If the Christian religion had been the invention of uninspired men, its first historians would never have told us that one of the chief apostles denied his Master three times.

The story of Peter's fall teaches us, firstly, **how small and gradual are the steps by which men may go down into great sins.** The various steps in Peter's fall are clearly marked out by the Gospel-writers. They ought always to be observed in reading this part of the apostle's history. The first step was proud self-confidence. Though all men denied Christ, yet he never would! He was ready to go with Him both to prison and to death! The second step was indolent neglect of prayer. When his Master told him to pray, lest he

should enter into temptation, he gave way to drowsiness, and was found asleep. The third step was vacillating indecision. When the enemies of Christ came upon Him, Peter first fought, then ran away, then turned again, and finally "followed afar off." The fourth step was mingling with bad company. He went into the high priest's house and sat among the servants by the fire, trying to conceal his religion, and hearing and seeing all manner of evil. The fifth and last step was the natural consequence of the preceding four. He was overwhelmed with fear when suddenly charged with being a disciple. The snare was round his neck. He could not escape. He plunged deeper into error than ever. He denied his blessed Master three times. The mischief, be it remembered, had been done before. The denial was only the disease coming to a head.

Let us beware of the beginnings of backsliding, however small. We never know what we may come to, if we once leave the king's high-way. The professing Christian who begins to say of any sin or evil habit, "it is but a little one," is in imminent danger. He is sowing seeds in his heart, which will one day spring up and bear bitter fruit. It is a homely saying, that "if men take care of the pence the pounds will take care of themselves." We may borrow a good spiritual lesson from the saying. The Christian who keeps his heart diligently in little things shall be kept from great falls.

The story of Peter's fall teaches us, secondly, **how very far a believer may backslide.**

In order to see this lesson clearly, the whole circumstances of Peter's case ought to be fully weighed. He was a chosen apostle of Christ. He had enjoyed greater spiritual privileges than most men in the world. He had just received the Lord's supper. He had just heard that wonderful discourse recorded in the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth chapters of John. He had been most plainly warned of his own danger. He had boasted most loudly that he was ready for anything that might come upon him. And yet this very man denies his gracious Master, and that repeatedly and after intervals giving him space for reflection. He denies Him once, twice, and three times!

The best and highest believer is a poor weak creature, even at his best times. Whether he knows it or not, he carries within him an almost boundless capacity of wickedness, however fair and decent his outward conduct may seem. There is no enormity of sin into which he may not run, if he does not watch and pray, and if the grace of God does not hold him up. When we read the falls of Noah, Lot, and Peter, we only read what might possibly befall any of ourselves. Let us never presume. Let us never indulge in high thoughts about our own strength, or look down upon others. Whatever else we pray for, let us daily pray that we may "walk humbly with God." (Micah 6:8.)

The story of Peter's fall teaches us, thirdly, **the infinite mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ.** This is a lesson which is brought out most forcibly by a fact which is only recorded in Luke's Gospel. We

are told that when Peter denied Christ the third time, and the rooster crowed, “the Lord turned and looked straight at Peter.”

Those words are deeply touching! Surrounded by blood-thirsty and insulting enemies, in the full anticipation of horrible outrages, an unjust trial, and a painful death, the Lord Jesus yet found time to think kindly of His poor erring disciple. Even then He would have Peter know, that He did not forget him. Sorrowfully no doubt, but not angrily, He “turned and looked straight at Peter.” There was a deep meaning in that look. It was a sermon which Peter never forgot.

The love of Christ toward His people, is a deep well which has no bottom. Let us never measure it by comparison with any kind of love of man or woman. It exceeds all other love, as far as the sun exceeds the rushlight. There is about it a mine of compassion, and patience, and readiness to forgive sin, of whose riches we have but a faint conception. Let us not be afraid to trust that love, when we first feel our sins. Let us never be afraid to go on trusting it after we have once believed. No man need despair, however far he may have fallen, if he will only repent and turn to Christ. If the heart of Jesus was so gracious when He was a prisoner in the judgment hall, we surely need not think it is less gracious, when He sits in glory at the right hand of God.

The story of Peter’s fall teaches us, lastly, **how bitter sin is to believers, when they have fallen into it and discovered their fall.**

This is a lesson which stands out plainly on the face of the verses before us. We are told that when Peter remembered the warning he had received, and saw how far he had fallen, “he went out and wept bitterly.” He found out by experience the truth of Jeremiah’s words, “It is an evil thing and a bitter that you have forsaken the Lord.” (Jer. 2:19.) He felt keenly the truth of Solomon’s saying, “The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways.” (Prov. 14:14.) No doubt he could have said with Job, “I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” (Job 42:6.)

Sorrow like this, let us always remember, is an inseparable companion of true repentance. Here lies the grand distinction between “repentance unto salvation,” and unavailing remorse. Remorse can make a man miserable, like Judas Iscariot, but it can do no more. It does not lead him to God. Repentance makes a man’s heart soft and his conscience tender, and shows itself in real turning to a Father in heaven. The falls of a graceless professor are falls from which there is no rising again. But the fall of a true saint always ends in deep contrition, self-abasement, and amendment of life.

Let us take heed, before we leave this passage, that we always make a right use of Peter’s fall. Let us never make it an excuse for sin. Let us learn from his sad experience, to watch and pray, lest we fall into temptation. If we do fall, let us believe that there is hope for us as there was for him. But above all, let us remember, that if we fall as Peter fell, we must repent as Peter repented, or else we shall never be saved.

LUKE 22:63-71

We should notice, firstly, in these verses, **the shameful treatment that our Lord Jesus Christ underwent at the hands of His enemies.** We read that the men who held Him, "mocked" Him, "smote" Him, "blindfolded" Him, and "struck Him on the face." It was not enough to have taken a prisoner a person of most blameless and charitable life. They must needs add insult to injury.

Conduct like this shows the desperate corruption of human nature. The excesses of savage malice to which unconverted men will sometimes go, and the fierce delight with which they will sometimes trample on the most holy and the most pure, almost justify the strong saying of an old divine, that "man left to himself is half-beast and half-devil." He hates God and all who bear anything of God's image about them. "The carnal mind is enmity against God." (Rom. 8:7.) We have probably a very faint idea of what the world would become, if it were not for the constant restraint that God mercifully puts upon evil. It is not too much to say that if unconverted men had their own way entirely, the earth would soon be little better than a hell.

Our Lord's calm submission to insults like those here described, shows the depth of His love towards sinners. Had He so willed, He could have stopped the insolence of His enemies in a moment. He who could cast out devils with a word, could have summoned legions of angels to His side, and scattered those wretched tools of Satan to

the winds. But our Lord's heart was set on the great work he had come on earth to do. He had undertaken to purchase our redemption by His own humiliation, and He did not flinch from paying the uttermost farthing of the price. He had undertaken to drink the bitter cup of vicarious suffering to save sinners, and "for the joy set before Him He despised the shame," and drank the cup to the very dregs. (Heb. 12:2.)

Patience like that which our blessed Lord exhibited on this occasion should teach His professing people a mighty lesson. We should forbear all murmuring and complaining, and irritation of spirit, when we are ill-treated by the world. What are the occasional insults to which we have to submit compared to the insults which were heaped on our Master? Yet "when He was reviled He reviled not again. When He suffered He threatened not." He left us an example that we should walk in His steps. Let us go and do likewise. (1 Peter 2:21-23.)

We should notice, secondly, in these verses, **the striking prophecy which our Lord delivers about His own coming glory.** He says to His insulting enemies, "Hereafter shall the Son of man sit on the right hand of the power of God." Did they find fault with His lowly appearance, and want a glorious Messiah? They would see Him in glory one day. Did they think He was weak, powerless, and contemptible, because at present there was no outward majesty about Him? They would behold Him one day in the most honorable position in heaven, fulfilling the well-known

prophecy of Daniel, with all judgment committed to His hands. (Dan. 7:9, 10.)

Let us take heed that the future glory of Christ forms a part of our creed, as much as Christ's cross and passion. Let it be a first principle in our religion, that the same Jesus who was mocked, despised, and crucified, is He who has now "all power in heaven and earth and will one day come again in His Father's glory with all His angels."

We see but half the truth if we see nothing but the cross and the first advent. It is essential to our own comfort to see also the second advent, and the crown. That same Jesus who stood before the bar of the high priest and of Pilate, will one day sit upon a throne of glory and summon all His enemies to appear before Him. Happy is that Christian who keeps steadily before his mind that word "hereafter!" Now in this present time believers must be content to take part in their Master's sufferings and with Him to be weak. "Hereafter" they shall share in His glory, and with Him be strong. Now like their Lord they must not be surprised if they are mocked, despised, and disbelieved. "Hereafter" they shall sit with Him on the right hand of God.

We should notice, lastly, in these verses, **what a full and bold confession our Lord makes of His own Messiahship and divinity.** We read that in answer to this question of His enemies, "Then you claim you are the Son of God?" Jesus replied, "You are right in saying that I am." The meaning of this short sentence may

not be clear at first sight to an English reader. It signifies in other words, “You speak the truth. I am, as you say, the Son of God.”

Our Lord’s confession deprived His enemies of all excuse for unbelief. The Jews can never plead that our Lord left their forefathers in ignorance of His mission, and kept them in doubt and suspense. Here we see our Lord telling them plainly who he was, and telling them in words which would convey even more to a Jewish mind than they do to ours. And yet the confession had not the least good effect upon the Jews! Their hearts were hardened by prejudice. Their minds were darkened by judicial blindness. The veil was over the eyes of their inward man. They heard our Lord’s confession unmoved, and only plunged deeper into the most dreadful sin.

The bold confession of our Master upon this occasion, is intended to be an example to all His believing people. Like Him, we must not shrink from speaking out when occasion requires our testimony. The fear of man, and the presence of a multitude must not make us hold our peace. (Job 31:34.) We need not blow a trumpet before us, and go out of our way, to proclaim our own religion. Opportunities are sure to occur in the daily path of duty, when, like Paul on board ship, we may show “whose we are and whom we serve.” (Acts 27:23.) At such opportunities, if we have the mind of Christ, let us not be afraid to show our colors. A confessing Master loves bold, uncompromising, and confessing disciples. Those who honor Him by an outspoken, courageous testimony, He will honor, because they are walking in

His steps. “Whoever,” He says, “shall confess me before men, him will I confess before my Father who is in heaven.” (Matt. 10:32.)

Notes on 22:63-71

69. “The Son of Man will be seated at the right hand . . .” This is a reference to the famous prophecy of Daniel 7:9, 14. Our Lord implies that he is the person spoken about in that prophecy and that, although condemned by the Jews, he would soon be exalted to the highest position of dignity in heaven. The Jews saw this at once and proceeded to put the question in the next verse. This, it should be noted, is the last occasion on which our Lord ever called himself “the Son of Man.”

70. “Are you then the Son of God?” In the previous verse our Lord had called himself “the Son of Man.” His enemies in their question ask him if he is “the Son of God.” They did so because his solemn saying about sitting at God’s right hand showed them that he claimed to be the Messiah and very God.

Luke – Chap. 23

LUKE 23:1-12

Let us observe, for one thing, in this passage, **what false accusations were laid to our Lord Jesus Christ’s charge.** We are told that the Jews accused Him of “subverting the nation, forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, and stirring up the people.” In

all this indictment, we know, there was not a word of truth. It was nothing but an ingenious attempt to enlist the feeling of a Roman governor against our Lord.

False witness and slander are two favorite weapons of the devil. He was a liar from the beginning, and is still the father of lies. (John 8:44.) When he finds that he cannot stop God's work, his next device is to blacken the character of God's servants, and to destroy the value of their testimony. With this weapon he assaulted David— "False witnesses," he says, "did rise against me—they laid to my charge things that I knew not." With this weapon he assaulted the prophets. Elijah was a "troubler of Israel!" Jeremiah was a man who "sought not the welfare of the people but the hurt!" (Psalm 35:11; 1 Kings 18:17; Jer. 38:4.) With this weapon he assaulted the apostles. They were "pestilent fellows," and men who "turned the world upside down." (Acts 24:5; 17:6.) With this weapon he assaulted our Lord all through His ministry. He stirred up his agents to call Him a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a Samaritan and a devil. (Luke 7:34; John 8:48.) And here, in the verses before us, we find him plying his old weapon to the very last. Jesus is arraigned before Pilate upon charges which are utterly untrue.

The servant of Christ must never be surprised if he has to drink of the same cup with his Lord. When He who was holy, harmless, and undefiled, was foully slandered, who can expect to escape? "If they called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they call them of his household?" (Matt. 10:25.) Nothing is too bad to be

reported against a saint. Perfect innocence is no fence against enormous lying, calumny, and misrepresentation. *The most blameless character will not secure us against false tongues.* We must bear the trial patiently. It is part of the cross of Christ. We must sit still, lean back on God's promises, and believe that in the long run truth will prevail. "Rest in the Lord," says David, "and wait patiently for Him." "He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your judgment as the noonday." (Psalm 37:6, 7.)

Let us observe, for another thing, in this passage, **the strange and mingled motives which influence the hearts of unconverted great men.** We are told that when our Lord was sent by Pilate to Herod, king of Galilee, "Herod was exceeding glad; for he was desirous to see him of a long season, because he had heard many things of him; and he hoped to see some miracles done by him."

These words are remarkable. Herod was a sensual, worldly man, the murderer of John the Baptist—a man living in foul adultery with his brother's wife. Such a man, we might have supposed, would have had no desire to see Christ. But Herod had an uneasy conscience. The blood of God's murdered saints, no doubt, rose often before his eyes, and destroyed his peace. The fame of our Lord's preaching and miracles had penetrated even into his court. It was said that another witness against sin had risen up, who was even more faithful and bold than John the Baptist; and who confirmed his teaching by works which even the power of kings could not perform. These

rumors made Herod restless and uncomfortable. No wonder that his curiosity was stirred, and he “desired to see Christ.”

It may be feared that there are many great and rich men like Herod in every age of the church, men without God, without faith, and living only for themselves. They generally live in an atmosphere of their own—flattered, fawned upon, and never told the truth about their souls—haughty, tyrannical, and knowing no will but their own. Yet even these men are sometimes conscience-stricken and afraid.

God raises up some bold witness against their sins, whose testimony reaches their ears. At once their curiosity is stirred. They feel “found out,” and are ill at ease. They flutter round his ministry, like the moth round the candle, and seem unable to keep away from it, even while they do not obey it. They praise his talents and openly profess their admiration of his power. But they never get any further. Like Herod, their conscience produces within them a morbid curiosity to see and hear God’s witnesses. But, like Herod, *their heart is linked to the world by chains of iron*. Tossed to and fro by storms of lust or ungovernable passions, they are never at rest while they live, and after all their fitful struggles of conscience, they die at length in their sins. This is a painful history. But it is the history of many rich men’s souls.

Let us learn from Herod’s case to PITY great men. With all their greatness and apparent splendor, they are often thoroughly miserable within. Silks and satins and official robes, often cover hearts which are utter strangers to peace. That man knows not what

he is wishing, who wishes to be a rich man. Let us PRAY for rich men, as well as pity them. They carry weight in the race for eternal life. If they are saved, it can only be by the greatest miracles of God's grace. Our Lord's words are very solemn, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." (Matt. 19:24.)

Let us observe, finally, in this passage, **how easily and readily, unconverted men can agree in disliking Christ.** We are told that when Pilate sent our Lord a prisoner to Herod, "the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together; for before they were at enmity between themselves." We know not the cause of their enmity. It was probably some petty quarrel, such as will arise among great as well as small. But whatever the cause of enmity, it was laid aside when a common object of contempt, fear, or hatred was brought before them. Whatever else they disagreed about, Pilate and Herod could agree to despise and persecute Christ.

The incident before us is a striking emblem of a state of things which may always be seen in the world. Men of the most discordant opinions can unite in opposing truth. Teachers of the most opposite doctrines can make common cause in fighting against the Gospel. In the days of our Lord, the Pharisees and the Sadducees might be seen combining their forces to entrap Jesus of Nazareth and put Him to death. In our own times we sometimes see Romanists and Socinians —infidels and idolaters—worldly pleasure-lovers and bigoted ascetics —the friends of so-called liberal views and the most determined

opponents of all changes—all ranked together against evangelical religion. One common hatred binds them together. They hate the cross of Christ. To use the words of the apostles in the Acts— "Against your holy child Jesus, whom you have anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, are gathered together." (Acts 4:27.) All hate each other very much, but all hate Christ much more.

The true Christian must not count the enmity of the world a strange thing. He must not marvel, if like Paul at Rome, he finds the way of life, a "way everywhere spoken against," and if all around him agree in disliking his religion. (Acts 28:22.) If he expects that by any concession he can win the favor of man, he will be greatly deceived. Let not his heart be troubled. He must wait for the praise of God. The saying of his Master should often come across his mind— "If you were of the world, the world would love his own; but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." (John 15:19.)

Notes on 23:1-12

1. Led him off to Pilate. Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea. Without him the Jews had no power to put our Lord to death. The mere fact that they were obliged to apply publicly to a foreign ruler to carry out their murderous plan was a striking proof that the scepter had departed from Judah (Genesis 49:10) when the Messiah came.

2. "He opposes payment of taxes." The duplicity and dishonesty of this charge are evident. When the enemies of our Lord wanted to

bring him into disfavor with the Jews, they had asked him “Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not?” (Luke 20:22). But now when they want to make him out to be an offender before the Roman governor, they accuse him of forbidding paying taxes to the Roman emperor. This false charge is as striking as it is dishonest.

3. “It is as you say.” St. Paul refers to this saying when he tells Timothy that our Lord “while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession” (1 Timothy 6:13).

5. They insisted. The Greek word here literally, means, “they grew more strong, more violent, more urgent; they persisted in their accusation.”

7. He sent him to Herod. This Herod was Herod Antipas, the same Herod who killed John the Baptist. He was son of Herod the Great, who had all the children of two years and younger killed in Bethlehem. He was uncle of Herod Agrippa, who killed the apostle James with the sword and would have killed Peter if the apostle had not been miraculously rescued from prison.

The family of the Herod’s was Idumean. They were all descended from Esau, the father of Edom. That detail is worth noting when we see their constant opposition against Christ and his followers. The seed of Esau seems to carry on the old enmity against the seed of Jacob.

11. Sent him back to Pilate. We are told that neither the ruler of Galilee nor the ruler of Judea could find any fault in our Lord. In Galilee most of his miracles had been performed, and he had spent much of his time there. Yet the ruler of Galilee accused him of nothing. He was to be crucified as a lamb without blemish or spot.

12. Herod and Pilate became friends. Theophylact remarks on this verse that "It is a matter of shame to Christians, that while the Devil can persuade wicked men to lay aside their enmities in order to do harm, Christians cannot even keep up friendship in order to do good."

LUKE 23:13-25

We should observe, for one thing, in this passage, *what striking testimony was borne to our Lord Jesus Christ's perfect innocence by His judges*.

We are told that Pilate said to the Jews, "You have brought this man unto me as one that subverts the people—and behold I, having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man concerning those things whereof you accuse him—no, nor yet Herod." The Roman and the Galilean governors were both of one mind. Both agreed in pronouncing our Lord not guilty of the things laid to His charge.

There was a peculiar fitness in this public declaration of Christ's innocence. Our Lord, we must remember, was about to be offered up as a sacrifice for our sins. It was fit and right that those who examined Him should formally pronounce Him a guiltless and blameless person. It was fit and right that the Lamb of God should be found by those who slew Him "a Lamb without blemish and without spot." (1 Pet. 1:19.) The over-ruling hand of God so ordered the

events of His trial, that even when His enemies were judges, they could find no fault and prove nothing against Him.

The circumstance before us may seem of trifling moment to a careless Bible reader. It ought however to commend itself to the heart of every well-instructed Christian. We ought to be daily thankful that our great Substitute was in all respects perfect, and that our Surety was a complete and faultless Surety. What child of man can count the number of his sins? We leave undone things we should do; and do things we ought not to do, every day we live. But this must be our comfort, that Christ the Righteous has undertaken to stand in our place, to pay the debt we all owe, and to fulfill the law we have all broken. He did fulfill that law completely. He satisfied all its demands. He accomplished all its requirements. He was the second Adam, who had "clean hands and a pure heart," and could therefore enter with boldness into God's holy hill. (Psalm 24:4.) He is the righteousness of all sinners who believe in Him. (Rom. 10:4.) In Him all believers are counted perfect fulfillers of the law. The eyes of a holy God behold them in Christ, clothed with Christ's perfect righteousness. For Christ's sake God can now say of the believer, "I find in him no fault at all."

Let us learn for another thing, in this passage, **how thoroughly the Jews took on themselves the whole responsibility of our Lord Jesus Christ's death.** We are told that when Pilate was "willing to release Jesus," the Jews "cried, saying, crucify him, crucify him!" Again, we are told that "with loud shouts they insistently

demanded that he be crucified, and their shouts prevailed." This fact in the history of our Lord's passion deserves particular notice. It shows the strict accuracy of the words of the apostles in after times, when speaking of Christ's death. They speak of it as the act of the Jewish nation, and not of the Romans. "You killed the Prince of life," says Peter to the Jews at Jerusalem. "You slew and hanged him on a tree." (Acts 3:15; 5:30.) "The Jews have both killed the Lord Jesus and their own prophets," says Paul to the Thessalonians. (1 Thess. 2:15.) So long as the world stands the fact before us is a memorial of man's natural hatred against God. When the Son of God came down to earth and dwelt among His own chosen people, they despised Him, rejected Him, and slew Him.

The fearful responsibility which the Jews took on themselves in the matter of our Lord's death was not forgotten by God. The righteous blood which they shed has been crying against them as a people for eighteen hundred years. Scattered all over the earth, wanderers among the nations, without a land, without a government, without a home, the Jews show to this day that their own words have been terribly fulfilled. The blood of their slain Messiah "is upon them and upon their children." They are a standing warning to the world that it is a fearful thing to reject the Lord Christ, and that the nation which speaks stoutly against God, must not be surprised if God deals with it according to its words. Marvelous indeed is the thought that there is mercy in store for Israel, notwithstanding all its sins and unbelief! The nation which pierced and slew Him, shall yet look to Him by faith and be restored to favor. (Zech. 12:10.)

We should observe, lastly, in this passage, **the remarkable circumstances connected with the release of Barabbas.** We are told that Pilate "released Barabbas, the man in prison for insurrection and murder. But he delivered Jesus over to them to do as they wished." Two people were before him, and he must needs release one of the two. The one was a sinner against God and man, a malefactor stained with many crimes. The other was the holy, harmless, and undefiled Son of God, in whom there was no fault at all. And yet Pilate condemns the innocent prisoner and acquits the guilty! He orders Barabbas to be set free, and delivers Jesus to be crucified.

The circumstance before us is very instructive. It shows the bitter malice of the Jews against our Lord. To use the words of Peter, "They denied the holy one and the just, and desired a murderer to be granted to them." (Acts 3:14.) It shows the deep humiliation to which our Lord submitted, in order to procure our redemption. He allowed Himself to be reckoned lighter in the balance than a murderer, and to be counted more guilty than the chief of sinners!

But there is a deeper meaning yet beneath the circumstance before us, which we must not fail to observe. The whole transaction is **a lively emblem of that wondrous exchange that takes place between Christ and the sinner**, when a sinner is justified in the sight of God. Christ has been made "sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." (2 Cor. 5:21.) Christ the innocent has been reckoned guilty before God, that

we the guilty might be reckoned innocent, and be set free from condemnation.

If we are true Christians, let us daily lean our souls on the comfortable thought that Christ has really been our Substitute, and has been punished in our stead. Let us freely confess that, like Barabbas, we deserve death, judgment, and hell. But let us cling firmly to the glorious truth that a sinless Savior has suffered in our stead, and that believing in Him the guilty may go free.

Notes on 23:13-25

14. "Have found no basis for your charges against him." Burgon remarks here that we ought to notice "how many and what various people bear testimony to the innocence of the Holy One: Pilate, Herod, Pilate's wife, Judas Iscariot, the thief on the cross, and the centurion" who supervised the crucifixion. We cannot doubt that this was specially overruled by God's providence.

21. "Crucify him!" Crucifixion was not only the most painful but the most ignominious and disgraceful death to which a person could be sentenced. Bishop Pearson remarks, "By the ignominy of this punishment we are taught how far our Savior descended for us, that while we were slaves, and in the bondage of sin, he might redeem us by a servile death."

25. To their will. This means "the will of the Jews." Here and throughout St. Luke's account of our Lord's passion, much less is made of the role of the Roman soldiers than in the other Gospels. The reason is simple. St. Luke wrote especially for Gentile Christians.

He wanted to emphasize that although our Lord was crucified under Pontius Pilate, the people most to blame for his death were not Gentiles but Jews.

LUKE 23:26-38

THE CRUCIFIXION

We ought to notice, in this passage, **our Lord's words of prophetical warning.** We read that He said to the women who followed Him, as He was being led away to Calvary, "Daughters of Jerusalem, don't weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For the days are coming when they will say, "Fortunate indeed are the women who are childless, the wombs that have not borne a child and the breasts that have never nursed."

These words must have sounded peculiarly terrible to the ears of a Jewish woman. To her it was always a disgrace to be childless. The idea of a time coming when it would be a blessing to have no children, must have been a new and fearsome thought to her mind. And yet within fifty years this prediction of Christ was literally fulfilled! The siege of Jerusalem by the Roman army under Titus, brought down on all the inhabitants of the city the most horrible sufferings from famine and pestilence that can be conceived. Women are reported to have actually eaten their own children during the siege for lack of food. Upon none did the last judgments sent upon the Jewish nation fall so heavily as upon the wives, the mothers, and the little children.

Let us beware of supposing that the Lord Jesus holds out to man nothing but mercy, pardon, love, and forgiveness. Beyond all doubt He is plenteous in mercy. There is mercy with Him like a mighty stream. He "delights in mercy." But we must never forget that there is justice with Him as well as mercy. There are judgments preparing for the impenitent and the unbelieving. There is wrath revealed in the Gospel for those who harden themselves in wickedness. The same cloud which was bright to Israel was dark to the Egyptians. The same Lord Jesus who invites the laboring and heavy-laden to come to Him and rest, declares most plainly that unless a man repents he will perish, and that he who believes not shall be damned. (Luke 13:3; Mark 16:16.)

The same Savior who now holds out His hands to the disobedient and gainsaying, will come one day in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those that know not God and obey not the Gospel. (2 Thess. 1:8.) Let these things sink down into our hearts. Christ is indeed most gracious. But the day of grace must come to an end at last. An unbelieving world will find at length, as Jerusalem did, that there is judgment with God as well as mercy. No wrath will fall so heavily as that which has been long accumulating and heaping up.

We ought to notice, for another thing, in this passage, **our Lord's words of gracious intercession.** We read that when He was crucified, His first words were, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." His own racking agony of body did not make Him forget others. The first of His seven sayings on the cross

was a prayer for the souls of His murderers. His prophetical office He had just exhibited by a remarkable prediction. His kingly office He was about to exhibit soon by opening the door of paradise to the penitent thief. His priestly office He now exhibited by interceding for those who crucified Him. “Father,” He said, “forgive them.”

The fruits of this wonderful prayer will never be fully seen until the day when the books are opened, and the secrets of all hearts are revealed. We have probably not the least idea how many of the conversions to God at Jerusalem which took place during the first six months after the crucifixion, were the direct reply to this marvelous prayer. Perhaps this prayer was the first step towards the penitent thief’s repentance. Perhaps it was one means of affecting the centurion, who declared our Lord “a righteous man,” and the people who “smote their breasts and returned.” Perhaps the three thousand converted on the day of Pentecost, foremost, it may be at one time among our Lord’s murderers, owed their conversion to this very prayer. The day will declare it. There is nothing secret that shall not be revealed. This only we know, that “the Father hears the Son always.” (John 11:42.) We may be sure that this wondrous prayer was heard.

Let us see in our Lord’s intercession for those who crucified Him, one more proof of *Christ’s infinite love to sinners*. The Lord Jesus is indeed most pitiful, most compassionate, most gracious. None are too wicked for Him to care for. None are too far gone in sin for his almighty heart to take interest about their souls. He wept over

unbelieving Jerusalem. He heard the prayer of the dying thief. He stopped under the tree to call the tax-collector Zaccheus. He came down from heaven to turn the heart of the persecutor Saul. He found time to pray for His murderers even on the cross. Love like this is a love that passes knowledge. The vilest of sinners have no cause to be afraid of applying to a Savior like this. If we want warrant and encouragement to repent and believe, the passage before us surely supplies enough.

Finally, let us see in our Lord's intercession **a striking example of the spirit which should reign in the hearts of all His people.** Like Him, let us return good for evil, and blessing for cursing. Like Him, let us pray for those who evil entreat us and persecute us. The pride of our hearts may often rebel against the idea. The fashion of this world may call it foolish to behave in such a way. But let us never be ashamed to imitate our divine Master. The man who prays for his enemies shows the mind that was in Christ, and will have his reward.

Notes on 23:26-38

26. They seized Simon from Cyrene. It would appear that our Lord carried his cross himself until he was exhausted, and that after this Simon was pressed into carrying it by the soldiers.

Nothing certain is known about this Simon, although his sons Alexander and Rufus are mentioned in Mark 15:21. Simon was perhaps a disciple of Christ when Mark wrote his Gospel, whatever he was at the time of the crucifixion.

27. A large number of people followed him, including women. Burgon remarks “that no woman is mentioned as speaking against our Lord in his life, or having a share in his death. On the contrary, he was anointed by a woman for his burial, women were the last at his grave and the first at his resurrection, to a woman he first appeared when he rose again, women ministered to his needs, women bewailed and lamented for him, a pagan woman pleaded with her husband, Pilate, for his life, and, above all, of a woman he was born.”

31. “When the tree is green . . . it is dry.” Our Lord contrasts himself and the Jewish nation. “If the Romans practice such cruelties on me, who is a green tree and the very source of life, what will they do one day to your nation, which is like a barren, withered trunk, dead in trespasses and sins?”

32. Criminals . . . led out with him. This is in literal fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy that the Messiah would be “numbered with the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:12).

33. They came to the place called The Skull. The commonly held opinion that Calvary was a mount or hill is destitute of any foundation in Scripture. All four Gospel writers speak of it as a “place.” None of them calls it a “mount.”

34. “Father, forgive them.” These words were probably spoken while our Lord was being nailed to the cross or as soon as the cross was set on end. It is worth noting that as soon as the blood of the great sacrifice began to flow, the Great High Priest began to intercede.

During the six hours that our Lord was on the cross, he showed that he possessed full power as the Son of God and that although he

suffered, his sufferings were undertaken voluntarily. As king and prophet he opened the gates of life to the penitent thief and foretold that man's entry into paradise. As priest he intercedes in this prayer for those who crucified him.

34. They divided up his clothes by casting lots. Our Lord evidently was crucified naked. The shame of such a posture in death must doubtless have added much to the misery of the punishment of crucifixion.

38. THE KING OF THE JEWS. Observe that our Lord was crucified in the end as a king. He came to set up a spiritual kingdom, and as a king he died.

LUKE 23:39-43

THE DYING THIEF

The verses we have now read deserve to be printed in letters of gold. They have probably been the salvation of myriads of souls. Multitudes will thank God to all eternity that the Bible contains this story of the penitent thief.

We see, firstly, in the history before us, **the sovereignty of God in saving sinners.** We are told that two malefactors were crucified together with our Lord, one on His right hand and the other on His left. Both were equally near to Christ. Both saw and heard all that happened, during the six hours that He hung on the cross. Both were dying men, and suffering acute pain. Both were alike wicked sinners, and needed forgiveness. Yet one died in his sins, as he had lived,

hardened, impenitent, and unbelieving. The other repented, believed, cried to Jesus for mercy, and was saved.

A fact like this should teach us humility. We cannot account for it. We can only say, "Even so, Father, for so it seems good in your sight." (Matt. 11:26.) How it is that under precisely the same circumstances one man is converted and another remains dead in sins—why the very same sermon is heard by one man with complete indifference and sends another home to pray and seek Christ—why the same Gospel is hidden to one and revealed to another, all these are questions which we cannot possibly answer. We only know that it is so, and that it is useless to deny it.

Our own duty is clear and plain. We are to make a diligent use of all the means which God has appointed for the good of souls. There is no necessity that any one should be lost. There is no such a thing as decreed damnation in the Bible. The offers of the Gospel are wide, free and general. "In all our doings," says the 17th Article, "that will of God is to be followed, which we have expressly declared to us in the word of God." God's sovereignty was never meant to destroy man's responsibility. *One thief was saved that no sinner might despair, but only one, that no sinner might presume.*

We see secondly in this history, **the unvarying character of repentance unto salvation.** This is a point in the penitent thief's story which is fearfully overlooked. Thousands look at the broad fact that he was saved in the hour of death, and look no further. They do not look at the distinct and well-defined evidences of repentance

which fell from his lips before he died. Those evidences deserve our closest attention.

The first notable step in the thief's repentance was his concern about his companion's wickedness in reviling Christ. "Do you not fear God," he said, "seeing you are in the same condemnation."

The second step was a full acknowledgment of his own sin. "We indeed are just in condemnation. We receive the due reward of our deeds."

The third step was an open confession of Christ's innocence. "This man has done nothing amiss."

The fourth step was faith in Jesus Christ's power and will to save him. He turned to a crucified sufferer, and called Him "Lord," and declared his belief that He had a kingdom.

The fifth step was prayer. He cried to Jesus when he was hanging on the cross, and asked Him even then to think upon his soul.

The sixth and last step was humility. He begged to be "remembered" by our Lord. He mentions no great thing. Enough for him if he is remembered by Christ.

These six points should always be remembered in connection with the penitent thief. His time was very short for giving proof of his conversion. But it was time well used. Few dying people have ever left behind them such good evidences as were left by this man.

Let us beware of a repentance without evidences. Thousands, it may be feared, are every year going out of the world with a lie in their right hand. They fancy they will be saved because the thief was saved in the hour of death. They forget that if they would be saved as he was, they must repent as he repented. The shorter a man's time is, the better must be the use he makes of it. The nearer he is to death, when he first begins to think, the clearer must be the evidence he leaves behind. Nothing, it may be safely laid down as a general rule, nothing is so thoroughly unsatisfactory as a death-bed repentance.

We see, thirdly, in this history, **the amazing power and willingness of Christ to save sinners.** It is written that He is "able to save to the uttermost." (Heb. 7:25.) If we search the Bible through, from Genesis to Revelation, we shall never find a more striking proof of Christ's power and mercy than the salvation of the penitent thief.

The time when the thief was saved was the hour of our Lord's greatest weakness. He was hanging in agony on the cross. Yet even then He heard and granted a sinner's petition, and opened to him the gate of life. Surely this was "power!"

The man whom our Lord saved was a wicked sinner at the point of death, with nothing in his past life to recommend him, and nothing notable in his present position but a humble prayer. Yet even he was plucked like a brand from the burning. Surely this was "mercy."

Do we want proof that salvation is of grace and not of works? We have it in the case before us. The dying thief was nailed hand and foot to the cross. He could do literally nothing for his own soul. Yet even he through Christ's infinite grace was saved. No one ever received such a strong assurance of his own forgiveness as this man.

Do we want proof that sacraments and ordinances are not *absolutely* needful to salvation, and that men may be saved without them when they cannot be had? We have it in the case before us. The dying thief was never baptized, belonged to no visible church, and never received the Lord's supper. But he repented and believed, and therefore he was saved.

Let these things sink down into our hearts. Christ never changes. The way of salvation is always one and the same. He lives who saved the penitent thief. There is hope for the vilest sinner, if he will only repent and believe.

We see, lastly, in the history before us, **how near a dying believer is to rest and glory.** We read that our Lord said to the malefactor in reply to his prayer, "Today shall you be with me in paradise."

That word "today" contains a body of divinity. It tells us that the very moment a believer dies, his soul is in happiness and in safe keeping. His full redemption is not yet come. His perfect bliss will not begin before the resurrection morning. But there is no mysterious delay, no season of suspense, no purgatory, between his

death and a state of reward. In the day that he breathes his last he goes to Paradise. In the hour that he departs he is with Christ. (Phil 1:23.)

Let us remember these things, when our believing friends fall asleep in Christ. We must not sorrow for them as those who have no hope. While we are sorrowing they are rejoicing. While we are putting on our mourning, and weeping at their funerals, they are safe and happy with their Lord. Above all, let us remember these things, if we are true Christians, in looking forward to our own deaths. To die is a solemn thing. But if we die in the Lord, we need not doubt that our death will be gain.

Notes on 23:39-43

42. "Jesus, remember me." The remarks of Ness on this wonderful prayer are worth reading:

This short prayer contained a very large and long creed, the articles whereof are these.

1. He believed that the soul died not with the body of man.
2. That there is a world to come for rewarding the pious and penitent, and for punishing the impious and impenitent.
3. That Christ though now under crucifying and killing tortures, yet had a right to a kingdom.
4. That this kingdom was in a better world than the present evil world.
5. That Christ would not keep this kingdom all to himself.
6. That he would bestow a part and portion thereof on those that be

truly penitent.
7. That the key of this kingdom did hang at Christ's girdle, though he now hung dying on the cross.
8. That he does roll his whole soul for eternal salvation upon a dying Savior.

43. "Today you will be with me in paradise." This sentence deserves close attention. It is a distinct answer to the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory. It shows clearly that no purification of any kind after death is needed for the person that dies a penitent believer. If the thief needed no purgatory, the whole doctrine of purgatory falls to the ground.
This is an instructive intimation about the state of believers after death. The moment they die, they are "with" Christ. Their condition, of course, is one we cannot pretend to explain. We cannot comprehend that state of a soul separate from the body. It is enough for us to know that a dead believer is immediately with Christ.
This is clear proof of the separate existence of the soul when the body is dead. We shall live and have a being even when our earthly tabernacle is moldering in the grave. The thief's body was that day to be broken and mangled by the Roman soldiers. But the thief himself was to be with Christ.
"In paradise." Heinsius remarks that Christ never performed a more illustrious miracle than he did in saving the penitent thief.
The Church of England's Homily of Good Works quotes Chrysostom as saying: "I can show a man that by faith without deeds lived and came to heaven: but without faith never man had life. The thief, who

was hanged when Christ suffered, did believe only, and the most merciful God justified him. And because no man shall say, that he lacked time to do good deeds, or else he would have done them, truth it is, I will not contend therein. But this I will surely affirm, that faith only saved him."

Luther says, "This is a comfortable symbol and example for all Christians, how that God will never let faith in Christ and a confession of his name go down. If the disciples as a body, and those otherwise related to Christ, confess not and lose their faith, deny him in fear, are offended and forsake him, this malefactor and murderer must come forward and confess him, to preach him to others, and teach all men who he is and what consolation all may find in him."

LUKE 23:44-49

JESUS' DEATH

Let us observe in these verses, **the miraculous SIGNS which accompanied our Lord's death on the cross.** We are told that there was "a darkness over all the earth" for three hours. "The sun was darkened and the curtain of the temple was torn in two."

It was fit and right that the attention of all around Jerusalem should be arrested in a marked way, when the great sacrifice for sin was being offered, and the Son of God was dying. There were signs and wonders wrought in the sight of all Israel, when the law was given on Sinai. There were signs and wonders in like manner when the atoning blood of Christ was shed on Calvary. There was a sign for

an unbelieving world. The darkness at mid-day was a miracle which would compel men to think. There was a sign for the professing Church and the ministers of the temple. The tearing of the curtain which hung between the holy place and the holy of holies, was a miracle which would strike awe into the heart of every priest and Levite in Jewry.

Signs like these, on special occasions, let us remember, are a part of God's ways in dealing with man. He knows the desperate stupidity and unbelief of human nature. He sees it necessary to arouse our attention by miraculous works, when He brings in a new dispensation. He thus compels men to open their eyes whether they will or not, and to hear His voice for a little season. He has done so frequently in the days that are past. He did so when He gave the law. He did so in the passage before us when He brought in the Gospel. He will do so once more when Christ comes again the second time. He will show a sneering, unbelieving world that He can suspend the laws of nature at His pleasure, and alter the framework of creation as easily as He called the earth into being. He will yet fulfill His words, "Yet once more, I will shake not the earth only, but also the heavens." "The moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the Lord of hosts shall reign in mount Zion." (Heb. 12:26; Isaiah 24:23.)

Let us observe, secondly, in these verses, **the remarkable WORDS which our Lord spoke when He died.** We read that "When he had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into your

hands I commend my spirit—and having said thus, he gave up the spirit."

There is a depth of meaning, no doubt, in these words which we have no line to fathom. There was something mysterious about our Lord's death, which made it unlike the death of any mere man. He who spoke the words before us, we must carefully remember, was God as well as man. His divine and human nature were inseparably united. His divine nature of course could not die. He says Himself; "I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man takes it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." (John 10:17, 18.) Christ died, not as we die when our hour is come—not because He was compelled and could not help dying—but voluntarily, and of His own free will.

There is a sense, however, in which our Lord's words supply a lesson to all true Christians. They show us *the manner in which death should be met by all God's children*. They afford an example which every believer should strive to follow. Like our Master, we should not be afraid to confront the king of terrors. We should regard him as a vanquished enemy, whose sting has been taken away by Christ's death. We should think of him as a foe who can hurt the body for a little season, but after that has no more that he can do. We should await his approaches with calmness and patience, and believe that when flesh fails our soul will be in good keeping. This was the mind of dying Stephen; "Lord Jesus," he said, "receive my spirit." This was the mind of Paul the aged, when the time of his departure

was at hand. He says, “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day.” (Acts 7:59; 2 Tim. 1:12.) Happy indeed are those who have a last end like this!

Let us observe, lastly, in these verses, **the power of conscience in the case of the centurion and the people who saw Christ die.** We are told that the centurion “praised God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man.” We are told that the people who had come together to the sight, “smote their breasts and went away.”

We know not exactly the nature of the feelings here described. We know not the extent to which they went, or the after-fruit which they brought forth. One thing, at all events, is clear. The Roman officer felt convinced that he had been superintending an unrighteous action, and crucifying an innocent person. The gazing crowd were pierced to the heart by a sense of having aided, countenanced, and abetted a grievous wrong. Both Jew and Gentile left Calvary that evening heavy-hearted, self-condemned, and ill at ease.

Great indeed is the power of conscience! Mighty is the influence which it is able to exercise on the hearts of men! It can strike terror into the minds of monarchs on their thrones. It can make multitudes tremble and shake before a few bold friends of truth, like a flock of sheep. Blind and mistaken as conscience often is, unable to convert man or lead him to Christ, it is still a most blessed part of man’s constitution, and *the best friend in the congregation that the preacher of the Gospel has.* No wonder that Paul says, “By

manifestation of the truth we commend ourselves to every man's conscience." (2 Cor. 4:2.)

He that desires inward peace must beware of quarreling with his conscience. Let him rather use it well, guard it jealously, hear what it has to say, and reckon it his friend. Above all, let him pray daily that his conscience may be enlightened by the Holy Spirit, and cleansed by the blood of Christ. The words of John are very significant— "If our heart condemns us not, then have we confidence toward God." (1 John 3:21.) That man is doing well who can say, "I exercise myself to have a conscience void of offence toward God and toward man." (Acts 24:16.)

Notes on 23:44-49

44. It was now about the sixth hour. Our Lord was crucified at 9 A. M. (the Jewish third hour). The darkness started at 12 noon (the sixth hour). So this supernatural darkness existed during the brightest part of the day, from 12 noon to 3 p.m. Jesus hung on the cross for six hours before he gave up his spirit.

Darkness came over the whole land. This was a miraculous darkness. It could not have been an eclipse of the sun because our Lord's crucifixion took place at the Passover, and the Passover was always kept at the full moon, when an eclipse of the sun is impossible.

45 The curtain of the temple was torn in two. This miracle must have been as striking and terrible to the priests who ministered in the temple as the darkness was to the inhabitants of Palestine. It signified the opening of the way into the holiest by Christ's death—

the passing away of the Jewish dispensation and the revelation of the gospel way of salvation to all mankind.
47. “Surely this was a righteous man.” It is doubtful if this translation conveys the exact meaning of the Greek. Alford translates it, “Truly this man was innocent, or just.”

LUKE 23:50-56

JESUS’ BURIAL

We see from these verses that **Christ has some disciples of whom little is known.** We are told of one Joseph, “a good man and a just”—a man who “had not consented to the counsel” of those who condemned our Lord—a man who “himself waited for the kingdom of God. This man went boldly to Pilate after the crucifixion, begged the body of Jesus, “took it down” from the cross, and “laid it in a tomb.”

We know nothing of Joseph excepting what is here told us. In no part of the Acts or Epistles do we find any mention of his name. At no former period of our Lord’s ministry does he ever come forward. His reason for not openly joining the disciples before, we cannot explain. But here, at the eleventh hour, this man is not afraid to show himself one of our Lord’s friends. At the very time when the apostles had forsaken Jesus, Joseph is not ashamed to show his love and respect. Others had confessed Him while He was living and doing miracles. It was reserved for Joseph to confess Him when He was dead.

The history of Joseph is full of instruction and encouragement. It shows us that Christ has friends of whom the Church knows little or nothing, friends who profess less than some do, but friends who in real love and affection are second to none. It shows us, above all, that events may bring out grace in quarters where at present we do not expect it; and that the cause of Christ may prove one day to have many supporters, of whose existence we are at present not aware. These are they whom David calls "hidden ones," and Solomon compares to a "lily among thorns." (Psalm 83:3; Cant. 2:2.)

Let us learn from the case of Joseph of Arimathaea, to be charitable and hopeful in our judgments. All is not barren in this world, when our eyes perhaps see nothing. There may be some latent sparks of light when all appears dark. Little plants of spiritual life may be existing in some remote Romish, or Greek, or Armenian congregations, which the Father Himself has planted. Grains of true faith may be lying hid in some neglected English parish, which have been placed there by God. There were seven thousand true worshipers in Israel of whom Elijah knew nothing. The day of judgment will bring forward men who seemed last, and place them among the first. (1 Kings 19:18.)

We see secondly, from these verses, **the reality of Christ's death.** This is a fact which is placed beyond dispute, by the circumstances related about His burial. Those who took His body from the cross and wrapped it in linen, could not have been deceived. Their own senses must have been witnesses to the fact, that He

whom they handled was a corpse. Their own hands and eyes must have told them, that He whom they laid in Joseph's sepulcher was not alive but dead.

The importance of the fact before us is far greater than a careless reader supposes. If Christ did not really die, there would be an end of all the comfort of the Gospel. Nothing short of His death could have paid man's debt to God. His incarnation, and sermons, and parables, and miracles, and sinless obedience to the law, would have availed nothing, if He had not died. The penalty threatened to the first Adam was death eternal in hell. If the second Adam had not really and actually died in our stead, as well as taught us truth, the original penalty would have continued in full force against Adam and all his children. It was the life-blood of Christ which was to save our souls.

Forever let us bless God that our great Redeemer's death is a fact beyond all dispute. The centurion who stood by the cross, the friends who took out the nails, and laid the body in the grave, the women who stood by and beheld, the priests who sealed up the grave, the soldiers who guarded the sepulcher, all, all are witnesses that Jesus actually was dead. The great sacrifice was really offered. The life of the Lamb was actually taken away. The penalty due to sin has actually been discharged by our Divine Substitute. Sinners believing in Jesus may hope and not be afraid. In themselves they are guilty. But Christ has died for the ungodly; and their debt is now completely paid.

We see, lastly, in these verses, **the respect paid by Christ's disciples to the fourth commandment.** We are told that the women who had prepared spices and ointment to anoint our Lord's body, "rested the Sabbath Day, according to the commandment."

This little fact is a strong indirect argument in reply to those who tell us that Christ abolished the fourth commandment. Neither here nor elsewhere do we find anything to warrant any such conclusion. We see our Lord frequently denouncing the man-made traditions of the Jews about Sabbath observance. We see Him purifying the blessed day from superstitious and unscriptural opinions. We see Him maintaining firmly that works of necessity and works of mercy were not breaches of the fourth commandment. But nowhere do we find Him teaching that the Sabbath was not to be kept at all. And here, in the verse before us, we find His disciples as scrupulous as any about the duty of keeping holy a Sabbath Day. Surely they could never have been taught by their Master that the fourth commandment was not intended to be binding on Christians.

Let us cling firmly to the old doctrine that the Sabbath is not a mere Jewish institution, but a day which was meant for man from the beginning, and which was intended to be honored by Christians quite as much as by Jews. Let us not doubt that the Apostles were taught by our Lord to change the day from the last day of the week to the first, although mercifully checked from publicly proclaiming the change, in order to avoid giving offence to Israel. Above all, let us regard the Sabbath as an institution of primary importance to man's

soul, and contend earnestly for its preservation among us in all its integrity. It is good for body, mind and soul. It is good for the nation which observes it, and for the church which gives it honor. It is but a few steps from “no Sabbath” to “no God.” The man who would make the Sabbath a day for business and pleasure, is an enemy to the best interests of his fellow-creatures. The man who supposes that a believer ought to be so spiritual as not to need the separation of one day in the week from the rest, can know but little of the human heart, or the requirements of our position in an ensnaring and evil world.

Notes on 23:50-56

51. Waiting for the kingdom of God. This expression reminds us of the words spoken about Simeon and Anna. Joseph expected the Messiah’s spiritual kingdom to be set up and believed that Jesus was the Messiah.

53. He took it down, wrapped it in linen cloth. This deserves special note. It is absurd to suppose that the nails could have been withdrawn from our Lord’s hands and feet, and the body prepared for burial by wrapping it in linen without some signs of life being perceived if life had remained in Christ. To see the vastness of the miracle of Christ’s resurrection, it is essential to be thoroughly convinced that he really died.

One in which no one had yet been laid. This detail is specially mentioned to show that no other body but our Lord’s was in the tomb, and that the person who rose was Jesus Christ and no one else.

56. Prepared spices and perfumes. This shows that the women were

fully satisfied that our Lord was dead and had no expectation that he would rise again.

Luke – Chap. 24

LUKE 24:1-12

THE RESURRECTION

The resurrection of Christ is one of the great foundation-stones of the Christian religion. In practical importance it is second only to the crucifixion. The chapter we have now begun directs our mind to the evidence of the resurrection. It contains unanswerable proof that Jesus not only died, but rose again.

We see, in the verses before us, **the reality of Christ's resurrection.** We read, that upon "the first day of the week" certain women came to the tomb in which the body of Jesus had been laid, in order to anoint Him. But when they came to the place, "they found the stone rolled away. And they entered in and found not the body of the Lord Jesus."

This simple fact is the starting-point in the history of the resurrection of Christ. On Friday morning His body was safe in the tomb. On Sabbath morning His body was gone. By whose hands had it been taken away? Who had removed it? Not surely the priests and scribes and other enemies of Christ! If they had had Christ's body to

show in disproof of His resurrection, they would gladly have shown it. Not the apostles and other disciples of our Lord! They were far too much frightened and dispirited to attempt such an action, and the more so when they had nothing to gain by it. One explanation, and one only, can meet the circumstance of the case. That explanation is the one supplied by the angels in the verse before us. Christ "had risen" from the grave. To seek Him in the sepulcher was seeking "the living among the dead." He had risen again, and was soon seen alive and conversing in the body by many credible witnesses.

The fact of our Lord's resurrection rests on evidence which no infidel can ever explain away. It is confirmed by testimony of every kind, sort, and description. The plain unvarnished story which the Gospel writers tell about it, is one that cannot be overthrown. The more the account they give is examined, the more inexplicable will the event appear, unless we accept it as true. If we choose to deny the truth of their account we may deny everything in the world. It is not so certain that Julius Caesar once lived, as it is that Christ rose again.

Let us cling firmly to the resurrection of Christ, as one of the pillars of the Gospel. It ought to produce in our minds a settled conviction of the truth of Christianity. Our faith does not depend merely on a set of texts and doctrines. It is founded on a mighty historical fact which the skeptic has never been able to overturn. It ought to assure us of the certainty of the resurrection of our own bodies after death. If our Master has risen from the grave, we need not doubt that His disciples shall rise again at the last day.

Above all it ought to fill our hearts with a joyful sense of the fullness of Gospel salvation. Who is he that shall condemn us? Our Great Surety has not only died for us but risen again. (Rom. 8:34.) He has gone to prison for us, and come forth triumphantly after atoning for our sins. The payment He made for us has been accepted. The work of satisfaction has been perfectly accomplished. No wonder that Peter exclaims, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy, has begotten us again to a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." (1 Pet. 1:3.)

We see, secondly, in the verses before us, **how dull the memory of the disciples was about some of our Lord's teachings.** We are told that the angels who appeared to the women, reminded them of their Master's words in Galilee, foretelling His own crucifixion and resurrection. And then we read, "They remembered his words." They had heard them, but made no use of them. Now after many days they call them to mind.

This *dullness of memory* is a common spiritual disease among believers. It prevails as widely now as it did in the days of the first disciples. It is one among many proofs of our fallen and corrupt condition. Even after men have been renewed by the Holy Spirit, their readiness to forget the promises and precepts of the Gospel is continually bringing them into trouble. They hear many things which they ought to store up in their hearts, but seem to forget as fast as they hear. And then, perhaps after many days, affliction brings them

up before their recollection, and at once it flashes across their minds that they heard them long ago! They find that they had heard, but heard in vain.

The true cure for a dull memory in religion, is to get deeper love toward Christ, and affections more thoroughly set on things above. *We do not readily forget the things we love*, and the objects which we keep continually under our eyes. The names of our parents and children are always remembered. The face of the husband or wife we love is engraved on the tablets of our hearts. The more our affections are engaged in Christ's service, the more easy shall we find it to remember Christ's words. The words of the apostle ought to be carefully pondered— "We ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip." (Heb. 2:1.)

We see, lastly, **how slow of belief the first disciples were on the subject of Christ's resurrection.** We read that when the women returned from the sepulcher and told the things they had heard from the angels to the eleven apostles, "their words seemed to them idle tales, and they believed them not." In spite of the plainest declarations from their Master's own lips that He would rise again the third day—in spite of the distinct testimony of five or six credible witnesses that the sepulcher was empty, and that angels had told them He was risen—in spite of the manifest impossibility of accounting for the empty tomb on any other supposition than that of

a miraculous resurrection—in spite of all this, these eleven faithless ones would not believe!

Perhaps we marvel at their unbelief. No doubt it seems at first sight most senseless, most unreasonable, most provoking, most unaccountable. But shall we not do well to look at home? Do we not see around us in the Christian Churches a mass of unbelief far more unreasonable and far more blameworthy than that of the apostles? Do we not see, after eighteen centuries of additional proofs that Christ has risen from the dead, a general lack of faith which is truly deplorable? Do we not see myriads of professing Christians who seem not to believe that Jesus died and rose again, and is coming to judge the world? These are painful questions. Strong faith is indeed a rare thing. No wonder that our Lord said, "When the Son of man comes, shall He find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8.)

Finally, let us admire the wisdom of God, which can bring great good out of seeming evil. The unbelief of the apostles is one of the strongest indirect evidences that Jesus rose from the dead. If the disciples were at first so backward to believe our Lord's resurrection, and were at last so thoroughly persuaded of its truth that they preached it everywhere, Christ must have risen indeed. The first preachers were men who were convinced in spite of themselves, and in spite of determined, obstinate unwillingness to believe. If the apostles at last believed, the resurrection must be true.

Notes on 24:1-12

1. The first day of the week. This was our Sunday. The Jewish

Sabbath was our Saturday.

2. The stone rolled away. This, according to Matthew 28:2, had been the first great sign accompanying the Resurrection. At the sight of the angels who rolled away the stone, the Roman guards were first terrified and then fled. After this the women came and found the grave empty.

3. The Lord Jesus. Bishop Brownrig remarks that this is the first time in the New Testament that our Saviour is called by this name. [Editor's note: in the New International Version, this is the second time, the first being Mark 16:19.] Lord, Christ, Jesus are names he frequently had. Here, after his resurrection as a conqueror, St. Luke calls him the Lord Jesus.

4. Wondering about this. They could not tell what to make of the facts in front of them—the empty tomb, the linen clothes lying by themselves, the body gone.

Two men. Here, as in Acts 1:10, we are, of course, to understand angels in the likeness of men. The frequency with which St. Luke mentions angels is a peculiar feature in his Gospel. An angel appears to Zechariah, an angel appears to the Virgin Mary, angels appear to the shepherds when our Lord is born—all mentioned only by St. Luke.

8. They remembered. Ford quotes a good remark of Cecil's on this: "It is not sufficiently considered how much more we need recollection than information."

9. Told all these things. Augustine remarks that these women were "the first preachers of the resurrection of Christ."

To all the others. Who these were, we do not know. It is clear that our

Lord had other disciples in Jerusalem besides the Eleven. On the day of his ascension there were 120.

12. The strips of linen lying by themselves. All writers on the resurrection of Christ call attention, with much justice, to this fact. If the body of our Lord had been stolen from the grave by his friends, it is most improbable that those who stole it would have taken the trouble to remove the linen clothes and wrap them together in an orderly way.

LUKE 24:13-35

The history contained in these verses is not found in any other Gospel but that of Luke. Of all the eleven appearances of Christ after His resurrection, none perhaps is so interesting as the one described in this passage.

Let us mark, in these verses, **what encouragement there is to believers to speak to one another about Christ.** We are told of two disciples walking together to Emmaus, and talking of their Master's crucifixion. And then come the remarkable words, "While they communed together and reasoned, Jesus Himself drew near, and went with them."

Conference on spiritual subjects is a most important means of grace. As iron sharpens iron, so does exchange of thoughts with brethren sharpen a believer's soul. It brings down a special blessing on all who make a practice of it. The striking words of Malachi were meant for the Church in every age — "Then those who feared the

Lord spoke often one to another—and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for those who feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name. And they shall be mine says the Lord, in that day when I make up my jewels." (Mal. 3:16, 17.)

What do we know ourselves of spiritual conversation with other Christians? Perhaps we read our Bibles, and pray in private, and use public means of grace. It is all well, very well. But if we stop short here we neglect a great privilege and have yet much to learn. We ought to "consider one another to provoke to love and good works." We ought to "exhort" and "edify one another." (Heb. 10:24; 1 Thess. 5:11.) Have we no time for spiritual conversation? Let us think again. The quantity of time wasted on frivolous, trifling, and unprofitable talk, is fearfully great. Do we find nothing to say on spiritual subjects? Do we feel tongue-tied and speechless on the things of Christ? Surely if this is the case, there must be something wrong within. A heart right in the sight of God will generally find words. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." (Matt. 12:34.)

Let us learn a lesson from the two travelers to Emmaus. Let us speak of Jesus, when we are sitting in our houses and when we are walking by the way, whenever we can find a disciple to speak to. (Deut. 6:7.) If we believe we are journeying to a heaven where Christ will be the central object of every mind, let us begin to learn the manners of heaven, while we are yet upon earth. So doing we shall

often have One with us whom our eyes will not see, but One who will make our hearts “burn within us” by blessing the conversation.

Let us mark, secondly, in these verses, **how weak and imperfect was the knowledge of some of our Lord’s disciples.** We are told that the two disciples confessed frankly that their expectations had been disappointed by the crucifixion of Christ. “We had hoped,” said they, “that it had been He who would have redeemed Israel.” A temporal redemption of the Jews by a conqueror appears to have been the redemption which they looked for. A spiritual redemption by a sacrificial death was an idea which their minds could not thoroughly take in.

Ignorance like this, at first sight, is truly astounding. We cannot be surprised at the sharp rebuke which fell from our Lord’s lips, “how foolish you are, and slow of heart to believe.” Yet ignorance like this is deeply instructive. It shows us how little cause we have to wonder at the spiritual darkness which obscures the minds of careless Christians. Myriads around us are just as ignorant of the meaning of Christ’s sufferings as these travelers to Emmaus. As long as the world stands the cross will seem foolishness to natural man.

Let us bless God that *there may be true grace hidden under much intellectual ignorance.* Clear and accurate knowledge is a most useful thing, but it is not absolutely needful to salvation, and may even be possessed without grace. A deep sense of sin, a humble willingness to be saved in God’s way, a teachable readiness to give up our own prejudices when a more excellent way is shown, these are

the principal things. These things the two disciples possessed, and therefore our Lord “went with them” and guided them into all truth.

Let us mark, thirdly, in these verses, **how full the Old Testament is of Christ.** We are told that our Lord began “with Moses and all the prophets, and expounded in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.”

How shall we explain these words? In what way did our Lord show “things concerning himself,” in every part of the Old Testament field? The answer to these questions is short and simple. Christ was the substance of every Old Testament sacrifice, ordained in the law of Moses. Christ was the true Deliverer and King, of whom all the judges and deliverers in Jewish history were types. Christ was the coming Prophet greater than Moses, whose glorious advent filled the pages of prophets. Christ was the true seed of the woman who was to bruise the serpent’s head—the true seed in whom all nations were to be blessed—the true Shiloh to whom the people were to be gathered, the true scape-goat—the true bronze serpent—the true Lamb to which every daily offering pointed—the true High Priest of whom every descendant of Aaron was a figure. These things, or something like them, we need not doubt, were some of the things which our Lord expounded in the way to Emmaus.

Let it be a settled principle in our minds, in reading the Bible, that Christ is the central sun of the whole book. So long as we keep Him in view, we shall never greatly err in our search for spiritual

knowledge. Once losing sight of Christ, we shall find the whole Bible dark and full of difficulty. The key of Bible knowledge is Jesus Christ.

Let us mark, finally, in these verses, **how much Christ loves to be entreated by His people.** We are told, that when the disciples drew near to Emmaus, our Lord "made as though he would have gone further." He desired to see if they were weary of His conversation. But it was not so. "They constrained Him, saying, abide with us—for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. And He went in to tarry with them."

Cases like this are not uncommon in Scripture. Our Lord sees it good for us to prove our love, by withholding mercies until we ask for them. He does not always force His gifts upon us, unsought and unsolicited. He loves to draw out our desires, and to compel us to exercise our spiritual affections, by waiting for our prayers. He dealt so with Jacob at Peniel. "Let me go," He said, "for the day breaks." And then came the noble declaration from Jacob's lips, "I will not let you go except you bless me." (Gen. 32:26.) The story of the Canaanitish mother, the story of the healing of two blind men at Jericho, the story of the nobleman at Capernaum, the parables of the unjust judge and friend at midnight, are all meant to teach the same lesson. All show that our Lord loves to be entreated, and likes importunity.

Let us act on this principle in all our prayers, if we know anything of praying. Let us ask much, and ask often, and lose nothing for lack of asking. Let us not be like the Jewish king who smote three times

on the ground, and then stopped his hand. (2 Kings 13:18.) Let us rather remember the words of David's Psalm, "Open your mouth wide and I will fill it." (Psalm. 81:10.) It is the man who puts a holy constraint on Christ in prayer, who enjoys much of Christ's manifested presence.

Notes on 24:13-35

16. They were kept from recognizing him. St. Mark says, "Jesus appeared in a different form" (16:12). This would account for the disciples not recognizing him. At the same time it is clear that in some miraculous way the eyes of the disciples were kept from seeing clearly (see 2 Kings 6:17-20).

18. The whole verse is important evidence about how well-known our Lord Jesus Christ's crucifixion was.

25. "Slow of heart to believe all the prophets have spoken!" This should be noted carefully. The disciples believed many things which the prophets had spoken; but they did not believe everything. They believed the predictions of the Messiah's glory but not of the Messiah's sufferings. Christians today too often make similar mistakes, though in a totally different direction. They believe all that the prophets say about Christ's sufferings, but not all that they say about Christ coming the second time in glory.

27. Beginning with Moses. Alford remarks, "Observe the testimony which this verse gives to the divine authority, and Christian interpretation of the Old Testament Scriptures. The denial of reference to Christ's death and glory in the Old Testament, is a denial of Christ's own teaching."

29. “Stay with us.” There are several similar expressions in Scripture on similar occasions (see Genesis 32:26; Judges 6:18; 13:15). All show that God loves to be entreated by his people and that those who wish to have much must ask much, and even do so with holy violence.

30. He took bread . . . gave thanks . . . broke it . . . began to give it. I think this refers to a well-known gesture of our Lord in the act of breaking bread, with which all his disciples were familiar. I think it is even possible that there is a reference to our Lord’s demeanor at the miracle of feeding the multitude with a few loaves and fishes.

Alford suggests that the marks of the nails of our Lord’s hands may have been first noticed as he was breaking bread.

31. Their eyes were opened and they recognized him. We cannot explain this sudden revelation of Christ. The whole transaction is so miraculous that we can only take the words as we find them and must not waste time in attempting to define what is beyond our comprehension.

He disappeared from their sight. This and other expressions concerning our Lord’s risen body show plainly that it was a body in some wonderful way different from the common body of man. It was a real material body and true flesh and blood; but it was a body capable of moving, appearing, and disappearing after a manner that we cannot explain.

33. There they found the Eleven. This deserves close attention. Was Thomas with them or not? If he was, he must have gone out immediately after the two disciples came in; otherwise it would be difficult to reconcile the verses which immediately follow, describing

our Lord's appearing when Thomas was not present. If Thomas was not present on this occasion, how can we explain St. Luke speaking of "the Eleven"? Doddridge must supply the answer: "As Paul calls the company of apostles 'the twelve' (1 Corinthians 15:5), though Judas the twelfth person was dead: so Luke here calls them the 'eleven,' though Thomas the eleventh person was absent, as appears from John 20:24." See Mark 16:14.

34. "Appeared to Simon." This appearance to Simon Peter alone is only mentioned here and in 1 Corinthians 15:5. The circumstances of the appearance we do not know.

It may be well to mention here the eleven separate appearances of our Lord after his resurrection.

1. To Mary Magdalene alone (Mark 16:1; John 20:14).
2. To the women returning from the tomb (Matthew 28:9-10).
3. To Simon Peter alone (Luke 24:34).
4. To the two disciples going to Emmaus (Luke 24:13)
5. To the apostles at Jerusalem, except for Thomas, who was absent (John 20:19).
6. To the apostles at Jerusalem a second time, when Thomas was present (John 20:26, 29).
7. At the sea of Tiberias, when seven disciples were fishing (John 21:1).
8. To the eleven disciples, on a mountain in Galilee (Matthew 28:16).
9. To more than 500 brethren at one time (1 Corinthians 15:6).
10. To James on his own (1 Corinthians 15:7).
11. To all the apostles on Mount Olivet, at his ascension (Luke 24:51).

35. Recognized by them when he broke the bread. To apply this to

the Lord's Supper is mere accommodation of Scripture words and not justified by the context.

LUKE 24:36-43

JESUS APPEARS TO THE DISCIPLES

We should observe in this passage **the singularly gracious words with which our Lord introduced Himself to His disciples after His resurrection.** We read that He suddenly stood in the midst of them and said, "Peace be unto you."

This was a wonderful saying when we consider the men to whom it was addressed. It was addressed to eleven disciples, who three days before had shamefully forsaken their Master and fled. They had broken their promises. They had forgotten their professions of readiness to die for their faith. They had been scattered, "every man to his own," and left their Master to die alone. One of them had even denied Him three times. All of them had proved backsliders and cowards. And yet behold the return which their Master makes to His disciples! Not a word of rebuke is spoken. Not a single sharp saying falls from His lips. Calmly and quietly He appears in the midst of them, and begins by speaking of peace. "Peace be unto you!"

We see, in this touching saying, one more proof that the love of Christ "passes knowledge." It is His glory to pass over a transgression. He "delights in mercy." He is far more willing to forgive than men are to be forgiven, and far more ready to pardon

than men are to be pardoned. There is in His almighty heart an infinite willingness to put away man's transgressions. Though our sins have been as scarlet He is ever ready to make them as white as snow, to blot them out, to cast them behind His back, to bury them in the depths of the sea, to remember them no more. All these are scriptural phrases intended to convey the same great truth. The natural man is continually stumbling at them, and refusing to understand them. At this we need not wonder. Free, full, and undeserved forgiveness to the very uttermost is not the manner of man. But it is the manner of Christ.

Where is the sinner, however great his sins, who need be afraid of beginning to apply to such a Savior as this? In the hand of Jesus there is mercy enough and to spare. Where is the backslider, however far he may have fallen, who need be afraid of returning? "Fury is not in Christ." (Isaiah. 27:4.) He is willing to raise and restore the very worst. Where is the saint who ought not to love such a Savior, and to pay Him willingly a holy obedience? There is forgiveness with Him, that He may be feared. (Psalm 130:4.) Where is the professing Christian who ought not to be forgiving toward his brethren? The disciples of a Savior whose words were so full of peace, ought to be peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated. (Coloss. 3:13.)

We should observe, for another thing, in this passage, **our Lord's marvelous condescension to the infirmity of His disciples.** We read that when His disciples were terrified at His

appearance, and could not believe that it was Himself, He said, “Behold my hands and feet—touch me and see.”

Our Lord might fairly have commanded His disciples to believe that He had risen. He might justly have said “Where is your faith? Why do you not believe my resurrection, when you see me with your own eyes?” But He does not do so. He stoops even lower than this. He appeals to the bodily senses of the eleven. He bids them touch Him with their own hands, and satisfy themselves that He was a material being, and not a ghost or spirit.

A mighty principle is contained in this circumstance, which we shall do well to store up in our hearts. Our Lord permits us to use our senses in testing a fact or an assertion in religion. Things ABOVE our reason we must expect to find in Christianity. But things CONTRARY to reason, and contradictory to our own senses, our Lord would have us know, we are not meant to believe. A doctrine, so-called, which contradicts our senses, is not a doctrine which came from Him who bade the eleven touch His hands and His feet.

Let us remember this principle in dealing with the Romish doctrine of a change in the bread and wine at the Lord’s Supper. There is no such change at all. Our own eyes and our own tongues tell us that the bread is bread and the wine is wine, after consecration as well as before. Our Lord never requires us to believe that which is contrary to our senses. The doctrine of transubstantiation is therefore false and unscriptural.

Let us remember this principle in dealing with the Romish doctrine of baptismal regeneration. There is no inseparable connection between baptism and the new birth of man's heart. Our own eyes and senses tell us that myriads of baptized people have not the Spirit of God, are utterly without grace, and are servants of the devil and the world. Our Lord never requires us to believe that which is contrary to our senses. The doctrine that regeneration invariably accompanies baptism is therefore undeserving of credit. It is mere antinomianism to say that there is grace where no grace is to be seen.

A mighty practical lesson is involved in our Lord's dealing with the disciples, which we shall do well to remember. That lesson is the duty of dealing gently with weak disciples, and teaching them as they are able to bear. Like our Lord, we must be forbearing and patient. Like our Lord, we must condescend to the feebleness of some men's faith, and treat them as tenderly as little children, in order to bring them into the right way. We must not cast off men because they do not see everything at once. We must not despise the humblest and most childish means, if we can only persuade men to believe. Such dealing may require much patience. But he who cannot condescend to deal thus with the young, the ignorant, and the uneducated, has not the mind of Christ. Well would it be for all believers, if they would remember Paul's words more frequently, "To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak." (1 Cor 9:22.)

Notes on 24:36-43

36. "Peace be with you." This greeting implied that the great battle

was fought and the great victory won over the prince of this world, and peace with God was won for man. It implied that our Lord came to his disciples with peaceful, gracious, and forgiving feelings, and with no resentment for their having forsaken him.

"Peace" was the last word in Zechariah's prophetic hymn; "peace on earth" was part of the good news proclaimed by the angels when Christ was born; "peace" was the proclamation which the seventy disciples were ordered to make in every house which they visited; "peace" was the legacy which our Lord left and gave to the apostles on the night before he was crucified; and "peace" was the first word which he spoke when he appeared among them again after his resurrection (Luke 1:79; 2:14; 10:5; John 14:27).

Peace, in short, is one main ingredient of the Gospel. All of St. Paul's letters begin with a gracious wish of "peace" to those to whom they are addressed.

LUKE 24:44-49

Let us observe, firstly, in these verses, **the gift which our Lord bestowed on His disciples immediately before He left the world.** We read that He "opened their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures."

We must not misapprehend these words. We are not to suppose that the disciples knew nothing about the Old Testament up to this time, and that the Bible is a book which no ordinary person can expect to comprehend. We are simply to understand that Jesus showed His disciples the full meaning of many passages which had

hitherto been hidden from their eyes. Above all, He showed the true interpretation of many prophetical passages concerning the Messiah.

We all need a like enlightenment of our understandings. “The natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” (1 Cor. 2:14.) Pride, and prejudice, and love of the world blind our intellects, and throw a veil over the eyes of our minds in the reading of the Scriptures. We see the words, but do not thoroughly understand them until we are taught from above.

He that desires to read his Bible with profit, must first ask the Lord Jesus to open the eyes of his understanding by the Holy Spirit. Human commentaries are useful in their way. The help of good and learned men is not to be despised. But there is no commentary to be compared with the teaching of Christ. A humble and prayerful spirit will find a thousand things in the Bible, which the proud, self-conceited student will utterly fail to discern.

Let us observe secondly in these verses, **the remarkable manner in which the Lord Jesus speaks of His own death on the cross.** He does not speak of it as a misfortune, or as a thing to be lamented, but as a necessity. He says, “The Messiah must suffer, and rise again the third day.”

The death of Christ was necessary to our salvation. His flesh and blood offered in sacrifice on the cross were “the life of the world.” (John 6:51.) Without the death of Christ, so far as we can see, God’s

law could never have been satisfied—sin could never have been pardoned—man could never have been justified before God—and God could never have shown mercy to man. The cross of Christ was the solution of a mighty difficulty. It untied a vast knot. It enabled God to be "just, and yet the justifier" of the ungodly. (Rom. 3:26.) It enabled man to draw near to God with boldness, and to feel that though a sinner he might have hope. Christ by suffering as a Substitute in our stead, the just for the unjust, has made a way by which we can draw near to God. We may freely acknowledge that in ourselves we are guilty and deserve death. But we may boldly plead, that One has died for us, and that for His sake, believing on Him, we claim life and acquittal.

Let us ever glory in the cross of Christ. Let us regard it as the source of all our hopes, and the foundation of all our peace. Ignorance and unbelief may see nothing in the sufferings of Calvary but the cruel martyrdom of an innocent person. Faith will look far deeper. Faith will see in the death of Jesus the payment of man's enormous debt to God, and the complete salvation of all who believe.

Let us observe, thirdly, in these verses, **what were the first truths which the Lord Jesus bade His disciples preach after He left the world.** We read that "repentance and forgiveness of sins" were to be preached in His name among all nations.

"Repentance and forgiveness of sins" are the first things which ought to be pressed on the attention of every man, woman, and child throughout the world. All ought to be told the necessity of

repentance. All are by nature desperately wicked. Without repentance and conversion, none can enter the kingdom of God. All ought to be told God's readiness to forgive every one who believes on Christ. All are by nature guilty and condemned. But any one may obtain by faith in Jesus, free, full, and immediate pardon. All, not least, ought to be continually reminded, that repentance and forgiveness of sins are inseparably linked together. Not that our repentance can purchase our pardon. Pardon is the free gift of God to the believer in Christ. But still it remains true, that an impenitent man, is an unforgiven man.

He that desires to be a true Christian, must be experimentally acquainted with repentance and remission of sins. These are the principal things in saving religion. To belong to a pure Church, and hear the Gospel, and receive the sacraments, are great privileges. But are we converted? Are we justified? If not, we are dead before God. Happy is that Christian who keeps these two points continually before his eyes! Repentance and forgiveness are not mere elementary truths, and milk for babes. The highest standard of sanctity is nothing more than a continual growth in practical knowledge of these two points. The brightest saint is the man who has the most heart-searching sense of his own sinfulness, and the liveliest sense of his own complete acceptance in Christ.

Let us observe, fourthly, **what was the first place at which the disciples were to begin preaching.** They were to begin "at Jerusalem."

This is a striking fact, and one full of instruction. It teaches us that none are to be reckoned too wicked for salvation to be offered to them, and that no degree of spiritual disease is beyond the reach of the Gospel remedy. Jerusalem was the wickedest city on earth when our Lord left the world. It was a city which had stoned the prophets and killed those whom God sent to call it to repentance. It was a city full of pride, unbelief, self-righteousness, and desperate hardness of heart. It was a city which had just crowned all its transgressions by crucifying the Lord of glory. And yet Jerusalem was the place at which the first proclamation of repentance and pardon was to be made. The command of Christ was plain— "Begin at Jerusalem."

We see in these wondrous words, the length, and breadth, and depth, and height of Christ's compassion toward sinners. We must never despair of any one being saved, however bad and profligate he may have been. We must open the door of repentance to the chief of sinners. We must not be afraid to invite the worst of men to repent, believe, and live. It is the glory of our Great Physician, that He can heal incurable cases. The things that seem impossible to men are possible with Christ.

Let us observe, lastly, **the peculiar position which believers, and especially ministers, are meant to occupy in this world.** Our Lord defines it in one expressive word. He says, "You are witnesses."

If we are true disciples of Christ, we must bear a continual testimony in the midst of an evil world. We must testify to the truth

of our Master's Gospel—the graciousness of our Master's heart—the happiness of our Master's service—the excellence of our Master's rules of life, and the enormous danger and wickedness of the ways of the world. Such testimony will doubtless bring down upon us the displeasure of man. The world will hate us, as it did our Master, because we "testify of it, that its works are evil." (John 7:7.) Such testimony will doubtless be believed by few comparatively, and will be thought by many offensive and extreme. But the duty of a witness is to bear his testimony, whether he is believed or not. If we bear a faithful testimony, we have done our duty, although, like Noah and Elijah, and Jeremiah, we stand almost alone.

What do we know of this witnessing character? What kind of testimony do we bear? What evidence do we give that we are disciples of a crucified Savior, and, like Him, are "not of the world?" (John 17:14.) What marks do we show of belonging to Him who said, "I came that I should bear witness unto the truth?" (John 18:37.) Happy is he who can give a satisfactory answer to these questions, and whose life declares plainly that he" seeks a country." (Heb. 11:14.)

Notes on 24:44-49

45. He opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. Poole remarks, "He did not open their understanding without the Scripture: he sends them there. He knows that Scripture would not give them a sufficient knowledge of the things of God without the influence and illumination of his Spirit. They are truly taught by God

who are taught by his Spirit to understand the Scriptures. Christ gives great honor to the Scriptures. The devil cheats those whom he persuades to drive away from the Scriptures in expectation of a teaching by the Spirit. The Spirit teaches by, not without, not contrary to, the holy Scriptures."

47. "Beginning at Jerusalem." This teaches that the apostles and first preachers of the Gospel should not shrink from offering salvation to the worst and greatest sinners. The other lesson here is that the first offer of salvation should always be made to the Jews; hardened and unbelieving as they were, they were still "loved on account of the patriarchs" (Romans 11:28) and were not to be despised.

49. "I am going to send you what my Father has promised." This refers to the Holy Spirit, whom the Father had promised in the Old Testament and who came down on the Day of Pentecost (see Isaiah 44:3; Joel 2:28; Ezekiel 36:27).

"Clothed." This word is frequently used in the New Testament and implies putting on something which we do not naturally possess. (See Romans 13:!4; 1 Corinthians 15:53; Galatians 3:27; Colossians 3:9-10.)

LUKE 24:50-53

These verses are the winding up of Luke's history of our Lord's ministry. They form a suitable conclusion to a Gospel, which in touching tenderness and full exhibition of Christ's grace, stands first among the four records of the things which Jesus did and taught. (Acts 1:1.)

Let us notice, firstly, in this passage, **the remarkable manner in which our Lord left His disciples.** We read that "He lifted up His hands and blessed them. And it came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them." In one word, He left them when in the very act of blessing.

We cannot for a moment doubt that there was a meaning in this circumstance. It was intended to remind the disciples of all that Jesus had brought with Him when He came into the world. It was intended to assure them of what He would yet do, after He left the world. He came on earth to bless and not to curse, and blessing He departed. He came in love and not in anger, and in love He went away. He came not as a condemning judge, but as a compassionate Friend, and as a Friend He returned to His Father. He had been a Savior full of blessings to His little flock while He had been with them. He would be a Savior full of blessings to them, He would have them know, even after He was taken away.

Forever let our souls lean on the gracious heart of Christ, if we know anything of true religion. We shall never find a heart more tender, more loving, more patient, more compassionate, and more kind. To talk of the Virgin Mary as being more compassionate than Christ is a proof of miserable ignorance. To flee to the saints for comfort, when we may flee to Christ, is an act of mingled stupidity and blasphemy, and a robbery of Christ's crown. Gracious was our Lord Jesus while He lived among His weak disciples, gracious in the very season of His agony on the cross, gracious when He rose again

and gathered His scattered sheep around Him—gracious in the manner of His departure from this world. It was a departure in the very act of blessing! Gracious, we may be assured He is at the right hand of God. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever—a Savior ever ready to bless abounding in blessings.

Let us notice, secondly, in this passage, **the place to which our Lord went when He left the world.** We read that "He was carried up into heaven."

The full meaning of these words we cannot of course comprehend. It would be easy to ask questions about the exact residence of Christ's glorified body, which the wisest theologian could never answer. We must not waste our time in unedifying speculations, or "intrude into things unseen." (Col. 2:18.) Let it suffice us to know that our Lord Jesus Christ is gone into the presence of God on behalf of all who believe on Him, as a Forerunner and a High Priest. (Heb. 6:20. John 14:2.)

As a Forerunner, Jesus has gone into heaven to prepare a place for all His members. Our great Head has taken possession of a glorious inheritance in behalf of His mystical body, and holds it as an elder brother and trustee, until the day comes when His body shall be perfected. As a High Priest, Jesus has gone into heaven to intercede for all who believe on Him. There in the holy of holies He presents on their behalf the merit of His own sacrifice, and obtains for them daily supplies of mercy and grace. The grand secret of the perseverance of saints is Christ's appearance for them in heaven.

They have an everlasting Advocate with the Father, and therefore they are never cast away. (Heb. 9:24. 1 John 2:1.)

A day will come when Jesus shall return from heaven, in like manner as He went. He will not always abide within the holy of holies. He will come forth, like the Jewish high priest, to bless the people, to gather His saints together, and to restore all things. (Lev. 9:23. Acts 3:21.) For that day let us wait, and long, and pray. Christ dying on the cross for sinners—Christ living in heaven to intercede—Christ coming again in glory, are three great objects which ought to stand out prominently before the eyes of every true Christian.

Let us notice, lastly, in this passage, **the feelings of our Lord's disciples when He finally left them and was carried up into heaven.** We read that "they returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God."

How shall we account for these joyful feelings? How shall we explain the singular fact, that this little company of weak disciples, left, for the first time, like orphans, in the midst of an angry world, was not cast down, but was full of joy? The answer to these questions is short and simple. The disciples rejoiced, because now for the first time they saw all things clearly about their Master. The veil was removed from their eyes. The darkness had at length passed away. The meaning of Christ's humiliation and low estate—the meaning of His mysterious agony, and cross, and passion—the meaning of His being Messiah and yet a sufferer—the meaning of His being crucified, and yet being Son of God—all, all was at length unraveled and made

plain. They saw it all. They understood it all. Their doubts were removed. Their stumbling-blocks were taken away. Now at last they possessed clear knowledge, and possessing clear knowledge felt unmingled joy.

Let it be a settled principle with us, that the little degree of joy which many believers feel arises often from lack of knowledge. Weak faith and inconsistent practice are doubtless two great reasons why many of God's children enjoy so little peace. But it may well be suspected that dim and indistinct views of the Gospel are the true cause of many a believer's discomfort. When the Lord Jesus is not clearly known and understood, it must needs follow that there is little "joy in the Lord."

Let us leave the Gospel of Luke with a settled purpose of heart to seek more spiritual knowledge every year we live. Let us search the Scriptures more deeply and pray over them more heartily. Too many believers only scratch the surface of Scripture, and know nothing of digging down into its hidden treasures. Let the word dwell in us more richly. Let us read our Bibles more diligently. So doing we shall taste more of joy and peace in believing, and shall know what it is to be "continually praising and blessing God."

Notes on 24:50-53

51. Was taken up into heaven. Where our Lord's body went to after it was taken up in this way is unprofitable speculation. It is enough for us to know that he went into the presence of God for us and that he will come again exactly in the way that he went (Acts 1:11).

53. Stayed continually at the temple, praising God. Maldonatus remarks that “it is a striking fact that St. Luke’s Gospel begins by describing a scene in the temple when Zechariah had a vision, and also leaves us in the temple when it concludes.”

Burgon says, “They repaired to the temple, and so the temple service became henceforth filled with new meaning. The song of Moses has become for them the song of the Lamb; for them the Psalms speak henceforth another language, for they speak to them only of Christ. Well may they have been henceforth ‘continually in the temple, praising and blessing God.’”

The Gospel of John

Preface – Expository Thoughts On John

I send forth the volume now in the reader's hands, with much reticence, and a very deep sense of responsibility. It is no light matter to publish an exposition of any book in the Bible. It is a peculiarly serious undertaking to attempt a Commentary on the Gospel of John.

I do not forget that we are all apt to exaggerate the difficulties of our own particular department of literary labor. But I think every intelligent student of Scripture will bear me out when I say, that John's Gospel is pre-eminently full of things "hard to be understood." (2 Pet. 3:16.) It contains a large portion of our Lord Jesus Christ's doctrinal teaching. It abounds in "deep things of God," and "sayings of the King," which we instinctively feel we have no *line* to fully fathom, no *mind* to fully comprehend, no *words* to fully explain. It must needs be that such a book of Scripture should be difficult. I can truly say that I have commented on many a verse in this Gospel with fear and trembling. I have often said to myself, "Who is sufficient for these things?"— "The place whereon you stands is holy ground." (2 Cor. 2:16; Exod. 3:5.)

The nature of the work now published, requires a few words of explanation. It is a continuation of the "Expository Thoughts on the Gospels," of which the first three Gospels, have been already sent forth. Like the previous volumes, the composition of this book is **a continuous series of short expositions, intended for family or private reading**, or for the use of those who visit the sick and the poor.

We live in a day of abounding vagueness and indistinctness on doctrinal subjects in religion. Now, if ever, it is the duty of all advocates of clear, well-defined, sharply-cut theology, to supply proof that their views are thoroughly borne out by Scripture. I have endeavored to do so in this Commentary. I hold that the Gospel of John, rightly interpreted, is the best and simplest answer to those who profess to admire a vague and indistinct Christianity.

The theological stand-point which the writer of this Commentary occupies will be obvious to any intelligent reader. Such a one will see at a glance that I belong to that school in the Church of England which, rightly or wrongly, is called "Evangelical." He will see that I have no sympathy whatever with either Romish or Neologian tendencies. He will see that I hold firmly the distinctive theological views of the Reformers and doctrinal Puritans, and that I totally disapprove the loose and broad theology of some modern schools of divines—But while I say all this, I must be allowed to add, that in interpreting Scripture, I "call no man master or father." *I abhor the idea of twisting and warping God's Word in order to made it*

support party views. Throughout this Commentary I have endeavored honestly and conscientiously to find out the real meaning of every sentence on which I have commented. I have evaded no difficulty, and shrunk from no inference. I have simply followed Scripture wherever its words seemed to point, and accepted whatever they seemed to mean. I have never hesitated to express my disagreement from the views of other commentators if occasion required; but when I have done so I have tried to do it with courtesy and respect.

I now conclude this preface with an earnest prayer, that it may please God to pardon the many deficiencies of this volume, and to use it for His own glory and the good of souls. It has cost me a large amount of time and thought and labor. But if the Holy Spirit shall make it useful to the Church of Christ, I shall feel abundantly repaid.

Ignorance of Scripture is the root of every error in religion, and the source of every heresy. To be allowed to remove a few grains of ignorance, and to throw a few rays of light on God's precious word, is, in my opinion, the greatest honor that can be put on a Christian.

John – Chap. 1

JOHN 1:1-5

The Prologue to the Gospel

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was fully God. The Word was with God in the beginning. All things were created by him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created. In him was life, and the life was the light of mankind. And the light shines on in the darkness, but the darkness has not mastered it.

The Gospel of John, which begins with these verses, is in many respects very unlike the other three Gospels. It contains many things which they omit. It omits many things which they contain. Good reason might easily be shown for this unlikeness. But it is enough to remember that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John wrote under the direct inspiration of God. In the general plan of their respective Gospels, and in the particular details—in everything that they record, and in everything that they do not record—they were all four equally and entirely guided by the Holy Spirit.

About the matters which John was specially inspired to relate in his Gospel, one general remark will suffice. *The things which are peculiar to his Gospel are among the most precious possessions of the Church of Christ.* No one of the four Gospel-writers has given us such full statements about the divinity of Christ—about justification by faith—about the offices of Christ—about the work of the Holy Spirit—and about the privileges of believers, as we read in the pages of John. On none of these great subjects, undoubtedly, have Matthew, Mark, and Luke been silent. But in John's Gospel, they stand out prominently on the surface, so that he who runs may read.

The five verses now before us contain a statement of matchless sublimity concerning the divine nature of our Lord Jesus Christ. He it is, beyond all question, whom John means, when he speaks of "the Word." No doubt there are heights and depths in that statement which are far beyond man's understanding. And yet there are plain lessons in it, which every Christian would do well to treasure up in his mind.

We learn, firstly, **that our Lord Jesus Christ is *eternal.*** John tells us that "in the *beginning* was the Word." He did not begin to exist when the heavens and the earth were made. Much less did He begin to exist when the Gospel was brought into the world. He had glory with the Father "before the world was." (John 17:5.) He was existing when matter was first created, and before time began. He was "before all things." (Col. 1:17.) He was from all eternity.

We learn, secondly, **that our Lord Jesus Christ is *a Person distinct from God the Father, and yet one with Him.*** John tells us that "the Word was *with* God." The Father and the Word, though two persons, are joined by an ineffable union. Where God the Father was from all eternity, there also was the Word, even God the Son—their glory equal, their majesty co-eternal, and yet their Godhead one. This is a great mystery! Happy is he who can receive it as a little child, without attempting to explain it.

We learn, thirdly, **that the Lord Jesus Christ is *very God.*** John tells us that "the Word was God." He is not merely a created angel, or a being inferior to God the Father, and invested by Him

with power to redeem sinners. He is nothing less than perfect God—equal to the Father as touching His Godhead—God of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds.

We learn, fourthly, **that the Lord Jesus Christ is the *Creator of all things*.** John tells us that "by Him were all things made, and without Him was not any thing made that was made." So far from being a creature of God, as some heretics have falsely asserted, He is the Being who made the worlds and all that they contain. "He commanded and they were created." (Psalm 148:5.)

We learn, lastly, **that the Lord Jesus Christ is the source of all spiritual life and light.** John tells us, that "in Him was life, and the life was the light of men." He is the eternal fountain, from which alone the sons of men have ever derived life. Whatever spiritual life and light Adam and Eve possessed before the fall, was from Christ. Whatever deliverance from sin and spiritual death any child of Adam has ever enjoyed since the fall, whatever light of conscience or understanding any one has obtained, all has flowed from Christ. The vast majority of mankind in every age have refused to know Him, have forgotten the fall, and their own need of a Savior. The light has been constantly shining "in darkness." The most have "not comprehended the light." But if any men and women out of the countless millions of mankind have ever had spiritual life and light, they have owed all to Christ.

Such is a brief summary of the leading lessons which these wonderful verses appear to contain. There is much in them, without

controversy, which is above our reason but there is nothing contrary to it. There is much that we cannot explain, and must be content humbly to believe. Let us however never forget that there are plain PRACTICAL CONSEQUENCES flowing from the passage, which we can never grasp too firmly, or know too well.

Would we know, for one thing, **the exceeding sinfulness of sin?** Let us often read these first five verses of John's Gospel. Let us mark what kind of Being the Redeemer of mankind must needs be, in order to provide eternal redemption for sinners. If no one less than the Eternal God, the Creator and Preserver of all things, could take away the sin of the world, sin must be a far more abominable thing in the sight of God than most men suppose. The right measure of sin's sinfulness is the dignity of Him who came into the world to save sinners. If Christ is so great, then sin must indeed be sinful!

Would we know, for another thing, **the strength of a true Christian's foundation for hope?** Let us often read these first five verses of John's Gospel. Let us mark that the Savior in whom the believer is bid to trust is nothing less than the Eternal God, One able to save to the uttermost all that come to the Father by Him. He that was "with God," and "was God," is also "Emmanuel, God with us." Let us thank God that our help is laid on One that is mighty. (Psalm 89:19.) *In ourselves we are great sinners. But in Jesus Christ we have a great Savior.* He is a strong foundation-stone, able to bear the weight of a world's sin. He that believes on Him shall not be confounded. (1 Peter 2:6.)

Technical Notes:

1. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2. The same was in the beginning with God. 3. All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made. 4. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not.”

The following prefatory remarks on St. John’s Gospel, may prove useful to some readers.

Firstly.—There is no doubt that this Gospel was written by John the Apostle, the son of Zebedee, and brother of James, once a fisherman on the sea of Galilee, and afterwards called to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus, an eye-witness of all Christ’s ministry, and a pillar of the Church. John, be it remembered, is specially called “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” He was one of the chosen three who alone saw the daughter of Jairus raised— were eye-witnesses of the transfiguration—and were bystanders during our Lord’s agony in the garden. He was the one who leaned on Christ’s breast at the last supper, and to whom our Lord committed the care of the Virgin Mary, when He was dying on the cross. It is an interesting fact, that he was the disciple who was specially inspired to write the deepest things concerning Christ.

Secondly.—There is little doubt that this Gospel was written at a much later date than the other three Gospels. How much later and at

what precise time, we do not know. It is commonly supposed that it was written after the rise of heresies about the Person and natures of Christ, such as those attributed to Ebion and Cerinthus. It is not likely that it was written at so late a period as the destruction of Jerusalem. It this had been the case, John would hardly have spoken of the "sheep-market" at Jerusalem as still standing. (John v.2.)

Thirdly.—The substance of this Gospel is, for the most part, peculiar to itself. With the exception of the crucifixion, and a few other matters, the things which St. John was inspired to record concerning our Lord, are only found in his gospel. He says nothing about our Lord's birth and infancy,—His temptation,—the Sermon on the Mount,—the transfiguration,— the prophecy about Jerusalem, and the appointment of the Lord's Supper. He gives us very few miracles, and even fewer parables. But the things which John does relate are among the most precious treasures which Christians possess. The chapter about Nicodemus,—the woman of Samaria,—the raising of Lazarus, and our Lord's appearance to Peter after His resurrection at the sea of Galilee,—the public discourses of the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, and tenth chapters,—the private discourses of the thirteenth, fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth chapters,—and, above all, the prayer of the seventeenth chapter, are some of the most valuable portions of the Bible. All these chapters, be it remembered, we owe to St. John.

Fourthly.—The style of this Gospel is no less peculiar than its substance. There appears extraordinary simplicity in many of its

statements, and yet there is a depth about them which no man can entirely fathom. It contains many expressions which are used in a profound and spiritual sense, such as “light,” “darkness,” “world,” “life,” “truth,” “to abide,” “to know.” It contains two names of the second and third Persons of the Trinity not found in the other Gospels. These are, “the Word,” as a name of our Lord, and “the Comforter,” as a name of the Holy Ghost. It contains, from time to time, explanatory comments and remarks on our Lord’s words. Moreover, it contains frequent short explanations of Jewish customs and terms, which serve to show that it was not written so much for Jewish readers as for the whole Church throughout the world. “Matthew” (says Gregory Nazianzen, quoted by Ford), “wrote for the Hebrews; Mark, for the Italians; Luke, for the Greeks; the great herald, John, for all.”

Lastly.—The preface of this Gospel is one of the most striking peculiarities about the whole book. Under the term preface, I include the first eighteen verses of the first chapter. This preface forms the quintessence of the whole Book, and is composed of simple, short, condensed propositions. Nowhere in the Bible shall we find such clear and distinct statements about our Lord Jesus Christ’s divine nature. Nowhere shall we find so many expressions, which for want of mental power, no mortal man can fully grasp or explain. In no portion of Scripture is it so deeply important to notice each word, and even each tense employed in each sentence. In no portion of Scripture do the perfect grammatical accuracy and verbal precision of an inspired composition shine out so brightly. It is not, perhaps,

too much to say, that not a single word could be altered in the first five verses of St. John's Gospel, without opening the door to some heresy.

The first verse of St. John's Gospel, in particular, has always been allowed to be one of the sublimest verses in the Bible. The ancients used to say that it deserved to be written in golden letters in every Christian Church. It has well been said to be an opening worthy of him whom Jesus called "a son of thunder."

1.—[In the beginning, &c.] This wonderful verse contains three things. It tells us that our Lord Jesus Christ, here called the Word, is eternal,— that He is a distinct Person from God the Father, and yet most intimately united to Him,—and that He is God. The term "God," be it remembered, in the second clause, is to be taken personally for God the Father, and in the third to be taken essentially as signifying the Divine Being. The expression, "In the beginning," means in the beginning of all creation. It is like the first verse of Genesis, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." (Gen. i.1.)

The expression "was," means "existed, was existing." The whole sentence signifies that when the world was first called into being, however long ago that may be,—when matter was first formed, however many millions of ages ago that may be,—at that period the Lord Jesus Christ was existing. He had no beginning. He was before all things. There never was the time when He was not. In short, the Lord Jesus Christ is an eternal Being. Several of the Fathers dwell strongly on the immense importance of the word "was" in this

sentence, and on the fact that it is four times repeated in the two first verses of this Gospel. It is not said, “the Word was made,” but “the Word was.” Basil says, “Those two terms, ‘beginning’ and ‘was,’ are like two anchors,” which the ship of a man’s soul may safely ride at, whatever storms of heresy may come.

The expression, “the Word,” is a very difficult one, and is peculiar to St. John. I see no clear proof that it is used by any other New Testament writer. The texts, Acts xx.32, and Heb. iv.12, are, to say the least, doubtful proofs. That it here signifies a “person,” and not a spoken word, and that it is applied to our Lord Jesus Christ, is clear from the after sentence, “The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.” That it was a term familiar to the Jews is undeniable. But why this particular name is used by St. John, both here and in his other writings, is a point on which commentators have differed greatly.

Some think, as Tertullian, Zwingli, Musculus, Bucer, and Calvin, that Christ is called “the Word” because He is the wisdom of God, and the “wisdom” of the Book of Proverbs. These would have the expression translated, “reason, wisdom, or counsel.”

Some think, as some of the Fathers, that Christ is called “the Word,” because He is the image and offspring of the Father’s mind, “the express image of the Father’s person,” just as our words, if honest and sincere, are the image and representation of our minds. Some think, as Cartwright and Tittman, that Christ is called “the Word,” because He is the Person who is spoken of in all the Old

Testament promises, and the subject of prophecy. Some think, as Melancthon, Rollock, Gomarus, and Scott, that Christ is called "the Word," because He is the speaker, utterer, and interpreter of God the Father's will. It is written in this very chapter, that "the only begotten Son hath declared the Father." It is also written, that "God hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son." (Heb. i.1.)

I think the last of these views the simplest and most satisfactory. All of them are at best only conjectures. There is probably something about the expression which has not yet been discovered.

It is thought by many that the expression "the Word," is used in several places of the Old Testament, concerning the Second Person in the Trinity. Such places are Psalm xxxiii.6; Psalm cvii.20, and 2 Sam. vii.21, compared with 1 Chron. xvii.19. The proof in all these cases is somewhat doubtful. Nevertheless the idea is strengthened by the fact that in Rabbinical writings the Messiah is often spoken of as "the Word." In the third of Genesis, the Chaldee paraphrase says that Adam and Eve "heard the Word of the Lord walking in the garden."

Arrowsmith, in his admirable work on this chapter, suggests a probable reason why John did not say, "In the beginning was the Son of God," but "the Word."— "John would not at first alienate the hearts of his readers. He knew that neither Jews nor Gentiles would endure the term, the Son of God. They could not endure to hear of a sonship in the Deity and Godhead: but with this term 'Word,' applied to the Godhead, they were well acquainted." Poole observes that no term was so abhorred by the Jews as the term "Son of God." Ferus

remarks, that by calling our Lord “the Word,” St. John excludes all idea of a material, carnal relationship between the Father and the Son. This is also shown by Suicer to be the view of Chrysostom, Theodoret, Basil, Gregory Nyssen, and Theophylact.

Whatever difficulty we may feel about this expression, “the Word,” in our times, there does not seem to have been the same difficulty felt about it, either by Jews or Gentiles, when St. John wrote his Gospel. To say, as some have done, that he borrowed the expression from the philosophers of his time, is dishonoring to inspiration. But we may safely say that he used an expression, of which the meaning was quite familiar to the first readers of his Gospel, as a name of the Second Person of the Trinity. With this we may be content. Those who wish more information, should consult Witsius’ Dissertation on the word Logos, Suicer’s Thesaurus, and Adam Clarke’s Commentary.

[The Word was with God.] This sentence means that from all eternity there was a most intimate and ineffable union between the first and second Persons in the blessed Trinity,—between Christ the Word, and God the Father. And yet, though thus ineffably united, the Word and the Father were from all eternity two distinct Persons. “It was He,” says Pearson, “to whom the Father said, Let us make man in our image.” (Gen. i.26.)

The truth contained in this sentence, is one of the deepest and most mysterious in the whole range of Christian theology. The nature of this union between the Father and the Son we have no mental

capacity to explain. Augustine draws illustrations from the sun and its rays, and from fire and the light of fire, which, though two distinct things, are yet inseparably united, so that where the one is the other is. But all illustrations on such subjects halt and fail. Here, at any rate, it is better to believe than to attempt to explain. Our Lord says distinctly, “I am in the Father and the Father in Me.” “I and the Father are one.” “He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.” (John xiv.9-11; John x.30.) Let us be fully persuaded that the Father and the Son are two distinct Persons in the Trinity, co-equal and co-eternal,—and yet that they are one in substance and inseparably united and undivided. Let us grasp firmly the words of the Athanasian Creed: “Neither confounding the Persons nor dividing the substance.” But here let us stop.

Musculus remarks on this sentence, how carefully St. John writes that “the Word was with God,” and not “God was with God.” He would have us remember that there are not two Gods, but one. And yet “the Word was with God, and was God.”

[The Word was God.] This sentence means that the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Word, was in nature, essence and substance very God, and that “as the Father is God, so also the Son is God.” It seems impossible to assert Christ’s divinity more distinctly than it is here asserted. The sentence cannot possibly mean that the Father is God, since no one ever thought of disputing that. Nor yet can it possibly mean that the title of God was conferred on some being inferior to God and created, as the princes of this world are called “gods.” He

who is here called God, is the same who was uncreated and eternal. There is no inferiority in the Word to God the Father. The Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one. To maintain in the face of such a text, as some so-called Christians do, that our Lord Jesus Christ was only a man, is a mournful proof of the perversity of the human heart.

The whole verse, honestly and impartially interpreted, is an unanswerable argument against three classes of heretics. It confutes the Arians, who regard Christ as a Being inferior to God. It confutes the Sabellians, who deny any distinction of Persons in the Trinity, and say that God sometimes manifested Himself as the Father, sometimes as the Son, and sometimes as the Spirit, and that the Father and the Spirit suffered on the cross!

Above all it confutes the Socinians and Unitarians who say that Jesus Christ was not God but man, a most holy and perfect man, but only a man. In leaving this verse, it is useless to deny that there are deep mysteries in it which man has no mind to comprehend, and no language to express. How there can be a plurality in unity, and a unity in plurality, three persons in the Trinity and One God in essence,—how Christ can be at the same time in the Father, as regards the unity of the essence, and with the Father, as regards the distinction of His Person,—these are matters far beyond our feeble understanding. Happy are we, if we can agree with Bernard's devout remark about the subject: "It is rashness to search too far into it. It is

piety to believe it. It is life eternal to know it. And we can never have a full comprehension of it till we come to enjoy it."

2.—[The same was in the beginning, etc.] This verse contains an emphatic repetition of the second clause of the preceding verse. St. John anticipates the possible objection of some perverse mind, that perhaps there was a time when Christ, the Word, was not a distinct Person in the Trinity. In reply to this objection, he declares that the same Word who was eternal, and was God, was also from all eternity a Person in the Godhead distinct from God the Father, and yet with Him by a most intimate
and ineffable union. In short, there never was a time when Christ was not "with God."

There are two passages in the Old Testament which throw strong light on the doctrine of this verse. The one is in the book of Proverbs viii.22-31. The other is in Zechariah xiii.7. The passage in Proverbs seems intended to explain the verse before us. The passage in Zechariah contains an expression which is almost a parallel to the expression "with God." "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord." "The man that is my fellow," according to the best commentators, means the Messiah, Jesus Christ; and a reference to Poole's Synopsis will show that the words signify "the man that is near me, or joined to me."

Arrowsmith says, "Ask the sun, if ever it were without its beams. Ask the fountain, if ever it were without its streams. So God was never without His Son."

We must not suppose that the repetition of this second verse is useless or unmeaning. Arrowsmith remarks that “Repetitions have divers uses in Scripture. In prayer they argue affection. In prophecy they note celerity and certainty. In threatening’s they note unavoidableness and suddenness. In precepts they note a necessity of performing them. In truths, like that before us, they serve to show the necessity of believing and knowing them.

3.—[All things…made by Him.] This sentence means that creation was the work of our Lord Jesus Christ, no less than of God the Father. “By Him were all things created.” (Coloss. i.16.) “Thou Lord in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth.” (Heb. i.10.) Now He that made all things must needs be God.

The expression, we must carefully remember, does not imply any inferiority of God the Son to God the Father, as if God the Son was only the agent and workman under another. Nor yet does it imply that creation was in no sense the work of God the Father, and that He is not the maker of heaven and earth. But it does imply that such is the dignity of the eternal Word, that in creation as well as in everything else, He cooperated with the Father. “What things soever the Father doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.” (John v.19.) “By whom also He made the worlds.” (Heb. i.2.) When we read the expression “by Me kings reign” (Prov. viii.15), we do not for a moment suppose that kings are superior in dignity to Him by whom they reign.

Jansenius remarks that this verse completely overthrows the heretical notion entertained by the Manichees, that the material world was formed by an evil spirit, as well as the notion of the Platonic school, that some part of creation was made by angels and demons.

[Without Him was not anything made, etc.] This sentence appears added to show the utter impossibility of our Lord Jesus Christ being no more than a created being. If not even the slightest thing was created without Him, it is plain that He cannot possibly be a creature Himself.

The Fathers raised curious speculations about the origin of evil from the expression now before us. “If nothing was made without Christ,” they argued, “from whence came sin?” The simplest answer to this question is, that sin was not among the things which were originally crated at the beginning. It came in afterwards, at the fall. “By one man sin entered into the world.” (Rom. v.12.) That it could not have entered without Divine permission, and that its entrance has been overruled to the display of Divine mercy in redemption, are undeniable truths. But we have no right to say that sin was among the “all things,” which were “made by Christ.” 4.—[In Him was life.] This sentence means that in the eternal counsels of the Trinity, Christ was appointed to be the source, fountain, origin and cause of life. From Him all life was to flow. As to the kind of “life” which is here meant, there is much difference of opinion among commentators.

Some think, as Cyril, Theophylact, Chemnitius and Calvin, that the expression refers specially to the continued preservation of all created things by Christ's providence. Having created all things, He keeps all alive and in order.

Some think, as Zwingli, Cartwright, Arrowsmith, Poole, Alford, and most modern commentators, that the expression includes all sorts of life, both vegetable, animal and spiritual. "Thou sendest forth Thy spirit, and they are created." (Psa. civ.30.) "In Him we live, and move, and have our being." (Acts xvii.28.)

Some think, as Luther, Melancthon, Brentius, Flacius, Lightfoot, Lampe, and Pearce, that the expression applies solely to spiritual life, and that it is meant to declare that Christ alone is the source of all life to the souls of men, whether in time or eternity. He was the creator of all things, and He also was the author of new creation. To this opinion I decidedly incline. For one thing, natural life seems already included in the preceding verse about creation. For another thing, it is the view which seems to agree best with the conclusion of the verse, and to be in harmony with the words, "With Thee is the fountain of life: in Thy light we shall see light." "God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son." (Psalm xxxvi.9; 1 John v.11.)

[The life was the light of men.] This sentence means that the life which was in Christ was intended before the fall to be the guide of man's soul to heaven, and the supply of man's heart and conscience, and that since the fall of man it has been the salvation and the comfort of all who have been saved. It is those and those only who

have followed Christ as their light, who have lived before God and reached heaven. There has never been any spiritual life or light enjoyed by men, excepting from Christ. 5.—[The light shines in darkness.] This sentence means that the spiritual light which Christ, the source of life, offers to man, has always been neglected since the fall, and is still neglected by unregenerate men. It has been like a candle shining in a dark place, a light in the middle of a world of darkness, making the darkness more visible. Unregenerate men are darkness itself about spiritual things. “Ye were darkness.” (Eph. v.8.) Arrowsmith remarks on this sentence, “Christ hath shined in all ages in the works of creation and providence. He left not Himself without witness. Every creature is a kind of professor that readeth man a lecture concerning God, of His wisdom, and power, and goodness.”

[The darkness comprehended it not.] This sentence means that the natural heart of man has always been so dark since the fall, that the great majority of mankind have neither understood, nor received, nor laid hold upon the light offered to them by Christ.

The difference in the tenses of the two verbs used in this verse is very remarkable. About the “light” the present tense is used: “It shineth now as it has always shone; it is still shining.” About the “darkness” the past tense is used: “It has not comprehended the light; it never has comprehended it from the first, and does not comprehend it at the present
day.”

The Greek word which we render “comprehended,” is the same that is used in Ephes. iii.18. In Acts iv.14, it is translated “perceived,”—in Rom. ix.30, “attained,”—in Phil. iii.13, “apprehend,”—in John viii.3, “taken,”—and in 1 Thess. v.4, “overtake.”

At this point, the remark of Bengel upon the whole passage deserves attention. “In the first and second verses of this chapter, mention is made of a state before the creation of the world; in the third verse, the world’s creation; in the fourth, the time of man’s uprightness; in the fifth, the time of man’s decline and fall.”

I cannot close these notes on the opening verses of St. John’s Gospel without expressing my deep sense of the utter inability of any human commentator to enter fully into the vast and sublime truths which the passage contains. I have labored to throw a little light on the passage, and have not hesitated to exceed the average length of these notes on account of the immense importance of this part of Scripture. But after saying all that I have said, I feel as if I had only faintly touched the surface of the passage. There is something here which nothing but the light of eternity will ever fully reveal.

JOHN 1:6-13

A man came, sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify about the light so that everyone may believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify about the light. The true light, who gives light to everyone, was

coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was created by him, but the world did not recognize him. He came to what was his own, but his own people did not receive him. But to all who have received him—those who believe in his name—he has given the right to become God's children—children not born by human parents or by human desire or a husband's decision, but by God.

John, after beginning his gospel with a statement of our Lord's nature as God, proceeds to speak of His forerunner, John the Baptist. The contrast between the language used about the Savior, and that used about His forerunner, ought not to be overlooked. Of Christ we are told that He was the eternal God—the Creator of all things—the source of life and light. Of John the Baptist we are told simply, that "there was a *man* sent from God, whose name was John."

We see, firstly, in these verses, ***the true nature of a Christian minister's office.*** We have it in the description of John the Baptist — "He came for a witness, to bear witness of the light, that all men through him might believe."

Christian ministers are not priests, nor mediators between God and man. They are not agents into whose hands men may commit their souls, and carry on their religion by deputy. They are witnesses. They are intended to bear testimony to God's truth, and specially to the great truth that Christ is the only Savior and light of the world. This was Peter's ministry on the day of Pentecost. "With many other words did he *testify*." (Acts 2:40.) This was the whole tenor of Paul's

ministry. “He *testified* both to the Jews and Greeks repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Acts 20:21.) Unless a Christian minister bears a full testimony to Christ, he is not faithful to his office. So long as he does testify of Christ, he has done his part, and will receive his reward, although his hearers may not believe his testimony. Until a minister’s hearers believe on that Christ of whom they are told, they receive no benefit from the ministry. They may be pleased and interested; but they are not profited until they believe. The great end of a minister’s testimony is “that through him, men may believe.”

We see, secondly, in these verses, ***one principal position which our Lord Jesus Christ occupies towards mankind***. We have it in the words, “He was the true light which lights every man that comes into the world.”

Christ is to the souls of men what the sun is to the world. He is the center and source of all spiritual light, warmth, life, health, growth, beauty, and fertility. Like the sun, He shines for the common benefit of all mankind—for high and for low, for rich and for poor, for Jew and for Greek. Like the sun, He is *free to all*. All may look at Him, and drink health out of His light. If millions of mankind were mad enough to dwell in caves underground, or to bandage their eyes, their darkness would be their own fault, and not the fault of the sun. So, likewise, if millions of men and women love spiritual “darkness rather than light,” the blame must be laid on their blind hearts, and not on Christ. “Their foolish hearts are darkened.” (John 3:19; Rom.

1:21.) But whether men will see or not, Christ is the true sun, and the light of the world. There is no light for sinners except in the Lord Jesus.

We see, thirdly, in these verses, ***the desperate wickedness of man's natural heart.*** We have it in the words, Christ "was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not."

Christ was in the world *invisibly*, long before He was born of the Virgin Mary. He was there from the very beginning, ruling, ordering, and governing the whole creation. By Him all things are held together. (Coloss. 1:17.) He gave to all life and breath, rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons. By Him kings reigned, and nations were increased or diminished. Yet men knew Him not, and honored Him not. They "worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator." (Rom. 1:25.) Well may the natural heart be called "wicked!"

But Christ came *visibly* into the world, when He was born at Bethlehem, and fared no better. He came to the very people whom He had brought out from Egypt, and purchased for His own. He came to the Jews, whom He had separated from other nations, and to whom He had revealed Himself by the prophets. He came to those very Jews who had read of Him in the Old Testament Scriptures—seen Him under types and figures in their temple services—and professed to be waiting for His coming. And yet, when He came, those very Jews received Him not. They even—rejected Him,

despised Him, and slew Him. Well may the natural heart be called "desperately wicked!"

We see, lastly, in these verses, ***the vast privileges of all who receive Christ, and believe on Him***. We are told that "as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become you sons of God, even to those who believe on His name."

Christ will never be without some servants. If the vast majority of the Jews did not receive Him as the Messiah, there were, at any rate, a few who did. To them He gave the privilege of being God's children. He adopted them as members of His Father's family. He reckoned them His own brethren and sisters, bone of His bone, and flesh of His flesh. He conferred on them a dignity which was ample recompense for the cross which they had to carry for His sake. He made them sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty.

Privileges like these, be it remembered, are the possession of all, in every age, who receive Christ by faith, and follow Him as their Savior. They are "children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." (Gal. 3:26.) They are born again by a new and heavenly birth, and adopted into the family of the King of kings. Few in number, and despised by the world as they are, they are cared for with infinite love by a Father in heaven, who, for His Son's sake, is well pleased with them. In time He provides them with everything that is for their good. In eternity He will give them a crown of glory that fades not away. These are great things! But faith in Christ gives men an ample title to them. Good masters care for their servants, and Christ cares for His.

Are we ourselves sons of God? Have we been born again? Have we the MARKS which always accompany the new birth—sense of sin, faith in Jesus, love of others, righteous living, separation from the world? Let us never be content until we can give a satisfactory answer to these questions.

Do we desire to be sons of God? Then let us "receive Christ" as our Savior, and believe on Him with the heart. To every one that so receives Him, He will give the privilege of becoming a son of God.

Technical Notes:

6. There was a man sent from God, whose name *was* John. 7. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all *men* through him might believe. 8. He was not that Light, but *was sent* to bear witness of that Light. 9. *That* was the true Light, which lights every man that comes into the world. 10. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. 11. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. 12. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, *even* to them that believe on his name: 13. Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

6.—[*There was a man sent from God,... John.*] This is a short and striking description of John the Baptist. He was the messenger whom God promised to send before Messiah's face. He was born

when his parents were aged, by God's miraculous interposition. He was filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother's womb. He received a special commission from God to preach the baptism of repentance, and to proclaim the immediate coming of Christ. In short, he was specially raised up by God to prepare the way for the Messiah. For all these reasons he is here called "a man sent from God." It is, in one sense, the common mark of all true ministers of the Gospel. Ignorant, blind, and unconverted ministers may be ordained and sent by man. But they are not "sent from God."

7.—[*Came for a witness.*] This does not mean, as it might at first sight appear, "came to be a witness." The Greek word which we translate "witness," does not mean "a person," but the testimony which a witness bears.

[*To bear witness of the Light.*] This means, to testify concerning Jesus Christ the Light of the world, that He was the promised Messiah, the Lamb of God, the Bridegroom, the Almighty Savior, to whom all dark souls ought to apply.

[*All men.*] This cannot of course signify "all mankind." It means all who heard John's testimony, and all Jews who were really looking for a Redeemer. One end of John the Baptist's testimony was, that all such should believe on Christ the true Light.

[*Through him.*] This does not mean "through Christ" and Christ's grace, but through John the Baptist and John's testimony. It is one of

those texts which show the immense importance of the ministerial office. It is a means and instrument through which the Holy Spirit is pleased to produce faith in man's heart. "Faith cometh by hearing." Through John the Baptist's testimony, Andrew was led to believe in Jesus and become a disciple. Just so now, through the preaching of ministers sinners learn to believe on Christ and are saved.

8.—[*He was not that Light*.] This expression would be more literally rendered, "He was not *the* Light," the promised light of sinners, the light of the world. The Greek article "the," is used in a similar emphatic manner, to denote eminence and distinction, in the following passages. "That bread." (John vi.32.) "That prophet." (John i.21-25.) "That day."
(1 Thess. v.4.) "That way." (Acts ix.2.)

Let it be noted that our Lord himself calls John the Baptist at a later period, "the burning and shining light." (John v.35.) But it is a curious fact that the Greek word there rendered "light," is not the one used here. It is a word which is frequently translated "candle." John the Baptist was a "candle," but not the Light itself. Believers are called "the light of the world" (Matt. v.14), but only as members of Christ the Light, and borrowing light from Him. Christ alone is the great sun and fountain of all light, the Light itself.

9.—[*That was the true Light*.] The force of the expression "true" in this sentence, is well brought out by Arrowsmith in his commentary on this verse. He says that Christ is "the true Light" in four respects. Firstly, He is undeceiving light, the true light in opposition to all the

false lights of the Gentiles. Secondly, He is real light, true in opposition to ceremonial types and shadows. Thirdly, He is underived light, true in opposition to all light that is borrowed, communicated, or participated from another. Fourthly, He is supereminent light, true in opposition to all that is ordinary and common.

[Which lights every man…comes…world.] This sentence has caused much difference of opinion among commentators, in respect to two points. (*a*) In the first place, men differ as to the application of the words, "that comes into the world." Some connect these words with "the true Light," and read the words, "this is the true light that coming into the world lighteth every man." In favor of this view, the words "light is come into the world" (John iii.19), and "I am come a light into the world" (John xii.46), deserve notice. Others connect the words with "every man," and regard them as a sweeping description of every one naturally born of the seed of Adam. That "coming into the world" is a Hebrew phrase for being born, is shown by Nifanius. The construction of the whole verse in the original Greek, is such that either rendering is grammatical and correct.

Opinions are so nicely balanced on this point, and so much may be said on either side, that I venture my own judgment with much hesitation. But I am inclined to think on the whole, with Chemnitius and Glassius, that our translators are right, and that the clause "that comes into the world," is better connected with "every man" than with "the true light." If the verse is rendered "this is the true light

that coming into the world lighteth every man," it seems rather to narrow the blessing of the true light, and to confine His illumining benefits to the times after His incarnation. This, be it remembered, is precisely the view of the Socinian. And yet it is unquestionably true that Christ's incarnation increased greatly the spiritual light in the world. St. John says, "The darkness is past and the true light now shineth." (1 John ii.8.) If, on the other hand, the verse is rendered as our version has it, the words "that comes into the world," seem very suitably joined to "every man," as expressing the universality of the blessings which Christ confers on man. He is not only the true light of the Jew, but of "every man that is born into the world," of every name, and people, and tongue. To suppose, as some have done, that this application of the words "come into the world," involves the pre-existence of souls, is, to say the least, a foolish thought.

The point is, happily, one on which men may agree to differ. Sound doctrine may be got out of either view.

(*b*) The second difference of opinion respecting this verse arises from the words, "lights every man." This expression has received widely different interpretations. All, except heretics, are agreed that the words cannot mean that all are converted, and cannot signify the final, universal salvation of all mankind. What then do they mean? Some think, as Cyril, that Christ "the true light," lights every man and woman on earth with the light of reason, intelligence, and consciousness of right and wrong. This view is partially true, and yet it seems weak and defective.

Some think, as the Quakers are reported to do, that Christ lights every man and woman on earth with an inward light of grace, sufficient to save him, if he will only use it. This view is a dangerous one, and beside contradicting many texts of Scripture, leads on to downright Pelagianism. Some think, as Augustine, that Christ lights all that are lighted by His grace, and that "every man" is practically the same as every believer. They quote in support of this view, the verse, "The Lord upholdeth all that fall" (Psalm cxlv.141), where "all" can only mean, "all those that are upheld are upheld by the Lord." A favorite illustration of this view is the saying, that a schoolmaster "teaches all the boys in a town," that is, "all who are taught are taught by him." This interpretation, however, is not thoroughly satisfactory, and has an appearance of quibbling and unfairness about it.

Some think, as Chrysostom, and Brentius in his Homilies, and Lightfoot, that Christ is really given to be the light of all mankind. They think that when it is said, He "lights every man," it means that He shines sufficiently for the salvation of all mankind, both Jews and Gentiles (like the sun shining upon all creation), though the majority of men are so blinded by sin that they do not see Him. Yet Christ is for every man. "He lighteth all," says Chrysostom, "as far as in Him lies." "There is power and good will in the light," says Chemnitius, "to illumine all; but some love darkness rather than light." Arrowsmith says, "Christ doth dispense to every one light sufficient to leave him without excuse. But Christ doth not dispense to every one converting light sufficient to bring him to salvation."

I believe this last view to be the most probable one, though I confess that it is not unattended by difficulties. But I rest in the conclusion that Christ is offered as a light to all the world, and that every one born into the world will prove at last to have been in some way indebted to Christ, even though not saved. Pearce says of the Greek word rendered "lighteth," that, "in the Hebrew tongue that which is only intended to be done is often expressed as a thing actually done." He regards this expression before us as a similar one. He gives, as parallel instances, 1 Cor. x.33, "please," for "intend to please;" Gal. v.4, "Justified," for "intend to be justified;" and 1 John ii.26, "seduce," for "intend to seduce."

The Greek word rendered "lights" is used eleven times in the New Testament, and is translated "to give light, to light, to bring to light, to enlighten, to illuminate."

10.—[He was in the world, etc...knew Him not.] This verse describes the unbelief of the whole world before Christ's incarnation. He "was in the world" invisibly, before He was born of the Virgin Mary, as in the days of Noah. (1 Pet. iii.19.) He was to be seen in His works and in His providential government of all things, if men had only had eyes to see Him. And yet the very world which He had made, the work of His hands, did not acknowledge, believe, or obey Him. It knew Him not. At Athens, Paul found an altar "to the unknown God." That the expression applies to Christ before His incarnation, and not after, is said by Lampe to be the unanimous opinion of Origen, Chrysostom, Augustine, Cyril, Theodoret, Beda, Theophylact, and

Euthymius. There is a striking similarity between the declaration of this verse and the contents of the latter part of the 1st chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. In fact the line of argument by which St. Paul shows the Gentiles to be guilty, in the first chapter of that epistle, and the Jews to be equally guilty and excuseless in the second chapter, is only a full exposition of what St. John here states briefly in two verses.

11.—[He came unto His own,...received Him not.] This verse describes the unbelief of the Jewish nation after the incarnation of Christ, and during His ministry among them. He came to a people who were peculiarly His own, by their redemption from Egypt, by their introduction into the land of Canaan, and by their possession of the law of Moses, and the covenants, and yet they did not believe on Him, or receive Him, but actually rejected and slew Him. There is a peculiarity about the Greek words rendered "His own," in this verse, which ought not to be overlooked. The first "His own" is in the neuter gender, and means literally "His own things." The second "His own" is in the masculine gender, and means "His own men, servants, or subjects." It is probably meant to show that our Lord came to a people whose land, territory, cities, temple, were all His own property, and had been originally granted by Himself. The Jews, Palestine, Jerusalem, the temple, were all Christ's peculiar possession. Israel was "His inheritance." (Psalm lxxviii.71.) This made the sin of those who "received Him not," even more sinful.

12.—[*As many as received Him.*] This expression signifies, "as many

as believed on Christ, and acknowledged Him as the Messiah." It is only another form of the expression at the end of the verse, "believed on His name." To receive Christ is to accept Him with a willing heart, and to take Him as our Savior. It is one of many forms of speech, by which that justifying faith which unites the sinner's soul to Christ is expressed in the Bible. To believe on Christ with the heart, is to receive Him, and to receive Him is to believe on Him. St. Paul says to the Colossians, "As ye have received Christ, so walk ye in Him." (Col. ii.6.) The Greek word rendered, "As many as," is literally, "whosoever," "whatsoever persons." Glassius remarks that the expression denotes the universality of the benefits which Christ conferred. "Whosoever" received Him, Pharisees, Sadducees, learned or unlearned, male or female, Jews or Gentiles, to them He gave the privilege of sonship to God.

[*To them gave He power to become the sons of God.*] This expression means, "He gave them the privilege of adoption into God's family." They became the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." (Gal. iii.26.) "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." (1 John v.1.) There is no sonship to God without living faith in Christ. Let this never be forgotten. To talk of God being men's Father, and men being God's children, while they do not believe on the Son of God, is contrary to Scripture. Those are not children of God who have not faith in Jesus. The word "power" in this sentence requires careful guarding against misrepresentation. It means, as the marginal reading says, "right or privilege." It does not mean strength or ability. It does not mean that Christ confers on

those who receive Him a spiritual and moral strength, by which they convert themselves, change their own hearts, and make themselves God's children. No doubt Christ gives to all His people all needful grace to supply all the wants of their hearts, and the necessities of their position. No doubt He gives them strength to carry the cross, fight the good fight, and overcome the world. But that is not the truth taught in the words before us, and must be sought in other places. The words before us only mean that Christ confers the privilege of adoption on all believers, and did so especially on His first disciples. While their unbelieving fellow-countrymen were boasting of being children of Abraham, Christ gave His disciples the far higher privilege of being children of God.

The Greek word rendered "power" is used 102 times in the New Testament, and never on one occasion in the sense of physical, moral, or spiritual strength to do a thing. It is generally translated, "authority, right, power, liberty, jurisdiction."

[*To them that believe on His name.*] These words are added to make clearer, if possible, the character of those who have the privilege of being sons of God. They are they who receive Christ and believe on His name. Arrowsmith remarks, "The word 'name,' in the Scripture, is often put for person. The receivers of Christ are said to believe on His name, because the direct object of their faith is the person of Christ. It is not the believing that Christ died for all, or for me, or for the elect, or any such proposition, that saveth. It is believing on Christ. The person, or name of Christ, is the object of faith."

The expression, “believe on His name,” ought not to be overlooked. Arrowsmith remarks that there is a known distinction amongst divines, between believing God, that there is such a Being,—believing God, that what He says is true,—and believing on God in the way of faith and confidence as our God. And he observes, most truly, that precisely the same distinction exists between faith that there is such a Savior as Christ,—faith that what Christ says is true, and faith of reliance on Christ as our Savior. Believing on Christ’s name is exactly this faith of reliance, and is the faith that saves and justifies.

13.—[*Which were born, etc…of God.*] The birth here spoken of is the new birth, or regeneration, that complete change of heart and nature which takes place in a man when he becomes a real Christian. It is a change so great that no other figure but that of birth can fully express it. It is as when a new being, with new appetites, wants, and desires is brought into the world. A person born of God is “a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” (2 Cor. v.17.) The persons who believe on Christ’s name are said to be born “not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” The interpretation of this expression which is usually given by commentators appears to me neither correct nor seemly. The true meaning of the words, I believe, is this. Believers did not become what they are “by blood,”—that is, by descent from Abraham or blood connection with godly people; grace does not descend from parent to child. Nor yet did believers become what they are by the will of the flesh,—that is, by the efforts and exertions of

their own natural hearts; nature can never change itself. “That which is born of the flesh is flesh.” Nor yet did believers become what they are by the will of man,—that is, by the acts and deeds of others; neither ordained ministers nor anyone else can confer grace upon another. Man cannot regenerate hearts. Believers become what they are solely and entirely by the grace of God. It is to God’s free grace, preventing, calling, converting, renewing and sanctifying, that they owe their new birth. They are born of God, or, as the third chapter says more distinctly, “born of the Spirit.”

The word which we render “blood,” in the singular number, is, in the Greek, plural, “bloods.” This peculiarity has made some conjecture that the expression refers to the blood shed in circumcision and sacrifice, and teaches the inability of these things to regenerate man. But this idea seems far-fetched and improbable. The use of the plural number appears to me intended to exclude all fleshly confidence in *any* descent or relationship. It was neither the blood of Abraham, nor of David, nor of Aaron, nor of Judah, nor of Levi, which would give grace or make anyone a child of God.

This is the first time the new birth is spoken of by name in Scripture. Let us not fail to notice how carefully the doctrine is fenced against errors, and how emphatically we are told what this new birth does *not* come from, as well as what it *does* come from. It is a striking fact that when St. Peter mentions the new birth, he fences it in like manner (1 Pet. i.23), and when he speaks of baptism “saving” us, he carefully adds that it is “not the putting away the filth of the flesh.” (1

Pet. iii.21.) In the face of all these cautions, it is curious to observe the pertinacity with which many overthrow the whole doctrine of the new birth by the assertion that all baptized persons are born again!

We must be careful that we do not interpret the words "which were born" as if the new birth was a change which takes place in a man *after* he has believed in Christ, and is the next step *after* faith. Saving faith and regeneration are inseparable. The moment that a man really believes in Christ, however feebly, he is born of God. The weakness of his faith may make him unconscious of the change, just as a new-born infant knows little or nothing about itself. But where there is faith there is always new birth, and where there is no faith there is no regeneration.

JOHN 1:14

Now the Word became flesh and took up residence among us. We saw his glory—the glory of the one and only, full of grace and truth, who came from the Father.

The passage of Scripture now before us is very short, if we measure it by words. But it is very long, if we measure it by the nature of its contents. The substance of it is so immensely important that we shall do well to give it separate and distinct consideration. This single verse contains more than enough matter for a whole exposition.

The main truth which this verse teaches is ***the reality of our Lord Jesus Christ's incarnation, or being made man***. John tells us that "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us."

The plain meaning of these words is, that our divine Savior really took human nature upon Him, in order to save sinners. He really became a man like ourselves in all things, sin only excepted. Like ourselves, he was born of a woman, though born in a miraculous manner. Like ourselves, He grew from infancy to boyhood, and from boyhood to man's estate, both in wisdom and in stature. (Luke 2:52.) Like ourselves, he hungered, thirsted, ate, drank, slept, was wearied, felt pain, wept, rejoiced, marveled, was moved to anger and compassion. Having become flesh, and taken a body, He prayed, read the Scriptures, suffered being tempted, and submitted His human will to the will of God the Father. And finally, in the same body, He really suffered and shed His blood, really died, was really buried, really rose again, and really ascended up into heaven. And yet all this time He was God as well as man!

This union of two natures in Christ's one Person is doubtless one of the greatest mysteries of the Christian religion. It needs to be carefully stated. It is just one of those great truths which are not meant to be curiously pried into, but to be reverently believed. Nowhere, perhaps, shall we find a more wise and judicious statement than in the second article of the Church of England. "The Son, who is the Word of the Father, begotten from everlasting of the Father, the very and eternal God, and of one substance with the Father, took

man's nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin of her substance—so that two whole and perfect natures, that is to say, the Godhead and the manhood, were joined together in one Person, never to be divided, whereof is one Christ, truly God and truly man." This is a most valuable declaration. This is "sound speech, which cannot be condemned."

But while we do not pretend to explain the union of two natures in our Lord Jesus Christ's Person, we must not hesitate to fence the subject with well-defined cautions. While we state most carefully what we *do* believe, we must not shrink from declaring boldly what we do *not* believe. We must never forget, that though our Lord was God and man at the same time, *the divine and human natures in Him were never confounded*. One nature did not swallow up the other. The two natures remained perfect and distinct. The divinity of Christ was never for a moment laid aside, although veiled. The manhood of Christ, during His life-time, was never for a moment unlike our own, though by union with the Godhead, greatly dignified. Though perfect God, Christ has always been perfect man from the first moment of His incarnation. He who is gone into heaven, and is sitting at the Father's right hand to intercede for sinners, is man as well as God. Though perfect man, Christ never ceased to be perfect God. He that suffered for sin on the cross, and was made sin for us, was "God manifest in the flesh." The blood with which the Church was purchased, is called the blood "of God." (Acts 20:28.) Though He became "flesh" in the fullest sense, when He was born of the Virgin Mary, He never at any period ceased to be the Eternal Word. To say

that He constantly manifested His divine nature during His earthly ministry, would, of course, be contrary to plain facts. To attempt to explain why His Godhead was sometimes veiled and at other times unveiled, while He was on earth, would be venturing on ground which we had better leave alone. But to say that at any instant of His earthly ministry He was not fully and entirely God, is nothing less than heresy.

The cautions just given may seem at first sight needless, wearisome, and hair-splitting. It is precisely the neglect of such cautions which ruins many souls. This constant undivided union of two perfect natures in Christ's Person is exactly that which gives infinite value to His mediation, and qualifies Him to be the very Mediator that sinners need. Our Mediator is One who can sympathize with us, because He is very MAN. And yet, at the same time, He is One who can deal with the Father for us on equal terms, because He is very GOD. It is the same union which gives infinite value to His righteousness, when imputed to believers. It is the righteousness of One who was God as well as man. It is the same union which gives infinite value to the atoning blood which He shed for sinners on the cross. It is the blood of One who was God as well as man. It is the same union which gives infinite value to His resurrection. When He rose again, as the Head of the body of believers, He rose not as a mere man, but as God. Let these things sink deeply into our hearts. The second Adam is far greater than the first Adam was. The first Adam was only man, and so he fell. The

second Adam was God as well as man, and so He completely conquered.

Let us leave the subject with feelings of deep gratitude and thankfulness. It is full of abounding consolation for all who know Christ by faith, and believe on Him.

Did the Word become flesh? Then He is One who can be touched with the feeling of His people's infirmities, because He has suffered Himself, being tempted. He is almighty because He is God, and yet He can sympathize with us, because He is man.

Did the Word become flesh? Then He can supply us with a perfect pattern and example for our daily life. Had he walked among us as an angel or a spirit, we could never have copied Him. But having dwelt among us as a man, we know that the true standard of holiness is to "walk even as He walked." (1 John 2:6.) He is a perfect pattern, because He is God. But He is also a pattern exactly suited to our needs, because He is man.

Finally, did the Word become flesh? Then let us see in our mortal bodies a real, true dignity, and not defile them by sin. Vile and weak as our body may seem, it is a body which the Eternal Son of God was not ashamed to take upon Himself, and to take up to heaven. That simple fact is a pledge that He will raise our bodies at the last day, and glorify them together with His own.

Technical Notes:

14. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

[*And the Word was made flesh*.] This sentence means that the eternal Word of God, the second Person in the Trinity, became a man, like one of ourselves in all things, sin only excepted. This He accomplished, by being born of the Virgin Mary, after a miraculous manner, through the operation of the Holy Ghost. And the end for which He became flesh was that He might live and die for sinners.

The expression "the Word," shows clearly that "the Word" who "was with God and was God," must be a Person. It could not reasonably be said of any one but a person, that He became "flesh and dwelt among us." Whether St. John could have found any other name for the second Person of the Trinity equally proper, we need not trouble ourselves to inquire. It certainly would not have been accurately correct to say that "Jesus was made flesh," because the name Jesus was not given to our Lord till after His incarnation. Nor yet would it have been correct to say, "In the beginning was Christ," because the name Christ belongs to the times after the fall of man.

This is the last time that John uses this expression, "The Word," about Christ in his Gospel. From the time of His incarnation he generally speaks of Him as "Jesus," or "the Lord."

[*Was made*.] This expression might perhaps have been better translated "became." At any rate we must carefully remember that it

does not signify “was created.” The Athanasian Creed says truly, “The Son is of the Father alone, neither made nor created, but begotten.”

[*Flesh*.] The use of this word, instead of “man,” ought not to be overlooked. It is purposely used in order to show us that when our Lord became incarnate, He took upon Him nothing less than our whole nature, consisting of a true body and a reasonable soul. As Arrowsmith says, “That which was not taken could not be healed. If Christ had not taken the whole man, He could not have saved the soul.” It also implies that our Lord took upon Him a body liable to those weaknesses, fatigues, and pains, which are inseparable from the idea of flesh. He did not become a man like Adam before the fall, with a nature free from all infirmity. He became a man like any one of Adam’s children, with a nature liable to everything that fallen humanity is liable to, except sin. He was made “flesh,” and “all flesh is grass.” Finally, it teaches that our Lord did not assume the human nature of any one family, or class, or people, but that nature which is common to all Adam’s children, whether Jews or Gentiles. He came to be a Savior for “all flesh,” and so was made “flesh.” The subject of this sentence is a deeply mysterious one, but one about which it is most important to have clear views. Next to the doctrine of the Trinity, there is no doctrine on which fallen man has built so many deadly heresies as the incarnation of Christ. There is unquestionably much about this union of two natures in one person which we cannot explain, and must be content to believe. There is much that we cannot understand, be it remembered, in the union of body and soul in our own persons. But there are some points in the subject of

Christ's incarnation which we must hold fast and never let go.

(*a*) In the first place, let us carefully remember that when "the Word became flesh," He became so by the union of two perfect and distinct natures in one Person. The manner of this union we cannot explain, but the fact we must firmly believe. "Christ," says the Athanasian Creed, "is God and Man; God of the substance of the Father, begotten before the world, and man of the substance of His mother, born in the world; perfect God and perfect man. Who, although He be God and man, yet He is not two but one Christ; one not by conversion of the godhead into flesh, but by taking of the manhood into God." These words are very important. The Word was not made flesh by changing one nature into another, or by laying aside one nature and taking up another. In all our thoughts about Christ, let us take care that we do not divide His Person, and that we maintain steadily that He has two distinct and perfect natures. The old Latin line on the subject, quoted by Gomarus, is worth remembering. It represents "the Word made flesh," as saying, "I am what I was, that is God: I was not what I am, that is man: I am now called both, that is both God and man."

(*b*) Secondly, when "the Word became flesh," He did not cease for a moment to be God. No doubt He was pleased to veil His divinity and to hide His power, and more especially so at some seasons. He emptied Himself of external marks of glory and was called "the carpenter." But He never laid His divinity aside. God cannot cease to be God. It was as God-man that He lived, suffered, died, and rose

again. It is written that God “has purchased the Church with His own blood.” It was the blood of one who was not man only, but God.

(*c*) Thirdly, when “the Word became flesh,” He was made a man in the truth of our nature, like unto us in all things, and from that hour has never ceased to be man. His humanity was not a humanity different from our own, and though now glorified is our humanity still. It was perfect man no less than perfect God who resisted temptation, fulfilled the law perfectly, endured the contradiction of sinners, spent nights in prayer, kept His will in subjection to the Father’s will, suffered, died, and at length ascended up to heaven with flesh, bones, and all things appertaining to man’s nature. It is written, that “in all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren.” Moreover, He did not lay aside His humanity when He left the world. He that ascended up on the mount of Olives and is sitting at the right hand of God to intercede for believers, is one who is still man as well as God. Our High Priest in heaven is not God only, but man. Christ’s humanity as well as divinity are both in heaven. One in our nature, our elder Brother has gone as our Forerunner to prepare a place for us.

(*d*) Lastly, when “the Word became flesh,” He did not take on Him “peccable flesh.” It is written that He was made in “the likeness of sinful flesh.” (Rom. viii.3.) But we must not go beyond this. Christ was “made sin for us.” (2 Cor. v.21.) But He “knew no sin,” and was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and without taint of corruption. Satan found nothing in Him. Christ’s human nature was

liable to weakness, but not to sin. The words of the fifteenth Article must never be forgotten:

Christ was "void from sin, both in His flesh and in His Spirit." For want of a clear understanding of this union of two natures in Christ's Person, the heresies which arose in the early Church were many and great. And yet Arrowsmith points out that no less than four of these heresies are at once confuted by a right interpretation of the sentence now before us. "The Arians hold that Jesus Christ was not true God. This text calleth Him the Word, and maketh Him a Person in the Trinity." The Apollinarians acknowledge Christ to be God, yea, and man too; but they hold that He took only the body of a man, not the soul of a man, while His divinity supplied the room of a soul. We interpret the word 'flesh' for the whole human nature, both soul and body.

"The Nestorians grant Christ to be both God and man; but then they say the Godhead made one person, and the manhood another person. We interpret the words 'was made' as implying a union in which Christ assumed not the person of man, but the nature of man."

"The Eutychians held but one person in Christ; but then they confounded the natures. They say the Godhead and manhood made such a mixture as to produce a third thing. Here they also are confuted by the right understanding of the union between the Word and flesh." He then goes on to show how the ancient Church met all these heretics with four adverbs, which briefly and conveniently

defined the union of two natures in Christ's person. They said that the divine and human natures when "the Word was made flesh," were united *truly*, to oppose the Arians,— *perfectly,* to oppose the Appolinarians,—*undividedly*, to oppose the Nestorians,—and *unmixedly*, to oppose the Eutychians. Those who wish to examine this subject further will do well to consult Pearson on the Creed, Dods on the Incarnation of the Eternal Word, and Hooker's Ecclesiastical Polity, B. v., chap. 51,52,53,54.

[*Dwelt among us.*] The Greek word rendered dwelt means literally "tabernacled," or "dwelt in a tent." The sentence does not mean that Christ dwelt in His human body as in a tabernacle, which He left when He ascended up to heaven. "Christ," says Arrowsmith, "continueth now, and shall forever, as true man as when He was born of the Virgin Mary. He so took human nature as never to lay it down again." The sentence only means that Christ dwelt among men on earth for thirty-three years. He was on earth so long conversing among men, that there could be no doubt of the reality of His incarnation. He did not appear for a few minutes like a phantom or ghost. He did not come down for a brief visit of a few days, but was living among us in His human body for the duration of a whole generation of men. For thirty-three years He pitched His tent in Palestine, and was going to and fro among its inhabitants. Arrowsmith remarks that three sorts of men are described in the Bible as living in tents: shepherds, sojourners, and soldiers. He thinks that the phrase here used has reference to the calling of all these three, and that it points to Christ's life on earth being that of a

shepherd, a traveler, and a soldier. But it may be doubted whether this is not a somewhat fanciful idea, however pleasing and true. The Greek word rendered “dwelt” is only used in four other places in the New Testament (Rev. vii.15; xii.12; xiii.6; xxi.3), and in each of them is applied to a permanent, and not a temporary dwelling.

[*We beheld His glory*.] St. John here declares that although “the Word was made flesh,” he and others beheld from time to time His glory, and saw manifest proof that He was not man only, but the “only-begotten Son of God.”

There is a difference of opinion among commentators as to the right application of these words. Some think that they apply to Christ’s ascension, which John witnessed, and to all His miraculous actions throughout His ministry, in all of which, as it is said of the miracle of Cana, He “manifested forth His glory,” and His disciples saw it. Others think that they apply especially to our Lord’s transfiguration, when He put on for a little season His glory, in the presence of John, James, and Peter. I am on the whole inclined to think that this is the true view, and the more so because of Peter’s words in speaking of the transfiguration (2 Pet. i.16,18), and the words which immediately follow in the verse we are now considering.

[*The glory as of the only begotten of the Father*.] This sentence means “such glory as became and was suitable to one who is the only begotten Son of God the Father.” These words will hardly apply to Christ’s miracles. They seem to confine the glory which John says

"we beheld," to the vision of glory which he and his two companions saw when Christ was transfigured, and they heard the Father saying, "This is my beloved Son." Lightfoot's paraphrase of this expression is worth reading, though he does not apply the passage to the transfiguration. "We saw His glory as what was worthy, as became, the only begotten Son of God. He did not glisten in any worldly pomp or grandeur, according to what the Jewish nation fondly dreamed their Messiah would do. But He was dressed with the glory of holiness, grace, truth, and the power of miracles." We must carefully remember that the adverb "as" in this place does not imply comparison or similitude, as if John only meant that the Word's glory was *like* that of the only begotten Son of God. Chrysostom says, "The expression 'as' in this place does not belong to similarity or comparison, but to confirmation and unquestionable definition, as though he said, we beheld glory such as it was becoming and likely that He should possess, who is the only begotten and true Son of God and King of all." He also remarks that it is a common manner of speaking, when people are describing the appearance of a king in state, to say that "he was like a king," meaning only that he was a real king.

Glassius, in his Philologia, makes the same comment on the expression, and quotes as parallel cases of the use of the adverb "as," 2 Pet. i.3; 1 Pet. i.19; Philemon 9; Rom. ix.32; Matt. xiv.5; 2 Cor. iii.18. He thinks it a Hebraism, denoting not the similitude but the reality and truth of a thing, and quotes Psalm cxxii.3 and Hosea iv.4 as Old Testament instances. [*The only begotten of the Father*.] This

remarkable expression describes our Lord's eternal generation, or Sonship. He is that Person who alone has been begotten of the Father from all eternity, and from all eternity has been His beloved son. The phrase is only used five times in the New Testament, and only in St. John's writings. That God always had a Son appears in the Old Testament. "What is his son's name," says Agur. (Prov. xxx.4.) So also the Father says to Messiah, "Thou art my Son: this day have I begotten thee." (Ps. ii.7.) But the Sonship now before us, we must carefully remember, is not to be dated from any "day." It is the everlasting Sonship of which John speaks.

The subject is one of those which we must be content to believe and reverence, but must not attempt to define too narrowly. We are taught distinctly in Scripture that in the unity of the Godhead there are three Persons of one substance, power and eternity—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. We are taught, with equal distinctness, that "Sonship" describes the everlasting relation which exists between the First and Second Persons in the Trinity, and that Christ is the only begotten and eternal Son of God. We are taught, with equal distinctness, that the Father loveth the Son, and loved Him before the foundation of the world. (John xvii.24.) But here we must be content to pause. Our feeble faculties could not comprehend more if more were told us. Let us however remember carefully, when we think of Christ as the only begotten Son of the Father, that we must not attach the least idea of inferiority to the idea of His Sonship. As the Athanasian creed says, "The Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost is all one, the glory equal, the majesty co-

eternal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son." And yet the Father is not the Son, and the Son is not the Father. The argument of the ancient Arians, that if Christ is the Son of God, He must necessarily be inferior in dignity to God and subsequent in existence to God, is one that will not stand for a moment. The reply is simple. We are not talking of the relationship of mortal beings, but of the relationship between the Persons of the Trinity, who are eternal. All analogies and illustrations drawn from human parents and children are necessarily defective. As Augustine said, so must we say, "Show me and explain to me an eternal Father, and I will show you and explain to you an eternal Son." We must believe and not try to explain. Christ's generation, as God, is eternal—who shall declare it? He was begotten from everlasting of the Father. He was always the beloved son. And yet, "He is equal to the Father as touching His godhead, though inferior to Him as touching His manhood."

[*Full of grace and truth.*] These words do not belong to the Father, though they follow His name so closely. They belong to "the Word." The meaning of them is differently explained.

Some think that they describe our Lord Jesus Christ's character, during the time that He was upon the earth, in general terms. Full of grace were His lips, and full of grace was His life. He was full of the grace of God, the Spirit dwelling in Him without measure; full of kindness, love, and favor to man; full of truth in His deeds and words, for in His lips were no guile; full of truth in His preaching concerning God the Father's love to sinners and the way of salvation,

for He was ever unfolding in rich abundance all truths that man can need to know for his soul's good. Some think that the words describe especially the spiritual riches that Christ brought into the world, when He became incarnate and set up His kingdom. He came full of the gospel of grace, in contradistinction to the burdensome requirements of the ceremonial law. He came full of truth, of real, true, solid comfort, in contradistinction to the types, and figures, and shadows of the law of Moses. In short, the full grace of God and the full truth about the way of acceptance were never clearly seen until the Word became flesh, dwelt among us on earth, opened the treasure-house, and revealed grace and truth in His own person.

I decidedly prefer the second of these two views. The first is truth, but not the truth of the passage. The second appears to me to harmonize with the 17th verse, which follows almost immediately, where the law and the Gospel are contrasted, and we are told that "grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."

JOHN 1:15-18

John testified about him and cried out, "This one was the one about whom I said, 'He who comes after me is greater than I am, because he existed before me.'" For we have all received from his fullness one gracious gift after another. For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came about through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. The only one, himself God, who is in the presence of the Father, has made God known.

The passage before us contains three great declarations about our Lord Jesus Christ. Each of the three is among the foundation-principles of Christianity.

We are taught, firstly, that ***it is Christ alone who supplies all the spiritual needs of all believers***. It is written that "of his fullness have we all received, and grace for grace."

There is an infinite fullness in Jesus Christ. As Paul says, "It pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell." "In Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." (Coloss. 1:19; 2:3.) There is laid up in Him, as in a treasury, a boundless supply of all that any sinner can need, either in time or eternity. The Spirit of Life is His special gift to the Church, and conveys from Him, as from a great root, sap and vigor to all the believing branches. He is rich in mercy, grace, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. Out of Christ's fullness, all believers in every age of the world, have been supplied. They did not clearly understand the fountain from which their supplies flowed, in Old Testament times. The Old Testament saints only saw Christ afar off, and not face to face. But from Abel downwards, all saved souls have received all they have had from Jesus Christ alone. Every saint in glory will at last acknowledge that he is Christ's debtor for all he is. Jesus will prove to have been all in all.

We are taught, secondly, ***the vast superiority of Christ to Moses, and of the Gospel to the Law***. It is written that "the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."

Moses was employed by God “as a servant,” to convey to Israel the moral and ceremonial law. (Heb. 3:5.) As a servant, he was faithful to Him who appointed him, but he was only a servant. The moral law, which he brought down from Mount Sinai, was holy, and just, and good. But it could not justify. It had no healing power. It could wound, but it could not bind up. It “worked wrath.” (Rom. 4:15.) It pronounced a curse against any imperfect obedience. The ceremonial law, which he was commanded to impose on Israel, was full of deep meaning and typical instruction. Its ordinances and ceremonies made it an excellent schoolmaster to guide men toward Christ. (Gal. 3:24.) But the ceremonial law was only a schoolmaster. It could not make him that kept it perfect, as pertaining to the conscience. (Heb. 9:9.) It laid a grievous yoke on men’s hearts, which they were not able to bear. It was a ministration of death and condemnation. (2 Cor. 3:7-9.) The light which men got from Moses and the law was at best only starlight compared to noon-day.

Christ, on the other hand, came into the world “as a Son,” with the keys of God’s treasury of grace and truth entirely in His hands, (Heb. 3:6.) *Grace* came by Him, when He made fully known God’s gracious plan of salvation, by faith in His own blood, and opened the fountain of mercy to all the world. *Truth* came by Him, when He fulfilled in His own Person the types of the Old Testament, and revealed Himself as the true Sacrifice, the true mercy-seat, and the true Priest. No doubt there was much of “grace and truth” under the law of Moses. But the whole of God’s grace, and the whole truth

about redemption, were never known until Jesus came into the world, and died for sinners.

We are taught, thirdly, that ***it is Christ alone who has revealed God the Father to man***. It is written that "no man has seen God at any time—the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared him."

The eye of mortal man has never beheld God the Father. No man could bear the sight. Even to Moses it was said, "You can not see my face—for there shall no man see me, and live." (Exod. 33:20.) Yet all that mortal man is capable of knowing about God the Father is fully revealed to us by God the Son. He, who was in the bosom of the Father from all eternity, has been pleased to take our nature upon Him, and to exhibit to us in the form of man, all that our minds can comprehend of the Father's perfections. In Christ's *words*, and *deeds*, and *life*, and *death*, we learn as much concerning God the Father as our feeble minds can at present bear. His perfect wisdom—His almighty power—His unspeakable love to sinners—His incomparable holiness—His hatred of sin, could never be represented to our eyes more clearly than we see them in Christ's life and death. In truth, "God was manifest in the flesh," when the Word took on Him a body. "He was the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of His person." He says Himself, "I and my Father are one." "He that has seen me has seen the Father." "In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." (Coloss. 2:9.) These

are deep and mysterious things. But they are true. (1 Tim. 3:16; Heb. 1:3; John 10:30; 14:9.)

And now, after reading this passage, can we ever give too much honor to Christ? Can we ever think too highly of Him? Let us banish the unworthy thought from our minds forever. Let us learn to exalt Him more in our hearts, and to rest more confidingly the whole weight of our souls in His hands. Men may easily fall into error about the three Persons in the holy Trinity if they do not carefully adhere to the teaching of Scripture. But no man ever errs on the side of giving too much honor to God the Son. Christ is the meeting-point between the Trinity and the sinner's soul. "He that honors not the Son, honors not the Father which sent Him." (John 5:23.)

Technical Notes:

15. John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that comes after me is preferred before me: for he was before me. 16. And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. 17. For the law was given by Moses, *but* grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. 18. No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared *him***.**

15.—[*John bare witness...cried.*] The time at which John the Baptist bore this testimony is not specified. We have not yet come to the historic part of John's Gospel, properly speaking. We are still in

the introductory preface. It seems therefore probable, as Lightfoot says, that the sentence before us describes the habitual character of John's testimony to Christ. He was, throughout his ministry, continually proclaiming Christ's greatness and superiority to himself, both in nature and dignity.

[*Cried*.] The Greek word so rendered, implies a very loud cry, like that of one making a proclamation. Parkhurst defines it in this place as "speaking out very openly."

[He that comes after me…preferred before…was before me.] This sentence has caused much discussion and some difference of opinion. The Greek words literally translated would be, "He that cometh after me has become, or been made, in front of me—for he was first of me." I feel no doubt that our English version gives the correct meaning of the sentence. Hammond's note on the text is very good.

The first "before" signifies before in place, position, or dignity. The Greek adverb so rendered is used forty-nine times in the New Testament, but never once in the sense of "before in point of time or age." The second "before" signifies before in point of time or existence. "He was existing before me, at the time when I was not." The expression is certainly remarkable and uncommon, but there is another exactly like it in this Gospel: "It hated me before it hated you," where the literal rendering would be, "it hated me first of you." The sentence "He was before me," is a distinct statement of Christ's

preexistence. He was born at least six months after John the Baptist, and was therefore younger in age than John. Yet John says, “He was before me. He was existing when I was born.” If he had meant only that our Lord was a more honorable person than himself, he would surely have said, “He *is* before me.”

The greatness of John the Baptist’s spiritual knowledge appears in this expression. He understood the doctrine of Christ’s pre-existence. Christians are apt to think far too slightingly of John the Baptist’s attainments and the depths of his teaching.

16.—[*Of His fulness have all we received.*] This sentence means, “all we who believe on Jesus have received an abundant supply of all that our souls need, out of the full store that resides in Him for His people. It is from Christ and Christ alone that all our spiritual wants have been supplied.” Waterland, in his book on the Trinity, calls particular attention to this expression. He thinks that it was specially used with a view to the strange doctrines of the Gnostics in general, and the Corinthians in particular, whose heresies arose before St. John’s Gospel was written. They seem to have held that there was a certain fulness or plenitude of the Deity, into which only certain spiritual men, including themselves, were to be received, and from which others who were less spiritual, though they had grace, were to be excluded. “St. John,” says Waterland, “here asserts that all Christians, equally and indifferently, all believers at large, have received of the plenitude or fulness of the divine Word, and that not sparingly, but in the largest measure, even grace upon grace.”

Melancthon on this verse calls particular attention to the word “all.” He observes that it embraces the whole Church of God from Adam downwards. All who have been saved have received out of Christ’s fulness, and all other sources of fulness are distinctly excluded.

[*Grace for grace.*] This expression is very peculiar, and has caused much difference of opinion among commentators.

(1) Some think it means “the new grace of the Gospel in place of, or instead of, the old grace of the law.” This is the view of Cyril, Chrysostom, Theophylact, Euthymius, Rupertus, Lyranus, Bucer, Beza, Scaliger, DeDieu, Calovius, Jansenius, Lampe, and Quesnel.
(2) Some think that it means “grace, on account of God’s grace or favour, and specially His favour towards His Son.” This is the view of Zwingle, Melancthon, Chemnitius, Flacius, Rollock, Grotius, Camerarius, Tornovius, Toletus, Barradius, Cartwright, and Cornelius à Lapide.
(3) Some think that it means “grace on account of, or in return for, the grace of faith that is in us.” This is the view of Augustine, Gomarus, and Beda.
(4) Some think that it means “grace answering to, or proportioned to, the grace that is in Christ.” This is the view of Calvin, Leigh, and Bridge.
(5) Some think that it means “grace for the propagation of grace.” This is the view of Lightfoot.
(6) Some think that it means “accumulated grace, abundant grace, grace upon grace.” This is the view of Schleusner, Winer, Bucer,

Pellican, Musculus, Gualter, Poole, Nifanius, Pearce, Burkitt, Doddridge, Bengel, A. Clarke, Tittman, Olshausen, Barnes, and Alford.

Brentius, Bullinger, Aretius, Jansenius, Hutcheson, Gill, Scott, and Henry give several views, but signify their adhesion to no one in particular. On the whole, I am inclined to think that the sixth and last is the correct view. I admit fully that the Greek preposition, here rendered "for," is only found in three senses in the Greek Testament: viz, "In the room or place of" (Matt. ii.22), "In return for" (Rom. xii.17), and "On account of" (Acts xii.23; Ephes. v.31.) In composition it also signifies "opposition;" but with that we have nothing to do here. In the present case I think the meaning is "grace in the place of grace; constant, fresh abundant supplies of new grace, to take the place of old grace; and therefore unfailing, abundant grace, continually filling up and supplying all our need."

17.—[*For the law was given, etc.*] This verse seems intended to show the inferiority of the Law to the Gospel. It does so by putting in strong contrast the leading characteristics of the Old and New dispensations—the religion which began with Moses, and the religion which began with Christ. By Moses was given the law—the moral law, full of high and holy demands, and of stern threatening's against disobedience;—the ceremonial law, full of burdensome sacrifices, ordinances, and ceremonies, which never healed the worshipper's conscience, and at best were only shadows of good things to come.

By Christ, on the other hand, came grace and truth—grace by the full manifestation of God's plan of salvation, and the offer of complete pardon to every soul that believes on Jesus,—and truth, by the unveiled exhibition of Christ Himself, as the true sacrifice, the true Priest, and the true atonement for sin.

Augustine, on this verse, says: "The law threatened, not helped; commanded, not healed; showed, not took away, our feebleness. But it made ready for the Physician who was to come with grace and truth." 18.—[*No man hath seen God, etc.*] This verse seems intended to show the infinite personal superiority of Christ to Moses, or to any other saint that ever lived.

No man hath ever seen God the Father; neither Abraham nor Moses, nor Joshua, nor David, nor Isaiah, nor Daniel. All these, however holy and good men, were still only men, and quite incapable of beholding God face to face, from very weakness. What they knew of God the Father, they knew only by report, or by special revelation, vouchsafed to them from time to time. They were but servants, and "The servant knoweth not what his lord doeth." (John xv.15.)

Christ, on the other hand, is the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father. He is one who is most intimately united from all eternity to God the Father, and is equal to Him in all things. He, during the time of His earthly ministry here, fully showed to man all that man can bear to know concerning His Father. He has revealed His Father's wisdom, and holiness, and compassion, and power, and

hatred of sin, and love of sinners, in the fullest possible way. He has brought into clear light the great mystery how God the Father can be just, and yet justify the ungodly. The knowledge of the Father which a man derived from the teaching of Moses, is as different from that derived from the teaching of Christ as twilight is different from noon-day.

We must carefully remember that none of the appearances of God to man, described in the Old Testament, were the appearances of God the Father. He whom Abraham, and Jacob, and Moses, and Joshua, and Isaiah, and Daniel saw, was not the First Person in the Trinity, but the Second. The speculations of some commentators on the sentence now before us, as to whether any created being, angel or spirit, has ever seen God the Father, are, to say the least, unprofitable. The sentence before us speaks of man, being written for man's use.

The expression, "Which is in the bosom of the Father," is doubtless a figurative one, mercifully accommodated to man's capacity. As one who lies in the bosom of another is fairly supposed to be most intimate with him, to know all his secrets, and possess all his affections, so is it, we are to understand, in the union of the Father and the Son. It is more close than man's mind can conceive.

The Greek word rendered "declared," means literally, "hath expounded." It is the root of the words which are well known among literary students of the Bible, "exegesis and exegetical." The idea is that of giving a full and particular explanation. (Acts xv.14.) Whether

the “declaring of God the Father,” here described, is to be confined to Christ’s oral teaching about the Father, or whether it means also that Christ has in His Person given a visible representation of many of the Father’s attributes, is a doubtful point. Perhaps both ideas are included in the expression. In leaving this passage, I must say something about the disputed question—

To whom do the three verses beginning “and of his fulness” belong? Are they the words of John the Baptist and a part of his testimony? Or are they the words of John the Gospel writer and an explanatory comment of his, such as we occasionally find in his Gospel? There is something to be said on both sides.

(*a*) Some think that these three verses were spoken by John the Baptist, because of the awkwardness and abruptness with which his testimony ends upon the other theory,—because they run on harmoniously with the fifteenth verse,—and because there is nothing in them which we might not reasonably expect John the Baptist to say. This is the opinion of Origen, Athanasius, Basil, Cyprian, Augustine, Theophylact, Rupertus, Melancthon, Calvin, Zwingle, Erasmus, Chemnitius, Gualter, Musculus, Bucer, Flacius, Bullinger, Pellican, Toletus, Gomarus, Nifanius, Rollock, Poole, Burkitt, Hutcheson, Bengel, and Cartwright.

(*b*) Others think that the three verses are the comment of John the Gospel writer, arising out of John’s testimony about Christ’s pre-existence, and out of the expression, “grace and truth,” in the

fourteenth verse. They regard the verses as an exposition of the expression, “full of grace and truth.” They question whether the language is such as would have been used by John the Baptist,—whether he would have said “all we,” after just saying “me,”—whether he would have used the word “fulness,”—whether he would, at so early a period, have contrasted the religion of Moses and of Christ,—and whether he would have so openly declared Christ to be the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father. Finally, they think that if these were John the Baptist’s words, the Gospel would not have begun again the nineteenth verse, “This is the record of John.” This is the opinion of Cyril, Chrysostom, Euthymius, Beda, Lyranus, Brentius, Beza, Ferus, Grotius, Aretius, Barradius, Maldonatus, Cornelius à Lapide, Jansenius, Lightfoot, Arrowsmith, Gill, Doddridge, Lampe, Pearce, Henry, Tittman, A. Clarke, Barnes, Olshausen, Alford, and Wordsworth. Baxter and Scott decline any decided opinion on the point, and Whitby says nothing about it.

The arguments on either side are so nicely balanced, and the names on either side are so weighty, that I venture an opinion with much diffidence. But on the whole, I am inclined to think that the three verses are not the words of John the Baptist, but of John the Evangelist. The remarkable style of the first eighteen verses of this chapter makes the abruptness and brevity of the testimony which John the Baptist bears, upon this theory, appear to me not strange. And the connection between the three verses and the words “full of grace and truth” in the fourteenth verse, appears to me much more marked and distinct than the connection between John’s testimony

and the words “of His fulness all we have received.” Happily the point is one which involves no serious question, and is therefore one on which Christians may be content to differ, if they cannot convince one another.

JOHN 1:19-28

The Testimony of John the Baptist

Now this was John’s testimony when the Jewish leaders sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” He confessed—he did not deny but confessed— “I am not the Christ.” So they asked him, “Then who are you? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the Prophet?” He answered, “No.” Then they said to him, “Who are you? Tell us so that we can give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?”

John said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord,’ as Isaiah the prophet said.” (Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. So they asked John, “Why then are you baptizing if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?”

John answered them, “I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not recognize, who is coming after me. I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandal!” These things happened in Bethany across the Jordan River where John was baptizing.

The verses we have now read begin the properly *historical* part of John's Gospel. Hitherto we have been reading deep and weighty statements about Christ's divine nature, incarnation, and dignity. Now we come to the plain narrative of the days of Christ's earthly ministry, and the plain story of Christ's doings and sayings among men. And here, like the other Gospel-writers, John begins at once with "the record" or testimony of John the Baptist. (Matt. 3:1; Mark 1:2; Luke 3:2.)

We have, for one thing, in these verses, ***an instructive example of true humility***. That example is supplied by John the Baptist himself.

John the Baptist was an eminent saint of God. There are few names which stand higher than his in the Bible calendar of great and good men. The Lord Jesus Himself declared that "Among those who are born of woman there has not risen a greater than John the Baptist." (Matt. 11:11.) The Lord Jesus Himself declared that he was "a burning and a shining light." (John 5:35.) Yet here in this passage we see this eminent saint lowly, self-abased, and full of humility. He puts away from himself the honor which the Jews from Jerusalem were ready to pay him. He declines all flattering titles. He speaks of himself as nothing more than the "voice of one crying in the wilderness," and as one who "baptized with water." He proclaims loudly that there is One standing among the Jews far greater than himself, One whose shoe-latchet he is not worthy to unloose. He

claims honor not for himself but for Christ. To exalt Christ was his mission, and to that mission he steadfastly adheres.

The greatest saints of God in every age of the Church have always been men of John the Baptist's spirit. In gifts, and knowledge, and general character they have often differed widely. But in one respect they have always been alike—they have been "clothed with humility." (1 Pet. 5:5.) They have not sought their own honor. They have thought little of themselves. They have been ever willing to decrease if Christ might only increase, to be nothing if Christ might be all. And here has been the secret of the honor God has put upon them. "He that humbles himself shall be exalted." (Luke 14:11.)

If we profess to have any real Christianity, let us strive to be of John the Baptist's spirit. Let us study HUMILITY. This is the grace with which all must begin, who would be saved. We have no true religion about us, until we cast away our high thoughts, and feel ourselves sinners. This is the grace which all saints may follow after, and which none have any excuse for neglecting. All God's children have not gifts, or money, or time to work, or a wide sphere of usefulness; but all may be humble. This is the grace, above all, which will appear most beautiful in our latter end. Never shall we feel the need of humility so deeply, as when we lie on our deathbeds, and stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. Our whole lives will then appear a long catalogue of imperfections, ourselves nothing, and Christ all.

We have, for another thing, in these verses, ***a mournful example of the blindness of unconverted men.*** That example is supplied by the state of the Jews who came to question John the Baptist.

These Jews professed to be waiting for the appearance of Messiah. Like all the Pharisees they prided themselves on being children of Abraham, and possessors of the covenants. They rested in the law, and made their boast of God. They professed to know God's will, and to believe God's promises. They were confident that they themselves were guides of the blind, and lights of those who sat in darkness. (Rom. 2:17-19.) And yet at this very moment their souls were utterly in the dark. "There was standing among them," as John the Baptist told them, "One whom they knew not." Christ Himself, the promised Messiah, was in the midst of them, and yet they neither knew Him, nor saw Him, nor received Him, nor acknowledged Him, nor believed Him. And worse than this, the vast majority of them never would know Him! The words of John the Baptist are a prophetic description of a state of things which lasted during the whole of our Lord's earthly ministry. Christ "stood among the Jews," and yet the Jews knew Him not, and the greater part of them died in their sins.

It is a solemn thought that John the Baptist's words in this place apply strictly to thousands in the present day. Christ is still standing among many who neither see, nor know, nor believe. Christ is passing by in many a parish and many a congregation, and the vast

majority have neither an eye to see Him, nor an ear to hear Him. The spirit of slumber seems poured out upon them. Money, and pleasure, and the world they know; but they know not Christ. The kingdom of God is close to them; but they sleep. Salvation is within their reach; but they sleep. Mercy, grace, peace, heaven, eternal life, are so near that they might touch them; and yet they sleep. "Christ stands among them and they know him not." These are sorrowful things to write down. But every faithful minister of Christ can testify, like John the Baptist, that they are true.

What are we doing ourselves? This, after all, is the great question that concerns us. Do we know the extent of our religious privileges in this country, and in these times? Are we aware that Christ is going to and fro in our land, inviting souls to join Him and to be His disciples? Do we know that the time is short and that the door of mercy will soon be closed for evermore? Do we know that Christ rejected will soon be Christ withdrawn? Happy are they who can give a good account of these inquiries and who "know the day of their visitation!" (Luke 19:44.) It will be better at the last day never to have been born, than to have had Christ "standing among us" and not to have known Him.

Technical Notes:

19. And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who are you? 20. And he confessed, and denied not, but confessed, I am not the Christ. 21. And they asked him, What then? Are

you Elijah? And he said, I am not. Are you that prophet? And he answered, No. 22. Then said they unto him, Who are you? that we may give an answer to them who sent us. What do you say about yourself? 23. He said, I *am* the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the LORD, as said the prophet Isaiah. 24. And they who were sent were of the Pharisees. 25. And they asked him, and said unto him, Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, neither that prophet? 26. John answered them, saying, I baptize with water, but there stands one among you, whom ye know not. 27. He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to unloose. 28. These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing.

19.—[*This is the record.*] The Greek word translated "record," is the same that is rendered "witness" in the 7th verse. The sentence means, "this is the testimony that John bore."

[*When.*] This word raises the question, "At what time was this testimony of John borne?" It appears to have been after our Lord Jesus Christ's baptism, and at the end of His forty days' temptation in the wilderness. The 29th verse tells us that "the next day John seeth Jesus coming to him." It is worthy of notice that nowhere in the Gospels do we find "days" so carefully marked as in that portion of the first chapter of St. John which we have now begun.

[*The Jews.*] This expression is remarkable, as peculiar to St. John's Gospel. He generally speaks of our Lord's enemies and questioners as "the Jews." It seems to indicate that St. John did not write his Gospel in Palestine or at Jerusalem, and that it was written especially for the Gentile Christians scattered over the world, and much later than the other three Gospels.

[*Sent priests and Levites…Jerusalem.*] These words show that those who questioned John the Baptist on this occasion were a formal deputation sent with authority from the Sanhedrim, or ecclesiastical council of the Jews, to inquire about John's proceedings, and to report what he taught and whom he gave himself out to be.

Wordsworth remarks, that "More honor was paid by the Jews to John than to Christ, both in the persons sent and in the place from which they were sent. They esteemed John for his sacerdotal lineage." When Christ appeared, they called Him the Carpenter's son. Our Lord refers to this great respect at first shown to John when He says, "Ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light." (John v.35.)

[*To ask him, Who are you?*] We can hardly suppose that these priests and Levites were ignorant that John was the son of a priest, Zacharias, and therefore a Levite himself. Their inquiry seems to refer to John's office. "What did he profess to be? Did he assume to be the Messiah? Did he claim to be a prophet? What reason could he assign for his having taken up his remarkable position as a preacher and a baptizer at a distance from Jerusalem? What account could he

give of himself and his ministry?" Two things are plainly taught in this verse. One is the great sensation which John the Baptist's ministry caused throughout Palestine. He attracted so much notice, and such crowds following him, that the Sanhedrim felt it necessary to inquire about him. The other is the state of expectation in which the minds of the Jews were at this particular season. Partly from the seventy weeks of Daniel having expired, partly from the scepter having practically departed from Judah, there was evidently an expectation that some remarkable person was about to appear. As to the sort of person the Jews expected, it is plain that they only looked for a temporal King, who would make them once more an independent nation. They had no idea of a spiritual Savior from sin. But as to the fact that this vague expectation existed throughout the East at this particular time, we have the direct testimony of Latin historians. The extraordinary ministry of John the Baptist at once suggested the idea to the Jews at Jerusalem that he might possibly be the expected Redeemer. Therefore they sent to ask, "Who are you? Are you the long expected King?"

20.—[He confessed…denied not…confessed, etc.] This is a peculiar form of speech, implying a very positive, unmistakable, emphatic asseveration. It gives the idea of a man shrinking with holy indignation from the very thought of being regarded as the Christ: "Pain me not by suggesting that such a one as I can be the Christ of God. I am one far inferior to Him." Bengel says on this verse, "Whilst John denied himself, he did not deny Christ." Luther makes some excellent remarks on the strong temptation which was here put in

John's way to take honour to himself, and the humility and faith which he showed in overcoming it.

21.—[*Are you Elijah?*] This question was not an absurd and unnatural one, as some commentators have thought fit to say. It was based upon that prophecy of Malachi which speaks of God "sending Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord." (Mal. iv.5.) The manner, dress, and ministry of John the Baptist, as well as his appearing in the wilderness, constituted a great similarity between him and Elijah and suggested the idea that John might possibly be Elijah. "If this man," thought the priests and Levites, "is not the Christ, perhaps he is His forerunner, the prophet Elijah."

[*And he said, I am not.*] This answer of John deserves particular notice and involves a grave difficulty. How could John say, "I am not Elijah," when Christ says distinctly in another place, "This is Elijah." How shall we reconcile these two statements? To me it seems impossible to explain John's words except on the simple theory that there are two comings of Elijah the prophet. The first was only a coming in spirit and in power, but not a literal coming. The second will be a literal and real appearance on earth of him whom Elisha saw taken up into heaven. The first coming took place at Christ's first advent, and was fulfilled by John the Baptist going before Messiah's face in the spirit and power of Elijah. The second coming of Elijah will take place at the second advent of Jesus Christ, and will be fulfilled by Elijah himself once more coming as a prophet to the tribes of Israel.

It is of this second, future, literal coming of Elijah that John speaks in this place. When he says, “I am not Elijah,” he means, “I am not that Elijah you mean, who was taken up to heaven 900 years ago. The coming of that Elijah is yet a future thing. I am the forerunner of the first advent in humiliation, not of the second advent in glory. I am not the herald of Christ coming to reign, as Elijah will be one day, but the herald of Christ coming to suffer on the cross. I am not come to prepare the way for a conquering King, such as you fondly expect, but for a meek and lowly Savior, whose great work is to bear our sins and to die. I am not the Elijah you expect.

In confirmation of this view, our Lord’s remarkable words in another Gospel ought to be carefully studied. He says distinctly, “Elijah truly shall first come and restore all things.” (Matt. xvii.11.) And yet He adds in the same breath, “I say unto you that Elijah is come already.” That is, “He is come, in a certain sense, by John the Baptist going before my face in the spirit and power of Elijah.” In short, our Lord says at the same time, “Elijah shall come,” and “Elijah is come!” To me His words seem a plain proof of the theory I am here maintaining, that there are two comings of Elijah. In *spirit* Elijah came when John the Baptist came, a man like to Elijah in mind and habits. But in the *flesh* Elijah has not yet come, and is yet to appear. And it was in the view of this future, literal coming, that John the Baptist said, “I am not Elijah.” He knew that the Jews were thinking of the times of Messiah’s glory and of the literal coming of Elijah, which would usher in those times. Therefore he says, “I am not the

Elijah you mean. I belong to a different dispensation." The other view, which is undoubtedly maintained by the vast majority of commentators, appears to me surrounded with insuperable difficulties. According to them, there never was to be more than one fulfilment of Malachi's prophecy about Elijah. It was to be fulfilled by John the Baptist; and when he appeared, it had received its full accomplishment. How John the Baptist's answer in this place can be satisfactorily explained, according to this theory, I am quite unable to see. The Jews ask him plainly whether he is Elijah; that is, whether he is the person who is to fulfil Malachi's prophecy. This, at any rate, was evidently the idea in their minds. He answers distinctly that he is not. And yet according to the theory against which I contend, he *was* Elijah, and he ought to have replied, "I am." In short, he appears to say that which is not true! There never was to be anyone after him who was to fulfil Malachi's prophecy, and yet he declares in effect that he does not fulfil it by saying that he is not Elijah!

About the future literal coming of Elijah the prophet, when the Jews will at last see a living person who will say, "I am Elijah," this is not the place to speak. Whether or not he will minister to any but the Jews, whether or not he will prove one of the two witnesses spoken of in Revelation xi.3, are interesting and disputed questions. I will only remark that the subject deserves far more attention than it ordinarily receives.

The following quotations from the Fathers will show that the opinion I have expressed is not a modern one.

Chrysostom, on Matt. xvii.10, says, “As there are two comings of Christ,— first, to suffer,—secondly, to judge; so there are two comings of Elijah; first of John before Christ’s first coming, who is called Elijah because he came in the manner and spirit of Elijah; secondly, of the person of Elijah, the Tishbite, before Christ’s second coming.” Jerome and Theophylact say just the same.

Gregory, quoted by Mayer, says, “Whereas John denieth himself to be Elijah, and Christ after affirmeth it, there is no contradiction. There is a double coming of Elijah. The one is in spirit, before Christ’s coming to redeem; the other in person, before Christ’s coming to judgment. According to the first, Christ’s saying is true, ‘This is Elijah.’ According to the second, John’s speech is true, ‘I am not.’ This was the fittest answer to men asking in a carnal sense.

Augustine says, “What John was to the first advent, Elijah will be to the second advent. As there are two advents, so there are two heralds.”

[*Are you that prophet?*] There are two views of this question. Some think, as Augustine and Gregory, that the words should be as our marginal reading has them, “Art thou a prophet?” Others think, as Cyril and Chrysostom, that the question referred to “the prophet” of whom Moses foretold that he would come. (Deut. xviii.15.) I decidedly prefer the latter view. It seems very improbable that John the Baptist would entirely deny that he was a prophet. Besides this, it

seems not unreasonable that the Jews would ask whether he was "the great prophet foretold by Moses." And to this question, John answers most truly, that he was not. It admits of doubt whether the Jews who questioned him clearly saw that the "prophet like unto Moses" and the "Messiah" were to be one and the same. It rather looks as if they thought "Christ" and "the prophet" were two different persons. Lightfoot thinks that the question refers to a common expectation among the Jews, that the prophets were to rise again at the coming of Messiah, and that John's questioners meant, "Are you one of the prophets raised from the dead?" This superstitious notion explains the words of the disciples in Luke: "Others say that one of the old prophets is risen again." (Luke ix.19.) But the Greek article in the words before us seems to me too strong to be rendered "a prophet."

22.—[*An answer to them that sent us.*] This expression confirms the opinion already given about the character of those who questioned John. They were not idle inquirers, but a formal deputation sent down from the Sanhedrim at Jerusalem with a commission to find out who John was, and to make a report of what they discovered.

23.—[*He said, I am the voice, etc.*] John the Baptist's account of himself in this verse consists of a reference to Scripture. He reminds the priests and Levites who wanted to know who he was, of Isaiah's prophecy concerning the times of the Messiah. (Isaiah xl.3.) They would there find Isaiah saying, with the abruptness of an inspired prophet, and speaking as if he saw what he was describing, "The voice of Him that crieth in the wilderness!" That means, "I hear in

spirit, as I look forward to Messiah's time, a man crying in a wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord." "That prophecy," says John the Baptist, "is this day fulfilled in me. I am the person whom Isaiah saw and heard in vision. I am come to prepare the way for Messiah, like a man going before a king in a desert country to prepare a road for his master. I am come to make ready the barren hearts of the Jewish nation for Christ's first advent and the kingdom of God. I am only a voice. I do not come to work miracles. I do not want disciples to follow me, but my Master. The object of my mission is to be a herald, a crier, a warning voice to my fellow-countrymen, so that when my Master begins His ministry they may not be found unprepared."

[*The wilderness.*] The common view of this expression is that it refers to John the Baptist's ministry having begun in the wilderness of Judæa. I rather doubt the correctness of this idea. The whole quotation is undeniably figurative. The prophet compares Messiah's forerunner to one preparing a road for a King through a desert or uninhabited country. The "way" or road is unquestionably figurative, and the straightness of the way too. No one supposes that Isaiah meant that John the Baptist was literally to make a road. But if the "way" is figurative, the country through which it is made must surely be figurative too. I therefore think that the wilderness is a prophetical and figurative description of the spiritual barrenness of Israel when the Messiah's forerunner began his ministry. At the same time, I fully admit that John's retired and ascetic habits and his residence in the wilderness form a remarkable coincidence with the

text. The expression “voice,” has often been remarked as a beautiful illustration of the general character of John’s ministry. He was eminently a humble man. He was one who desired to be *heard*, and to awaken attention by the sound of this testimony, but not to be *seen* or visibly honored.

24.—[And they…sent… Pharisees.] The object of this verse is somewhat doubtful. Some think that it refers to the verse preceding, which contains a quotation from Isaiah. They which were sent being Pharisees, and not Sadducees or Herodians, should have seen and admitted the Scriptural character of John’s mission. Some think, as Bengel, that it refers to the following verse, in which a question was raised about baptism. They which were sent, being Pharisees, were specially strict about ceremonies, ordinances, and forms. Therefore they were not satisfied with a reference to Scripture. They asked John’s authority for baptizing. Some think that it refers generally to the notorious enmity and dislike with which the Pharisees regarded John the Baptist all through his ministry. Our Lord says in another place, “They rejected the counsel of God, not being baptized of him.” (Luke vii.30.) The text before us would then mean, that they which asked all these questions asked them with a thoroughly unfriendly spirit, and with no real desire to learn God’s truth, because they were Pharisees.

25.—[*Why then do you baptize if you be not, etc.*] This verse evidently implies that John’s questioners expected the Messiah, or his forerunner, to baptize whenever he appeared. It is not unlikely, as

Lightfoot says, that the idea arose from the text in Ezekiel, describing Messiah's time, "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean," etc. (Ezek. xxxvi.24.)

Luther thinks that this verse shows that the questioners who came to John now changed their tone. Hitherto they had flattered. Now they began to threaten. One thing is very clear from this verse. The Jews were not unacquainted with baptism as a religious ordinance. It was one of the ceremonies, according to Lightfoot, by which proselytes were admitted into the Jewish Church. Moreover it is worthy of notice, that when proselytes were so admitted, their children were baptized together with them. It was not therefore the fact of John baptizing which the Pharisees here called in question, but his authority for administering baptism.

26.—[*I baptize with water, but, etc.*] The answer of John the Baptist here reported is very elliptical, and the full meaning of what he said must be supplied from other places. He seems to say, "I do not baptize by my own authority, but by a commission from One far higher than either you or I. I only baptize with water, and I do not do it to make disciples for myself, but for my master. I form no party. I ask no man to follow me. I tell all whom I baptize to believe on that Mighty One who is coming after me. I am only the servant of One far greater than myself, who is even now standing among you, if you had eyes to see Him. He is one so much above me in nature and dignity, that I am not worthy to be his humblest servant. He can baptize hearts, and will fulfil the promises about Messiah to which you are

vaguely referring. In the meantime, I only baptize with water all those who profess repentance and willingness to receive my Master. I baptize for another and not for myself."

[*There stands One among you.*] I doubt whether these words literally mean, "There is standing in the crowd of you, my hearers." I prefer the sense, "There is already *living* and abiding among you, in this land of Judæa, One greater than I." I think this to be the sense, because of the words in the 29th verse, "John seeth Jesus coming to him," which seem to imply that he was not with him the previous day. The thought seems parallel to that contained in the words, "The kingdom of God comes not with observation." "The messenger of God comes suddenly to his temple." (Mal. iii.1; Luke xvii.20.) All serve to point to the same truth: viz., that when Messiah came the first time, He came quietly, without noise, without display, without the nation of the Jews knowing it; so that He "stood among them," and yet they were not aware of His presence. The Greek word rendered "stands" is in the perfect tense, and would be literally rendered, "there hath stood;" that is, "hath stood for some little time, and is still standing." The Messiah has come and is present. Bengel renders it, "hath taken His stand."

The view I have maintained of the meaning of the word "stands," is held by Parkhurst, who defines it as "being or living," and quotes John vi.22 as a parallel instance. Pearce takes the same view, and quotes Acts xxvi.22. Jansenius renders it, "has conversed among you, as when He sat among the doctors" in the temple. Aretius renders it,

"He is present in the flesh, and walking in Judæa." [*Ye know not.*] This seems to mean not only that the Jews knew not Jesus the Messiah by sight, but that they had no spiritual knowledge of Him, and of the true nature of His office as the Savior of sinners. "Ye look for a conquering, reigning Messiah. Ye know not the suffering Messiah, who came to be cut off and to be crucified for sinners."

Bengel remarks that John is here specially "addressing inhabitants of Jerusalem who had not been present at the baptism of Jesus. And he whets their desires that they may be anxious to become acquainted with Him."

27.—[*Coming after…preferred before.*] The remarks made on the 15th verse apply fully to this expression. John declares that though his Master, in point of time, began His ministry after him, in point of dignity He was far above him. To exalt Christ and abase himself seem ideas never long out of John's mind.

[*Sandal strap I am not worthy to unloose.*] This is evidently a proverbial expression. "I am so inferior to Him that came after me, that in comparison with Him, I am like the humblest servant compared to his master." To be not fit to carry a person's shoes, in our times, is a well-known proverb, describing inferiority.

28.—[These things…done…in Bethabara.] In hot countries like Palestine, it was evidently important for John the Baptist to be near a supply of water suited to the baptism of the multitudes who came to

him. If Beth-barah, spoken of in Gideon's history, is the same place, it is worthy of notice that it is specially mentioned as near "waters." (Judges vii.24.)

The name of the place ought always to be dear to the hearts of Christians. It is the place where the first disciples of Jesus were made, and the foundation of the Christian Church was laid. It was here, "the next day," that Jesus was publicly proclaimed as the "Lamb of God." It was here, "the day after," that Andrew and another disciple followed Jesus. Here then the Church of Christ, properly so called, began. In leaving this passage, let us remember that John the Baptist's ministry left the Jews entirely without excuse, when afterwards they refused to believe on Christ. They could never plead that our Lord's ministry came on them unawares and took them by surprise. The whole nation dwelling in Palestine, from the great ecclesiastical Council down to the humblest classes, were evidently aroused to a state of attention by John's doings.

JOHN 1:29-34

Jesus the Lamb of God

On the next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one about whom I said, 'After me comes a man who is greater than I am, because he existed before me.' I did not recognize him, but I came baptizing with water so that he could be revealed to Israel."

Then John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending like a dove from heaven, and it remained on him. And I did not recognize him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'The one on whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining, this is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' I have both seen and testified that this man is the Chosen One of God."

This passage contains a verse which ought to be printed in great letters in the memory of every reader of the Bible. All the stars in heaven are bright and beautiful, and yet one star exceeds another star in glory. So also all texts of Scripture are inspired and profitable, and yet some texts are richer than others. Of such texts the first verse before us is preeminently one. Never was there a fuller testimony borne to Christ upon earth, than that which is here borne by John the Baptist.

Let us notice, firstly, in this passage, ***the peculiar name which John the Baptist gives to Christ.*** He calls Him "The Lamb of God."

This name did not merely mean, as some have supposed, that Christ was meek and gentle as a lamb. This would be truth no doubt, but only a very small portion of the truth. There are greater things here than this! It meant that Christ was the great sacrifice for sin, who was come to make atonement for transgression by His own death upon the cross. He was the true Lamb which Abraham told Isaac at Moriah God would provide. (Gen. 22:8.) He was the true Lamb to which every morning and evening sacrifice in the temple

had daily pointed. He was the Lamb of which Isaiah had prophesied, that He would be "brought to the slaughter." (Isaiah 53:7.) He was the true Lamb of which the Passover lamb in Egypt had been a vivid type. In short, He was the great propitiation for sin which God had covenanted from all eternity to send into the world. He was God's Lamb.

Let us take heed that in all our thoughts of Christ, we first think of Him as John the Baptist here represents Him. Let us serve him faithfully as our *Master*. Let us obey Him loyally as our *King*. Let us study His teaching as our *Prophet*. Let us walk diligently after Him as our *Example*. Let us look anxiously for Him as our coming *Redeemer* of body as well as soul. But above all, let us prize Him as our *Sacrifice*, and rest our whole weight on His death as an atonement for sin. Let His blood be more precious in our eyes every year we live. Whatever else we glory in about Christ, let us glory above all things in His cross. This is the corner-stone, this is the citadel, this is the rule of true Christian theology. We know nothing rightly about Christ, until we see him with John the Baptist's eyes, and can rejoice in Him as "the Lamb that was slain."

Let us notice, secondly, in this passage, ***the peculiar WORK which John the Baptist describes Christ as doing.*** He says that "he takes away the sin of the world."

Christ is a SAVIOR. He did not come on earth to be a conqueror, or a philosopher, or a mere teacher of morality. He came to save sinners. He came to do that which man could never do for himself—

to do that which money and learning can never obtain—to do that which is essential to man's real happiness, He came to "take away sin."

Christ is a COMPLETE savior. He "takes away sin." He did not merely make vague proclamations of pardon, mercy, and forgiveness. He "took" our sins upon Himself, and carried them away. He allowed them to be laid upon Himself, and "bore them in His own body on the tree." (1 Pet. 2:24.) The sins of every one that believes on Jesus are made as though they had never been sinned at all. The Lamb of God has taken them clean away.

Christ is an ALMIGHTY Savior, and a Savior for all mankind. He "takes away the sin of the world." He did not die for the Jews only, but for the Gentile as well as the Jew. He did not suffer for a few people only, but for all mankind. The payment that He made on the cross was more than enough to make satisfaction for the debts of all. The blood that He shed was precious enough to wash away the sins of all. His atonement on the cross was *sufficient* for all mankind, though *efficient* only to those who believe. The sin that He took up and bore on the cross was the sin of the whole world.

Last, but not least, Christ is a PERPETUAL and UNWEARIED Savior. He "takes away" sin. He is daily taking it away from every one that believes on Him—daily purging, daily cleansing, daily washing the souls of His people, daily granting and applying fresh supplies of mercy. He did not cease to work for His saints, when He died for them on the cross. He lives in heaven as a Priest, to present His

sacrifice continually before God. In grace as well as is providence, Christ works still. He is ever taking away sin.

These are golden truths indeed. Well would it be for the Church of Christ, if they were used by all who know them! Our very familiarity with texts like these is one of our greatest dangers. Blessed are they who not only keep this text in their memories, but feed upon it in their hearts!

Let us notice, lastly, in this passage, ***the peculiar office which John the Baptist attributes to Christ***. He speaks of Him as Him "who baptizes with the Holy Spirit."

The baptism here spoken of is not the baptism of water. It does not consist either of dipping or sprinkling. It does not belong exclusively either to infants or to grown up people. It is not a baptism which any man can give, Episcopalian or Presbyterian, Independent or Methodist, layman or minister. It is a baptism which the great Head of the Church keeps exclusively in His own hands. It consists of the implanting of grace into the inward man. It is the same thing with the new birth. It is a baptism, not of the body, but of the heart. It is a baptism which the penitent thief received, though neither dipped nor sprinkled by the hand of man. It is a baptism which Ananias and Sapphira did not receive, though admitted into church-communion by apostolic men.

Let it be a settled principle in our religion that the baptism of which John the Baptist speaks here, is the baptism which is

absolutely necessary to salvation. It is well to be baptized into the visible Church; but it is far better to be baptized into that Church which is made up of true believers. The baptism of water is a most blessed and profitable ordinance, and cannot be neglected without great sin. But the baptism of the Holy Spirit is of far greater importance. The man who dies with his heart not baptized by Christ can never be saved.

Let us ask ourselves, as we leave this passage, Whether we are baptized with the Holy Spirit, and whether we have any real interest in the Lamb of God? Thousands, unhappily, are wasting their time in controversy about water baptism, and neglecting the baptism of the heart. Thousands more are content with a head-knowledge of the Lamb of God, or have never sought Him by faith, that their own sins may be actually taken away. Let us take heed that we ourselves have new hearts, and believe to the saving of our souls.

Technical Notes:

29. The next day John saw Jesus coming unto him, and said, Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! 30. This is he of whom I said, After me comes a man who is preferred before me, for he was before me. 31. And I knew him not; but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water. 32. And John bore record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. 33. And I knew him not, but he that sent me to baptize with water

said unto me, Upon whom you shall see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he who baptizes with the Holy Ghost. 34. And I saw, and bore record that this is the Son of God.

29.—[*The next day*.] This means the day after the conversation between John the Baptist and the deputation of priests and Levites. The careful marking of days by St. John at this stage of his gospel deserves particular notice.

[*Saw Jesus coming unto him*.] These words seem to prove that Jesus was not present on the preceding day, during the conversation with the priests and Levites, and that John's words, "Stands among you," cannot be literally taken.

It seems probable, as before observed, that our Lord came back to John after His temptation in the wilderness. The Spirit took Him into the wilderness "immediately" after His baptism (Mark i.12), and it was upon His return, at the end of forty days, that John the Baptist saw Him again. [*And said, Behold!*] This appears to have been a public, open proclamation made by John to his disciples and the multitude who surrounded him. "Behold that person who is coming towards us. He is the Lamb of God, the Messiah of whom I have been preaching to you, and on whom I have told you to believe."

[*The Lamb of God*.] There can be no reasonable doubt that John gave this name to our Lord because He was the true sacrifice for sin,

the true antitype of the Passover lamb, and the lamb prophesied of by Isaiah. (Is. liii.7.) The idea that he only refers to the quietness and meekness of our Lord's personal character is utterly unsatisfactory. He is describing our Lord's official character as the great propitiation for sin. The expression, "Lamb of God," according to some, signifies "that eminent, great, divine, and most excellent Lamb." It is a well-known Hebraism to describe anything very great as a thing "of God." Thus we read of "thundering's of God," and "trembling of God" (Ex. ix.28; 1 Sam. xiv.15.) According to others, it signifies the Lamb which God has provided from all eternity, and which God has long covenanted and promised to send into the world to be slain for sinners. Both views make good doctrine, but the second seems the preferable one.

Bengel thinks that John called our Lord "the Lamb of God," with a special reference to the Passover, which was then near. (John ii.13.) He also sees a parallel between the expression "Lamb of God," and the phrase "sacrifice of God" (Psalm li.17), which means "the Sacrifice which God acknowledges as pleasing to Him." Chemnitius thinks, in addition to other reasons why John calls our Lord "the Lamb," that he desired to show that Christ's kingdom was not political. He was neither the ram nor the he-goat described in Daniel. (Dan. viii.20.)

[*Takes away*.] The Greek word so rendered is given in the marginal reading, "beareth." Both ideas are included. It means "takes away by his expiatory death." The Lamb of God "bears" the sin of the world by

taking it upon Himself. He allowed our guilt to be laid upon Him, and carried it away like the scapegoat, so that there was none left. It is one of the many expressions which describe the great Scripture truth that Christ's death was a vicarious sacrifice for sin. He became our substitute. He took upon Him our sin. He was made sin for us. Our sins were imputed to Him. He was made a curse for us.

The word here rendered "takes away" is found at least 100 times in the New Testament. In 82 places it is rendered, "take,"— "take up,"— or "take away." In five places it is "bear." In four it is "lift up." In two it is "remove." In most of the other places it is the imperative expression, "away with!" All point to the same view of the text before us: viz., "a complete atonement for sin."

The use of the present tense, "takes away," is remarked by all the best commentators, ancient and modern. It is intended to show the completeness of Christ's satisfaction for sin, and the continual application of His once-made sacrifice. He is always taking sin away. Rollock observes, "The influence of Christ's sacrifice is perpetual, and His blood never dries up."

The idea maintained by some that "taking away sin" in this place includes sanctification as well as justification, seems to me quite untenable. That Christ "takes away" the power of a believer's sins, when He applies His redemption to his soul, is no doubt true. But it is not the truth of this text.

[*The sin.*] Let it be noted that the singular number is used here. It is

"the sin," not "the sins." The expression seems to me purposely intended to show that what Christ took away and born on the cross was not the sin of certain people only, but the whole accumulated mass of all the sins of all the children of Adam. He bore the weight of all, and made an atonement sufficient to make satisfaction for all. The idea propounded by some, that "the sin" which Christ is said here to take away is only man's original sin, and that for man's actual sins each man must make satisfaction himself, is destitute of the slightest foundation in Scripture, contradicts scores of plain texts, and utterly overthrows the whole Gospel.

[*Of the world*.] It is almost needless to say that there are two views of this expression. Some say that it only means that Christ takes away the sin of Gentiles as well as Jews, and that it does not mean the sin of any but the elect. Others say that it really means that Christ "takes away" the sin of all mankind; that is, that He made an atonement sufficient for all, and that all are *salvable*, though not all saved, in consequence of His death.

I decidedly prefer the latter of these two views. I hold as strongly as anyone that Christ's death is profitable to none but to the elect who believe in His name. But I dare not limit and pare down such expressions as the one before us. I dare not say that no atonement has been made, in any sense, except for the elect. I believe it is possible to be more systematic than the Bible in our statements. When I read that the wicked who are lost "deny the Lord that bought them" (2 Peter ii.1), and that "God was in Christ, reconciling the

world unto Himself" (2 Cor. v.19), I dare not confine the intention of redemption to the saints alone. Christ is for every man.

I am aware the objection is often made that "if Christ takes away the sin of the world, and yet the vast majority of men die in their sins and are lost, Christ's work for many was wrought in vain." I see no force in this objection. I think we might as well argue that because sin came into the world and marred creation, creation was in vain. We are not talking of the works of men but of the eternal Word, and we must be content to see much in His works that we do not entirely understand. Though multitudes are lost, I have no doubt the last day will prove that nothing that Christ did for them was in vain.

I rest in the view of the text that in some ineffable and inscrutable way the whole world's sin was borne and atoned for by Christ. "He takes away, or makes atonement for, the sin of all the men and women in the world." I have no doubt, from Scripture, that the vast majority of "the world's" inhabitants will be found at last to have received no benefit from Christ and to have died in their sins. I repudiate the idea of universal salvation as a dangerous heresy and utterly contrary to Scripture. But the lost will not prove to be lost because Christ did nothing for them. He bore their sins, he carried their transgressions, he provided payment, but they would not put in their claim to any interest in it. He set the prison door open to all, but the majority would not come out and be free. In the work of the Father in election, and of the Spirit in conversion, I see limitation in the Bible most clearly. But in the work of Christ in atonement, I see

no limitation. The atonement was made for all the world, though it is applied to and enjoyed by none but believers. Christ's intercession is the peculiar privilege of His people. But Christ's atonement is a benefit which is offered freely and honestly to all mankind. In saying all this I am fully aware that the word "world" is sometimes used in a qualified sense, and must be interpreted with some limitation. When it is said, "The world knew Him not" (John i.10), it cannot mean that not a single person in the world knew Him. But in the text before us I see no necessity for limitation. I see the whole mass of mankind's guilt brought together in one singular word, "the sin of the world," and that sin, I am told, Christ "takes away." And I believe the true meaning to be that the Lamb of God has made atonement sufficient for all mankind, though efficient unquestionably to none but believers.

Augustine remarks, "How weighty must be the blood of the Lamb, by whom the world was made, to turn the scale when weighed against the world!" Calvin, in his commentary on this verse, says: "John uses the word sin in the singular number for any kind of iniquity; as if he had said that every kind of unrighteousness which alienates men from God is taken away by Christ. And when he says 'The sin of the world,' he extends this favor indiscriminately to the whole human race, that the Jews might not think that He had been sent to them alone. Hence we infer that the whole world is involved in the same condemnation; and that as all men, without exception, are guilty of unrighteousness before God, they need to be reconciled to Him. John the Baptist, by speaking generally of the sin of the world, intended to

impress upon us the conviction of our own misery, and to exhort us to seek the remedy. Now our duty is to embrace the benefit which is offered to all, that each of us may be convinced that *there is nothing to hinder him* from obtaining reconciliation in Christ, provided that he comes to Him by the guidance of faith." Brentius says: "Although all the men in the world do not receive the benefit of Christ's passion, because all do not believe on Christ, yet that benefit is so offered to the whole world, that whosoever, whether circumcised or uncircumcised, king or peasant, high or low, rich or poor, sick or well, old or young, receives Christ by faith, is justified before God, and saved with an eternal salvation."

Musculus says: "John places before us no one particular person whose sins the Lamb has come to take away; but under the expression 'the world,' he comprehends the whole race of mortals from the very beginning of the world to the end of it."

Melancthon says: "He taketh away the sin, that is the universal condemnation, of the human race."

Chemnitius says: "John affirms that the benefits of Christ belong not to the Jews only, but to the whole world, and that no one who is in the world is excluded from them, if he is only willing to receive them by faith." The deep spiritual knowledge exhibited by John the Baptist in this verse ought not to be overlooked. Such a sentence as the one before us never fell from the lips of any other disciple of Christ before the day of Pentecost. Others could say that our Lord was the Christ,

the son of God, the Messiah, the Son of David, the King of Israel, the Son of the Blessed, who was to come into the world. But none seem to have seen so clearly as John that Christ was the sacrifice for sin, the Lamb that was to be slain. Well would it be for the Church of Christ in the nineteenth century, if all its ministers possessed as much knowledge of Christ's atonement as is here shown by John the Baptist! John saw the vicarious sacrifice of Christ before He died on the cross. Many so-called Christians cannot see Christ's vicarious sacrifice even at this day!

30.—[*This is He of whom I said.*] These words appear to have been spoken in our Lord's presence, and to have been specially intended to point the multitude to Him. "This person before you is He of whom I have repeatedly spoken in my ministry, as the coming One who is far greater than myself. You see Him now before you."
[*A man... He was before me.*] The human and divine natures of our Lord are here brought together by John in one sentence. "He of whom I spoke to you is a man, and yet at the same time He is One who was before me, because He has existed from all eternity."

31.—[*I knew Him not.*] This means, "I was not acquainted with Him in time past. There has been no private collusion or arrangement between Him and me. I did not even know Him by sight until the day when He came to be baptized." The difficulty connected with these words of John will be considered fully at the 33rd verse.

[*That He should be made manifest to Israel, etc.*] John here declares

that the great end of his ministry was that this wonderful Person, whom he had just pointed out, should be manifested and made known to the Jews. He did not come to form a party of his own, or to baptize in his own name. The whole object of his preaching and baptizing was now before his hearers. It was simply to make known to Israel the Mighty One, the Lamb of God, whom they now saw.

32.—[*And John bore record.*] These words seem to denote a public and solemn testimony borne by John to the fact that our Lord had been visibly acknowledged by God the Father as the Messiah. If his hearers would have further proof that this Person, to whom he was pointing them, was really the Christ, he would tell them what he had seen with his own eyes. He would bear witness that he had seen visible proofs that this Person was really the Messiah.

[*I saw.*] This means, "At the time when our Lord was baptized, I saw this heavenly vision." Whether any beside John saw this vision and heard the voice of the Father which accompanied it, may well be doubted. At any rate, if they did, they did not understand either what they saw or heard.

[*The Spirit descending, etc.*] This means that John saw something coming down from heaven after the manner of a dove flying downwards, and that what he saw was the Holy Spirit, graciously revealing Himself in a visible manner.

[*It abode upon Him.*] This means that the heavenly vision of the

Holy Spirit rested upon Christ at the time of His baptism. It lighted down upon Him as a dove would settle down, and did not leave Him. I cannot satisfy myself that the expression “like a dove,” in this verse means that any dove was really seen by John when our Lord was baptized. All the four Gospel writers describe an appearance “like a dove.” St. Luke distinctly speaks of “a bodily shape.” That something visible was seen by John is plain, and that its appearance descending on our Lord resembled the downward flight of a dove, is also plain. But I am unable to see that the Holy Ghost took upon Him the actual form of a dove. Some think, as Augustine, that the likeness to a dove was especially employed at this time to answer the figure of Noah’s flood. He says, “As a dove did at that time bring tidings of the abating of the water, so doth it now of the abating of the wrath of God upon the preaching of the Gospel.” We must beware of supposing for a moment that this vision of the Spirit descending was meant to imply that our Lord first received the grace of the Holy Ghost at that particular time, or that He had not received it before in the same degree. We must not doubt that the Holy Ghost dwelt in Jesus “without measure” from the very time of His incarnation. The vision was meant to show the Church that when Christ’s ministry began, a fuller revelation of all Three Persons in the Trinity was made at once to mankind. It was meant at the same time to be a formal testimony to John the Baptist that the Messiah was before him, that this was the promised Savior whom God had anointed with the Holy Ghost and sent into the world, that the time of Christ’s ministry had begun, that He who had the spirit to bestow on men was before him, and that His entrance on His public work was attested by the presence

both of the Father and the Holy Ghost, in short, by a manifestation of all Three Persons in the Trinity at one time. As a Levite, John doubtless was familiar with all the ceremonies by which the Jewish high priests and kings were solemnly inducted into their office. For his satisfaction, therefore, our Lord received visible attestation from heaven, and was publicly recognized as the Messiah, the anointed Priest, and King, and Prophet, before His forerunner's eyes. Musculus on this verse remarks: "The Spirit did not descend on Christ's account, who was never separate, either from the Holy Spirit or from the Father—but on our account, that He who came to redeem the world might be made manifest through John's declaration of Him."

33.—[*I knew Him not.*] The Greek word so rendered, both here and in the 31st verse, is literally, "I had not known Him." There is a difficulty connected with the expression, which demands explanation. St. Matthew tells us that when our Lord came to John to be baptized, John said to Him, "I have need to be baptized of Thee, and comest Thou to me?" (Matt. iii.14), showing plainly by these words that he knew He was before him. And yet here we find John saying, "I knew Him not." How can this apparent inconsistency be reconciled?

Some think, as Chrysostom, that "John is speaking of former times, and not of the times near to his baptism." Some think, as Augustine, that it means, "I had not known till that day that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Ghost, although I had long known Him personally, and

had recognized Him as the Christ of God. But when He came to be baptized, it was also revealed to me that He would confer on men the great gift of the Holy Ghost." Some think, as Brentius and Beza, that it means, "I had not known Jesus by sight until the day when He came to be baptized. I knew that He had been born of the Virgin Mary, but was not personally acquainted with Him, having been myself brought up in the desert." (Luke i.80.) I had only been told by Him who sent me to baptize, "that whenever the Messiah came to be baptized, I should recognize Him by the descent of the Holy Ghost. When He did come, I received a secret revelation from God that Messiah stood before me, and under the power of that feeling I confessed my unworthiness to baptize Him. But when at last I did baptize Him, I received a full confirmation of my faith, by beholding the promised sign of the descent of the Holy Ghost." Those who hold this view think the case of Samuel receiving a secret revelation about Saul an illustration of the matter. (1Sam. ix.15.)

Some think as Poole, that it means, "I knew Him not perfectly and distinctly, though I had an impression when I first saw Him coming to be baptized, that He was one far greater than myself, and under that impression demurred to baptizing Him. After His baptism I saw clearly who He was." The last explanation is perhaps the simplest, and most probable. That John at one time did not know our Lord by sight at all, that he afterwards knew Him imperfectly, and that his perfect knowledge of Him, His nature, office, and work was not attained till the time when the Spirit descended at His baptism, are points that seem clear. The time when he said, "I have need to be

baptized of Thee," would seem to be the time of imperfect knowledge, when the fact that Jesus was the Messiah began to dawn upon him, and made him cry out, "Comest Thou to me?"

Chrysostom observes that the expression is a proof "that the miracles which they say belong to Christ's childhood are false, and the invention of those who bring them to notice. For if He had begun from His early age to work miracles, neither could John have been ignorant of Him, nor would the multitude have needed a teacher to make Him known."

[*He that sent me...same said.*] This expression indicates that John the Baptist had many special revelations of God concerning His work, of which we have no record given to us. He seems to have been taught and instructed like one of the old prophets.

[*He who baptizes with the Holy Ghost.*] The remarkable description of our Lord, here given by John the Baptist, has received three very different interpretations. Some think that it means, "This is He who shall institute Christian baptism, with which the gift of the Holy Ghost shall be connected. His baptism shall be like mine, a baptism of water." But it shall not be a baptism of water only, as mine is, but a baptism accompanied by the regenerating grace of the Spirit.

Some think that it means, "This is He who shall baptize with the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost, and confer miraculous gifts on the Church." Some think it means, "This is He who shall baptize the

hearts of men, which neither thou canst do nor any other human minister. He has the prerogative of giving spiritual life. He is the giver of the Holy Spirit to all who believe on Him."

I am decidedly of the opinion that this third view is the correct one. It is the only one which seems at all answerable to the majesty of the Person spoken of, the dignity of the speaker, and the solemnity of the occasion. To say, "This is He who shall institute Christian baptism" seems a very lame and impotent account of the expression. To say, "This is He who shall bestow miraculous gifts at the day of Pentecost," is a degree better, but gives a picture of our Lord's office confined to a single generation. But to say, "This is He who, in every age of the Church, will baptize the hearts of His people by the Holy Ghost, and by this baptism continually replenish the ranks of His mystical body," is saying that which exactly suits the occasion, and describes our Lord's work in the world in a worthy manner.

Musculus, on this verse, remarks: "What is it to baptize with the Holy Ghost? It is to regenerate the hearts of the elect, and consecrate them into the fellowship of the sons of God." Again, he says, "It is Christ alone who baptizes with the Holy Ghost; a power which, as divine, He keeps in His own hands and never communicates to any minister." The view I have maintained is ably set forth in Bucer's commentary on this place. He says, "By the baptism of water we are received into the outward Church of God; by the baptism of the Spirit into the inward Church." The opinion of one who was Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, in the reign of Edward the Sixth,

and the personal friend and adviser of Cranmer and the other English reformers, deserves much consideration. It proves, at any rate, that the doctrine of inward baptism of the Spirit, which Christ alone gives to every believer, and the identity of this baptism with conversion or new birth, are not such modern and contemptible notions as some persons are pleased to think.

The untenableness of the view, held by many, that John's baptism was not the same as Christian baptism, to all intents and purposes, is ably shown by Lightfoot in his "Harmony of the Four Evangelists." If it was not Christian baptism, it would be hard to prove that some of the disciples ever received Christian baptism at all. There is not the slightest evidence that Andrew, Peter, and Philip were baptized by Jesus. The familiarity which John displays with the Holy Ghost and His work deserves particular attention. To say, as many do, that the Holy Ghost was not known until the day of Pentecost, is saying what cannot be proved. The Holy Ghost has always been in the hearts of believers in every age of the world. His abundant outpouring is undoubtedly a leading mark of the days since Christ came into the world. But the Holy Ghost was ever in God's elect, and without Him there never was a soul saved.

34.—[*I saw and bore record, etc.*] This means, I saw perfectly, and from that time have distinctly and unhesitatingly testified that the person whom you now see before you is the Christ, the Son of the living God. From the day of His baptism I have been fully convinced that this is the Messiah." John here declares his own firm conviction

of our Lord's divinity and eternal generation. He was satisfied that our Lord was not the Son of Mary only, but the Son of God.

JOHN 1:35-42

Again the next day John was standing there with two of his disciples. Gazing at Jesus as he walked by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!" When his two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. Jesus turned around and saw them following and said to them, "What do you want?" So they said to him, "Rabbi" (which is translated Teacher), "where are you staying?" Jesus answered, "Come and you will see." So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day. Now it was about four o'clock in the afternoon.

Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, was one of the two disciples who heard what John said and followed Jesus. He found first his own brother Simon and told him, "We have found the Messiah!" (which is translated Christ). Andrew brought Simon to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon, the son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter).

These verses ought always to be interesting to every true Christian. They describe the first beginnings of the Christian Church. Vast as that church is now, there was a time when it consisted of only two weak members. The calling of those two members is described in the passage which is now before our eyes.

We see, for one thing, in these verses, ***what good is done by continually testifying of Christ.***

The first time that John the Baptist cried, “Behold the Lamb of God,” no result appears to have followed. We are not told of any who heard, inquired, and believed. But when he repeated the same words the next day, we read that two of his disciples “heard him speak and followed Jesus.” They were received most graciously by Him whom they followed. “They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day.” Truly it was a day in their lives most eventful, and most blessed! From that day they became fast and firm disciples of the new-found Messiah. They took up the cross. They continued with Him in His temptations. They followed Him wherever He went. One of them at least, if not both, became a chosen apostle, and a master builder in the Christian temple. And all was owing to John the Baptist’s testimony, “Behold the lamb of God.” That testimony was a little seed. But it bore mighty fruits.

This simple story is a pattern of the way in which good has been done to souls in every age of the Christian Church. By such testimony as that before us, and by none else, men and women are converted and saved. It is by EXALTING CHRIST, not the church—Christ, not the sacraments—Christ, not the ministry—it is by this means that hearts are moved, and sinners are turned to God. To the world such testimony may seem weakness and foolishness. Yet, like the ram’s horns, before whose blast the walls of Jericho fell down, this testimony is mighty to the pulling down of strongholds. The story of

the crucified Lamb of God has proved in every age, the power of God unto salvation. Those who have done most for Christ's cause in every part of the world, have been men like John the Baptist. They have not cried, Behold me, or Behold the church, or Behold the ordinances, but "Behold the Lamb." If souls are to be saved, men must be pointed directly to Christ.

One thing, however, must never be forgotten. There must be patient continuance in preaching and teaching the truth, if we want good to be done. Christ must be set forth again and again, as the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." The story of grace must be told repeatedly—line upon line, and precept upon precept. It is the constant dropping which wears away the stone. The promise shall never be broken, that "God's word shall not return unto him void." (Isaiah. 55:11.) But it is nowhere said that it shall do good the very first time that it is preached. It was not the first proclamation of John the Baptist, but the second, which made Andrew and his companion follow Jesus.

We see, for another thing, ***what good a believer may do to others, by speaking to them about Christ.***

No sooner does Andrew become a disciple, than he tells his brother Simon what a discovery he has made. Like one who has unexpectedly heard good tidings, he hastens to impart it to the one nearest and dearest to him. He says to his brother, "We have found the Messiah," and he "brings him to Jesus." Who can tell what might have happened if Andrew had been of a silent, reserved, and

uncommunicative spirit, like many a Christian in the present day? Who can tell but his brother might have lived and died a fisherman on the Galilean lake? But happily for Simon, Andrew was not a man of this sort. He was one whose heart was so full that he must speak.

And to Andrew's out-spoken testimony, under God, the great apostle Peter owed the first beginning of light in his soul.

The fact before us is most striking and instructive. Out of the three first members of the Christian Church, one at least was brought to Jesus, by the private, quiet word of a relative. He seems to have heard no public preaching. He saw no mighty miracle wrought. He was not convinced by any powerful reasoning. He only heard his brother telling him that he had found a Savior himself, and at once the work began in his soul. The simple testimony of a warm-hearted brother was the first link in the chain by which Peter was drawn out of the world, and joined to Christ. The first blow in that mighty work by which Peter was made a pillar of the Church, was struck by Andrew's words, "We have found the Christ."

Well would it be for the Church of Christ, if all believers were more like Andrew! Well would it be for souls if all men and women who have been converted themselves, would speak to their friends and relatives on spiritual subjects, and tell them what they have found! How much good might be done! How many might be led to Jesus, who now live and die in unbelief! The work of testifying the Gospel of the grace of God ought not to be left to ministers alone. All who have received mercy ought to find a tongue, and to declare what

God has done for their souls. All who have been delivered from the power of the devil, ought to “go home and tell their friends what great things God has done for them.” (Mark 5:19.) Thousands, humanly speaking, would listen to a word from a friend, who will not listen to a sermon. Every believer ought to be a home-missionary, a missionary to his family, children, servants, neighbors, and friends. Surely, if we can find nothing to say to others about Jesus, we may well doubt whether we are savingly acquainted with Him ourselves.

Let us take heed that we are among those who really follow Christ, and abide with Him. It is not enough to hear Him preached from the pulpit, and to read of Him as described in books. We must actually follow Him, pour out our hearts before Him, and hold personal communion with Him. Then, and not until then, we shall feel constrained to speak of Him to others. The man who only knows Christ by the hearing of the ear, will never do much for the spread of Christ’s cause in the earth.

Technical Notes:

35. Again, the next day, John stood with two of his disciples. 36. And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he said, Behold the Lamb of God! 37. And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. 38. Then Jesus turned, and seeing them following, said to them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master) where dwellest thou? 39. He said to them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt,

and abode with him that day (for it was about the tenth hour). 40. One of the two who heard John *speak*, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his own brother Simon, and said to him, We have found the Messiah (which is, being interpreted, the Christ). 42. And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas (which is by interpretation, A stone).

35.—[*The next day*.] Let St. John's particularity in noting days at this period of our Lord's history be observed again in this verse. If, as many suppose, St. John was one of the two who this day followed Jesus and became His disciples, we can well understand that it was a memorable day to him. [*John stood*.] This expression seems to imply that there was some particular spot near Bethabara where John the Baptist was in the habit of standing, to preach and to receive those who came to be baptized. While he "stood" here, the event which follows took place.

36.—[*Looking... Jesus, as He walked*.] This probably means that he saw Jesus walking among the crowd of persons who were attracted to Bethabara, alone, without followers, and as yet not recognized by any one as the Messiah. Stier remarks, "John saw Jesus walking in silent meditation, waiting for His hour and His Father's commands; in full preparation for the world and its sin: equipped, for the testimony to the truth, with that armor which has been tested and approved in His first great spiritual conflict, and for the utterance of the new words of

God which the Father has given Him." [*He said, Behold, etc.*] This seems to have been a second public proclamation of our Lord's office and character, a partial repetition of what had been said the day before; and yet, as the event shows, a more effective proclamation. The same truth may do good the second time that it is preached, which does nothing the first time.

37.—[Heard...speak...followed.] The three steps described in this verse are very noteworthy. John the Baptist "speaks," the disciples "hear." After hearing they "follow Jesus." This is a succinct summary of God's way of saving myriads of souls. Rollock, on this verse, remarks: "We learn by this example how powerful is the preaching of Christ. Yea, one or two words about Christ and the cross, how powerful are they in changing the hearts of men! Preach, if you like, about the great deeds of kings and generals and their courage and glory. These things will please men for a little time, but they will not convert them. But preach concerning Him that was crucified, a subject apparently ignominious and foolish, and then the story of the cross, which is foolishness to them that perish, will be the power and wisdom of God to them that believe."

38.—[*What seek ye?*] We cannot doubt that our Lord knew perfectly well the hearts and motives of these two disciples. In asking this question, therefore, He spoke partly for their encouragement and partly to stir them up to self-inquiry. "What seek ye? Is there anything that I can do for you, any truth that I can teach you, any burden that I can take away? If so, speak and be not afraid." "What

seek ye? Are you sure that you are following Me with right motives? Are you sure that you are not regarding Me as a temporal ruler? Are you sure that you are not, like other Jews, seeking riches, honor, greatness, in this world? Prove your own selves and be sure that you are seeking the right object."

[*Which is to say, being interpreted.*] This is one of a class of expressions which shows that John wrote for Gentile readers rather than Jews. A Jew would not have needed this parenthetical comment. This same remark applies to verse 41.

[*Where dwellest Thou?*] This question seems to imply a desire for conversation and private communion. "We would fain know more of Thee. We are drawn to Thee by John the Baptist's proclamation. We would like to go aside with Thee from the crowd and inquire of Thee more privately and quietly, at Thy dwelling, about the things which are upon our hearts." To apply the text, as many do, to our Lord's spiritual dwelling in "contrite hearts," etc. (Isaiah lviii.15), may produce good doctrinal and practical theology. But it is not the point of the text. 39.—[*Come and see.*] The great affability and condescension of these first words of our Lord's after His public appearance as Messiah, ought not to be overlooked. The very first thing that we hear Him saying, after He has been publicly proclaimed as the "Lamb of God," is "come and see." It is a pleasant type of what He has been ever saying to the sons of men from that day down to this. "Come and see who I am, and what I am. Come and be acquainted with Me."

Schottgen and Lightfoot both remark that the expression, “Come and see,” is a very common one in Rabbinical writings and would be very familiar to the Jews.

[*Where He dwelt*.] We can only suppose that the place where our Lord was dwelling at this time was some temporary residence in or near Bethabara. At the best, it was probably some humble lodging. It is not impossible that it was nothing more than a cave. He often “had not where to lay His head.” If the two disciples had the least relic of Jewish expectation that Messiah would appear in royal dignity and glory, our Lord’s dwelling would go far to disabuse their minds of the idea.

[*Abode with Him that day…tenth hour*.] The Jewish day began at six oclock in the evening. The tenth hour therefore means four o’clock in the afternoon. At this late hour of the day, His disciples found it impossible to conclude their conversation with Jesus, and therefore remained in the same lodging with Him all night.

Many commentators, from Augustine downwards, make the natural remark that this evening must have been a blessed evening for these two disciples, and that it would have been pleasant if the conversation had been given to us! Yet if it had been good for us to know the conversation, it would doubtless have been recorded. There are no deficiencies in Scripture. 40.—[*One of the two…was Andrew*.] The priority of Andrew to Peter ought not to be overlooked. Peter, to whom the Church of Rome boastfully attributes a primacy among the

apostles, was neither converted nor made acquainted with Christ so soon as his brother.

Who the other of these two disciples was, we are not told. It is highly probable, as Chrysostom and Theophylact conjecture, that it was St. John himself. On seven other occasions in this Gospel, he humbly withholds his name. (John xiii.23; xix.26,35; xx.2; xxi.7,20,24.) It is therefore very likely that he withheld it here. The supposition of Musculus and others, that the other disciple was a person of less zeal and sincerity than Andrew and is therefore not named, appears to me improbable.

41.—[*He first*.] This expression must either mean that Andrew was the first of the two disciples who brought a brother to Jesus, or that he was the first disciple, speaking generally, who spoke to others of the Messiah when he had found Him, or that he was the first to tell his brother Peter, and Peter was not the first to tell him about Christ. [*We have found*.] This expression implies an unexpected and joyful discovery. The evening's conversation which Andrew had held with Jesus had convinced him that He was indeed the Christ.

[The Messiah…interpreted… Christ.] It is almost needless to remark that these names mean the "anointed one." The first is Hebrew and the second is Greek. Kings, prophets, and priests, in the Old Testament, were anointed; and our Lord as the Prophet, Priest, and King of the Church, was called the Anointed One, not because He was really anointed with oil, but because He was "anointed with the

Holy Ghost." (Acts x.38.)

The extent of Andrew's religious knowledge ought not to be overlooked. Poor and humble in station as he was, he seems, like all the Jews, to have known what the Old Testament prophets had foretold about Messiah, and to have been prepared to hear of a person appearing in the character of Messiah. It is one of many expressions in the Gospels which show that the lower orders among the Jews were far better acquainted with the letter of the Old Testament Scriptures, than the poor in our own day generally are with the letter of the New Testament, or indeed of any part of the Bible. Calvin remarks on Andrew's conduct, "Woe to our indolence if we do not, after having been fully enlightened, endeavor to make others partakers of the same grace."

42.—[When Jesus beheld...said...you are Simon.] Our Lord here displayed His perfect knowledge of all persons, names, and things. He needed not that any should tell Him who and what a person was. This knowledge was supposed by the Jews to be a peculiar attribute of Messiah, whenever He came. He was to be one of "quick understanding." (Isaiah xi.3.) Enough for us to know that it is a peculiar attribute of God. He alone knows the hearts of men. Our Lord's perfect knowledge of all hearts was one among many proofs of His divinity. The same knowledge appears again in His address to Nathanael, in this chapter, ver. 47, and in His conversation with the Samaritan woman. (John iv.18, etc.) The effect produced in both cases is very worthy of notice.

[*Cephas*.] This is a Syriac word and is equivalent to the Greek word Petros, which we render Peter. Both mean a stone, a portion of a rock. “Petra” means a rock, “Petros” a piece of a rock. Peter was the latter, but not the former.

[*A stone*.] The marginal reading here, as Lightfoot remarks, would have been much better than that which the translators have put in our version. If the words were “Cephas, which is by interpretation Peter,” it would have conveyed our Lord’s meaning far more clearly. The custom of having two manes appears to have been common in New Testament times. The apostle Peter seems to have been only known as “Cephas” in the Corinthian Church. Out of the five other places in the New Testament where the name Cephas is found, four are in the Epistle to the Corinthians, while the name Peter is not used in that Epistle at all. Nifanius give the names of three Popes who have so grossly mistaken the origin of the word Cephas as to suppose that it is derived from the Greek word which signifies “a head,” and that it indicated Peter’s headship in the Church! Such a palpable blunder is one of a thousand proofs that Popes are no more infallible than other men. Calovius makes the same charge against no less a person than Cardinal Bellarmine. If it be asked why our Lord gave Simon this new name, the best answer appears to be that it was given with a special reference to the change which grace was to work in Simon’s heart. Naturally impulsive, unstable, and unsteady, he was finally to become a firm, solid stone in the Church of Christ, and to testify his unshaken adherence to Christ by suffering martyrdom.

Chrysostom thinks that our Lord altered Simon's name "to show that it was He who gave the old covenant, that it was He who called Abram Abraham, and Sarai Sarah, and Jacob Israel."

Lightfoot, on these verses, after noticing the error which Roman Catholic writers attempt to found upon it, about Peter being the rock on which the Church is built, makes the following curious observation: "If they will so pertinaciously adhere to it, let us apprehend our Lord speaking *prophetically,* and foretelling the grand error that would spring up in the Church, namely, that Peter is a rock than which the Christian Church has known nothing more sad and destructive."

Let it be noted, in leaving this passage, that the selection of such humble unlearned men, as those here described to be the first apostles and preachers of the Gospel, is a strong evidence of the truth of Christianity. A religion which was propagated by such weak instruments, in the face of persecution and opposition from the great and learned, must be a religion from God. Such results from such instrumentality cannot possibly be accounted for on natural principles.

JOHN 1:43-51

The Calling of More Disciples

On the next day Jesus wanted to set out for Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." (Now Philip was from

Bethsaida, the town of Andrew and Peter.) Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the law, and the prophets also wrote about—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Nathanael replied, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip replied, "Come and see."

Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and exclaimed, "Look, a true Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" Nathanael asked him, "How do you know me?" Jesus replied, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel!" Jesus said to him, "Because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You will see greater things than these." He continued, "I tell all of you the solemn truth—you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

Let us observe, as we read these verses, *how various are the paths by which souls are led into the narrow way of life.*

We are told of a man, named Philip, being added to the little company of Christ's disciples. He does not appear to have been moved, like Andrew and his companions, by the testimony of John the Baptist. He was not drawn, like Simon Peter, by the out-spoken declaration of a brother. He seems to have been called directly by Christ Himself, and the agency of man seems not to have been used in his calling. Yet in faith and life he became one with those who were disciples before him. Though led by different paths, they all

entered the same road, embraced the same truths, served the same Master, and at length reached the same home.

The fact before us is a deeply important one. It throws light on the history of all God's people in every age, and of every tongue. There are diversities of operations in the saving of souls. All true Christians are led by one Spirit, washed in one blood, serve one Lord, lean on one Savior, believe one truth, and walk by one general rule. But all are not converted in one and the same manner. All do not pass through the same experience. In conversion, the Holy Spirit acts as a sovereign. He calls every one severally as He will.

A careful recollection of this point may save us much trouble. We must beware of making the experience of other believers the measure of our own. We must beware of denying another's grace, because he has not been led by the same way as ourselves. Has a man got the real grace of God? This is the only question that concerns us. Is he a penitent man? Is he a believer? Does he live a holy life? Provided these inquiries can be answered satisfactorily, we may well be content. It matters nothing by what path a man has been led, if he has only been led at last into the right way.

Let us observe, secondly, in these verses, *how much of Christ there is in the Old Testament Scriptures*. We read that when Philip described Christ to Nathanael, he says, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write."

Christ is the sum and substance of the Old Testament. To Him the earliest promises pointed in the days of Adam, and Enoch, and Noah, and Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob. To Him every sacrifice pointed in the ceremonial worship appointed at Mount Sinai. Of Him every high priest was a type, and every part of the tabernacle was a shadow, and every judge and deliverer of Israel was a figure. He was the prophet like unto Moses, whom the Lord God promised to send, and the King of the house of David, who came to be David's Lord as well as son. He was the Son of the virgin, and the Lamb, foretold by Isaiah—the righteous Branch mentioned by Jeremiah—the true Shepherd, foreseen by Ezekiel—the Messenger of the Covenant, promised by Malachi—and the Messiah, who, according to Daniel, was to be cut off, though not for Himself. The further we read in the volume of the Old Testament, the clearer do we find the testimony about Christ. The light which the inspired writers enjoyed in ancient days was, at best, but dim, compared to that of the Gospel. But the coming Person they all saw afar off, and on whom they all fixed their eyes, was one and the same. The Spirit, which was in them, testified of Christ. (1 Pet. 1:11.)

Do we stumble at this saying? Do we find it hard to see Christ in the Old Testament, because we do not see His name? Let us be sure that the fault is all our own. It is our spiritual vision which is to blame, and not the book. The eyes of our understanding need to be enlightened. The veil has yet to be taken away. Let us pray for a more humble, childlike, and teachable spirit, and let us take up "Moses and the prophets" again. Christ is there, though our eyes may not yet

have seen Him. May we never rest until we can subscribe to our Lord's words about the Old Testament Scriptures, "They are they which testify of me." (John 5:39.)

Let us observe, thirdly, in these verses, *the good advice which Philip gave to Nathanael.* The mind of Nathanael was full of doubts about the Savior, of whom Philip told Him. "Can there any good thing," he said, "come out of Nazareth?" And what did Philip reply? He said, "Come and see."

Wiser counsel than this it would be impossible to conceive! If Philip had reproved Nathanael's unbelief, he might have driven him back for many a day, and given offence. If he had reasoned with him, he might have failed to convince him, or might have confirmed him in his doubts. But by inviting him to prove the matter for himself, he showed his entire confidence in the truth of his own assertion, and his willingness to have it tested and proved. And the result shows the wisdom of Philip's words. Nathanael owed his early acquaintance with Christ to that frank invitation, "Come and see."

If we call ourselves true Christians, let us never be afraid to deal with people about their souls as Philip dealt with Nathanael. Let us invite them boldly to make proof of our religion. Let us tell them confidently that they cannot know its real value until they have tried it. Let us assure them that vital Christianity courts every possible inquiry. It has no secrets. It has nothing to conceal. Its faith and practice are spoken against, just because they are not known. Its enemies speak evil of things with which they are not acquainted.

They understand neither what they say nor whereof they affirm. Philip's mode of dealing, we may be sure, is one principal way to do good. Few are ever moved by reasoning and argument. Still fewer are frightened into repentance. The man who does most good to souls, is often the simple believer who says to his friends, "I have found a Savior; come and see Him."

Let us observe, lastly, in these verses, *the high character which Jesus gives of Nathanael.* He calls him "an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile."

Nathanael, there can be no doubt, was a true child of God, and a child of God in difficult times. He was one of a very little flock. Like Simeon and Anna, and other pious Jews, he was living by faith and waiting prayerfully for the promised Redeemer, when our Lord's ministry began. He had that which grace alone can give, an honest heart, a heart without guile. His knowledge was probably small. His spiritual eyesight was dim. But he was one who had lived carefully up to his light. He had diligently used such knowledge as he possessed. His eye had been single, though his vision had not been strong. His spiritual judgment had been honest, though it had not been powerful. What he saw in Scripture, he had held firmly, in spite of Pharisees and Sadducees, and all the fashionable religion of the day. He was an honest Old Testament believer, who had stood alone. And here was the secret of our Lord peculiar commendation! He declared Nathanael to be a true son of Abraham—a Jew inwardly, possessing

circumcision in the spirit as well as in the letter—an Israelite in heart, as well as a son of Jacob in the flesh.

Let us pray that we may be of the same spirit as Nathanael. An honest, unprejudiced mind—a child-like willingness to follow the truth, wherever the truth may lead us—a simple, hearty desire to be guided, taught, and led by the Spirit—a thorough determination to use every spark of light which we have—are a possession of priceless value. A man of this spirit may live in the midst of much darkness, and be surrounded by every possible disadvantage to his soul. But the Lord Jesus will take care that such a man does not miss the way to heaven. "The meek will he guide in judgment—and the meek will he teach his way." (Psalm 25:9.)

Technical Notes:

43. The day following Jesus would go forth to Galilee, and he found Philip and said to him, Follow me. 44. Now Philip was from Bethasaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. 45. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, We have found him of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. 46. And Nathanael said to him, Can any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip said to him, Come and see. 47. Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile! 48. Nathanael said to him, How do you know me? Jesus answered and said to him, Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree,

I saw you. 49. Nathanael answered and said to him, Rabbi, Thou art the son of God! Thou art the King of Israel! 50. Jesus answered and said to him, Because I said to you, I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You shall see greater things than these. 51. And he said to him, Verily, verily, I say to you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.

43.—[*The day following*.] This is the fourth successive day which is specially named by St. John, and its events described. The first contained John the Baptist's reply to the priests and Levites—the second, his public announcement of our Lord as the Lamb of God—the third, the calling of Andrew and his companion, and Peter—the fourth describes the calling of Philip and Nathanael.

[*Would go forth*.] The Greek word rendered "would," signifies that our Lord "willed," or had a will.

[*Found Philip*.] It does not appear where Philip was when Jesus called him. He must either have been at Bethabara among John's hearers, or at some place on the road from Bethabara to Galilee, or at his own native place, Bethsaida. The last is perhaps the most probable idea. [*Follow Me*.] This simple sentence describes the direct quickening voice of an almighty Savior. It is evident that the power of the Holy Ghost accompanied our Lord's words, and that as soon as they were spoken, Philip, like Matthew the publican, arose, left all,

and became a disciple. In conversion God acts as a sovereign. One is called in one way, and another in another. Rollock observes on this verse, "This teaches us that Christ is able to call anyone whom He pleases into the kingdom of heaven, without the ministry either of angel or man."

44.—[Philip…of Bethsaida…city… Andrew… Peter.] This verse seems to make it probable that Philip's conversion and calling took place at Bethsaida. Andrew and Peter, having been converted and become companions of Jesus on His way to Galilee, would appear to have taken Him to their own native place, Bethsaida.

45.—[*We have found Him*.] Philip, like his fellow-citizen Andrew, seems to have expected the appearance of Messiah.
Chrysostom remarks, "See what a thoughtful mind he had, how assiduously he meditates on the writings of Moses, and expected the advent? The expression, 'We have found,' belongs always to those who are in some way seeking."

[*Him… Moses…prophets wrote*.] Here, as in the case of Andrew, we should notice the familiarity with the general contents of Scripture which a poor Jew like Philip possessed. He thoroughly understood that "Moses and the prophets" held forth the promise of a coming Redeemer, and that a better Priest, Prophet, and King were foretold in their writings. "The Old Testament," as the Church of England Article wisely declares, "is not contrary to the New; for both in the Old Testament and New, everlasting life is offered to mankind by

Christ." We must beware in these latter days of despising the Old Testament. It is one by-path to infidelity.

[*Jesus of Nazareth…son of Joseph.*] Philip here describes our Lord according to the common report about Him, and in all probability according to his own present knowledge. His heart was at present better than his head. The miraculous conception of Christ was hidden from him. Yet it is not unworthy of remark, that this ignorant account of our Lord was very likely the cause of Nathanael's doubt and prejudice, exhibited in the next verse. The mistakes of young converts are often mighty stumbling blocks in the way of other people's souls. We must not, however, despise Philip because of his mistake. Rollock remarks, "I had rather a man should stammer and babble about Christ, providing he does it sincerely and from his heart, and has before him as an object the glory of God and salvation of men, than say many things eloquently about Christ for ostentation and vain glory."

46.—[*Can any good thing…Nazareth?*] This question shows the low estimate in which Nazareth, where our Lord had been brought up, was held. It was an obscure town in a corner of Galilee, not far from the borders of the province, and its reputation seems to have been very bad. Nathanael could not remember any prophecy about Messiah coming out of Nazareth, and at once stumbled at the idea of Him whom "Moses and the prophets" had described belonging to such a contemptible place. The condescension of our Lord in living thirty years in such a place as Nazareth is strongly brought out by

Nathanael's question. Augustine, Cyril, Origen, and others thought that the sentence before us ought not to be interpreted as a question, but as a simple affirmation:

"Some good thing may come out of Nazareth." Wycliffe's version also takes this view. The sentence would then be the expression of a calm and unprejudiced mind acknowledging the possibility of good coming from Nazareth. Musculus thinks it possible, in this view of the expression, that Nathanael might have had in his mind the remarkable prophetical saying quoted in St. Matthew, "He shall be called a Nazarene!" The judgment of the great majority of interpreters agrees with our own translation, that it is a question and not an assertion, and it is by far the more probable view of the text.

[*Come and see.*] How common this expression was among the Jewish religious teachers has been already noticed. Philip's wisdom in not arguing and reasoning with Nathanael should be observed. Ford gives a good quotation from Adam: "Little good comes by disputing. Pride is generally at the bottom of it, and not charity or love of truth; and it is seldom managed with decency or candor enough to produce any good effect. Let fall a word in season, and wait in patience till the rain drops on it from heaven." 47.—[*In whom is no guile.*] It is very likely that in using this expression our Lord referred to the 32nd Psalm, where the character of the godly man is described. He is not only one whose iniquities are forgiven, but one "in whose lips there is no guile." The expression implies a true heart, a really converted man, a genuine son of Abraham by faith, as well as

a son according to the flesh.

Hutcheson observes, “The true mark of a true Israelite in spirit, is not sinlessness or perfection, but sincerity.”

48.—[*How do you know me?*] This question implies Nathanael’s surprise that Jesus should exhibit any knowledge of his character. [*When…fig tree, I saw you.*] The common opinion about this expression is that Nathanael was praying or holding communion with God under the fig tree. It may be so. We are told nothing about it and are entirely left to conjecture. If it had been good for us to know, it would have been told us. Sufficient for us to understand that when Nathanael thought he was alone and no eye upon him, the Lord Jesus, by His divine power of seeing and knowing all things, was perfectly acquainted with all that Nathanael said, thought, and did. His “eyes are in every place.” (Prov. xv.3.) Chrysostom and Theophylact think that the expression only refers to the conversation between Philip and Nathanael about Jesus, which had taken place under a fig tree. Grotius takes the same view. Gill mentions a tradition in the Syriac dictionary, “that Nathanael’s mother had laid him under a fig tree when the infants were slain at Bethlehem by Herod” (Matt. ii.16), and that our Lord showed His perfect knowledge by referring to this fact.

Heinsius thinks there is a reference to the prophecy of Zechariah: “In that day ye shall call every man his neighbor, under the vine and under the fig tree” (Zech. iii.10), and that hence Nathanael drew the

inference that Messiah's days were come, and Messiah before him. Augustine sees an allegory in the fig tree, and gravely says that "as Adam and Eve, when they had sinned, made themselves aprons of fig leaves, fig leaves must signify sins. Nathanael therefore being under the fig tree signifies being under the shadow of death!"

49.—[Thou art... Son of God... King of Israel!] These words are the outburst of a heart convinced at once that Jesus was the Messiah. They are a noble confession that our Lord was that divine Person who was promised to come into the world to redeem sinners, and that King who was prophesied of as the future Gatherer and Ruler of the tribes of Israel. Whether Nathanael clearly understood the nature of our Lord's kingdom at this time, may be reasonably doubted. But that he saw, like Peter, that He was the Christ, the Son of the Blessed, we cannot doubt. The restoring of the kingdom to Israel was a subject which we know, from other passages of Scripture, was one of the last which the first disciples were able to understand aright. (Acts i.6.)

The history of Nathanael's calling at this point should be compared with that of the woman of Samaria, in the fourth chapter of this Gospel. It is striking to observe that a discovery and conviction of our Lord's perfect knowledge of the most secret things was in both cases the turning point. It should not be forgotten that the title "King of Israel," was one which our Lord never refused during His ministry, though He never took to Himself His great power and actually reigned. The angel Gabriel foretold that the "Lord God would give

unto Him the throne of His father David, and that He would reign over the house of Jacob, and that of His kingdom there would be no end." (Luke i.32,33.) When the wise men came from the East, they inquired for him who was born "King of the Jews." (Matt. ii.2.) When our Lord was crucified, the title over His head was "King of the Jews." All this shall yet be literally true. Christ shall yet be King in Zion and reign over the gathered and restored tribes of Israel at His second coming. And then the words of Nathanael shall be seen completely fulfilled. He shall be acknowledged by all as the "Son of God, and King of Israel."

[*Do you believe?*] It admits of a question whether this expression would not be better rendered, as it might be with perfect grammatical correctness, "you believe." It would then be very like our Lord's words to Thomas, "Because you have seen Me, you have believed." (John xx.29.) The sense would be, "Because I said I saw you under the fig tree, you believe. It is well. Great is your faith. But I tell you for your comfort and encouragement, that you shall one day see far greater proofs of my divinity and Messiahship than these." Wycliffe's, Tyndale's, and Cranmer's versions all render the expression as an affirmation and not as a question. Aretius maintains the same view.

[*Verily, verily I say*.] This expression is peculiar to St. John's Gospel, and very remarkable. It is the word which is familiar to all Christians: "Amen," twice repeated. It is found twenty-five times in this Gospel, always at the beginning of a sentence, and always used

by Christ. In every place it implies a very solemn, emphatic assertion of some great truth or heart-searching fact. No writer in the New Testament, except St. John, ever gives the double "Amen."

[Hereafter you shall see heaven…angels… Son of man.] This prediction is very remarkable. It should be carefully observed that it is not addressed to Nathanael alone. The preceding verse says, "thou shalt see." The present verse says, "ye shall see,"—that is, "thou and all my other disciples."

About the true meaning of the prediction, commentators differ exceedingly. Arguing, as nearly all do, that the words plainly refer to Jacob's vision of the ladder reaching from heaven to earth (Gen. xxviii.12), they disagree about the way in which the prediction is fulfilled. Some think, as Stier, that the prediction must be interpreted figuratively, and that it was fulfilled when our Lord was upon earth. They think it only means that Nathanael and the other disciples would see a still fuller revelation of Christ and the Gospel by and by. They would see a figurative fulfilment of Jacob's vision, and a way opened from earth to heaven for all true Israelites, or believers. They would see still greater proofs in the shape of miracles and signs that Jesus was the Son of God. Heaven, in a spiritual sense shut by the sin of the first Adam, would be opened by the obedience of the second Adam. "The heavenly ladder," says Bonaventura, quoted by Calovius, "was broken in Adam and repaired in Christ." According to this view, "the angels of God" in the text mean nothing in particular, which, to say the least, seems a very loose and unsatisfactory explanation.

Others think, as Rollock, that the prediction must be interpreted literally, and that it was fulfilled while our Lord was on earth. They think it was accomplished when our Lord was transfigured—when an angel appeared in the garden of Gethsemane—and when our Lord ascended on the Mount of Olives. This view also seems very unsatisfactory. The transfiguration and the agony in the garden were not seen by Nathanael at all. There is nothing whatever said about angels appearing, either at the transfiguration or the ascension. And as to "angels ascending and descending," there is nothing at any period of the Gospel history at all answering to the expression.

The only true and satisfactory view, I believe, is that which makes the whole prediction apply to events which are still future. Our Lord spoke of His second coming and kingdom. When He comes the second time to take His great power and reign, the words of this text shall be literally fulfilled. His believing people shall see heaven open and a constant communication kept up between heaven and earth, the tabernacle of God with men, and the angels visibly ministering to the King of Israel and king of all the earth. The context confirms me in this view of the text. Nathanael believed Jesus to be the Messiah when He was lowly and poor. Jesus rewards his faith by assuring him that, lowly as He now seems, He shall one day come in the clouds of heaven and reign as a King.

I am further confirmed by the striking likeness between our Lord's words here and those He addressed to the chief priests, in the day that He was arraigned as a prisoner before them: "Hereafter ye shall

see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." (Matt. xxvi.64.)

This view of the prediction is maintained by Gomarus. I am aware that some maintain, in opposition to the view I support, that the Greek word rendered "hereafter" must mean "from henceforth: *i.e.* immediately after the present time, and ever hereafter," and does not imply a distant event. In reply, I would have it specially noted that the Greek word here translated "hereafter" is the very same that is used by our Lord in the solemn words, just quoted, which He addressed to the chief priests when He was arraigned. (Matt. xxvi.69.) In that case there cannot be any reasonable doubt that He spoke of a far distant event and time. I believe, that in like manner, He speaks of a far distant event and time in this place.

As to the nature of Christ's future kingdom, and the intercourse which shall then be kept up by angels between earth and heaven, this is not the place to speak. I only remark that the words before us will probably receive a far more real and literal accomplishment than many of us are expecting.

It is worthy of remark that Nathanael calls our Lord "the Son of God." Jesus, in His prediction, tells him he shall see angels ascending and descending on the "Son of man." He whom Nathanael now saw as a man would yet appear as man glorified in the heavenly kingdom. He would even then be God-man. The expression "Son of man," here first used by St. John, seems derived, as Chemnitius says, from

Daniel's words in a prophecy about Messiah. (Dan. vii.13,14.) It is never applied to our Lord by any but Himself, except by Stephen. (Acts vii.56.) Lightfoot thinks that "it is used so often by our Savior about Himself, as intimating that He is the second Adam, the true seed of the woman."

In leaving this passage, the question naturally arises, Who was Nathanael? How is it that we hear so little afterwards of so good a man and so clearsighted a believer? Some think, as Augustine and others, that Nathanael was purposely not placed among our Lord's immediate companions and apostles because he was a man of learning and knowledge, lest any should say that our Lord chose learned men to be His first ministers. I can see nothing in this argument. There is no evidence to my own mind that Nathanael was more learned than other Jews of humble birth in our Lord's time. Moreover he was a friend of Philip, one of our Lord's apostles, and most probably a man of similar position and attainments. In fact, we are told elsewhere that he lived at "Cana of Galilee." (John xxi.1.)

Some think, because Nathanael lived at Cana, that he was the same person as the apostle Simon the Canaanite. (Matt. x.4; Mark iii.18.) Some think that he was Stephen the martyr, because Stephen saw the heavens opened in a vision. (Acts vii. 56.)

The most probable opinion to my own mind is that Nathanael was the apostle who is called elsewhere Bartholomew, and who, like others of the apostles, had two names. In favor of this opinion there

are three remarkable facts. The first is that in three lists of the twelve apostles out of four, the names of Philip and Bartholomew are always found together. (Matt. x.3; Mark iii.18; Luke vi.14.) The second is that Nathanael is specially mentioned after our Lord's ascension as a companion of Peter, Thomas, James, John and two other disciples. The third is that St. John never once mentions the name of Bartholomew in his Gospel. The objection that Nathanael's name is never mentioned by Matthew, Mark, or Luke is of no weight. No one of the three, it may be replied, tells us that Peter was called Cephas. Only Matthew gives Jude, the brother of James, the name of Lebbæus. The point happily is not one of any particular importance. I only say that the conjectural probability that Nathanael was an apostle and was the same as Bartholomew, seems to me very strong and well founded. In leaving this chapter, the observation of Aretius is worth quoting. He remarks that the chapter is singularly rich in names or epithets applied to the Lord Jesus Christ. He numbers up the following twenty-one. 1. The Word. 2. God. 3. Life. 4. Light. 5. The true light. 6. The only begotten of the Father. 7. Full of grace and truth. 8. Jesus Christ. 9. The only begotten Son. 10. The Lord. 11. The Lamb of God. 12. Jesus. 13. A Man. 14. The Son of God. 15. Rabbi. 16. Teacher. 17. Messiah. 18. Christ. 19. The Son of Joseph. 20. The King of Israel. 21. The Son of man.

John – Chap. 2

JOHN 2:1-11

Turning Water into Wine

Now on the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and both Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the wedding. When the wine ran out, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no wine left." Jesus replied, "Woman, why are you saying this to me? My time has not yet come." His mother told the servants, "Whatever he tells you, do it."

Now there were six stone water jars there for Jewish ceremonial washing, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus told the servants, "Fill the water jars with water." So they filled them up to the very top. Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the head steward," and they did. When the head steward tasted the water that had been turned to wine, not knowing where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), he called the bridegroom and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the cheaper wine when the guests are drunk. You have kept the good wine until now!" Jesus did this as the first of his miraculous signs, in Cana of Galilee. In this way he revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

These verses describe a miracle which should always possess a special interest in the eyes of a true Christian. It is the first, in order of time, of the many mighty works which Jesus did, when He was upon earth. We are distinctly told, “This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee.” Like every other miracle which John was inspired to record, it is related with great minuteness and particularity. And, like every other miracle in John’s Gospel, it is rich in spiritual lessons.

We learn, firstly, from these verses, ***how honorable in the sight of Christ is the estate of matrimony***. To be present at a “marriage” was almost the first public act of our Lord’s earthly ministry.

Marriage is not a sacrament, as the Church of Rome asserts. It is simply a state of life ordained by God for man’s benefit. But it is a state which ought never to be spoken of with levity, or regarded with disrespect. The Prayerbook service has well described it, as “an honorable estate, instituted of God in the time of man’s innocency, and signifying unto us the mystical union that is between Christ and his Church.” Society is never in a healthy condition, and true religion never flourishes in that land where the marriage tie is lightly esteemed. They who lightly esteem it have not the mind of Christ. He who “beautified and adorned the estate of matrimony by His presence and first miracle that He wrought in Cana of Galilee,” is One who is always of one mind. “Marriage,” says the Holy Spirit by Paul, “is honorable in all.” (Heb. 13:4.)

One thing, however, ought not to be forgotten. Marriage is a step which so seriously affects the temporal happiness and spiritual welfare of two immortal souls, that it ought never to be taken in hand "unadvisedly, lightly, wantonly, and without due consideration." To be truly happy, it should be undertaken "reverently, discreetly, soberly, and in the fear of God." Christ's blessing and presence are essential to a happy wedding. The marriage at which there is no place for Christ and His disciples, is not one that can justly be expected to prosper.

We learn, secondly, from these verses, that ***there are times when it is lawful to be merry and rejoice***. Our Lord Himself sanctioned a wedding-feast by His own presence. He did not refuse to be a guest at "a marriage in Cana of Galilee." "A feast," it is written, "is made for laughter, and wine makes merry." (Eccles. 10:19.) Our Lord, in the passage before us, approves both the feast and the use of wine.

True religion was never meant to make men melancholy. On the contrary, it was intended to increase real joy and happiness among men. The servant of Christ unquestionably ought to have nothing to do with races, balls, theaters, and such-like amusements, which tend to frivolity and indulgence, if not to sin. But he has no right to hand over innocent recreations and family gatherings to the devil and the world. The Christian who withdraws entirely from the society of his fellow-men, and walks the earth with a face as melancholy as if he was always attending a funeral, does injury to the cause of the

Gospel. A cheerful, kindly spirit is a great recommendation to a believer. It is a real misfortune to Christianity when a Christian cannot smile. A merry heart, and a readiness to take part in all innocent mirth, are gifts of inestimable value. They go far to soften prejudices, to take up stumbling-blocks out of the way, and to make way for Christ and the Gospel.

The subject no doubt is a difficult and delicate one. On no point of Christian practice is it so hard to hit the balance between that which is lawful and that which is unlawful, between that which is right and that which is wrong. It is very hard indeed to be both merry and wise. High spirits soon degenerate into levity. Acceptance of many invitations to feasts soon leads to waste of time, and begets leanness of soul. Frequent eating and drinking at other men's tables, soon lowers a Christian's tone of religion. Going often into company is a heavy strain on spirituality of heart. Here, if anywhere, God's children have need to be on their guard. Each must know his own strength and natural temperament, and act accordingly. One believer can go without risk where another cannot. Happy is he who can use his Christian liberty without abusing it! It is possible to be sorely wounded in soul at marriage feasts and the tables of friends.

One golden rule on the subject may be laid down, the use of which will save us much trouble. Let us take care that we always go to feasts *in the spirit of our divine Master*, and that we never go where He would not have gone. Like Him, let us endeavor to be always "about our Father's business." (Luke 2:49.) Like Him, let us

willingly promote joy and gladness, but let us strive that it may be sinless joy, if not joy in the Lord. Let us endeavor to bring the salt of grace into every company, and to drop the word in season in every ear we address. Much good may be done in society by giving a healthy tone to conversation. Let us never be ashamed to show our colors, and to make men see whose we are and whom we serve. We may well say, "Who is sufficient for these things?" But if Christ went to a marriage feast in Cana there is surely something that Christians can do on similar occasions. Let them only remember that if they go when their Master went, they must *go in their Master's spirit*.

We learn lastly, from these verses, ***the Almighty power of our Lord Jesus Christ***. We are told of a miracle which He wrought at the marriage feast, when the wine failed. By a mere act of will He changed water into wine, and so supplied the need of all the guests.

The manner in which the miracle was worked deserves especial notice. We are not told of any outward visible action which preceded or accompanied it. It is not said that He touched the waterpots containing the water that was made wine. It is not said that He commanded the water to change its qualities, or that He prayed to His Father in Heaven. He simply willed the change, and it took place. We read of no prophet or apostle in the Bible who ever worked a miracle after this fashion. *He who could do such a mighty work, in such a manner, was nothing less than very God.*

It is a comfortable thought that the same almighty power of will which our Lord here displayed is still exercised on behalf of His

believing people. They have no need of His bodily presence to maintain their cause. They have no reason to be cast down because they cannot see Him with their eyes interceding for them, or touch Him with their hands, that they may cling to Him for safety. If He "wills" their salvation and the daily supply of all their spiritual need, they are as safe and well provided for as if they saw Him standing by them. Christ's *will* is as mighty and effectual as Christ's *deed*. The will of Him who could say to the Father, "I will that they whom you have given me be with me where I am," is a will that has all power in heaven and earth, and must prevail. (John 17:24.)

Happy are those who, like the disciples, believe on Him by whom this miracle was wrought. A greater marriage feast than that of Cana will one day be held, when Christ Himself will be the bridegroom and believers will be the bride. A greater glory will one day be manifested, when Jesus shall take to Himself His great power and reign. Blessed will they be in that day who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb! (Rev. 19:9)

Technical Notes:

1. And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. 2. And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage. 3. And when they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to him, They have no wine. 4. Jesus said to her, Woman, what have I to do with you? My hour is not yet come. 5. His mother said to the servants, Whatsoever he says to you, do *it*. 6.

And there were set there six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece. 7. And Jesus said to them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim. 8. And he said to them, Draw out now, and take to the governor of the feast. And they took it. 9. When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the governor of the feast called the bridegroom. 10. And he said to him, Every man at the beginning does set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse. But you have kept the good wine until now. 11. This beginning of miracles Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him.

1.—[*The third day.*] The question naturally arises, "What day was this? From what day was it the third?" The most probable answer is that it was the third day after the last event described in the preceding chapter; the third day after Nathanael was brought to Jesus and became a disciple. The meaning therefore is, "The third day after the conversation between Jesus and Nathanael."

[*A marriage in Cana.*] Let it be remembered that we are told elsewhere that Nathanael was an inhabitant of Cana. (John xxi.2.) This makes it far from improbable that Nathanael, after he became a disciple, invited our Lord to visit the place where he lived. Cana is a

place not mentioned in the Old Testament. Robinson, in his Biblical Researches, says it was a village about three hours' journey from Nazareth.

[*The mother of Jesus was there.*] We must suppose that the Virgin Mary was in some way connected with the bride or bridegroom, and was therefore present at the marriage and assisting in the arrangements of the feast. Without some such supposition, it is difficult to understand her speaking to the servants, as she afterwards does.

The absence of Joseph's name, both here and in other places where the mother of our Lord is mentioned in the Gospels and Acts, has induced most commentators to think that Joseph was dead when our Lord began His public ministry. The point is one of which we know nothing except by conjecture. It deserves notice, however, that the Jews of Capernaum speak of Jesus as "the son of Joseph, whose *father* and mother we *know*." (John vi.42.) If it had been profitable to us to know more about Joseph, we should have been told more. The Roman Catholic Church has already given him a superstitious reverence, upon the authority of tradition, and without the slightest warrant of Scripture. What would have not been said about Joseph by the Romish Church if he had been more prominently mentioned in God's Word? Lightfoot points out that a comparison of Mark iii.18, Mark vi.3, and John xix.25, makes it exceedingly probable that the Virgin Mary's sister, called elsewhere Mary, the wife of Cleopas or Alphæus, and all her family, lived at Cana. He observes that in the

list of our Lord's "brethren" or cousins, we find the following names —James, Joses, Juda, and Simon. Of these he thinks that James, Juda, and Simon were apostles. James the apostle is expressly called "the brother of our Lord" and the son of Alphæus, and Jude is expressly called brother of this James. (Gal. i.19; Jude 1.) The remaining brother, Simon, he thinks was the apostle who is called Simon the Canaanite. This, Lightfoot argues, is a proof that his father and mother lived at Cana, and hence he concludes that this marriage feast was in the house of Alphæus. That Alphæus and Cleopas were the same person is a general and well-founded opinion.

2.—[*Jesus was called…disciples.*] Our Lord was doubtless invited as the Virgin Mary's son. His disciples were invited as His friends and companions. We cannot, of course, suppose that at so early a period of our Lord's ministry He was recognized as a religious teacher, or those with Him as disciples of a new faith. The disciples here spoken of must be the five mentioned in the last chapter, viz., Andrew and his companion (probably John), Simon Peter, Philip, and Nathanael.

[*To the marriage.*] We know nothing about the names of the bride and bridegroom. There is a legend among Romish writers that the bridegroom was John the apostle, and that though married, John left wife and home at once in order to become Christ's disciple! The whole story is utterly destitute of Scriptural foundation and a tissue of improbabilities. Baronius conjectures that the bridegroom was Simon the Canaanite, but without any proof worth mentioning.

Let it be noted that the presence of Jesus, His disciples, and the Virgin Mary at a marriage, is a significant fact which stands out in strong contrast to the Patristic and Roman Catholic doctrine of the imperfection of the state of marriage compared to that of celibacy. "Forbidding to marry" is a doctrine of Antichrist, not of Christ. (1 Tim. iv.3.) The Roman Catholic argument that Christ, by His presence, made marriage a sacrament, is utterly worthless. Dyke remarks that we might as well call feasts and burials sacraments, because Christ was present at them. He says, "There is required a word of institution to make a sacrament. Let the Papists show any such word here used. And if Christ did make marriage a sacrament, why do they call it a work of the flesh? Are sacraments works of the flesh?"

The suggestion of some modern writers, that our Lord's presence at a marriage feast condemns those Christians who decline to go to such amusements as balls, routs, and dancing parties, has no weight in it at all. The objects for which people meet together at a marriage feast and at a ball are widely different. The one is a mere irreligious assembly for pleasure and recreation of a very questionable tendency, entailing late hours and ministering to worldliness, levity, and the love of display. The other is a gathering of friends to witness the most important step in life that two persons can take, and a gathering closely connected with a religious ceremony.

3.—[*When they ran out of wine.*] The Greek words so rendered mean literally, "Wine having failed." This circumstance probably shows the

poor and humble condition of those to whose marriage Jesus was invited. His acquaintances and those of his mother were not wealthy persons. It throws light on this expression, and indeed on the whole story, to remember that a marriage feast among the Jews was often an affair of several days' duration, and an occasion when many were invited. Consequently it entailed not only much expense, but a considerable consumption of food and wine. Thus Samson's marriage feast lasted seven days. (Jud. xiv.10-18.) Thus the marriage feast described in the parable of the King's Son was a feast which large numbers were invited to attend. (Matt. xxii.2, etc.) This being the case, we may well understand that in the feasts of those who were not wealthy, the wine might soon run short without there having been any excess of drinking. So it seems to have happened in the case before us.

[*The mother of Jesus said…no wine.*] This little sentence has given rise to various and strange interpretations.

Some have thought, as Bengel, that Mary suggested to our Lord that it was time for Him and His disciples to depart and leave the feast, in order to spare the feelings of the bride and bridegroom and to avoid exposing their poverty. Some have thought, as Calvin, that she wished our Lord to occupy the minds of the guests by profitable discourse, and so to take off their attention from the deficiency of wine. By far the most reasonable and probable idea is that Mary conjectured that our Lord might in some way supply the deficiency of wine. How it would be done, she could not tell. There is not the

slightest ground for supposing that our Lord had ever worked a miracle up to this time. But it would be foolish to suppose that Mary did not remember well all the miraculous circumstances of our Lord's birth, and all the words spoken before by the angel Gabriel concerning Him. We cannot doubt that although our Lord had lived a quiet life at Nazareth for thirty years, and done no miracles, His mother must have observed in Him a perfection of word and deed utterly unlike the behavior of common men. We cannot doubt that she was aware of all the events of the last few weeks—our Lord's baptism by John, John's public proclamation of Him as the Messiah, and the gathering around Jesus of a small knot of disciples. Remembering all these things, we surely need not wonder that Mary's expectations were greatly raised. She looked for her Son speedily doing some great miracle. She was in daily expectation that He would prove Himself the Messiah by some mighty act. And it was under these feelings that she turned to Him, saying, "They have no wine." It is as though she said, "Surely the time is come for declaring Thyself. Manifest Thy power, as I have long expected Thee to do, by providing a supply of wine."

The argument which the Roman Catholics draw from this expression in favor of the Virgin Mary's intercession in heaven for sinners, and the consequent lawfulness of praying to her, is utterly worthless and most unhappy. For one thing, it does not follow that because the petitions of living saints are heard upon earth, that the petitions of dead saints in heaven are effectual. For another thing, it is an unfortunate fact that this petition, the only one that we ever find

addressed to our Lord by the Virgin Mary, brought from Him an immediate rebuke! Men must be in great straits for an argument when they can reason in this way in defense of the invocation of saints!

Melancthon, Chemnitius, and others think that this lack of wine at the marriage feast is purposely mentioned in order to remind married persons, or those who intend marriage, that matrimony brings with it cares as well as comforts, and specially cares from poverty. They that marry do well, and with Christ's blessing will have happiness. But they must not expect to escape "trouble in the flesh" from the very day of marriage. (1 Cor. vii.28.)

4.—[*Jesus said, Woman, what, etc.*] This remarkable verse has naturally attracted great attention. In interpreting it, it is very important to avoid the extremes into which some Protestants, and nearly all Roman Catholic writers have fallen in their interpretations. On the one side, we must not lay too much stress on the expression "Woman." It is surely a mistake to suppose, as Calvin and others suggest, that it conveys any reproof or is anywise inconsistent with reverence and respect. The very same expression was used by our Lord when He addressed His mother for the last time on the cross and affectionately commended her to John's care. He said, "Woman, behold thy son." (John xix.26.) The Virgin Mary was an erring woman, like all other believing women, but we must not lay more blame on her than Scripture warrants.

On the other side, it is useless to deny that our Lord's words were intended, as Chrysostom, Theophylact, and Euthymius say, to be a rebuke to Mary. She erred here, perhaps from affectionate desire to bring honor to her Son, as she erred on other occasions. The words before us were meant to remind her that she must henceforth leave our Lord to choose His own times and modes of acting. The season of subjection to her and Joseph was over. The season of His public ministry had at length begun. In carrying on that ministry, she must not presume to suggest to Him. The utter contrariety of this verse to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church about the Virgin Mary is too palpable to be explained away. She was not without error and sin, as Romish writers have dared to assert, and was not meant to be prayed to and adored. If our Lord would not allow His mother even to suggest to Him the working of a miracle, we may well suppose that all Roman Catholic prayers to the Virgin Mary, and especially prayers entreating her to "command her Son" are most offensive and blasphemous in His eyes.

The Greek expression rendered "What have I to do with thee," would be translated literally, "What to Me and thee?" It is an elliptical expression of which the full meaning probably is, "What is there in common to Me and thee?" "My thoughts," as Bengel says, "are one thing, and thine another." It is the same phrase that is used in an interrogative form in Matt. viii.29; Mark i.24; v.7; Luke viii.28; and in an imperative form in Matt. xxvii.19.)

[*My hour is not yet come.*] The simplest and most reasonable view of

these words is to refer them to Christ's "hour," or time for working a miracle. It is like the expression, "My time is not yet full come." (John vii.8.) Our Lord did not tell Mary that He would not work a miracle; but He would have her know that she must not expect Him to do mighty works to please His relatives after the flesh. He would only work a miracle, upon this or any other occasion, when the fitting season for it, the time appointed in God's counsel, had arrived.
There is a curious idea maintained by Augustine, Wordsworth, and others, that our Lord here referred to the hour of His crucifixion, and that He meant, "My hour is not yet come for recognizing thee and honoring thee publicly as my mother, but I shall do it one day on the cross." This, however, seems a very far-fetched and improbable application of the words.

5.—[*His mother said…do it*.] Two things are very noteworthy in this verse. One is the meekness with which the Virgin Mary submitted to the gentle rebuke which came from our Lord's mouth in the last verse. The other is the firm faith which she still exhibited in our Lord's power to work a miracle in order to supply the lack of wine, and in the probability of His working it.

Dyke observes, "The direction which Mary gives to the servants belongs to us all. We must perform simple obedience to Christ in all things; His sayings must be our doings. No reasoning of the matter must there be, no inquiry, as into men's commandments and speeches; but this must suffice, 'Christ has said it,' This is the blind obedience which Jesuits yield to their superiors, but it is the

obedience that belongs to Christ. Many will do *something* that Christ says, but not *whatsoever* He says." It is not, perhaps, going too far to say that after observing her Son's perfect life and perfect wisdom during thirty years at Nazareth, Mary spoke the words before us with special confidence, and with a greater depth of meaning than appears on the surface of the sentence. "Whatsoever He says deserves attention. Whatsoever He says, do it." At any rate, the verse contains a deep practical lesson for the whole Church of Christ. Whatsoever Christ says, let us obey and do.

6.—[Six waterpots...after the manner... Jews.] St. John mentions these details in describing the miracle, with a special reference to Gentile readers. He meant them to understand that there was nothing remarkable in the circumstance that there were six large waterpots of stone in the place where the feast was held. The peculiar customs of the Jews about ceremonial washings and purifying's made it necessary to have a large supply of water at hand. The words of St. Mark throw light on the verse before us: "The Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders," etc. (Mark vii.3, etc.) The presence of the six waterpots, therefore, could not arise from collusion or pre-arrangement. It was a natural consequence of Jewish habits in our Lord's times.

[*Two or three firkins apiece.*] Many foolish and unprofitable remarks have been built on this expression, as to the very large quantity of wine which our Lord must have created when the miracle

we are considering was wrought. It might suffice to reply that there is much uncertainty about the precise quantity of liquid which the ancient measure, which we here render “firkins,” contained. But the best and safest answer is that we must not measure the demands of a Jewish marriage-feast, which perhaps lasted several days and included a large number of guests, by the feasts of our own times.

7.—[Jesus said… Fill the waterpots, etc.] The remark is frequently made by commentators on this verse, with much propriety, that these simple words describe the duty of all who work for Christ, and especially of ministers and teachers. They are to hear Christ’s voice and do as He tells them, and then leave the result to Him. Duties are ours; events are God’s. It is ours to fill the waterpots; it is Christ’ to make the water wine. [*Up to the brim*.] This circumstance is no doubt mentioned in order to show that there was no room left for trick, jugglery, or imposture. What was put into the waterpots was water, and only water, and they were so filled that nothing could be infused or mingled with their contents.

8.—[*And he said… Draw out now*.] It was at this moment, no doubt, that the miracle took place. By an act of will our Lord changed the contents of the waterpots. That which was poured in was water. That which was drawn out was wine. To Him who created the vine and made it bear grapes at the first, the change was perfectly easy. He who could create matter out of nothing could much more easily change one kind of matter into another. [*The governor of the feast*.] This person appears to have been one who presided at large

entertainments like that before us, and superintended all the proceedings. The Greek word so rendered is precisely the same as that translated “ruler of the feast,” in the following verse. The presence of such a person at feasts was a well-known custom among the Greeks and Romans.

9.—*[Tasted…wine…where it came from.] The testimony of the ruler of* the feast is specially adduced in order to show the reality of the miracle. He knew nothing of what had been done to the waterpots. He had not seen the water poured in by our Lord’s command. There was no collusion or conspiracy between him and the servants, much less between him and our Lord. Hence the value of his testimony. He not only testifies that the liquid which a few minutes before was water was now wine, but that it was also wine of more than common goodness and strength—not wine mixed with water, put pure, good wine. Let the word “tasted” be carefully noticed in this place. It supplies a strong incidental argument against the Romish doctrine of transubstantiation. The occasion before us is the only known occasion on which our Lord changed one liquid into another. When He did so change it, the reality of the change was at once proved by the “taste.” Why is it then that in the pretended change of the sacramental wine in the Lord’s Supper into Christ’s blood the change cannot be detected by the senses? Why does the wine after consecration taste like wine, just as it did before? These are questions which the Roman Catholics cannot satisfactorily answer. The pretended change of the bread and wine in the Lord’s Supper is a complete delusion. It is contradicted by the senses of every

communicant. The bread after consecration is still bread, and the wine is still wine. That which contradicts our senses we are nowhere required in God's Word to believe.

10.—[*Every man at the beginning, etc.*] The words in this sentence must not be pressed too closely in order to bring out of them a spiritual meaning. The ruler of the feast makes a general remark about the way in which banquets were usually managed. The ordinary custom was to bring the best wine first, and the inferior wine last. But the wine before him, drawn from the waterpots, was so singularly good, that the custom on this day seemed reversed. The verse is a strong incidental testimony to the reality and greatness of our Lord's miracle. Not only did He change water into wine, but into wine so singularly good as to excite remark and attention.

[*When men have well drunk.*] Foolish remarks have sometimes been made on this expression, as if our Lord had countenanced excessive drinking on this occasion. For one thing, it may be remarked that the Greek word rendered "have well drunk," does not necessarily imply intoxication. It may be justly interpreted, as Schleusner and Parkhurst observe, "have drunk sufficient, or drunk freely." Men who have had enough are indifferent as to the quality of the wine set before them. For another thing, we must remember that the ruler of the feast was only making a general remark about men's ordinary customs in supplying wine to their guests. There is nothing whatever to show that he was alluding to the guests actually before him.

[*You have kept the good wine until now.*] A good practical remark has often been raised from these words of the ruler of the feast. The world gives its best things, like the best wine, first, and its worst things last. The longer we serve the world, the more disappointing, unsatisfactory, and unsavory will its gifts prove. Christ, on the other hand, gives His servants their best things last. They have first the cross, the race, and the battle, and then the rest, the glory, and the crown. Specially will it be found true at His second advent. Then will believers say emphatically, "Thou hast kept the good wine until you." These are pious and useful thoughts. But it may be doubted whether they are more than accommodations. This is perhaps the proper place to remark that it seems utterly impossible, on any fair and honest interpretation, to reconcile the passage before us with the leading principles of what is commonly called "Teetotalism." If our Lord Jesus Christ actually worked a miracle in order to supply wine at a marriage feast, it seems to be impossible, by any ingenuity, to prove that drinking wine is sinful. Temperance in all things is one of the fruits of the Spirit. An intemperate man is an unconverted man. Total abstinence from fermented liquors is in many cases most useful and desirable. But to say, as many do say, that to drink any fermented liquor at all is "a sin," is taking up ground that cannot be maintained in the face of the passage before us, without wresting the plain meaning of Scripture and charging Christ with abetting sin.

11.—[*This beginning of miracles, etc.*] The plain meaning of this sentence seems to be that this was the first miracle which our Lord

Jesus Christ ever worked. The miracles which some have reported that He worked in His infancy and childhood, are destitute of the slightest foundation in Scripture, and utterly unworthy of credit. Those who wish to see their absurdity will find specimens of them in the preliminary Essay to Trench's Notes on Miracles.

Lightfoot suggests the five following reasons why the miracle now before us was purposely the first that Christ worked. (1) As marriage was the first institution ordained by God, so at a marriage was Christ's first miracle. (2) As Christ had showed Himself miraculous a little while ago by a fast, so He does now by an extraordinary provision at a feast. When He would not make stones bread, it was not because He could not. (3) He would not make stones into bread to satisfy Satan, but He was willing to turn water into wine to show forth His own glory. (4) The first miracle wrought in the world by man was transformation (Exod. vii.9), and the first miracle wrought by the Son of man was of the same nature. (5) The first time you hear of John the Baptist, you hear of his strict diet, and so the first time you hear of Christ in His public ministry, you hear of Him at a marriage feast.

[*Manifested forth His glory*.] I am unable to see that these words refer to the expression used in the first chapter, "We beheld His glory." (John i.14.) I believe the meaning to be that "by this miracle Jesus now for the first time opened or revealed His glorious and divine power, and His commission to be the Messiah." After thirty years' seclusion at Nazareth, He now for the first time lifted up the

veil which He had thrown over His divinity in becoming flesh, and revealed something of His almighty power and Godhead.

[*His disciples believed on Him.*] These words cannot of course mean that Andrew, and John, and Peter, and Philip, and Nathanael now believed on Jesus for the first time. The probable meaning is that from this time forth they believed more confidently, more implicitly, and more unhesitatingly. From this time they felt thoroughly convinced, in spite of much remaining ignorance, that He whom they were following was the Messiah. I cannot close the note on this wonderful miracle without saying something about the allegorical and typical meanings assigned to it by the Fathers and many other commentators. Many see in the miracle an allegorical history of the introduction of the Gospel into the world. Like the marriage feast, the Gospel was an occasion of joy. As at the marriage feast, the personal presence of Jesus was the great feature of the Gospel. The times of the Jewish dispensation were times of deficiency and dim light. The coming of Christ supplied all that was lacking. Revealed religion before Christ was like water. Christ coming into the world turned the water of the old dispensation into wine. The good wine was reserved until the time of Christ. The first miracle wrought by Moses was turning water into blood. The first wrought by Christ was turning water into wine. These are undoubtedly pious thoughts and full of truth. I should be sorry to speak harshly of them, or to pronounce decidedly that they may not be legitimately deduced from the miracle. I only venture the remark that it is far wiser to abstain from allegorical interpretations as a general rule, and to be content

with the plain meaning which appears on the surface of Scripture. Once begin allegorizing Scripture, and you never know where you are to stop. You may prove anything and find anything in the Bible upon the allegorical system, and at last throw open the floodgate to a torrent of wild fanaticism.

The allegorical lessons drawn from this miracle by Augustine, Bernard, and Alcuin, are striking examples of the extremes into which allegory may run. When such a man as Augustine, for instance, tells us that the two or three firkins mean the two races of men, Jews and Greeks, or the three sons of Noah,—or when he says that the six waterpots in the miracle before us denote six successive prophetical periods in the days between Adam and Christ, one cannot but feel that there is something wrong. These are his words: "The six waterpots, containing two or three firkins apiece, are six ages, containing the prophecy belonging to all nations, whether as referred to two kinds of men, Jews and Gentiles, as the apostle often says, or to three, on account of the three sons of Noah." The system of interpreting Scripture which can lead a good man into such assertions as this must surely be a dangerous two-edged weapon, and likely to do more harm than good.

That all our Lord's miracles were deeply significant, I do not deny. That all were intended to convey deep spiritual lessons, beside supplying proofs of His divinity, I make no question. All I maintain is that they require reverent and delicate handling, and that to rush hastily into allegorical interpretations of them and invest every

minute portion of them with a figurative meaning, is an unwise mode of handling Scripture, and eminently calculated to bring the Bible into contempt.

Hardly any commentator has drawn more useful practical lessons from this miracle than Melancthon. Those who think lightly of Protestant divinity would do well to compare his commentary on the whole passage with that of Augustine.

JOHN 2:12-25

Cleansing the Temple, Jesus at the Passover Feast

After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples, and they stayed there a few days. Now the Jewish feast of Passover was near, so Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

He found in the temple courts those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers sitting at tables. So he made a whip of cords and drove them all out of the temple courts, with the sheep and the oxen. He scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold the doves he said, "Take these things away from here! Do not make my Father's house a marketplace!" His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will devour me."

So then the Jewish leaders responded, "What sign can you show us, since you are doing these things?" Jesus replied, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up again." Then the Jewish leaders said to him, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and are you going to raise it up in three days?" But Jesus was speaking about the temple of his body. So after he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the scripture and the saying that Jesus had spoken.

Now while Jesus was in Jerusalem at the feast of the Passover, many people believed in his name because they saw the miraculous signs he was doing. But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people. He did not need anyone to testify about man, for he knew what was in man.

The second miracle which our Lord is recorded to have wrought demands our attention in these verses. Like the first miracle at Cana, it is eminently typical and significant of things yet to come. To attend a marriage feast, and cleanse the temple from profanation were among the first acts of our Lord's ministry at His first coming. To purify the whole visible Church, and hold a marriage supper, will be among His first acts, when He comes again.

We see, for one thing, in this passage, ***how much Christ disapproves all irreverent behavior in the house of God***.

We are told that He drove out of the temple those whom He found selling oxen and sheep and doves within its walls—that He poured out the changers' money and overthrew their tables—and that He said to those who sold doves, "Take these things away from here! Do not make my Father's house a marketplace!" On no occasion in our Lord's earthly ministry do we find Him acting so energetically, and exhibiting such righteous indignation, as on the occasion now before us. Nothing seems to have called from Him such a marked display of holy wrath as the gross irreverence which the priests permitted in the temple, notwithstanding all their boasted zeal for God's law. Twice, it will be remembered, He discovered the same profanation of His Father's house going on, within three years, once at the beginning of His ministry and once at the end. Twice we see Him expressing his displeasure in the strongest terms. "The thing is doubled" in order to impress a lesson more strongly on our minds.

The passage is one that ought to raise deep searching's of heart in many quarters. Are there none who profess and call themselves Christians, behaving every Sunday just as badly as these Jews? Are there none who secretly bring into the house of God their money, their lands, their houses, their cattle, and a whole train of worldly affairs? Are there none who bring their bodies only into the place of worship, and allow their hearts to wander into the ends of the earth? Are there none who are "almost in all evil, in the midst of the congregation?" (Prov. 5:14.) These are serious questions! Multitudes, it may be feared, could not give them a satisfactory answer. Christian churches and chapels, no doubt, are very unlike the Jewish temple.

They are not built after a divine pattern. They have no altars or holy places. Their furniture has no typical meaning. But they are places where God's word is read, and where Christ is specially present. The man who professes to worship in them should surely behave with reverence and respect. The man who brings his worldly matters with him when he professes to worship, is doing that which is evidently most offensive to Christ. The words which Solomon wrote by the Holy Spirit are applicable to all times, "Keep your foot when you go to the house of God." (Eccles. 5:1.)

We see, for another thing, in this passage, ***how men may remember words of religious truth long after they are spoken, and may one day see a meaning in those who at first they did not see.***

We are told that our Lord said to the Jews, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." John informs us distinctly that "He spoke of the temple of His body," that he referred to His own resurrection. Yet the meaning of the sentence was not understood by our Lord's disciples at the time that it was spoken. It was not until "He was risen from the dead," three years after the events here described, that the full significance of the sentence flashed on their hearts. For three years it was a dark and useless saying to them. For three years it lay sleeping in their minds, like a seed in a tomb, and bore no fruit. But at the end of that time the darkness passed away. They saw the application of their Master's words, and as they saw it

were confirmed in their faith. “They remembered that He had said this,” and as they remembered “they believed.”

It is a comfortable and cheering thought, that the same kind of thing that happened to the disciples is often going on at the present day. The sermons that are preached to apparently heedless ears in churches, are not all lost and thrown away. The instruction that is given in schools and pastoral visits, is not all wasted and forgotten. The texts that are taught by parents to children are not all taught in vain. There is often a resurrection of sermons, and texts, and instruction, after an interval of many years. The good seed sometimes springs up after he that sowed it has been long dead and gone. Let preachers go on preaching, and teachers go on teaching, and parents go on training up children in the way they should go. Let them sow the good seed of Bible truth in faith and patience. Their labor is not in vain in the Lord. Their words are remembered far more than they think, and will yet spring up “after many days.” (1 Cor. 15:58; Eccles. 11:1.)

We see, lastly, in this passage, ***how perfect is our Lord Jesus Christ’s knowledge of the human heart***.

We are told that when our Lord was at Jerusalem, the first time, He “did not commit Himself” to those who professed belief in Him. He knew that they were not to be depended on. They were astonished at the miracles which they saw Him work. They were even intellectually convinced that He was the Messiah, whom they had long expected. But they were not “disciples indeed.” (John 8:31.)

They were not converted, and true believers. Their hearts were not right in the sight of God, though their feelings were excited. Their inward man was not renewed, whatever they might profess with their lips. Our Lord knew that nearly all of them were stony-ground hearers. (Luke 8:13.) As soon as tribulation or persecution arose because of the word, their so-called faith would probably wither away and come to an end. All this our Lord saw clearly, if others around Him did not. Andrew, and Peter, and John, and Philip, and Nathanael, perhaps wondered that their Master did not receive these seeming believers with open arms. But they could only judge things by the outward appearance. Their Master could read hearts. "He knew what was in man."

The truth now before us, is one which ought to make hypocrites and false professors tremble. They may deceive men, but they cannot deceive Christ. They may wear a cloak of religion, and appear, like whited sepulchers, beautiful in the eyes of men. But the eyes of Christ see their inward rottenness, and the judgment of Christ will surely overtake them, except they repent. Christ is already reading their hearts, and as He reads He is displeased. They are known in heaven, if they are not known on earth, and they will be known at length to their shame, before assembled worlds, if they die unchanged. It is written, "I know your works, that you have a name that you live, and are dead." (Rev. 3:1.)

But the truth before us has two sides, like the pillar of cloud and fire at the Red sea. (Exod. 14:20.) If it looks darkly on hypocrites, it

looks brightly on true believers. If it threatens wrath to false professors, it speaks peace to all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. A real Christian may be weak, but he is true. One thing, at any rate, the servant of Christ can say, when cast down by a sense of his own infirmity, or pained by the slander of a lying world. He can say, "Lord, I am a poor sinner, but I am in earnest, I am true. You know all things—you know that I love you. You know all hearts, and you know that, weak as my heart is, it is a heart that cleaves to you." The false Christian shrinks from the eye of an all-seeing Savior. The true Christian desires his Lord's eye to be on him morning, noon, and night. He has nothing to hide.

Technical Notes:

12. After this he went down to Capernaum, he, his mother, his brethren, and his disciples; and they continued there not many days. 13. Now the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 14. And he found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting. 15. When he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables. 16. And said to those who sold doves, Take these things away! Do not make my Father's house a house of merchandise! 17. Then his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house has eaten me up. 18. Then answered the Jews and

said to him, What sign do you show to us, since you do these things? 19. Jesus answered and said to them, Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up. 20. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and will you raise it up in three days? 21. But he was speaking of the temple of his body. 22. When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said. 23. Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast *day*, many believed in his name when they saw the miracles which he did. 24. But Jesus did not commit himself to them, because he knew all *men,* 25. And needed not that any should testify of man, for he knew what was in man.

12.—[*He went down to Capernaum.*] The strict accuracy of John's writing is noteworthy here. Cana was a village in the hill country. Capernaum was a town on the shore of the lake of Galilee, at a very much lower level than Cana. It is therefore said that Jesus "went *down*."

Capernaum appears to have been our Lord's principal residence in Galilee during His earthly ministry. "Leaving Nazareth, he dwelt in Capernaum." (Matt. iv.13.) At no place does He seem to have worked so many miracles; and on no place does He denounce so severe a judgment for its impenitence and neglect of privileges: "Thou, Capernaum, which are exalted to heaven, shall be cast down to hell."

(Matt. xi.23.) It is a striking fact that though Capernaum was a wealthy and important place in our Lord's time, it has so entirely passed away and been "cast down," that even its situation has never been clearly ascertained.

[*His mother*.] Here again we see no mention of Joseph. Whether the Virgin Mary was a constant companion of our Lord throughout His earthly ministry, may be doubted. We see her here. We see her again at the crucifixion. But we see her in another place "standing without and desiring to speak with Him" when He was talking to the people, and giving occasion to the solemn saying, "Who is my mother?" (Matt. xii.46.) Indeed, there is no proof that Mary ever saw more clearly than the rest of our Lord's disciples the whole purpose of Christ's advent, or was at all more prepared than the rest for His crucifixion and sufferings.

[*His brethren*.] There is no good ground for supposing that these were our Lord's brethren according to the flesh, and that Mary ever had any other son after our Lord's miraculous birth. For one thing, it is well known to every careful reader that the word "brethren" is applied in the Bible to many relatives besides those whom we call "brethren." Abraham says to Lot, "We be *brethren*" (Gen. xiii.8), though Lot was his nephew. Mishael and Elzaphan were called the "*brethren*" of Nadab and Abihu, though they were only cousins. (Lev. x.4.) Jacob said "to his *brethren*," gather stones (Gen. xxxi.46); yet they were his sons and servants. For another thing, it is quite possible that Joseph might have had children by a former marriage,

before he was espoused to the Virgin Mary; and these children, we can well understand, would be called our Lord's "brethren." In the last place, we know that the Apostle James was called our "Lord's brother" (Gal. i.19), and yet we are distinctly told that he was the son of Alpheus or Cleophas, the husband of the Virgin Mary's sister. It is therefore most probable that "brethren" in the verse before us means "cousins," some of whom believed on our Lord, though others did not. (John vii.5.) It is an interesting fact that two at least of our Lord's apostles were His kinsmen according to the flesh: viz., James and Jude, the sons of Alpheus. To them we may probably add Simon, on the strength of Mark vi.3, and perhaps Matthew also, on the strength of Mark ii.14 and Matthew ix.9.

[*And His disciples.*] This expression, being used after the words, "His brethren," may raise a doubt whether any of our Lord's relatives as yet believed on Him, except the Virgin Mary. It is possible that they only followed Him now out of curiosity, in consequence of the miracle He had just wrought.

13.—[*The Jews' Passover…at hand.*] This expression is another proof that St. John wrote his Gospel for Gentile believers rather than for Jews. Our Lord's regular attendance on the feasts and ordinances of the Law of Moses deserves notice. So long as the dispensation of the Old Testament lasted, He gave it all due honor, however unworthy the hands which administered it. The unworthiness of ministers will not justify us in neglecting God's ordinances.

The exact number of Passovers which our Lord kept, and consequently the exact length of His ministry from His baptism to His crucifixion, are points on which there is much difference of opinion. For myself, I can see no better view than the old one, that our Lord's ministry lasted three years. It evidently began shortly before a Passover, and ended with a Passover. But whether it included only three Passovers, and in that case lasted between two and three years—or four Passovers, and in that case lasted between three and four years—I think we have no materials for deciding positively. If I must venture an opinion, I think it most likely that our Lord only kept three Passovers. But it is an open question, and one happily not of deep moment. Three Passovers are distinctly named by John: viz., the one before us, the one in the sixth chapter (John vi.3), and the one at which our Lord was crucified. If the "feast" mentioned in the fifth chapter (John v.1) was the Passover, our Lord kept four Passovers. But this last point cannot be settled.

Sir Isaac Newton thought that our Lord kept no less than five Passovers. Some few writers have maintained that He kept only two. Those who wish to see the subject discussed will find it in Doddridge's notes on this place.

[*Jesus went up to Jerusalem.*] Let it be noted that this journey, and all the circumstances which attended this visit to Jerusalem, are only related by St. John. For some wise reason, the other three Gospel writers were inspired to leave out this part of our Lord's history.

14.—[*Found in the temple those who sold, etc.*] The presence of oxen, sheep, doves, and money-changers within the temple courts is easily accounted for. The animals were intended to supply the needs of Jews who came to the Passover and other feasts from distant places, and who required sacrifices. For them the dealers in oxen, sheep, and doves were ready, within a few yards of the altar. The changers of money came naturally enough, where buying and selling went on to meet the convenience of Jews who had nothing but foreign money which they wished to exchange for the current coin of Jerusalem. The tendency of the whole custom was evidently most profane. It was no doubt connived at by the priests from covetous motives. They were either connected with those who sold animals and changed money, and shared in their profits; or else they received a rent for the privilege of carrying on business within the sacred walls. No doubt they would have pleaded that all was done with a good intention! Their end was to provide facilities for worshiping God! But good intentions cannot sanctify unscriptural actions. As Dyke says on the passage, "No pretense of good ends can justify that which is forbidden by God."

When we are told that our Lord found all this going on "in the temple," we must, of course, understand that it means "in the courtyards surrounding the temple, within the precincts of the temple." But these courtyards, we must remember, were regarded as part of the temple and therefore holy ground.

I am inclined to see in this visit of our Lord to the temple, at His first appearance in Jerusalem after beginning His ministry, a partial though very imperfect fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy: "The Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to His temple." (Mal. iii.1.) While the Jewish nation was expecting the appearance of a conquering Messiah with power and great glory, the true Messiah suddenly appeared in the temple and declared His presence, not by exhibiting temporal power, but by insisting on greater purity in the temple worship as the first thing which the nation needed. That a fuller and more complete accomplishment of Malachi's words remains yet to come, I feel no doubt. But like many Old Testament prophecies about Messiah, the words were purposely intended to have a double fulfillment—a partial one at Messiah's first coming to suffer, and a complete one at Messiah's second coming to reign.

The great majority of the best Commentators hold that our Lord cast out the buyers and sellers from the temple twice; once at the beginning of His ministry and once at the end. It is fair to say that Bishop Pearce and a few other writers think that it only happened once—at the end of His ministry, just before His crucifixion. But the arguments in favor of this view do not appear to me at all weighty or satisfactory.

15.—[*Made a scourge of small cords.*] The Greek word translated "small cords," means literally a "cord made of rushes." Some have thought that these rushes were used as litter for the sheep and oxen. Others have thought that such small cords as these might very likely

have been lying about, after having been used for tying up the oxen. Whether the scourge was applied to those persons who brought the animals into the temple, as a sort of chastisement, as some old painters have represented the scene, we do not know. The more probable view seems to be that the scourge was simply meant to assist our Lord in speedily ejecting the sheep and oxen. The whole transaction is a remarkable one, as exhibiting our Lord using more physical exertion and energetic bodily action than we see Him using at any other period of his ministry. A word, a touch, or the reaching forth of a hand, are the ordinary limits of His actions. Here we see Him doing no less than four things: (1) making the scourge, (2) driving out the animals, (3) pouring out on the ground the changers' money, and (4) overturning the tables. On no occasion do we find Him showing such strong outward marks of indignation as at the sight of the profanation of the temple. Remembering that the whole transaction is a striking type of what Christ will do to His visible Church at His second coming, we may get some idea of the deep meaning of that remarkable expression, "The wrath of the Lamb." (Rev. vi.16.)

A remark of Dyke on our Lord's conduct in this place is worth noticing. "This act of Christ is not to be drawn into imitation, because He did it as Lord of the temple by virtue of His Sonship. Therefore, the Papists grossly abuse this place that hence gather the power of the Pope to punish offenders even with corporal punishments, or to deprive princes of their kingdoms. As for ministers, the only whip they may use is their tongue, in powerful

preaching against abuses. As for private persons, God has not tied their tongues, though He has their hands. As occasion is offered, they may show their detestation and dislike of corruption."

16.—[Said…sold doves… Take these things away!] The distinction between our Lord's mode of dealing with each of the objects of His displeasure deserves notice. The oxen and sheep He *drove* out; there was no danger of their being lost by such treatment. The money He *threw on the* ground; it might be soon picked up and carried away. The doves He simply ordered to be *taken* away; had He done more, they might have flown away and been completely lost to their owners. It would have been well for the Church if all church reformers had blended like wisdom with a like zeal in their proceedings. In the present instance, all were rebuked and all instructed. But no one was really injured, and nothing was lost.

[*My Father's house*.] This expression is noteworthy. Whether the Jews observed it, in the hurry and confusion of the whole transaction, may be questioned. It was evidently as assertion by our Lord of His divine Sonship, and consequently of His right to vindicate the purity of His Father's place of worship. On another occasion when our Lord called God His Father, the Jews at once said that He "made Himself equal with God." (John v.18.) Some have thought that the expression is parallel to that used in the description of Christ among the doctors (Luke ii.49), and that the words used there, "I must be about my Father's business," would have been better rendered, "I must be in my Father's house." The fact that the

profane custom which our Lord here reproved was resumed by the Jews, and that two or three years afterward our Lord found the same things going on again in the temple and again cast out the buyers and sellers, ought not to be overlooked. It is a striking proof of the desperate wickedness and fallen condition of the priests and rulers of the temple. They were deaf to all counsel and reproof and given over to a reprobate mind. The difference between our Lord's language at the second visit and that used at the first ought also to be noticed. At the first visit He only says, "Make not my Father's house a house of merchandise:" a place of buying and selling. At the second visit He says, "Ye have made it a den of thieves." (Matt. xxi.13.) The more wicked and hardened men are, the louder must be our protest and the sharper our rebuke.

[*A house of merchandise*.] Musculus remarks on this expression, that if the sale of animals for sacrifices called forth Christ's displeasure, much more must He be displeased at what goes on continually in Roman Catholic churches. The sale of masses, indulgences, etc., must be far more offensive to Christ than the sale of oxen and sheep. The complete success of our Lord on this occasion, and the absence of the slightest opposition on the part of the Jews, deserve notice. It is a fact that induced some of the Fathers to call this the greatest miracle Christ ever worked. There are, however, three things to be remembered in considering this matter. For one thing, the conscience of the Jews was on our Lord's side. They knew that He was right and they were wrong. For another thing, as a nation familiar with the history of the Old Testament

Prophets, they would not be surprised at an individual apparently under a divine impulse suddenly doing what our Lord did. Above all, there can be little doubt that a divine influence was brought to bear on all present, as it was when our Lord rode into Jerusalem on an ass, and when He caused His enemies in the garden to "go backward and fall to the ground." (Matt. xxi.9,10; John xviii.6.) Here, as on other occasions, our Lord showed His disciples that He had complete power over all wills and minds, when He thought fit to exercise it; and that when He was rejected and disobeyed by the Jews, it was not because He had no power to compel obedience. They had no power against Him except when He permitted.

The allegorical meanings assigned to the sheep, oxen, and doves by Augustine, Origen, and Bede, are too absurd to be quoted. They may be seen in the Catena of Aquinas. Origen sees in the casting out of the animals a type of the dissolution of the Jewish dispensation with its offerings and sacrifices.

Beza sees a peculiar fitness in our Lord's action of purifying the temple. It became Him who was to be our Prophet, Priest, and King, to exhibit the same zeal for the purity of God's house that was formerly exhibited by such men as the prophet Isaiah, the priest Jehoiada, and the Kings Hezekiah and Josiah. (2 Chron. xxiv.16.)

17.—[*His disciples remembered, etc.*] These words certainly appear to mean that our Lord's disciples "remembered" the text which is here quoted, at the very time when our Lord was casting out the

buyers and sellers. It occurred to their minds as a striking illustration of the spirit which their divine Master was exhibiting. He was completely absorbed for the moment in zeal for the purity of God's house. It is one among many proofs of the familiarity of the poor and unlearned Jews with the Old Testament Scriptures. Whether, however, the disciples regarded the Psalm, of which they remembered this verse, as applicable to the Messiah, may be reasonably doubted.

[*The zeal...eaten me up.*] The 69th Psalm, from which this text is taken, is quoted no less than seven times in the New Testament as the utterance of Messiah. In the first twenty-one verses of the Psalm, the Messiah's sufferings are related by Himself. The fifth verse is undoubtedly very remarkable as coming from Messiah's lips, when He speaks of "my foolishness" and "my sins." Ainsworth says it means, "false imputation of sins." "Thou knowest if there be any such as my foes charge me with." Bonar says much the same.

The text before us shows that it is sometimes justifiable to be entirely absorbed and eaten up, so to speak, by zeal for some object in which God's glory is concerned. Moses, Phineas, and Paul at Athens, are examples of such zeal. (Exodus xxxii.19; Num. xxv.11; Acts xvii.16.) Augustine remarks on this text: "Let the zeal of the house of God ever eat thee. For example: seest thou a brother running to the theatre? Stop him, warn him, be grieved for him, if the zeal of God's house hath now eaten thee. Seest thou others running and wanting to drink themselves drunk? Stop whom thou canst, hold whom thou canst, frighten whom thou canst; whom thou canst, win in gentleness: do

not in any wise sit still and do nothing."

18.—[*Then answered the Jews, and said*.] Doddridge remarks here that these Jews were probably the rulers, because the Great Assembly, or Sanhedrim, sat in the temple, and our Lord's actions would undoubtedly come to their knowledge without delay. This makes the question and answer which follow the more important.

[*What sign do you show…do these things*.] This question of the Jews shows us that they admitted the lawfulness of a man doing such things as our Lord had done, if he could prove that he had a divine commission. He had suddenly taken upon Himself a great and independent authority. Though neither a priest nor a Levite, He had virtually interfered with the management of the temple courts. Let Him now show that He was a Prophet, like Elijah or Amos, and they would concede He had a warrant for His conduct.

19.—[Jesus answered… Destroy this temple.] The meaning of this

remarkable expression is either hypothetical or prophetical. It must either be rendered, "Supposing you destroy this temple," or "Ye will destroy this temple,"— "If ye kill my body," or "When ye shall kill my body." It is, of course, absurd to suppose that our Lord literally commanded the Jews to destroy Him. The use of the imperative instead of the future must surely be familiar to every Bible reader. See especially the 109th Psalm. In the present case, it is truly astonishing that anyone can see difficulty in our Lord's expression.

He only used a mode of speaking which is in common use among ourselves. If a lawyer said to his client in a consultation, “Take such a step, and you will be ruined,” we all know that he would not be commanding his client to take the step. He would only means, “If you do take such a step.” A similar form of language may be seen in our Lord’s words, “Fill ye up the measure of your fathers,” addressed to the Pharisees. (Matt. xxiii.42.) No one would say that our Lord commanded the Pharisees to do this. It is a prophecy. So also, “Make the tree good” (Matt. xii.33), is not so much a command as a hypothesis. (See also Isa. viii.9,10.)

[*In three days I will raise it up.*] This is a prophecy of our Lord’s resurrection. But it is a very remarkable one from the fact that our Lord distinctly asserts His own power to raise Himself up. It is like the expression, “I have power to lay down my life, and I have power to take it again.” (John x.18.) Both the expressions deserve particular notice, because many now-a-days assert that our Lord’s resurrection was owing to the operation of God the Father and of God the Holy Ghost, and that He did not rise by His own power. This is a dangerous heresy. That the Father and the Holy Ghost cooperated in the resurrection of our Lord’s body there can be no doubt. It is clearly taught in many places. But to say that our Lord did not raise His own body is to contradict the text before us, and the other which has been already quoted.

Hurrion, quoted by Ford, observes: “The efficient cause of Christ’s resurrection was the infinite power of God, which being common to

all the Persons in the blessed Trinity, the resurrection is sometimes ascribed to the Father, sometimes to the Son, and sometimes to the Holy Ghost. Christ's being raised by the Father and the Spirit is not inconsistent with His raising Himself; for 'what things soever the Father doeth, these also doeth the Son' (John v.19), for being one in nature, they are also one in operation."

The questions naturally arise in many minds, Why did Jesus not work some miracle at once, as a sign, to convince the Jews? Why did He not at once proclaim Himself the Messiah? Why did He give the Jews so dark and mysterious a reply as the one before us? The answer to these questions is this. For one thing, we must remark, it was a leading principle in our Lord's dealings with men not to force conviction on them, but to speak to them according to what He saw was the state of their hearts. He answered fools according to their folly. (Prov. xxvi.5.) If He had given the Jews a more direct reply, He knew that it would have brought His ministry to an abrupt end, and would have led to His being cut off before the time. For another thing, we must remember that however dark our Lord's saying seemed when it was spoken, it did in effect tell the Jews of the greatest and most important sign which could be given them as a proof of His Messiahship. It told them of His future resurrection. It was equivalent to saying, "You ask Me for a sign, and I will give you one. I will rise again from the dead the third day after my crucifixion. If I do not so rise from the dead, you need not believe that I am the Messiah. But if I do so rise, you will be without excuse if you do not believe on Me." In effect, our Lord staked the truth of His mission on

His resurrection. He did the same when He said that He would give the Jewish nation no sign but that of the Prophet Jonah. (Matt. xii.39.) When the Apostles began to preach, they continually referred the Jews to Christ's resurrection as the proof of His Messiahship. And why did they do so? One main reason was, because their Master had told the Jews, the first time He appeared in the temple, that the great sign they must look to was His own rising again from the dead.

20.—[Then said the Jews, Forty and six years, etc.] This expression has given rise to some difference of opinion. The temple to which the Jews refer cannot of course be the temple built by Solomon. That temple was completely destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. Nor yet does it seem likely to have been the temple built by Zerubbabel and his companions after the return from Babylon. There is no sufficiently clear proof that this temple was forty and six years in building. By far the most probable view is that the temple spoken of is the one repaired, or rather rebuilt, by Herod, and that the forty-six years here mentioned mean the time during which these repairs were going on, and that the entire completion of them had not been effected up to our Lord's time. These repairs, according to Josephus, had been going on exactly forty-six years when our Lord visited the temple. They were so extensive and costly, that eighteen thousand workmen were employed about them, and they amounted to a rebuilding. Moreover, the minds of the Jews would probably be full of them at this particular time, because they were of recent date, if not going on at that very time. The Greek words might fairly be rendered, "Forty and six years has this temple been building." They

denote a time, as Whitby remarks, not perfectly past. If anyone desires to see an instance of the extravagant lengths into which a good man may be led in following the allegorical system of interpreting Scripture, he will do well to read Augustine's allegorical explanation of the forty and six years. It is far too absurd to be worth inserting here.

[*Will you raise it up in three days?*] This question implies three things: a sneer, astonishment, and incredulity. There is probably an emphasis meant to be laid on the word "You." Such a one as You! Will You do it? That this saying of our Lord, nevertheless, was not thrown away and forgotten but stuck in the minds of the Jews, though they did not understand it, is strikingly proved by two facts. One is, that the false witnesses brought it forward, though in a garbled form, when our Lord was arraigned before the high priests. The other is that the Jews taunted Him with it when He hung on the cross. (Matt. xxvi.61; xxvii.40.)

21.—[*But He…temple of his body.*] This verse is an instance of St. John's habit of making explanatory comments in his Gospel, as he goes on, in order to make things clear to his Gentile readers. Let it be noted that as our Lord calls His own body a "temple," so also the bodies of His believing people are called "the temple of the Holy Ghost." (1 Cor. vi.19.) If it was wrong to defile and profane the temple made of stone and wood, how much more is it wrong to defile by sin the temple of our bodies! St. Paul and St. Peter both call our bodies our "tabernacle." (2 Cor. v.1; 2 Peter i.13.)

22.—[*When…risen…dead…disciples remembered.] This sentence is an* interesting proof of two things. For one thing, it shows how much light was brought to the minds of the disciples by our Lord's resurrection, and how many hard sayings of His were at once unraveled and made plain. For another thing, it shows how long truth may lie dormant in men's minds without being understood, or doing them any service. It is one of the special offices of the Holy Ghost to bring things to remembrance. (John xiv.26.) We must not suppose religious teaching does no good because it is not understood immediately. It may do good long after the teacher is dead. [*They believed the Scripture.*] What Scripture does this mean? It cannot, of course, be our Lord's saying. What our Lord said is specially added as something beside the Scripture which the disciples "believed." Nor yet does it seem likely that it means any particular text in the Old Testament about the resurrection. I incline to the opinion that it means generally the whole testimony of Scripture to our Lord's claim to be received as the Messiah. When Jesus rose from the dead, the disciples were fully convinced that the Scripture about the Messiah was fulfilled in their Master. The expression "believed" cannot mean that the disciples then believed for the first time. As in other places, it signifies that they believed fully, and without any more doubt and hesitation. The same may be said of John xiv.1.

23.—[*Many believed.*] These persons do not appear to have really believed with the heart, but to have been only convinced in their understandings. The distinction between intellectual belief and

saving belief, and between one degree of saving belief and another, ought to be carefully noticed in Scripture. There is a faith which devils have, and a faith which is the gift of God. The persons mentioned in this verse had the former but not the latter. So also we are told that Simon Magus "believed." (Acts viii.13.) Again, there is a real heart-belief which a man may have that admits of great increase. This is the belief spoken of in the preceding verse.

[*When they saw the miracles*.] This expression shows us that there were many miracles worked by our Lord which are nowhere recorded in Scripture. St. John himself tells us so twice over. (John xx.30; xxi.25.) Nicodemus refers to these miracles in the beginning of the following chapter. (John iii.2.) If it had been good for us to know anything about these miracles, they would no doubt have been recorded. But it is well to remember that there were such miracles, in order that we may rightly understand the unbelief and hardness of the Jews at Jerusalem. The miracles which are related as having been worked in or near Jerusalem, we must remember, are by no means all that our Lord worked there.

24.—[*Did not commit Himself*.] The Greek word so rendered means literally, "Did not trust Himself." It is the same verb that is generally rendered "believe."

[*He knew all men*.] This is a direct assertion of our Lord's Divine omniscience. As God, He knew all mankind, and these seeming believers among others. As God, He knew that their hearts were like

the stony ground in the parable and their faith only temporary.

Melancthon makes some very wise remarks on this verse, as to the example which our Lord sets us here of caution in dealing with strangers. It is a melancholy fact, which the experience of years always confirms, that we must not trust implicitly to appearances of kindness, or be ready to open our hearts to every one as a friend upon short acquaintance. The man who does not hastily contract intimacies may be thought cold and distant by some; but in the long run of life, he will escape many sorrows. It is a wise saying that a man ought to be friendly with all, but intimate with few.

25.—[*Needed not…testify of man.*] These words mean that our Lord had no need of anyone's testimony "about man." He required no information from others about the real character of those who professed faith in Him.

[*He knew what was in man.*] This means that our Lord, as God, possessed a perfect knowledge of man's inner nature, and was a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. We should remember Solomon's words in his prayer, "Thou only knowest the hearts of all the children of men." (1 Kings viii.39.)

The immense difference between our Lord and all ministers of His Gospel appears strikingly in this verse. Ministers are constantly deceived in their estimate of people. Christ never was and never could be. When He allowed Judas Iscariot to be a disciple, He was

perfectly acquainted with His character.

Wordsworth observes that the two last verses of this chapter "afford an instance of the peculiar manner in which the Holy Spirit, in St. John's Gospel, pronounces judgment on things and persons. Compare vi.64,71; vii.39; viii.27; xii.33,37; xiii.11; xxi.17."

In leaving the whole passage, I cannot help remarking what a faithful picture of human nature it exhibits, and how many are the ways in which human corruption and infirmity show themselves. Within the space of a few verses, we find some openly profaning God's temple for the sake of gain, some angrily demanding a sign of Him who shows zeal for purity, some professing a false faith, and some few only believing, but even these believing with a weak, unintelligent faith. It is the state of things which exists everywhere and always.

John – Chap. 3

JOHN 3:1-8

Conversation with Nicodemus

Now a certain man, a Pharisee named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council, came to Jesus at night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs that you

do unless God is with him." Jesus replied, "I tell you the solemn truth, unless a person is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter his mother's womb and be born a second time, can he?"

Jesus answered, "I tell you the solemn truth, unless a person is born of water and spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must all be born from above.' The wind blows wherever it will, and you hear the sound it makes, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

The conversation between Christ and Nicodemus, which begins with these verses, is one of the most important passages in the whole Bible. Nowhere else do we find stronger statements about those two mighty subjects, the new birth, and salvation by faith in the Son of God. The servant of Christ will do well to make himself thoroughly acquainted with this chapter. *A man may be ignorant of many things in religion, and yet be saved. But to be ignorant of the matters handled in this chapter, is to be in the broad way which leads to destruction.*

We should notice, firstly, in these verses, ***what a weak and feeble beginning a man may make in religion, and yet finally prove a strong Christian***. We are told of a certain

Pharisee, named Nicodemus, who feeling concerned about his soul, "came to Jesus by night."

There can be little doubt that Nicodemus acted as he did on this occasion from the fear of man. He was afraid of what man would think, or say, or do, if his visit to Jesus was known. He came "by night," because he had not faith and courage enough to come by day. And yet there was a time afterwards when this very Nicodemus took our Lord's part in open day in the council of the Jews. "Does our law judge any man," he said, "before it hear him, and know what he does." (John 7:51.). Nor was this all. There came a time when this very Nicodemus was one of the only two men who did honor to our Lord's dead body. He helped Joseph of Arimathea to bury Jesus, when even the apostles had forsaken their Master and fled. His last things were more than his first. Though he began badly, he ended well.

The history of Nicodemus is meant to teach us that we should never "despise the day of small things" in religion. (Zec. 4:10.) We must not set down a man as having no grace, because his first steps towards God are timid and wavering, and the first movements of his soul are uncertain, hesitating, and stamped with much imperfection. We must remember our Lord's reception of Nicodemus. He did not "break the bruised reed, or quench the smoking flax," which He saw before Him. (Matt. 12:20.) Like Him, let us take inquirers by the hand, and deal with them gently and lovingly. In everything there must be a beginning. It is not those who make the most flaming

profession of religion at first, who endure the longest and prove the most steadfast. Judas Iscariot was an apostle when Nicodemus was just groping his way slowly into full light, Yet afterwards, when Nicodemus was boldly helping to bury his crucified Savior, Judas Iscariot had betrayed Him, and hanged himself! This is a fact which ought not to be forgotten.

We should notice, secondly, in these verses, ***what a mighty change our Lord declares to be needful to salvation,*** *and what a remarkable expression He uses in describing it*. He speaks of a new birth. He says to Nicodemus, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." He announces the same truth in other words, in order to make it more plain to his hearer's mind—"Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." By this expression He meant Nicodemus to understand that "no one could become His disciple, unless his inward man was as thoroughly cleansed and renewed by the Spirit, as the outward man is cleansed by water." To possess the privileges of Judaism a man only needed to be born of the seed of Abraham after the flesh. To possess the privileges of Christ's kingdom, a man must be born again of the Holy Spirit.

The change which our Lord here declares needful to salvation is evidently no slight or superficial one. It is not merely reformation, or amendment, or moral change, or outward alteration of life. It is a thorough change of heart, will, and character. It is a resurrection. It is a new creation. It is a passing from death to life. It is the

implanting in our dead hearts of a new principle from above. It is the calling into existence of a new creature, with a new nature, new habits of life, new tastes, new desires, new appetites, new judgments, new opinions, new hopes, and new fears. All this, and nothing less than this is implied, when our Lord declares that we all need a "new birth."

This change of heart is rendered absolutely necessary to salvation by the corrupt condition in which we are all, without exception, born. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh." Our nature is thoroughly fallen. The carnal mind is enmity against God. (Rom. 8:7.) We come into the world without faith, or love, or fear toward God. We have no natural inclination to serve Him or obey Him, and no natural pleasure in doing His will. Left to himself, no child of Adam would ever turn to God. The truest description of the change which we all need in order to make us real Christians, is the expression, "new birth."

This mighty change, it must never be forgotten, we cannot give to ourselves. The very name which our Lord gives to it is a convincing proof of this. He calls it "a birth." No man is the author of his own existence, and no man can quicken his own soul. We might as well expect a dead man to give himself life, as expect a natural man to make himself spiritual. A power *from above* must be put in exercise, even that same power which created the world. (2 Cor. 4:6.) Man can do many things; but he cannot give life either to himself or to others.

To give life is the peculiar prerogative of God. Well may our Lord declare that we need to be "born again!"

This mighty change, we must, above all, remember, is a thing without which we cannot go to heaven, and could not enjoy heaven if we went there. Our Lord's words on this point are distinct and express. "Except a man be born again, he can neither *see* nor *enter* the kingdom of God." Heaven may be reached without money, or rank, or learning. But it is clear as daylight, if words have any meaning, that nobody can enter heaven without a "new birth."

We should notice, lastly, in these verses, ***the instructive comparison which our Lord uses in explaining the new birth.*** He saw Nicodemus perplexed and astonished by the things he had just heard. He graciously helped his wondering mind by an illustration drawn from "the wind." A more beautiful and fitting illustration of the work of the Spirit it is impossible to conceive.

There is much about the wind that is mysterious and inexplicable. "You can not tell," says our Lord, "whence it comes and where it goes." We cannot handle it with our hands, or see it with our eyes. When the wind blows, we cannot point out the exact spot where its breath first began to be felt, and the exact distance to which its influence shall extend. But we do not on that account deny its presence. It is just the same with the operations of the Spirit, in the new birth of man. They may be mysterious, sovereign, and incomprehensible to us in many ways. But it is foolish to stumble at them because there is much about those who we cannot explain.

But whatever mystery there may be about the wind, its presence may always be known by its sound and effects. “You hear the sound thereof,” says our Lord. When our ears hear it whistling in the windows, and our eyes see the clouds driving before it, we do not hesitate to say, “There is wind.” It is just the same with the operations of the Holy Spirit in the new birth of man. Marvelous and incomprehensible as His work may be, it is work that can always be seen and known. The new birth is a thing that “cannot be hidden.” There will always be visible “fruits of the Spirit” in every one that is born of the Spirit.

Would we know what the marks of the new birth are? We shall find them already written for our learning in the First Epistle of John. The man born of God “believes that Jesus is the Christ,”— “does not commit sin,”— “does righteousness,”— “loves the brethren,”— “overcomes the world,”— “keeps himself from the wicked one.” This is the man born of the Spirit! Where these fruits are to be seen, there is the new birth of which our Lord is speaking. He that lacks these marks, is yet dead in trespasses and sins. (1 John 5:1; 3:9; 2:29; 3:14; 5:4; 5:18.)

And now let us solemnly ask ourselves whether we know anything of the mighty change of which we have been reading? Have we been born again? Can any marks of the new birth be seen in us? Can the sound of the Spirit be heard in our daily conversation? Is the image and superscription of the Spirit to be discerned in our lives? Happy is the man who can give satisfactory answers to these questions! A day

will come when those who are not born again will wish that they had never been born at all.

Technical Notes:

1. There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. 2. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles that you do unless God is with him. 3. Jesus answered and said to him, Verily, verily, I say to you, unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. 4. Nicodemus said to him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb and be born? 5. Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say to you, unless a man is born of water and *of* the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. 6. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7. Marvel not that I said to you, Ye must be born again. 8. The wind blows there it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.

1.—[*There was a man, etc.*] The close connection of the conversation between Christ and Nicodemus with the end of the preceding chapter ought to be carefully noted. In fact, the original Greek contains a connecting particle, which our translators have omitted to express in

our version. The chapter should begin, “And there was a man,” or, “Now there was a man.” The conversation took place when our Lord “was in Jerusalem,” at the time of the Passover. Nicodemus was one of those who “saw the miracles which Jesus did,” and was so much struck by what he saw that he sought out our Lord in order to converse with Him.

[*Of the Pharisees.*] The striking variety of character in those who were brought to believe on Christ while He was on earth, ought not to be overlooked. His disciples were not drawn exclusively from any one class. As a general rule, none were more bitterly opposed to Him and His doctrines than the Pharisees. Yet here we see that nothing is impossible with grace. Even a Pharisee became in inquirer, and ultimately a disciple! Nicodemus and St. Paul are standing proofs that no heart is too hard to be converted. The third chapter shows us Jesus teaching a proud, moral Pharisee. The fourth will show Him teaching an ignorant, immoral Samaritan woman. None are too bad to be taught by Christ.

[*A ruler of the Jews.*] The civil government of the Jews at this time, we must remember, was in the hands of the Romans. When Nicodemus is called “a ruler,” it means that he was a chief person among the Jews, probably in high ecclesiastical position, and certainly a famous religious teacher. See v.10.

2.—[*Came to Jesus by night.*] The fact here recorded appears to me to show that Nicodemus was influenced by the fear of man, and was

afraid or ashamed to visit Jesus by day. The view maintained by some, that we ought not to blame him for coming by night, because it was the quietest time for conversation and the time when an interview was least liable to be interrupted, or because the Jewish teachers were in the habit of receiving inquirers by night, appears to me undeserving of attention. I am confirmed in this opinion by the fact that on the only other occasions where Nicodemus is mentioned, he is specially described as the man who "came to Jesus by night." This repeated expression appears to me to imply blame. (John vii.50; xix.39.)

How anyone can waste time, as some famous commentators do, in speculating how the conversation between Christ and Nicodemus was reported, is to my mind perfectly astonishing. To hint, as one has done, that Jesus must have told St. John about the conversation afterwards, or that St. John must have been present, appears to me to strike a blow at the very root of inspiration. Both here and elsewhere, frequently, St. John describes things which he only knew by the direct inspiration of the Holy Ghost. [*Rabbi.*] This expression was a name of dignity among the Hebrews, signifying Doctor or Master. Cruden says that the name came originally from the Chaldees, and that it was not used before the time of captivity, except in describing the officers of the Kings of Assyria and Babylon. Thus we find the names of Rab-saris and Rab-shakeh. (2 Kings xviii.17.) The use of the word here by Nicodemus was intended to mark his respect for our Lord.

[*We know*.] Different reasons have been assigned for Nicodemus' use of the plural number in this place. Whom did he mean when he said "we"? Some say that he meant himself and many of his brethren among the Pharisees. Some say that he meant himself and the secret believers of all classes mentioned at the end of the last chapter. Some say, as Lightfoot, that he meant no one on particular but used the plural for the singular, according to an idiom common in all languages. He only meant, "It is commonly known." I venture the suggestion that Nicodemus probably used the plural number intentionally on account of its vagueness, and avoided the singular number from motives of caution, that he might not commit himself too much. Even at the present day people will talk of "we" in religion, long before they will talk of "I." Weak faith strives to be hid in a crowd.

[*Teacher come from God*.] This cautious sentence is an instructive indication of the state of Nicodemus' mind. He was naturally a timid, hesitating, slow-moving man. That Jesus was somebody remarkable, he was convinced by His miracles. That He might possibly be the Messiah had probably crossed his mind, and the more so because he doubtless knew of the ministry of John the Baptist, and had heard that John spoke of one greater than himself who was yet to come. But until he can make out more about Jesus, by private conversation, he declines to commit himself to any stronger statement than that before us. The Greek words would be more literally rendered, "From God thou hast come a teacher." Lightfoot thinks that Nicodemus here refers to the long cessation of prophecy,

which had now lasted four hundred years. During this long period, no one had appeared from God to teach the once-favored Jewish nation, as the prophets did of old. But now, he seems to say, "Thou hast appeared, as the prophets did in former times, to teach us."

[*No man can do these miracles…with him*.] This sentence has been justly called an illustration of one great purpose of our Lord's miracles. They arrested men's attention. They were evidences of a divine mission. They showed that He who wrought them was no ordinary Person, and ought to be listened to.

I am aware that some have thought that Nicodemus attached too much weight to our Lord's miracles, and have boldly asserted that miracles are no necessary proof of a divine mission, seeing that Antichrist will appear with signs and lying wonders. (2 Thess. ii.9; Rev. xiii.14.) In reply, it might be sufficient to remark that our Lord Himself declared that "His works bore witness that the Father had sent Him." (John v.36; x.25; xv.24.) But I also think that sufficient stress is not laid on the expression, "These miracles that you do." The character and quality of our Lord's miracles were such as to prove His divine commission. False teachers and Antichrists may be permitted to work *some* miracles, like the magicians who withstood Moses. But there is a point beyond which Antichrist and his servants cannot go. Such miracles as our Lord worked could only be wrought by the finger of God. I therefore think that Nicodemus' argument was just and correct. It is, moreover, worthy of note that the expression he uses is precisely the same as that used by St. Peter when

describing our Lord's ministry and miracles. He says, "God was with Him." (Acts x.38.) The expression, "God being with a man," is a common phrase in the Scriptures, denoting the possession of certain special gifts or graces from God, beyond those ordinarily given to men. Thus 1 Sam. xvi.18; iii.19; and xviii.12-14.

3.—[*Jesus answered.*] The question has often been asked, "To what did our Lord answer?" No question was put to Him. What is the connecting link between the words of Nicodemus and the solemn statement contained in the first words which our Lord addressed to him?

I believe the true reply to these questions is that our Lord, as on many other occasions, made answer according to what He saw going on in Nicodemus' heart. He knew that the inquirer before Him, like all the Jews, was expecting the appearance of Messiah, and was even suspecting that he had found Him. He therefore begins by telling him at once what was absolutely needful if he would belong to Messiah's kingdom. It was not a temporal kingdom, as he vainly supposed, but a spiritual one. It was not a kingdom in which all persons born of the seed of Abraham would, as a matter of course, have a place because of their birth. It was a kingdom in which grace, not blood, was the indispensable condition of admission. The first thing needful in order to belong to Messiah's kingdom was to be "born again." Men must renounce all idea of privileges by reason of their natural birth. All men, whether Jews or Gentiles, must be born again, born anew, born from above by a spiritual birth. "Nicodemus," our Lord seems

to say, “If you want to know how a man is to become a member of Messiah’s kingdom, understand this day that the first step is to be born again. Think not because Abraham is your father that Messiah will acknowledge you as one of His subjects. I tell you at once, that the first thing you and all other men need is a new birth.”

I am quite aware that several other explanations have been given of the link between Nicodemus’ remark and our Lord’s opening assertion. I will only say, that the one I have given appears to me by far the simplest and most satisfactory.

[*Verily, verily, I say to you.*] This expression, which is peculiar to St. John’s Gospel, has been already commented on. (John i.51.) But it is useful to remark, in considering the verse before us, that the phrase is never used except in connection with some statement of great importance and solemnity.

[*Unless a man.*] The Greek word which our version has rendered “a man,” would be more literally translated, “any one,” or “any person.” The change called the “new birth,” our Lord would have us know, is of universal necessity. Nobody can be saved without it.

[*Born again.*] The Greek word here rendered “again,” might be translated with equal correctness, “from above:” *i.e.*, from heaven, or from God. It is so translated in this chapter (verse 31), and in four other places in the New Testament. (John xix.11; James i.17; iii.15,17.) In one other place, (Gal. iv.9), it is “again.” Many

commentators in every age, as Origen, Cyril, Theophylact, Bullinger, Lightfoot, Erasmus, Bengel, have maintained strongly that "born from above," and not "born again," is the true and better translation of the phrase. Cranmer's version renders it "born from above," and our own translators have allowed it in a marginal reading. My own impression agrees with that of most commentators, that "born again" is the right translation. For one thing, it seems most probable that Nicodemus understood our Lord to mean "born again," or else he would hardly have asked the question, "Can a man enter the *second time* into his mother's womb and be born?" For another thing, the Greek words used in four other places where regeneration is spoken of in the New Testament, admit of no other meaning than being "born again," and could not possibly be rendered "born from above." See 1 Pet. i.3,23; Matt. xix.28; Titus iii.5.

The point is happily not one of importance, and men may agree to differ about it, if they cannot convince one another. Every true Christian is undoubtedly "born from above" by the quickening power of God in heaven, as well as "born again" by a second spiritual birth.

The meaning of our Lord when He said, "Unless a man be born again," is unhappily a subject on which there is a wide difference of opinion in the Church of Christ. The expression at any rate cannot be said to stand alone. It is used six times in the Gospel of St. John, once in the first Epistle of St. Peter, and six times in the first Epistle of St. John. (John i.13; iii.3,5,6,7,8; 1 Peter i.23; 1 John ii.29; iii.9; iv.7; v.1,4,18.) Common sense and fair interpretation of language

point out that “born again, born of the Spirit, and born of God,” are expressions so intimately connected with one another that they mean one and the same thing. The only question is, “What do they mean?”

Some think that to be “born again,” means nothing more than “an outward reformation, or such outward conformity as a proselyte might yield to a new set of rules of life.” This is an almost obsolete and utterly unsatisfactory interpretation. It makes our Lord tell Nicodemus nothing more than he might have learned from heathen philosophers, such as Socrates, Plato, or Aristotle; or than he might have heard from any Rabbi about the duties of a proselyte from heathenism to Judaism. Some think that to be “born again,” means to be admitted into the Church of Christ by baptism, and to receive a spiritual change of heart inseparably connected with baptism. This again is an unsatisfactory interpretation. For one thing, it seems improbable that the first truth which our Lord would propound to an inquiring Pharisee would be the necessity of baptism. He certainly never did so on any other occasion. For another thing, if our Lord only meant baptism, it is difficult to account for the astonishment and perplexity which Nicodemus expressed on hearing our Lord’s words. Baptism was not a thing with which a Pharisee was unacquainted. In the Jewish Church, proselytes were baptized. Last, but not least, it is clear from St. John’s first Epistle, that to be “born again, born of the Spirit, or born of God,” means something much greater than baptism. The picture which the Apostle there gives of the man who is “born of God,” could certainly not be given of the man who is baptized. The true view of the expression I believe to be

this. Being “born again,” means that complete change of heart and character which is produced in a man by the Holy Ghost when he repents, believes on Christ, and becomes a true Christian. It is a change which is frequently spoken of in the Bible. In Ezekiel it is called “taking away the stony heart and giving a heart of flesh,”—“giving a new heart, and putting within a new spirit.” (Ezek. xi.19; xxxvi.26.) In Acts it is called “repentance and conversion.” (Acts iii.19.) In Romans it is called “being alive from the dead.” (Rom. vi.13.) In Corinthians it is called “being a new creature.” (2 Cor. v.17.) In Ephesians it is called “being quickened.” (Eph. ii.1.) In Colossians it is called “putting off the old man and putting on the new.” (Col. iii.9,10.) In Titus it is called the “washing of regeneration.” (Titus iii.5.) In Peter it is called “being called out of darkness into light,” and being “made partaker of the Divine Nature.” (1 Peter ii.9; 2 Peter i.4.) In John it is called “passing from death to life.” (1 John iii.14.) I believe that all these expressions come to the same thing in the end. They are all the same truth, only viewed from different sides. They all mean that mighty inward change of heart which our Lord here calls a “new birth,” and which John the Baptist foretold would specially characterize Messiah’s kingdom. He was to baptize not with water, but with the Holy Ghost. Our Lord begins His address to Nicodemus by taking up his forerunner’s prediction: He tells him that he must be “born again” or baptized with the Spirit. Human nature is so entirely corrupt, diseased, and ruined by the fall, that all who would be saved must be born again. No lesser change will suffice. They need nothing less than a new birth.

[*He cannot see.*] This expression has received two interpretations. Some think that it means, “He cannot understand, or comprehend.” Others think that it means, “He cannot enter, enjoy, partake of, or possess.” The last I believe to be the true meaning of the expression. The first is truth, but not the truth of the text. The second is confirmed by the language used in the fifth verse, and is a common form of speech of which there are many instances in the Bible. Thus we find to “see life” (John iii.36), to “see corruption” (Psalm xvi.10), to “see death” (John viii.51, to “see evil” (Psalm xc.15), to “see sorrow.” (Rev. xviii.7.)

[*The kingdom of God.*] This expression means that spiritual kingdom which Messiah came into the world to set up, and of which all believers are the subjects; the kingdom which is now small, and weak, and despised, but which shall be great and glorious at the second advent. Our Lord declares that no man can belong to that kingdom and be one of its subjects without a new birth. To belong to the covenant of Israel with all its temporal privileges, a man need only be born of Jewish parents. To belong to Messiah’s kingdom, a man must be “born again” of the Spirit and have a new heart.

Luther’s remark on this verse, quoted by Stier, is worth reading. He supposes our Lord to say, “My doctrine is not of doing and of leaving undone, but of being and becoming; so that it is not a new work to be done, but the being new created; not the living otherwise before the being new born.”

The unvarying suitableness of our Lord's teaching to the special state of mind of those whom He taught deserves observation. To the young ruler fond of his money, He says, "Sell all and give to the poor." To the multitude craving food, He says, "Labor not for the meat that perishes." To the Samaritan woman coming to draw water, He commends "living water." To the Pharisee proud of his *birth*, as a son of Abraham, He says, "Ye must be born again." (Luke xviii.22; John vi.27; iv.10.)

4.—[*Nicodemus said… How.*] The question of Nicodemus is precisely one of those which the natural ignorance of man in spiritual things prompts a person to ask. Just as the Samaritan woman, in the 4th chapter, put a carnal meaning on our Lord's words about "living water," and the Jews, in the 6th chapter, put a carnal meaning on the "bread of God," so Nicodemus puts a carnal meaning on the expression "born again." There is nothing which the heart of man in every part and every age of the world is so slow to understand as the work of the Holy Ghost. Our minds are so gross and sensuous that we cannot take in the idea of an inward and spiritual operation. Unless we can see things and touch things in religion, we are slow to believe them.

[*When he is old.*] This expression seems to indicate that Nicodemus himself was an old man when this conversation took place. If this be so, it is only fair, in judging his case, to make some allowance for the slowness with which old age receives new opinions, and specially in the things of religion. At the same time, it supplies an encouraging

proof that no man is too old to be converted. One of our Lord's first converts was an old man!

5.—[Unless…born of water and of the Spirit.] This famous text has unhappily given rise to widely different interpretations. On one thing only respecting it nearly all commentators are agreed. It is the same truth that is laid down in the third verse, only laid down with greater fullness, in compassion to Nicodemus' weakness of understanding. But what does it mean? The expression "born of water" is peculiar to this place and occurs nowhere else in the Bible. It cannot be literally interpreted. No one can be literally "born of water." What then does the phrase signify? When can it be said of anyone that he is "born of water and of the Spirit"? The first and commonest interpretation is to refer the text entirely to baptism and to draw from it the inseparable connection of baptism and spiritual regeneration. According to this view of the text, our Lord tells Nicodemus that baptism is absolutely necessary to salvation and is the appointed means of giving new birth to the heart of man. "If you wish to belong to my kingdom, you must be born again, as I have already said; and if you wish to be born again, the only way to obtain this mighty blessing is to be baptized. Unless a man be regenerated or born again by baptism, he cannot enter my kingdom." This is the view of the text which is maintained by the Fathers, by the Roman Catholic writers, by the Lutheran commentators, and by many English divines down to the present day. It is a view which is supported by much learning and by many strange and farfetched arguments, such as Gen. i.2. It is, however, a view which to my own mind is utterly unsatisfactory.

The second, and less common interpretation, is to refer the text partly to baptism and partly to that real regeneration of heart which a man may receive, like the penitent thief, without having been baptized. According to this view, our Lord tells Nicodemus that a new birth is absolutely necessary to salvation, and that to be baptized or "born of water," is one of the appointed ways by which regeneration is effected. Those who hold this view deny as stoutly as any that there is any inseparable connection between baptism and regeneration. They hold that multitudes are "born of water" who are never born of the Spirit. But they maintain that the word "water" must be intended to point us to baptism, and that by the use of the expression "born of water" our Lord meant to defend both John's baptism and His own, and to show their value. This is the view of the text which is maintained by some few of the best Roman Catholic writers, such as Rupertus and Ferus, by almost all the English Reformers, and by many excellent commentators down to the present day. It is a view which to my own mind seems not much more satisfactory that the former one, already described, on account of the strange consequences which it involves. The third, and much the least common interpretation, is to refer the text entirely to the regeneration of man's heart, and to exclude baptism altogether from any place in it. According to this view, our Lord explains to Nicodemus, by the use of a figure, what He had meant when He spoke of being "born again." He would have Nicodemus know that a man must have his heart as thoroughly cleansed and renewed by the Spirit as the body is cleansed and purified by water. He must be born

of the Spirit working on his inward nature, as water works on the material body. In short, he must have a "clean heart" created in him if he would belong to Messiah's kingdom. Most of those who take this view consider that baptism was certainly meant to point to the change of heart described in the text, but that this text was meant to point out something distinct from baptism and even more important that baptism. This is the view which I believe to be the true one, and to which I unhesitatingly adhere. Those who hold that baptism is not referred to in this text are undoubtedly a small minority among theologians, but their names are weighty. Among them will be found Calvin, Zwingle, Bullinger, Gualter, Archbishop Whitgift, Bishop Prideaux, Whitaker, Fulke, Poole, Hutcheson, Charnock, Gill, Cartwright, Grotius, Cocceius, Gomarus, Piscator, Rivetus, Chamier, Witsius, Mastricht, Turretin, Lampe, Burkitt, A. Clarke, and according to Lampe, Whycliffe, Daillé, and Paræus. I do not assert this on second-hand information. I have verified the assertion by examining with my own eyes the works of all the authors above-named, excepting the three referred to by Lampe. On the precise meaning of the word "water," they are not agreed. But they all hold that our Lord did not mean baptism when He spoke of being "born of water and the Spirit." Dean Alford, I observe, says that the expression "refers to the token, or outward sign of baptism, on any *honest* interpretation." How far it is justifiable to use such language about an opinion supported by so many great names, I leave to the reader to decide! Those who wish to see the view of the text which I advocate more fully defended, will find what they want in Lampe's Dissertations and Chamier's Panstratia.

In adhering to a view of this text which is adopted by so few commentators, I feel a natural desire to give the reasons of my opinion at full length, and I think that the importance of the subject in the present day justifies me in doing so. In giving these reasons, I must decline entering into questions which are not directly before me. The value of the sacrament of baptism, the right of infants to baptism, the true meaning of the Church of England Baptismal Service, are matters which I shall not touch. The meaning of our Lord's words, "Unless a man be born of water and the Spirit," is the only point to which I shall confine myself. I believe that in using these words, our Lord did *not* refer to baptism, and I think so for the following reasons:

(a) Firstly, there is nothing in the words of the text which necessarily requires to be referred to baptism. "Water," "washing," and "cleansing" are figurative expressions, frequently used in Scripture in order to denote a spiritual operation on man's heart. See Psa. li.7-10; Isa. xliv.3; Jer. iv.14; Ezek. xxxvi.25; John iv.10; vii.38,39.) The expression, "Born of water and of the Spirit," is doubtless very peculiar. But it is not more peculiar than the parallel expression, "He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire." (Matt. iii.10.) To explain this last text by the tongues of fire on the day of Pentecost, is an utterly unsatisfactory interpretation and confines the fulfillment of a mighty general promise to one single act and one single day. I believe that in each case an element is mentioned in connection with the Spirit, in order to show the nature of the Spirit's operation. Men

must be “baptized with the Holy Ghost,” purifying their hearts from corruption, as *fire* purifies metal, and must be “born of the Spirit,” cleansing their hearts as *water* cleanses the body. The use of fire and water as the great instruments of purification was well known to the Jews. See Num. xxxi.23, where both are mentioned together. Chrysostom well remarks that “Scripture sometimes connects the grace of the Spirit with fire and sometimes with water.”

(b) Secondly, the assertion that “water” must mean baptism because baptism is the ordinary means of regeneration, is an assertion utterly destitute of Scriptural proof. It is no doubt written of professing saints and believers that “they have been buried with Christ in baptism,” and that “as many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” (Rom. vi.4; Gal. iii.27.) But there is not a single text which declares that baptism is the *only* way by which people are born again. On the contrary, we find two plain texts in which regeneration is distinctly ascribed not to baptism, but to the Word. (1 Pet. i.23; James i.18.) Moreover the case of Simon Magus clearly proves that in apostolic times all persons did not receive grace when they were baptized. St. Peter tells him a very few days after his baptism, “Thou art in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity,—thy heart is not right in the sight of God,—thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter.” (Acts viii.21-23.) The assertion, therefore, that “water” *must* mean baptism, is a mere gratuitous assumption and must fall to the ground.

(c) Thirdly, if “water” in the text before us means baptism, it follows

as a logical consequence that baptism is absolutely necessary to salvation, and that all who have died unbaptized since these words were spoken have been lost. The penitent thief was lost on this theory, for he was never baptized. All infants who have died unbaptized have been lost. The whole body of the Quakers, who die in their own communion, are lost. There is no evading this conclusion, unless we adopt the absurd and untenable hypothesis that the kingdom of God in this solemn passage means nothing more than the visible Church. Where our Lord, in declaring a great general truth, makes no exceptions, we have no right to make them. If words mean anything, to refer "water" to baptism excludes unbaptized persons from heaven! And yet there is not another instance in Scripture of an outward ordinance being made absolutely necessary to salvation, and specially an ordinance which a man cannot confer on himself. A new, regenerate heart is undoubtedly necessary to the salvation of everyone, without exception, and it is of this only, I believe, that the text before us speaks.

(d) Fourthly, if we accept the theory that baptism is the ordinary means of conveying the grace of regeneration, that all baptized persons are necessarily regenerated, and that all who are "born of water" are at the same time born of the Spirit, we are irresistibly involved in the most dangerous and pernicious consequences. We pour contempt on the whole work of the Spirit, and on the blessed doctrine of regeneration. We bring into the Church a new and unscriptural kind of new birth, a new birth that cannot be seen by its fruits. We make out that people are "born of God" when they have

not one of the marks of regeneration laid down by St. John. We encourage the rankest antinomianism. We lead people to suppose that they have grace in their hearts while they are servants of sin, and that they have the Holy Spirit within them while they are obeying the lusts of the flesh. Last, but not least, we pour contempt on the holy sacrament of baptism. We turn it into a mere form in which faith and prayer have no place at all. We lead people to suppose that it matters nothing in what spirit they bring their children to baptism, and that if water is sprinkled and certain words are used, an infant is, as a matter of course, born again. Worst of all, we induce people secretly to despise baptism, because we teach them that it always conveys a mighty spiritual blessing, while their own eyes tell them that in a multitude of cases it does no good at all. I see no possibility of avoiding these consequences, however little some persons who hold the inseparability of baptism and regeneration may intend them. Happily, I have the comfort of thinking that there is an utter lack of logic in some hearts which have much grace.

(e) Fifthly, if "born of water and of the Spirit" was meant to teach Nicodemus that baptism is the ordinary means of conveying spiritual regeneration, it is very difficult to understand why our Lord rebuked him for not knowing it. "Do you not know these things?" How could he know them? That there was such a thing as baptism, he knew as a Pharisee. But that baptism was the appointed means of conveying "new birth," he could not know. It was a doctrine nowhere taught in the Old Testament. It is a doctrine, on the showing of its own advocates, peculiar to Christianity. And yet Nicodemus is rebuked for

not knowing it! To my mind, this is inexplicable. The necessity of a thorough change of heart, on the contrary, Nicodemus might have known from the Old Testament Scriptures. And it was for ignorance of this, not for ignorance of baptismal regeneration, that he was rebuked.

(f) Sixthly and lastly, if it be true that "to be born of water" means baptism, and that baptism is the ordinary means of conveying the grace of regeneration, it is most extraordinary that there is so little about baptism in the Epistles of the New Testament. In Romans it is only twice mentioned, and in 1st Corinthians, seven times. In Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, Hebrews, and 1st Peter we find it named once in each Epistle. In thirteen of the remaining Epistles, it is neither named nor referred to. In the two Pastoral Epistles to Timothy, where we might expect something about baptism, if anywhere, there is not a word about it! In the Epistle to Titus, the only text that can possibly be applied to baptism is by no means clearly applicable. (Titus iii.5.) Nor is this all. In the one Epistle which mentions baptism seven times, we find the writer saying that "Christ sent him not to baptize, but to preach the Gospel," and actually "thanking God" that he had "baptized none of the Corinthians, save Crispus and Gaius." (1 Cor. i.14,17.) He would surely never have said this if all whom he baptized were at once born again. Imagine St. Paul saying, "I thank God I regenerated none of you!" Moreover, it is a startling fact that this very same Apostle in the very same Epistle says to these same Corinthians, "I have begotten you through the Gospel." (1 Cor. iv.14.) My deliberate conviction is

that St. Paul would never have written these sentences if he had believed that the only way to be born of the Spirit was to be baptized.

I give these reasons with a sorrowful feeling that to many they are given in vain. But I have felt it due to myself, in maintaining an opinion about a most important text which is not commonly held, to state fully my reasons and to show that my opinion is not lightly maintained. Before leaving this subject, I think it right, in self-defense, to say something about the fact that the view I maintain is not held by the great majority of commentators. This fact undoubtedly calls for some explanation.

With regard to the Fathers, no one can read their writings without seeing that they were fallible men. On no point does their weakness appear so strongly as in their language about the sacraments. The man who intends to abide by all the opinions of the Fathers about the sacraments, will have to swallow a great deal. After all, the very earliest Father, whose commentary on St. John's Gospel is extant, is Origen, who died in 253 A. D. The true view of the text before us might easily be lost in the period of at least 150 years between Origen's day and the days of St. John. Tertullian incidentally applies the text before us to baptism in one of his writings. But even he was not born till 160 A. D., at least two generations after St. John's time.

With regard to the Lutheran writers, their avowed opinions upon the sacraments make their interpretations of the text before us of little weight. They have a peculiar sacramental theory to maintain when

they expound Scripture, and to that theory they steadfastly adhere. Yet even Brentius on this text confesses that the baptism here signified by “water” means something much more than the sacrament of baptism and includes the whole doctrine of the Gospel. The Roman Catholic commentators are of course even more fettered in their views of the sacraments than the Lutherans, and hardly call for any remark. Their constant endeavor in expounding Scripture is to maintain the sacramental system of their own Church, and a text like that before us is unhesitatingly applied to baptism.

With regard to our own English Reformers and their immediate successors, their opinions about a text like this are perhaps less valuable than upon any subject. They always display an excessive anxiety to agree with the Fathers. They were anxious in every way to conciliate opponents and to support their own Protestantism by appeals to primitive antiquity. When, therefore, they saw that the Fathers referred the text before us to baptism, and that at best the point was doubtful, we cannot wonder that they held that to be “born of water” was to be baptized. Yet even they seem not unanimous on the point; and Latimer’s well-known assertion, that “to be christened with water is not regeneration,” must not be forgotten. The famous remarks of Hooker, which are so frequently thrown in the teeth of those who take the view of “water and the Spirit” which I do, are a curious instance of the coolness with which a great man can sometimes draw an illogical conclusion in his own favor from some broad general premise. He lays down the general principle that “when a literal construction of a text will stand, that furthest from

the letter is commonly the worst." He then proceeds to take it for granted that to interpret "born of water" of baptism is the *literal* construction of the text now before us. Unfortunately this is precisely the point that I for one do not concede; and his conclusion is consequently, to my mind, worthless. Moreover, when we talk of a "literal" sense, there must evidently be some limit to it. If not, we cannot answer the Roman Catholic when he proves transubstantiation from the words, "This is my body."

I believe that for a true and sound exposition of the text before us, we must look to the Puritans and Dutch divines of the seventeenth century. It was necessary for men to be a generation further off from Romanism before they were able to give a dispassionate opinion about such a text as this. The early Protestants did not see the consequences of the language they sometimes used about baptism with sufficient clearness. Otherwise, I believe they would not have written about it as they did. To anyone who asks for a specimen of the 17th century divinity, I would say that one of the simplest and best statements of the true meaning of the text before us will be found in Poole's Annotations.

In leaving the whole subject, there is one fact which I think deserves very serious consideration. Those Churches of Christendom at the present day which distinctly maintain that all baptized persons are born of the Spirit, are, as a general rule, the most corrupt Churches in the world. Those bodies of Christians, on the other hand, which deny the inseparable connection of baptism and the new birth, are

precisely those bodies which are most pure in faith and practice, and do most for the extension of the Gospel in the world. This is a great fact which ought not to be forgotten.

[That which is born…flesh…spirit.] In this verse our Lord gives Nicodemus the reason why the change of heart called "new birth" is a thing of such absolute necessity, and why no slight moral change will suffice. Nicodemus had spoken of "entering a second time into his mother's womb." Our Lord tells him that even if such a thing was possible, it would not make him fit for the kingdom of God. The child of human parents would always be like the parents from which it sprang, if it was born a hundred times over. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh." All men and women are by nature corrupt, sinful, fleshly, and alienated from God. "They that are in the flesh cannot please God." (Rom. viii.8.) Their children will always be born with a nature like that of their parents. To bring a clean thing out of an unclean is proverbially impossible. A bramble will never bear grapes, however much it may be cultivated, and a natural man will never be a godly man without the Spirit. In order to be really spiritual and fit for the kingdom of God, a new power from without must enter into a man's nature. "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit." The sentence is undoubtedly very elliptical and expressed in abstract terms. It is like St. Paul's words, "The carnal mind is enmity against God." (Rom. viii.7.) But the general meaning is unmistakable. Human nature is so utterly fallen, corrupt, and carnal, that nothing can come from it by natural generation but a fallen, corrupt, and carnal offspring. There is no self-curative power in man. He will

always go on reproducing himself. To become spiritual and fit for communion with God requires nothing less than the entrance of the Spirit of God into our hearts. In one word, we must have that new birth of the Spirit which our Lord twice described to Nicodemus.

The word "flesh," I am inclined to think, with Poole and Dyke, is taken in two senses in this verse. In the first case, it means the natural body of man, as in John i.14. In the second case, it means the corrupt carnal nature of man, as in Gal. v.17. The same remark applies to the word Spirit. In the first instance, it means the Holy Spirit, and in the second, the spiritual nature which the Spirit produces. The offspring of all the children of Adam is fleshly. The offspring of the Spirit is spiritual. Neither the grace, nor rank, nor money, nor learning of parents will prevent a child having a corrupt heart if it is naturally born of the flesh. Nothing will make anyone spiritual but being born again of the Spirit.

It must be carefully remembered, in considering this verse, that it cannot be applied to the human nature of our Lord Jesus Christ. Though He had a true body like our own, He was not "born of the flesh" as we are by natural generation, but conceived by the miraculous operation of the Holy Ghost. 7.—[*Marvel not…born again*.] In reading this verse, the stress ought to be laid on the two last words, "born again." It is evident that the thing which stumbled Nicodemus was the idea of any "new birth" at all being necessary. He felt unable to understand what this "new birth" was. Our Lord forbids him to marvel, and proceeds to explain the new birth by a

familiar illustration.

It is a noteworthy and striking fact that no doctrine has excited such surprise in every age of the Church, and has called forth so much opposition from the great and learned, as this very doctrine of the new birth. The men of the present day who sneer at conversions and revivals as fanaticism and enthusiasm, are no-wise better than Nicodemus. Like him, they expose their own entire ignorance of the work of the Holy Ghost.

8.—[*The wind blows, etc.*] The object of this verse appears to be to explain the work of the Holy Ghost in the regeneration of man by a familiar illustration drawn from the wind. Mysterious as the Spirit's work was, Nicodemus must allow that there was much of mystery about the wind. "The wind blows where it wishes." We cannot account for the direction in which it blows, or for the beginning or extent of its influence. But when we hear the sound of the wind, we do not for a moment question that it is blowing. Our Lord tells Nicodemus that it is just the same with the operations of the Spirit. There is doubtless much about them that is mysterious and incomprehensible. But when we see fruit brought forth in a manifest change of heart and life, we have no right to question the reality of the Spirit's operations.

The last clause of the verse is undeniably somewhat difficult— "So is everyone who is born of the Spirit." We should rather have expected, "So does the spirit operate on everyone who is born again." And this

was, no doubt, our Lord's meaning. Yet the form of speech which our Lord uses is not altogether without parallel in the New Testament. For instance, we read, "The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed." (Matt. xiii.24.) The likeness in this case is clearly not between the man and the kingdom. The meaning is that the whole story is an illustration of the kingdom of heaven. So also we read that "the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchantman seeking goodly pearls," and might make a similar remark. (Matt. xiii.45.)

The Greek word translated "wind," at the beginning of this verse, might be rendered with equal correctness, "the Spirit." Many think, as Origen, Augustine, Rupertus, Bengel, Schottgen, Ambrose, Jansenius, Wycliffe's Version, Bucer, and Bede, that it ought to be so rendered. They deny that our Lord brought in the idea of "the wind" at all. They object to it being said of the wind that "it wishes" and say that the expression cannot be applied to any but a person.

This notion seems to me, as it does to the great majority of commentators, entirely untenable. For one thing, it creates great awkwardness to make a comparison between the Spirit and the work of the Spirit, which we must do if this theory is correct. "The Spirit blows, and so is every one born of the Spirit!" For another thing, it seems to me very strange to speak of the Holy Ghost as "blowing" and to speak of the "sound" of the Holy Ghost, or of that "sound," being heard by Nicodemus.

I can see no difficulty whatever in the expression, “The wind blows where it wishes.” It is common in the Bible to personify unintelligent things and to speak of them as having mind and will. Thus our Lord speaks of the “stones crying out.” (Luke xix.40.) And the Psalmist says, “The sun knows his going down.” (Psalm civ.19.) See also Job xxxvii.8,35. In addition to this, I see a peculiar beauty in the selection of the wind as an illustration of the work of the Spirit. Not only is the illustration most apt and striking, but it is one which is used in other places in Scripture. See, for instance, in the vision of the dry bones how Ezekiel cries to the “wind” to breathe on the slain. (Ezek. xxxvii.9.) See also Cant. iv.16 and Acts ii.2. Last, but not least, it seems to me that Nicodemus’ state of perplexity makes it highly probable that our Lord would graciously help his ignorance by the use of a familiar illustration like that of the wind. If no illustration at all was used in this verse, it is not quite easy to see how its language would help Nicodemus to understand the doctrine of the new birth. But if the verse contains a familiar illustration, the whole purpose of our Lord in saying what He did becomes clear and plain.

JOHN 3:9-21

Nicodemus replied, “How can these things be?” Jesus answered, “Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you don’t understand these things? I tell you the solemn truth, we speak about what we know and testify about what we have seen, but you people do not accept our testimony. If I have told you people about earthly things and you don’t believe, how will you believe if I tell you about heavenly

things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven—the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life."

For this is the way God loved the world—he gave his one and only Son that everyone who believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world should be saved through him. The one who believes in him is not condemned. The one who does not believe has been condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God. Now this is the basis for judging that the light has come into the world and people loved the darkness rather than the light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil deeds hates the light and does not come to the light, so that their deeds will not be exposed. But the one who practices the truth comes to the light, so that it may be plainly evident that his deeds have been done in God.

We have in these verses the second part of the conversation between our Lord Jesus Christ and Nicodemus. A lesson about regeneration is closely followed by a lesson about justification! The whole passage ought always to be read with affectionate reverence. It contains words which have brought eternal life to myriads of souls.

These verses show us, firstly, ***what gross spiritual ignorance there may be in the mind of a great and learned man.*** We see a "master of Israel" unacquainted with the first

elements of saving religion. Nicodemus is told about the new birth, and at once exclaims, “How can these things be?” When such was the darkness of a Jewish *teacher*, what must have been the state of the Jewish *people?* It was indeed due time for Christ to appear! The pastors of Israel had ceased to feed the people with knowledge. The blind were leading the blind, and both were falling into the ditch. (Matt. 15:14.)

Ignorance like that of Nicodemus is unhappily far too common in the Church of Christ. We must never be surprised if we find it in quarters where we might reasonably expect knowledge. Learning, and rank, and high ecclesiastical office are no proof that a minister is taught by the Spirit. The successors of Nicodemus, in every age, are far more numerous than the successors of Peter. On no point is religious ignorance so common as on the work of the Holy Spirit. That old stumbling-block, at which Nicodemus stumbled, is as much an offence to thousands in the present day as it was in the days of Christ. “The natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God.” (1 Cor. 2:14.) Happy is he who has been taught to prove all things by Scripture, and to call no man master upon earth. (1 Thess. 5:21; Matt. 23:9.)

These verses show us, secondly, ***the original source from which man’s salvation springs.*** That source is the love of God the Father. Our Lord says to Nicodemus, “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

This wonderful verse has been justly called by Luther, “The Bible in miniature.” No part of it, perhaps, is so deeply important as the first five words, “God so loved the world.” The love here spoken of is not that special love with which the Father regards His own elect, but that mighty pity and compassion with which He regards the whole race of mankind. Its object is not merely the little flock which He has given to Christ from all eternity, but the whole “world” of sinners, without any exception. There is a deep sense in which God *loves* that world. All whom He has created He regards with *pity* and *compassion*. Their sins He cannot love—but He loves their souls. “His tender mercies are over all His works.” (Psalm. 145:9.) Christ is God’s gracious gift to the whole world.

Let us take heed that our views of the love of God are Scriptural and well-defined. The subject is one on which error abounds on either side. On the one hand we must beware of vague and exaggerated opinions. We must maintain firmly that God hates wickedness, and that the end of all who persist in wickedness will be destruction. It is not true that God’s love is “lower than hell.” It is not true that God so loved the world that all mankind will be finally saved, but that He so loved the world that He gave His Son to be the Savior of all who believe. His love is offered to all men freely, fully, honestly, and unreservedly, but it is only through the one channel of Christ’s redemption. He that rejects Christ cuts himself off from God’s love, and will perish everlastingly.

On the other hand, we must beware of narrow and contracted opinions. We must not hesitate to tell any sinner that God loves him. It is not true that God cares for none but His own elect, or that Christ is not offered to any but those who are ordained to eternal life. There is a "kindness and love" in God towards all mankind. It was in consequence of that love that Christ came into the world, and died upon the cross. Let us not be wise above that which is written, or more systematic in our statements than Scripture itself. God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. God is not willing that any should perish. God would have all men to be saved. God loves the world. (John 6:32; Titus 3:4; 1 John4:10; 2 Pet. 3:9; 1 Tim. 2:4; Ezek. 33:11.)

These verses show us, thirdly, ***the peculiar plan by which the love of God has provided salvation for sinners.*** That plan is the atoning death of Christ on the cross. Our Lord says to Nicodemus, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be *lifted up*, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."

By being "lifted up," our Lord meant nothing less than His own death upon the cross. That death, He would have us know, was appointed by God to be "the life of the world." (John 6:51.) It was ordained from all eternity to be the great propitiation and satisfaction for man's sin. It was the payment, by an Almighty Substitute and Representative, of man's enormous debt to God. When Christ died upon the cross, our many sins were laid upon Him.

He was made “sin” for us. He was made “a curse” for us. (2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13.) By His death He purchased pardon and complete redemption for sinners.

The bronze serpent, lifted up in the camp of Israel, brought health and cure within the reach of all who were bitten by the snakes. Christ crucified, in like manner, brought eternal life within reach of lost mankind. Christ has been lifted up on the cross, and man looking to Him by faith may be saved.

The truth before us is the very foundation-stone of the Christian religion. Christ’s death is the Christian’s life. Christ’s cross is the Christian’s title to heaven. Christ “lifted up” and put to shame on Calvary is the ladder by which Christians “enter into the holiest,” and are at length landed in glory. It is true that we are sinners—but Christ has suffered for us. It is true that we deserve death—but Christ has died for us. It is true that we are guilty debtors—but Christ has paid our debts with His own blood. This is the real Gospel! This is the good news! On this let us lean while we live. To this let us cling when we die. Christ has been “lifted up” on the cross, and has thrown open the gates of heaven to all believers.

These verses show us, fourthly, ***the way in which the benefits of Christ’s death are made our own.*** That way is simply to put faith and trust in Christ. Faith is the same thing as believing. Three times our Lord repeats this glorious truth to Nicodemus. Twice He proclaims that “whoever believes shall not

perish." Once He says, "He that believes on the Son of God is not condemned."

Faith in the Lord Jesus is the very key of salvation. He that has it has life, and he that has it not has not life. Nothing whatever *beside* this faith is necessary to our complete justification; but nothing whatever, *except* this faith, will give us an interest in Christ. We may fast and mourn for sin, and do many things that are right, and use religious ordinances, and give all our goods to feed the poor, and yet remain unpardoned, and lose our souls. But if we will only come to Christ as guilty sinners, and believe on Him, our sins shall at once be forgiven, and our iniquities shall be entirely put away. Without faith there is no salvation; but through faith in Jesus, the vilest sinner may be saved.

If we would have a peaceful conscience in our religion, let us see that our views of saving faith are distinct and clear. Let us beware of supposing that justifying faith is anything more than a sinner's simple trust in a Savior, the grasp of a drowning man on the hand held out for his relief. Let us beware of mingling anything else with faith in the matter of *justification*. Here we must always remember faith stands entirely alone. A justified man, no doubt, will always be a holy man. True believing will always be accompanied by godly living. But that which gives a man a saving interest in Christ, is not his *living,* but his *faith*. If we would know whether our faith is genuine, we do well to ask ourselves how we are living. But if we would know

whether we are justified by Christ, there is but one question to be asked. That question is, “Do we believe?”

These verses show us, lastly, ***the true cause of the loss of man’s soul.*** Our Lord says to Nicodemus, “This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and *men loved darkness* rather than light, because their deeds were evil.”

The words before us form a suitable conclusion to the glorious tidings which we have just been considering. They completely clear God of injustice in the condemnation of sinners. They show in simple and unmistakable terms, that *although man’s salvation is entirely of God, his ruin, if he is lost, will be entirely from himself.* He will reap the fruit of his own sowing.

The doctrine here laid down ought to be carefully remembered. It supplies an answer to a common cavil of the enemies of God’s truth. There is no decreed reprobation, excluding any one from heaven. “God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.” There is no unwillingness on God’s part to receive any sinner, however great his sins. God has sent “light” into the world, and if man will not come to the light, the fault is entirely on man’s side. His blood will be on his own head, if he makes shipwreck of his soul. The blame will be at his own door, if he misses heaven. His eternal misery will be the result of his own choice. His destruction will be the work of his own hand. God loved him, and was willing to save him; out he “loved darkness,” and

therefore darkness must be his everlasting portion. He would not come to Christ, and therefore he could not have life. (John 5:40.)

The truths we have been considering are peculiarly weighty and solemn. Do we live as if we believed them?. Salvation by Christ's death is close to us today. Have we embraced it by faith, and made it our own? Let us never rest until we know Christ as our own Savior. Let us look to Him without delay for pardon and peace, if we have never looked before. Let us go on believing on Him, if we have already believed. "Whoever," is His own gracious word— "whoever believes on Him, shall not perish, but have eternal life."

Technical Notes:

9. Nicodemus answered and said to him, How can these things be? 10. Jesus answered and said to him, Are you a master of Israel, and do not know these things? 11. Verily, verily, I say to you, we speak what we know and testify what we have seen, and ye do not receive our witness. 12. If I have told you earthly things and ye do not believe, how shall ye believe if I tell you *of* heavenly things? 13. And no man has ascended up to heaven but he who came down from heaven, *even* the Son of man who is in heaven. 14. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, 15. that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 16. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but

have everlasting life. 17. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. 18. He who believes in him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. 19. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. 20. For everyone that does evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. 21. But he who does truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they have been done in God.

9.—[Nicodemus answered… How…these things be?] This is the third and last time that Nicodemus speaks during his visit to Christ, as far as it is reported to us. His question here is a striking and instructive instance of the deep spiritual ignorance which may be found in the mind of a learned man. In four different ways our Lord had brought before him one and the same lesson. First, He had laid down the great principle that every man must be "born again." Second, He had repeated the same thing in fuller words and brought in the idea of "water," to illustrate the work of the Spirit. Third, He had shown the necessity of the new birth, from the natural corruption of man. Fourth, He had illustrated the work of the Spirit a second time by the instance of the "wind." And yet now, after all that our Lord has said, this learned Pharisee seems utterly in the dark and asks the pitiable question, "How can these things be?" We have no right to be

surprised at the vast ignorance of saving religion which we see on all sides when we consider the history of Nicodemus. We should make up our minds to expect to find spiritual darkness the rule and spiritual light the exception. Few things in the long run give so much trouble to ministers, missionaries, teachers, and district-visitors, as beginning work with extravagant and unscriptural expectations.

10.—[*Jesus answered and said.*] It will be observed that our Lord does not answer the question of Nicodemus directly, but rebukes him sharply for his ignorance. Yet it ought to be carefully noted, as Melancthon remarks, that before He concludes what He now beings to say, He supplies a complete answer to His inquirer. He shows him the true root and spring of regeneration, namely, faith in Himself. He answers his groping inquiry, "How can these things be?" by showing him the first step in saving religion, viz., to believe in the Son of God. Let Nicodemus begin like a little child by simply believing on Him who was to be lifted up on the cross, and he would soon understand "*how*" a man could be born again, even in his old age.

[*Are you a master of Israel.*] The English version of this question hardly gives the full force of the original. It should be literally rendered, "Are you *the* master of Israel?" *i.e.,* "Are you the famous teacher and instructor of the Jews?" "Do you profess to be a light of them that sit in darkness and an instructor of others?" The expression certainly seems to indicate that Nicodemus was a man of established reputation as a teacher among the Pharisees. When the teachers were so ignorant, what must have been the state of the

taught?

[*Not know these things*.] These words unquestionably imply rebuke. The things which our Lord had just mentioned, Nicodemus ought to have known and understood. He professed to be a religious teacher. He professed to know the Old Testament Scriptures. The doctrine, therefore, of the necessity of a new birth ought not to have appeared strange to him. "A clean heart, circumcision of the heart, a new heart, a heart of stone instead of a heart of flesh," were expressions and ideas which he must have read in the Prophets, and which all pointed towards the new birth. (Psalm li.10; Jer. iv.4; Ezek. xviii.31; xxxvi.26.) His ignorance consequently was deserving of blame.

The verse before us appears to me to supply a strong argument against the idea that the expression "born of water and the Spirit" means baptism. I do not see how Nicodemus could possibly have known this doctrine, as it is nowhere revealed in the Old Testament, and even its own advocates confine it to New Testament times. To blame a man for not knowing "things" which he could not possibly know would be obviously most unjust, and entirely at variance with the general tenor of our Lord's dealings. 11.—[*We speak what we know, etc*.] Whom does our Lord mean here when He says, "We?" The answers to this question are various.

(a) Some think, as Luther, Brentius, Bucer, Gualter, Aretius, Hutcheson, Musculus, Gomarus, Piscator, and Cartwright, that "We" means, "I, and John the Baptist."

(b) Some think, as Calvin, Beza, and Scott, that it means, "I, and the Old Testament Prophets. Some think, as Alcuin (according to Maldonatus), and Wesley, that it means, "I, and all who are born of the Spirit."
(d) Some think, as Chrysostom, Cyril, Rupertus, Calovius, Glassius, Chemnitius, Lampe, Leigh, Nifanius, Cornelius á Lapide, Cocceius, Stier, and Bengel, that it means either, "I, and the Father," or "I, and the Holy Ghost," or "I, and both the Father and the Spirit."
(e) Some think, as Theophylact, Zwingli, Poole, and Doddridge, that our Lord only means Himself when He says "We," and that He uses the plural number in order to give weight and dignity to what He says, as kings do. So also He says, "Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it?" (Mark, iv.30.) "We," in that text, evidently stands for "I." In St. John's First Epistle, the first person plural is used instead of the singular repeatedly in the first five verses of the first chapter.

The last of these five opinions appears to me by far the most probable and satisfactory. The first three seem to me to be entirely overthrown by John the Baptist's words in this chapter (verse 32), where he mentions it as a peculiar mark of our Lord's superiority to all other teachers that "He testifies what He has seen and heard." The fourth opinion appears to me untenable. The fear of Socinianism must not make us wrest texts in order to apply them to the Trinity. There is a fitness in our Lord's saying, during His earthly ministry after his Incarnation, "I speak and testify what I have known and seen from all eternity with my Father." But there is no apparent

fitness in saying that He and the two other Persons in the Trinity "speak what they have seen."

The meaning of the sentence appears to be this: "I declare with authority and bear witness to truths which from all eternity I have known and seen, as God in union with the Father and the Holy Ghost. I do not speak (as all merely human ministers must) what I have been taught by others. I do not testify things which I have received as God's servant, as ordinary Prophets have, and which I should not have known without God's inspiration. I testify what I have seen with my Father and knew before the world began." It is like the expression, "I speak that which I have seen with my Father." (John viii.38.)

Melancthon thinks that our Lord, in this verse, contrasts the uncertain traditions and human inventions which the Pharisees taught with the sure, certain, and irrefragable truths of God which He came to preach. Bucer remarks that the verse contains a practical lesson for all religious teachers. No man has a right to teach unless he is thoroughly persuaded of the truth of what he teaches.

[*Ye do not receive our witness*.] This sentence corresponds so exactly with John the Baptist's words at verse 32, that it confirms me in the opinion that our Lord, in this verse, only speaks of Himself. The words before us, as well as those of John the Baptist, must be taken with some qualification: "The greater part of you receive not our testimony." The object of the verse is to rebuke the unbelief of

Nicodemus and all who were like-minded with him among the Jews. The use of the plural number "Ye" makes it probable that our Lord in this verse refers not merely to what He had just been saying to Nicodemus, but to all His public teaching at Jerusalem from the time of His casting out the buyers and sellers in the temple. If we do not adopt this theory, we must suppose Him to mean, "What I have spoken and testified to you about regeneration, is what I continually say to all who come, like you, to inquire of Me; and yet neither you nor they believe what I say. You all alike stumble at this stumbling-stone, the new birth."

Calvin remarks on this expression that we ought never to be surprised at unbelief. If men would not receive Christ's testimony, it is no wonder if they will not receive ours.

12.—[If I have told...earthly...heavenly things?] To see the full force of this verse, we should paraphrase it thus: "If ye do not believe what I say when I tell you, as I have done, things that are earthly, how will ye believe if I go on, as I shall do, to tell you of things that are heavenly? If ye will not believe when ye hear my first lesson, what will ye do when ye hear my second? If ye are stumbled at the very alphabet of my Gospel, what will ye do when I proceed to show you higher and deeper truths?" The difficulty of the verse lies in the two expressions, "earthly things" and "heavenly things." Our Lord does not explain them, and we are therefore left to conjecture their true meaning. I offer the following explanation with some diffidence, as the most satisfactory one. By "earthly things" I believe our Lord

means the doctrine of the “new birth,” which He had just been expounding to Nicodemus. By “heavenly things” I believe He means the great and solemn truths which He was about immediately to declare, and which He does declare in rapid succession from this verse down to the end of the conversation. These truths were His own divinity, the plan of redemption by His own death on the cross, the love of God to the whole world and His consequent provision of salvation, faith in the Son of God as the only way to escape hell, and man’s willful rejection of light, the only cause of man’s condemnation.

But why does our Lord call the new birth an “earthly thing”? I reply, that He does so because it is an “earthly” thing compared with His own divinity and atonement. Regeneration is a thing that takes place in man here upon earth. The atonement is a transaction that was done for man, and of which the special effect is on man’s position before God in heaven. In regeneration God comes down to man and dwells in him upon earth. In the atonement Christ takes up man’s nature as man’s representative, and as man’s forerunner goes up into heaven. Regeneration is a change of which even the men of this world have some faint inkling, and which can be illustrated by such earthly figures as water and wind. Almost everyone allows, as Bucer remarks, that he is not so good as he should be, and that he needs some change to fit him for heaven. Christ’s divinity, and the incarnation, and the atonement, and justification by faith, are such high and heavenly things, that man has no natural conception of them. Regeneration is so far an “earthly” idea that even irreligious

men borrow the word, and talk of regenerating nations and society. Salvation by faith in Christ's blood is so entirely a "heavenly thing," that it is constantly misunderstood, hated, and sneered at by unconverted men. When therefore our Lord calls the new birth an "earthly thing," we must understand that He does so comparatively. In itself the new birth is a high, holy, and "heavenly thing." But compared with the doctrine of the incarnation and the atonement, it is an "earthly thing."

13.—[*And no man has ascended, etc.*] This verse, according to my view, contains the first "heavenly thing" which our Lord displays to Nicodemus. But the sentence is undeniably a difficult one, and commentators differ widely as to its meaning.

Some think, as Calvin, Musculus, Bullinger, Hutcheson, Poole, Quesnel, Schottgen, Dyke, Lightfoot, Leigh, Doddridge, A. Clark, and Stier, that our Lord here shows to Nicodemus, in highly figurative language, the necessity of divine teaching in order to understand spiritual truth. "No child of Adam has ever reached the lofty mysteries of heaven, and made himself acquainted with its high and holy truth, by his own natural understanding. Such knowledge is only possessed by the incarnate Savior, the Son of man, who has come down from heaven. If you would know spiritual truth, you must sit at His feet and learn of Him." This view of the text is supported by Prov. xxx.34. According to this view, the verse must be taken in close connection with the preceding one, where the ignorance of Nicodemus is exposed.

Some think, as Zwingli, Melancthon, Brentius, Aretius, Flacius, and Ferus, that our Lord here shows to Nicodemus (and again in highly figurative language), the impossibility of human merit, and the utter inability of man justifying himself and obtaining an entrance into heaven by his own righteousness. “No one can possibly ascend into God’s presence in heaven and stand perfect and complete before Him, except the incarnate Savior who has come down from heaven to fulfill all righteousness. I am the way to heaven. If you would enter heaven, you must believe on the Son of man, and become a member of His body by faith.” This view of the text appeals for support to Rom. x.6-9. According to this view, the verse must be taken in close connection with the following verse, in which the way of justification is explained.

The true view of the text, I venture to think, is as follows. The words of the text are to be taken literally. Our Lord begins His list of “heavenly things” by declaring to Nicodemus His own divine nature and dignity. He reminds him that no one has ever ascended literally into that heaven where God dwells. Enoch, Eljah, and David, for instance, were doubtless in a place of bliss when they left this world, but they had not “ascended into heaven.” (Acts ii.34.) But that which no man, not even the holiest saint, had attained, was the right and prerogative of Him in whose company Nicodemus was. The Son of man had dwelt from all eternity in heaven, had come down from heaven, would one day ascend again into heaven, and in His divine nature was actually in heaven, one with God the Father, at that very

moment. “Know who it is to whom you are speaking. I am not merely a teacher come from God, as you. I am the Messiah, the Son of man foretold by Daniel. I have come down from heaven according to promise, to save sinners. I shall one day ascend again into heaven as the victorious forerunner of a saved people. Above all, I am as God in heaven at this moment. I am He who fills heaven and earth.” I prefer this view of the verse to any other, for two reasons. For one thing, it gives a literal meaning to every word in the text. For another, it seems a fitting answer to the first idea which Nicodemus had put forward in the conversation, viz., that our Lord was only “a teacher come from God.” It is the view which is in the main held by Rollock, Calovius, and Gomarus, and expounded by them with much ability.

The Greek word which we render “but,” I am inclined to think ought to be taken in an *adversative* rather than in an *exceptive* sense. Instances of this usage will be found in Matt. xii.4; Mark xiii.32; Luke iv.26,27; John xvii.12; Rev. ix.4; xxi.27. The thought appears to be, “Man has not, and cannot ascend into heaven. But that which man cannot do, I the Son of man can do.”

“Heaven” throughout this verse must be taken in the sense of that immediate and peculiar presence of God, which we can conceive of and express in no other form than by the word “heaven.”

The expression “who is in heaven” deserves particular notice. It is one of those many expressions in the New Testament which can be explained in no other way than by the doctrine of Christ’s divinity. It

would be utterly absurd and untrue to say of any mere man, that at the very time he was speaking to anther on earth he was in heaven! But it can be said of Christ with perfect truth and propriety. He never ceased to be very God when He became incarnate. He was “with God and was God.” As God, He was in heaven while He was speaking to Nicodemus.

The expression is one which no Socinian can explain away. If Christ was only a very holy man and nothing more, He could not have used these words. The Socinian explanation of the former part of the verse, viz., that Christ was caught up into heaven after His baptism and there instructed about the Gospel He was to teach, would be of itself utterly absurd, and a mere theory invented to get over a difficulty. But the conclusion of the verse is a blow at the very root of the Socinian system. It is written not only that Christ “came down from heaven,” but that “He is in heaven.” It admits of a question whether the Greek words which we translate “who is,” do not, both here and in chap. i.18, point to that peculiar name of Jehovah, which was doubtless familiar to Nicodemus, “The Ever-existing One; the Living One.” It is the same phrase which forms part of Christ’s name in Revelation, “Him who is.” (Rev. i.4.)

Much of the difficulty of the verse is removed by remembering that the past tense, “has ascended,” admits of being rendered with equal grammatical correctness, “does ascend, can ascend, or will ascend.” Pearce takes this view and quotes in support of it John i.26; iii.18; v.24; vi.69; xi.27; xx.29.

Whitby thinks that throughout this verse our Lord has in view a Rabbinical tradition—that Moses had been into heaven to receive the law—and that He declares the falsehood of this tradition by saying, "No man, not even Moses, had ascended into heaven."

14.—[As Moses lifted…serpent…so must, etc.] In this verse our Lord proceeds to show Nicodemus another "heavenly thing," viz., the necessity of His own crucifixion. Nicodemus probably thought, like most Jews, that when Messiah appeared He would come with power and glory, to be exalted and honored by men. Jesus tells him that so far from this being the case, Messiah must be "cut off" at His first advent, and put to an open shame by being hanged on a tree. He illustrates this by a well-known event in the history of Israel's wanderings—the story of the brazen serpent. (Num. xxi.9.) "Are you expecting Me to take to myself power and to restore the kingdom of Israel? Cast away such a vain expectation. I have come to do very different work. I have come to suffer, and to offer up myself as a sacrifice for sin."

The mention of Moses, of whom the Pharisees thought so much, was eminently calculated to arrest the attention of Nicodemus. "Even Moses, in whom ye trust, has supplied a most vivid type of my great work on earth—the crucifixion."

[*The Son of Man must be lifted up*.] The expression "Son of Man," was doubtless intended to remind Nicodemus of Daniel's prophecy of the Messiah. The Greek word rendered "must" signifies "it behooves that," "it is necessary that." It is necessary in order that God's

promises of a Redeemer may be fulfilled, the type of the Old Testament sacrifices be accomplished, the law of God be satisfied, and a way for God's mercy be provided. In order to all this, Messiah must suffer in our stead. The phrase "lifted up," appears to me most decidedly to mean "lifted up on the cross." For one thing, we find it so explained in this Gospel. (John xii.32,33.) For another, the illustration of the brazen serpent makes it absolutely necessary to explain it so. To apply the phrase, as Calvin and others do, to the "necessity of lifting up and exalting Christ's atonement in Christian teaching," seems to me a mistake. It is needlessly dragging in an idea which the words were not intended to convey. It is truth no doubt, and truth abundantly taught in Scripture, but not the truth of this text.

The main points of resemblance in the comparison "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness," form a subject which requires careful handling. The lifting up of the serpent of brass for the relief of Israel when bitten by serpents is evidently selected by our Lord as an apt illustration of His own crucifixion for sinners. But how far may we press this illustration? Where are we to stop? What are the exact points at which the type and antitype meet? These questions require consideration. Some see a meaning in the "brass" of which the serpent was made, as a shining metal, a strong metal, etc. I cannot see it. Our Lord does not even mention the brass.

Some see in the "serpent" hanging on the pole a type of the devil, the old serpent, bruised by Christ's death on the cross and openly triumphed over on it. (Col. ii.15.) I cannot see this at all. It appears to

me to confound and mingle up two Scriptural truths which ought to be kept distinct. Moreover, there is something revolting in the idea that in order to be healed the Israelite had to look at a figure of the devil. Some see in "Moses" lifting up the serpent a type of the law of God requiring payment of its demands, and becoming the cause of Christ dying on the cross. On this I will content myself with saying that I am not satisfied that this idea was in Christ's mind.

The points of resemblance appear to me to be these:
(a) As the Israelites were in sore distress and dying from the bites of poisonous serpents, so is man in great spiritual danger and dying from the poisonous effects of sin.
(b) As the serpent of brass was lifted up on a pole in the sight of the camp of Israel, so Christ was to be lifted up on the cross publicly, and in the sight of the whole nation, at the Passover.
(c) As the serpent, lifted up on the pole, was an image of the very thing which had poisoned the Israelites, even so Christ had in Himself no sin, and yet was made and crucified "in the likeness of sinful flesh," and counted sin. (Rom. viii.3.) The brazen serpent was a serpent without poison, and Christ was a man without sin. The thing which we should specially see in Christ crucified is our sin laid upon Him, and Him counted as a sinner and treated as a sinner and punished as a sinner for our redemption. In fact, we see on the cross our sins punished, crucified, borne, and carried by our Redeemer.
(d) Finally, as the one way by which Israelites obtained relief from the brazen serpent was by looking at it, so the one way to get benefit from Christ is to look at Him by faith. The feeblest look brought cure

to an Israelite, and the weakest faith, if true and sincere, brings salvation to sinners.

It should be carefully noted that it seems impossible to reconcile this verse with that modern divinity which can see nothing in Christ's death but a great act of self-sacrifice, and which denies Christ's substitution for us on the cross and the imputation of our sins to Him. Such divinity withers up such a verse as this entirely, and cuts out the life, heart, and marrow of its meaning. Unless words are most violently wrested from their ordinary signification, the illustration before us points directly towards two great truths of the Gospel. One of them is that Christ's death upon the cross was meant to have a medicinal, health-conferring effect upon our souls, and that there was something in it far above a mere martyr's example. The other truth is that when Christ died upon the cross, He was dealt with as our Substitute and Representative, and punished through the imputation of our sins, in our place. The thing that Israel saw on the pole and from which they got health, was an image of the very serpent that bit them. The object that Christians should see on the cross is a Divine Person—made sin and a curse for them, and allowing that very sin that has poisoned the world to be imputed to Him, and laid upon His head. It is easy work to sneer at the *words* "vicarious sacrifice," and "imputed merit," as nowhere to be found in Scripture. But it is not so easy to disprove the fact that the *ideas* are constantly to be met with in the Bible. The use of the brazen serpent in this verse, as an illustration of Christ's death and its purpose, must not be abused and made an excuse for turning every incident of the

history of Israel in the wilderness into an allegory. It is very important not to attach an allegorical meaning to Bible facts without authority. Such things as the manna, the smitten rock, and the brazen serpent, are allegorized for us by the Holy Ghost. But where the Holy Ghost has not pointed out any allegory, we ought to be very cautious in our assertions that allegory exits. Bucer's remarks on this subject deserve reading.

15.—[That whosoever believes...not perish...life.] In this verse our Lord declares to Nicodemus the great end and purpose for which the Son of man was to be "lifted up" on the cross, and the way in which the benefits of His crucifixion become our own. In interpreting the verse, we should carefully remember that the comparison of the serpent lifted up in the wilderness must be carried through to the end of the sentence. The Son of man must be lifted up on the cross, that whosoever believes on Him, or looks to Him by faith, as the Israelite looked to the brazen serpent, should not perish in hell.

The expression "whosoever" deserves special notice. It might have been equally well translated "every one." It is intended to show us the width and breadth of Christ's offers of salvation. They are for "every one," without exception, who "believes."

The expression, "believes in Him," is deeply important. It describes that one act of man's soul which is needful to give him an interest in Jesus Christ. It is not a mere belief of the head that there is such a Person as Jesus Christ, and that He is a Savior. It is a belief of the

heart and will. When a person—feeling his desperate need by reason of sin—flees to Jesus Christ and trusts in Him, leans on Him, and commits his soul entirely to Him as his Savior and Redeemer, he is said (in the language of the text) to "believe on Him." The simpler our views of faith are, the better. The more steadily we keep in view the Israelites looking at the brazen serpent, the more we shall understand the words before us. "Believing" is neither more nor less than heart looking. Whosoever looked at the brazen serpent was made well, however ill he was, and however feeble his look. Just so, whosoever looks to Jesus by faith is pardoned, however great his sins may have been, and however feeble his faith. Did the Israelite *look?* That was the only question in the matter of being healed from the serpent's bite. Does the sinner *believe?* That is the only question in the matter of being justified and pardoned. Looking to Moses or looking to the tabernacle or looking even to the pole on which the serpent hung, or looking to anything except the brazen serpent, the bitten Israelite would not have been cured. Just so, looking to anything but Christ crucified, however holy the object looked at may be, the sinner cannot be saved. The expression "should not perish but have eternal life," is peculiarly strong. As the Israelite who looked to the brazen serpent not only did not die of his wound, but recovered complete health, so the sinner who looks to Jesus not only escapes hell and condemnation, but has a seed of eternal life at once put in his heart, receives a complete title to an eternal life of glory and blessedness in heaven, and enters into that life after death. The salvation of the Gospel is exceedingly full. It is not merely being pardoned. It is being counted completely righteous and made a

citizen of heaven. It is not merely an escape from hell, but the reception of a title to heaven. It has been well remarked that the Old Testament generally promised only "length of days," but the Gospel promises "everlasting life."

16.—[*For God so loved the world, etc.*] Our Lord, in this verse, shows Nicodemus another "heavenly thing." Nicodemus probably thought, like many Jews, that God's purposes of mercy were entirely confined to His chosen people Israel, and that when Messiah appeared He would appear only for the special benefit of the Jewish nation. Our Lord here declares to him that God loves all the world, without any exception; that the Messiah, the only begotten Son of God, is the Father's gift to the whole family of Adam; and that every one, whether Jew or Gentile, who believes on Him for salvation, may have eternal life. A more startling declaration to the ears of a rigid Pharisee it is impossible to conceive! A more wonderful verse is not to be found in the Bible! That God should love such a wicked world as this and not hate it,—that He should love it so as to provide salvation,—that in order to provide salvation He should give, not an angel, or any created being, but such a priceless gift as His only-begotten Son,—that this great salvation should be freely offered to every one that believes,—all, all this is wonderful indeed! This was indeed a "heavenly thing." The words, "God loved the world," have received two very different interpretations. The importance of the subject in the present day makes it desirable to state both views fully.

Some think, as Hutcheson, Lampe, and Gill, that the "world" here

means God's elect out of every nation, whether Jews or Gentiles, and that the "love" with which God is said to love them is that eternal love with which the elect were loved before the creation began, and by which their calling, justification, preservation, and final salvation are completely secured. This view, though supported by many and great divines, does not appear to me to be our Lord's meaning. For one thing, it seems to me a violent straining of language to confine the word "world" to the elect. "The world" is undoubtedly a name sometimes given to the "wicked" exclusively. But I cannot see that it is a name ever given to the saints. For another thing, to interpret the word "world" of the elect only is to ignore the distinction which, to my eyes, is plainly drawn in the text between the whole of mankind and those out of mankind who "believe." If the "world" means only the believing portion of mankind, it would have been quite enough to say, "God so loved the world, that he gave His only-begotten Son, that the world should not perish." But our Lord does not say so. He says, "that whosoever believes, *i.e.,* that whosoever out of the world believes." Lastly, to confine God's love to the elect is taking a harsh and narrow view of God's character, and fairly lays Christianity open to the modern charges brought against it as cruel and unjust to the ungodly. If God takes no thought for any but His elect, and cares for none beside, how shall God judge the world? I believe in the electing love of God the Father as strongly as anyone. I regard the special love with which God loves the sheep whom He has given to Christ from all eternity as a most blessed and comfortable truth, and one most cheering and profitable to believers. I only say that it is not the truth of this text. The true view of the words, "God loved the world," I

believe to be this. The “world” means the whole race of mankind, both saints and sinners, without any exception. The word, in my opinion, is so used in John i.10,29; vi.33,51; viii.12; Rom. iii.19; 2 Cor. v.19; 1 John ii.2; iv.14. The “love” spoken of is that love of pity and compassion with which God regards all his Creatures, and specially regards mankind. It is the same feeling of “love” which appears in Psalm cxlv.9, Ezek. xxxiii.11, John vi.32, Titus iii.4, 1 John iv.10, 2 Pet. iii.9, 1 Tim. ii.4. It is a love unquestionably distinct and separate from the special love with which God regards His saints. It is a love of pity and not of approbation or complaisance. But it is not the less a real love. It is a love which clears God of injustice in judging the world.

I am quite familiar with the objections commonly brought against the theory I have just propounded. I find no weight in them, and am not careful to answer them. Those who confine God’s love exclusively to the elect appear to me to take a narrow and contracted view of God’s character and attributes. They refuse to God that attribute of compassion with which even an earthly father can regard a profligate son, and can offer to him pardon even though his compassion is despised and his offers refused. I have long come to the conclusion that men may be more systematic in their statements than the Bible, and may be led into grave error by idolatrous veneration of a system. The following quotations from one whom for convenience sake I must call a thorough Calvinist, I mean Bishop Davenant, will show that the view I advocate is not new.

“The general love of God toward mankind is so clearly testified in Holy Scripture, and so demonstrated by the manifold effects of God’s goodness and mercy extended to every particular man in this world, that to doubt thereof were infidelity, and to deny it plain blasphemy.” *-Davenant’s Answer to Hoard, p.1.*

“God hates nothing which Himself created. And yet it is most true that He hates sin in any creature, and hates the creature infected with sin, in such manner as hatred may be attributed to God. But for all this, He so generally loved mankind, fallen in Adam, that He has given His only begotten Son, that what sinner soever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. And this everlasting life is so provided for man by God, that no decrees of His can bring any man thither without faith and repentance; and no decrees of His can keep any man out who repents and believes. As for the measure of God’s love exhibited in the external effect unto man, it must not be denied that God pours out His grace more abundantly on some men than on others, and works more powerfully and effectually in the hearts of some men than of others, and that out of His alone will and pleasure. But yet, when this more special love is not extended, His less special love is not restrained to outward and temporal mercies, but reaches to internal and spiritual blessings, even such as will bring men to an eternal blessedness, if their voluntary wickedness hinders *not.”—Davenant’s Answer to Hoard, p. 469.*

“No divine of the Reformed Church, of sound judgment, will deny a general intention or appointment concerning the salvation of all men

individually by the death of Christ, on the condition if they should believe. For the intention or appointment of God is general, and is plainly revealed in holy Scripture, although the absolute and not to be frustrated intention of God concerning the gift of faith and eternal life to some persons, is special, and limited to the elect alone. So I have maintained and do maintain."—
Davenant's Opinion on the Gallican Controversy.

Calvin observes on this text, "Christ brought life, because the heavenly Father loves the human race, and wishes that they should not perish." Again he says, "Christ employed the universal term *whosoever,* both to invite indiscriminately all to partake of life, and to cut off every excuse from unbelievers. Such also is the import of the term *world*. Though there is nothing in the world that is worthy of God's favor, yet He shows Himself to be reconciled to the whole world, when He invites all men without exception to the faith of Christ."

The same view of God's "love" and the "world," in this text, is taken by Brentius, Bucer, Calovius, Glassius, Chemnitius, Musculus, Bullinger, Bengel, Nifanius, Dyke, Scott, Henry, and Manton. The little word "so," in this verse, has called forth many remarks, on account of its depth of meaning. It doubtless signifies "so greatly, so much, so dearly." Bishop Sanderson, quoted by Ford, observes, "How much that 'so' contains, no tongue or wit of man can reach: nothing expresses it better to the life, than the work itself does."

[*That He gave His only-begotten Son.*] The gift of Christ, be it here noted, is the result of God's love to the world, and not the cause. To say that God loves us because Christ died for us is wretched theology indeed. But to say that Christ came into the world in consequence of the love of God is scriptural truth.

The expression, "He gave," is a remarkable one. Christ is God the Father's gift to a lost and sinful world. He was given generally to be the Savior, the Redeemer, the Friend of sinners,—to make an atonement sufficient for all—and to provide a redemption large enough for all. To effect this, the Father freely gave Him up to be despised, rejected, mocked, crucified, and counted guilty and accursed for our sakes. It is written that He was "delivered for our offenses," and that "God spared Him not, but delivered Him up for us all." (Rom. iv.25; viii.32.) Christ is the "gift of God," spoken of to the Samaritan woman (John iv.10), and the "unspeakable gift" spoken of by St. Paul. (2 Cor. ix.15.) He Himself says to the wicked Jews, "My Father *gives you* the true bread from heaven." (John vi.32.) This last text, be it noted, was one with which Erskine silenced the General Assembly in Scotland, when he was accused of offering Christ too freely to sinners. It should be observed that our Lord calls Himself "the only-begotten Son of God" in this verse. In the verse but one before this, He called Himself the "Son of man." Both the names were used in order to impress upon the mind of Nicodemus the two natures of Messiah. He was not only the Son of man but the Son of God. But it is striking to remark that precisely the same words are

used in both places about faith in Christ. If we would be saved, we must believe in Him both as the Son of man and the Son of God.

[*That whosoever believes…life.*] These words are exactly the same as those in the preceding verse. Why our translators should have rendered the same Greek word by "everlasting" in one place and "eternal" in the other, it is hard to say. In Matt. xxv.46, they did just the same. The repetition of this glorious saying "whosoever believes" is very instructive. For one thing, it serves to show that mighty and broad as is the love of God, it will prove useless to every one who does not believe in Christ. God loves all the world, but God will save none in the world who refuse to believe in His only-begotten Son. For another thing, it shows us the great point to which every Christian should direct his attention. He must see to it that he believes on Christ. It is mere waste of time to be constantly asking ourselves whether God loves us, and whether Christ died for us; and it argues gross ignorance of Scripture to trouble ourselves with such questions. The Bible never tells men to look at these questions, but commands them to believe. Salvation, it always teaches, does not turn on the point, "Did Christ die for me?" but on the point, "Do I believe on Christ." If men do not "have eternal life," it is never because God did not love them, or because Christ was not given for them, but because they do not believe on Christ.

In leaving this verse, I may remark that the idea maintained by Erasmus, Olshausen, Wetstein, Rosenmuller, and others, that it does not contain our Lord's words, and that from this verse down to the

21st we have St. John's comments or observations, appears to me utterly destitute of foundation and unsupported by a single argument worth noticing. That our Lord would not have used the third person in speaking of Himself is no argument. We find Him frequently speaking of Himself in the third person. See for instance John v.19,29. There is literally nothing to be gained by adopting the theory, while it contradicts the common belief of nearly all believers in every age of the world.

Flacius observes that this verse and the two preceding ones comprise all the causes of justification: (1) the remote and efficient cause, God's love; (2) the approximate efficient cause, the gift of God's Son; (3) the material cause, Christ's exaltation on the cross; (4) the instrumental cause, faith; (5) the final cause, eternal life.

17.—[*God did not send…condemn the world.*] In this verse our Lord shows Nicodemus another "heavenly thing." He shows him the main object of Messiah coming into the world. It was not to judge men, but to die for them; not to condemn, but to save.

I have a strong impression that when our Lord spoke these words, He had in view the prophecy of David about Messiah bruising the nations with a rod of iron, and Daniel's prophecy about the judgment, where he speaks of the thrones being cast down, and the Ancient of Days judging the world. (Ps. ii.6-9; Dan. vii.9-22.) I think that Nicodemus, like most Jews, was filled with the expectation that when Messiah came He would come with power and great glory, and

judge all men. Our Lord corrects this notion in this verse. He declares that Messiah's first advent was not to judge, but to save people from their sins. He says in another place, "I came not to judge the world, but to save the world." (John xii.47.) The Greek word for judging and condemning, it must be remembered, is one and the same. Judgment and the condemnation of the ungodly, our Lord would have us know, are not the work of the first advent, but of the second. The special work of the first advent was to seek and save that which was lost.

[*That the world...saved.*] This sentence must clearly be interpreted with some qualification. It would contradict other plain texts of Scripture if we took it to mean, "God sent His Son into the world, that all the world might finally be saved through Him, and none be lost." In fact, our Lord Himself declares in the very next verse, that "He that believes not is *condemned* already."

The meaning of the sentence evidently is, that "all the world might have a door of salvation opened through Christ, that salvation might be provided for all the world, and that so anyone in the world believing on Christ might be saved." In this view, it is like the expression of St. John, "The Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world." (1 John iv.14.) The expression, "God has sent," in this verse, ought not to be overlooked. It is very frequently applied, in St. John's Gospel, to our Lord. At least thirty-eight times we find Him speaking of Himself as Him "whom God has sent." It is probably from this expression that St. Paul derives the peculiar name which he

gives to our Lord, “The Apostle of our profession.” (Heb. iii.1.) The Apostle means simply, “The sent one.” The readiness of natural man everywhere to regard Christ as a Judge much more than as a Savior is a curious fact. The whole system of the Roman Catholic Church is full of the idea. People are taught to be afraid of Christ, and to flee to the Virgin Mary! Ignorant Protestants are not much better. They often regard Christ as a kind of Judge, whose demands they will have to satisfy at the last day, much more than as a present personal Savior and Friend. Our Lord seems to foresee this error, and to correct it in the words of this text.

Calvin observes on this verse: “Whenever our sins press us, whenever Satan would drive us to despair, we ought to hold out this shield—that God is unwilling that we should be overwhelmed with everlasting destruction, because He has appointed His Son to be the salvation of the world.”

18.—[*He who believes in Him is not condemned.*] In this verse our Lord shows Nicodemus another “heavenly thing.” He declares the privileges of believing, and the peril of not believing in the Son of God. Nicodemus had addressed Him as a “teacher come from God.” He would have Nicodemus know that He was that high and holy One, to believe on whom was life eternal, and not to believe on whom was everlasting destruction. Life or death was before men. If they believed and received Him as the Messiah, they would be saved. If they believed not, they would die in their sins. The expression, “He that believes,” deserves special notice. It is the third time that our

Lord speaks of "believing" on Himself, and the consequence of believing, within four verses. It shows the immense importance of faith in the sinner's justification. It is that one thing, without which eternal life cannot be had. It shows the amazing graciousness of the Gospel, and its admirable suitableness to the wants of human nature. A man may have been the worst of sinners, but if he will only "believe," he is at once pardoned. Last, but not least, it shows the need of clear, distinct views of the nature of saving faith, and the importance of keeping it entirely distinct from works of any kind, in the matter of justification. Faith, and faith only, gives an interest in Christ. The old sentence of Luther's days is perfectly true, paradoxical and startling as it may sound: "The faith which justifies is not the faith which includes charity, but the faith which lays hold on Christ." The expression, "is not condemned," is equivalent to saying, "he is pardoned, acquitted, justified, cleared from all guilt, delivered from the curse of a broken law, no longer counted a sinner, but reckoned perfectly righteous in the sight of God." The *presentness* of the phrase, if one may coin a word, should be specially noticed. It is not said that the believer "shall not be condemned at the last day," but that "he is not condemned." The very moment a sinner believes on Christ, his iniquities are taken away, and he is counted righteous. "All that believe are justified from all things." (Acts xiii.39.)

[*He who does not…already.*] This sentence means that the man who refuses to believe on Christ is in a state of condemnation before God, even while he lives. The curse of a broken law, which we all deserve,

is upon him. His sins are upon his head. He is reckoned guilty and dead before God, and there is but a step between him and hell. Faith takes all a man's sins away. Unbelief keeps them all on him. Through faith a man is made an heir of heaven, though kept outside till he dies. Through unbelief a man is already a subject of the devil, though not yet entirely in his power and within hell. The moment a man believes, all charges are completely wiped away from his name. So long as a man does not believe, his sins cover him over and make him abominable before God, and the just wrath of God abides upon him.

Melancthon remarks that the sentence of God's condemnation, which was passed at the beginning— "Thou shalt surely die"— remains in full force and unrepealed against every one who does not believe on Christ. No new condemnation is needful. Every man or woman who does not believe is under the curse and condemned already.

[Because...not believed...name... Son of God.] This sentence is justly thought to prove that no sin is so great, and so damning and ruinous to the soul, as unbelief. In one sense it is the only unpardonable sin. All other sins may be forgiven, however many and great, and a man may stand complete before God. But if a man will not believe on Christ, there is no hope for him; and if he persists in his unbelief, he cannot be saved. Nothing is so provoking and offensive to God as to refuse the glorious salvation He has provided at so mighty a cost, by the death of His only begotten Son. Nothing is so suicidal on the part of man as to turn away from the only remedy which can heal his soul.

Other sins may be scarlet, filthy, and abominable. But not to believe on Christ is to bar the door in our own way, and to cut off ourselves entirely from heaven. It has been truly remarked that it was a greater sin in Judas Iscariot not to believe on Christ for pardon, after he had betrayed Him, than to betray Him into the hands of His enemies. To betray Him no doubt was an act of enormous covetousness, wickedness, and ingratitude. But not to seek Him afterwards by faith for pardon, was to disbelieve His mercy, love, and power to save. The expression, "the name," as the object of faith, is explained in chap. i.12. Here, as frequently, it stands for the attributes, character, and office of the Son of God.

Luther, quoted by Brown, remarks: "Henceforward, he who is condemned must not complain of Adam and his inborn sin. The seed of the woman, promised by God to bruise the head of the serpent, is now come, and has atoned for sin and taken away condemnation. But he must cry out against himself for not having accepted and believed in the Christ, the devil's head-bruiser and sin-strangler. If I do not believe the same, sin and condemnation must continue."

19.—[*This is the condemnation, etc.*] In this verse our Lord shows Nicodemus one more "heavenly thing." He unfolds to him the true cause of the ruin of those who are lost. Primarily, I think, our Lord had in view the unbelieving Jews of His own day, and the real reason of their rejection of Himself. It was not that there was any lack of evidence of His Messiahship. They had evidence enough and to spare. The real reason was that they had no mind to give up their

sins. Secondarily, I think, our Lord had in view the future history of all Christians, and the true cause of the ruin of all who are not saved in every age. It is not because there is any lack of light to guide men to heaven. It is not because God is lacking in love and unwilling to save. The real reason is that men in every age love their own sins, and will not come to Christ that they may be delivered from them.

The expression, "this is the condemnation," is evidently very elliptical, and the full meaning must be supplied. It is probably equivalent to saying "this is the cause of the condemnation, this is the true account of it." The following elliptical expressions are somewhat similar, and all found in St. John's 1st Epistle. "This is the promise," "This is the love of God," "This is the victory," "This is the confidence." (1 John ii.25; v.4-14.) [*That light is come into the world.*] It is a question in this sentence whether "light" means Christ Himself or the light of Christ's Gospel. I am inclined to think that our Lord meant to include both ideas. He has come as a light into the world, and the Gospel that He has brought with Him is, like its author, a strong contrast to the ignorance and wickedness of the earth.

[*Men loved darkness rather than light.*] The darkness in this sentence means moral darkness and mental darkness—sin, ignorance, superstition, and irreligion. Men cannot come to Christ and receive His Gospel without parting with all this, and they love it too well to part with it. [*Because their deeds were evil.*] This sentence means that their habits of life were wicked, and any

doctrine which necessitated a change of these habits they naturally hated.

Throughout this verse I am inclined to think that the past tense, “loved,” ought to be taken in a present sense (proleptically, to use a grammarian’s phrase), as is frequently the case in the New Testament. (See John xv.8, and Rom. viii.30.) The meaning will then be, “Men have loved, do love, and always will love darkness, on consequence of the corruption of human nature, as long as the world stands.” The sentence then becomes a solemn description of a state of things which was not only to be seen among the Jews while our Lord was on earth, but would be seen everywhere to the end of time.

The verse is one which deserves special notice because of the deep mystery it unfolds. It tells us the true reason why men miss heaven and are lost in hell. The origin of evil we are not told. The reason why evil men are lost, we are told plainly. There is not a word about any decree of God predestinating men to destruction. There is not a syllable about anything deficient or lacking either in God’s love or in Christ’s atonement. On the contrary, our Lord tell us that “light has come into the world,” that God has revealed enough of the way of salvation to make men inexcusable if they are not saved. But the real account of the matter is that men have naturally no will or inclination to use the light. They love their own dark and corrupt ways more than the ways which God proposes to them. They therefore reap the fruit of their own ways, and will have at last what they loved. They loved darkness, and they will be cast into outer

darkness. They did not like the light, and so they will be shut out from light eternally. In short, lost souls will be what they willed to be, and will have what they loved.

The words, “because their deeds were evil,” are very instructive. They teach us that where men have no love to Christ and His Gospel, and will not receive them, their lives and their works will prove at last to have been evil. Their habits of life may not be gross and immoral. They may be even comparatively decent and pure. But the last day will prove them to have been in reality “evil.” Pride of intellect, or selfishness, or love of man’s applause, or dislike to submission of will, or self-righteousness, or some other false principle will be found to have run through all their conduct. In one way or another, when men refuse to come to Christ, their deeds will always prove to be “evil.” Rejection of the Gospel will always be found to be connected with some moral obliquity. When Christ is refused, we may be quite sure that there is something or other in life or heart which is not right. If a man does not love light, his “deeds are evil.” Human eyes may not detect the flaw; but the eyes of an all-seeing God do.

The whole verse is a deeply humbling one. It shows the folly of all excuses for not receiving the Gospel, drawn from intellectual difficulties, from God’s predestination, from our own inability to change ourselves, or to see things with the eyes of others. All such excuses are scattered to the winds by this solemn verse. People do not come to Christ and do continue unconverted just because they do not wish and want to come to Christ. They love something else better

than the light. The elect of God prove themselves to be elect by "choosing" the things which are according to God's mind. The wicked prove themselves to be only fit for destruction by "choosing, loving, and following" the things which must lead to destruction.
Quesnel says on this verse, "The greatest misfortune of men does not consist in their being subject to sin, corruption, and blindness; but in their rejecting the Deliverer, the Physician, and the Light itself."

20.—[*Everyone that does evil, etc.*] This verse and the following one form a practical application of all that our Lord has been saying to Nicodemus, and are also a logical consequence of the preceding verse. Like the preceding verse, these two verses apply primarily to the Jews in our Lord's day, and secondarily to every nation to which the light of the Gospel comes. They are a most remarkable appeal to an inquirer's conscience, and supply a most searching test of the sincerity of a man in Nicodemus' state of mind.

The words "everyone that does evil," mean every unconverted person, everyone whose heart is not right and honest in God's sight, and whose actions are consequently evil, and ungodly. Every such person "hates the light, neither comes to the light." He cannot really love Christ and the Gospel, and will not honestly and with his whole heart seek Christ by faith and embrace His Gospel, until he is renewed. The reason of this is that every unconverted person shrinks from having his ungodliness exposed. He does not wish his wicked ways to be discovered and his utter lack of true righteousness and true preparedness for death, judgment, and eternity to be put to

shame. He does not like “his deeds to be reproved,” and therefore he shrinks from the light and keeps away from Christ. The application of this verse must doubtless be made with caution. In the case of many unconverted persons, its truth is plain as noonday. They love sin and hate true religion, and get away from the Gospel, the Bible, and religious people as much as they possibly can. In the case of others, its truth is not so apparent at first sight. There are many unconverted persons who profess to like the Gospel, and seem to have no prejudice against it and to hear it with pleasure, and yet remain unconverted. Yet even in the case of those persons the text would be found perfectly true if their hearts were really known. With all their seeming love to the light, they do not really love it with all their heart. There is something or other which they love better and which keeps them back from Christ. There is something or other which they do not want to give up and do not like to be discovered and reproved. Man’s eyes may not detect it, but the eyes of God can. The general principle of the text will be found true at last of every hearer of the Gospel who dies unconverted. He did not thoroughly love the light. He did not really want to be changed. He did not truly and honestly seek salvation. All this was true of the Jews in the time of Nicodemus, and it is no less true of all mankind to whom the Gospel comes in the present day. Right hearts will always come to Christ. If a man keeps away from the light, his heart is wrong. He is one who “does evil.” There is a curious difference between the Greek word translated “does” in this verse and the one translated “does” in the next verse. Stier and Alford think the difference instructive and meaningful. They say that the Greek word used for “does evil,”

means the habit of action without fruit or result. On the contrary, the Greek word for “doing truth,” signifies the true doing of good: good fruit, good that remains.

21.—[*He that does truth, etc.*] This verse, it is needless to say, is closely connected with the preceding one. The preceding verse describes the unconverted man. The verse before us describes the converted man. The expression, “He that does truth,” signifies the person whose heart is honest, the man who is truly converted, however weak and ignorant, and whose heart and actions are consequently true and right in the sight of God. The phrase is frequently found in St. John’s writings. (See John xviii.37; 1 John i.6-8; ii.4; iii.19; 2 John i.; 3 John iii.4.) Every such person will always come to Christ and embrace His Gospel, when it is brought near him. He will have an honest desire that “his deeds may be made manifest,” and that his real character may be discovered to himself and to others. He will have an honest wish to know whether his habits of life are really godly, or “wrought in God.”

The principle here laid down is of great importance, and experience shows that the assertion of the text is always confirmed by facts. I believe there was not a truly good man among the Jews in our Lord’s day who did not at once receive Christ and welcome Christ’s Gospel as soon as it was brought before him. Nathanael was an example. He was a man “who did truth” under the obscure light of the law of Moses, as ministered by Scribes and Pharisees. But the moment the Messiah was brought before him, he received Him and believed. So

also I believe, when the Gospel comes into a Church, a parish, or a congregation, it is always gladly received and embraced by any whose hearts are true. To be a truly godly man and yet to refuse to come to Christ is an impossibility. He that hears of Christ and does not come to Him and believe on Him as God's appointed way of salvation, has something fatally wrong about him. He is not really "doing truth." He is not a converted man. Gospel light is a mighty magnet. If there is anyone that has true religion within its sphere, it will attract to itself that person. To be truly religious and not to gravitate towards Him who is the great center of all light and truth is impossible. If a man refuses Christ, he cannot be a godly man.

The application of the last two verses to the case of Nicodemus and those Jews who were in the same state of mind as Nicodemus, is plain and obvious. Our Lord leaves on the Pharisee's mind a solemn and heart-searching conclusion. "Think not that you can stay away from Me after hearing this discourse and be saved. If you are a really earnest inquirer after truth, and your heart is honest and sincere, you must go on; you must come to the light and embrace the light, and you will do so, however great your present ignorance. If, on the other hand, you are not really desirous to serve God, you will prove it by keeping away from my Gospel and by not confessing Me as the Messiah." It is a pleasant reflection that after-events proved that Nicodemus was one who "did truth." He used the light our Lord graciously imparted to him. He came forward and spoke for Christ in the Council. And at last, when he boldly helped to bury Christ, he made it manifest to all Israel that "his deeds were wrought in God."

Let it be noted that the two verses which conclude our Lord's address to Nicodemus are a most instructive test of the sincerity and reality of persons who appear anxious inquirers in religion. If they are honest and true, they will go on and come to the full light of Christ. If they are not honest and sincere but only influenced by temporary excitement, they will probably go back from the light and will certainly not close with Christ and become His disciples. This should be pressed by ministers on all inquirers. "If you are true, you will come to the light. If you are not true, you will go back or stand still; you will not draw near and close with Christ." The test will never be found to fail. Those who wish to see how exceedingly weak the beginnings of grace may be in a heart and yet be true, as is proved in the case of Nicodemus, will find the matter most skillfully treated in a small work of Perkins, little known, called, "A Grain of Mustard Seed." A man may have the beginning of regeneration in his heart and yet be so ignorant as not to know what regeneration is. In concluding these long notes, for the length of which the immense importance of the passage must be my apology, I think we should remark that we never hear a word about Nicodemus being baptized! This fact is a strong incidental evidence to my mind that the baptism of water was not the subject which our Lord had in view when he told Nicodemus that he must be born of water and the Spirit.

One other thing ought to be remarked in leaving this subject of our Lord's conversation with Nicodemus. That thing is the singular fullness of matter by which the whole of our Lord's address is characterized. Within the space of twenty verses, we read of the work

of all three Persons in the Trinity—the Father's love, the Son's death on the cross, and the Spirit's operation in the new birth of man—the corruption of man's nature, the nature of regeneration, and the efficacy of faith in Christ—the way to escape perishing in hell, the true cause of man's condemnation if he is lost, and the true marks of sincerity in an inquirer. A fuller sermon was never delivered than that which was here preached to Nicodemus in one evening! There is hardly a single important point in divinity which is left untouched!

JOHN 3:22-36

Further Testimony About Jesus by John the Baptist

After this, Jesus and his disciples came into Judean territory, and there he spent time with them and was baptizing. John was also baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized. (For John had not yet been thrown into prison.)

Now a dispute came about between some of John's disciples and a Jew concerning ceremonial washing. So they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, the one who was with you on the other side of the Jordan River, about whom you testified—see, he is baptizing, and everyone is flocking to him!"

John replied, "No one can receive anything unless it has been given to him from heaven. You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but rather, 'I have been sent before him.' The one

who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands by and listens for him, rejoices greatly when he hears the bridegroom's voice. This then is my joy, and it is complete. He must become more important while I become less important."

The one who comes from above is superior to all. The one who is from the earth belongs to the earth and speaks about earthly things. The one who comes from heaven is superior to all. He testifies about what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony. The one who has accepted his testimony has confirmed clearly that God is truthful. For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for he does not give the Spirit sparingly. The Father loves the Son and has placed all things under his authority. The one who believes in the Son has eternal life. The one who rejects the Son will not see life, but God's wrath remains on him.

On one account, this passage deserves the special attention of all devout readers of the Bible. It contains the last testimony of John the Baptist concerning our Lord Jesus Christ. That faithful man of God was the same at the end of his ministry that he was at the beginning. the same in his views of self—the same in his views of Christ. Happy is that church whose ministers are as steady, bold, and constant to one thing, as John the Baptist!

We have, firstly, in these verses, ***a humbling example of the petty jealousies and party-spirit which may exist among professors of religion.*** We are told, that the disciples of John the Baptist were offended, because the ministry of Jesus began to attract

more attention than that of their master. “They came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with you beyond Jordan, to whom you barest witness, behold the same baptizes, and all men come to him.”

The spirit exhibited in this complaint, is unhappily too common in the Churches of Christ. The succession of these complainers has never failed. There are never lacking religions professors who care far more for the increase of their own party, than for the increase of true Christianity; and who cannot rejoice in the spread of religion, if it spreads anywhere except within their own denomination. There is a generation which can see no good being done, except in the ranks of its own congregations; and which seems ready to shut men out of heaven, if they will not enter therein under their banner.

The true Christian must watch and pray against the spirit here manifested by John’s disciples. It is very insidious, very contagious, and very injurious to the cause of religion. Nothing so defiles Christianity and gives the enemies of truth such occasion to blaspheme, as jealousy and party-spirit among Christians. Wherever there is real grace, we should be ready and willing to acknowledge it, even though it may be outside our own pale. We should strive to say with the apostle, “If Christ be preached, I rejoice, yes! and will rejoice.” (Phil. 1:18.) If good is done, we ought to be thankful, though it even may not be done in what we think the best way. If souls are saved, we ought to be glad, whatever be the means that God may think fit to employ.

We have, secondly, in these verses, ***a splendid pattern of true and godly humility.*** We see in John the Baptist a very different spirit from that displayed by his disciples. He begins by laying down the great principle, that acceptance with man is a special gift of God; and that we must therefore not presume to find fault, when others have more acceptance than ourselves. “A man can receive nothing except it be given him from heaven.” He goes on to remind his followers of his repeated declaration, that one greater than himself was coming— “I said, I am not the Christ.” He tells those who his office compared to that of Christ, is that of the bridegroom’s *friend*, compared to the bridegroom. And finally, he solemnly affirms, that Christ must and will become greater and greater, and that he himself must become less and less important, until, like a star eclipsed by the rising sun, he has completely disappeared.

A frame of mind like this, is the highest degree of grace to which mortal man can attain. The greatest saint in the sight of God, is the man who is most thoroughly “clothed with humility.” (1 Peter 5:5.) Would we know the prime secret of being men of the stamp of Abraham, and Moses, and Job, and David, and Daniel, and Paul, and John the Baptist? They were all *eminently humble men*. Living at different ages, and enjoying very different degrees of light, in this matter at least they were all agreed. In themselves they saw nothing but sin and weakness. To God they gave all the praise of what they were. Let us walk in their steps. Let us covet earnestly the best gifts; but above all, let us covet humility. The way to true honor is to be

humble. No man ever was so praised by Christ, as the very man who says here, “I must decrease,” the humble John the Baptist.

We have, thirdly, in these verses, ***an instructive declaration of Christ’s honor and dignity.*** John the Baptist teaches his disciples once more, the true greatness of the Person whose growing popularity offended them. Once more, and perhaps for the last time, he proclaims Him as one worthy of all honor and praise. He uses one striking expression after another, to convey a correct idea of the majesty of Christ. He speaks of Him as “the bridegroom” of the Church—as “him that comes from above,”—as “him whom God has sent,”—as “him to whom the Spirit is given without measure,”—as Him “whom the Father loves,” and into “whose hands all things are given,”—to believe in whom is life everlasting, and to reject whom is eternal ruin. Each of these phrases is full of deep meaning, and would supply matter for a long sermon. All show the depth and height of John’s spiritual attainments. More honorable things are nowhere written concerning Jesus, than these verses recorded as spoken by John the Baptist.

Let us endeavor in life and death, to hold the same views of the Lord Jesus, to which John here gives expression. *We can never make too much of Christ*. Our thoughts about the Church, the ministry, and the sacraments, may easily become too high and extravagant. *We can never have too high thoughts about Christ, can never love Him too much, trust Him too implicitly, lay too much weight upon Him, and speak too highly in His praise*. He is worthy of all the

honor that we can give Him. He will be all in heaven. Let us see to it, that He is all in our hearts on earth.

We have, lastly, in these verses, ***a broad assertion of the nearness and presentness of the salvation of true Christians.*** John the Baptist declares, "He that believes on the Son *has* everlasting life." He is not intended to look forward with a sick heart to a far distant privilege. He "has" everlasting life as soon as he believes. Pardon, peace, and a complete title to Heaven, are an immediate possession. They become a believer's own, from the very moment he puts faith in Christ. They will not be more completely his own, if he lives to the age of Methuselah.

The truth before us, is one of the most glorious privileges of the Gospel. There are no works to be done, no conditions to be fulfilled, no price to be paid, no wearing years of probation to be passed, before a sinner can be accepted with God. Let him only believe on Christ, and he is at once forgiven. Salvation is close to the chief of sinners. Let him only repent and believe, and this day it is his own. By Christ all that believe are at once justified from all things.

Let us leave the whole passage with one grave and heart-searching thought. If faith in Christ brings with it present and immediate privileges, to remain unbelieving is to be in a state of tremendous peril. *If heaven is very near to the believer, hell must be very near to the unbeliever*. The greater the mercy that the Lord Jesus offers, the greater will be the guilt of those who neglect and

reject it. “He that believes not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abides on him.”

Technical Notes:

22. After these things Jesus and his disciples came into the land of Judæa; and there he tarried with them and baptized. 23. And John also was baptizing in Ænon near Salim, because there was much water there. And they came and were baptized. 24. For John had not yet been cast into prison. 25. Then there arose a question between *some* of John’s disciples and the Jews about purifying. 26. And they came to John and said to him, Rabbi, he who was with you beyond Jordan, to whom you bore witness, behold, the same baptizes and all *men* come to him. 27. John answered and said, A man can receive nothing except it be given him from heaven. 28. Ye yourselves bear me witness that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. 29. He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled. 30. He must increase, but I *must* decrease. 31. He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all. 32. And what he has seen and heard, that he testifies; and no man receives his testimony. 33. He who has received his testimony has set to his seal

that God is true. 34. For he whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure *to him*. 35. The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into his hand. 36. He who believes on the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.

22.—[*Jesus…came into the land of Judæa*.] Some have thought, from this expression, that the conversation between Christ and Nicodemus did not take place in Jerusalem or Judæa, but in Galilee. Others have thought that a long interval must be supposed to have elapsed between the conversation and the events which are here narrated. I can agree with neither view. I believe the true explanation is that "the land" here spoken of means the rural part or territory of Judæa, in contradistinction to the capital town of the territory, Jerusalem. The meaning will then be that Jesus left the city and went into the country districts. The expression, "Thou Bethlehem, in the land of Judæa," is similar. (Matt. ii.6.)

[*He tarried*.] The Greek word so rendered signifies a lengthened stay. It is translated in other places "continued" or "abode." It is noteworthy that many of the events of our Lord's ministry in Jerusalem and the surrounding district are evidently not recorded in any of the Gospels. [*And baptized*.] That our Lord did not baptize with His own hands but left the ordinance to be administered by His disciples, as a work inferior to that of preaching, we may learn from the next chapter. (John iv.2.) Lightfoot observes that "The

administration of Christ's ordinances by His ministers, according to His institution, is as His own work. The disciples' baptizing is called His baptizing."

The questions have often been raised, "In what name was this baptism administered? Was it a baptism that needed to be repeated after the day of Pentecost?" The most probably answer to the first question is that it was a baptism in the name of Jesus, upon profession of belief that He was the Messiah. The most probable answer to the second question is that it was certainly not a baptism that required repetition. To suppose that a baptism administered by our Lord's disciples, under our Lord's own eye, and by our Lord's own command, was not as effectual and profitable an ordinance as any baptism that was ever afterwards administered, is a most improbable supposition.

It may be remarked here that there is no ground for the common idea that it is absolutely necessary that baptism should be administered in the name of the Trinity in order to be a valid and Christian baptism. In three cases recorded in the Acts, we are expressly told that baptism was administered in the name of Jesus Christ, and no mention is made of all three Persons in the Trinity. (See Acts ii.38; viii.37; x.48.) In all these cases, however, it will be remembered, baptism in the name of Christ was practically baptism in the name of the Trinity. It was confession of faith in Him whom the Father sent, and who was the giver of the Holy Ghost. As a general rule in the Church of Christ, no doubt baptism ought to be in

the name of the Trinity. (Matt. xxviii.19.) But that our Lord's disciples, in the place now before us, did not baptize in the name of the Trinity is pretty certain. That baptism in the name of Jesus is valid Christian baptism, seems clear from the places referred to in the Acts. Hutcheson remarks that "Christ's own bodily presence, filled with the Spirit without measure, did not take away the use of external ordinances," such as baptism. The Quaker's opinion, that we need no external ordinances under the Gospel, is hard to reconcile with such a text as this.

23.—[*John was also baptizing*.] We can hardly doubt that John baptized all who came to him, at this period of his ministry, in the name of Jesus upon confession of faith that Jesus was the Messiah. It seems most improbable that after publicly pointing out Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God and the promised Savior, he would be content to baptize with the baptism of repentance, which he had administered before Christ appeared. In short, John's baptism at this period and the baptism administered by Christ's disciples must have been precisely the same.

I may remark here that the opinion maintained by Roman Catholics and those who agree with them, that there was an essential difference between John's baptism and Christian baptism, seems to me entirely destitute of foundation. I agree with Brentius, Lightfoot, and most of the Protestant commentators, that John's baptism and Christian baptism differed only in circumstantials but were the same in substance, and that a person baptized by John the Baptist had no

need to be re-baptized after the day of Pentecost. Unless we take this view, I cannot see any evidence that Peter, Andrew, James, and John ever received Christian baptism at all. There is not a single word in the Gospel to show that they were ever baptized again after leaving John the Baptist's company and becoming Christ's disciples. Moreover, we are expressly told that "Jesus Himself baptized not." (John iv.2.) The only baptism that the first Apostles received appears to have been John the Baptist's baptism. This fact seems to me to prove irresistibly that John's baptism was essentially of equal value with Christian baptism, and that a person baptized by John had no need to be baptized again.

The well-known passage in Acts (Acts xix.1-6), which is always quoted in opposition to the view I maintain, does not appear to me at all conclusive and decisive upon the question now before us. For one thing, the persons described in that passage as having only been baptized with John's baptism seem to have been ignorant of the first principles of Christianity. They said, "We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost." That expression shows pretty clearly that they had not been hearers of John the Baptist, who frequently spoke of the Holy Ghost (Matt. iii.11), and had not been baptized by John himself. It is most probable that they were inhabitants of Ephesus who had only heard Apollos preaching, and knew even less than their teacher. Whether St. Paul might not think it needful to administer baptism to such ignorant disciples as these—who could give no intelligent account of Christianity—is a question I would not undertake to decide. But beside this, it is by no means

certain that these disciples were really baptized again with water at all. Brentius holds that the words, "They were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus," mean the baptism of the Spirit. Streso maintains that the words are the concluding sentence of St. Paul's address to these ignorant men. I cannot say that either of these last views is altogether satisfactory. All I say is that I would infinitely rather adopt either of them than hold such a monstrous opinion as the Romish one, that John's baptism was not Christian baptism at all and needed to be repeated. The difficulties in the way of this last view appear to me far greater than the difficulties in the way of the one which I support. To say that the first five Apostles never received any Christian baptism at all is really preposterous. To assert that Christ Himself baptized them is to assert what the Bible never even hints at. There is not a shadow of proof that Jesus ever baptized a single person. I see no escape from the conclusion that Andrew, John, Peter, Philip, and Nathanael either received John's baptism or no baptism at all. Whatever men may think about John's baptism before the time when our Lord appeared, they will never prove that the baptism he administered in the text before us was not Christian baptism. To suppose that John would go on administering an ordinance which he knew was imperfect while Christian baptism was being administered by Christ's disciples a few miles off, is simply absurd.

[*Ænon near Salim*.] It is not certainly known where this place was. The probability is that it was somewhere in Judæa. In the list of the cities given to the tribe of Judah, we find together "Shilhim and Ain."

(John xv.32.) It is very possible that these two may be the "Ænon and Salim" now before us. The changes which proper names undergo in passing from one language to another, everyone knows, are very great. [*Because there was much water*.] It is frequently assumed from this expression that John's baptism was immersion and not sprinkling, and that on this account a great supply of water was absolutely needful. It may perhaps have been so. The point is one of no importance. That immersion, however, is necessary to the validity of baptism and that sprinkling alone is not sufficient, are points that can never be demonstrated from Scripture. So long as water is used, it seems to be left a matter of indifference whether the person baptized is dipped or sprinkled. I should find it very hard to believe that the three thousand baptized on the day of Pentecost, or the jailor and his family baptized at midnight in the Philippian prison, were all immersed. The Church of England wisely allows either mode of applying water to be used. To suppose that dipping is forbidden to English Churchmen is mere ignorance. [*They came…baptized*.] This is an elliptical sentence. We are not told who are meant by "they." It is like "men," in Matt. v.15, and means generally "people."

24.—[*John…not yet…prison*.] John's diligence in his Master's work is here pointed out. He doubtless knew that his ministry was fulfilled when Christ appeared, and that the time of his own departure and violent death under Herod's hands was at hand. Yet he worked on to the very last. "Blessed is that servant whom his Lord, when He comes, shall find so doing." (Matt. xxiv.46.)

Theophylact thinks that John's early death was permitted in God's providence in order to prevent any distraction in people's minds between him and Christ.

25.—[There arose…question…disciples… Jews…purifying.] The nature and particulars of this dispute must be left to conjecture. We can only form an idea of it from the context. It seems probable that it was a dispute between the unbelieving Jews and the disciples of John the Baptist about the comparative value of the two baptisms which were being administered in Judæa: viz., John's baptism and Christ's. Which was the most purifying? Which was the most efficacious? Which was the most valuable of the two? The Jews probably taunted John's disciples with the decline of their master's popularity. John's disciples, in ignorant zeal and heat for their master, probably contended that no new teacher's baptism could possibly be more purifying and valuable than their own master's. Wordsworth remarks upon the word "purifying" that St. John never uses the word "baptism" and never calls John the Baptist by his common surname, "the Baptist." He says, "John was no longer the Baptist when St. John wrote. His baptism had passed away."

Musculus, on this verse, observes the excessive readiness of men in every age to raise questions, controversies, and persecutions about ceremonies of merely human institution, while about faith, hope, love, humility, patience, mortification of the flesh, and renewal of the Spirit, they exhibit no zeal at all. Controversies about baptism

certainly appear to be among the oldest and most mischievous by which the Church has been plagued.

26.—[*They came to John, etc.*] The language of the whole verse seems intended to show that John's disciples were jealous for their master's ministry, and that its declining popularity, in consequence of our Lord's appearance in Judæa as a public teacher, was a cause of annoyance to them. The verse is an instructive instance of that littleness and party-spirit which are so painfully common among Christians when one minister's popularity is interfered with by the appearance of another. [*He…to whom you bore witness.*] This expression shows the publicity and notoriety of John's testimony to our Lord as the Messiah and the Lamb of God. It was testimony not borne privately in a corner, but in the hearing and full knowledge of all John's disciples. It would seem to have had very little effect on their minds. The words fell on their ears, but went to further.

[*Behold, the same baptizes.*] This expression implies partly surprise and partly complaint. In any case, it shows how little the bulk of John's disciples understood that Jesus was really the Messiah promised in the prophecies. If they had understood it, they would surely neither have been surprised nor annoyed at Him for baptizing and becoming popular. They would rather have expected it and rejoiced at it. It is one among many proofs that ministers may be loved by their hearers and may tell them the truth faithfully, and yet be utterly unable to make their hearers understand or believe. Few are like Andrew and "follow Jesus" when their minister says, "Behold

the Lamb." The most are as though they did not hear at all.

[*All men come to Him.*] These words must doubtless be taken with qualification. The expression "all men" only means "many persons." We know as a fact that not all men came to Christ. Moreover, we must remember that out of those who did come to Christ, very few believed. John says in his reply to his disciples, "No man receives His testimony." Allowance must be made for the irritation under which John's disciples spoke. When men are vexed in spirit by seeing their own party diminishing, they are often tempted to use exaggerated and incorrect expressions. Hutcheson remarks on this verse, that "Carnal emulation is an old and great sin in the Church, and even among professors; it being the foul fruit of a carnal temper to look on the success of one man's gifts as the debasing of another's who is faithful, and to count the thriving of God's work in one minister's hand the disgracing of another who is not so much flocked to. Cyril remarks, on this verse, how admirably God can bring good out of apparent evil. Here, as in many cases, a carnal and unkind saying of John's disciples gives occasion to John's admirable testimony about Christ.

27.—[John answered...receive nothing, etc.] This sentence is the statement of a general truth in religion. Success, promotion, and growth of influence are gifts which God keeps entirely in His own hands. If one faithful minister's popularity wanes while another's popularity and influence over men's hearts increases, the thing is of God, and we must submit to His appointment. (Ps. lxxv.6.) The application of the sentence is not to Christ, as Chrysostom thought,

but to John the Baptist himself, as Augustine thought. They are meant to imply, "I cannot command continued success in my ministry. I can only receive what God gives me. If He thinks fit to give anyone more acceptance with men than myself, I cannot prevent it and have no right to complain. All success is of God. All that I have had, at any period of my ministry, has been received and none deserved." To apply the sentence to our Lord seems to me an unsatisfactory interpretation and derogatory to the dignity of Christ's ministry. Those who take this view would probably prefer the marginal reading of the word "receive," and would render it, "No man can take to himself anything." The sentence would then be like St. Paul's words to the Hebrews: "No man takes this honor unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron." (Heb. v.4.) But the translation "receive" and the application to John the Baptist appear to me more agreeable to the context and the general spirit of John's reply. And although the word, a "man," ought not to have much stress laid upon it, I cannot help thinking that John uses it intentionally in order to point to himself. "A mere *man* like me can receive nothing but what is given him from heaven." Lightfoot thinks that the Greek word rendered "receive" means "perceive" or "apprehend;" and that John meant, "I see by this instance of yourselves that no man can learn or understand anything, unless it be given him from heaven." He regards the sentence as John's rebuke to his disciples for incredulity and stupidity. I doubt myself whether the Greek word will bear the sense Lightfoot would put on it. The expression "from heaven" is equivalent to saying "from God." (See Dan. iv.26; Luke xv.21.) The whole verse is a most useful

antidote to that jealousy which sometimes springs up in a minister's mind when he sees a brother's ministry prospering more than his own.

28.—[Ye yourselves bear me witness... I said, etc.] John here reminds his disciples that he had repeatedly told them that he was not the Christ and that he was only a forerunner sent before Him. They ought to have remembered this. If they had done so, they would not have been surprised at the rise and progress of Christ's ministry but would rather have expected Him to outshine and surpass their master, as a matter of course. The verse is an instructive illustration of the forgetfulness of hearers. John's testimony to the dignity of Christ and His superiority to himself had been constantly repeated. But it had been all thrown away on his disciples, and when Christ began to receive greater honors than their master and their own party began to grow smaller than that of Christ's disciples, they were offended. People soon forget what they do not like.

29.—[He that has...bride...bridegroom, etc.] In this verse John the Baptist explains the relative positions occupied by himself and Christ by a familiar illustration. In tracing it out, it is of great importance not to press the points of resemblance too far. The illustration is one which specially requires to be handled with reverence, decency, and discretion. The "bride" in this verse signifies the whole company of believers: the Lamb's wife. (Rev. xxi.9.) The "bridegroom" is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. The "friend of the bridegroom" means John the Baptist and all other faithful ministers

of Christ. According to the marriage customs of the Jews, there were certain persons called the bridegroom's *friends*, who were the means of communication between him and the bride before the marriage. Their duty was simply to set forward and promote the bridegroom's interest, and to remove all obstacles, as far as possible, to a speedy union of the parties. To accomplish this end, and promote a thoroughly good understanding between the bride and bridegroom, was their sole office. If they saw the bridegroom's suit prospering, and at last saw him received favorably and gladly by the bride, their end was accomplished and their work was done. To all this John the Baptist makes allusion in the verse now before us. He tells his disciples that his sole work was to set forward and promote a good understanding between Christ and men. If he saw that work prospering, he was thankful and would rejoice, even though the result was that his own personal importance was diminished. He would have his disciples know that the growing popularity of Christ which offended them was the very thing which he longed to see. He had no greater joy than to hear of the voice of Christ, the Bridegroom, being listened to by believers, the bride. It was the very thing for which he had been preaching and ministering. His "joy was fulfilled."

The word "has" means "possesses as his own." Possession of the bride, as "bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh," is the peculiar prerogative of the bridegroom. (Gen. ii.23.) With this his friends have nothing to do. The expression "stands" must probably not be pressed too far. Some think that it is taken from the position

occupied by the bridegroom's friends on the day when the bridegroom was first formally introduced to the bride. They stood at a respectful distance and looked on. The expression certainly implies inferiority. St. Paul says that the Jewish priests *"stand"* daily ministering, but Christ *"sat down"* on the right hand of God. (Heb. x.12.)

The expression, "Hears the bridegroom's voice," like the last, is one that must not be pressed too far. It is a part of the drapery of the illustration. When report was brought to John the Baptist that Jesus Christ's ministry was accepted by some, and that He found favor with many disciples, then was fulfilled what is here meant. John "heard the Bridegroom's voice" and saw the successful progress of his mission, and seeing and hearing this "rejoiced."

The whole verse is a most instructive picture of a true minister's work and character. He is a friend of Christ and is ordained in order to promote a union between Christ and souls. (2 Cor. ii.2.) He must rigidly adhere to that office and must never take to himself that which does not belong to him. The minister who allows honor to be given to himself which only belongs to Jesus, and exalts his own office into that of a mediator and priest, is treacherously usurping a position which is not his but his Master's. The professing Christian who treats ministers as if they were priests and mediators is dishonoring Jesus Christ, and basely giving that honor to the Bridegroom's friends which belongs exclusively to the Bridegroom Himself.

The expression, “This joy of mine is fulfilled,” is a very instructive one for ministers. It shows that the truest happiness of a minister should consist in Christ’s voice being heard by souls. “Now we live,” says St. Paul, “if ye stand fast in the Lord.” (1 Thess. iii.8, etc.) It deserves notice that when our Lord, at another period of His ministry, expressly speaks of Himself as “the Bridegroom” (Matt. ix.15), He seems purposely to remind them of their master’s words.

Musculus, on this verse, observes: “The day of the Lord will declare what kind of zeal that is in our Popish Bishops, who profess to be influenced by zeal for the love of the Church, which is Christ’s bride, against Christ’s enemies. The day will declare whether a zeal which makes them shed innocent blood and persecute the members of Christ is the zeal of true friends of the Bridegroom or of treacherous suitors of the bride.”

30.—[*He must increase, but I must decrease.*] In this sentence, John the Baptist tells his complaining disciples that it is right and proper and necessary that Christ should grow in dignity, and that he himself should be less thought of. He was only the servant; Christ was the Master. He was only the forerunner and ambassador; Christ was the King. He was only the morning star; Christ was the Sun. The idea implied appears to be that of the stars gradually fading away as the sun rises after the break of day. The stars do not really perish or really become less, but they pale and become invisible before the superior brightness of the great center of light. The sun does not

really become larger or really increase in brightness, but it becomes more fully visible and occupies a position in which it more completely fills our vision. So was it with John the Baptist and Christ. Every faithful minister ought to be like-minded with John. He must be content to be less thought of by his believing hearers in proportion as they grow in knowledge and faith and see Christ Himself more clearly. As churches decay and fall away, they think less of Christ and more of their ministers. As churches revive and receive spiritual life, they think less of ministers and more of Christ. To a decaying church, the sun is going down and the stars are beginning to appear. To a reviving church, the stars are waning and the sun appearing.

31.—[He…comes…above…above all.] In this sentence John the Baptist asserts the infinite superiority of Christ over himself or any other child of Adam, whatever office he may fill. Christ is "from above." He is not merely man, but God. He came from heaven when He took our nature on Him and was born. As God, He is as far above all His ministers and servants as the Creator is above the creature. He is "far above all principality, and power, and every name that can be named." He is "head over all things to the Church," and richly deserves all the honor, dignity, respect, and reverence that man can give. (Eph. i.21,22.)

[He…of the earth…speaks of the earth.] In this sentence John the Baptist expresses in strong language the comparative inferiority to Christ of himself or of any other minister. He seems to say, "All who

like me are only men, mere dust and clay descended from a father who was made out of the dust of the ground, are comparatively earthly. The weakness and feebleness of our origin pervade all our doings. By nature earthly, our works are earthly and our speaking and preaching earthly." In short, there will be a savor of humanity about the ministry of everyone who is naturally engendered of the seed of Adam.

The difficulty that some see in John the Baptist calling his own ministry "earthly" is quite needlessly raised. It is evident that he calls it so "comparatively." Compared to the teaching of Scribes and Pharisees, it was not earthly but heavenly. Compared to the teaching of Him who came from heaven, it was earthly. A candle compared to darkness is light; but the same candle compared to the sun is a poor dim spark.

[He who comes…heaven…above all.] This sentence is only a repetition of the beginning of the verse. It is a second assertion of Christ's greatness and superiority over any mere man, in order to impress the matter more deeply on those who heard it. "Mark what I tell you," John the Baptist seems to say to his disciples: "I repeat emphatically that Christ having come from heaven and being by nature God as well as man, is far above me and all other ministers who are only men and nothing more." Some think, as Erasmus, Bengel, Wetstein, Olshausen, and Tholuck, that John the Baptist's words end with the verse preceding the one now before us, and that the words, "He who comes from above," begin the comment of John

the Evangelist. I cannot for a moment admit this idea to be correct. I see no necessity for it. The whole passage runs on naturally as the language of John the Baptist to the end of the chapter. I see nothing unsuitable to John the Baptist in the concluding verses. They contain no truth which he was not likely to know. I see nothing gained by this idea. It throws no new light on the passage and is an awkward break which would never occur to a simple reader of the Bible.

32.—[What…seen…heard…testifies.] In this sentence John the Baptist shows the divinity of Christ and His consequent superiority over himself in another point of view. He says that Christ bears witness to truths which He has "seen and heard." He is not like mere human ministers who only declare what they have been taught by the Holy Spirit and inspired to communicate to others. As God, He declares with authority truths which He had seen and heard and known from all eternity with the Father. (John v.19-30; viii.38.)

Some draw a distinction between what our Lord has seen and what He has heard. They think that what Christ has "seen" means what He has seen as one with God the Father in essence, and what Christ has "heard" means what He has heard as a distinct person in the Trinity. Or else they think that what Christ as "seen" means what He has seen with the Father as God, and what He has "heard" means what he has heard from the Father as man. I doubt the correctness of either view. I think it more probable that the expression "seen and heard" is only a proverbial way of signifying perfect knowledge, such as a person has intuitively or at first hand. Euthymius thinks that the expression

"seen and heard" was purposely used because of the weakness of John's hearers; and that such expressions were necessary in order to give such hearers any adequate idea of Christ's divine nature.

The word "testifies" deserves notice as an expression peculiarly characteristic of Christ's ministry. He told Pilate, "I came into the world that I should bear witness unto the truth." (John xviii.27.)

[*And no man receives His testimony.*] The expression "no man" in this sentence must evidently, from the following verses, be taken with qualification. It must mean "very few." Andrew, Peter, Philip, and others had received Christ's testimony. The sentence seems intended to rebuke the complaint uttered by John's disciples, "All men come unto Him." John seems to say, "However many persons come to hear Jesus, you will yet see that very few believe on Him. Great as He is, and deserving of far more reverence than myself, you have yet to learn that even He is really believed on by few. The crowds who follow Him are, unhappily, not true believers. The temporary popularity which attends His ministry is as worthless as that which attended my own."

Pearce thinks that the Greek word rendered "and" would have been better translated "and yet," as in John vii.19 and ix.30. The notion of Augustine's that "no man" in this sentence means "none of the wicked," seems very untenable and unsatisfactory. 33.—[*He who has received, etc.*] In this verse John shows the great importance of receiving Christ's testimony. So far from being offended by the crowd

which attended Christ's ministry, John's disciples should be thankful that so many heard Him, and that some few received His teaching into their hearts.

[*Has set to his seal.*] This expression is peculiar and found nowhere else in the New Testament in the same sense. Of course it does not mean any literal sealing. It only means "has formally declared his belief, has publicly professed his conviction," just as a man puts his seal to a document as a testimony that he consents to its contents. In ancient days, when few comparatively could write, to affix a seal to a paper was a more common mode of expressing assent to it than to sign a name. The sentence is equivalent to saying, "He who receives Christ's testimony has set down his name as one who believes that God is true."

[*That God is true.*] These words may be taken two ways. According to some they mean, "He that receives Christ declares his belief that it is the true God who has sent Christ, and that Christ is no imposter but the Messiah whom the true God of the Old Testament prophets promised to send." According to others they mean, "He who receives Christ declares his belief that God is true to His word and has kept the promise that He made to Adam, Abraham, and David." That the Greek word rendered "true" will bear this last meaning seems proved by the expression, "Let God be true, but every man a liar." (Rom. iii.4.) Either view makes good sense and good divinity; but on the whole, I prefer the second one. It seems to me strongly confirmed by the expression in St. John's 1st Epistle: "He who believes not God,

has made Him a liar; because he believes not the record that God gave of His Son." (1 John v.10.)

Some have thought that the sentence may mean, "He that receives Christ declares his belief that Christ is the true God," and that it is parallel to 1 John v.20: "This is the true God." But I do not think the Greek words will admit of the interpretation. If they would, the Greek fathers would never have overlooked this text in writing against the Arians. Maldonatus seems to favor this opinion and says that Cyril hold it. But it certainly does not clearly appear in Cyril's commentary on the place.

34.—[*He whom God has sent*.] In this verse John the Baptist shows the dignity of Christ and His superiority over all other teachers by another striking declaration about Him. He begins by giving Him the well-known epithet which was peculiarly applied to Messiah, "He whom God has sent—the sent One: the One whom God has sent into the world according to promise." [*Speaks the words of God*.] This sentence means that Christ's words were not the words of a mere man, like John himself or one of the prophets. They were nothing less than the words of God. He who heard them heard nothing less than God speaking. The unity of the Father and the Son is so close that he who hears the teaching of the Son hears the teaching of the Father also. (Compare John vii.16; v.19; xiv.10,,11; viii.28; xii.49.) When John the Baptist spoke, he spoke merely human words, however true and good and Scriptural. But when Christ spoke, He spoke Divine words, even the words of God

Himself. As Quesnel says, “He spoke by the Holy Ghost, who is His own Spirit, who inseparably dwells in Him, and by the possession of whose fulness He receives His unction and consecration.” Theophylact remarks on this sentence and others like it in St. John’s Gospel, that we must not suppose that Christ needed to be taught by God the Father what to speak, because whatever the Father knows the Son also knows, as consubstantial with Him. So also when we read of the Son being “sent,” we must think of Him as a ray sent from the sun, which is not in reality separate from the sun but a part of the sun itself.

Some think that the expression, “speaks the words of God,” in this place, has special reference to the promise given to Moses about Messiah: “I will put my words in His mouth.” (Deut. xviii.18.)

[*For God…spirit by measure to Him.*] The expression “by measure” in this sentence means “partially, scantily, stintedly, in small degree.” It is the opposite to “fully, completely, in unmeasured abundance.” Thus we read in Ezekiel’s description of a time of scarcity at Jerusalem, “They shall drink water by measure.” (Ezek. iv.16.)

The whole sentence is peculiar and requires careful interpretation. The object of John the Baptist is to show once more the infinite superiority of the Lord Jesus over himself or any other man. To all others, even to the most eminent prophets and apostles, God gives the Holy Spirit “by measure.” Their gifts and graces are both imperfect. As St. Paul says, they “know in part and prophesy in part.”

(1 Cor. xiii.9.) But with Him whom God has sent, it is very different. To Him the Holy Ghost is given without measure, in infinite fullness and completeness. In His human nature the gifts and graces of the Spirit are present without the slightest shadow of imperfection. As man, Jesus of Nazareth was anointed with the Holy Ghost, and fitted for His office as our Priest and Prophet and King, in a way and degree never granted to any other man. (Acts x.38.) All this is undoubtedly true, but it is not, in my opinion, the whole truth of the sentence. I believe that John the Baptist points not only to our Lord's human nature, but to His divinity. I believe his meaning to be, "He whom God has sent is One far above prophets and ministers, to whom the Spirit is only given by measure. He is One who is Himself very God. In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. He is One who, as a Person in the Trinity, is eternally and ineffably united with God the Holy Spirit. From Him the Holy Spirit proceeds as well as from the Father, and is the Spirit of Christ and the Spirit of the Son. As God, it is impossible that He can be separated from the Holy Spirit. To Him therefore the Spirit is not given by measure, as if He were only a man. He is God as well as man, and as such He needs not that the Spirit should be *given* to Him. He has the Spirit without measure, because in the Divine essence, He, and the Spirit, and the Father, are One and undivided." I am inclined to hold the view just stated because of the verse which follows. The object of John the Baptist, in this last testimony to Christ, appears to be to lead his disciples step by step to the highest view of Messiah's dignity. He would have them recognize in Him One who was very God as well as very man. The view of the sentence before us, which is commonly

adopted, appears to me of an unsafe tendency. That the Spirit was *given* to our Lord as man and given without measure is doubtless true. But we must be very careful that we never forget a truth of no less importance. That truth is that our Lord Jesus Christ never ceased to be God as well as man, and that as God He was never separate from the Spirit. As Henry says, "The Spirit dwelt in Him, not as in a vessel, but as in a fountain, as in a bottomless ocean."

It deserves remark that the concluding words of the verse, "unto Him," are not found in the original Greek. This has led some to maintain that the second clause of the verse is only a general statement: "God is not a God who gives the Spirit by measure." But all the best commentators, from Augustine downwards, hold the view of our translators that it is Christ who is signified, and that "unto Him" ought to be supplied in any translation. Chemnitius thinks that this verse specially refers to Isa. xi.2, where it is predicted that the seven-fold gifts of the Spirit shall rest on Messiah.

35.—[*The Father loves...into His hand.*] There is something, at first sight, abrupt and elliptical in this verse. The full meaning of it I believe to be as follows: "He whom God has sent is One far above me or any other prophet. He is the eternal Son of God, whom the Father loved from all eternity, and into whose hands all things concerning man's salvation have been given and committed by an everlasting covenant. He is no mere man, as you, my disciples, ignorantly suppose. He is the Son of whom it is written, 'Kill the Son lest He be angry, and so ye perish from the way.' He is the Son to whom the

Father has said, 'I will give Thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.' (Ps. ii.7-9.) Instead of being jealous of His present popularity, you should serve Him with fear, and rejoice before Him with trembling."

The "love of the Father toward the Son" here spoken of, is a subject far too deep for man to fathom. It is an expression graciously accommodated to man's feeble understanding, and intended to signify that most intimate and ineffable union which exists between the First and Second Persons in the blessed Trinity, and the entire approbation and complacency with which the Father regards the work of redemption undertaken by the Son. It is that love to which our Lord refers in the words, "Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world" (John xvii.24), and which the Father expressly asserted at the beginning of the Son's earthly ministry: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (Matt. iii.17.) When it says that the Father has given all things into the Son's hand, we must understand that mediatorial kingdom which in the eternal counsels of the Trinity has been appointed to Christ. By the terms of the everlasting covenant, the Father has given to the Son power over all flesh, to quicken whom He will,—to justify, to sanctify, to keep, and to glorify His people,—to judge, and finally punish the wicked and unbelieving, —and at last to take to Himself a kingdom over all the world, and put down every enemy under His feet. These are the "all things," of which John speaks. Christ, he would have us know, has the keys of death and hell in His hand, and to Him alone men must go if they want anything for their souls. Calvin observes on this verse: "The

love here spoken of is that peculiar love of God which, beginning with the Son, flows from Him to all the creatures. For that love, with which embracing His Son He embraces us also in Him, leads Him to communicate all His benefits to us by His hand." Quesnel remarks: "God loved the prophets as His servants; but He loves Christ as His only Son, and communicates Himself to Him in proportion to His love." "The prophets had only particular commissions, limited to a certain time and certain purposes; but Christ has full power given Him as the general disposer of all His Father's works, the executor of His designs, the head of His Church, the universal High Priest of good things to come, the steward and disposer of all His graces." Chemnitius, on this verse, remarks the infinite wisdom and love of God in giving the management of our soul's affairs into Christ's hand. We are all naturally so weak and feeble, that if anything was left in our hands we should never be saved. We should lose all, even sooner than Adam did in Paradise. But Christ will take care of all committed to His charge, and our wisdom is to commit all things to Him, as St. Paul did. (2 Tim. i.12.)

36.—[*He who believes...has life.*] In this verse John the Baptist concludes his testimony to Christ by a solemn declaration of the unspeakable importance of believing on Him. Whether his disciples would receive it or not, he tells them that life or death, heaven or hell, all turned on believing in this Jesus who had "been with him beyond Jordan." The excellence of faith should be noted here. Like his Divine Master, John teaches that "believing on the Son," is the principal thing in saving religion. Believing is the way to heaven, and

not believing the way to hell.

The “presentness” of the salvation which is in Christ should be here noted. Again, like his Divine Master, John teaches that a believer “has” everlasting life. Pardon, peace, and a title to heaven are at once and immediately a man’s possession the very moment that he lays his sins on Jesus and puts his trust in Him.

[He…not believe…not see life.] The Greek word here rendered “does not believe,” is quite different from the one translated “believes,” at the beginning of the verse. It means something much stronger than “not trusting.” It would be more literally rendered, “He who does not obey, or is disobedient to.” It is the same word so rendered in Rom. ii.8; x.21; 1 Pet. ii.8; ii.1-20.

The expression “shall not see life” must of course mean “shall not see life, if he continues impenitent and unbelieving and dies in that state.” The phrase “to see life” most probably means “to taste, enter, enjoy, possess life” and must not be literally interpreted as seeing either with bodily or mental eyes.

[*The wrath of God abides on him.*] This concluding sentence of John the Baptist’s testimony is again very like his Master’s teaching: “He who does not believe is condemned already.” The meaning of the sentence is, that so long as a man is not a believer in Christ, the just wrath of God hangs over him and he is under the curse of God’s broken law. We are all by nature born in sin and children of wrath;

and our sins are all upon us, unpardoned, unforgiven, and untaken away until that day when we believe on the Son of God and are made children of grace.

The sentence is a very instructive one, and especially so in the present day. I see in it an unanswerable reply to some grievous errors which are very prevalent in some quarters.

(a) It condemns the notion, upheld by some, that under the Gospel there is no more anger in God, and that He is only love, mercy, and compassion and nothing else. Here we are plainly told of "the wrath of God." It is clear that God hates sin. There is a hell. God can be angry. Sinners ought to be afraid.

(b) It condemns the notion, maintained by some, that the elect are justified from all eternity, or justified before they believe. Here we are plainly told that if a man does not believe on the Son, God's wrath abides on him. We know nothing of anyone's justification until he believes. Those whom God predestinates, God calls and justifies in due season. But there is no justification until there is faith.

(c) It condemns the modern idea that Christ by His death justified all mankind, and removed God's wrath from the whole seed of Adam; and that all men and women are justified in reality, though they do not know it, and will all finally be saved. This idea sounds very amiable but is flatly contrary to the text before us. Here we are plainly told that until a man "believes on the son of God, the wrath of

God abides on him."

(d) Finally, it condemns the weak and false charity of those who say that preachers of the Gospel should never speak of God's wrath and should never mention hell. Here we find that the last words of one of Christ's best servants consist of a solemn declaration of the danger of unbelief. "The wrath of God" is John's last thought. To warn men of God's wrath and of their danger of hell is not harshness, but true charity. Many will go to hell because their ministers never told them about hell. In leaving this passage, the variety of expressions used by John the Baptist concerning our Lord Jesus Christ is very worthy of notice. He calls Him the Christ, the Bridegroom, He who comes from above, He who testifies what He has seen and heard, He whom God has sent, He who has the Spirit without measure, He whom the Father loves, He into whose hands all things are given, He in whom to believe is everlasting life. To talk of John the Baptist's knowledge of Divine things as meager and scanty, in the face of such a passage as this, is, to say the least, not wise and argues a very slight acquaintance with Scripture. To suppose, as some do, that the man who had such clear views of our Lord's nature and office could afterwards doubt whether Jesus was the Christ is to suppose what is grossly improbable. The message that John sent to Jesus when he was in prison was for the sake of his disciples, and not for his own satisfaction. (Matt. xi.3, etc.)

John – Chap. 4

JOHN 4:1-6

Conversation With a Samaritan Woman

Now when Jesus knew that the Pharisees had heard that he was winning and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus himself was not baptizing, but his disciples were), he left Judea and set out once more for Galilee.

But he had to pass through Samaria. Now he came to a Samaritan town called Sychar, near the plot of land that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, so Jesus, since he was tired from the journey, sat right down beside the well. It was about noon.

There are two sayings in these verses which deserve particular notice. They throw light on two subjects in religion, on which clear and well-defined opinions are of great importance.

We should observe, for one thing, ***what is said about baptism.*** We read that "Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples."

The expression here used is a very remarkable one. In reading it we seem irresistibly led to one instructive conclusion. That

conclusion is, that baptism is not the principal part of Christianity, and that to baptize is not the principal work for which Christian ministers are ordained. Frequently we read of our Lord preaching and praying. Once we read of His administering the Lord's supper. But we have not a single instance recorded of His ever baptizing any one. And here we are distinctly told, that it was a *subordinate* work, which He left to others. Jesus "himself baptized not, but his disciples."

The lesson is one of peculiar importance in the present day. Baptism, as a sacrament ordained by Christ Himself, is an honorable ordinance, and ought never to be lightly esteemed in the churches. It cannot be neglected or despised without great sin. When rightly used, with faith and prayer, it is calculated to convey the highest blessings. But baptism was never meant to be exalted to the position which many now-a-days assign to it in religion. It does not act as a *charm*. It does not necessarily convey the grace of the Holy Spirit. The benefit of it depends greatly on the manner in which it is used. The doctrine taught, and the language employed about it, in some quarters, are utterly inconsistent with the fact announced in the text. If baptism was all that some say it is, we would never have been told, that "Jesus himself baptized not."

Let it be a settled principle in our minds that the first and chief business of the Church of Christ is to preach the Gospel. The words of Paul ought to be constantly remembered— "Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the Gospel." (1 Cor. 1:17.) When the Gospel of

Christ is faithfully and fully preached we need not fear that the sacraments will be undervalued. Baptism and the Lord's supper will always be most truly reverenced in those churches where the truth as it is in Jesus is most fully taught and known.

We should observe, for another thing, in this passage, ***what is said about our Lord's human nature.*** We read that Jesus was "wearied with his journey."

We learn from this, as well as many other expressions in the Gospels, that our Lord had a body exactly like our own. When "the Word became flesh," He took on Him a nature like our own in all things, sin only excepted. Like ourselves, He grew from infancy to youth, and from youth to man's estate. Like ourselves, He hungered, thirsted, felt pain, and needed sleep. He was liable to every sinless infirmity to which we are liable. In all things His body was framed like our own.

The truth before us is full of comfort for all who are true Christians. He to whom sinners are bid to come for pardon and peace, is one who is man as well as God. He had a real human nature when He was upon earth. He took a real human nature with Him, when He ascended up into heaven. We have at the right hand of God a High Priest who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, because He has suffered Himself being tempted. When we cry to Him in the hour of bodily pain and weakness, He knows well what we mean. When our prayers and praises are feeble through bodily weariness, He can understand our condition. He knows our frame.

He has learned by experience what it is to be a man. To say that the Virgin Mary, or any one else, can feel more sympathy for us than Christ, is ignorance no less than blasphemy. The man Christ Jesus can enter fully into everything that belongs to man's condition. *The poor, the sick, and the suffering, have in heaven One who is not only an almighty Savior, but a most sympathetic Friend.*

The servant of Christ should grasp firmly this great truth, that there are two perfect and complete natures in the one Person whom he serves. The Lord Jesus, in whom the Gospel bids us believe, is, without doubt, almighty God—equal to the Father in all things, and able to save to the uttermost all those that come unto God by Him. But that same Jesus is no less certainly perfect man—able to sympathize with man in all his bodily sufferings, and acquainted by experience with all that man's body has to endure. Power and sympathy are marvelously combined in Him who died for us on the cross. Because He is God, we may repose the weight of our souls upon Him with unhesitating confidence. He is mighty to save. Because He is man, we may speak to Him with freedom, about the many trials to which flesh is heir. He knows the heart of a man. Here is rest for the weary! Here is good news! Our Redeemer is man as well as God, and God as well as man. He that believes on Him, has everything that a child of Adam can possibly require, either for safety or for peace.

Technical Notes:

1. Therefore, when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, 2. (though Jesus Himself did not baptize, but his disciples), 3. He left Judæa and departed again to Galilee. 4. But He needed to go through Samaria. 5. So He came to a city of Samaria which is called Sychar, near the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. 6. Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied from *His* journey, sat thus on the well. It was about the sixth hour.

1.—[Therefore... Pharisees...than John.] The connection between this chapter and the last will be found at the 25th verse of the last chapter. The controversy between John's disciples and the Jews was the means of calling public attention to our Lord's ministry. It became a subject of common conversation and attracted the notice of the principal religious teachers of the Jews: viz., the Pharisees. They had been already disturbed by the ministry of John the Baptist and the crowds which attended it. (John i.19-28.) The deputation which they sent to John had been distinctly told by him that One greater than himself was about to appear. When therefore "the Pharisees heard" that Jesus was actually baptizing more disciples and attracting more attention than John, we can well imagine that their minds would be even more disturbed than before. A vague, uncomfortable feeling would arise in their hearts that this mysterious person, who had cast out of the temple the buyers and sellers in so miraculous a manner and was now baptizing so many disciples, might possibly be the Christ. And then would come the attendant

feeling that if this was the Christ, He was not the Christ they either expected or wanted. The result of both feelings would probably be a bitter enmity against our Lord, and a secret determination, if possible, to settle all doubts by putting Him to death. In what manner our Lord "knew" what the Pharisees had heard, we need not be careful to inquire. Possibly He knew it from information obtained by His disciples. We can hardly doubt that some of them kept up intercourse with their old master, John the Baptist, and so learned what was going on at Ænon. It is more probable that He knew it from His omniscience as God. We are frequently told that "he knew the thoughts" of His enemies, and acted and spoke accordingly. It is good for us all to remember that nothing is spoken, talked of, or reported among men, however secretly, which Christ does not know.

2.—[Though Jesus…baptize…disciples.] The fact that our Lord did not actually administer baptism with His own hands is only mentioned here in the Gospels and is noteworthy. It shows, at any rate, that what is done by Christ's ministers, at Christ's command, in the administration of ordinances is regarded as done by Christ Himself. The preceding verse says that "Jesus baptized" while the present one says that He "did not baptize." Lightfoot remarks: "It is ordinary, both in Scripture phrase and in other language, to speak of a thing as done by a man himself which is done by another at his appointment. So Pharaoh's daughter is said to 'nurse Moses,' and Solomon is said to 'build the temple and his own house.' So David 'took Saul's spear and cruse,' meaning Abishai by David's appointment.'" (1 Sam. xxvi.12.)

The reasons assigned for our Lord's not administering baptism with His own hands are various. Lightfoot mentions four. (1) "Because He was not sent so much to baptize as to preach. (2) Because it might have been taken as a thing somewhat improper for Christ to baptize in His own name. (3) Because the baptizing that was most proper for Christ to use was not with water but with the Holy Ghost. (4) Because He would prevent all quarrels and disputes among men about their baptism, which might have risen if some had been baptized by Christ and others only by His disciples." To these reasons we may add another of considerable importance. Our Lord would show us that the effect and benefit of baptism did not depend on the person who administers it. We cannot doubt that Judas Iscariot baptized some. The intention of the minister does not affect the validity of the sacrament.

One thing seems abundantly clear, and that is, that baptism is not an ordinance of primary but of subordinate importance in Christianity. The high-flown and extravagant language used by some divines about the sacrament of baptism and its effects is quite irreconcilable with the text before us, as well as with the general teaching of Scripture. (See Acts x.48; 1 Cor. i.17.)

2.—[*He left Judæa, etc.*] The context of the preceding verses seems to show that this movement was intended to avoid the designs of the Pharisees against our Lord. If He had remained in Judæa, he would have been cut off and put to death before the appointed time. He therefore withdrew into the province of Galilee where He was further

off from Jerusalem, and where His ministry would attract less public notice.

Our Lord's conduct on this occasion shows us that it is not obligatory on a Christian to await danger to life and person, when he sees it coming, and that it is not cowardice to use all reasonable means to avoid it. We are not to court martyrdom or needlessly throw our lives away. There is a time for all things—a time to live and work as well as a time to suffer and to die. Whether some of the primitive martyrs would have acted as our Lord did here may be questioned. Their zeal for martyrdom seems sometimes to have partaken of the character of fanaticism.

[*He needed…Samaria.*] Many pious and profitable remarks have been made on this expression. It has been thought to teach that our Lord went purposely and out of the regular road in order to save the soul of the Samaritan woman. It admits of grave question whether this opinion is well-rounded. There was no other way by which a person could conveniently go from Judæa to Galilee, excepting through Samaria. The expression, therefore, is probably nothing more than a natural introduction to the story of the Samaritan woman. The first in the train of circumstances which led to her conversion was the circumstance that Jesus was obliged to pass through Samaria on His journey towards Galilee. This accounted for His meeting with a Samaritan woman.

5.—[*Came to a city… Sychar.*] The common opinion is that the city

here spoken of is the same as Sichem or Shechem. (Gen. xxxiii.18,19.) Few places in Palestine, after Jerusalem, have had so much of Bible history connected with them. Here God first appeared to Abraham. (Gen. xii.6.) Here Jacob dwelt when he first returned from Padan-aram, and here the disgraceful history of Dinah and the consequent murder of the Shechemites took place. (Gen. xxxiv.2, etc.) Here Joseph's brethren fed their flocks when Jacob sent him to them, little thinking he would not see him again for many years. (Gen. xxxvii.12.) Here, when Israel took possession of the land of Canaan, was one of the cities of refuge. (Josh. xx.7,8.) Here Joshua gathered all the tribes when he addressed them for the last time. (Josh. xxiv.1.) Here the bones of Joseph were buried and all the patriarchs were interred. (Josh. xxiv.32; Acts vii. 16.) Here the principal events in the history of Abimelech took place. (Judges ix.1, etc.) Here Reboboam met the tribes of Israel after Solomon's death and gave the answer which rent his kingdom in two. (1 Kings xii.1.) Here Jeroboam first dwelt when he was made King of Israel. (1 Kings xii.25.) And finally, close by Shechem was the city Samaria itself and the two hills of Ebal and Gerizim, where the solemn blessings and cursing's were recited after Israel entered Canaan. (Josh. viii.33.) A more interesting neighborhood it is difficult to imagine. Whichever way the eye of a wearied traveler looked, he would see something to remind him of Israel's history.

It is only fair to say that one of the latest travelers in Palestine (Dr. Thomson, author of "The Land and the Book"), doubts whether Sychar and Shechem really were the same place. He grounds his

doubt on the fact that the well now called Jacob's well is two miles from the ruins of Shechem, and that close to these ruins are beautiful fountains of water. He thinks it highly improbable that a woman of Shechem would go two miles to draw water if she could find it close by. He therefore thinks it more likely that a place now called Aschar, which is close to Jacob's well, must be the ancient Sychar, and that Sychar and Shechem were two different places. The subject is one on which it is impossible to attain a conclusive decision. Whether the ruins now called the ruins of Shechem are really on the site of ancient Shechem—whether the well now called Jacob's well is really the well spoken of in this chapter—whether ancient Shechem may not have been nearer the well that it now appears, are all points on which, after eighteen hundred years have passed away, it is impossible to speak positively. It ought, however, to be remembered that the opinion of most competent judges is almost entirely against Dr. Thomason's theory. Moreover, it is worth noticing that the Samaritan woman's words, "Neither come hither to draw," seem to imply that she had to come some distance to Jacob's well when she drew water.

[*Near the parcel... Joseph.*] The ground here spoken of seems to consist of two parts. One part was bought by Jacob of Hamor, Shechem's father, for a hundred pieces of silver. (Gen. xxxiii.29.) The other seems to have been his by conquest, when his sons slew the Shechemites for dishonoring Dinah. (Gen. xxxiv.28, and xlviii.22.)

Let it be carefully noted that St. John here speaks of Jacob and

Joseph and the events of their lives as if the history contained in Genesis was all simple matter of fact. It is always so in the New Testament. The modern theory, that the histories of the Old Testament are only fables destitute of any foundation in fact, is a mere baseless invention without a single respectable argument to be adduced in its favor.

6.—[*Jacob's well*.] It is not known how or when this well received its name. In Genesis we find mention of Abraham and Isaac digging wells, but not of Jacob doing so. All we know about it is what we read in the chapter before us.

A well called Jacob's well is still shown to all travelers in Palestine, near the ruins of Shechem, and is commonly supposed to be one of the oldest and most genuine remains of ancient times in the Holy Land. In fact, there seems no reason for disputing the common belief that it is the very identical well at which our Lord sat and held the conversation recorded in this chapter. It is in good preservation, and about thirty yards deep.

[*Wearied from His journey*.] This expression deserves notice. It shows the reality of our Lord's human nature. He had a body like our own, subject to all the conditions of flesh and blood. It shows our Lord's infinite compassion, humility, and condescension when He became flesh and came on earth to live and die for our sins. Though He was rich, He became poor. He who had made the world, and whose were "the cattle on a thousand hills," was content to be a

weary traveler on foot in order to provide eternal redemption for us. We never read of Jesus traveling in a carriage, and only once of His riding on a beast. It supplies the poor with the strongest argument for contentment. If Christ was willing to be poor, we may surely be willing to submit to poverty. Men need not be ashamed of poverty, if they have not brought it on themselves by misconduct. It is disgraceful to be profligate and immoral. But it is no sin to be poor. Finally, it shows believers what a sympathizing Savior Christ is. He knows what it is to have a weak and weary body. He can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. When our work wearies us, though we are not weary of our work, we may confidently tell Jesus and ask Him for help. He knows the heart of a weary man.

[*Sat thus on the well.*] The general meaning of these words is that our Lord sat down on the stones which, according to Eastern custom, formed a wall or battlement around the mouth of the well. The particular meaning of the word "thus" in the sentence is a point that has perplexed commentators in every age, and will perhaps never be settled.

Some think, as DeDieu, A. Clarke, and Schleusner, that "thus" is a pleonasm, or elegant expletive and redundancy in the Greek original, and that although a Greek would see a meaning in it, as giving a finish to the sentence, it has no special meaning that can be attached to it in the English translation.

Some think, as Chrysostom, Theophylact, Euthymius, Musculus, Bengel, Glassius, and Wordsworth, that "thus" means "just as He

was," without any regular seat, without looking for any convenient position, without any pride or formality; not upon a throne, not upon a cushion, but simply upon the ground. Some think, as Doddridge, that "thus" means immediately, and find a parallel for it in Acts xx.11. Some think, as Calvin, Lightfoot, Dyke, Bullinger, Beza, Parkhurst, Stier, Alford, and Burgon, that "thus" refers to the weariness just mentioned. Jesus, being wearied, sat down on the well accordingly, after the manner and according to the fashion that any weary person would sit. He was weary, and ***so*** He sat on the well.

The question is one that I feel unable to settle. The last meaning seems to me, on the whole, the most probable one, though it fails to carry complete conviction with it. The use of the word "so," in Acts vii.8, is somewhat like it. The Greek word for "so" in that case is the same as the one here rendered "thus."

Burgon remarks on this sentence, "that Jacob and Moses each found his future wife beside a well of water; and here it is seen that One greater than they, their Divine Antitype, the Bridegroom, takes to Himself His alien spouse, the Samaritan Church, at a well likewise Quesnel remarks, "The rest of Jesus Christ is as mysterious and full of kindness and beneficence as His weariness. It is a great matter for a man to learn how to rest himself without being idle, and to make his necessary repose subservient to the glory of God."

[*It was about the sixth hour*.] What time of the day was this, according to our calculation of time? By far the most common

opinion is that the sixth hour here means twelve o'clock, the hottest and sultriest time of the day. It is notorious that the Jewish day began at six o'clock, and their sixth hour would be our twelve o'clock.

It is, however, only just and right to say that some commentators, as Wordsworth and Burgon, maintain strongly that in St. John's Gospel the Jewish mode of reckoning the hours of the day is not observed. They say that, writing later than the other Evangelists and in Asia Minor, St. John uses the Roman or Asiatic mode of reckoning time, and that the Roman mode was like our own. They say, therefore, that when the disciples followed Jesus (John i.39) at the tenth hour, it was ten o'clock in the morning; and when the fever left the ruler's son at the seventh hour, it was seven o'clock in the evening. (John iv.52.) They say that when Pilate brought forth Jesus to the Jews on the day of the crucifixion at the sixth hour (John xix.14), it was six o'clock in the morning. And finally, they say that when Jesus, in the passage before us, sat wearied on the well at the sixth hour, it means six o'clock in the evening. Moreover, they plead in support of their view that it is infinitely more likely that a woman would come to a well to draw water at six o'clock in the evening than at twelve o'clock in the day. In Genesis it is distinctly said that the "evening" is the "time that women go out to draw water." (Gen. xxiv.11.) These arguments are undoubtedly weighty and ingenious, and the matter is one that admits of doubt. Nevertheless, for several reasons I am disposed to think that the common view of the question is the correct one, and that the sixth hour in this place means twelve o'clock in the day. I purposely omit the consideration of the other places where St.

John mentions hours in his Gospel. None of them seem to me to present any difficulty, except the “sixth hour” in St. John’s account of the crucifixion. That difficulty I shall be prepared to examine in its proper place. I think then that the “sixth hour” in the text before us means twelve o’clock, for the following reasons:

(a) It seems exceedingly improbable that St. John would reckon time in a manner different to the other three Gospel writers.
(b) It is by no means clear that the Romans did reckon time in our way and not in the Jewish way. When the Roman poet Horace describes himself as lying late in bed in a morning, he says, “I lie till the fourth hour.” He must surely mean ten o’clock and not four in the afternoon. When the Roman poet Martial describes the Roman day, he says, “The first and second hours are employed by clients in attending levees, and the third hour exercises the advocates in the law courts.” He surely cannot mean that Roman law courts did not open till two o’clock in the afternoon. About the custom of the Asiatics I offer no opinion. It is a doubtful point.
(c) It is entirely a gratuitous assumption to say that no woman ever came to draw water except in the evening. There must surely be exceptions to every rule. The fact of the woman coming *alone*, seems of itself to indicate that she came at an unusual hour and not in the evening.
(d) Last, but not least, it seems far more probable that our Lord would hold a conversation alone with such a person as the Samaritan woman at twelve o’clock in the day than at six o’clock in the evening. The conversation was not a very short one. There is little or no

twilight in Eastern countries. The night soon comes on. And yet, on the theory I oppose, our Lord begins a conversation about six o'clock and carries it on till the woman is converted. Then the woman goes away to the city and tells the men what has happened, and they all come out to the well to see Jesus. Yet by this time, in all reasonable probability, it would be quite dark, and the night would have begun. And yet, after all this, our Lord says to the disciples, "Lift up your eyes and look on the fields." (iv.35.) This last reason weighs very heavily in my mind in forming a conclusion on the subject. Our Lord appears to me to have reached a resting-place for the middle of the day, according to the Eastern custom in traveling, and to have intended staying by the well for a short time, until the heat of the day was past. The arrival of the Samaritan woman at this hour of the day gave ample time for the conversation, for her rapid return to the city, and for the coming of the inhabitants to the well.

I must say that I see a peculiar beauty and fitness in the mention of the sixth hour, if it means twelve o'clock, which I should not see so strongly if it meant six in the evening. To my eyes there is a special seemliness and propriety in the fact that our Lord held His conversation with such a person as the Samaritan woman at noonday. When he talked to Nicodemus, in the preceding chapter, we are told that it was at night. But when He talked to a woman of impure life, we are carefully told that it was twelve o'clock in the day. I see in this fact a beautiful carefulness to avoid even the appearance of evil, which I should entirely miss if the sixth hour meant six o'clock in the evening. I see even more than this. I see a lesson to all

ministers and teachers of the Gospel about the right mode of carrying on the work of trying to do good to souls like that of the Samaritan woman. Like their Master, they must be careful about times and hours, and specially if they work alone. If a man will try to do good to a person like the Samaritan woman, alone and without witnesses, let him take heed that he walks in his Master's footsteps, both as to the time of his proceedings as well as to the message he delivers. I believe there was a deep meaning in the little sentence, "It was about the sixth hour." Augustine thinks that "the sixth hour" here was meant to represent, allegorically, the sixth age of the world. He says that the first hour was from Adam to Noah, the second from Noah to Abraham, the third from Abraham to David, the fourth from David to the Babylonian captivity, the fourth from the captivity to the baptism of John, and the sixth the time of the Lord Jesus. I can see no foundation for these things in the text. If such interpretations of Scripture are correct, it is easy to make the Bible mean anything.

JOHN 4:7-26

Conversation With a Samaritan Woman

But he had to pass through Samaria. Now he came to a Samaritan town called Sychar, near the plot of land that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, so Jesus, since he was tired from the journey, sat right down beside the well. It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me some water to drink." (For his disciples had gone off into the town to buy supplies.) So the Samaritan woman said to him, "How can you—a Jew—ask me, a Samaritan woman, for water to drink?" (For Jews use nothing in common with Samaritans.)

Jesus answered her, "If you had known the gift of God and who it is who said to you, 'Give me some water to drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." "Sir," the woman said to him, "you have no bucket and the well is deep; where then do you get this living water? Surely you're not greater than our ancestor Jacob, are you? For he gave us this well and drank from it himself, along with his sons and his livestock."

Jesus replied, "Everyone who drinks some of this water will be thirsty again. But whoever drinks some of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again, but the water that I will give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water." He said to her, "Go call your husband and come back here." The woman replied, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "Right you are when you said, 'I have no husband,' for you have had five husbands and the man you are living with now is not your husband. This you said truthfully!"

The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you people say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus said to

her, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You people worship what you do not know. We worship what we know, because salvation is from the Jews. But a time is coming—and now is here—when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such people to be his worshipers. God is spirit, and the people who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (the one called Christ); "whenever he comes, he will tell us everything." Jesus said to her, "I, the one speaking to you, am he."

The history of the Samaritan woman, contained in these verses, is one of the most interesting and instructive passages in John's Gospel. John has shown us, in the case of Nicodemus, how our Lord dealt with a self-righteous formalist. He now shows us how our Lord dealt with an ignorant, carnal-minded woman, whose moral character was more than ordinarily bad. There are lessons in the passage for ministers and teachers, which they would do well to ponder.

We should mark, firstly, ***the mingled tact and humility of Christ in dealing with a careless sinner.***

Our Lord was sitting by Jacob's well when a woman of Samaria came there to draw water. At once He says to her, "Give me to drink." He does not wait for her to speak to Him. He does not begin by reproving her sins, though He doubtless knew them. He opens communication by asking a favor. He approaches the woman's mind

by the subject of “water,” which was naturally uppermost in her thoughts. Simple as this request may seem, it opened a door to spiritual conversation. It threw a bridge across the gulf which lay between her and Him. It led to the conversion of her soul.

Our Lord’s conduct in this place should be carefully remembered by all who want to do good to the thoughtless and spiritually ignorant. It is vain to expect that such people will voluntarily come to us, and begin to seek knowledge. We must begin with them, and go down to them in the spirit of courteous and friendly offensive. It is vain to expect that such people will be prepared for our instruction, and will at once see and acknowledge the wisdom of all we are doing. We must go to work WISELY. We must study the best avenues to their hearts, and the most likely way of arresting their attention. There is a handle to every mind, and our chief aim must be to get hold of it. Above all, we must be KIND in manner, and beware of showing that we feel conscious of our own superiority. If we let ignorant people fancy that we think we are doing them a great favor in talking to them about religion, there is little hope of doing good to their souls.

We should mark, secondly, ***Christ’s readiness to give mercies to careless sinners.*** He tells the Samaritan woman that if she had asked, “He would have given her living water.” He knew the character of the person before Him perfectly well. Yet He says, “If she had asked, He would have given,”—He would have given the living water of grace, mercy, and peace.

The infinite willingness of Christ to receive sinners is a golden truth, which ought to be treasured up in our hearts, and diligently impressed on others. The Lord Jesus is far more ready to hear than we are to pray, and far more ready to give favors than we are to ask them. All day long He stretches out His hands to the disobedient and gainsaying. He has thoughts of pity and compassion towards the vilest of sinners, even when they have no thoughts of Him. He stands waiting to bestow mercy and grace on the worst and most unworthy, if they will only cry to Him. He will never draw back from that well known promise, "Ask and you shall receive—seek and you shall find." The lost will discover at the last day, that they *had* not, because they *asked* not.

We should mark, thirdly, ***the priceless excellence of Christ's gifts when compared with the things of this world.*** Our Lord tells the Samaritan woman, "He that drinks of this water shall thirst again, but he that drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst."

The truth of the principle here laid down may be seen on every side by all who are not blinded by prejudice or love of the world. Thousands of men have every temporal good thing that heart could wish, and are yet weary and dissatisfied. It is now as it was in David's time— "There be many that say, Who will show us any good." (Psalm 4:6.) Riches, and rank, and place, and power, and learning, and amusements, are utterly unable to fill the soul. He that only drinks of these waters is sure to thirst again. Every Ahab finds a Naboth's

vineyard near by his palace, and every Haman sees a Mordecai at the gate. There is no heart satisfaction in this world, until we believe on Christ. Jesus alone can fill up the empty places of our inward man. Jesus alone can give solid, lasting, enduring happiness. The peace that He imparts is a fountain, which, once set flowing within the soul, flows on to all eternity. Its waters may have their ebbing seasons; but they are living waters, and they shall never be completely dried.

We should mark, fourthly, ***the absolute necessity of conviction of sin before a soul can be converted to God.*** The Samaritan woman seems to have been comparatively unmoved until our Lord exposed her breach of the seventh commandment. Those heart-searching words, "Go, call your husband," appear to have pierced her conscience like an arrow. From that moment, however ignorant, she speaks like an earnest, sincere inquirer after truth. And the reason is evident. She felt that her spiritual disease was discovered. *For the first time in her life she saw herself.*

To bring thoughtless people to this state of mind should be the principal aim of all teachers and ministers of the Gospel. They should carefully copy their Master's example in this place. *Until men and women are brought to feel their sinfulness and need, no real good is ever done to their souls.* Until a sinner sees himself as God sees him, he will continue careless, trifling, and unmoved. By all means we must labor to convince the unconverted man of sin, to pierce his conscience, to open his eyes, to show him himself. To this end we

must expound the length and breadth of God's holy law. To this end we must denounce every practice contrary to that law, however fashionable and customary. This is the only way to do good. Never does a soul value the Gospel medicine until it feels its disease. Never does a man see any beauty in Christ as a Savior, until he discovers that he is himself a lost and ruined sinner. Ignorance of sin is invariably attended by neglect of Christ.

We should mark, fifthly, ***the utter uselessness of any religion which only consists of formality.*** The Samaritan woman, when awakened to spiritual concern, started questions about the comparative merits of the Samaritan and Jewish modes of worshiping God. Our Lord tells her that true and acceptable worship depends not on the place in which it is offered, but on the state of the worshiper's heart. He declares, "The hour comes when you shall neither in this place nor at Jerusalem worship the Father." He adds that "the true worshipers shall worship in spirit and in truth."

The principle contained in these sentences can never be too strongly impressed on professing Christians. We are all naturally inclined to make religion a mere matter of outward forms and ceremonies, and to attach an excessive importance to our own particular manner of worshiping God. We must beware of this spirit, and especially when we first begin to think seriously about our souls. The heart is the principal thing in all our approaches to God. "The Lord looks on the heart." (1 Sam. 16:7.) The most gorgeous cathedral-service is offensive in God's sight, if all is gone through coldly,

heartlessly, and without grace. The feeblest gathering of three or four poor believers in a lowly cottage to read the Bible and pray, is a more acceptable sight to Him who searches the heart than the fullest congregation which is ever gathered in St. Peter's at Rome.

We should mark, lastly, ***Christ's gracious willingness to reveal Himself to the chief of sinners.*** He concludes His conversation with the Samaritan woman by telling her openly and unreservedly that He is the Savior of the world. "I that speak to you," He says, "am the Messiah." Nowhere in all the Gospels do we find our Lord making such a full avowal of His nature and office as He does in this place. And this avowal, be it remembered, was made not to learned Scribes, or moral Pharisees, but to one who up to that day had been *an ignorant, thoughtless, and immoral person!*

Dealings with sinners, such as these, form one of the grand peculiarities of the Gospel. Whatever a man's past life may have been, there is hope and a remedy for him in Christ. If he is only willing to hear Christ's voice and follow Him, Christ is willing to receive him at once as a friend, and to bestow on him the fullest measure of mercy and grace. The Samaritan woman, the penitent thief, the Philippian jailor, the tax-collector Zaccheus, are all patterns of Christ's readiness to show mercy, and to confer full and immediate pardons. It is His glory that, like a great physician, *He will undertake to cure those who are apparently incurable*, and that none are too bad for Him to love and heal. Let these things sink down into our hearts. Whatever else we doubt, let us never doubt that Christ's love

to sinners passes knowledge, and that Christ is as willing to receive as He is almighty to save.

What are we *ourselves?* This is the question, after all, which demands our attention. We may have been up to this day careless, thoughtless, sinful as the woman whose story we have been reading. But yet there is hope—He who talked with the Samaritan woman at the well is yet living at God's right hand, and never changes. Let us only ask, and He will "give us living water."

Technical Notes:

7. A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, Give me a drink. 8. (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy meat.) 9. Then the woman of Samaria said to him, How is it that you, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman? For the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans. 10. Jesus answered and said to her, If you knew the gift of God and who it is who says to you, Give me a drink, you would have asked of him, and he would have given you living water. 11. The woman said to him, Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do you get that living water? 12. Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock? 13. Jesus answered and said to her, Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I

shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life. 15. The woman said to him, Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst nor come here to draw. 16. Jesus said to her, Go, call your husband, and come here. 17. The woman answered and said, I have no husband. Jesus said to her, You have well said, I have no husband, 18. for you have had five husbands, and he whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly. 19. The woman said to him, Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. 20. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. 21. Jesus said to her, Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when ye will neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem worship the Father. 22. Ye worship what ye do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. 23. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship him. 24. God *is* a Spirit, and those who worship him must worship *him* in spirit and truth. 25. The woman said to him, I know that Messiah is coming, who is called Christ. When he comes, he will tell us all things. 26. Jesus said to her, I who speak to you am *he*.

7.—[*A woman…water*.] The scarcity of water in the hot climates of the East makes drawing water from the nearest well an important part of the daily business of an Eastern household. We learn from

other parts of Scripture that it was a work ordinarily done by women. (Gen. xxiv.11; 1 Sam. ix.11.) A well became naturally a common meeting-place for the inhabitants of a neighborhood, and especially for the young people. (Judges v.11.) The insinuation, however, of some writers, as Schottgen, that the Samaritan woman's motives in coming to the well were possibly immoral, seems destitute of any foundation. Bad as her moral character evidently was, we have no right to heap upon her more blame than is warranted by facts.

Augustine regards this woman as a type of the Gentile Church, "not now justified, but even now at the point to be justified." I doubt whether we were meant by the Holy Ghost to take this view. There is great danger in adopting such allegorical interpretations. They insensibly draw away the mind from the plain lessons of Scripture.

Musculus remarks what a wonderful instance it is of sovereign grace that our Lord should turn away from learned Scribes, Pharisees, and Priests to converse with and convert such a person as this woman, to all appearance so utterly unworthy of notice. He also observes how singularly our least movements are overruled by God's providence. Like Rebecca and Rachel, the woman came to the well knowing nothing of the importance of that day's visit to her soul.

[*Jesus said to her, Give me a drink*.] In this simple request of our Lord, there are four things deserving notice.
(a) It was a gracious act of spiritual aggression on a sinner. He did not wait for the woman to speak to Him, but was the first to begin

conversation.

(b) It was an act of marvelous condescension. He by whom all things were made, the Creator of fountains, brooks, and rivers, is not ashamed to ask a draught of water from the hand of one of His sinful creatures.

(c) It was an act full of wisdom and prudence. He does not at once force religion on the attention of the woman and rebuke her for her sins. He begins with a subject apparently indifferent, and yet one of which the woman's mind was doubtless full. He asks her for water.

(d) It was an act full of the nicest tact, and exhibiting perfect knowledge of the human mind. He asks a favor and puts Himself under an obligation. No line of proceeding, it is well known to all wise people, would be more likely to conciliate the woman's feelings towards Him, and to make her willing to hear His teaching. Simple as the request was, it contains principles which deserve the closest attention of all who desire to do good to ignorant and thoughtless sinners. The idea of Euthymius, that our Lord *pretended* thirst in order to introduce conversation, is unworthy of notice. Cyril thinks that our Lord intended to make a practical protest against the exclusiveness of the Jews by asking drink of a Samaritan woman, and to show her that He disapproved the custom of His nation.

[*For his disciples…buy food.*] This verse is an instance of our Lord's general rule not to work a miracle in order to supply His own needs. He who could feed five thousand with a few loaves and fishes when He willed, was content to buy food like any other man. It is an instance of His lowly-mindedness. The Creator of all things, though

rich, for our sakes became poor. It ought to teach Christians that they are not meant to be so spiritual as to neglect the management of money and a reasonable use of it for the supply of their needs. God could feed His children, as He fed Elijah, by a daily miracle. But He knows it is better for our souls, and more likely to call grace into exercise, not to feed them so but to make them think and use means. There is no real spirituality in being careless about money. Jesus Himself allowed His disciples to "buy." The word rendered "meat" means nothing more than "food or nourishment," and must not be confined to "flesh." Out of the sixteen places where it is used in the New Testament, there is not one where it necessarily signifies "flesh." The meat offering of the Old Testament consisted of nothing but flour, oil, and incense. (Lev. ii.1,2.) The meaning of the word "meat," in the English language, has evidently changed since the last revision of the English Bible.

The whole verse is an instance of one of those short, parenthetical, explanatory comments which are common in St. John's Gospel. Its object is to explain the circumstance of our Lord being alone at the well, and the fact that He did not ask a disciple to give Him water.

9.—[Then the woman... How is it... Samaritan woman?] This question implies that the woman was surprised at our Lord speaking to her. It was an unexpected act of condescension on His part, and as such arrested her attention. Thus one point, at any rate, was gained. It is a great matter if we can only get a careless sinner to give us a quiet hearing. We shall soon see how our Lord improved the

opportunity.

How the woman knew our Lord to be a Jew is matter of conjecture. Some think that she knew it by the dialect that He spoke. Some think that she knew it by the fringe upon His dress, which He probably wore in conformity to the Mosaic law (Num. xv.38,39), and which the Samaritans very likely neglected. One thing is very clear. There was nothing in our Lord's personal appearance, when He was a man upon earth, to distinguish Him from any other Jewish traveler who might have been found sitting at a well. There was nothing eccentric or peculiar about His dress. He looked like other men.

I venture the opinion that in the woman's question stress should be laid on the word "woman." She was not only surprised that a Jewish man asked drink of a Samaritan, but also that he asked it of a woman.

[The Jews...dealings... Samaritans.] This sentence is generally thought, with much reason, to be the explanatory comment of St. John and not the words of the Samaritan woman. It certainly seems more natural to take it so. The sentence should then be read as a parenthesis. Calvin thinks it is the woman's words, but his reasons are not convincing. The enmity between the Jews and Samaritans, here referred to, no doubt originated in the separation of the ten tribes under Jeroboam and the establishment of the kingdom of Israel. It was exceedingly increased after the ten tribes were carried into captivity by the Assyrians, by the fact that the Samaritans

became mingled with foreigners whom the king of Assyria sent to Samaria from Babylon and other places, and so lost their right to be called pure Jews. (2 Kings xvii.1, etc.) It was further aggravated by the opposition which the inhabitants of Samaria made to the rebuilding of Jerusalem after the return from the captivity of Babylon in the days of Ezra. (Ezra iv.10, etc.) In the days of our Lord, the Jews seem to have gone to the extreme of regarding the Samaritans as entirely foreigners and aliens from the commonwealth of Israel. When they told our Lord that He was "a Samaritan and had a devil," they meant the expression to convey the bitterest scorn and reproach. (John viii.48.) It is clear, however, from the conversation in this chapter, that the Samaritans, however mistaken on many points, were not ignorant heathens. They regarded themselves as descended from Jacob. They had a kind of Old Testament religion. They expected the coming Messiah.

The bitter and exclusive spirit of the Jews towards all other nations, referred to in this verse, is curiously confirmed by the language used about the Jews by heathen writers at Rome. Exclusiveness was noted as one among their peculiarities. The immense difficulty with which even the apostles got over this exclusive feeling and went forth to preach to the Gentiles is noticeable both in the Acts and the Epistles. (Acts x.28; xi.2; Gal. ii.12; 1 Thess. ii.16.)

The utter absence of real charity and love among men in the days when our Lord was upon earth ought not to be overlooked. Well would it be if men had never quarreled about religion after He left

the world! Quarrels among the crew of a sinking ship are not more hideous, unseemly, and irrational than the majority of quarrels among professors of religion. A historian might truly apply St. John's words to many a period in Church history and say, "The Romanists have no dealings with the Protestants," or "the Lutherans have no dealings with the Calvinists," or "the Calvinists have no dealings with the Arminians," or "the Episcopalians have no dealings with the Presbyterians," or "the Baptists have no dealings with those who baptize infants," or "the Plymouth Brethren have no dealings with anybody who does not join their company." These things ought not so to be. They are the scandal of Christianity, the joy of the devil, and the greatest stumbling-block to the spread of the Gospel.

The Greek words translated "have no dealings," mean literally "use not anything together with the Samaritans." Pearce says, "The Jews would not eat or drink with the Samaritans, would not drink out of the same cup or eat of the same dish with them." This fact throws much light on the woman's surprise at our Lord's request, "Give me a drink."

10.—[*Jesus answered, etc.*] In this verse our Lord proceeds to use the opportunity which the woman's question affords Him. He passes over, for the present, her expression of surprise at a Jew speaking to a Samaritan. He begins by exciting her curiosity and raising her expectations by speaking of something within her reach which He calls "living water." The first step to take with a careless sinner, after his attention has been arrested, is to produce on his mind the

impression that we can tell him of something to his advantage within his reach. There is a certain vagueness in our Lord's words which exhibits his consummate wisdom. A systematic statement of doctrinal truth would have been thrown away at this stage of the woman's feelings. The general and figurative language which our Lord employed was exactly calculated to arouse her imagination and to lead her on to further inquiry.

[*The gift of God*.] This expression is variously explained. Some think, as Augustine, Rupertus, Jansenius, Whitby, and Alford, that it means "the Holy Spirit," that peculiar gift which it was the Messiah's special office to impart to men in greater abundance than it had before been imparted. (Acts ii.38; x.45.)

Some think, as Brentius, Bucer, Musculus, Calovius, Grotius, and Barradius, that it means "the gracious opportunity which God is graciously giving to thee." If you did but know what a door of life is close to you, you would joyfully use it.

Some think, as Euthymius, Toletus, Bullinger, Gualter, Hooker, Beza, Rollock, Lightfoot, Glassius, Dyke, Hildersam, and Gill, that it means "Christ Himself," God's gracious gift to a sinful world. It you did but know that God has actually given His only-begotten Son, according to promise, and that He has come into the world, and that it is He who is speaking to you, you would at once ask of Him living water. Some think that it means "God's gifts, and especially His gift of grace," which is now being proclaimed and made manifest to the

world by the appearing on earth of His Son. (See Rom. v.15.) This seems to be the view of Cyril, Lámpe, Theophylact, Zwingli, and Calvin. Of these four views, the last seems to me, on the whole, the most probable and satisfactory. The first sounds strange and unlike the usual teaching of Scripture. "If you knew the Holy Spirit, you would have asked," is an expression we can hardly expect at this period of our Lord's ministry, when the mission of the Comforter had not yet been explained. The second view seems hardly more natural than the first. The third view is undoubtedly recommended by the fact that Christ is frequently spoken of as God's great gift to the world. If the woman had really known anything aright about Messiah, and had known that He was before her, she would have asked of Him living water. Nevertheless, it is a strong objection to this view that it makes our Lord apparently say the same thing twice over. "If you knew Christ, and that it is Christ who speaks."

The last view makes the first clause *general*— "If you knew the grace of God," and the second *particular*— "If you also knew that the Savior Himself is with you." Thus both clauses receive a meaning.

[*Living water*.] The meaning of this expression, like "the gift of God," is variously explained. Some, as Calovius and Chemnitius, seem to think it means the doctrine of God's mercy, pardon, cleansing, and justification. Others, as Chrysostom, Augustine, Cyril, Theophylact, Calvin, Beza, Gualter, Musculus, and Ferus, think it means the Holy Spirit, renewing, and sanctification.

I doubt whether either view is quite correct. I am inclined, with Bullinger and Rollock, to regard the expression as a general figurative description of everything which it is Christ's office to bestow on the soul of man—pardon, peace, mercy, grace, justification, and sanctification. As water is cleansing, purifying, cooling, refreshing, thirst-satisfying to man's body, so are Christ's gifts to the soul. I think everything that a sinful soul needs is purposely included under the general words "living water." It comprises not only the justifying "blood which cleanses from all sin," but the sanctifying grace of the Spirit by which we "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness"—not only the inward peace which is the result of pardon, but the sense of inward comfort which is the companion of renewal of heart.

The idea of "water," we should remember, is specially brought forward in some of the Old Testament promises of good things to come. (See Isa. xii.3; xliv 3; Ezek. xlvii.1, etc.; Zech. xiii.1; xiv.8.) A sprinkling of clean water was particularly mentioned as one of the things Messiah was to give. (Isa. lii.15; Ezek. xxxvi.25.) To an intelligent reader of the Old Testament, the mention of "living water" would at once raise up the idea of Messiah's times.

The word "living," applied here to water, must not be pressed too far. It does not necessarily mean anything more than fresh, running waters. Thus it is said that Isaac's servants found a well of living waters. (Gen. xxvi.19. See also Num. xix.17; Cant. iv.15.) There was undoubtedly a deep meaning in our Lord's words, and a tacit

reference to the verse in Jeremiah, where God speaks of Himself as "the fountain of living waters." (Jer. ii.13.) Nevertheless, the first idea that the words would convey to the woman's mind would probably be no more than this, that He who sat before her had better, fresher, and more valuable water than that of the well. The fact is that our Lord purposely used a figurative, general expression in order to lead the woman's mind gently on. If He had said, "He would have given thee grace and mercy," she would have been unprepared for such purely doctrinal language, and it would have called forth prejudice and dislike.

There is a vast quantity of deep truth contained in this verse. It is rich in first principles, linked together in a most instructive chain. (1) Christ has living water to give to men. (2) If men would only ask, Christ would give at once. (3) Men do not ask because they are ignorant. The verse condemns all who die unpardoned. They have not because they ask not; they ask not because they are blind to their condition. To remove this blindness and ignorance must be the first object we should aim at in dealing with a thoughtless, unconverted man.

The notion of Ambrose, Cyprian, and Rupertus, that "living water" here means baptism, is too monstrous to require refutation. It is only a sample of the preposterous view of some of the Fathers and their followers about the sacraments.

Bengel remarks on this verse our Lord's readiness to draw lessons of spiritual instruction from every object near Him. To the Jews

desiring bread, He spoke of the bread of life. (John vi.33.) To the people at Jerusalem at break of day, He speaks of the light of the world, referring probably to the rising sun. (John viii.2,12.) To the woman coming to draw water, He speaks of living water.

11.—[*The woman said to him*.] The words of the woman, in this and the following verse, imply surprise, curiosity, and perhaps a slight sneer. At any rate they show that her attention was arrested. A strange Jew at a well suddenly speaks to her about "living water." What could He mean? Was he in earnest or not? With a woman's curiosity she desires to know. [*Sir*.] The Greek word so rendered is generally translated "Lord." This leads some, as Chrysostom, to think that the woman's heart was so far impressed now that she purposely used a term of respect and reverence. We must not, however, lay too much stress on the word. It is certainly translated "Sir" in other places where inferiors speak to superiors. (Matt. xiii.27; xxi.30; xxvii.63; John iv.49; v.7; xii. 21; xx.15; Rev. vii.14.) Yet it is difficult to see what other word the woman could have used in addressing a strange man, without rudeness and discourtesy. [*Nothing to draw with*.] The Greek expression here is simply a substantive meaning "an instrument for drawing water." What it was we are left to conjecture. Schleusner suggests from Nonnus that it must mean a cup fastened to a rope.

[*The well is deep*.] These words, according to the universal testimony of travelers at this day, are still literally true. The well is at least thirty yards deep, and to a person not provided with a rope, as the woman

doubtless saw was our Lord's case, the water would be inaccessible. [*Where then…that living water*.] The Greek word here rendered "that" is simply the article commonly translated "the." It is like "that prophet." (John i.21.)

The ignorance of the woman in thinking of nothing but material water naturally strikes us. Yet it is nothing more than we see in many other instances in the Gospels. Nicodemus could not see any but a carnal meaning in the new birth; the disciples could not understand our Lord's having "meat to eat," unless it was literal meat; the Jews thought the "bread from heaven" was literal bread. (John iii.4; iv.33; vi.34.) The natural heart of man always tries to put a carnal and material sense on spiritual expressions. Hence have arisen the greatest errors about the sacraments. 12.—[*Are you greater*.] This question exhibits the woman's curiosity to know who the stranger before her could be. Who are you that speaks of living water? It also savors of a sneer and incredulity. Do you mean to say that you can give me better and more abundant supplies of water than a well which the patriarch Jacob found sufficient for himself and all his numerous company? Do you pretend to know of a better well? Are you, a poor weary traveler in appearance, so great a person that you do possess a better well than Jacob possessed?

[*Our father Jacob…well*.] Let is be noted that the woman carefully claimed relationship with Jacob and called him "our father," though, after all the intermixture of the Samaritans with heathen nations, the relationship was not very easy of proof. But it is common to find

people shutting their eyes to difficulties when they want to prove a connection or relationship. The advocates of an extreme view of apostolical succession seldom condescend to notice difficulties when they assert that episcopally ordained ministers can trace their order up to the apostles. When it says that "Jacob gave" the well, there is probably a reference to the grant which Jacob made to his son Joseph of the district near the well. From Joseph came the tribe of Ephraim to which, no doubt, the Samaritan woman claimed to belong. (Gen. xlviii.22.)

[*Drink…himself…livestock.*] These words were doubtless said to show the goodness and abundance of the water. Did the stranger at the well really mean to say that he could really give any better water? Bucer, on this verse, remarks how the Samaritans prided themselves on their relationship to Jacob and the possession of his well while they made no effort to imitate his goodness, and points out the tendency of superstition to the same thing in every age. "True piety," he says, "does not consist in having Jacob's well and Jacob's land, but Jacob's spirit; not in keeping the bones of the saints but in imitating their lives."

13.—[*Jesus answered, etc.*] In this and the following verse our Lord proceeds to raise the desires of the woman by exalting the value of the living water of which He had spoken. He still refrains from distinct statements of doctrinal truth; He still adheres to the figurative expression "water." And yet He makes an advance and leads on the woman gently and almost imperceptibly to glorious

spiritual things. Now, for the first time, He begins to speak of "everlasting life."

[*Whosoever drinks…thirst again.*] It will be noted that our Lord does not answer the woman's questions directly. He keeps steadily to the one point He desires to fasten on her mind: viz., the infinite excellence of a certain "living water" which He had to give. And first He reminds her of what she knew well by laborious experience: the water of Jacob's well might be good and plentiful, but still he who drank of it was only satisfied for a few hours. He soon thirsted again.

We cannot doubt that there was a deep latent thought in our Lord's words in this sentence. He would have us know that the waters of Jacob's well are typical of all temporal and material good things: they cannot satisfy the soul. They have no power to fill the heart of an immortal creature like man. He who only drinks of them is sure to thirst again. Some have thought that there is a tacit reference in these words to the woman's insatiable love of sin.

The similarity ought to be noticed between our Lord's line of argument in this verse and the line He adopts in recommending to the Jews the bread of life in the sixth chapter. He showed the Jews the superiority of the bread of life over the manna by the words, "Your father did eat manna and are dead." (John vi.49.) Just so in this place, He shows the inferiority of the water of Jacob's well to the living water by saying, "He that drinks of this water shall thirst again." The two passages deserve a careful comparison.

14.—[*Whosoever drinks…never thirst.*] These words contain a precious promise and declare a glorious truth of the Gospel. The benefits of Christ's gifts are promised to everyone who is willing to receive them, whosoever and whatsoever he may be. He may have been as bad as the Samaritan woman, but the promise is for him as well as for her: "whosoever drinks shall never thirst." The declaration "shall never thirst" does not mean "shall never feel any spiritual want at all." It simply asserts the abiding and enduring nature of the benefits which Christ gives. He that drinks of the living water which Christ gives shall never entirely and completely lose the cleansing, purifying, and soul refreshing effects which it produces.

Our English translation of this sentence hardly gives the full sense of the Greek. Literally rendered it would be, "Shall never thirst unto eternity." The same expression is used frequently in St. John's Gospel. See John vi. 51-58; viii.51; x.28; xi.26; xiv.16.

[*The water I shall give…everlasting life.*] To see the full meaning of this figurative sentence, it must be paraphrased. The meaning seems to be something of this kind: "The gift of grace, mercy, and peace which I am ready to give shall be in the heart of him who receives it an ever-flowing source of comfort, satisfaction, and spiritual refreshment; continuing and flowing on, not only through this life but unto life eternal. He that receives my gift of living water has a fountain opened in his soul of spiritual satisfaction, which shall neither be dried up in this life or the life to come, but shall flow on to all eternity."

Let it be noted that the whole verse is a strong argument in favor of the doctrine of the perpetuity of grace and the consequent perseverance in the faith of believers. It is difficult to understand how the Arminian doctrine of the possibility of believers completely falling away and being lost can be reconciled with any natural interpretation of this verse. Zwingli thinks, with much probability, that the words "a fountain in him," point to the benefits which grace once received makes a man impart to others, as well as enjoy himself. (See John vii.38.) Rollock remarks on this verse: "Let me say in a word what I feel. You will find nothing either in heaven or in earth, with which you will be satisfied and feel supplied, except Jesus Christ alone, with all that fullness of the godhead which dwells in Him bodily."

Poole says: "He who receives the Holy Spirit and the grace thereof, though he will be daily saying Give, give, and continually desiring further supplies of grace, yet he shall never wholly want, never want any good thing that shall be needful for him. The seed of God shall abide in him, and His water shall be in him a spring supplying him until he comes to heaven."

15.—[*The woman said, etc.*] In this verse, I think, we see the first sparks of good in the woman's soul. Our Lord's words aroused a desire in her heart for this living water of which He had spoken. She does what our Lord said she ought to have done at first. She "asks" Him to give her the water.

[Give me this water…not thirst…draw.] The motives of the woman in making this request are variously explained. Some think, as Musculus, Calvin, Bucer, Brentius, Gualter, Lightfoot, Poole, and Dyke, that the request was made in a sarcastic and sneering spirit, as though she would say, "Truly this water would be a fine thing, if we could get it! Give it to me, if you have it to give." Some think, as Augustine, Cyril, Bullinger, Rollock, Hildersam, Jansenius, and Nifanius, that the request was only the lazy, indolent wish of one who was weary of this world's labor, and yet could see nothing but the things of this world in our Lord's sayings; like the request of the Jews, "Evermore give us this bread." (John vi.34.) It is as though she would say, "Anything to save me the trouble of coming to draw water would be a boon. If you can do that for me, do it." As Bengel says, "She wished to have this living fountain at her own house."

Some think, as Chrysostom, Theophylact, and Euthymius, that the request was really the prayer of an anxious soul, aroused to some faint spiritual desires by the mention of eternal life. "Hast thou eternal life to bestow? Give it to me."

I venture to think that none of these three views is quite correct. The true motive of the request was probably a vague feeling of desire that the woman herself could hardly have defined. It is useless to analyze and scrutinize too closely the first languid and imperfect desires that arise in souls when the Spirit begins His work of conversion. It is folly to say that the first moving's of a heart towards God must be free from all imperfect motives and all mixture of infirmity. The

woman's motives in saying "Give me this water" were probably mixed and indefinite. Material water was not out of her thoughts, and yet she had probably some desires after everlasting life. Enough for us to know that she asked and received, she sought and found. Our great aim must be to persuade sinners to apply to Jesus and to say to Him, "Give me to drink." If we forbid them to ask anything until they can prove that they ask in a perfect spirit, we should do no good at all. It would be as foolish to scrutinize the grammatical construction of an infant's cries as to analyze the precise motives of a soul's first breathings after God. If it breathes at all and says "Give," we ought to be thankful.

16.—[Jesus said…call your husband…here.] This verse begins an entirely new stage in the history of the woman's conversion. From this point on we hear no more of "living water." Figurative language is dropped entirely. Our Lord's words become direct, personal, and plain. The woman had asked at last for "living water." At once our Lord proceeds to give it to her.

Our Lord's reasons for bidding the woman to call her husband have been variously interpreted. Some think that He only meant her to understand that He had spoken long enough to her, a solitary woman, and that before He proceeded further she must call her husband to be a witness of the conversation and to partake of the benefits He was going to confer. This seems the view of Chrysostom and Theophylact. Others think, with far more probability in my judgment, that our Lord's main object in naming the woman's

husband was to produce in her mind conviction of sin, and to show her His own divine knowledge of all things. He knew that she had no husband, and He purposely named him in order to touch her conscience. He always knew the thoughts of those to whom He spoke, and He knew, in the present case, what the effect of His words would be. It would bring to light the woman's besetting sin. It is as though He said, "You do ask Me for living water. You do at last express a desire for that great spiritual gift which I am able to bestow. Well then, I begin by bidding you to know yourself and your sinfulness. I will show you that I know your spiritual disease and can lay my finger on the most dangerous ailment of your soul. Go, call your husband, and come here."

Let it be noted that the first draught of living water which our Lord gave to the Samaritan woman was conviction of sin. That fact is a lesson for all who desire to benefit ignorant and careless sinners. The first thing to be taught to such persons, when once we have gotten their attention, is their own sinfulness and their consequent need of a Savior. No one values the physician until he feels his disease.

Augustine thinks that when our Lord said "Call thy husband," He meant, "Cause thine understanding to be forthcoming. Thine understanding is not with thee. I am speaking after the spirit, and thou hearest after the flesh!" I can see no wisdom in this fanciful idea.

17.—[*The woman answered...no husband.*] These words were an

honest and truthful confession, as far as they went. Whether the woman wished it to be supposed that she was a widow, it would perhaps be hardly fair to inquire. Theophylact and Euthymius suggest that she did wish to deceive our Lord. The way in which our Lord received her declaration makes it probable that she did not profess to be a widow, and very likely her dress showed that she was not. In this point of view, the honesty of her confession is noteworthy. There is always more hope of one who honestly and bluntly confesses sin than of a smooth-tongued hypocrite.

[Jesus said…well said…no husband.] Our Lord's commendation of the woman's honest confession deserves notice. It teaches us that we should make the best of an ignorant sinner's words. An unskillful physician of souls would probably have rebuked the woman sharply for his wickedness, if her words led him to suspect it. Our Lord, on the contrary, says, "Thou hast well said."

18.—[*Five husbands.*] Many foolish and unseemly things have been written about this sentence which it is not worthwhile to bring forward. Of course it is utterly improbable that the woman had lost five husbands by death and had been five times a widow. The more likely explanation is that she had been divorced and put away by several husbands in succession. Divorces were notoriously common among the Jews, and in all probability among the Samaritans, for very trivial causes. In the case, however, of the woman before us, the second clause of the verse makes it likely that she had been justly divorced for adultery.

Augustine regards these five husbands as significant of "the five senses of the body," which are as five husbands by which the soul of the natural man is ruled! I cannot think that our Lord meant anything of the kind. Euthymius mentions another allegorical view, making the woman to typify human nature, and the five husbands five different dispensations and him with whom she now lived the Mosaic Law! This seems to me simply absurd. Origen says much the same. It is well to know what patristic interpretation is!

[*He whom…not your husband.*] These words show plainly that the Samaritan woman was living in adultery up to the very day when our Lord spoke to her. Our Lord's perfect knowledge of the woman's past and present life is very noteworthy. It ought to remind us how perfectly He is acquainted with every transaction of our own lives. From Him no secrets are hid.

[*In that you spoke truly.*] There is a kindness very worthy of notice in these words. Wicked and abandoned as this Samaritan woman was, our Lord deals gently and kindly with her, and twice in one breath commends her confession: "You have well said. In that you spoke truly." Kindness of manner like this will always be found a most important point in dealing with the ungodly. Scolding and sharp rebuke, however well-deserved, have a tendency to harden and shut up hearts and to make people bolt their doors. Kindness, on the contrary, wins, softens, conciliates, and disarms prejudice. An unskillful soul-physician would probably have ended his sentence by

saying, “You are a wicked woman, and if you do not repent, you will be lost.” All this would have been true no doubt. But how different our Lord’s grave and gentle remark: “You spoke truly!”

19.—[The woman said… I perceive…prophet.] I think we see in this verse a great change in the Samaritan woman’s mind. She evidently confesses the entire truth of what our Lord had just said and turns to Him as an anxious inquirer about her soul. It is as though she said, “I perceive at last that you are indeed no common person. You have told me what you could not have known if you were not a prophet sent from God. You have exposed sins which I cannot deny and aroused spiritual concern which I would now fain have relieved. Now give me instruction.”

Let it be noted that the thing which first struck the Samaritan woman and made her call Jesus “a prophet” was the same that struck Nathanael, viz., our Lord’s perfect knowledge. To call our Lord “a prophet” at first sight may seem not much. But it must be remembered that even after His resurrection, the two disciples going to Emmaus only described Jesus as a “prophet mighty in deed and word.” (Luke xxiv.19.) A clear knowledge of the divine nature of Messiah seems to have been one of the points on which almost the whole Jewish nation was ignorant. Even the learned Scribes could not explain how Messiah was to be David’s Lord and also David’s Son. (Mark xii.37.)

20.—[*Our fathers worshiped, etc.*] To see the full drift of this verse,

we must carefully remember the state of the Samaritan woman's mind at this moment. I think that she spoke under spiritual anxiety. She was alarmed by having her sins suddenly exposed. She found herself for the first time in the presence of a prophet. She felt for the first time the necessity of religion. But at once the old question between the Jews and Samaritans arose before her mind. How was she to know what was truth? What was she to believe? Her own people said that the Samaritan mode of worshiping God was correct. The Jews said that Jerusalem was the only place where men ought to worship. Between these two conflicting opinions, what was she to do?

The natural ignorance of almost all unconverted people, when first aroused to thought about religion, appears strikingly in the woman's words. Man's first idea is to attach great importance to the outward mode of worshiping God. The first refuge of an awakened conscience is strict adherence to some outward form and zeal for the external part of religion. The woman's readiness to quote "the fathers" and their customs is an instructive instance of man's readiness to make custom and tradition his only rule of faith. "Our fathers did so" is one of the natural man's favorite arguments. Calvin's comments on the expression "fathers" in this verse are very useful. He remarks, among other things, "None should be reckoned Fathers but those who are manifestly the sons of God." When the woman spoke of "this mountain," she doubtless meant the hill on which the rival temple of Samaria was built, to the bitter annoyance of the Jerusalem Jews. It is said that this temple was first built in the days of Nehemiah by

Sanballat, and that his son-in-law, the son of Joiada, whom Nehemiah "chased from him" was its first high priest. (Neh. xiii.29.) Some have gone so far as to maintain that the hill Gerizim at Samaria was the hill on which Abraham offered up Isaac, and that the words of the woman refer to this. The more common opinion is that Mount Moriah at Jerusalem was the place.

When the woman says "Ye say," she doubtless includes the whole Jewish nation, of whom she regards our Lord as a representative. Musculus, Baxter, Scott, and Barnes think that the woman, in this verse, desired to turn away the conversation from her own sins to a subject of public controversy, and in this way to change the subject. I am not, however, satisfied that this view is correct. I prefer the view of Brentius, which I have already set forth, that she was truly impressed by our Lord's exposure of her wickedness and made a serious inquiry about the things needful to salvation. She was aroused to seriousness and asked what was true religion. Her own nation said one thing, the Jews said another. What was truth? In short, her words were only another form of the jailer's question, "What shall I do to be saved?"

21.—[*Jesus said…believe me.*] The calmness, gravity, and solemnity of these opening words are very noteworthy. "I tell you a great truth, which I ask you to credit and believe."
Jansenius thinks that our Lord uses the expression "believe Me," because the truth He was about to impart was so new and strange that the woman would be apt to think it incredible.

Stier remarks that this is the only time our Lord ever uses this expression, “Believe Me,” in the Gospels.

[*The hour comes*.] The hour, or time here spoken of, means the time of the Gospel, the hour of the Christian dispensation.

[Ye shall neither…mountain… Jerusalem…worship, etc.] Our Lord here declares that under the Gospel there was to be no more distinction of places, like Jerusalem. The old dispensation under which men were bound to go up to Jerusalem three times a year, to attend the feasts and worship in the temple, was about to pass away. All questions about the superior sanctity of Samaria or Jerusalem would soon be at an end. A Church was about to be founded whose members would find access to the Father everywhere, and would need no temple service and no priests or sacrifices or altars in order to approach God. It was, therefore, mere waste of time to be disputing about the comparative claims of either Samaria or Jerusalem. Under the Gospel all places would soon be alike. It seems far from improbable that our Lord referred in this verse to the prophecy of Malachi: “In every place incense shall be offered to my name.” (Mal. i.11.)

The utter passing away of the whole Jewish system seems clearly pointed at in this verse. To bring into the Christian Church holy places, sanctuaries, altars, priests, sacrifices, gorgeous vestments, and the like is to dig up that which has been long buried, and to turn to candles for light under the noon-day sun. The favorite theory of

the Irvingites, that we ought (as far as possible) in our public worship copy the Jewish temple services and ceremonial, seems incapable of reconciliation with this verse. Calvin says, “By calling God the Father in this verse, Christ seems indirectly to contrast Him with the ‘father’ whom the woman had mentioned, and to convey this instruction that God will be a common Father to all, so that He will be generally worshiped without distinction of place or nation.”

22.—[*Ye worship…not know*.] In this verse our Lord unhesitatingly condemns the religious system of the Samaritans, as compared with that of the Jews. The Samaritans could show no Scriptural authority, no revelation of God, commanding and sanctioning their worship. Whatever it was, it was purely an invention of man which God had never formally authorized or accredited. They had no warrant for believing that it was accepted. They had no right to feel sure that their prayers, praises, and offerings were received. In short, all was uncertainty. They were practically worshiping an “unknown God.”

Mede remarks that the Samaritan woman overlooked the *object* of worship in her question about the *place*. “You inquire concerning the place of worshiping. But a far more important question is at issue between us, viz., the Being to be worshiped, respecting whom you are ignorant.” [*We know what we worship*.] In contrast to the Samaritan religious system, our Lord declares that the Jews at any rate could show divine warrant and scriptural authority for all they did in their religion. They could render a reason of their hope. They knew whom they approached in their religious services.

[*Salvation is of the Jews.*] Our Lord here declares that God's promises of a Savior and Redeemer specially belong to the Jerusalem Jews. They were the descendants of the tribe of Ephraim, from which it was nowhere said that Messiah should spring. And in truth the Samaritans were of such mixed origin that they had no right to be called Israelites at all. I believe with Olshausen that "salvation" in this verse was really intended to mean "the Savior" Himself. The use of the article in the Greek is striking. It is literally "the salvation." Does not the saying to Zacchæaus point the same way? "This day is salvation come to this house." (Luke xix.9.)

The expression "we" in this verse is very interesting. It is a wonderful instance of our Lord's condescension and one that stands almost alone. He was pleased to speak of Himself, just in the light that He appeared to the woman, as one of the Jewish nation. "I and all other Jews know what we worship."

The folly of supposing that ignorance is to be praised and commended in religion as the mother of devotion is strongly condemned in this verse. Christ would have Christians "know what they worship." The testimony borne to the general truth of the religious system of the Jews in this place is very striking. Corrupt and wicked as Scribes and Pharisees were, Jesus declares that the Jewish religion was true and Scriptural. It is a mournful proof that a Church may retain a sound creed and yet be on the high road to destruction.

Hildersam has a long note which is well worth reading on the words "salvation is of the Jews." Considering the times in which he lived, it shows singularly clear views of God's continual purposes concerning the Jewish nation. He sees in the words the great truth that all God's revelations to man in every age have been made through the Jews. 23.—[*Hour is coming, and now is.*] These words mean that the times of the Gospel approach, and indeed have already begun. "They have begun by the preaching of the kingdom of God. They will be fully brought in by my death and ascension, and the establishment of the New Testament Church." [*True worshipers…and truth.*] Our Lord here declares who alone would be considered true worshipers in the coming dispensation of the Gospel. They would not be merely those who worshiped in this place or in that place. They would not be exclusively Jews or exclusively Gentiles or exclusively Samaritans. The external part of the worship would be of no value compared to the internal state of the worshipers. They only would be counted true worshipers who worshiped in spirit and in truth.

The words "in spirit and in truth" are variously interpreted, and much has been written about them. I believe the simplest explanation to be this: The word "spirit" must not be taken to mean the Holy Spirit, but the intellectual or mental part of man, in contradistinction to the material or carnal part of man. This distinction is clearly marked in 1 Cor. vii.34:

"Holy in body and in spirit." "Worship in spirit" is heart-worship in contradistinction to all formal, material, carnal worship consisting

only of ceremonies, offerings, sacrifices, and the like. When a Jew offered a formal meat-offering with his heart far away, it was worship after the flesh. When David offered in prayer a broken and a contrite heart, it was worship in spirit. “Worship in truth” means worship through the one true way of access to God, without the medium of the sacrifices or priesthood which were ordained till Christ died on the cross. When the veil was rent and the way into the holiest made manifest by Christ’s death, then, and not till then, men “worshiped in truth.” Before Christ they worshiped through types and shadows and figures and emblems. After Christ they worshiped in truth. Spirit is opposed to “flesh,” truth to “shadow.” “Spirit,” in short, is heart-service contrasted with lip worship and formal devotion. “Truth” is the full light of the Christian dispensation contrasted with the twilight of the law of Moses.

The view I have endeavored to give is substantially that of Chrysostom and Euthymius. Caryl, quoted by Ford, says, “In *spirit* regard the inward power, in *truth* the outward form. The first strikes at hypocrisy, the second at idolatry.” [*The Father seeks… Him.*] This is a remarkable sentence. I believe it to mean that “the hour is come in which the Father has ordained from eternity that He will gather out of the world a company of true and spiritual worshipers. He is even now seeking out and gathering in such worshipers.” The expression “seeks” is peculiar. There is something like it in the sentence, “The Son of man is come to *seek* and to save that which is lost.” (Luke xix.10.) It seems to show the exceeding compassion of the Father and His infinite willingness to save souls. He does not

merely “wait” for men to come to Him. He “seeks” for them. It also shows the wide opening of God the Father’s mercy under the Gospel. He no longer confines His grace to the Jews. He now *seeks* and desires to gather in everywhere true worshipers out of every nation.
The clause appears to me specially intended to encourage the Samaritan woman. Let her not trouble herself with difficulties about the comparative claims of the Samaritan and Jewish systems. Was she willing to be a spiritual worshiper? That was the one question which deserved her attention.

Trapp observes, “How should this fire up our hearts to spiritual worship! That God *seeks* for such worshipers!”

24.—[*God is a Spirit.*] Our Lord here declares to the Samaritan woman the true nature of God. Let her cease to think that God was such a one as man, and that He could not be found or approached or addressed like a mere earthly Monarch, except at one particular place. Let her learn to have higher, nobler, and more exalted views of the Being with whom sinners have to do. Let her know this day that God was a Spirit.

The declaration before us is one of the most lofty and definite sayings about God’s nature which is to be found in the whole Bible. That such a declaration should have been made to such a person as the Samaritan woman is a wonderful instance of Christ’s condescension! To define precisely the full meaning of the expression is past man’s understanding. The leading idea most probably is that “God is an

immaterial being, that He dwells not in temples made with hands, and that He is not, therefore, (like ourselves) absent from one place when He is present at another." These things are all true, but how little we can realize them!

Cornelius à Lapide gives an excellent summary of the opinions of heathen philosophers on the nature of God, in his commentary on this verse. [*Those who worship…spirit and truth*.] Our Lord draws this broad conclusion from the statement of God's nature which He has just made. If "God is a Spirit," it behooves those who would worship Him acceptably to worship in spirit and in truth. It is unreasonable to suppose that He can like any worship which does not come from the heart, or can be so well pleased with worship which is offered through types and ceremonies, as with worship offered through the true way which He has provided and is now revealing.

The importance of the great principle laid down in this and the preceding verse can never be overrated. Any religious teaching which tends to depreciate heart-worship and to turn Christianity into a mere formal service, or which tends to bring back Jewish shadows, ceremonies, and services and to introduce them into Christian worship, is on the face of these remarkable verses most unscriptural and deserving of reprobation. Of course we must not admit the idea that in this and the preceding verse Jesus meant to pour contempt on the ceremonial law, which God Himself had given. But He plainly teaches that it was an imperfect dispensation, given because of man's

ignorance and infirmity, as we give pictures to children in teaching them. It was, in fact, a schoolmaster to Christ. (Gal. iii.24.) To want men to return to it is as absurd as to bid grownup people begin learning the alphabet by pictures in an infant school. On the other hand, as Beza remarks, we must not run into the extreme of despising all ordinances, sacraments, and outward ceremonies in religion. These things have their use and value, however much they may be abused.

25.—[The woman said... Messiah...called Christ.] This verse is an interesting one. It shows the woman at last brought to the very state of mind in which she would be prepared to welcome a revelation of Christ. She had been told of "living water," and had expressed a desire for it. She had been told her own sin, and had been unable to deny it. She had been told the uselessness of resting on any formal membership of the Samaritan Church and the necessity of spiritual and heart-worship of God. And now what can she say? It is all true, she feels; she cannot gainsay it. But what can she do? To whom is she to go? Whose teaching can she follow? All she can do is to say that she knows Messiah is one day coming, and that He will make all things clear and plain. It is evident that she wishes for Him. She is uncomfortable and sees no relief for her newly-raised perplexities, unless Messiah should appear.

The mention of Messiah in this verse makes it clear that the Samaritans were not altogether ignorant of the Old Testament, and that there was an expectation of a Redeemer of some kind among them, as well as among the Jews. The existence of a general

expectation of this sort throughout the East, at the time when our Lord appeared on earth, is a fact to which even heathen writers have testified.

When the woman says, “He will tell us all things,” we must probably not inquire too closely into what she meant. It is very likely that she had only a vague feeling that Messiah would remove all doubts and show all things needful to salvation.

Chrysostom remarks on this verse, “The woman was made dizzy by Christ’s discourse and fainted at the sublimity of what He said, and in her trouble said, I know that Messiah comes.” Wordsworth observes that the Samaritan woman had a clearer knowledge of Messiah’s office than the Jews generally showed. She looked for Him as a Teacher. They looked for Him as a conquering King. Beza and A. Clark think that the words, “who is called Christ,” in this verse are St. John’s parenthetical explanation of the word Messiah. It is certainly rather unlikely that the woman would have used them in addressing a Jew. Yet most commentators think that they were her words. 26.—[*Jesus said, I who speak to you am He.*] These words are the fullest declaration that our Lord ever made of His own Messiahship which the Gospel writers have recorded. That such a full declaration should be made to such a person as the Samaritan woman is one of the most wonderful instances of our Lord’s grace and condescension related in the New Testament! At last the woman obtained an answer to one of her first questions, “Are you greater than our father Jacob?” When the answer came, it completely converted her soul.

Rollock remarks on this verse how ready and willing Christ is to reveal Himself to a sinner's soul. The very moment that this woman expressed any desire for Messiah, He at once revealed Himself to her: "I am He." Quesnel observes, "It is a great mistake to suppose that the knowledge of the mysteries of religion ought not to be imparted to women by the reading of Scripture, considering this instance of the great confidence Christ reposed in this woman by His manifestation of Himself. The abuse of the Scriptures and the sin of heresies did not proceed from the simplicity of women, but from the conceited learning of men."

In leaving the whole passage, there are several striking points which ought never to be forgotten. (a) Our Lord's *mercy* is remarkable. That such a one as He should deal so graciously with such a sinner is a striking fact. (b) Our Lord's *wisdom* is remarkable. How wise was every step of His way in dealing with this sinful soul! © Our Lord's *patience* is remarkable. How He bore with the woman's ignorance, and what trouble He took to lead her to knowledge! (d) Our Lord's *power* is remarkable. What a complete victory He won at last! How almighty must that grace be which could soften and convert such a carnal and wicked heart!

We must never despise any soul after reading this passage. None can be worse than this woman. But Christ did not despise her. We must never despair of any soul after reading this passage. If this woman was converted, anyone may be converted. Finally, we must never

contemn the use of all wise and reasonable means in dealing with souls. There is a “wisdom which is profitable to direct” in approaching ignorant and ungodly people, which must be diligently sought.

JOHN 4:27-30

The Disciples Return

Now at that very moment his disciples came back. They were shocked because he was speaking with a woman; however, no one said, “What do you want?” or “Why are you speaking with her?” Then the woman left her water jar, went off into the town and said to the people, “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Surely he can’t be the Messiah, can he?” So they left the town and began coming to him.

These verses continue the well-known story of the Samaritan woman’s conversion. Short as the passage may appear, it contains points of deep interest and importance. The mere worldling, who cares, nothing about experimental religion, may see nothing particular in these verses. To all who desire to know something of the experience of a converted person, they will be found full of food for thought.

We see, firstly, in this passage, ***how marvelous in the eyes of man are Christ’s dealings with souls.*** We are told that the disciples “marveled that he talked with the woman.” That their

Master should take the trouble to talk to a *woman* at all, and to a *Samaritan* woman, and to an *adulterous* woman at a well, when He was wearied with His journey—all this was amazing to the eleven disciples. It was a sort of thing which they did not expect. It was contrary to their idea of what a religious teacher should do. It startled them and filled them with surprise.

The feeling displayed by the disciples on this occasion, does not stand alone in the Bible. When our Lord allowed publicans and sinners to draw near to Him and be in His company, the Pharisees marveled. They exclaimed, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.” (Luke 15:2.). When Saul came back from Damascus, a converted man and a new creature, the Christians at Jerusalem were astonished. “They did not believe that he was a disciple.” (Acts 9:26.). When Peter was delivered from Herod’s prison by an angel, and brought to the door of the house where disciples were praying for his deliverance, they were so taken by surprise that they could not believe it was Peter. “When they saw him they were astonished.” (Acts 12:16.)

But why should we stop short in Bible instances? The true Christian has only to look around him in this world in order to see abundant illustrations of the truth before us. How much astonishment every fresh conversion occasions. What surprise is expressed at the change in the heart, life, tastes, and habits of the converted person! What wonder is felt at the power, the mercy, the patience, the compassion of Christ! It is now as it was eighteen

hundred years ago. The dealings of Christ are still *a marvel* both to the Church and to the world.

If there was more real faith on the earth, there would be less surprise felt at the conversion of souls. If Christians believed more, they would expect more, and if they understood Christ better, they would be less startled and astonished when He calls and saves the chief of sinners. We should consider nothing impossible, and regard no sinner as beyond the reach of the grace of God. The astonishment expressed at conversions is a proof of the weak faith and ignorance of these latter days. The thing that ought to fill us with surprise is the obstinate unbelief of the ungodly, and their determined perseverance in the way to ruin. This was the mind of Christ. It is written that He thanked the Father for *conversions*. But He marveled at *unbelief*. (Matt. 11:25; Mark 6:6.)

We see, secondly, in this passage, ***how absorbing is the influence of grace, when it first comes into a believer's heart.*** We are told that after our Lord had told the woman He was the Messiah, "She left her water-pot and went her way into the city, and said to the men, Come, see a man which told me all things that ever I did." She had left her home for the express purpose of drawing water. She had carried a large vessel to the well, intending to bring it back filled. But she found at the well a new heart, and new objects of interest. She became a new creature. Old things passed away. All things became new. At once everything else was forgotten for the time. She could think of nothing but the truths she had heard, and

the Savior she had found. In the fullness of her heart she “left her water-pot,” and hastened away to tell others.

We see here *the expulsive power of the grace of the Holy Spirit*. Grace once introduced into the heart drives out old tastes and interests. A converted person no longs cares for what he once cared for. A new tenant is in the house. A new pilot is at the helm. The whole world looks different. All things have become new. It was so with *Matthew* the tax-collector. The moment that grace came into his heart he left the receipt of custom. (Matt. 9:9.). It was so with *Peter*, *James*, and *John*, and *Andrew*. As soon as they were converted they forsook their nets and fishing-boats. (Mark 1:19.). It was so with *Saul* the Pharisee. As soon as he became a Christian he gave up all his brilliant prospects as a Jew, in order to preach the faith he had once despised. (Acts 9:20.). The conduct of the *Samaritan woman* was precisely of the same kind. For the time present the salvation she had found completely filled her mind. That she never returned for her water-pot would be more than we have a right to say. But under the first impressions of new spiritual life, she went away and “left her water-pot” behind.

Conduct like that here described is doubtless uncommon in the present day. Rarely do we see a person so entirely taken up with spiritual matters, that attention to this world’s affairs is made a secondary matter, or postponed. And why is it so? Simply because true conversions to God are uncommon. Few really feel their sins, and flee to Christ by faith. Few really pass from death to life, and

become new creatures. Yet these few are the real Christians of the world. These are the people whose religion, like the Samaritan woman's, tells on others. Happy are they who know something by experience of this woman's feelings, and can say with Paul, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ!" Happy are they who have given up everything for Christ's sake, or at any rate have altered the relative importance of all things in their minds! "If your eye be single your whole body shall be full of light." (Philip. 3:8; Matt. 6:22.)

We see, lastly, in this passage, ***how zealous a truly converted person is to do good to others.*** We are told that the Samaritan woman "went into the city, and said to the men, Come, see a man who told me all things that ever I did—is not this the Christ?" *In the day of her conversion she became a missionary!* She felt so deeply the amazing benefit she had received from Christ, that she could not hold her peace about Him. Just as Andrew told his brother Peter about Jesus, and Philip told Nathanael that he had found Messiah, and Saul, when converted, immediately preached Christ, so, in the same way, the Samaritan woman said, "Come and see Christ." She used no abstruse arguments. She attempted no deep reasoning about our Lord's claim to be the Messiah. She only said, "Come and see." Out of the abundance of her heart her mouth spoke.

That which the Samaritan woman here did, all true Christians ought to do likewise. The Church needs it. The state of the world demands it. Common sense points out that it is right. Every one who

has received the grace of God, and tasted that Christ is gracious, ought to find words to testify of Christ to others. Where is our faith, if we believe that souls around us are perishing, and that Christ alone can save them, and yet remain silent? Where is our charity if we can see others going down to hell, and yet say nothing to them about Christ and salvation? We may well doubt our own love to Christ, if our hearts are never moved to speak of Him. We may well doubt the safety of our own souls, if we feel no concern about the souls of others.

What are WE ourselves? This is the question, after all, which demands our notice. Do we feel the supreme importance of spiritual things, and the comparative nothingness of the things of the world? Do we ever talk to others about God, and Christ, and eternity, and the soul, and heaven, and hell? If not, what is the value of our faith? Where is the reality of our Christianity? Let us take heed lest we awake too late, and find that we are lost forever, a wonder to angels and devils, and, above all, a wonder to ourselves, because of our own obstinate blindness and folly.

Technical Notes:

27. And upon this his disciples came and marveled that he talked with the woman; yet no man said, What do you seek? or, Why are you talking with her? 28. The woman then left her waterpot, went her way into the city, and said to the men, 29. Come, see a man who told me all things that I ever did. Is not this the Christ? 30. Then they went out of

the city and came to him.

[*Upon this*.] The true idea contained in this expression seems to be, "At this point, at this critical juncture in the conversation between our Lord and the woman." What the woman would have said next after our Lord's marvelous discovery of Himself we are left to conjecture. But just as our Lord said, "I am the Messiah," the disciples returned from buying food and their appearance stopped the conversation. The woman's heart was probably too full and her mind too much excited to say more in the presence of witnesses, and especially of strangers. Therefore, no more was said and she withdrew. The soul, in the beginning of a work of grace, shrinks from discovering its workings before strangers.

[*Marveled…the woman*.] I am inclined to think that these words would have been more correctly rendered, "Talked with a woman." There is no article in the original Greek. The wonder of the disciples was excited not so much by our Lord talking to this woman, as by His talking to a woman at all. It is clear from Rabbinical writings that there was a common opinion among the Jews that both in understanding and religion women were an inferior order of beings to men. This ignorant prejudice had most likely leavened the minds of the disciples and is probably referred to in this place. Of the woman's moral character, it is not clear that the disciples could know anything at all.

Rupertus thinks that our Lord, by conversing openly with a

Samaritan woman, wished to show His disciples by an example that the wall between Jews and other people was to be broken down by the Gospel, just as He taught Peter the same lesson after His ascension by the vision of the sheet full of clean and unclean beats. (Acts x.11-15.) He thinks that the wonder of the disciples arose from the same Jewish prejudice against intercourse with uncircumcised Gentiles which appeared so strongly in after times. Lightfoot, Schottgen, and Tholuck quote proverbial sayings from Rabbinical writers showing the Jewish feeling about women. The following are instances. “He who instructs his daughter in the law plays the fool.” “Do not multiply discourses with a woman.” “Let no one talk with a woman in the street, no not with his own wife.” Whitby also says, from Buxtorf, that the Rabbins say that “talking with a woman is one of the six things which make a disciple impure.”

[*No man said…talking with her?*] We are left to conjecture whether both these questions apply to our Lord, or whether the first applied to the woman (“What do you seek of Him?”), and the second to our Lord (“Why are you talking with her?”). The point is of no particular importance. To me, however, it appears that both questions apply to Christ. “No man said, ‘What are you seeking from her? Why are you talking with her?’” Grotius suggests that the disciples supposed our Lord might have been seeking meat or drink from the Samaritan woman, and meant, “Why are you seeking any meat or drink from her?”

I venture to doubt whether both questions had not better have been

translated alike: “What are you seeking from her? What are you talking about with her?” The Greek word is the same which our translators have rendered “what” in the first question and “why” in the second. The expression, “No man said,” seems to imply that no man ventured to ask any question about our Lord’s reason for talking with the woman. It is not very clear why the sentence is introduced. The object probably is, as Cyril and Chrysostom remark, to show us the deep reverence and respect with which the disciples regarded our Lord and all His actions, even at this early period of his ministry. It also shows us that they sometimes thought things about Him to which they dared not give expression, and saw deeds of His which they could not understand but were content silently to wonder at. There is a lesson for us in their conduct. When we cannot understand the reason of our Lord’s dealings with souls, let us hold our peace and try to believe that there are reasons which we shall know one day. A good servant in a great house must do his own duty and ask no questions. A young student of medicine must take many things on trust. [*Left her waterpot.*] The Greek word here rendered “waterpot” is the same that is used in the account of the miracle at Cana in Galilee. (John ii.6.) It does not mean a small drinking vessel but a large jar, such as a woman in Eastern countries would carry on her head. We can therefore well understand that if the woman wished to return in haste to the city, she would leave her waterpot. So large a vessel could not be carried quickly, whether empty or full.

The mind of the woman in leaving her waterpot seems to me clear and unmistakable. She was entirely absorbed in the things which she

had heard from our Lord's mouth. She was anxious to tell them without delay to her friends and neighbors. She therefore postponed her business of drawing water, for which she had left her house, as a matter of secondary importance, and hurried off to tell others what she had been told. The sentence is deeply instructive.

Lightfoot thinks, besides this, that the woman left her waterpot out of kindness to our Lord, "that Jesus and His disciples might have wherewithal to drink."

[*Went…city*.] The Greek word rendered "went her way," means simply, "departed" or "went." The city must of course mean "Sychar."

[*Said to the men*.] We must not suppose that the woman spoke to the men only and not to her own sex. But it is probable that the "men of the place would be the first persons she would see, and that the women would not be in the streets but at home. Moreover, it is not unlikely that the expression is meant to show us the woman's zeal and anxiety to spread the good tidings. She did not hesitate to speak to men, though she well knew that anything a woman might say about religion was not likely to command attention."

Cyril, on this verse, remarks the power of Christ's grace. He began by bidding the woman go and "call her husband." The end of the conversation which ensued was her going and calling all the men of the city to come and see Christ.

29.—[*Come, see a man*.] The missionary spirit of the woman, in this verse, deserves special notice. Having found Christ herself, she

invites others to come and be acquainted with Him. Origen calls her "the apostle of the Samaritans."

Let it be noted that her words are simple in the extreme. She enters into no argument. She only asks the men to "come and see." This, after all, is often the best way of dealing with souls. A bold invitation to come and make trial of the Gospel often produces more effect than the most elaborate arguments in support of its doctrines. Most men do not want their reason convinced so much as their will bent and their conscience aroused. A simple-minded, hearty, unlearned young disciple will often touch hearts that would hear an abstruse argument without being moved. This fact is most encouraging to all believers who try to do good. All cannot argue; but all believers may say, "Come and see Christ. If you would only look at Him and see Him, you would soon believe."

Barradius remarks what a practical illustration the woman affords of one of the concluding sentences of Revelation: "Let him who hears, say 'Come!'" (Rev. xxii.17.) The Samaritan woman, having heard, said "Come," and the result was that many souls came and took the water of life freely. Cyril remarks the difference between the woman's conduct and that of the servant who buried his talent in the ground. She received the talent of the good tidings of the Gospel and at once put it out at interest. Chrysostom remarks the wisdom of the woman. "She did not say, Come, *believe*; but Come, *see:* a gentler expression than the other, and one which more attracted them."

[*Told me all things that I ever did.*] These words must be taken with some qualifications. Of course they cannot mean that our Lord had literally told the woman "all things that she ever did in her life." This would have been physically impossible in the space of a single afternoon. The probable meaning is, "He has told me all the principal sins that I have committed. He has shown a perfect knowledge of the chief events of my life. He has shown such thorough acquaintance with my history that I doubt not He could have told me anything I ever did."

Some allowance must probably me made for the warm and excited feelings of the woman when she spoke these words. She used hyperbolic and extravagant language under the influence of these feelings which she would probably not have used in a calm state of mind, and which we must therefore not judge too strictly. Moreover, as Poole remarks, it admits of doubt whether our Lord may not have spoken of other things in the conversation which St. John has not been inspired to record.

Let it be noted that the Samaritan woman, in saying that "our Lord had told her all things she had ever done," very probably referred to the common opinion about Messiah's omniscience. The Rabbinical writers, according to Lightfoot, specially applied to Messiah the words of Isaiah: "He shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by the sight of his eyes." (Isa. xi.3.) Her words, therefore, were a well-known argument that our Lord must be the Christ, and her object in using them would be

thoroughly understood.

[*Is not this the Christ?*] The Greek words so rendered would be translated with equal correctness, “Is this the Christ? Can this be the Christ?” A similar form of interrogative sentence is found in thirteen other places in the New Testament. In twelve of them the interrogative is used without “not”: viz., Matt. vii.16; xxvi.22,25; Mark iv.21; xiv.9; Luke vi.39; John vii.31; viii.22; xviii.35; Acts x.47; 2 Cor. i.17; James iii.11. In only one place is the interrogative used with “not”: Matt. xii.23. I am inclined, on the whole, to think that “not” would have been better omitted in the sentence before us. Euthymius takes this view. The value of questions, if we want to do good to souls, is well illustrated in this verse. A question often sets working a mind which would be utterly unmoved by an affirmation. It drives the mind to exertion, and by a gentle compulsion arouses it to think. Men are far less able to go to sleep under religious teaching when they are invited to answer a question. The number of questions in the New Testament is a striking and instructive fact. Had the woman said, “This is the Christ!” she might have excited prejudice and dislike. By asking, “Is this the Christ?” she got the men to inquire and judge for themselves.

30.—[*Then they went out of the city*.] This sentence is full of encouragement to all who try to do good to souls. The words of one single woman were the means of arousing a whole city to go forth and inquire about Christ. We must never despise the smallest and meanest efforts. We never know to what the least beginnings may

grow. The grain of mustard seed at Sychar was the word of a feeble woman: “Come and see.” Specially we ought to observe the encouragement the verse affords to the efforts of women. A woman may be the means, under God, of founding a Church. The first person baptized by Paul in Europe was not a man but a woman, Lydia, the seller of purple. Let women never suppose that men only can do good. Women also, in their way, can evangelize as really and truly as men. Every believing woman who has a tongue can speak to others about Christ. The Samaritan woman was far less learned than Nicodemus. But she was far bolder and so did far more good.

[*And came to Him.*] Perhaps the sentence would be more literally rendered “were coming” or “began to come to Him.” It was while they were coming that the conversation which immediately follows, between Christ and His disciples, took place, and perhaps it was the sight of the crowd coming which made our Lord say some of the things that He did. Calvin remarks on this part of the woman’s history, that some may think her blamable in that “while she is still ignorant and imperfectly taught, she goes beyond the limits of her faith. I reply that she would have acted inconsiderately if she had assumed the office of a teacher; but when she desires nothing more than to excite her fellow-citizens to hear Christ speaking, we will not say that she forgot herself or proceeded further than she had a right to do. She merely does the office of a trumpet or a bell, to invite others to come to Christ.”

The concluding verse shows us most forcibly that ministers and

teachers of religion ought never to be above taking pains and trouble with a single soul. A conversation with one person was the means of leading a whole city to come and hear Christ and resulted in the salvation of many souls. Cornelius à Lapide, at this point of his commentary, gravely informs us that the name of the Samaritan woman was Photina; that after her conversion she preached the Gospel at Carthage, and that she suffered martyrdom there on the 20th of March, on which day the Romish Martyrology makes special mention of her name! He also tells us that her head is kept as a relic at Rome in the Basilica of St. Paul, and that it was actually shown to him there! It is well to know what ridiculous and lying legends the Church of Rome palms off upon Roman Catholics as truths while she withholds from them the Bible!

JOHN 4:31-42

Workers for the Harvest

Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, “Rabbi, eat something.” But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about.” So the disciples began to say to one another, “No one brought him anything to eat, did they?” Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to complete his work. Don’t you say, ‘There are four more months and then comes the harvest?’ I tell you, look up and see that the fields are already white for harvest! The one who reaps receives pay and gathers fruit for eternal life, so that the one who sows and the one who reaps can rejoice together. For in this instance the saying is true, ‘One sows and

another reaps.' I sent you to reap what you did not work for; others have labored and you have entered into their labor."

Now many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the report of the woman who testified, "He told me everything I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to him, they started asking him to stay with them. He stayed there two days, and because of his word many more believed. They said to the woman, "No longer do we believe because of your words, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this one really is the Savior of the world."

We have, for one thing, in these verses, ***an instructive pattern of zeal for the good of others.*** We read, that our Lord Jesus Christ declares, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to finish his work." To do good was not merely duty and pleasure to Him. He counted it as His food and drink. Job, one of the holiest Old Testament saints, could say, that he esteemed God's *word* "more than his necessary food." (Job 23:12.) The Great Head of the New Testament Church went even further. He could say the same of God's *work*.

Do we do any work for God? Do we try, however feebly, to set forward His cause on earth—to check that which is evil, to promote that which is good? If we do, let us never be ashamed of doing it with all our heart, and soul, and mind, and strength. Whatever our hand finds to do for the souls of others, let us do it with our might. (Eccles. 9:10.) The world may mock and sneer, and call us enthusiasts. The world can admire zeal in any service but that of God, and can praise

enthusiasm on any subject but that of religion. Let us work on unmoved. Whatever *men* may say and think, we are walking in the steps of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us, beside this, take comfort in the thought that Jesus Christ never changes. He that sat by the well of Samaria, and found it "food and drink" to do good to an ignorant soul, is always in one mind. High in heaven at God's right hand, He still delights to save sinners, and still approves zeal and labor in the cause of God. The work of the missionary and the evangelist may be despised and ridiculed in many quarters. *But while man is mocking, Christ is well pleased!* Thanks be to God, Jesus is the, same yesterday, and today, and forever.

We have, for another thing, in these verses, ***strong encouragement held out to those who labor to do good to souls.*** We read, that our Lord described the world as a "field white for the harvest;" and then said to His disciples, "He that reaps, receives wages, and gathers fruit unto life eternal."

Work for the souls of men, is undoubtedly attended by great *dis*couragements. The heart of natural man is very hard and unbelieving. The blindness of unsaved men to their own lost condition and peril of ruin, is something past description. "The carnal mind is enmity against God." (Rom. 8:7.) No one can have any just idea of the desperate hardness of men and women, until he has tried to do good. No one can have any conception of the small number of those who repent and believe, until he has personally endeavored to "save some." (1 Cor. 9:22.) To suppose that everybody

will become a true Christian, who is told about Christ, and entreated to believe, is mere childish ignorance. “Few there be that find the narrow way!” The laborer for Christ will find the vast majority of those among whom he labors, unbelieving and impenitent, in spite of all that he can do. “The many” will not turn to Christ. These are discouraging facts. But they are facts, and facts that ought to be known.

The true antidote against despondency in God’s work, is an abiding recollection of such promises as that before us. There are “wages” laid up for faithful reapers. They shall receive a reward at the last day, far exceeding anything they have done for Christ—a reward proportioned not to their success, but to the quantity of their work. They are gathering “fruit,” which shall endure when this world has passed away—fruit, in some souls saved, if many will not believe, and fruit in evidences of their own faithfulness, to be brought out before assembled worlds. Do our hands ever hang down, and our knees wax faint? Do we feel disposed to say, “my labor is in vain and my words without profit.” Let us lean back at such seasons on this glorious promise. There are “wages” yet to be paid. There is “fruit” yet to be exhibited. “We are a sweet savor of Christ, both in those who are saved and in those who perish.” (2 Cor. 2:15.) Let us work on. “He that goes forth and weeps, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.” (Psalm. 126:6.) One single soul saved, shall outlive and outweigh all the kingdoms of the world.

We have, lastly, in these verses, ***a most teaching instance of the variety of ways by which men are led to believe Christ.*** We read that "many of the Samaritans believed on Christ for the saying of the woman." But this is not all. We read again, "Many more believed because of Christ's own word." In short, some were converted trough the means of the woman's testimony, and some were converted by hearing Christ Himself.

The words of Paul should never be forgotten, "There are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which works all in all." (1 Cor. 12:6.) The *way* in which the Spirit leads all God's people is always one and the same. But the *paths* by which they are severally brought into that road are often widely different. There are some in whom the work of conversion is sudden and instantaneous. There are others in whom it goes on slowly, quietly, and by imperceptible degrees. Some have their hearts gently opened, like Lydia. Others are aroused by violent alarm, like the jailor at Philippi. All are finally brought to *repentance* toward God, *faith* toward our Lord Jesus Christ, and holiness of conversation. But all do not begin with the same experience. The weapon which carries conviction to one believer's soul, is not the one which first pierces another. *The arrows of the Holy Spirit are all drawn from the same quiver. But He uses sometimes one and sometimes another, according to His own sovereign will.*

Are we converted ourselves? This is the one point to which our attention ought to be directed. Our experience may not tally with

that of other believers. But that is not the question. *Do we feel sin, hate it, and flee from it? Do we love Christ, and rest solely on Him for salvation? Are we bringing forth fruits of the Spirit* in righteousness and true holiness? If these things are so we may thank God, and take courage.

Technical Notes:

31. In the meantime his disciples prayed him, saying, Master, eat.32. But he said to them, I have meat to eat of which ye do not know. 33. Therefore the disciples said to one another, Has anyone brought him *anything* to eat? 34. Jesus said to them, My meat is to do the will of him who sent me, and to finish his work. 35. Do ye not say, There are still four months and *then* comes the harvest? Behold, I say to you, Lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! 36. And he who reaps receives wages and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. 37. Herein the saying is true: One sows and another reaps. 38. I sent you to reap that for which ye have not labored; other men labored, and ye have entered into their labors. 39. And many of the Samaritans of that city believed in him because of the word of the woman who testified, He told me all that I ever did. 40. So when the Samaritans had come to him, they urged him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. 41. And many more believed because of his own

word. 42. Then they said to the woman, Now we believe, not because of your saying, for we ourselves have heard *him* and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.

31.—[*In the meantime.*] This expression means, "during the time when the Samaritans were coming out of the city to the well," between the time when the woman went her way and the time where her fellow-countrymen, aroused by her testimony, appeared at the well. It is highly probable that they were already in sight.

[*Prayed.*] The Greek word so rendered is remarkable. It is frequently used to convey the idea of "asking or making inquiry." It is a curious fact that it is not used in describing any person's address to God in prayer, except in the case of our Lord Jesus Christ. (John xiv.16; xvi.26; xvii.9.15,20.) There is one remarkable instance where it seems to be used in describing a believer's prayer, (1 John v.16.), but this instance stands so entirely alone that it is probable the meaning is not "pray" but "make curious inquiry."

[*Master, eat.*] The difference between our Lord and His disciples appears here in a striking manner. Their weak minds were preoccupied with the idea of food and bodily sustenance. His heart was filled with the great object of His ministry: "doing good to souls." It is a striking illustration of a difference that may frequently be seen between a believer of great grace and a believer of little grace. The latter, with the best possible intentions, will often attach an

importance to bodily and temporal things, with which the strong believer will feel no sympathy.

32.—[*I have food, etc.*] The meaning of our Lord's words in this verse must evidently be figurative. He had soul-nourishment and soul-sustenance of which His disciples were ignorant. He found such refreshment in doing good to ignorant souls that for the time present He did not feel bodily hunger.

There is no necessity for supposing that our Lord referred to any miraculous supply of His bodily needs in this place. His words appear to me only to indicate that He found such delight and comfort in doing good to souls that it was as good as meat and drink to Him. Many of His holiest servants in every age, I believe, could testify much the same. The joy and happiness of spiritual success has for the time lifted them above all bodily needs and supplied the place of material meat and drink. I see no reason why this may not have been the case with our Lord. He had a body in all respects constituted like our own.

The idea of some writers that these words show that our Lord's "thirst" was only simulated and pretended, seems to me utterly unworthy of notice. The application of the words, which every believer ought to endeavor to make to himself, is familiar to every well-instructed Christian. He has supplies of spiritual nourishment and support which are hidden and unknown to the world. These supplies he ought to use at all times, and specially in times of sorrow

and trial.

33.—[*Therefore…anything to eat?*] These words seem to have been spoken privately or whispered one to another by the disciples. Their inability to put any but a carnal sense on their Master's words has been already remarked. In slowness to see a spiritual sense in His language, they do not appear at all unlike Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman. "What wonder is it," says Augustine, "if the woman could not understand our Lord speaking about living water when the disciples could not understand Him speaking about meat?" The original Greek of the expression, "Has any man brought him anything to eat," is remarkable. There is a negative left out in our translation. It seems to show that the question of the woman at verse 29, would have been better rendered, "Is this the Christ? Can this be the Christ?"

34.—[*Jesus said, etc.*] The leading idea of this verse is "that doing God's will and finishing God's work was so soul-refreshing and pleasant to our Lord that He found it equivalent to meat and drink." The Greek expression rendered "to do" and "to finish" would have been more literally rendered "that I should do" and "that I should finish." But there can be little doubt, as Winer remarks, that the language is intended to have an infinitive sense. Precisely the same construction is employed in another remarkable place, John xvii.3. It seems matter of regret that our translators did not render that verse as they have rendered the verse before us. It should have been, "This is life eternal to know thee," etc. The "will of God," which it was

Christ's meat to "do," must mean God's will; that salvation by faith in a Savior should be proclaimed and a door of mercy set wide open to the chief of sinners. "It is my meat," says our Lord, "to do that will, and to proclaim to everyone with whom I speak, that whosoever believes on the Son shall not perish." The view that it simply means, "My meat is to obey God's commandments and do what He has told me to do," appears to me to fall short of the full meaning of the expression. The leading idea seems to me to be specially God's will about proclaiming salvation by Christ. Compare John vi.39,40.

The "work of God," which it was Christ's meat to "finish," must mean that work of complete fulfillment of a Savior's office which Christ came on earth to perform and that obedience to God's law which He came to render. "It is my meat," says our Lord, "to be daily doing that great work which I came into the world to do for man's soul, to be daily preaching peace and daily fulfilling all righteousness." Compare John xvii.4. The utter unlikeness between Christ and all ministers of the Gospel who perform their duties in a mere perfunctory way, and care more for the world and its pleasures or gains than for saving souls, is strikingly brought out in this and the preceding verse. How many professing teachers of religion know nothing whatever of the spirit and habits of mind which our Lord here displays! It can never be said of hunting, shooting, ball-going, card playing, farming clergymen, that it is their meat and drink to do God's will and finish His work! With what face will they meet Christ in the day of judgment?

Cyril says, on this verse, “We learn from hence how great is the love of God towards men. He calls the conversion of lost people His meat.” 35.—[*Do ye not say, etc.*] This saying is interpreted in two different ways.

Some think, as Origen, Rupertus, Brentius, Beza, Jansenius, Cyril, Lightfoot, Lampe, Suicer, and many others, that our Lord really meant that at the time when He spoke there were four literal months to harvest, and as the harvest began about May, He spoke in February. The sense would then be, “Ye say at this time of the year that it will be harvest in four months. But I tell you there is a spiritual harvest already before you if you will only lift up your eyes and see it.”

Others think, as DeDieu, Maldonatus, Calovius, Whitby, Schottgen, Pearce, Tittman, Stier, Alford, Barnes, and Tholuck, that our Lord only meant that it was a proverbial saying among the Jews— “four months between seed time and harvest,” and that He did not mean the words to be literally taken. The sense would then be, “Ye have a common saying that it is four months from seed time to harvest. But I tell you that in spiritual works the harvest ripens far more quickly. Behold those Samaritans coming out already to hear the word the very day that seed has been sown among them. The fields are already white for harvest.”

Either of the above views makes good sense and good divinity. Yet on the whole I prefer the second view: viz., that our Lord quoted a

proverb. To suppose that He really meant that there were literally four months to pass away before harvest appears to me to involve serious chronological difficulties. It necessitates the assumption that at least three quarters of a year had passed away since the Passover when our Lord purified the temple. (John ii.23.) No doubt this possibly may have been the case. But it does not appear to me probable. In addition, we must remember that our Lord on another occasion referred to a proverbial saying about the weather, beginning much as He does here, "Ye say." (Matt. xvi.3.) Moreover, in this very passage He quotes a proverb about "one sowing and another reaping," within two verses. The expression therefore, "Do ye not say" seems to me to point to a proverbial saying much more than to a fact. The antithesis to it is the "I say," which immediately follows.

Calvin says, "By this expression, *Do ye not say?* Christ intended indirectly to point out how much more attentive the minds of men are to earthly than to heavenly things, for they burn with so intense a desire of harvest that they carefully reckon up months and days, while it is astonishing how drowsy and indolent they are in gathering the heavenly wheat." Cornelius à Lapide conjectures that the disciples had been talking to one another about the prospects of harvest as they came to the well, and that our Lord, knowing the conversation, referred to it by the words, "Do ye not say?"

[*Lift up your eyes…white for harvest.*] There can be little doubt that this saying must be interpreted figuratively. The sense is, "There is a harvest of souls before you ready to be gathered in." The same figure

is used elsewhere. (Matt. ix.37; Luke x.32.)

Some think, as Chrysostom, that when our Lord said, “Behold…lift up your eyes…look,” He spoke with especial reference to the crowd of Samaritans whom He saw coming from the city to the well. If this be so, it is hard to suppose that He first began conversation with the woman at six o’clock in the evening.

Others think that our Lord spoke these words with reference to the whole world, and specially the Jewish nation at the time of His ministry. They were so ready and prepared for the preaching of the Gospel, that they were like a field white for harvest. The expression, “lift up your eyes,” is used elsewhere in Scripture when mental attention is being called to something remarkable. (See Isa. xlix.18; lx.4; Gen. xiii.14,15.) I am disposed to think that both views are correct. Our Lord wished His disciples to notice that both at Samaria and elsewhere the minds of men were everywhere ready to receive the message of the Gospel in an unusual degree. Let them mark how willing the multitude was everywhere to listen to the truth. Let them know that everywhere, as in the apparently hopeless field of Samaria, they would find a harvest of souls ready to be reaped if only they would be reapers.

Chrysostom, on this verse, remarks: “Christ leads His disciples, as His custom is, from low things to high. *Fields* and *harvests* here express the great number of souls which are ready to receive the word. The *eyes* are both spiritual and bodily ones, for they saw a great multitude of Samaritans now approaching. This expectant

crowd He calls, very suitably, white fields. For as the corn when it grows white is ready for harvest, so were those ready for salvation. But why does He not say all this in direct language? Because by making use of the objects around them, He gave great vividness and power to His words, and also caused His discourse to be more pleasant and sink deeper into their memories."

36.—[*He who reaps, etc.*] This verse seems to me to show that our Lord is speaking generally of the field of this world, and of the whole work which His apostles would have to do in it, not only in Samaria but to the ends of the earth. The verse is a general promise for the encouragement of all laborers of Christ. The full meaning of it can hardly be brought out without a paraphrase. "The reaper of the spiritual harvest has a far more honorable and satisfactory office than the reaper of the natural harvest. He receives wages and gathers fruit not for this life only, but for the life to come. The wages that he receives are eternal wages, a crown of glory that fades not away. (1 Pet. vi.4.) The fruit that he gathers is eternal fruit, souls plucked from destruction and saved forevermore." (See Daniel xii.3; John xv.16; and 1 Cor. ix.17.)

Burkitt and several other writers call attention to the fact that the harvestman's wages are much more than the wages of any other laborer, and hence draw the conclusion that no Christian will receive so glorious a reward as the man who labors to win souls to Christ. [*That both he...rejoice together.*] These words appear to me to refer to the common joy that there will be in heaven among all who have

labored for Christ when the whole harvest of saved souls is finally gathered in. The Old Testament prophets and John the Baptist, who *sowed,* will all rejoice together with the apostles, who *reaped.* The results of the spiritual harvest are not temporal like those of the natural harvest but eternal, so that a day will come when all who have labored for it in any way, either by sowing or reaping, will sit down and rejoice together to all eternity. Here in this world the sower sometimes does not live to see the fruit of his labor, and the reaper who gathers in the harvest rejoices alone. But work done in the spiritual harvest is eternal work, and consequently both sowers and reapers are sure at last to "rejoice together" and to see the fruit of their toil.

Let it be noted that in heaven there will at last be no jealousy and envy among Christ's laborers. Some will have been sowers and some will have been reapers. But all will have done that part of the work allotted to them, and all will finally "rejoice together." Envious feelings will be absorbed in common joy.

Let it be noted that in doing work for Christ and laboring for souls, there are sowers as well as reapers. The work of the reaper makes far more show than the work of the sower, yet it is perfectly clear that if there was no sowing there would be no reaping. It is of great importance to remember this. The Church is often disposed to give an excessive honor to Christ's reapers and to overlook the labors of Christ's sowers.

37.—[*Herein…one sows and another reaps.*] Our Lord here quotes a proverbial saying, which appears to me to confirm the view I have already maintained that the expression of the 35th verse, “Say not ye there are yet four months,” etc., refers to a proverb.

The phrase “herein” means literally, “in this,” and seems to me to refer to the verse which immediately follows. “That common saying, one sows and another reaps, is made good in this say,—is fulfilled by this circumstance,—is verified in the following manner: viz., “I sent you to reap,” etc.

The meaning of the proverb is plain. “It is a common saying among men that it often falls to one to sow the field and to another to reap it. The sower and the reaper are not always the same person.” The frequent use of proverbial sayings in the New Testament deserves notice. It shows the value of proverbs and the importance of teaching them to children and young people. A pointed proverb is often remembered when a long moral lesson is forgotten.

38.—[*I sent you to reap, etc.*] Our Lord here states the manner in which the proverbial saying of the preceding verse is true. He tells the apostles that they were sent to reap a spiritual harvest on which they had bestowed no labor. Other men had labored: viz., the prophets of the Old Testament and John the Baptist. They had broken up the ground; they had sown the seed. The result of their labor was that the minds of men in the apostles’ times were prepared to expect the Messiah, and the apostles had only to go forth and

proclaim the glad tidings that Messiah was come. Pearce maintains the strange notion that our Lord, in this verse, only means, “I sent you away into the city to buy meat. While you were absent I sowed spiritual seed in the heart of a Samaritan woman. She is now gone to call others. These and many more will be the harvest which you will reap, without having bestowed any labor on it.” This interpretation seems to me quite untenable.

The past tense in this verse, “I have sent,” is used, as a grammarian would say, proleptically. It means, “I do send you.” Such a use of the past tense is common in Scripture, and especially when God speaks of a thing about to be done. With God there is no uncertainty. When He undertakes a thing, it may be regarded as done and finished, because in His counsels it is certain to be finished. Our Lord’s meaning is, “I send you throughout Samaria, Galilee, and Judæa to reap the fruit of the labors of the prophets and John the Baptist. They have sowed, and you have now only to reap.” Some think, as Stier and Alford, that when our Lord said, “other man have labored,” He referred rather to Himself than to the prophets. I am unable to see this. It appears to me a forced and unnatural interpretation. I hold decidedly, with Chrysostom, Cyril, Theophylact, Calvin, Zwingle, Melancthon, Brentius, Lampe, and Poole, that it applies principally to the law and prophets. “If the prophets were not the sowers,” says Augustine, “whence had that saying come to the woman, ‘I know that Messiah comes?’” Origen says, “Did not Moses and Elias, the sowers, rejoice with the reapers, Peter, James and John, when they saw the glory of the Son of God at the

transfiguration?”

Theophylact sees in this verse a strong argument against the heretical view of the Marcionites, Manichees, and others, that the New Testament is contrary to the Old. Here the prophets and apostles are spoken of together as laborers under one common Master in one common field. The idea propounded by Bucer, that our Lord alludes here to the heathen philosophers as well as the prophets, seems to me unwarrantable and unsafe.

39.—[Many… Samaritans…believed.] About the exact nature of the belief mentioned here and in the 41st verse, we have no materials for forming an opinion. Whether it was only an intellectual belief that Christ was the Messiah, or whether it was that true faith of the heart which justifies a sinner before God, we are left to conjecture. The more probable opinion appears to be that it was true faith, though very weak and unintelligent, like that of the apostles themselves. It is a strong confirmation of this view that when Philip, after the day of Pentecost, went down to Samaria and preached Christ, his preaching was received with joy and many were baptized, both men and women. (Acts viii.5-12.) The Gospel was received without prejudice and embraced at once as an acknowledged truth. [*Because of the woman who testified, etc.*] These words show the importance of merely human testimony to Christ’s Gospel. The word of one weak woman was made the instrumental means of belief to many souls. There was nothing remarkable in the woman’s word. It contained no elaborate reasoning and no striking eloquence. It was only a hearty,

earnest testimony of a believing heart. Yet God was pleased to use it to the conversion of souls. We must never despise the use of means. If the woman had not spoken, the Samaritans would not have been converted. Above all, we must never despise means because of their apparent weakness, feebleness, and inaptness to do good. God can make the weakest instruments powerful to pull down the strongholds of sin and Satan, just as He made David's sling and stone prevail over Goliath.

Theophylact points out that the Samaritan woman's past wicked life was well known to her fellow-citizens, and that their attention must have been aroused by her publicly proclaiming that she had found One who knew her former life, although a stranger. They rightly concluded that He must be no common person.

Melancthon remarks that the belief which resulted from the testimony of a woman in this case is a clear proof that it is not absolutely necessary to have regular ministerial orders in order to do good to souls, and that episcopal orders are not absolutely needful in order to give effect to the word when spoken.

40.—[*So when…urged him to stay, etc.*] The desire of the Samaritans for instruction is shown in this verse, and the willingness of Christ to assist inquirers is strikingly exhibited. He waits to be entreated. If we have Him not abiding with us, it is because we do not ask Him. The two disciples journeying to Emmaus would have missed a great privilege if they had not said, "Abide with us." (Luke xxiv.29.)

Ferus on this verse remarks the wide difference between the Samaritans and the Gergesenes. The Gergesenes prayed our Lord to "depart" from them, the Samaritans to "tarry" with them. (Matt. viii.34.)

[*He stayed two days.*] We can only suppose that these two days were spent in teaching and preaching the Gospel. One would like to know all that was taught and said in those two days. But it is an instance of the occasional "silences" of Scripture, which every attentive Bible-reader must have noticed. The first thirty years of our Lord's life at Nazareth, the way in which St. Paul spent his time in Arabia, and his employment during his two years' imprisonment in Cæsarea, are similar silences. (Gal. i.17; Acts xxiv.27.)

It is an interesting fact, which has been observed by some writers, that at this very day Nablous and its neighborhood—occupying the site of Samaria and Sychar—are in a more flourishing and prosperous condition than almost any place in Palestine. Capernaum and Chorazin and Bethsaida, which rejected Christ, have almost entirely passed away, while Samaria, which believed and received Him, flourishes still.

41.—[*Many more believed...own word.*] This verse shows the sovereignty of God in saving souls. One is called in one way and another in another. Some Samaritans believed when they heard the woman testify. Others did not believe till they heard Christ Himself. We must be careful that we do not bind down the Holy Ghost to one

mode of operation. The experience of saved souls often differs widely. If people are brought to repentance and faith in Christ, we must not be stumbled because they are not all brought in the same way.

Olshausen remarks on this verse, “Here is a rare instance in which the ministry of the Lord produced an awakening on a large scale. Ordinarily we find that a few individuals only were aroused by Him, and that these, like grains of seed scattered here and there, became the germs of a new and higher order of things among the people at large.” 42.—[*Now we believe…saying*.] The Greek words so rendered would be translated more literally, “Not any longer because of your saying do we believe.”

Calvin thinks that the Greek word here rendered “saying,” means literally, “talk, or talkativeness,” and that “the Samaritans appear to boast that they have now a stronger foundation than a woman’s tongue.” In the only other three places where it is used, it is translated “speech.” (Matt. xxvi.73; Mark vix.70; John viii.43.)

[This… Christ, the Savior of the world.] The Greek words so rendered would be translated more literally, “This is the Savior of the world, the Christ.” The singular fullness of the confession made by these Samaritans deserves special notice. A more full declaration of our Lord’s office as “Savior of the world” is nowhere to be found in the Gospels. Whether the Samaritans clearly understood what they meant when they spoke of our Lord as “the Savior” may be reasonably doubted. But that they saw with peculiar clearness a truth

which the Jews were specially backward in seeing—that He had come to be a Redeemer for all mankind and not for the "Jews" only—seems evident from the expression "the world." That such a testimony should have been borne to Christ by a mixed race of semi-heathen origin like the Samaritans, and not by the Jews, is a remarkable instance of the grace of God.

The inference drawn by Calvin from this verse, that "within two days the sense of the Gospel was more plainly taught by Christ at Samaria than He had hitherto taught it at Jerusalem," seems both unwarrantable and needless. Ought we not rather to fix our eyes on the difference between the Jews and Samaritans? Christ's teaching was the same, but the hearts of His hearers were widely different. The Jews were hardened. The Samaritans believed.

Chemnitius, on this verse, thinks that an emphasis is meant to be laid on the Greek word rendered "indeed." Literally it is "truly." He thinks it was used of our Lord in contradistinction to the false Christs and Messiahs who had appeared before Him, as well as to the typical Messiahs and Saviors, such as the Judges.

In leaving the passage, we may well wonder that so many "Samaritans" should at once have believed on our Lord when so few "Jews" ever believed. Our wonder may well be increased when we consider that our Lord worked no miracle on this occasion and that the word was the only instrument used to open the Samaritans' hearts. We see, for one thing, the entire sovereignty of the grace of

God. The last are often first and the first last; the most ignorant and unenlightened believe and are saved while the most learned and enlightened continue unbelieving and are lost. We see, for another thing, that it is not miracles and privileges, but grace, which converts souls. The Jews saw scores of mighty miracles worked by our Lord and heard Him preach for weeks and months, and yet, with a few rare exceptions, remained impenitent and hardened. The Samaritans saw no miracles worked at all, and only had our Lord among them for two days, and yet many of them believed. If ever there was clear proof that the grace of the Holy Spirit is the chief thing needed in order to procure the conversion of souls, we have it in the verses we are now leaving.

The allegorical and typical meanings which some writers assign to the Samaritan woman and her history, as related in this chapter, are hardly worth recounting. Some regard the woman as a type of the Jewish synagogue, slavishly bound to the five Books of the Law, and drawn finally by Christ to drink the living water of the Gospel. Some regard the woman as a type of the Gentile nations, for five thousand years committing fornication with heathen idols and at length purged by Christ and casting away their empty waterpot in obedience to Christianity. Some go even further and regard the woman as a prophetical type of things yet to come. They consider her as a type of the Greek Church, which is yet to be brought into the true faith of Christ! These views appear to me at best only fanciful speculations and more likely to do harm than good by drawing men away from the plain practical lessons which the passage contains.

JOHN 4:43-54

Healing the Royal Official's Son

After the two days he departed from there to Galilee. (For Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country.) So when he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him because they had seen all the things he had done in Jerusalem at the feast (for they themselves had gone to the feast).

Now he came again to Cana in Galilee where he had made the water wine. In Capernaum there was a certain royal official whose son was sick. When he heard that Jesus had come back from Judea to Galilee, he went to him and begged him to come down and heal his son, who was about to die. So Jesus said to him, "Unless you people see signs and wonders you will never believe." "Sir," the official said to him, "come down before my child dies." Jesus told him, "Go home; your son will live." The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and set off for home.

While he was on his way down, his slaves met him and told him that his son was going to live. So he asked them the time when his condition began to improve, and they told him, "Yesterday at one o'clock in the afternoon the fever left him." Then the father realized that it was the very time Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live," and he himself believed along with his entire household. Jesus did this as his second miraculous sign when he returned from Judea to Galilee.

Four great lessons stand out boldly on the face of this passage. Let us fix them in our memories, and use them continually as we journey through life.

We learn, firstly, ***that the rich have afflictions as well as the poor.*** We read of a nobleman in deep anxiety because his son was sick. We need not doubt that every means of restoration was used that money could procure. But *money is not almighty*. The sickness increased, and the nobleman's son lay at the point of death.

The lesson is one which needs to be constantly impressed on the minds of men. There is no more common, or more mischievous error, than to suppose that the rich have no cares. The rich are as liable to sickness as the poor; and have a hundred anxieties beside, of which the poor know nothing at all. *Silks and satins often cover very heavy hearts*. The dwellers in *palaces* often sleep more uneasily than the dwellers in *poor cottages*. Gold and silver can lift no man beyond the reach of trouble. They may shut out debt and rags, but they cannot shut out care, disease, and death. The higher the tree, the more it is shaken by storms. The broader its branches, the greater is the mark which it exposes to the tempest. *David* was a happier man when he kept his father's sheep at Bethlehem, than when he dwelt as a king at Jerusalem, and governed the twelve tribes of Israel.

Let the servant of Christ beware of desiring riches. They are *certain cares*, and *uncertain comforts*. Let him pray for the rich, and not envy them. How hardly shall a rich man enter the kingdom of

God! Above all, let him learn to be content with such things as he has. He only is truly rich, who has treasure in heaven.

We learn, secondly, in this passage, that ***sickness and death come to the young as well as to the old.*** We read of a son sick unto death, and a father in trouble about him. We see the natural order of things inverted. The elder is obliged to minister to the younger, and not the younger to the elder. The child draws near to the grave before the parent, and not the parent before the child.

The lesson is one which we are all slow to learn. We are apt to shut our eyes to plain facts, and to speak and act, as if young people, as a matter of course, never died when young. And yet the grave-stones in every churchyard would tell us, that few people out of a hundred ever live to be fifty years old, while many never grow up to man's estate at all. *The first grave that ever was dug on this earth, was that of a young man*. The first person who ever died, was not a father but a *son*. Aaron lost two sons at a stroke. David, the man after God's own heart, lived long enough to see three children buried. Job was deprived of all his children in one day. These things were carefully recorded for our learning.

He that is wise, will *never consider long life as a certainty*. We never know what a day may bring forth. The strongest and fairest are often cut down and hurried away in a few hours, while the old and feeble linger on for many years. The only true wisdom is to be always prepared to meet God, to put nothing off which concerns eternity, and to live like men ready to depart at any moment. So living, it

matters little whether we die young or old. Joined to the Lord Jesus, we are safe in any event.

We learn, thirdly, from this passage, ***what benefits affliction can confer on the soul.*** We read, that anxiety about a son led the nobleman to Christ, in order to obtain help in time of need. Once brought into Christ's company, he learned a lesson of priceless value. In the end, "he believed, and his whole house." All this, be it remembered, hinged upon the son's sickness. *If the nobleman's son had never been ill, his father might have lived and died in his sins!*

Affliction is one of God's medicines. By it He often teaches lessons which would be learned in no other way. By it He often draws souls away from sin and the world, which would otherwise have perished everlastingly. Health is a great blessing, but sanctified disease is a greater. Prosperity and worldly comfort, are what all naturally desire; but losses and crosses are far better for us, if they lead us to Christ. Thousands at the last day, will testify with David, and the nobleman before us, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted." (Psalm. 119:71.)

Let us beware of murmuring in the time of trouble. Let us settle it firmly in our minds, that there is a meaning, a needs-be, and a message from God, in every sorrow that falls upon us. There are no lessons so useful as those learned in the school of affliction. There is no commentary that opens up the Bible so much as sickness and sorrow. "No chastening for the present seems to be joyous, but grievous—nevertheless afterward it yields peaceable fruit." (Heb.

12:11.) The resurrection morning will prove, that many of the losses of God's people were in reality eternal gains.

We learn, lastly, from this passage, ***that Christ's word is as good as Christ's presence.*** We read, that Jesus did not come down to Capernaum to *see* the sick young man, but only *spoke* the word, "Your son lives." Almighty power went with that little sentence. That very hour the patient began to amend. Christ only spoke, and the cure was done. Christ only commanded, and the deadly disease stood fast.

The fact before us is singularly full of comfort. It gives enormous value to every promise of mercy, grace, and peace, which ever fell from Christ's lips. He that by faith has laid bold on some word of Christ, has placed his feet upon a ROCK. What Christ has said, He is able to do; and what He has undertaken, He will never fail to make good. The sinner who has really reposed his soul on the word of the Lord Jesus, is safe to all eternity. He could not be safer, if he saw the book of life, and his own name written in it. If Christ has said, "Him that comes to me, I will in no wise cast out," and our hearts can testify, "I have come," we need not doubt that we are saved. In the things of this *world*, we say that seeing is believing. But in the things of the *Gospel*, believing is as good as seeing. Christ's word is as good as man's deed. He of whom Jesus says in the Gospel, "He lives," is alive for evermore, and shall never die.

And now let us remember that afflictions, like that of the nobleman, are very common. They will probably come to our door

one day. Have we known anything of bearing affliction? Would we know where to turn for help and comfort when our time comes? Let us fill our minds and memories betimes with Christ's words. They are not the words of man only, but of God. The words that he speaks are spirit and life. (John 6:63.)

Technical Notes:

43. Now after two days he departed from there and went into Galilee. 44. For Jesus himself testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country. 45. So when he came to Galilee, the Galileans received him, having seen all the things that he did at Jerusalem at the feast; for they also had gone to the feast. 46. So Jesus came again to Cana of Galilee where he made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman whose son was sick at Capernaum. 47. When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judæa into Galilee, he went to him and besought him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. 48. Then Jesus said to him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe. 49. The nobleman said to him, Sir, come down before by child dies. Jesus said to him, Go your way, your son lives. And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken to him, and he went his way. 51. And as he was now going down, his servants met him and told *him* saying, Your son lives! 52. Then he inquired of them the hour when he began to amend. And they said to him, Yesterday at the

seventh hour the fever left him. 53. So the father knew that *it was* at the same hour in which Jesus said to him, Your son lives. And he himself believed, and his whole house. 54. This *is* again the second miracle *that* Jesus did, when he had come out of Judæa into Galilee.

43.—[*After two days.*] The Greek words here would be more literally rendered, "After the two days:" *i.e.*, after the two days mentioned in the preceding verse.

[*Departed from there.*] Quesnel remarks, "It is an instance of self-denial, which is very uncommon, to leave those who respect and applaud us that we may go to preach among others from whom we have reason to expect a quite different treatment."

[*For Jesus...testified...country.*] This verse has much perplexed commentators. What is meant by the expression, "His own country"? If it means Galilee, as most suppose, how are we to reconcile it with the words which follow, "the Galileans received him"? And again, what is the connection between the verse before us and the one which precedes it? Why should our Lord go into Galilee when it was a place where He had no honor? And finally, how are we to reconcile the statement that our Lord had no "honor" in Galilee with the undeniable fact that nearly all His disciples and adherents were Galileans? All these points have given rise to much speculation and conjecture.

(a) Some, as Origen and Maldonatus, get over the difficulty in the

following manner. They say that the words, “His own country,” must mean Judæa, and Bethlehem, where Christ was born. The sense will then be, “After two days Jesus departed from Samaria and went into Galilee, and not into Judæa, because in Judæa He received no honor and was not believed.” This solution seems to me unnatural and unsatisfactory. Our Lord’s going to Galilee was a premeditated journey and not a sudden plan decided on during His stay at Samaria. Beside this, there is no proof whatever that our Lord was not received and believed in Judæa. On the contrary, He “made and baptized” so many disciples in Judæa that it attracted the notice of the Pharisees and made it necessary for Him to “depart into Galilee.”

(b) Augustine holds that “His own country” means Galilee, and seems to attach the following sense to the verse: “And yet Jesus testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country, for when He came into Galilee no one believed on Him except the nobleman and his house.” This appears to me a far-fetched and unnatural interpretation. Tittman and Blomfield take much the same view and render it, “Although Jesus had testified,” etc.

(c) Chrysostom and Euthymius think that “His own country” means Capernaum. This interpretation also seems to me improbable. We find Capernaum elsewhere called our Lord’s “own city,” but nowhere else “His own country.” (See Matt. ix.1.)

(d) Theophylact suggests that the verse before us is inserted in order to explain “why our Lord did not always abide and continue in

Galilee, but only came there at intervals. The reason was that He received no honor there." This also seems to me an unsatisfactory interpretation.

(e) Alford says, "The only true and simple view is that this verse refers to the next following, and indeed to the whole narrative which it introduces. It stands as a preliminary explanation of 'Except ye see signs and wonders ye will not believe,' and indicates the contrast between the Samaritans, who believed on Him for His own word, and His own countrymen, who only received Him because they had seen the miracles which He did at Jerusalem." This view of the text seems to me as far-fetched and unsatisfactory as any of those I have mentioned. Moreover, I doubt much whether the Greek word rendered "for," is ever used in the sense Alford puts on it, in the New Testament.

(f) The following explanation appears to me by far the most probable one. The words, "His own country," mean neither Galilee nor Judæa, but "Nazareth." The sense is, "Jesus departed from Samaria into Galilee, but not to His own country, Nazareth, because He testified, both now and on other occasions, that a prophet has no honor in his own country." In confirmation of the view I have maintained, it deserves notice that in the six only places in which the Greek word here rendered "country" is found in the Gospels, beside the one before us, it always means the town of Nazareth and not the district in which Nazareth is situated. (Matt. xiii.54,57; Mark vi.1,4; Luke iv.23,24.) The view I have supported is that of Cyril, Calvin, Calovius,

Lampe, Poole, DeDieu, Pearce, Doddridge, Dyke, and Olshausen.

Our Lord's use of a proverb in this verse is again worthy of notice. It is another proof of the value of proverbial sayings. The lesson of the proverb is a very instructive one. It is one of the most melancholy proofs of man's fallen and corrupt state, that he never values what he is familiar with, and that familiarity breeds contempt. Ministers of the Gospel discover this by painful experience, when they have resided many years in the same parish and ministered long in the same congregation. Those who have the most abundant supply of Gospel privileges are often the people who value them least. "The nearer the church, the further from God," is often found to be literally true. Those who live furthest off and are obliged to deny themselves most in order to hear the Gospel, are often the very persons who take most pains to hear it. One grain of comfort, however, may be extracted from this painful verse. A minister must not despair and accuse himself of unfaithfulness because the Gospel he preaches is not honored in his own congregation and many remain hardened and unbelieving after he has preached to them many years. Let him remember that he is sharing his Master's lot. He is drinking the very cup of which Christ drank. Christ had no honor in Nazareth, and faithful ministers have often less honor among their own people than they have elsewhere.

Pellican thinks that our Lord "testified" the truth contained in this verse in reply to someone who asked Him why He did not go to

Nazareth. I prefer the opinion that it simply means our Lord "always did testify, and made a practice of testifying."

45.—[*Galileans received Him.*] The word "received" probably means no more than that they "received Him with respect and reverence," as One who was no common person. There is no warrant for supposing that they all received Him with true faith and experimentally believed on Him as the Savior of their souls.

[Having seen...things...feast.] This expression confirms the view already maintained (John ii.23), that our Lord did many other miracles at Jerusalem at the first Passover, when He was there, beside casting the buyers and sellers out of the temple. It is probable that the miracles recorded in the four Gospels are only a selection out of the number that Christ worked. Here, as elsewhere, we see the special use of miracles. They served to arrest men's attention, and gave the impression that He who wrought them deserved a hearing. The Galileans were ready to receive Christ respectfully because they had seen His miracles.

[*They also had gone to the feast.*] This sentence is a useful proof of the universality of the Jewish custom of attending the great feasts at Jerusalem, and especially the feast of the Passover. Even those who lived furthest off from Jerusalem, in Galilee, made a point of going to the Passover. It serves to show the publicity of our Lord's ministry, both in life and death. When He was crucified at the Passover, the event happened in the presence of myriads of witnesses from every

part of the world. The overruling providence of God ordered things so that the facts of Christ's life and death could never be denied. "This thing was not done in a corner." (Acts xxv.26.)

46.—[Jesus...Cana...water wine.] The circumstance of our Lord going twice to Cana may be accounted for by remembering the fact that one of His disciples, "Nathanael," belonged to Cana, and that His mother, Mary, in all probability had relatives there. (See note on John ii.1.)

[*A certain nobleman*.] The Greek word rendered "nobleman" is only found here in this sense, as a substantive, in the New Testament. The marginal reading, "courtier or ruler," hardly makes it more clear. Some have conjectured that the nobleman must have been some one attached to Herod's court, and is therefore called "a royal person," which is the literal meaning of the word. Some, as Luther, Chemnitius, Lightfoot, and Pearce, have also conjectured that "Chuza, Herod's steward," whose wife Joanna became one of our Lord's disciples and "ministered unto Him" (Luke viii.3), must have been this nobleman. This is no doubt possible, and would be an interesting fact if it could be proved. But there is no authority for it except conjecture. Lightfoot adds a conjecture that if not Chuza, it might have been Manaen. (Acts xiii.1.)

The rarity of a nobleman and a person connected with a royal court seeking Christ under any circumstances is observed by Glassius and others. It shows us that Christ will have trophies of the power of His

grace out of every rank, class, and condition. In the first chapter of St. John's Gospel, we see fishermen converted; in the third, a self-righteous Pharisee; in the beginning of the fourth, a fallen Samaritan woman; and in the end, a nobleman out of a King's court.

Pearce thinks that the nobleman was one of the class called Herodians. (Matt. xxii.16.)

[*Son was sick at Capernaum*.] We should always notice the number and greatness of miracles which our Lord worked at Capernaum, and the dignity of the persons at whose instance they were worked. Here He healed the Centurion's servant. (Matt. viii.5) Here, in all probability, He restored to life the daughter of Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue. (Mark vi.21.) And here, in the present instance, He healed the nobleman's son. Three distinct and leading classes had each of them a mighty miracle wrought among them. The Centurion was a Gentile soldier. The ruler of the synagogue was a Jew of high ecclesiastical position. The nobleman was connected with the highest civil authorities. The consequence, no doubt, was that the name and power of Christ became known to every leading family in Capernaum. No wonder that our Lord says, "Thou Capernaum that are exalted unto heaven." (Matt. xi.23.) No place was so privileged as this city.

The idea entertained by some that this "nobleman" was the same as the Centurion in Matt. viii.5, and that the miracle here recorded is only the same miracle differently reported, seems to me entirely

destitute of foundation. The details of the two miracles are entirely different. The miracle before us is nowhere else reported in the Gospels.

47.—[*Heard that Jesus had come, etc.*] This verse shows how widely spread was the fame of the miracle wrought at Cana upon the occasion of our Lord's former visit, and how great was the report of our Lord's miracles at Jerusalem, brought back by the Galileans who went to the feast. In no other way can we account for the nobleman going to our Lord and beseeching Him to come and heal his son. Our Lord must have got the reputation of being One who was both able and willing to work such cures. Musculus remarks on this verse how much more love descends than ascends. In all the Gospels, we never read of any sons or daughters coming to Christ on behalf of their parents.

Dyke observes, "Some crosses drive men to Christ, especially in our children. This was the cross that subdued Egypt; and to great men, such as this ruler, who have much to leave their children, this cross is the greatest."

48.—[*Jesus said... Except ye see, etc.*] Our Lord in this verse appears to refer to the common desire expressed by the Jews to see miracles and signs as a proof of His Messiahship. "Cannot you believe unless you actually see with your own eyes a miracle worked? Is your faith so small that except you *see* something you cannot believe?" No doubt our Lord knew the heart of the man before Him. He wished to

test his faith and to draw out from him more earnest desires after the mercy that he wanted. The resemblance between our Lord's first answer to the nobleman and His first answer to the woman of Canaan, who came to Him about her daughter, deserve comparison. (Matt. xv.24.)

Chrysostom remarks, "Christ's meaning is, Ye have not yet the right faith but still feel towards Me as only a prophet. He rebukes the state of mind with which the nobleman had come to Him, because that before a miracle he believed not strongly. Thus too He drew him on the more to belief. That the nobleman came and entreated was nothing wonderful, for parents in their great affection are wont to resort to and talk with physicians. But that he came without any strong purpose appears from this, that he only came to Christ when Christ came into Galilee, whereas, if he had firmly believed, he would not have hesitated when his child was at the point of death to go into Judæa."

Glassius thinks that our Lord, in these words, intends to contrast the faith of the Samaritans with the unbelief of the Galileans. The Samaritans believed without having seen any signs or wonders at all.

Chemnitius thinks that our Lord, in this verse, spoke with special reference to the state of mind in which He found the inhabitants of Cana upon His second visit. He thinks that He found them aroused to a state of expectation and curiosity by His miracle of changing water into wine, but still destitute of any real saving faith.

Poole compares the nobleman to Naaman, who had faith enough to come to Elisha's door to be healed of his leprosy, but was stumbled because Elisha did not put his hand on the diseased place but only sent him a message. (2 Kings v.11.)

49.—[*The nobleman said, etc.*] This verse shows the earnestness of the nobleman's desire for relief, quickened and sharpened by the apparent rebuff contained in our Lord's reply to his first application. Yet it was a saying exhibiting much ignorance. It is clear that he did not discover what our Lord hinted at—that possibly he might be helped without His coming down to see his sick son. He neither denies the truth of our Lord's words nor enters into argument. He only knew that he felt in grievous distress and begged our Lord to "come down ere his child died." That our Lord could heal him he did not doubt. But that He could heal him at a distance, without even seeing him, was something that he could not yet understand.

Chrysostom says, "Observe how these very words show the weakness of the man. When he ought, after Christ had rebuked his state of mind, to have imagined something great concerning Him, even if he did not before, listen how he drags along the ground! He speaks as though Christ could not raise his son after death, and as though He knew not in what state the child was."

Brentius remarks that the nobleman did not bring to Christ faith but merely a spark of faith.

50.—[*Jesus said to him, etc.*] Three things are very deserving of notice in this verse. (a) We should observe our Lord's marvelous kindness and compassion. He takes no notice of the nobleman's weak faith and slowness of understanding. He freely grants his request and gives his son life and health without delay. (b) We should observe our Lord's almighty power. He simply speaks the words, "Thy son lives," and at once a sick person, at several miles distance, is cured and made well. He spoke and it was done. (c) We should observe, not least, the unhesitating confidence which the nobleman reposed in our Lord's power. He asked no more questions after he heard the words, "Thy son lives." At once he believed that all would be well and went his way.

Cyril observes on this verse that our Lord here healed two persons at one time by the same words. "He brought the nobleman's mind to faith, and delivered the body of the young man from disease." Chrysostom remarks, "What can be the reason why in the case of the Centurion Christ undertook voluntarily to come and heal while here, though invited, He came not? Because in the case of the Centurion, faith had been perfected, and therefore He undertook to go that we might learn the rightmindedness of the man; but here, the nobleman was imperfect. When therefore he continually urged Him, saying, 'Come down,' and knew not clearly that even when absent He could heal, He shows that even this was possible to Him in order that this man might gain, from His not going, that knowledge which the Centurion had of himself."

Bishop Hall observes, “The ruler’s request was, Come and heal. Christ’s answer was, ‘Go thy way, thy son lives.’ Our merciful Savior meets those in the end whom He crosses in the way. How sweetly does He correct our prayers; and while He does not give us what we asked, gives us better than we asked.”

51.—[*Now going down.*] The relative position of Cana and Capernaum are not precisely known at the present day. The exact site of Capernaum is matter of dispute among travelers and geographers. All we can glean from the expression before us is that Cana was probably in the hill country and Capernaum on the lake of Galilee. Hence a person leaving Cana for Capernaum would “go down.”

[*Your son lives.*] The meaning of this expression must evidently be, “Your son is so much better, that he is comparatively alive from the dead. He was as one dead. He is now alive.”

52.—[*Inquired…the hour.*] This man’s mind seems at once to have laid hold on the nature of the miracle and to have acknowledged the power of Christ’s word.

[*When he began to amend.*] The Greek expression so rendered is a very peculiar one and only found in this place. It is literally, “Had himself better: in more elegant order.” Let it be noted that here, as elsewhere, we find an expression which is only used once in the New Testament. This shows that it is no valid argument against the

inspiration of any text of passage that it contains Greek expressions nowhere else used.

[*Yesterday at the seventh hour*.] This expression has been differently interpreted according to the view which commentators take of St. John's mode of reckoning time. Those who think that he numbered hours in the same way that we do, maintain that it means, "at seven o'clock in the evening." Those, on the contrary, who maintain that St. John observed the Jewish mode of computation, say that it means "at one o'clock in the afternoon." I have already given it as my decided opinion that John observes the Jewish mode of reckoning time, and I therefore hold with those who think that "the seventh hour" means one o'clock. The arguments of those who say that if it had been one o'clock, the nobleman would never have taken till the next day to reach home, appear to my mind quite inconclusive. For one thing, we know nothing accurately of the distance from Cana to Capernaum. For another thing, we forget the slow rate at which people travel in Eastern countries, on bad roads, in a hilly country. For another thing, it is entirely an assumption to suppose that the nobleman had nothing else to do at Cana when he came to Jesus about his son. For anything we know, he had, as a nobleman, business of various kinds which made it impossible for him to reach home in the afternoon after Jesus had said, "Thy son lives." Last, but not least, it seems hardly probable that the nobleman would have asked our Lord to come down to Capernaum at so late an hour as seven o'clock in the evening, or would have set off on his own return at that hour and met his servants in the night.

[*The fever left him.*] Trench remarks that the words seem to indicate that there was not merely an abatement of the fever, but that it suddenly forsook him. (Compare Luke iv.9.)

[*Himself believed.*] Beda remarks on the matter of the nobleman's believing, that "there are three degrees of faith—the beginning, the increase, and the perfection. There was a beginning in this man when he first came to Christ; an increase when our Lord told him that his son lived; and a perfection when he found him to have recovered at that very time." [*His whole house.*] This expression probably means "his whole family," including children and servants. We have no right whatever to exclude children from the sense of the words. Remembering this, we shall better understand what is meant when it is written, "St Paul baptized "the household of Stephanas," or when it is related that the house of Lydia was baptized. (1 Cor. i.16; Acts xvi.15.)

There seems no reason for doubting that the nobleman, from this time forth, became a thorough, true-hearted believer in Christ. If, as some suppose, he is the same as Chuza, Herod's steward, we may perhaps date the conversion of Joanna his wife to the period of the verse now before us. Bishop Hall remarks on this verse: "Great men cannot want clients. Their example sways some; their authority more. They cannot go to either of the other worlds alone. In vain do they pretend power over others who labor not to draw their families to God!"

54.—[*This second miracle, etc.*] The plain meaning of these words is that our Lord had worked no other miracle in Galilee before this one, excepting that of turning the water into wine at Cana. It appears likely that many of our Lord's earliest miracles were wrought in Judæa and Jerusalem, although we have no record of them except in the second chapter of St. John's Gospel. (John ii.23.) This fact is noteworthy because it throws light on the wickedness of the Jews at Jerusalem, where at last Christ was condemned and crucified.
Chrysostom remarks, "The word 'second' is not added without cause, but to exalt yet more the praises of the Samaritans by showing that even when a second miracle had been wrought, they who beheld it had not yet reached so high as those who had not seen one."

Origen says, "Mystically the two journeys of Christ into Galilee signify His two advents. At the first, He makes us His guests at supper and gives us wine to drink. At the second, He raises up the nobleman's son at the point of death,—*i.e.*, the Jewish people, who after the fulness of the Gentiles attain salvation. The sick son is the Jewish people fallen from the true religion." This is patristic interpretation! Allegorical expositions like this destroy the whole value of God's Word. At this rate the Bible may be made to mean anything.

Chemnitius thinks that with this chapter ends the first year of our Lord's public ministry, and gives a useful summary of the principal events comprehended within it. These are: the Lord's baptism, the

calling of the first disciples, the miracle at Cana, the miracle of casting out of the temple the buyers and sellers, the conversation with Nicodemus, the tarrying in Judæa and baptizing, the testimony of John the Baptist, the journey through Samaria, the arrival in Galilee, and the healing of the nobleman's son. Epiphanius, he observes, calls it the "acceptable year" of our Lord's ministry, because it was the most quiet and peaceful. Bengel, in closing this chapter, observes that St. John seems to arrange our Lord's miracles in threes. He relates three in Galilee—the first at the marriage in Cana, the second on the nobleman's son, the third in feeding five thousand men (John vi.); three in Judæa—the first at Bethesda at pentecost (ch. v), the second after the feast of tabernacles on the blind man (ch. ix), and the third on Lazarus before the Passover (ch. xi.) So also after the ascension he describes three appearances of our Lord to His disciples. (John xxi.14.)

Dyke observes how God keeps account of all the gracious means He affords men for their good. "The *second* miracle is specified to aggravate the infidelity of the Jews; that though Christ had now done another and a second miracle, yet only the ruler and his household believed. Two miracles wrought, and one household converted! God takes account not only how many men are won by a sermon (Acts ii.41), but of how many sermons are lost by men."

John – Chap. 5

JOHN 5:1-15

Healing a Paralytic at the Pool of Bethesda

After this there was a Jewish feast, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool called Bethesda in Aramaic, which has five covered walkways. A great number of sick, blind, lame, and paralyzed people were lying in these walkways. Now a man was there who had been disabled for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and when he realized that the man had been disabled a long time already, he said to him, "Do you want to become well?" The sick man answered him, "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up. While I am trying to go into the water, someone else goes down before me." Jesus said to him, "Stand up! Pick up your mat and walk." Immediately the man was healed, and he picked up his mat and started walking. (Now that day was a Sabbath.)

So the Jewish authorities said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath, and you are not permitted to carry your mat." But he answered them, "The man who made me well said to me, 'Pick up your mat and walk.'" They asked him, "Who is the man who said to you, 'Pick up your mat and walk'?" But the man who had

been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had slipped out since there was a crowd in that place.

After this Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, "Look, you have become well. Don't sin any more, lest anything worse happen to you." The man went away and informed the Jewish authorities that Jesus was the one who had made him well.

We have in this passage one of the few miracles of Christ, which John records. Like every other miracle in this Gospel, it is described with great minuteness and particularity. And like more than one other miracle it leads on to a discourse full of singularly deep instruction.

We are taught, for one thing, in this passage, ***what misery sin has brought into the world.*** We read of a man who had been ill for no less than thirty-eight years! For thirty-eight weary summers and winters he had endured pain and infirmity. He had seen others healed at the waters of Bethesda, and going to their homes rejoicing. But for him there had been no healing. Friendless, helpless, and hopeless, he lay near the wonder-working waters, but derived no benefit from them. Year after year passed away, and left him still uncured. No relief or change for the better seemed likely to come, except from the grave.

When we read of cases of sickness like this, we should remember how deeply we ought to hate sin! Sin was the original root, and cause, and fountain of every disease in the world. God did not create

man to be full of aches, and pains, and infirmities. These things are the fruits of the Fall. There would have been no sickness, if there had been no sin.

No greater proof can be shown of man's inbred unbelief, than his carelessness about sin. "Fools," says the wise man, "make a mock at sin." (Pro. 14:9.) Thousands delight in things which are explicitly evil, and run greedily after that which is downright poison. They love that which God abhors, and dislike that which God loves. They are like the madman, who loves his enemies and hates his friends. Their eyes are blinded. Surely if men would only look at hospitals and infirmaries, and think what havoc sin has made on this earth, they would never take pleasure in sin as they do.

Well may we be told to pray for the coming of God's kingdom! Well may we be told to long for the second advent of Jesus Christ! Then, and not until then, shall there be no more curse on the earth, no more suffering, no more sorrow, and no more sin. Tears shall be wiped from the faces of all who love Christ's appearing, when their Master returns. Weakness and infirmity shall all pass away. Hope deferred shall no longer make hearts sick. There will be no chronic invalids and incurable cases, when Christ has renewed this earth.

We are taught, for another thing, in this passage, ***how great is the mercy and compassion of Christ.*** He "saw" the poor sufferer lying in the crowd. Neglected, overlooked, and forgotten in the great multitude, he was observed by the all-seeing eye of Christ. "He knew" full well, by His Divine knowledge, how long he had been

“in that case,” and pitied him. He spoke to him unexpectedly, with words of gracious sympathy. He healed him by miraculous power, at once and without tedious delay, and sent him home rejoicing.

This is just one among many examples of our Lord Jesus Christ’s kindness and compassion. He is full of undeserved, unexpected, abounding love towards man. “He delights in mercy.” (Micah 7:18.) He is far more ready to save than man is to be saved, far more willing to do good than man is to receive it.

No one ever need be afraid of beginning the life of a true Christian, if he feels disposed to begin. Let him not hang back and delay, under the vain idea that Christ is not willing to receive him. Let him come boldly, and trust confidently. He who healed the cripple at Bethesda is still the same.

We are taught, lastly, the lesson that ***recovery from sickness ought to impress upon us.*** That lesson is contained in the solemn words which our Savior addressed to the man He had cured — “Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto you.”

Every sickness and sorrow is the voice of God speaking to us. Each has its peculiar message. Happy are they who have an eye to see God’s hand, and an ear to hear His voice, in all that happens to them. Nothing in this world happens by chance.

And as it is with sickness, so it is with recovery. Renewed health should send us back to our post in the world with a deeper hatred of

sin, a more thorough watchfulness over our own ways, and a more constant purpose of mind to live for God. Far too often the excitement and novelty of returning health tempt us to forget the vows and intentions of the sick-room. There are spiritual dangers attending a recovery! Well would it be for us all after illness to grave these words on our hearts, “Let me sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto me.”

Let us leave the passage with grateful hearts, and bless God that we have such a Gospel and such a Savior as the Bible reveals. Are we ever sick and ill? Let us remember that Christ sees, and knows, and can heal as He thinks fit. Are we ever in trouble? Let us hear in our trouble the voice of God, and learn to hate sin more.

Technical Notes:

1. After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 2. Now there is in Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool, which is called in Hebrew, Bethesda, having five porches. 3. In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, blind, lame, paralyzed, waiting for the moving of the water. 4. For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and troubled the water; whoever then first, after the troubling of the water, stepped in was made well of whatever disease he had. 5. And a certain man was there who had an infirmity thirty-eight years. 6. When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he said to him, Will you be made

well? 7. The impotent man answered him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool; but while I am coming, another steps down before me. 8. Jesus said to him, Rise, take up your bed and walk. 9. And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked. And that day was the Sabbath. 10. The Jews therefore said to him who was cured, It is the sabbath day; it is not lawful for you to carry your bed. 11. He answered them, He who made me well said to me, Take up your bed and walk. 12. Then they asked him, Who is the man who said to you, Take up your bed and walk? 13. And he who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had conveyed himself away, a multitude being in that place. 14. Afterward Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, Behold, you are made well; sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you. 15. The man departed and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.

1.—[*After this*.] Literally translated this would be "after these things." Some think that when St. John is telling some event which follows immediately after the last thing narrated, he uses the expression "after this thing" (as John ii.12), but that when there has been an interval of time, he uses the expression "after these things." If this be correct, we must suppose that some space of time elapsed between the healing of the nobleman's son and the visit to Jerusalem, recorded in this chapter. [*A feast of the Jews*.] There is nothing to show what feast this was. Most commentators think it was the

Passover. Many, however, think it was the feast of Pentecost. Some few say it was the feast of tabernacles, some the feast of Purim, and some the feast of the dedication. Each view has its advocates, and the question will probably never be settled. An argument in favor of the Passover is the fact that none of the five Jewish feasts were so regularly attended by devout Jews as the Passover. An argument against it is the fact that on three other occasions, when the feast of the Passover is mentioned in St. John, he carefully specifies it by name, and one would naturally expect that it would be named here. The matter is really of no peculiar importance. In one point of view only is it interesting. If the "feast" was the Passover, it proves that there were four Passovers during the period of our Lord's ministry on earth. St. John mentions three by name, beside this "feast." (John ii.23; vi.4; xii.1.) This would make it certain that our Lord's ministry lasted three full years, or at any rate must have begun with a Passover and ended with a Passover. If the "feast" was not the Passover, we have no proof that His ministry lasted longer than between two and three years. (See notes on John ii.13.)

The expression, "a feast of the Jews," is one of many incidental evidences that St. John wrote specially for the use of Gentile converts, and that he thought it needful for their benefit to explain Jewish ordinances. [*Jesus went up*.] The frequency of our Lord's attendance at Jewish feasts, and the respect He showed for Mosaic ordinances, should always be noticed. They were appointed by God, and so long as they lasted, He gave them honor. It is an important proof to us that the unworthiness of ministers is no reason for

neglecting God's ordinances, such as baptism and the Lord's Supper. The benefit we receive from ordinances and sacraments does not depend on the character of those who administer them, but on the state of our own souls. The priests and officers of the Temple, in our Lord's time, were probably very unworthy persons. But that did not prevent our Lord honoring the Temple ordinances and feasts. It does not, however, follow from this that we should be justified in habitually going to hear false doctrine preached. Our Lord never did this.

Let it be noted that none of the four Gospel writers speak so much of our Lord's doings in Judæa and Jerusalem as St. John does. 2. [*There is in Jerusalem*.] These words, it is thought, show that Jerusalem was yet standing and not taken and destroyed by the Romans when John wrote his Gospel. Otherwise, it is argued, he would have said, "There *was* at Jerusalem."

[*By the sheep market a pool*.] Nothing certain is known about this pool or its precise situation. Modern travelers have professed to point out where it was. But there is little ground for determining the matter, except conjecture and tradition. After all the changes of eighteen centuries, points like these are almost incapable of a satisfactory solution. There is no place in the world, perhaps, where it is so difficult to settle anything decidedly about ancient buildings and sites as Jerusalem. Some propose to render the expression "sheep market" the "sheep gate," because of Nehemiah iii.1. But we really have no certain ground for either expression.

[*Called in Hebrew, Bethesda.*] The word "Bethesda," according to Cruden, means "house of effusion" or "house of pity or mercy." It is not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible. The mention of "in Hebrew" shows again that John did not write for Jews so much as Gentiles.

[*Having five porches.*] These porches were probably covered arcades, piazzas, colonnades, or verandas, open at one side to the air but protected against the sun or rain overhead. In a hot country like Palestine, such buildings are very necessary.

3.—[*In these lay a great multitude.*] The context seems to show that the multitude were assembled at this particular feast in this place, expecting a certain miracle to be wrought which only took place at this particular time of the year.

[*Impotent folk.*] This expression evidently does not mean paralytic people, but merely people who were sick and ill. The mention of "blind, lame, paralyzed," shows this.
[*Moving of the water.*] This "moving" must have been something that could be seen and observed by persons standing by or looking on. There was no virtue or healing element in the water until the movement took place. 4.—[*For an angel went down, etc.*] The thing we are here told is very curious. There is nothing like it in the Bible. Josephus, the Jewish writer, does not mention it. The simplest view is that it was a standing miracle wrought once every year, as Cyril says, or at any rate at some special season only, by God's

appointment, to keep the Jews in mind of the wonderful works that had been done for them in time past, and to remind them that the God of miracles was unchanged. But when this singular miracle first began, on what occasion it began, why we never hear anything else about it, in what way the angel came down, are questions which cannot be answered. That angels did interpose in a miraculous manner in the days of the New Testament is perfectly clear from many instances in the Gospels and Acts. That the Jews themselves had strong faith in the interposition of angels on certain occasions is clear from the account of the vision of Zacharias, when we are simply told that the people "perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple." (Luke i.22.) That from the days of Malachi, when inspiration ceased, God may have seen it good to keep up in the Jewish mind a faith in unseen things by the grant of a standing miracle, is a very probable opinion. The wisest course is to take the passage as we find it and to believe though we cannot explain.

All other attempts to get over the difficulties of the passage are thoroughly unsatisfactory. To condemn the passage as not genuine is a lazy way of cutting the knot, and not at all clearly warranted by the authority of manuscripts. To say that St. John only used the popular language of the Jews in describing the miracle and did not really believe it himself is, to say the least, irreverent and profane. To suppose, as Hammond and others have done—that the "angel" only means a common human "messenger" sent by the priests and that the healing efficacy of the water arose from the blood of the many sacrifices which drained into the pool of Bethesda at the Passover

feast, or to suppose as do others—that Bethesda was a pool where sacrifices were washed before they were offered, are all entirely gratuitous assumptions and do not get over the main difficulty. There is no proof that the blood of the sacrifices did drain into the pool. There is no proof that the blood would give the water any healing virtue. There is no proof, as Lightfoot shows, that sacrifices were washed at all. (See Lightfoot's Exercitations on John on this passage.) Moreover, this hypothesis would not account for only one person being healed every time the waters were "stirred up" or for St. John's mention of the "angel stirring up" the waters. Here, as in many other instances, the simplest view, and the one which involves the fewest difficulties, is to take the passage as we find it and to interpret it as narrating an actual fact: viz., a standing miracle which actually was literally wrought at a certain season and perhaps every year.

After all, there is no more real difficulty in the account before us than in the history of our Lord's temptation in the wilderness, the various cases of Satanic possession, or the release of Peter from prison by an angel. Once admit the existence of angels, their ministry on earth, and the possibility of their interposition to carry out God's designs, and there is nothing that ought to stumble us in the passage. The true secret of some of the objections to it is the modern tendency to regard all miracles as useless lumber which must be thrown overboard, if possible, and cast out of the Sacred Narrative on every occasion. Against this tendency we must watch and be on our guard.

Rollock remarks: “The Jewish people at this time was in a state of great confusion, and the presence of God was in great measure withdrawn from it. The prophets whom God had been accustomed to raise up for extraordinary purposes were no longer given to the Jews. Therefore God, that He might not appear altogether to cast off His people, was willing to heal some miraculously, and in an extraordinary way, in order that He might testify to the world that the nation was not yet entirely rejected.” Brentius and Calvin say much the same.

Poole thinks that this miracle only began a little before the birth of Christ “as a figure of Him being about to come who was to be a Fountain opened to the house of David.” Lightfoot takes the same view. [*Troubled the water*.] This means, no doubt, “disturbed, agitated, stirred up,” the water of the pool. There is no reason for supposing that the angel visibly appeared in doing this. It is enough to suppose that at a certain hour there was a sudden stir and agitation of the waters, immediately after which they possessed the miraculous virtue of healing, just as the waters at Marah became sweet immediately after Moses cast the tree into them. (Exod. xv.25.)

[*Whoever then first*.] This shows that the whole affair was miraculous. On no other supposition can we account for only one person being healed after the troubling of the water. That only “one” was healed is plain, I think from the wording of the passage.

[*Of whatever disease he had*.] These words would be more literally translated, “with whatsoever disease he was held.” Bengel thinks that

the use of the past tense throughout this verse shows that the miracle had ceased when John wrote. He “used to go down,” “used to trouble the waters,” etc. Tertullian declares expressly that the miracle ceased from the time that the Jews rejected Christ. 5.—[*Infirmity thirty-eight years.*] This means the length of time during which the sick man had been ill. How old he was we do not know. Baxter remarks, “How great a mercy is it to live eight and thirty years under God’s wholesome discipline! O my God, I think Thee for the like discipline of eight and fifty years. How safe a life is this compared to one spent in full prosperity and pleasure!”

Those who see typical and abstruse meanings in all the least details of the narratives of Scripture observe that thirty-eight years was the exact time of Israel’s wanderings in the wilderness. They see in the sick man (helpless and hopeless till Christ came) a type of the Jewish Church. The pool of Bethesda is Old Testament religion. The small benefit it conferred (only healing one at a time) represents the narrow and limited benefit which Judaism conferred on mankind. The merciful interference of Christ on the sick man’s behalf represents the bringing in of the Gospel for all the world. These are pious thoughts, but it may well be doubted whether there is any warrant for them.

The notions that the pool of Bethesda was a type of baptism, and the five porches typical of the five books of the law or the five wounds of Christ, appear to me mere ingenious inventions of man without any solid foundation. Yet Chrysostom, Augustine, Theophylact,

Euthymius, Burgon, Wordsworth, and many others maintain them. Those who wish to see a full reply to the theory that the miracle at the pool of Bethesda is a typical proof of the doctrine of baptismal regeneration will find it in Gomarus, the Dutch divine. He takes up Bellarmine's argument on the subject and answers him completely.

6.—[When Jesus saw…knew…long time.] We need not doubt that our Lord knew this man's history by that divine knowledge which, as God, He possesses of all things in heaven and earth. To suppose that He ascertained by inquiry the state of his case before speaking to him is a weak, meager, and frigid interpretation. As a practical truth, it is a most comfortable doctrine that Jesus knows every sickness and disease and all its weary history. Nothing is hid from Him.

[*He said to him.*] This is an example of our Lord being the first to speak and begin conversation, as He did with the woman of Samaria. (John iv.7.) Unasked, unsolicited, unexpectedly, He mercifully addressed the sick man. No doubt He always begins in man's heart before man begins with Him. But He does all things as a Sovereign, according to His own will; and it is not always that we see Him taking the first step so entirely of Himself as we do here.

[*Will you be made well?*] The English language here fails to give the full force of the Greek. It means, "Have you a will? Do you wish? Do you desire to be made well?" The question was perhaps meant to awaken desire and expectation in the man and to prepare him in some sense for the blessing about to be bestowed on him.

Is not this, to take a spiritual view, the very language that Christ is continually addressing to every man and woman who hears His Gospel? He sees us in a wretched, miserable, sin-sick condition. The one thing He asks us is, “Have you any wish to be saved?”

7.—[*I have no man…put me into the pool.*] This is no doubt mentioned as an intentional proof of the heartlessness and unkindness of human nature. Think of a poor invalid waiting for years by the water and having not a single friend to help him! The longer we live on earth, the more we shall find that it is a selfish world, and that the sick and afflicted have few real friends in time of need. “The poor is hated even of his neighbor.” (Prov. xiv.20.) Christ is the only unfailing friend of the friendless and helper of the helpless.

8.—[*Rise…walk.*] Here, as in other similar cases, it is evident that miraculous healing power went forth with the words of our Lord. Thus, “Stretch forth thy hand” (Mark iii.5); “Go show yourselves to the priests” (Luke xvii.14). Commands like these tested the faith and obedience of those to whom they were given. How could they possibly do the things commanded if impotent like the man before us? Where was the use of doing them if still covered with leprosy, like the ten lepers? But it was precisely in the act of obedience that the blessing came. The whole power is Christ’s. But He loves to make us exert ourselves and show our obedience and faith.

Augustine finds in the command “Take up your bed” an exhortation to the love of our neighbors, because we are to bear one another’s

burdens; and in the command "Walk" an exhortation to love God! Such allegorizing appears to me very unwarrantable and calculated to bring the Bible into contempt as a book that can be made to mean anything.

9.—[Immediately…made well…walked.] Here we see the reality of the miracle wrought. Nothing but Divine power could enable one who had been a cripple for so many years to move his limbs and carry a burden all at once. But it was as easy to our Lord to give immediate strength as it was to create muscles, nerves, and sinews in the day that Adam was made. When we are told that the man "took up his bed," we must remember that this probably was nothing more than a light mattress, carpet, or thick cloth such as is commonly used in hot countries for sleeping on. 10.—[*The Jews*.] Here, as in many places in St. John's Gospel, the expression, "the Jews," when used of the Jews at Jerusalem, means the leaders of the people—elders, rulers, and scribes. It does not mean vaguely the "Jewish crowd" around our Lord, but the representatives of the whole nation—the heads of Israel at the time.

[*It is not lawful…bed*.] In support of this charge of unlawfulness, the Jew would allege not merely the general law of the fourth commandment, but the special passages in Nehemiah and Jeremiah about "bearing no burden" on the Sabbath day. (Neh. xiii.19; Jer. xvii.21.) But they could not have proved that these passages applied to the case of the man before them. For a man to carry merchandise and wares on the Sabbath was one thing. For a sick man, suddenly and miraculously healed, to walk away to his home carrying his

mattress, was quite another. To forbid the one man to carry his burden was Scriptural and lawful. To forbid the other was cruel and contrary to the spirit of the law of Moses. The act of the one man was unnecessary. The act of the other was an act of necessity and mercy. It might perhaps be urged, in defense of the Jews, that they only saw a man carrying off a burden and knew nothing of his previous illness or his cure. But when we remember the many instances recorded in the Gospels of their extreme and harsh interpretation of the fourth commandment, it is doubtful whether this plea will stand.

11.—[*He who made me well, etc.*] The answer of the man seems simple. But it contains a deep principle. "He who has done so great thing to me was surely to be obeyed when He told me to take up my bed. If He had authority and power to heal, He was not likely to lay upon me an unlawful command. I only obeyed Him who cured me." If Christ has really healed our souls, should not this be our feeling towards Him? "Thou hast healed me. What Thou commandest I will do."

12.—[*Who is the man…walk?*] Ecolampadius, Grotius, and many others, remark what an example this question is of the malevolent and malicious spirit of the Jews. Instead of asking "Who healed you?" they asked, "Who told you to carry your bed?" They cared not for knowing what they might admire as a work of mercy, but what they might make the ground of an accusation. How many are like them! They are always looking out for something to find fault with.

13.—[*Did not know who it was.*] It is most probable that the cripple really did not know not who it was who had healed him, and had only seen our Lord that day for the first time. He was ignorant of His name and only knew Him as a kind person, who came up and said suddenly, “Will you be made well?” and after curing him, miraculously, suddenly disappeared in the crowd.

[*Conveyed himself away.*] The Greek word so rendered is peculiar and only found in this place. Parkhurst thinks that it simply means “departed, or went away.” Schleusner says that the root of the idea is “swimming out, or escaping by swimming,” and that the meaning here is “withdrew himself secretly from the crowd that was in the place.” If so, it is not improbable that, as in Luke iv.30 at Nazareth, and John x.39 in the Temple, our Lord put forth a miraculous power in passing or gliding through the crowd without being observed or stopped.

14.—[*Afterward…temple.*] It is not clear how long a time elapsed before our Lord found the man whom He had healed in the Temple. If the theory be correct to which I adverted in the note on the first verse, there must have been an interval. The word “afterward” is literally “after these things.” Chrysostom thinks that the circumstance of the man being found “in the temple” is an indication of his piety.

[*Behold you are made well; sin no more, etc.*] These words appear to point at something more than meets the eye. They are a solemn

caution. One might fancy that our Lord knew that some sin had been the beginning of the man's illness, and that He meant to remind him of it. It certainly seems very unlikely that our Lord would say broadly and vaguely, "sin no more," unless He spoke with a significant reference to some sin which had been the primary cause of this man's long illness. (See 1 Cor. xi.30.) There are sins which bring their own punishments on men's bodies; and I am strongly disposed to think that it may have been the cause with this man. The expression "a worse thing" would then come out with more force. It would be "a heavier visitation," a worse judgment even than this thirty-eight years' illness. A sick bed is a sorrowful place, but hell is much worse. Besser remarks: "It is a dreadful thing when the correction and mercy of Divine love wearies itself with a man in vain. You that are sick, write over your beds when you rise up from them in renewed health, 'Behold you are made well; sin no more lest a worse thing come unto you.'" Brentius says much the same.

If sin was the cause of this man's disease, and he had been ill from the effects of it thirty-eight years, it is plain that it must have been committed before our Lord was born! It is an instance, in that case, of our Lord's perfect and Divine knowledge of all things, past as well as future.

15.—[*Departed and told the Jews.*] There is no proof that the man did this with an evil design. Born a Jew and taught to reverence his rulers and elders, he naturally wished to give them the information

they desired and had no reason to suppose, for anything we can see, that it would injure his Benefactor.

JOHN 5:16-23

Responding to Jewish Authorities

Now because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish authorities began persecuting him. So Jesus told them, "My Father is working until now, and I too am working." For this reason the Jewish authorities were trying even harder to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was also calling God his own Father, thus making himself equal with God.

So Jesus answered them, "I tell you the solemn truth, the Son can do nothing on his own initiative, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. For the Father loves the Son and shows him everything he does, and greater deeds than these he will show him, so that you may be amazed. For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomever he wishes. Furthermore, the Father does not judge anyone, but has assigned all judgment to the Son, so that all people may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. The one who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him."

These verses begin one of the most deep and solemn passages in the four Gospels. They show us the Lord Jesus asserting His own

Divine nature, His unity with God the Father, and the high dignity of His office. No where does our Lord dwell so fully on these subjects as in the chapter before us. And no where, we must confess, do we find out so thoroughly the weakness of man's understanding! There is much, we must all feel, that is far beyond our comprehension in our Lord's account of Himself. Such knowledge, in short, is too astonishing for us. "It is high—we cannot attain unto it." (Psalm 139:6.) How often men say that they want clear explanations of such doctrines as the Trinity. Yet here we have our Lord handling the subject of His own Person, and, behold! we cannot follow Him. We seem only to touch His meaning with the tip of our fingers.

We learn, for one thing, from the verses before us, ***that there are some works which it is lawful to do on the Sabbath day.***

The Jews, as on many other occasions, found fault because Jesus healed a man who had been ill for thirty-eight years, on the Sabbath. They charged our Lord with a breach of the fourth commandment.

Our Lord's reply to the Jews is very remarkable. "My Father," he says, "works hitherto, and I also work." It is as though He said—"Though my Father rested on the seventh day from His work of *creation*, He has never rested for a moment from His *providential government* of the world, and from His merciful work of supplying the daily needs of all His creatures. Were He to rest from such work, the whole frame of nature would stand still. And I also work works of mercy on the Sabbath day. I do not break the fourth commandment

when I heal the sick, any more than my Father breaks it when He causes the sun to rise and the grass to grow on the Sabbath."

We must distinctly understand, that neither here nor elsewhere does the Lord Jesus overthrow the obligation of the fourth commandment. Neither here nor elsewhere is there a word to justify the vague assertions of some modern teachers, that "Christians ought not to keep a Sabbath," and that it is "a Jewish institution which has passed away." The utmost that our Lord does, is to place the claims of the Sabbath on the right foundation. He clears the day of rest from the false and superstitious teaching of the Jews, about the right way of observing it. He shows us clearly that works of necessity and works of mercy are no breach of the fourth commandment.

After all, the errors of Christians on this subject, in these latter days, are of a very different kind from those of the Jews. There is little danger of men keeping the Sabbath too strictly. The thing to be feared is the disposition to keep it loosely and partially, or not to keep it at all. The tendency of the age is not to exaggerate the fourth commandment, but to cut it out of the Decalogue, and throw it aside altogether. Against this tendency it becomes us all to be on our guard. The experience of eighteen centuries supplies abundant proofs that vital religion never flourishes when the Sabbath is not well kept.

We learn, for another thing, from these verses, ***the dignity and greatness of our Lord Jesus Christ.***

The Jews, we are told, sought to kill Jesus because He said "that God was his Father, making himself equal with God." Our Lord, in reply, on this special occasion, enters very fully into the question of His own Divine nature. In reading His words, we must all feel that we are reading mysterious things, and treading on very holy ground. But we must feel a deep conviction, however little we may understand, that the things He says could never have been said by one who was only man. The Speaker is nothing less than "God manifest in the flesh." (1 Tim. 3:16.)

He asserts *His own unity with God the Father*. No other reasonable meaning can be put on the expressions— "The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he sees the Father do—for what things soever he does, these also does the Son likewise. The Father loves the Son, and shows him all things that himself does." Such language, however deep and high, appears to mean that in operation, and knowledge, and heart, and will, the Father and the Son are One—two Persons, but one God. Truths such as these are of course beyond man's power to explain particularly. Enough for us to believe and rest upon them.

He asserts, in the next place, *His own Divine power to give life*. He tells us, "The Son gives life to whom he will." Life is the highest and greatest gift that can be bestowed. It is precisely that thing that man, with all his cleverness, can neither give to the work of his hands, nor restore when taken away. But life, we are told, is in the hands of the Lord Jesus, to bestow and give at His discretion. Dead

bodies and dead souls are both alike under His dominion. He has the keys of death and hell. In Him is life. He is the life. (John 1:4. Rev. 1:18.)

He asserts, in the last place, *His own authority to judge the world*. "The Father," we are told, "has committed all judgment unto the Son." All power and authority over the world is committed to Christ's hands. He is the King and the Judge of mankind. Before Him every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess that he is Lord. He that was once despised and rejected of man, condemned and crucified as a malefactor, shall one day hold a great judgment, and judge all the world. "God shall judge the secrets of man by Jesus Christ." (Rom. 2:16.)

And now let us think whether it is possible to make too much of Christ in our religion. If we have ever thought so, let us cast aside the thought forever. Both in His Own nature as God, and in His office as commissioned Mediator, He is worthy of all honor. He that is one with the Father—the Giver of life—the King of kings—the coming Judge, can never be too much exalted. "The one who does not honor the Son, does not honor the Father who sent him."

If we desire salvation, let us lean our whole weight on this mighty Savior. So leaning, we never need be afraid. Christ is the rock of ages, and he that builds on Him shall never be confounded—neither in sickness, nor in death, nor in the judgment-day. **The hand that was nailed to the cross is almighty!** The Savior of sinners is "mighty to save." (Isaiah 63:1)

Technical Notes:

16. For this reason the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill him, because he had done these tings on the sabbath day. 17. But Jesus answered them, My Father works hitherto, and I work. 18. Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God. 19. Then Jesus answered and said to them, Verily, verily, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of himself, but what he sees the Father do; for whatever he does, the Son also does likewise. 20. For the Father loves the Son, and shows him all things that he himself does; and he will show him greater works than these, that ye may marvel. 21. For as the Father raises up the dead and quickens *them*, even so the Son quickens whom he will. 22. For the Father judges no man, but has committed all judgment to the Son, 23. that all *men* should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He who honors not the Son honors not the Father who has sent him.

16.—[*For this reason…persecuted, etc.*] The verbs in this verse are all in the imperfect tense. It may be doubted whether the meaning is not, strictly speaking, something of this kind: "The Jews from this time began to persecute Jesus, and were always seeking to slay Him, because He made a habit of doing these things on the Sabbath day." It is some confirmation of this view that our Lord at a much later

period refers to this very miracle at Bethesda as a thing which had specially angered the Jews of Jerusalem, and for which they hated Him and sought still to kill Him. It was long after the time of this miracle when He said, “Are ye angry at Me because I have made a man every whit whole on the Sabbath day?” (John vii.23.)

17.—[*But Jesus answered.*] This seems to have been the first reply which our Lord made when charged with breaking the fourth commandment. It was a short, simple justification of the lawfulness of doing works of mercy on the Sabbath. There seems to have been an interval between this reply and the long argumentative defense which begins in the 19th verse.

[*My Father works hitherto, and I work.*] The words rendered “hitherto,” are literally, “until now;” that is, from the beginning of creation up to the present time. I can only see one meaning in this pithy sentence: “My Father in heaven is continually working works of mercy and kindness in His providential government of the world, in supplying the needs of all His creatures, in maintaining the whole fabric of the earth in perfection, in giving rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, in preserving and sustaining life. All this He does on Sabbaths as well as weekdays. Were He to cease from such works, the whole world would be full of confusion. When He rested from His works of creation, He did not rest from His works of providence. I also, who am His beloved Son, claim the right to work works of mercy on the Sabbath. In working such works I do not break the Sabbath any more than my Father does. My Father appointed the fourth commandment to be honored, and yet never ceased to cause

the sun to rise and the grass to grow on the Sabbath. I also, who claim to be One with the Father, honor the Sabbath, but I do not abstain from works of mercy upon it." Two things should be observed in this sentence. One is the plain practical lesson that the Sabbath was not meant to be a day of total idleness and of entire cessation from all kinds and sorts of work. "The Sabbath was made for man"—for his benefit, comfort, and advantage. Works of mercy and of real necessity, to man's life and animal existence, on the Sabbath day were never intended to be forbidden. The other thing to be observed is our Lord's assertion of His own Divinity and quality with God the Father. When He said, "My Father works and I also work," He evidently meant much more than bringing forward His Father's *example,* though that of course is contained in His argument and justifies all Christians in doing works of mercy on Sundays. What He meant was, "I am the beloved Son of God; I and my Father are One in essence, dignity, honor, and authority. Whatever He does, I also do and have right to do. He works and I also work. He gave you the Sabbath, and it is His day. I too, as one with Him, am Lord of the Sabbath." That the Jews saw this to be the meaning of His words seems clear from the next verse.

Chrysostom remarks on this verse: "If anyone says, 'How does the Father *work*, who ceased on the seventh day from all His works,' let him learn the manner in which He works. What is it? He cares for, He holds together all that has been made. When you behold the sun rising, the moon running in her path, the lakes, the fountains, the rivers, the rains, the course of nature in seeds and in our own bodies

and those of irrational beings and all the rest (by means of which this universe is made up), then learn the ceaseless working of the Father." (Matt. v.45; vi.30.) Schottgen quotes a remarkable saying of Philo Judæus: "God never ceases to work. Just as it is the property of fire to burn and of snow to be cold, so is it the property of God to work."

Ferus remarks on the great variety of arguments used by our Lord on various occasions in reply to the superstitious views of the Jews about the Sabbath. One time He adduces the example of David eating the showbread, another time the example of the priests working in the temple on the Sabbath, another time the readiness of the Jews to help an ox out of a pit on the Sabbath. All these arguments were used in defense of works of necessity and mercy. Here He takes higher ground still—the example of His Father.

18.—[*Therefore the Jews…kill him.*] This short defense which our Lord made seems to have rankled in the minds of the Jews and to have made them even more bitter against Him. What length of time is covered by this verse is not very plain. I am inclined to think that it implies some little pause between the 17th and 19th verses. Here again, as in the 16th verse, we have the imperfect tense all the way through. It must surely point at something of habit, both in the designs of the Jews against our Lord, in our Lord's conduct, and in His language about His Father. [*Said God… Father…equal with God.*] It is clear that our Lord's words about His Sonship struck the Jews in a far more forcible way than they seem to strike us. In a

certain sense all believers are “sons of God.” (Rom. viii.14.) But it is evident that they are not so in the sense that our Lord meant when He talked of God as His Father and Himself as God’s Son. The Greek undoubtedly might be translated more clearly, “said that God was His own particular Father.” (Compare Rom. viii.32.) The Jews, at any rate, accepted the words as meaning our Lord to assert his own peculiar Sonship and His consequent entire equality with God the Father. Their charge and ground of anger against Him amounted to this: “You call God your own particular Father, and claim authority to do whatever He does. By so doing You make Yourself equal with God.” And our Lord seems to have accepted this charge as a correct statement of the case and to have proceeded to argue that He had a right to say what He had said, and that He really was equal with God. As St. Paul says, “He thought it not robbery to be equal with God.” (Phil. ii.6.)

Augustine remarks, “Behold, the Jews understood what the Arians would not understand.” Whitby remarks that the Jews never accused our Lord of blasphemy for saying that He was the Messiah, but for saying that He was the Son of God, because they did not believe that Messiah when He appeared was to be a Divine Person.

Ferus remarks that the Jews probably took notice of our Lord calling God “My Father,” and not “our Father.” Cartwright also thinks that there is much weight in the expression “my,” and that the Jews gathered from it that Christ claimed to be the only-begotten Son of God, and not merely a Son by adoption and grace.

19.—[*Then Jesus answered and said to them.*] This verse begins a long discourse in which our Lord formally defends Himself from the charge of the Jews of laying claim to what He had no right to claim. (1) He asserts His own Divine authority, commission, dignity, and equality with God His Father. (2) He brings forward the evidence of His Divine commission, which the Jews ought to consider and receive. (3) Finally, He tells the Jews plainly the reason of their unbelief and charges home on their consciences their love of man's praise more than God's, and their inconsistency in pretending to honor Moses while they did not honor Christ. It is a discourse almost unrivaled in depth and majesty. There are few chapters in the Bible, perhaps, where we feel our own shallowness of understanding so thoroughly, and discover so completely the insufficiency of all human language to express "the deep things of God." Men are often saying they want explanations of the mysteries of the Christian faith, the Trinity, the Incarnation, the person of Christ, and the like. Let them just observe, when we do find a passage full of explanatory statements on a deep subject, how much there is that we have no line to fathom and no mind to take in. "I want more light," says proud man. God gives him his desire in this chapter and lifts up the veil a little. But behold, we are dazzled by the very light we wanted and find we have not eyes to take it in!

It has always been thought by many commentators that this solemn discourse of our Lord's was delivered before the Sanhedrim, or general Ecclesiastical Assembly of the Jews. They regard it as a

formal defense of His Divinity and Messiahship, and a statement of evidence why He should be received before a regularly constituted ecclesiastical court. It may be so. Probabilities seem in favor of the idea. But it must be remembered that we have nothing but internal evidence in favor of the theory. There is not a word said to show that our Lord was formally brought before the Sanhedrim and made a formal defense. Some writers lay much stress upon the opening words of the 19th verse— "Then answered Jesus and said"—and consider that these words imply a formal charge in court and a formal reply from our Lord. It may be true. But we must remember that it is only a conjecture. One thing only is certain: Nowhere else in the Gospels do we find our Lord making such a formal, systematic, orderly, regular statement of His own unity with the Father, His Divine commission and authority, and the proofs of His Messiahship as we find in this discourse. To me it seems one of the deepest things in the Bible.

[*Verily, verily, I say to you.*] Here, as elsewhere, the remark applies that this form of expression always precedes some statement of more than ordinary depth and importance.

[*The Son can do nothing of Himself, etc.*] This opening verse declares the complete unity there is between God the Father and God the Son. The Son, from His very nature and relation to the Father, "can do nothing" independently or separately from the Father. It is not that He lacks or *wants* the power to do, but that He *will* not do. (Compare Gen. xix.22.) When the angel said, "I cannot do anything

till Thou be come higher," it means, of course, "I will not do." "Of Himself" does not mean without help or unassisted, but "from Himself," from His own independent will. He can only do such things, as from His unity with the Father and consequent ineffable knowledge, He "sees" the Father doing. For the Father and the Son are so united—one God through two Persons—that whatsoever the Father does the Son does also. The acts of the Son, therefore, are not His own independent acts but the acts of His Father also. The Greek word which we render "likewise" must not be supposed to mean nothing more than "also, as well." It is literally "in like manner." Bishop Hall paraphrases this saying of our Lord thus: "I and the Father are one indivisible essence, and our acts are not less inseparable. The Son can do nothing without the will and act of the Father; and, even as He is man, can do nothing but what He sees agreeable to the will and purpose of His heavenly Father."

Barnes remarks: "The words 'what things soever' are without limit. All that the Father does, the Son likewise does. This is as high an assertion as possible of His being equal with God. If one does all that another does or can do, then there is proof of equality. If the Son does all that the Father does, then, like Him, He must be almighty, omniscient, all-present, and infinite in every perfection; or, in other words, He must be God." Augustine remarks: "Our Lord does not say, whatsoever the Father does the Son does other *things like* them, but the very *same things*...If the Son does the same things and in like manner, then let the Jew be silenced, the Christian believe, the heretic be convinced: the Son is equal with the Father."

Hilary, quoted in the "*Catena Aurea,*" remarks: "Christ is the Son because He does nothing of Himself. He is God because whatsoever things the Father does, He does the same. They are one because They are equal in honor. He is not the Father because He is sent."

Diodati remarks: "The phrase, 'what He sees the Father do,' is a figurative term, showing the inseparable communion of will, wisdom, and power between the Son and the Father in the internal order of the most holy Trinity." Toletus remarks: "When it is said 'the Son can do nothing of Himself,' this does not mean lack of power, but the highest power. Just as it is a mark of omnipotence not to be able to die or to be worn out or to be annihilated (because there is nothing that can injure omnipotence), so likewise, 'to be unable to do anything of Himself' is not a mark of impotence but of the highest power. It means nothing less than having one and the same power with the Father, so that nothing can be done by the One which is not equally done by the Other."

20.—[*The Father loves the Son, etc.*] This verse carries on the thought begun in the preceding verse—the unity of the Father and the Son. When we read the words "the Father loves" and "the Father shows," we must not for a moment suppose them to imply any superiority in the Father or any inferiority in the son as to their Divine nature and essence. The "love" is not the love of an earthly parent to a beloved child. The "showing" is not the showing of a teacher to an ignorant scholar. The "love" is meant to show us that

unspeakable unity of heart and affection (if such words may be reverently used) which eternally existed and exists between the Father and the Son. The “showing” means that entire confidence and cooperation which there was between the Father and the Son, as to all the works which the Son should do when He came into the world to fill the office of Mediator and to save sinners. The “greater works” which remained to be shown were evidently the works specified in the two following verses—the works of quickening and of judging. That the Jews did “marvel” and were confounded at the works of “quickening” we know from the Acts of the Apostles. That they will “marvel” even more at our Lord’s work of judgment we shall see when Christ comes again to judge the heathen, to restore Jerusalem, to gather Israel, to convince the Jews of their unbelief, and to renew the face of the earth.

Both in this and the preceding verse, we must carefully remember the utter inability of any human language or human ideas to express perfectly such matters as our Lord is speaking of. Language is intended specially to express the things of man. It fails greatly when used to express things about God. In the expression, “sees the Father do,” “loves the Son,” “shows Him all things,” “will show Him greater works,” we must carefully bear this in mind. We must remember that they are expressions accommodated to our weaker capacities. They are intended to explain the relation between two Divine Beings who are one in essence though two Persons, one in mind and will though two in manifestation, equal in all things as touching the Godhead though the Son is inferior to the Father as touching His manhood.

There must needs be immense difficulty in finding words to convey any idea of the relation between these two Persons. Hence the language used by our Lord must be cautiously handled with a constant recollection that we are not reading of an earthly father and son, but of God the Father and God the Son, who though one in essence as God are at the same time two distinct Persons.

Augustine wisely remarks, “There are times when speech is deficient even when the understanding is proficient. How much more does speech suffer defect when the understanding has nothing perfect!” Augustine and Bernard both remark that it is far “greater work” to repair ruined human nature than to make it at first, and to re-create it than to create it.

21,22.—[*As the Father raises up the dead, etc.*] Our Lord here proceeds to tell the Jews one of His mighty works which He had come to do in proof of His Divine nature, authority, and commission. Did they find fault with Him for making Himself equal with God? Let them know that He had the same power as God the Father to give “life” and quicken the dead. Let them know furthermore that all “judgment” was committed to Him. Surely He who had in His hand the mighty prerogatives of giving life and judging the world had a right to speak of Himself as equal with God!

When we read “the Father raises up the dead and quickens them,” we must either understand the words to refer generally to God’s power to raise the dead at the last day, which the Jew would allow as an

article of faith and a special attribute of divinity; or else we must understand it to apply to the power of spiritually quickening men's souls, which God had from the beginning exercised in calling men from death to life; or else we must simply take it to mean that to give life, whether bodily or spiritual, is notoriously the peculiar attribute of God. The last view appears to me the most probable one and most in harmony with what follows in after verses. When we read "the Son quickens whom He will," we have a distinct assertion of the Son's authority to give life at His will, either bodily or spiritual, with the same irresistible power as the Father. The highest of all gifts He has but to "will" and to bestow. The Greek work translated "quickens" is very strong. It is, literally, "makes alive," and seems to imply the power of making life of all kind, both bodily and spiritual. Burkitt remarks that it is never said of any prophet or apostle that he did mighty works "at his will."

When we read "the Father judges no man but has committed all judgment to the Son," we must understand that in the economy of redemption, the Father has honored the Son by devolving on Him the whole office of judging the world. It cannot, of course, mean that judgment is work with which the Father, from His nature, has nothing to do, but that it is work which He has completely and entirely committed to the Son's hands. He that died for sinners is He who will judge them. Thus it is written, "He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he has ordained." (Acts xvii.31.) Burgon remarks: "There is an original, supreme, judicial power; and there is also a judicial power derived, given by commission. Christ, as

God, has the first together with the Father; Christ, as man, has the second from the Father."

I think it highly probable that the "all judgment committed to the Son" includes not merely the final judgment of the last day, but the whole work of ordering, governing, and deciding the affairs of God's kingdom. "To judge" is an expression constantly used in the Old Testament in the sense of "to rule." The meaning then would be that the Father has given to the Son the office of King and Judge. The whole administration of the Divine government of the world is put into the hands of the Son, Christ Jesus. Everything connected with the rule of the church and world, as well as the last judgment, is placed in the Son's hands.

We should carefully mark the distinction between "quickening" and "judging" in the language of these two verses.
(a) It is *not said* that "the Father quickens no man," but has committed the power of giving life to the Son. Had this been said, it would have contradicted the texts "no man can come unto Me except the Father draws him" and "the Spirit gives life." (John vi.44; 2 Cor. iii.6.) Quickening is the work of all three Persons in the Trinity, of one as much as another.
(b) It *is said* that judgment is the special work of the second Person in the Trinity. It is not the peculiar office either of the Father or of the Spirit, but of the Son. There seems a fitness in this. He who was condemned by an unjust judgment and died for sinners is He whose office it will be to judge the world.

(c) It is said that "the Son quickens whom He will." The power of giving life is as much the prerogative of the Son as of the Father or of the Spirit. Surely this teaches us, that to place the election of God the Father or the work of the Spirit before men, as the first and principal thing they should look at, is not good theology. Christ, after all, is the meeting-point between the Trinity and the world. It is His office to quicken as well as pardon. No doubt He quickens by the Spirit whom He sends into man's heart. But it is His prerogative to give life as well as peace. This ought to be remembered. There are some in this day who in a mistaken zeal put the work of the Father and the Spirit before the work of Christ.

23.—[*That all men should honor the Son, etc.*] By these words our Lord teaches us that the Father would have the Son to receive equal honor with Himself. We are to understand distinctly that there is no inferiority in the Son to the Father. He is equal to Him in dignity and authority. He is to be worshiped with equal worship. If any man fancies that to honor the Son equally with the Father detracts from the Father's honor, our Lord declares that such a man is entirely mistaken. On the contrary, "He that honors not the Son honors not the Father who sent Him." It was the mind and intention of the Father that the Son, as the Mediator between God and man, should receive honor from all men. The glory of His beloved Son is part of the Father's eternal counsels. Whenever, therefore, anyone through ignorance, pride, or unbelief, neglects Christ but professes at the same time to honor God, he is committing a mighty error, and so far from pleasing God is greatly displeasing Him. The more a man

honors Christ and makes much of Him, the more the Father is pleased. Evangelical Christians should mark the doctrine of this verse and remember it. They are sometimes taunted with holding new views in religion because they bring forward Christ so much more prominently than their fathers or grandfathers did. Let them see here that the more they exalt the Son of God and His office, the more honor they are doing to the Father who sent Him.

To the Deist and Socinian, the words of this verse are a strong condemnation. Not honoring Christ, they are angering God the Father. The Fatherhood of God, out of Christ, is a mere idol of man's invention and incapable of comforting or saving.

Alford remarks: "Whosoever does not honor the Son with equal honor to that which he pays to the Father, however he may imagine that he honors or approaches God, does not honor Him at all; because He can only be known by us as "the Father who sent His Son."

Barnes remarks: "If our Savior here did not intend to teach that He ought to be worshiped and esteemed equal with God, it would be difficult to teach it by any language."
Rollock remarks: "The Jews and Turks in the present day profess to worship God earnestly, not only without the Son but even with contempt of the Son Jesus Christ. But the whole of such worship is idolatrous, and that which they worship is an idol. There is no knowledge of the true God except in the face of the Son."

Wordsworth remarks: “They who profess zeal for the one God do not honor Him aright unless they honor the Son as they honor the Father. This is a warning to those who claim the title of Unitarians and deny the divinity of Christ. No one can be said to believe in the Divine unity who rejects the doctrine of the Trinity.”

The entire unity of the three Persons in the Trinity is a subject that needs far more attention than many give to it. It may be feared that many well-meaning Christians are *tritheists*, or worshipers of three distinct Gods, without knowing it. They talk as if God the Father’s mind toward sinners was one thing and God the Son’s another—as if the Father hated man and the Son loved him and protected him. Such persons would do well to study this part of Scripture and to mark the unity of the Father and the Son.

After all, that deep truth— “the eternal generation” of God the Son—whatever proud man may say of it, is the foundation truth which we must never forget in trying to understand a passage like that before us. In the Trinity, “none is afore or after other. The Father is eternal; the Son eternal; the Holy Ghost eternal. The Father is God; the Son is God; the Holy Ghost is God. And yet there are not three eternals but one eternal; not three Gods but one God.” As Burgon remarks, “There never was a time when any one of the three Persons was not.” And it might be added, there never was a time when the three Persons were not equal. And yet the Son was begotten of the Father

from all eternity, and the Holy Ghost proceeded from all eternity from the Father and the Son.

JOHN 5:24-29

"I tell you the solemn truth, the one who hears my message and believes the one who sent me, has eternal life and will not be condemned, but has crossed over from death to life. I tell you the solemn truth, a time is coming and is now here when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For just as the Father has life in himself, thus he has granted the Son to have life in himself, and he granted the Son authority to execute judgment because he is the Son of Man."

"Do not be amazed at this, because a time is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and will come out—the ones who have done what is good to the resurrection resulting in life, and the ones who have done what is evil to the resurrection resulting in damnation."

The passage before us is singularly rich in weighty truths. To the minds of Jews, who were familiar with the writings of Moses and Daniel, it would come home with peculiar power. In the words of our Lord they would not fail to see fresh assertions of His claim to be received as the promised Messiah.

We see in these verses that ***the salvation of our soul depends on hearing Christ.*** It is the man, we are told, who

"hears Christ's word," and believes that God the Father sent Him to save sinners, who "has everlasting life." Such "hearing" of course is something more than mere listening. It is hearing as a humble learner—hearing as an obedient disciple—hearing with faith and love —hearing with a heart ready to do Christ's will—this is the hearing that saves. It is the very hearing of which God spoke in the famous prediction of a "prophet like unto Moses"— "Unto him shall you hearken."— "Whoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him." (Deut. 18:15-19.)

To "hear" Christ in this way, we must never forget, is just as needful now as it was eighteen hundred years ago. It is not enough to hear sermons, and run after preachers, though some people seem to think this makes up the whole of religion. We must go much further than this—we must "hear Christ." To submit our hearts to Christ's teaching—to sit humbly at His feet by faith, and learn of Him—to enter His school as penitents, and become His believing scholars—to hear His voice and follow Him—this is the way to heaven. Until we know something experimentally of these things, there is no life in us.

We see, secondly, in these verses, ***how rich and full are the privileges of the true hearer and believer.*** Such a man enjoys a present salvation. Even now, at this present time, he "has everlasting life." Such a man is completely justified and forgiven. There remains no more condemnation for him. His sins are put away. "He shall not come into condemnation." Such a man is in an

entirely new position before God. He is like one who has moved from one side of a gulf to another; “He has passed from death unto life.”

The privileges of a true Christian are greatly underrated by many. Chiefly from deplorable ignorance of Scripture, they have little idea of the spiritual treasures of every believer in Jesus. These treasures are brought together here in beautiful order, if we will only look at them. One of a true Christian’s treasures is the “presentness” of his salvation. It is not a far distant thing which he is to have at last, if he does his duty and is good. It is his own in title the moment he believes. He is already pardoned, forgiven, and saved, though not in heaven. Another of a true Christian’s treasures is the “completeness” of his justification. His sins are entirely removed, taken away, and blotted out of God’s book, by Christ’s blood. He may look forward to judgment without fear, and say, “who is he that condemns?” (Rom. 8:34.) He shall stand without fault before the throne of God. The last, but not the least, of a true Christian’s treasures, is the entire change in his relation and position toward God. He is no longer as one dead before Him—dead, legally, like a man sentenced to die, and dead in heart. He is “alive unto God.” (Rom. 6:11.) “He is a new creature. Old things are passed away, and all things are become new.” (2 Cor. 5:17.) Well would it be for Christians if these things were better known! It is lack of knowledge, in many cases, that is the secret of lack of peace.

We see, thirdly, in these verses, ***a striking declaration of Christ’s power to give life to dead souls.*** Our Lord tells us that

"the hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear shall live." It seems most unlikely that these words were meant to be confined to the rising of men's bodies, and were fulfilled by such miracles as that of raising Lazarus from the grave. It appears far more probable that what our Lord had in view was the quickening of souls, the resurrection of conversion. (Ephes. 2:1; Colos. 2:13.)

The words were fulfilled in not a few cases, during our Lord's own ministry. They were fulfilled far more completely after the day of Pentecost, through the ministry of the Apostles. The myriads of converts at Jerusalem, at Antioch, at Ephesus, at Corinth, and elsewhere, were all examples of their fulfillment. In all these cases, "the voice of the Son of God" awakened dead hearts to spiritual life, and made them feel their need of salvation, repent, and believe. They are fulfilled at this very day, in every instance of true conversion. Whenever any men or women among ourselves awaken to a sense of their soul's value, and become alive to God, the words are made good before our eyes. It is Christ who has spoken to their hearts by His Spirit. It is "the dead hearing Christ's voice, and living."

We see, lastly, in these verses, ***a most solemn prophecy of the final resurrection of all the dead.*** Our Lord tells us that "the hour is coming when all that are in the grave shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of damnation."

The passage is one of those that ought to sink down very deeply into our hearts, and never be forgotten. All is not over when men die. Whether they like it or not, they will have to come forth from their graves at the last day, and to stand at Christ's judgment bar. None can escape His summons. When His voice calls them before Him, all must obey. When men rise again, they will not all rise in the same condition. There will be two classes—two parties—two groups of people. Not all will go to heaven. Not all will be saved. Some will rise again to inherit eternal life, but some will rise again only to be condemned. These are alarming things! But the words of Christ are plain and unmistakable. Thus it is written, and thus it must be.

Let us make sure that we hear Christ's quickening voice now, and are numbered among His true disciples. Let us know the privileges of true believers, while we have life and health. Then, when His voice shakes heaven and earth, and is calling the dead from their graves, we shall feel confidence, and not be "ashamed before Him at his coming." (1 John 2:28.)

Technical Notes:

24. Verily, verily, I say to you, He who hears my word and believes on him who sent me has everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death to life. 25. Verily, verily, I say to you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they who hear shall live. 26. For as the Father has life in himself, so has he given to the Son to have

life in himself, 27. and has given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man. 28. Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves shall hear his voice, 29. and shall come forth —those who have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and those who have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.

1.—[*Verily, verily I say*.] Here, as in other places, these words are the preface to a saying of more than ordinary solemnity and importance. [*He who hears my word*.] The "hearing" here is much more than mere listening, or hearing with the ears. It means hearing with the heart, hearing with faith, hearing accompanied by obedient discipleship. He that so hears the doctrine, teaching, or "word" of Christ, has life. It is such hearing as that of true sheep: "My sheep hear my voice" (John x.27); or as that spoken of by St. Paul: "Ye have not so learned Christ; if so be that ye have heard Him and have been taught by Him." (Eph. iv.21.) [*Believes on Him who sent Me*.] This must not be supposed to mean that a vague faith in God, such as the Deist professes to have, is the way to everlasting life. The belief spoken of is a believing on God in Christ—a believing on God as the God who sent Christ to save sinners—a believing on God as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has planned and provided redemption by the blood of His Son. He who so believes on God the Father is the same man who believes in God the Son. In this sense, the Father is just as much the object of saving faith as the Son. Thus we read, "It shall be imputed if we believe on Him who raised up

Jesus our Lord from the dead." (Rom. iv.24.) And again, "Who by Him do believe in God, who raised Him up from the dead and gave Him glory, that your faith and hope might be in God." (1 Pet. i.21.) He who rightly believes on Christ as his Savior, with the same faith believes in God as his reconciled Father. The Gospel that invites the sinner to believe in Jesus as his Redeemer and Advocate invites him at the same time to believe in the Father, who is "well pleased" with all who trust in His Son. Henry remarks: "Christ's design is to bring us to God. (1 Pet. iii.18.) As God is the first original of all grace, so is He the ultimate object of all faith. Christ is our way, and God is our rest. We must believe on God as having sent Jesus Christ, and recommended Himself to our faith and love, by manifesting His glory in the face of Jesus Christ." Lightfoot remarks: "He does most properly center the ultimate fixing and resting of belief in God the Father. For as from Him as from the fountain do flow all those things that are the object of faith—namely free grace, the gift of Christ, the way of redemption, the gracious promises—so unto Him as to that fountain does faith betake itself in its final resting and repose, namely, to God in Christ."

Chemnitius remarks that the expression "believe on Him who sent Me" shows "that true faith embraces the word of the Gospel, not as something thought out by Christ alone, but as something decreed in the secret counsel of the whole Trinity."

[*Has everlasting life.*] This means that he possesses a complete title to an everlasting life of glory hereafter and is reckoned pardoned,

forgiven, justified, and an heir of heaven even now upon earth. His soul is delivered from the second death. The "presentness" of the expression should be carefully noticed. Everlasting life is the present possession of every true believer from the moment he believes. It is not a thing he shall have at last. He has it at once, even in this world. "All that believe *are* justified." "Being justified by faith, we *have* peace with God." (Acts xiii.39; Rom. v.1.)

[*Shall not come into condemnation.*] The Greek word for "come" is in the present tense, and it would be more literally rendered "does not come." The meaning is, there is no condemnation for him. His guilt is removed even now. He has nothing to fear in looking forward to the judgment of the last day. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus." "He that believes on Him is not condemned." (Rom. viii.1;
John iii.18.)

I cannot see in these words any warrant for the notion held by some, that the saints of God shall not be judged at the last day in any way at all. The notion itself is so utterly contradictory to some plain texts of Scripture (2 Cor. v.10; Rom. xiv.10; Matt. xxv.31), that I cannot understand anyone holding it. But even in the text before us, it seems to me a violent straining of the words to apply them to the judgment-day. The thing our Lord is speaking of is the present privilege of a believer. The tense he uses, as Chemnitius bids us specially observe, is the present and not the future. And even supposing that the words do apply to the judgment day, the utmost that can be fairly made of

them is that a believer has no condemnation to fear at the last day. *Judged* according to his works he shall be. *Condemned* he may certainly feel assured he shall not be. From the day he believes, all his condemnation is taken away. Ecolampadius remarks how irreconcilable this verse is with the Romish doctrine of purgatory.

[*But is passed from death to life.*] This means that a believer has passed from a state of spiritual death to a state of spiritual life. Before he believed, he was dead legally—dead as a guilty criminal condemned to die. In the day that he believed, he received a free and full pardon. His sentence was reversed and put away. Instead of being legally dead, he became legally alive. But this is not all. His heart, which was dead in sins, is now renewed and alive unto God. There is a change in his character as well as in his position toward God. Like the prodigal son, he "was dead and is alive." (Luke xv.24.)

We should mark carefully the strong language of Scripture in describing the immense difference between the position of a man who believes and the man who does not believe. It is nothing else than the difference between life and death—between being dead and being alive. Whatever some may think fit to say about the privileges of baptism, we must never shrink from maintaining that so long as men do not hear Christ's voice and believe, so long are they dead—whether baptized or not—and have no life in them. Faith, not baptism, is the turning point. He that has not yet believed is dead and must be born again. When he believes, and not till then, he will pass from death to life.

Ferus remarks: “Although it seems very easy to believe, and many think they do believe when they have only heard the name of believing (supposing that to believe is the same as to understand, to remember, to know, to think), yet this believing is in truth a hard and difficult thing. It is easy to fast, to say prayers, to go on pilgrimage, to give alms and the like; but to believe is a thing impossible to our strength. Let superstitious people learn that God requires of us a far higher and more difficult kind of worship than they imagine. Let pious people learn to seek faith more than anything, saying, Lord, increase our faith.”

25.—[*Verily, verily, I say to you.*] This emphatic preface here begins a prophecy of the wonderful things that should yet be done by the Son of God. Did the Jews of Jerusalem desire to know what proofs of Divine power and authority the Son of God would give? Let them hear what He would do. [*The hour is coming and now is.*] This meant that a time was coming, and in fact had already begun.

[*The dead shall hear His voice and live.*] It is thought by some that these words apply to the literal raising again of dead persons, such as Lazarus at Bethany. I cannot think it. I believe that the “dead” here spoken of are the spiritually dead. I believe that the “hearing the voice of the Son of God” means the hearing of faith. I believe that the “living” spoken of means the rising out of the death of sin to spiritual newness of life. And I believe that the whole verse is a prediction of the many conversions of dead sinners that were to take place soon,

and had begun in some measure to take place already. The prediction was fulfilled when dead souls were converted during our Lord's own ministry, and was much more fulfilled after the day of Pentecost when He was preached by His apostles to the Gentiles and "believed on in the world." (1 Tim. iii.16.)

To confine the words to the few cases of miraculous raising of dead bodies which took place in the time of our Lord and His apostles appears to supply a very inadequate interpretation, and to be rendered unnecessary by the succeeding verse.

Let it be noted that it is only those who "hear" or "have heard" with faith the voice of Christ that live. Spiritual life turns on believing. "Ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth." (Eph. i.13.) Ferus and Cocceius think that the calling and conversion of the Gentiles was the principal thought in our Lord's mind when He spoke these words. 26.—[*For as the Father, etc.*] The first part of this verse needs no explanation. It is an admitted principle that God is the Author and Source of all life. He "has life in Himself." When it says further that "He has given to the Son to have life in Himself," we must not suppose it means that He has bestowed it on His Son in the same way that He gives gifts to mere men, such as prophets and apostles. It rather means that in His everlasting counsels concerning man's redemption, He has appointed that the second Person of the Trinity, His beloved Son, should be the Dispenser and Giver of life to all mankind. "God has given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son." (1 John v.11.)

Both here and in the following verse we must remember that "giving" does not imply any inferiority in the Son to the Father, so far as concerns His Divine essence. The things "given" to the Son were things solemnly appointed, deputed, and laid upon Him when He assumed the office of Mediator, in virtue of His office.

Burgon remarks: "Both the Father and the Son have the same life; both have it in themselves; both in the same degree; as the one so the other; but only with this difference—the Father from all eternity *gives* it, the Son from all eternity *receives* it."

27.—[*And has given Him authority, etc.*] This means that in virtue of His mediatorial office, the Second Person of the Trinity is specially appointed to be the Judge of all mankind. In the counsels of God concerning man, "judgment" is assigned to the Son and not to the Father or the Holy Spirit. It is undoubtedly true that God is "the Judge of all." (Heb. xii.23.) But it is also true that it is God the Son who will execute judgment and sit on the throne at the last day.

[*Because He is the Son of man.*] These words seem to imply that there is a connection between our Lord's incarnation and His filling the office of the Judge. It is because He humbled Himself to take our nature on Him and be born of the Virgin Mary that He will at length be exalted to execute judgment at the last day. It appears to be the same thought that St. Paul expresses when he tells the Philippians that *because* of Christ's humiliation, "God has highly exalted Him

and given Him a name which is above every name," etc. (Phil.ii.9.) Burgon remarks: "Because of His alliance with man's nature, because of His sense of man's infirmities, because of all He did and suffered for man's sake as the Son of man, the Son is that Person of the Trinity who is most fit, as well as most worthy, to be man's judge."

The expression, "The Son of man," would be rendered more literally "a Son of man" or "Son of man." Campbell remarks that the absence of the article "the" before the words "Son of man," occurs nowhere in the Gospels except in this passage.

Both in this and the preceding verse, we should observe an example of the great truth that "order is heaven's first law." Even the Second Person in the Trinity, one with the Father, very and eternal God, does not *take on Himself* the office of giving life and executing judgment, but receives it through the solemn appointment of God the Father. Just as it is written, "Christ glorified not Himself to be made a high priest, but He that said to Him, "Thou art my Son" (Heb. v.5), so we find it written here that in taking on Him the office of Mediator, it was "*given*" to Him to have life in Himself and "authority *given* to Him" to judge. Those who take on themselves offices without either divine or human commission are very unlike our Lord.

Toletus quotes a remarkable passage from Athanasius in which he points out that such expressions as "*given* to the Son by the Father," "*received* by the Son from the Father," are purposely used in order to prevent the Sabellian heresy of supposing that the Father and the

Son are one and the same Person. Such expressions are an unanswerable proof that the Father and the Son are two distinct Persons, though one God. We must never forget the words of the Athanasian creed: "Neither confounding the Persons nor dividing the substance."

28,29.—[*Do not marvel.*] These words imply that the hearers of our Lord were astonished at the things He had spoken concerning His Divine commission to give life and to judge. He proceeds to tell them that they have not yet heard all. If they wondered at what they had already heard, what would they think when He told them one thing more?

[*The hour is coming.*] This means the last day. To use the present tense of a time so distant as this, is characteristic of one who is very God, to whom time past, time present, and time to come are all alike, and a thousand years are as one day.

[All who are in the graves…voice…forth…damnation, etc.] These words are singularly like those in Daniel xii.2. They contain one of the most distinct statements in Scripture of that great truth—the resurrection of the dead. It shall be universal and not confined to a few only. "All" in the graves shall come forth, whether old or young, rich or poor. It shall take place at Christ's command and bidding. His "voice" shall be the call that shall summon the dead from their graves. There shall be a distinction of those who rise again into two classes. Some shall rise to glory and happiness—to what is called a "resurrection of life." Some shall rise to be lost and ruined forever—

to what is called a “resurrection of damnation.” The doings of men shall be the test by which their final state shall be decided. “Life” shall be the portion of those that have “done good,” and “damnation” of those that “have done evil” in the resurrection day.

(a) This passage condemns those who fancy that this world is all, and that this life ends everything, and that the grave is the conclusion. They are awfully mistaken. There is a resurrection and a life to come.
(b) This passage condemns those who try to persuade us in the present day that there is no future punishment, no hell, no condemnation for the wicked in the world to come—that the love of God is lower than hell—that God is too merciful and compassionate to punish anyone. There is a “resurrection,” we are told, “of damnation.”
(c) This passage condemns those who try to make out that resurrection is the peculiar privilege of believers and saints, and that the wicked will be punished by complete annihilation. Both here and in Acts xxiv. 15, we are distinctly told that both bad and good shall rise again. In St. Paul’s famous chapter about the resurrection (1 Cor. xv.), the resurrection of believers only is treated of.
(d) This passage condemns those who try to make out that men’s lives and conduct are of little importance so long as they profess to have faith and to believe in Christ. Christ himself tells us expressly that the “doings” of men, whether good or evil, will be the evidence that shall decide whether they rise again to glory or condemnation. Musculus remarks that the goodness which God requires of us is not such as only begins in the next world, after the resurrection. We

must have it now, and it must precede the time of judgment. It is not said, “some shall rise again that they may be made good and partakers of life,” but, “they that *have done* good shall come forth to a resurrection of life.” We should take care to be such in this life as we desire to be found in the day of judgment. He also remarks that our Lord does not say, “those who have known or talked about what is good,” but “those who have actually *done* good,” shall come forth to a resurrection of life. Those only will be found to have “done good” who are God’s elect—born again and true believers. Nothing but true faith will bear the fruit of good works. Calvin remarks that our Lord is not here speaking of the cause of salvation, but of the marks of the saved, and that one great mark which distinguishes the elect from the reprobate is good doing. There are two different Greek words used to express the English words “they that have done,” and it is difficult to say why. Precisely the same difference exists in John iii.20,21. The attempts made to explain the distinction between the two words do not appear to me very successful. For instance, Wordsworth remarks: “Good made and done has permanence forever; evil is practiced but produces no fruit for eternity.” Yet I doubt whether this remark will apply to Rom. i.32, and ii.3, where both the two Greek words for “doing” are used together and applied to the same class of persons, viz., the wicked.

It is thought by some that this passage supports the doctrine of the first resurrection as the peculiar privilege of the saints. (Rev. xx.5.) But it must in fairness be remembered that there is nothing said here about distinction of time in the resurrection of the good and bad. As

to the manner in which Christ's "voice" will be heard by the dead "in the graves," we are told nothing. It is remarkable that there are two other places beside this in which a "voice" or sound is mentioned as accompanying the resurrection. In Corinthians we read of the "last trumpet." (1 Cor. xv.52.) In Thessalonians we are told of "a shout," of the "voice of the archangel," and the "trump of God." (1 Thess. iv.16.) Nothing, however, but conjecture can be brought forward about the subject. No doubt the latent thought is that the dead bodies of men are sleeping and need to be awakened, as sleepers are roused by a voice. As to the nature of risen bodies, we are told nothing. Enough for us to know that this passage clearly shows it will be a resurrection of "bodies" as well as souls. It is those who are "in the graves" who shall come forth.

JOHN 5:30-39

I can do nothing on my own initiative. Just as I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I do not seek my own will, but the will of the one who sent me.

"If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true. There is another who testifies about me, and I know the testimony he testifies about me is true. You have sent to John, and he has testified to the truth. (I do not accept human testimony, but I say this so that you may be saved.) He was a lamp that was burning and shining, and you wanted to rejoice greatly for a short time in his light."

"But I have a testimony greater than that from John. For the deeds that the Father has assigned me to complete—the deeds I am now doing—testify about me that the Father has sent me. And the Father who sent me has himself testified about me. You people have never heard his voice nor seen his form at any time, nor do you have his word residing in you, because you do not believe the one whom he sent. You study the scriptures thoroughly because you think in them you possess eternal life, and it is these same scriptures that testify about me."

In these verses we see the proof of our Lord Jesus Christ being the promised Messiah, set forth before the Jews in one view. Four different witnesses are brought forward. Four kinds of evidence are offered. His Father in heaven—His forerunner, John the Baptist—the miraculous works He had done—the Scriptures, which the Jews professed to honor—each and all are named by our Lord, as testifying that He was the Christ, the Son of God. Hard must those hearts have been which could hear such testimony; and yet remain unmoved! But it only proves the truth of the old saying—that unbelief does not arise so much from lack of evidence, as from lack of will to believe.

Let us observe for one thing in this passage, ***the honor Christ puts on His faithful SERVANTS.*** See how He speaks of John the Baptist. "He bore witness of the truth"— "He was a burning and a shining light." John had probably passed away from his earthly labors when these words were spoken. He had been persecuted, imprisoned, and put to death by Herod—none interfering, none

trying to prevent his murder. But this murdered disciple was not forgotten by his Divine Master. If no one else remembered him, Jesus did. He had honored Christ, and Christ honored him.

These things ought not to be overlooked. They are written to teach us that Christ cares for all His believing people, and never forgets them. Forgotten and despised by the world, perhaps, they are never forgotten by their Savior. He knows where they dwell, and what their trials are. A book of remembrance is written for them. "Their tears are all in His bottle." (Psalm 56:8.) Their names are engraved on the palms of His hands. He notices all they do for Him in this evil world, though they think it not worth notice, and He will confess it one day publicly, before His Father and the holy angels. He that bore witness to John the Baptist never changes. Let believers remember this. In their worst estate they may boldly say with David — "I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinks upon me." (Psalm 40:17.)

Let us observe, for another thing, ***the honor Christ puts upon MIRACLES, as an evidence of His being the Messiah.*** He says— "The works which the Father has given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me that the Father has sent me."

The miracles of the Lord receive far less attention, in the present day, as proofs of His Divine mission, than they ought to do. Too many regard them with a silent incredulity, as things which, not having seen, they cannot be expected to care for. Not a few openly avow that they do not believe in the possibility of such things as

miracles, and would like to strike them out of the Bible as weak stories, which, like burdensome lumber, should be cast overboard, to lighten the ship.

But, after all, there is no getting over the fact, that in the days when our Lord was upon earth, His miracles produced an immense effect on the minds of men. They aroused attention to Him who worked them. They excited inquiry, if they did not convert. They were so many, so public, and so incapable of being explained away, that our Lord's enemies could only say that they were done by satanic agency. That they were *done,* they could not deny. "This man," they said, "does many miracles." (John 11:47.) The facts which wise men pretend to deny now, no one pretended to deny eighteen hundred years ago.

Let the enemies of the Bible take our Lord's last and greatest miracle. His own resurrection from the dead and disprove it if they can. When they have done that, it will be time to consider what they say about miracles in general. They have never answered the evidence of it yet, and they never will. Let the friends of the Bible not be moved by objections against miracles, until that one miracle has been fairly disposed of. If that is proved unassailable, they need not care much for quibbling arguments against other miracles. If Christ did really rise from the dead by His own power, there is none of His mighty works which man need hesitate to believe.

Let us observe, lastly, in these verses, ***the honor that Christ puts upon the SCRIPTURE.*** He refers to them in concluding His

list of evidences, as the great witnesses to Him. “Search the Scriptures,” He says— “these are they which testify of me.”

The “Scriptures” of which our Lord speaks are of course the Old Testament. And His words show the important truth which too many are apt to overlook, that every part of our Bibles is meant to teach us about Christ. Christ is not merely in the Gospels and Epistles. Christ is to be found directly and indirectly in the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets. In the promises to Adam, Abraham, Moses, and David—in the types and emblems of the ceremonial law—in the predictions of Isaiah and the other prophets—Jesus, the Messiah, is everywhere to be found in the Old Testament.

How is it that men see these things so little? The answer is plain. They do not “search the Scriptures.” They do not dig into that wondrous mine of wisdom and knowledge, and seek to become acquainted with its contents. Simple, regular reading of our Bibles is the grand secret of establishment in the faith. Ignorance of the Scriptures is the root of all error.

And now what will men believe, if they do not believe the Divine mission of Christ? Great indeed is the obstinacy of infidelity. A cloud of witnesses testify that Jesus was the Son of God. To talk of lacking evidence is childish folly. The plain truth is, that the chief seat of unbelief is the heart. Many do not wish to believe, and therefore remain unbelievers.

Technical Notes:

30. I can of myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just, because I do not seek my own will but the will of the Father who has sent me. 31. If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true. 32. There is another who bears witness of me, and I know that the witness which he witnesses of me is true. 33. Ye sent to John, and he bore witness to the truth. 34. But I receive not testimony from man, but these things I say that ye might be saved. 35. He was a burning and shining light, and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light. 36. But I have greater witness than that of John, for the works which the Father has given me to finish, the very works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father has sent me. 37. And the Father himself, who has sent me, has borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape. 38. And ye have not his word abiding in you, for whom he has sent, him ye do not believe. 39. Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and these are they which testify of me.

30.—[*I can of myself, etc.*] This verse is perhaps one of the most difficult in Scripture. It is so because the subject of it is that great mystery, the unity of God the Father and God the Son. Man has no language to express adequately the idea that has to be conveyed. The general thought of the verse seems to be as follows:

"In consequence of the close relation between Me and the Father, I

cannot do anything independently and separately from Him. 'I judge,' and decide, and speak on all points, in entire harmony with the Father, as though I *heard* Him continually at my side; and so judging and speaking, my judgment on all points is always right. It is right now, and will be seen right at the great account of the last day. For in all that I do, I seek not to do my own will only but the will of Him that sent Me, since there is an entire harmony between my will and His."

Let it be carefully noted that at this part of His address our Lord ceases to speak in the third person of Himself as "the Son of man," and begins to use the first person: "I can," "I hear," "I judge," etc. "Of myself" does not mean "unhelped and unassisted," but "from myself"— from my own independent volition and action.

Chrysostom remarks: "Just as when we say it is *impossible* for God to do wrong, we do not impute to Him any weakness, but confess in Him an unutterable power; so also when Christ says, 'I can of my own self do nothing,' the meaning is that it is impossible—my nature admits not—that I should do anything contrary to the Father."

"As I hear" is an expression adapted to man's comprehension, to convey the idea of the unity between the Father and the Son. It is like verse 19 where it is said, "The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what *He sees* the Father do." It is also like the words used of the Holy Ghost: "He shall not speak of Himself, but whatsoever He shall *hear*, that shall He speak." (John xvi.13.)

Chrysostom remarks: “Just as when Christ said, ‘We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen,’ and John the Baptist said, ‘That which He has seen and heard He testifies’ (John iii.11.32), both expressions are used concerning exact knowledge and not concerning mere ‘seeing’ and ‘hearing;’ so in this place, when Christ speaks of ‘hearing,’ He declares nothing else than that it is impossible for Him to desire anything save what the Father desires.”

“I judge” applies not only to all Christ’s judgments and decisions as Mediator when He was upon earth, but to His final judgment at the last day. “My judgment is just” would probably remind the Jews of the prophecies about Messiah. (Isa. xi.3 and Dan. vii.13.)

“I seek not my own will” must be interpreted with special reference to our Lord’s Divine nature as Son of God. Having as God one will with the Father, it was not possible for Him to seek His own will independently of the Father. Hence the judgment was not His only, but His Father’s also. As Son of man, He had a human will distinct from His Divine will, as when He said “Let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will but as Thou wilt.” (Matt. xxvi.39.) But the will here seems to be His Divine will. Chrysostom remarks: “What Christ implies is of this kind: not that the will of the Father is one and His own another, but that as one will in one mind, so is mine own will and my Father’s.”

Once more we must remember the extreme difficulty of handling such a subject as the one before us. The distinction between the

Persons in the Trinity, and the unity of their essence at the same time, must always be a deep thing to man—hard to conceive, and harder still to speak or write about.

31.—[*If I bear witness of myself, etc.*] This verse must be interpreted with caution and reasonable qualification. It would be folly and blasphemy to say that our Lord's testimony about Himself must be false. What the verse does appear to mean is this: "If I have no other testimony to bring forward in proof of my Messiahship but my own word, my testimony would be justly open to suspicion." Our Lord knew that in any disputed question a man's assertions in his own favor are worth little or nothing. He tells the Jews that He did not want them to believe Him merely because He said He was the Son of God. He would show them that He had other witnesses, and these witnesses He next proceeds to bring forward. A comparison of this verse with John viii.14 shows at once that the meaning of the words, "My witness is not true," must be qualified and restrained, or else one place of Scripture would contradict the other.

32.—[*There is another who bears witness.*] There are two distinct and different views of this expression.

(a) Some, as Chrysostom, Theophylact, Euthymius, Lightfoot, Brentius, Grotius, Ferus, Barradius, Quesnel, Whitby, Doddridge, Gill, think that the "other witness" is John the Baptist.

(b) Some, as Cyril, Athanasius, Calvin, Beza, Gualter, Bucer, Ecolampadius, Zwingli, Rupertus, Flacius, Calovius, Cocceius, Piscator, Musculus, Aretius, Toletus, Nifanius, Rollock, Poole, Leigh,

Diodati, Hammond, Trapp, Hutcheson, Henry, Burkitt, Baxter, Blomfield, Lampe, Bengel, Pearce, A. Clark, Scott, Barnes, Stier, Alford, Webster, think that "the other witness," is God the Father.

I feel no doubt in my own mind that this last is the correct view. The use of the present tense, "witnesses," is a strong proof of it. John the Baptist's testimony was a thing past and gone. Our Lord declares that His Father had borne distinct testimony to Him and supplied abundant evidence, if they, the Jews, would only receive it. And He adds, "His testimony is true." He will never bear witness to a lie. Then having laid down this general proposition, He goes on to show the threefold testimony which God had provided: first, John the Baptist; second, the miracles which the Father had commissioned Him to work; and, third, the Scriptures. The expression "I know" probably implies the deep consciousness which our Lord had, even in His humiliation, of His Father's perfect righteousness and truthfulness. It means much more than a mere man's "I know." "I know, and have known from all eternity, that my Father's testimony is perfect truth."

33.—[*Ye sent to John, etc.*] In this sentence the word "ye" must be taken emphatically. It is "ye yourselves." The meaning of the verse seems to be, "My first witness is John the Baptist. Now ye yourselves sent to him at any early period of his ministry, and ye know that he told you One greater than himself was coming, whose messenger he was, and that afterwards he said of Me, 'Behold the Lamb of God.' You cannot deny that he was a prophet indeed. Yet he bore faithful

witness to Me. He told you the truth."
There can be no doubt that our Lord refers to the formal mission of "priests and Levites from Jerusalem," to John the Baptist, described in John i.19.

34.—[*But I receive not testimony from man, etc.*] This sentence seems meant to remind the Jews that they must not suppose our Lord depended either solely or chiefly on man's testimony. "Not that I would have you think I rest my claim to be received as the Messiah on the witness of John the Baptist, or of any other man. But I say these things about John and his witness to Me in order to remind you of what you heard him say, and that remembering his testimony to Me, you may believe and be saved." Here, as elsewhere, we should note how our Lord presses home on the Jews the inconsistency of admitting John the Baptist to be a prophet sent from God while they refused to believe Himself as the Messiah. If they believed John, they ought in consistency to have believed Him. (See Matt. xxi.23-27.)

35.—[*He was a burning…light.*] This is very high testimony to John. Doubtless he was not "the light," as Christ was. But still he was not an ordinary lamp lighted from above, as all true believers are. He was preeminently "the lamp;" a lamp of peculiar power and brilliancy, a "burning" and a "shining" light, like a flaming beacon of light-house seen from afar. I think the expression "he was" shows that at the time when our Lord spoke John the Baptist was either in prison or dead. At any rate, his public ministry was ended. "He used to be a light. He is burning and shining no longer."

Chrysostom remarks, “He called John a torch or lamp, signifying that he had not light of himself but by the grace of the Spirit.” [*Ye were willing for a season to rejoice.*] This refers to the extraordinary popularity and acceptance of John the Baptist when his ministry first began. “Then went out unto him Jerusalem and all Judæa and all the country round about Jordan.” (Matt. iii.5) “Many of the Pharisees and Sadducees came to his baptism.” (Matt. ii.7.) It was an ignorant excitement that brought many of John’s hearers to him. They thought, most probably, that the Messiah, of whom he spoke and whose way he came to prepare, would be a temporal king and conqueror and would give to Israel its old pre-eminence on earth. But be the motives what they might, the fact remains that John’s ministry attracted immense attention and awakened the curiosity of the whole Jewish nation. “They willingly rejoiced in the light which John lifted up.” They seemed to take pleasure in coming to him, hearing him, following him, and submitting to his baptism.

The expression “for a season” seems purposely used to remind the Jews of the very temporary and transitory nature of the impressions which John’s ministry produced on them.

Stier remarks: “Man generally, even a prophet, can only give light by burning, like a lighted candle, until he is burnt out and his mission on earth ceases. Thus did the Baptist burn, brightly but rapidly.” Burkitt remarks: “It has been an old practice among professors not to like their pastors long, though they have been never such burning and shining lights. John was not changed, but his hearers were

changed. He did burn and shine in the candlestick with equal zeal and luster to the last, but they had changed their thoughts of him."

36.—[*But I have greater witness than that of John.*] This means, "although John the Baptist was a witness to my being the Messiah and the Son of God, his was not the only testimony I bid you receive. There is testimony even more important than his, namely, that of my miracles." The Greek means literally, "the greater witness;" "the witness that I have is greater." Flacius suggests that our Lord here and in the preceding verse reminds the Jews how willing they were at first to receive John's ministry, and almost seemed to think he was the Messiah. Yet all this time "John did no miracle." But when the true Messiah appeared doing mighty "works," the Jews did not show Him even as much attention as they had shown to John. [*The works... Father has given, etc.*] This is a distinct appeal to miracles as an important proof of our Lord's Messiahship and Divinity. Four times in this Gospel we find the same appeal. (John iii.2; x.25; xv.24.) The evidence of miracles should never be lightly esteemed. We are apt to underrate their value because they were wrought so long ago. But in the days when they were wrought, they were great facts which demanded the attention of all who saw them and could not be evaded. Unless the Jews could explain them away, they were bound, as honest and reasonable men, to believe our Lord's Divine mission. That they really were wrought the Jews never appear to have denied. In fact, they dared not attempt to deny them. What they did do was to ascribe them to Satanic agency. All who attempt to deny the reality of our Lord's miracles in the present day would do

well to remember that those who had the best opportunity of judging, namely, the men who saw these miracles and lived within hearing of them, never disputed the fact that they were wrought. If the enemies of our Lord could have proved that His miracles were only tricks, legerdemain, and impostures, it stands to reason they would have been only too glad to show it to the world and to silence Him forever.

Five things should always be noted about our Lord's miracles. (1) Their *number*: they were not a few only but very many indeed. (2) Their *greatness*: they were not little but mighty interferences with the ordinary course of nature. (3) Their *publicity*: they were generally not done in a corner but in open day, and before many witness and often before enemies. (4) Their *character*: they were almost always works of love, mercy, and compassion, helpful and beneficial to man and not mere barren exhibitions of power. (5) Their *direct appeal to men's senses*: they were visible and would bear any examination. The difference between them and the boasted miracles of the Church of Rome, on all these points, is striking and instructive.

The manner in which our Lord speaks of His miracles is very remarkable. He calls them, "The works that the Father has given Me that I should finish." He carefully avoids the appearance of lack of unity between the Father and Himself, even in the working of miracles. They are not works which He did of His own independent will, but "works which the Father has given Me," works which it had been arranged in the eternal counsels the Son should work when He

became man and dwelt upon earth. Precisely the same expression is used elsewhere about "the words" our Lord spake as here about "the works:"— "I have given unto them the words which *Thou gavest* Me." (John xvii.8.)

37.—[And the Father Himself...witness of Me.] There is undeniable difficulty about these words. It is not clear to what "witness of the Father" our Lord here refers.

(a) Some, as Chrysostom, Brentius, Bullinger, Gualter, Ferus, Toletus, Barradius, Cartwright, Chemnitius, Rollock, Jansenius, Trapp, Baxter, Hammond, Burkitt, Lampe, Bengel, Henry, Scott, Gill, think that our Lord refers to the audible testimony borne to Him by the Father at His baptism and at the transfiguration, when he said, "This is my beloved Son, hear Him." (Matt. iii.17; xvii.5.) But it surely is a capital objection to this theory that this voice of the Father was in all probability heard by nobody excepting John the Baptist at the baptism, and Peter, James, and John at the transfiguration. At this rate, it would be entirely a private testimony and of no avail to the general body of the Jewish nation.

(b) Some, as Theophylact, Euthymius, Rupertus, Calvin, Cocceius, Pearce, Tholuck, Blomfield, Tittman, A. Clark, D. Brown, Alford, Burgon, think that our Lord refers to the testimony the Father has borne to Him generally throughout the Old Testament Scriptures, and that the sentence before us should be taken in close connection with the next verse but one, beginning, "Search the Scriptures." In fact, that expression would then be the explanation of our Lord's meaning.

Of the two views, I decidedly prefer the second one. It certainly seems the least difficult and open to the fewest objections. There is a third view, supported by Olshausen and Bucer: viz., that the "witness" here means the inward witness of the Spirit in the hearts of believers. This, however, appears to me wholly out of the question. It is a witness that would be useless to the world at large.

Both here and elsewhere we must take care that we do not attach the idea of "inferiority" to the expression "sent by the Father." Rollock remarks, "It is quite possible that an equal may send an equal to discharge some office." Cyril remarks, "Mission and obedience, being sent and obeying, do not take away equality of power in the sender and the sent one." [*Ye have neither heard...seen His shape*.] This appears to be a parenthetical sentence as well as the verse that follows. It certainly seems to strengthen the view that when our Lord spoke of His Father "bearing witness," He could not have meant the audible witness of His voice at the baptism or transfiguration. In fact, the sentence seems purposely to preclude the notion. It is as though our Lord said, "Do not suppose that I mean any audible testimony of voice or apparition or vision when I speak of my Father bearing witness to Me. I mean testimony of a very different kind, even the testimony of His Word."

The expression, "not seen His shape," teaches the same great truth we find elsewhere: viz., that the Father in invisible and has never been seen by mortal man. He who appeared to Abraham was the

Second Person of the Trinity and not the Father. St. Paul says distinctly of the Father, “Whom no man has seen nor can see.” (1 Tim. vi.16.) The idea of artists and painters, when they represent the Father as an aged man, is a mere irreverent invention of their own brains, without the slightest warrant of Scripture.

Rupertus and Ferus suggest that the latter part of this verse was spoken to prevent the Jews thinking that our Lord spoke of Joseph, His supposed father. This, however, seems a rather improbable and fanciful idea. 38.—[*And ye have not his word, etc.*] This verse seems meant to remind the Jews that with all their pretended reverence for God and affected zeal against blasphemies of Him, they were really ignorant of God’s mind. Their reverence for Him was only a form. Their zeal for Him was a blind fanaticism. They knew no more of His mind than of His shape or voice. They were not acquainted with His word; it did not dwell in their hearts and guide their religion. They proved their own ignorance by not believing Him whom the Father had sent. Had they really been familiar with the writings of the Old Testament, they would have believed. Our Lord evidently implies that real knowledge of God’s Word will always lead a man to faith in Christ. Where there is no faith, we may rightly assume the Bible is either not read or read in a wrong spirit. Ignorance and unbelief will go together.

Locke holds the curious opinion that the “Word” in this verse means the “Personal Word,” as at John i.1. “Ye have not Me, the eternal Word, dwelling in your hearts.” But Christ nowhere calls Himself

"the Word," and the idea does not harmonize with the context.

Ecolampadius thinks that in this and the preceding verse there is a reference to Deut. xviii.15-19, where the Lord promised a prophet to the Jews like unto Moses, because they had said, "Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not." He thinks our Lord reminds them of this. God had fulfilled His promise and sent them a prophet like unto Moses, and now they would not believe on Him!

39.—[*Search the Scriptures*.] This famous sentence is interpreted two different ways.

(a) Some, as Cyril, Erasmus, Ecolampadius, Beza, Brentius, Piscator, Cameron, Poole, Toletus, Lightfoot, Lampe, Bengel, Doddridge, Blomfield, Tholuck, A. Clarke, Scholefield, Barnes, Burgon, D. Brown, Webster, think that our Lord spoke in the indicative mood, simply making an assertion: "Ye do search."

(b) Some, as Chrysostom, Augustine, Theophylact, Euthymius, Luther, Calvin, Cartwright, Gualtier, Grotius, Rollock, Ferus, Calovius, Jansenius, Cocceius, Barradius, Musculus, Nifanius, Maldonatus, Cornelius à Lapide, Leigh, Whitby, Hammond, Stier, Alford, Wordsworth, think that He spoke in the imperative mood, giving a command: "Search," as our version gives it. I decidedly prefer this latter view. It is more forcible and more in keeping with our Lord's general style of address. Above all, it seems to me to agree far better with the context. Our Lord had told the Jews that His Father had borne witness of Him, though not by audible voice nor by

visible apparition. How, then, had He borne witness? They would find it in His Word. “Go and search your own Scriptures,” our Lord seems to say. “Examine them and become really acquainted with their contents; you will find that they testify clearly and distinctly of Me. If you wish to know God the Father’s testimony to Me, search the Scriptures.” The word rendered “search” means “search minutely and diligently.” It appears to me intentionally used, to show that the Jews should not be content with mere reading. The Septuagint version of Prov. ii.4 has an expression like it.

Chrysostom remarks: “When Christ referred the Jews to the Scriptures, He sent them not to a mere reading but to a careful and considerate search. He said not ‘read,’ but ‘search.’ Since the sayings about Him required great attention (for they had been concealed from the beginning for the advantage of men of that time), He bids them now dig down with care, that they might discern what lay in the depths below. These sayings were not on the surface, nor were they cast forth to open view, but lay like some treasure hidden very deep.” Some who think the word “search” should be taken as an indicative, “ye search,” maintain that our Lord spoke ironically and meant, “Ye pretend to make a minute investigation of Scripture and search into the letter of it, but never get any further.” I can see little ground for this view. The word “search” is never used in a bad sense in Scripture. (I Pet. i.11.) The chief argument in favor of the “indicative” side of the question is the notorious Rabbinical custom of minutely scrutinizing and reverencing every syllable of Scripture. To this custom of honoring the letter of Scripture while neglecting its spirit,

many advocates of the "indicative" here think that Our Lord referred. Brentius gives a full account of the length to which the Jews went in their reverence for the letter of Scripture, such as counting the letters of each book, etc., and thinks that this was in our Lord's mind. I cannot, however, agree with this view. [*In them…eternal life*.] In this sentence the first "ye" must be taken emphatically, as in the 33rd verse. "Think" does not imply that it was a doubtful point or mere matter of opinion. It is rather, "Ye yourselves think, and think rightly—it is one of the dogmas of your faith—that ye have in the Scriptures the way to eternal life pointed out." Chemnitius remarks: "The words 'ye think' mean that common persuasion and opinion of all men concerning Scripture, which, like an axiom in science, is established, firm, and certain."

Let it be noted that many Christians are just in the unsatisfactory state of the Jews here described. Like them, they "think" and hold it as a dogma of their creed that they "have eternal life in the Scriptures." But like them, they never read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest what Scripture contains.

Ecolampadius remarks: "Scripture alone does not make a man any the better, nor even preaching, by itself, except by the Holy Ghost aiding. It is the peculiar office of the external Word to supply testimony; but it is the Spirit of God alone that can make the heart of man assent." [*These are they which testify of Me*.] This sentence is a strong and weighty declaration of the value of the Old Testament Scriptures. It was to them exclusively, of course, that our Lord referred. He says, "they testify of Me." In direct prophecies, in

promises, in typical persons, in typical ceremonies, the Old Testament Scripture all through testifies of Christ. We read them to very little purpose if we do not discern this. Ferus remarks that there are three ways in which the Scriptures testify of Christ. (1) Generally: they are as it were the voice of the uncreated Word, ever speaking to man in every part of them. (2) In figures: the paschal lamb, the brazen serpent, and all the sacrifices of the law were witnesses of Christ. (3) In direct prophecies.

Let us note in this verse the high honor which our Lord puts on the Old Testament Scriptures. He distinctly endorses the Jewish canon of inspired writings. Those modern writers who labor to depreciate them and bring them into disrepute show very little of Christ's mind. Much infidelity begins with an ignorant contempt of the Old Testament. Stier remarks, "Israel, possessing still the Old Testament, will enter into the kingdom, when the despisers of Scripture in the final unbelief of Christendom will be judged and condemned."

Let us note further what a plain duty it is to read the Scriptures. Men have no right to expect spiritual light if they neglect the great treasury of all light. If even of the Old Testament our Lord said, "Search," "it testifies of Me," how much more is it a duty to search the whole Bible! An idle neglect of the Bible is one secret of the ignorant formal Christianity which is so widely prevalent in these latter days. God's blessing on a diligent study of the Scriptures is strikingly illustrated in the case of the Bereans. (Acts xvii.11.)

JOHN 5:40-47

"But you are not willing to come to me so that you may have life.

"I do not accept praise from people, but I know you, that you do not have the love of God within you. I have come in my Father's name, and you do not accept me. If someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him. How can you believe, if you accept praise from one another and don't seek the praise that comes from the only God?

"Do not suppose that I will accuse you before the Father. The one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have placed your hope. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, because he wrote about me. But if you do not believe what Moses wrote, how will you believe my words?"

This passage concludes our Lord Jesus Christ's wondrous defense of His own divine mission. It is a conclusion worthy of the defense, full of heart-searching appeals to the consciences of His enemies, and rich in deep truths. A mighty sermon is followed by a mighty application.

Let us mark, in this passage, ***the reason why many souls are lost.*** The Lord Jesus says to the unbelieving Jews— "You will not come to me that you might have life."

These words are a golden sentence, which ought to be engraved in our memories, and treasured up in our minds. It is lack of will to come to Christ for salvation that will be found, at last, to have shut

the many out of heaven. It is not men's sins. All manner of sin may be forgiven. It is not any decree of God. We are not told in the Bible of any whom God has only created to be destroyed. It is not any limit in Christ's work of redemption. He has paid a price sufficient for all mankind. It is something far more than this. It is man's own innate unwillingness to come to Christ, repent, and believe. Either from pride, or laziness, or love of sin, or love of the world, the many have no mind, or wish, or heart, or desire to seek life in Christ. "God has given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son." (1 John 5:11.) But men stand still, and will not stir hand or foot to get life. And this is the whole reason why many of the lost are not saved.

This is a painful and solemn truth, but one that we can never know too well. It contains a first principle in Christian theology. Thousands, in every age, are constantly laboring to shift the blame of their condition from off themselves. They talk of their *inability* to change. They tell you complacently, that they *cannot help* being what they are! They know, undeniably, that they are wrong, but they *cannot* be different! It will not do. Such talk will not stand the test of the Word of Christ before us. The unconverted are what they are because they have no will to be better. "Light has come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light." (John 3:19.) The words of the Lord Jesus will silence many— "I would have gathered you, and *you would not* be gathered." (Matt. 23:37.)

Let us mark, secondly, in this passage, ***one principal cause of unbelief.*** The Lord Jesus says to the Jews, "How can you believe

which receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that comes of God only?" He meant by that saying, that *they were not honest in their religion*. With all their apparent desire to hear and learn, they cared more in reality for pleasing man than God. In this state of mind they were never likely to believe.

A deep principle is contained in this saying of our Lord's, and one that deserves special attention. True faith does not depend merely on the state of man's head and understanding, but on the state of his heart. His mind may be convinced. His conscience may be pierced. But so long as there is anything the man is secretly loving more than God, there will be no true faith. The man himself may be puzzled, and wonder why he does not believe. He does not see that he is like a child sitting on the lid of his box, and wishing to open it, but not considering that his own weight keeps it shut. Let a man make sure that he honestly and really desires first the praise of God. It is the lack of an honest heart which makes many stick fast in their false religion all their days, and die at length without peace. Those who complain that they hear, and approve, and assent, but make no progress, and cannot get any hold on Christ, should ask themselves this simple question— "Am I honest? Am I sincere? Do I really desire first the praise of God?"

Let us mark, lastly, in this passage, ***the manner in which Christ speaks of MOSES.*** He says to the Jews, "Had you believed Moses you would have believed me—for he wrote of me."

These words demand our special attention in these latter days. That there really was such a person as Moses—that he really was the author of the writings commonly ascribed to him—on both these points our Lord's testimony is distinct. "He wrote of me." Can we suppose for a moment that our Lord was only accommodating Himself to the prejudices and traditions of His hearers, and that He spoke of Moses as a writer, though He knew in His heart that Moses never wrote at all? Such an idea is profane. It would make out our Lord to have been dishonest. Can we suppose for a moment that our Lord was ignorant about Moses, and did not know the wonderful discoveries which learned men, falsely so called, have made in the nineteenth century? Such an idea is ridiculous blasphemy. To imagine the Lord Jesus speaking ignorantly in such a chapter as the one before us, is to strike at the root of all Christianity. There is but one conclusion about the matter. There was such a person as Moses. The writings commonly ascribed to him were written by him. The facts recorded in them are worthy of all credit. Our Lord's testimony is an unanswerable argument. The skeptical writers against Moses and the Pentateuch have greatly erred.

Let us beware of handling the Old Testament irreverently, and allowing our minds to doubt the truth of any part of it, because of alleged difficulties. The simple fact that the writers of the New Testament continually refer to the Old Testament, and speak even of the most miraculous events recorded in it as undoubtedly true, should silence our doubts. Is it at all likely, probable, or credible, that we of the nineteenth century are better informed about Moses than

Jesus and His Apostles? God forbid that we should think so! Then let us stand fast, and not doubt that every word in the Old Testament, as well as in the New, was given by inspiration of God.

Technical Notes:

40. And ye will not come to me that ye might have life. 41. I do not receive honor from men. 42. But I know you, that ye do not have the love of God in you. 43. I am come in my Father's name, and ye do not receive me; if another comes in his own name, him ye will receive. 44. How can ye believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that *comes* from God only? 45. Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father; there is *one* who accuses you, *even* Moses, in whom ye trust. 46. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me; for he wrote of me. 47. But if ye do not believe his writings, how shall ye believe my words?

40. [*And ye will not…life.*] The connection between this verse and the preceding one is not very clear. It is one of those abrupt elliptical transitions which occur frequently in St. John's writings. I conjecture the link must be something of this kind: "The Scriptures testify plainly of Me. *And yet* in the face of this testimony, ye have no will or inclination to come to Me by faith, that ye may have eternal life through Me." This verse evidently begins the third part of our Lord's address to the Jews. He had declared the relation between Himself

and God the Father. He had brought forward the evidence of His own Divine commission and His claim to be received as the Messiah. And now He concludes by a most heart-piercing appeal to the consciences of His enemies, in which He exposes the true state of their hearts and the real reasons why they did not believe in Him. If ever men were plainly dealt with and received home-thrusts as to their own spiritual condition, it was on this occasion. In reading the conclusion of this chapter, one cannot but feel that a miraculous restraint must have been put on our Lord's enemies. Otherwise it is difficult to understand how they could have allowed Him to bring such cutting and truthful charges against them. If ministers desire a warrant for dealing plainly with their hearers and addressing them directly and personally about their sins, they have only to look at their Divine Master's words in this passage.

The opening charge that our Lord makes, "Ye will not come to Me," misses much of its force in the English language. It is not the future tense of "come" that is used in the Greek. Two distinct verbs are employed. The right meaning is, "Ye do not will to come,"— "Ye have no heart, desire, or inclination to come to Me."

Let it be noted here that (1) we are all by nature dead in sins; that (2) spiritual life is laid up for sinners in Christ alone—He is the fountain of life; that (3) in order to receive benefit from Christ, men must come to Him by faith and believe—believing is coming; and, finally, (4) that the real reason why men do not come to Christ, and consequently die in their sins, is their lack of will to come.

Let it be carefully noted that both here and elsewhere the loss of man's soul is always attributed in Scripture to man's own lack of will to be saved. It is not any decree of God. It is not God's unwillingness to receive. It is not any limitation of Christ's redeeming work and atonement. It is not any lack of wide, broad, free, full invitations to repent and believe. It is simply and entirely man's own fault, his lack of will. Forever let us cleave to this doctrine. Man's salvation, if saved, is entirely of God. Man's ruin, if lost, is entirely of himself. He "loves darkness rather than light." He will have his own way. We should observe in this concluding part of our Lord's address that He charges the Jews with four distinct sins: (1) lack of real will to come to Him, (2) lack of real love to God, (3) undue desire of man's praise, (4) lack of real faith in Moses' writings.

41.—[*I do not receive honor from men.*] The connection between these words and the preceding verse is again not very clear. I conjecture that it must be as follows: "I do not say these things as if I desired the praise and honor of man. I do not complain of your not coming to Me as if I only came into the world to seek man's praise. It is not on my own account that I mention your unbelief, but on yours, because it shows the state of your hearts. Do not suppose that I stand in need of followers and am covetous of man's favor."

42.—[*But I know you...in you.*] The sense and connection here appear to be as follows: "But the plain truth is that I know and have long known the state of your hearts, and I know that you have no real

love of God in you. You profess to worship the one true God and to give Him honor, but you show by your conduct that with all your profession you do not really love God." To a Jewish hearer this tremendous charge must have been peculiarly galling. It was a charge that none but our Lord could make with equal decision, because He read men's hearts and knew what was in them. The word "I know" is literally "I have known." Alford paraphrases the sentence: "By long trial and bearing with your manners these many generations, and personally also, I have known and do know you." In another place we find our Lord naming this sin as one of the special sins of the Pharisees. "Woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment and the *love of God."* (Luke xi.42.)

Ferus remarks that the incredulity of the Jews did not arise from lack of evidence but lack of love towards God.

43.—[*I am come…do not receive me.*] This sentence contains a proof of the assertion made in the preceding verse. "You show that you have no real love for God by your not receiving Me, who has come in my Father's name and desire nothing so much as His honor. If you really loved and honored God as you professed to do, you would gladly receive and honor His Son." [*If another…will receive.*] In this sentence our Lord supposes a case, to show the corrupt and carnal state of the Jews' hearts. "If another public teacher shall appear giving himself out to be some great one, not seeking God's honor and doing all in God's name but aiming to exalt himself and get honor to

himself, you will receive and believe him. You reject Me, the true Son of God. You are ready to receive any false pretender who comes among you though he may give no honor to the God whom you profess to worship. It is true, then, that you have no real love of God in you." I believe decidedly that our Lord spoke these words prophetically. He had in view the many false Christs and false Messiahs who arose within the first hundred years after His death, and by whom so many of the Jews were invariably deluded. According to Stier, no less than sixty-four false Messiahs appeared to them and were more or less believed. The readiness with which they believed these imposters is a remarkable historical fact and a striking fulfillment of the words before us. They proved as forward to believe these pretenders to a Divine mission who came in their own names as they had been backward to believe our Lord. I may add, however, that I am one of those who doubt whether the words of our Lord have even yet received their complete fulfillment. I think it highly probable that the world may yet see a personal Antichrist arise who will succeed in obtaining credence from a vast portion of the Jewish nation. Then, and not till then, when Antichrist has appeared, this verse will be completely accomplished. Chrysostom, Cyril, Theophylact, Euthymius, Alcuin, Heinsius, take this view.

Stier remarks: "He of whom the Lord here prophesies is finally Antichrist with his open and avowed denial of God and of Christ; with his most daring 'I' before which all the proud will humbly bow down, because they will find themselves in him and will honor him as their true God. As the Father reveals Himself in Christ, so will

Satan manifest himself in Antichrist and give him all his work and witness and his own honor as the prince of their world; and the wicked will yield themselves to him, because through unbelief they have already fallen into his nature and fitly belong to him." Wordsworth remarks: "The Fathers were generally of the opinion, grounded on this passage, that Antichrist would be received by the Jews." 44.—[*How can ye believe, etc.*] This verse contains a very important principle. The substance of the meaning seems to be as follows: Our Lord tells the Jews that they were not likely to believe so long as they cared more for the praise of man than the praise of God. The true cause of their unbelief was a lack of honesty and godly sincerity. With all their professed zeal for God, they did not really care so much for pleasing Him as for pleasing man. In this state of mind they were never likely to have faith or to come to the knowledge of the truth. "How can ye believe, receiving and seeking honor from one another as ye do now?" It is not possible that you can believe until you cease from your present earthly-mindedness and honestly desire God's praise more than man's. The great principle contained in the verse is the close connection between the state of a man's heart and his possessing the gift of faith. Believing or not believing, to have faith or not to have faith, is not a thing that depends only on a man's head being satisfied and his intellect convinced. It depends far more on the state of a man's heart. If a man is not thoroughly honest in his professed desire to find out the truth in religion, if he secretly cherishes any idol which he is resolved not to give up, if he privately cares for anything more than God's praise, he will go on to the end of his days doubting, perplexed,

dissatisfied, and restless, and will never find the way to peace. His insincerity of heart is an insuperable barrier in the way of his believing. There is a mine of wisdom in the expression, “An honest and good heart.” (Luke viii.15.) For lack of it, many a one complains that he cannot get comfort in religion and cannot see his way towards heaven, when the truth is that his own dishonesty of heart is the cause. There is something he loves more than God. The consequence is that he never feels an honest will to believe. The “can” in this verse should be compared with the “will” in the fortieth verse. “Ye cannot because ye will not.”

[*From God only*.] This expression would be more literally rendered “from the only God”—the one true God whom the Jews boasted that they alone knew and worshiped.

Doddridge remarks that the whole verse “has much more spirit in it if we consider it as applied to the members of the Sanhedrim, who had such distinguished titles of honor, than if we only take it as spoken to a mixed multitude.” If, as many suppose, our Lord was making a formal defense of Himself and His divine mission before the great Ecclesiastical Assembly of the Jews, His words in this verse would come home to His hearers with stinging power.

45.—[*Do not think that I will accuse, etc.*] We must not suppose that our Lord literally meant that there was any real likelihood of Moses or Himself standing up to make a formal accusation against the Jews. What He did mean was that not to believe Him was not to believe Moses. There was no need for Him to accuse them of unbelief. Moses himself, for whom they professed such respect,

might be their accuser and prove them guilty. “Even now,” He says, “Moses accuses you. His writings, daily read in your synagogue, are a constant witness of your unbelief.” There may also, it is highly probable, be a reference here to the Song of Moses, where he predicts the unbelief of the people, and desires the book of the law to be “put in the side of the ark, that it may be there for a witness against thee.” (Deut. xxxi.26.)

Chemnitius remarks: “What the Lord says to the Jews is exactly as if I were to say to the Papists, It is not I, but the very Fathers whose authority ye allege in favor of your superstition, who will accuse you of impiety. Or as if we were to say to the Pope, It is not we who accuse and condemn thee but Christ Himself, whose vicar thou callest thyself; and Peter whose successor thou wilt have thyself; and Paul whose sword thou pretendest to bear; they it is who will accuse thee.” Beza makes much the same remark, and observes that none will be more opposed to the Roman Catholics in the judgment day than the Virgin Mary and the saints in whom they profess to trust!

The notion of some Romanists that the expression “Moses, in whom ye trust,” justifies the invocation of saints and putting confidence in them as mediators, is, as Chemnitius observes, too weak and groundless to need refutation.

46.—[*For had ye believed Moses... Me.*] These words are simply an amplification of the idea in the preceding verse. If the Jews had really believed Moses, they could not have helped believing Christ.

The witness of Moses to Christ was so distinct, express, and unmistakable that true belief in his writings must inevitably have led them to belief in Christ. [*He wrote of Me*.] These words are very remarkable. In what sense our Lord used them, we cannot exactly know. At the very least we may conclude He meant that throughout the five books of Moses, by direct prophecy, by typical persons, by typical ceremonies, in many ways and in divers manners, Moses had written of Him. There is probably a depth of meaning in the Pentateuch that has never yet been fully fathomed. We shall probably find at the last day that Christ was in many a chapter and many a verse, and yet we knew it not. There is a fullness in all Scriptures far beyond our conception.

Let us note carefully that our Lord distinctly speaks of Moses as a real person (who, as a matter of history, lived and wrote books) and of his writings as true genuine writings deserving of all credit and of undeniable authority. In the face of such an expression as this, it is a mournful fact that any man called a Christian can throw doubt on the existence of Moses or on the authority of the books attributed to him. To say, as some have done, that our Lord was only accommodating Himself to the conventional language of the times and that He did not really mean to assert His own belief either in the existence of Moses or the authority of his writings, is to charge Him with downright dishonesty. It represents Him as One aiding and countenancing the dissemination of a lie! To say, as some have done, that our Lord, born of a Jewish woman and brought up among Jews, was not above the ignorant prejudices of the Jews and did not really

know that Moses ever existed and that his writings are full of mistakes, is to talk downright blasphemy and nonsense. Fancy the eternal Son of God at any time talking ignorantly! Fancy, above all, that any trace of Jewish ignorance would be likely to be found in this chapter of St. John's gospel in which, above all other chapters perhaps, our Lord's divine knowledge is most strikingly brought out!

47.—[*If ye do not believe his writings, etc.*] This verse is an extension of the thought contained in the preceding one and a solemn and mournful conclusion of the whole address. There is evidently an intentional contrast between "writings" and "words," as if our Lord would remind the Jews that "writings" are generally more relied upon than "sayings." "If you do not really believe what your own honored lawgiver Moses WROTE—and it is plain that you do not—it is not likely that you will believe what I SAY. If you have no real faith in the things written in your Scriptures by that very Moses for whom you profess such reverence, your favorite teacher and lawgiver, it is not to be wondered at that you have no faith in what I say, and that I speak to you in vain."

The Greek word used here for "writings" is very remarkable. It is generally translated "letters," as Luke xxiii.38 In 2 Tim. iii.15, it is rendered "Scriptures." To my mind it is a strong indirect evidence in favor of the verbal inspiration of Scripture.

There is a sense in which these words should ring painfully in the ears of all the modern assailants of the Mosaic writings. It is just as

true now, I firmly believe, as it was eighteen hundred years ago. They cannot divide Moses and Christ. If they do not believe the one, they will find sooner or later that they do not believe the other. If they begin with casting off Moses and not believing his writings, they will find in the end that to be consistent they must cast off Christ. If they will not have the Old Testament, they will discover at last that they cannot have the New. The two are so linked together that they cannot be separated. “What God has joined together let no man put asunder.”

In concluding the notes on this wonderful chapter, one would like to know how this marvelous address was received by those who heard it. But here we meet with one of the peculiar “silences” of Scripture. Not one word is written to tell us what the Jews at Jerusalem thought of our Lord’s argument or what effect it had upon them. Our own duty is clear. Let us take heed that it has some effect on ourselves.

The amazing fullness of our Lord’s teaching appears most strikingly in the address contained in this chapter. Within the short span of twenty-nine verses, we find no less than eleven mighty subjects brought forward. (1) The intimate relation of the Father and the Son. (2) The divine commission and dignity of the Son. (3) The privileges of the man who believes. (4) The quickening of the spiritually dead. (5) The judgment. (6) The resurrection of the body. (7) The value of miracles. (8) The Scriptures. (9) The corruption of man’s will the secret of man’s ruin. (10) The love of man’s praise the cause of unbelief. (11) The importance of the writings of Moses.

John – Chap. 6

JOHN 6:1-14

The Feeding of the Five Thousand

After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee (also called the Sea of Tiberias). A large crowd was following him because they were observing the miraculous signs he was performing on the sick. So Jesus went on up the mountainside and sat down there with his disciples. (Now the Jewish feast of the Passover was near.) Then Jesus, when he looked up and saw that a large crowd was coming to him, said to Philip, "Where can we buy bread so that these people may eat?" (Now Jesus said this to test him, for he knew what he was going to do.) Philip replied, "Two hundred silver coins worth of bread would not be enough for them, for each one to get a little." One of Jesus' disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, "Here is a boy who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what good are these for so many people?"

Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." (Now there was a lot of grass in that place.) So the men sat down, about five thousand in number. Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed the bread to those who were seated. He then did the same with the fish, as much as they wanted. When they were all satisfied, Jesus said to his disciples, "Gather up the broken pieces

that are left over, so that nothing is wasted." So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with broken pieces from the five barley loaves left over by the people who had eaten.

So when the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus performed, they began to say to one another, "This is certainly the Prophet who is to come into the world."

These verses describe one of our Lord's most remarkable miracles. Of all the great works that He did, none was done so publicly as this, and before so many witnesses. Of all the miracles related in the Gospels, this is the only one which all the four Gospel-writers alike record. This fact alone (like the four times repeated account of the crucifixion and resurrection) is enough to show that it is a miracle demanding special attention.

We have, for one thing, in this miracle, ***a lesson about Christ's almighty power.*** We see our Lord feeding five thousand men with "five barley loaves and two small fish." We see clear proof that a miraculous event took place in the "twelve baskets of fragments" that remained after all had eaten. Creative power was manifestly exercised. Food was called into existence that did not exist before. In healing the sick, and raising the dead, something was amended or restored that had already existed. In feeding five thousand men with five loaves, something must have been created which before had no existence.

Such a history as this ought to be specially instructive and encouraging to all who endeavor to do good to souls. It shows us the Lord Jesus "able to save to the uttermost." He is One who has all power over dead hearts. Not only can He mend that which is broken —build up that which is ruined—heal that which is sick—strengthen that which is weak. He can do even greater things than these. He can call into being that which was not before, and call it out of nothing. We must never despair of any one being saved. So long as there is life there is hope. Reason and sense may say that some poor sinner is too hardened, or too old to be converted. Faith will reply— "Our Master can *create* as well as *renew*. With a Savior who, by His Spirit, can create a new heart, nothing is impossible."

We have, for another thing, in this miracle, ***a lesson about the office of ministers.*** We see the apostles receiving the bread from our Lord's hands, after He had blessed it, and distributing it to the multitude. It was not their hands that made it increase and multiply, but their Master's. It was His almighty power that provided an unfailing supply. It was their work to receive humbly, and distribute faithfully.

Now here is a lively emblem of the work which a true minister of the New Testament is meant to do. He is not a mediator between God and man. He has no power to put away sin, or impart grace. His whole business is to receive the bread of life which his Master provides, and to distribute it among the souls among whom he labors. He cannot make men value the bread, or receive it. He cannot

make it soul-saving, or life-giving, to any one. This is not his work. For this he is not responsible. His whole business is to be a *faithful distributor* of the food which his Divine Master has provided; and that done, his office is discharged.

We have, lastly, in this miracle, ***a lesson about the sufficiency of the Gospel for the needs of all mankind.*** We see the Lord Jesus supplying the hunger of a huge multitude of five thousand men. The provision seemed, at first sight, utterly inadequate for the occasion. To satisfy so many craving mouths with such scanty fare, in such a wilderness, seemed impossible. But the event showed that there was enough and to spare. There was not one who could complain that he was not filled.

There can be no doubt that this was meant to teach the adequacy of Christ's Gospel to supply the necessities of the whole world. Weak, and feeble, and foolish as it may seem to man, the simple story of the Cross is enough for all the children of Adam in every part of the globe. The tidings of Christ's death for sinners, and the atonement made by that death, is able to meet the hearts and satisfy the consciences of all nations, and peoples, and kindreds, and tongues. Carried by faithful messengers, it feeds and supplies all ranks and classes. "The preaching of the cross is to those who perish foolishness, but to us who are saved it is the power of God." (1 Cor. 1:18.) Five barley loaves and two small fishes seemed scanty provision for a hungry crowd. But blessed by Christ, and distributed by His disciples, they were more than sufficient.

Let us never doubt for a moment, that the preaching of Christ crucified—the old story of His blood, and righteousness, and substitution—is enough for all the spiritual necessities of all mankind. It is not worn out. It is not obsolete. It has not lost its power. We need nothing new—nothing more broad and kind—nothing more intellectual—nothing more effectual. We need nothing but the true bread of life, distributed faithfully among starving souls. Let men sneer or ridicule as they will. Nothing else can do good in this sinful world. No other teaching can fill hungry consciences, and give them peace. We are all in a wilderness. We must feed on Christ crucified, and the atonement made by His death, or we shall die in our sins.

Technical Notes:

1. After these things Jesus went over the sea of Galilee, which is *the sea* of Tiberias. 2. And a great multitude followed him, because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased. 3. And Jesus went up into a mountain, and there he sat with his disciples. 4. And the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was near. 5. Then Jesus lifted up *his* eyes and seeing a great multitude coming toward him, he said to Philip, Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat? 6. And this he said to prove him, for he himself knew what he would do. 7. Philip answered him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little. 8. One of his

disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, 9. There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fishes, but what are they among so many? 10. And Jesus said, Make the men sit down. Now there was much grass in the place, so the men sat down, in number about five thousand. 11. And Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks he distributed *them* to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down; and likewise of the fishes, as much as they wanted. 12. When they were filled, he said to his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost. 13. Therefore they gathered *them* together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten. 14. Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is truly that prophet who should come into the world.

1.—[*After these things*.] The remark made in chapter 5:1 applies here. The expression denotes an interval of time having elapsed between the end of the fifth chapter and the beginning of the sixth. John passes over all the events which happened at the conclusion of our Lord's defense of Himself at Jerusalem. In fact, if the feast spoken of at the beginning of the fifth chapter was really the Passover, almost an entire year of our Lord's ministry is unnoticed by John.

The events in this chapter, we should remark, are the only events in

our Lord's ministry in Galilee described by St. John, excepting the miracle of turning the water into wine at Cana and the healing of the ruler's son. (Chapters ii and iv.)

[*Went over the sea... Tiberias.*] This sea so-called was a fresh-water lake in Galilee through which the Jordan runs. According to Thomson, one of the most recent and accurate travelers in the Holy Land, it is about fourteen miles long, and nine wide at the widest part. It lies no less than six hundred feet below the level of the sea and is often agitated by sudden and violent storms.

Tiberias was a town on the west side of the lake, built by Herod about the time of our Lord's birth and comparatively a modern place in our Lord's time. In the days of Josephus, forty years after our Lord's crucifixion, Tiberias had become an important city. It was spared by the Romans, when Vespasian's army destroyed almost every other city in Galilee, for its adherence to the Roman cause, and was made capital of the province. John is the only Gospel-writer who calls the lake the "sea of Tiberias." His doing so is an incidental confirmation of the opinion that he wrote much later than Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and after the taking of Jerusalem. He naturally used the name by which the lake was best known when he wrote, and most familiar to the Gentile readers whom he had especially in view. The reason of our Lord going over the sea would appear to be His desire to withdraw Himself from public notice (Mark vi.31.), and perhaps from the persecution of Herod's party after the death of John the Baptist. Comparing John's account with that of Matthew, Mark, and

Luke, it seems most likely that he “went over the sea” from the west coast and landed on the northeast side of the lake not far from Bethsaida. Luke tells us distinctly that the miracle which John here records was wrought in “a desert place belonging to the city called Bethsaida.” (Luke ix.10.) Add to this the fact that no less than three of our Lord’s disciples were inhabitants of Bethsaida, viz., Philip, Andrew, and Peter, and our Lord’s retirement to this neighborhood seems natural and reasonable. The notion held by many that there were two Bethsaidas, one in Galilee where Andrew, Peter, and Philip lived, and one in Gaulanitis where this miracle of feeding the multitude was wrought, seems both groundless and needless. Bethsaida was at the head of the lake, in Galilee, near the point where the river Jordan entered the lake, and the district belonging to it extended most probably beyond the river into Gaulanitis. Thomson shows this satisfactorily.

2.—[*A great multitude followed…diseased.*] There seems no reason to suppose that this multitude followed our Lord from any but low motives. They “saw His miracles;” that was all. Some few, perhaps, were in doubt and suspense, wondering whether He who wrought such miracles could possibly be the Messiah. The great majority probably “followed” from that vague idle curiosity and love of excitement which are the principles that gather nearly every crowd in the world.

St. Mark says that “the people saw them departing, and many knew Him and ran afoot thither out of all cities and outwent them and

came together unto Him." (Mark vi.33.) This they might easily do by going round the head of the lake to the point where Bethsaida was.

3.—[*Jesus went up into a mountain.*] The Greek here would be more correctly rendered "into *the* mountain." Whether there is any special reason for this we cannot tell. It may be the one mountain which stood there in contradistinction to the more level ground composing the district. Thomson, the American traveler, expressly says that there is a "bold headland" here with "a smooth grassy spot" at the base, "capable of seating many thousand people." It may possibly be "that particular hill" to which our Lord was in the habit of going when He visited the district near Bethsaida. It may be "the hill country" generally, or mountainous district near Bethsaida.

[*His disciples.*] This expression includes not only the twelve who had been chosen and set apart by our Lord by this time, but many others who professed themselves His disciples. Many of them, it would appear from this very chapter (verse 66), were not really believers, and in course of time fell away. If Christ Himself had many such disciples and followers, ministers now-a-days (even the very best) must not be surprised to find the same state of things among their people.

4.—[*The Passover...was near.*] John's habit of explaining Jewish customs for the benefit of Gentile readers should here be noticed. The approach of the Passover feast is no doubt specially mentioned in order to show the suitableness of our Lord's discourse in this

chapter to the season of the year. The minds of His hearers would doubtless be thinking of the Passover lamb and its flesh about to be eaten and blood about to be sprinkled. Our Lord takes occasion to speak of that "flesh and blood" which must be eaten and drunk by all who would not perish in sin. It is an instance of that divine wisdom with which our master spoke "words in season" and turned everything to account.

Let it be noted that our Lord did not keep this Passover in Jerusalem to all appearance but remained in Galilee. Yet He generally observed all the ordinances of the law of Moses most strictly and "fulfilled all righteousness." The reason evidently is, as Rollock remarks, that the enmity and persecution of the leading Jews at Jerusalem made it impossible for Him to go there. It would have cut short His ministry and brought on His death before the time. May we not also learn here that the use of outward ordinances and ceremonies is not so absolutely necessary that they can never be dispensed with? Grace, repentance, and faith are absolutely needful to salvation; sacraments and ordinances are not. The near approach of the Passover may possibly account in part for the crowds who were assembled on this occasion. Not a few of the people, perhaps, were on their way to Jerusalem to keep the Passover feast and were drawn out of their road by hearing of our Lord's miracles.

5.—[Then Jesus…eyes…multitude.] We must not conclude from these expressions that our Lord was suddenly surprised by the appearance of a great crowd. On the contrary, Matthew and Mark both tell us

that before He wrought the miracle of which we are about to read, He had felt compassion for the multitude because they were "as sheep not having a shepherd," and had "taught them many things." (Mark. vi.34.) When this teaching was over, He seems to have taken a survey of the crowd before Him, and seeing how large it was proceeded to show His tender concern for the needs of men's bodies as well as of their souls. A great crowd is always an impressive and solemn sight. It is an interesting thought that the same eyes which looked compassionately on this crowed are still looking at every crowd, and especially at every crowd of persons assembled in God's name. [*He said to Philip…eat?*] Our Lord's reason for asking this question is given in the next verse. But it is worth notice that there was a certain propriety in asking Philip this question because Philip "was of Bethsaida," the very town near which they were all assembled. (John 1.44.) Our Lord, therefore, might reasonably appeal to Philip as one most likely and able to answer His question, whether it were possible to buy bread for such a multitude. He would, of course, know the capabilities of the neighborhood. The idea, maintained by Chrysostom, Burgon, and others, that Philip was a disciple peculiarly slow to recognize Christ's godhead and therefore requiring special appeals, seems to be a far less satisfactory solution. 6.—[*This He said to prove him.*] We find the same kind of procedure on other occasions. When our Lord appeared to the two disciples at Emmaus, we read that after His discourse with them, "He made as though He would have gone further." (Luke xxiv.28.) This was "to prove" whether they really wished for more of His company. When on another occasion He came to the disciples walking on the sea, St.

Mark says, “He would have passed by them.” (Mark vi.48.) When in this very chapter He would draw forth an expression of faith from His disciples, He says, “Will ye also go away?” (John vi.67.) Our Lord knows the sluggishness and coldness of our hearts, and He sees it good to stir our spiritual senses and draw forth our spiritual desire by such a mode of dealing with us. Explanatory observations like this, made by the Gospel writer himself, are more frequent in St. John’s Gospel than in any of the other three. [*He himself knew…do.*] This would be rendered more literally “what he was about to do.” Our Lord’s foreknowledge of the miracle He was about to do should be noted. The words He used in the last chapter should be remembered. They were not works which were done by chance and accidentally, in consequence of unforeseen circumstances, but foreseen and predetermined. They were “the works which the Father had given Him to finish.” (John v.36.)

7.—[Philip answered…not sufficient, etc.] What quantity of bread this sum would have procured we have no accurate means of knowing. But we may remember that the Roman “denarius,” or penny, represented a very much larger sum than a penny does among ourselves. We must remember also that bread was much cheaper then than it is now. The quantity Philip named was probably much larger than we suppose.

Burgon thinks that the sum named by Philip was the whole “store of money contained in their common purse,” viz., about six or seven pounds. But this cannot be proved.

8.—[*One of His disciples, Andrew, etc.*] Let it be noted here that Andrew, as well as Philip, was a native of the district of Bethsaida where all these things happened. There is a propriety, therefore, in his speaking and giving information on the present occasion. 9.—[*There is a lad…fishes.*] We should note in this verse how small were the provisions which our Lord miraculously multiplied. The fact that one "little boy" (for this is the meaning of the word we render "lad") could carry all the supply that Andrew mentions is a plain proof that the "loaves" could not have been large nor the "fish" of great size. The "fishes" were probably small dried fish such as are not uncommonly used as food now in hot countries, and, near the sea of Galilee would be, of course, common.

Barley was regarded, according to the Talmud, as a coarse food only fit for horses and asses.

[*What are they among so many?*] This expression of Andrew's is purposely reported, no doubt, in order to show how strong was the conviction of our Lord's disciples that they had not sufficient provision to feed the multitude, and then to bring out into clear light the greatness of the miracle which our Lord wrought. It also helps to prove that the wonderful feeding of the multitude was not a preconcerted and prepared thing arranged by our Lord and His disciples. Even His own immediate followers were taken by surprise.

10.—[*Jesus said, Make the men sit down.*] This arrangement

prevented confusion and preserved order—points of vast importance when any large assembly of people is gathered together. Moreover, it made less easy to practice any imposition or deceit in the feeding of the multitude. When every man was sitting steadily in his appointed place, no one could be passed over in the distribution of food without it being observed. St. Mark tell us that they "sat down in ranks, by hundreds and by fifties."
(Mark vi.40.)

[*There was much grass in the place.*] The time of the year when these things happened would be the very time when there was the most "grass." It was in the springtime, just before the Passover, when the winter was gone and the parching heat of summer had not begun. Thomson, the American traveler, reports that at this very day there is an open space of green grass at the foot of a hill at the very place where, in all probability, this miracle took place.

Let us note our Lord's consideration for the bodily comfort of His followers. He chooses a place where there was "much grass" to sit down on. [*So the men sat down…five thousand.*] The word "men" here is probably emphatic, in contradistinction to the "women and children," whom Matthew expressly mentions as having been present beside the five thousand men. In the Greek the word is not the same as that rendered "men" in the first clause of this verse.

11.—[Jesus took the loaves…given thanks.] The expression here seems rather to imply a solemn action of prayer and blessing, as well

as of giving thanks, as the first preliminary to the mighty miracle about to follow. In fact, St. Luke says, “He took the five loaves and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven He blessed them, and brake, and gave,” etc. (Luke ix.16.) This also seems implied in St. John’s subsequent reference to this miracle where He speaks of “the place where they did eat bread after that the Lord had given thanks.” (John vi.23.) The Greek word here used is precisely the same that is used in the account of the institution of the Lord’s Supper given by St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke, and St. Paul. St. Matthew and St. Mark say that our Lord “gave thanks” when He took “the cup.” St. Luke and St. Paul say that He also did it when He took “the bread.” So here we can hardly doubt that blessing and giving thanks went together. The Greek word is the one which we have borrowed and transferred to our own language in the expression “Eucharist.” [*He distributed to the disciples, etc.*] I think there can be no doubt that this was the point at which the mighty miracle here wrought by our Lord came in. As fast as He broke the loaves and the disciples carried them away to distribute them, so fast did the loaves multiply under His hands. It was in the act of breaking and distributing to the disciples that the miraculous multiplication took place. In fact, there was a continual act of creation going on. Bread was continually called into existence which did not exist before. The greatness of this miracle is perhaps not sufficiently realized. One loaf and less than half a fish to every thousand men! It is evident there could not have been more than a small morsel for each one without a miraculous increase of the food. Bishop Hall remarks: “He could as well have multiplied the loaves whole. Why would He rather do it in the breaking? Was it not to

teach us that in the distribution of our goods we should expect His blessing, not in their entireness and reservation? There is [he] who scatters and yet increases."

12.—[*When they were filled.*] That expression deserves notice. It is one of the strongest proofs of the reality of the miracle we are reading. It would be impossible to convince five thousand hungry men in a wilderness that they were really filled if they were not. A few enthusiasts and fanatics might possibly have been found who might have fancied they had eaten when they had not. But it is absurd to suppose that so strong a bodily sensation as hunger could possibly be relieved in five thousand men if there had not been a real supply of food and real eating of it. [*He said... Gather up, etc.*] In this little circumstance, again, we have a proof that real food was supplied and in sufficient quantity for all. There was not merely a morsel for each man but an abundant supply, enough and to spare. Our Lord's care for little things and dislike of waste and extravagance appear strong in this sentence. It would be well if the principle contained in the words was more remembered by Christians: "Let nothing be lost." It is a deep principle of very wide application. Time, money, and opportunities of showing kindness and doing good are specially to be remembered in applying this principle.

It admits of question whether the "disciples" who distributed the bread on this occasion, and afterwards gathered the fragments, did not include other helpers beside the twelve apostles. The time necessary for the distribution of bread among five thousand people,

if only twelve pairs of hands were employed, would prove on calculation to be very great.

13.—[Therefore…filled twelve baskets, etc.] This simple fact is enough to prove that a mighty miracle had been wrought. Our common sense can tell us that five loaves and two fishes alone could not have filled a single basket. Now, if the fragments left after the meal were enough to fill "twelve baskets," there must evidently have been a miraculous multiplication of the food at some stage of the proceedings. The fragments alone were probably fifty times more bulky than the original supply of food with which the meal began. The identity between the number of the baskets filled and the number of the apostles will, of course, strike any reader. One might think that each apostle had a basket. St. Mark mentions that there were fragments of "fishes" put into the baskets as well as loaves, so that the fishes also were miraculously multiplied as well as the bread.

Some early writers, not without justice, call this the greatest miracle that our Lord ever wrought. Perhaps we are poor judges of such points and little able to make comparisons. But it is certain that on no other occasion did our Lord manifest so clearly His creative power. No doubt it was as easy for Him to cause bread to be as to say "Let there be light," or to make the earth bring forth herbs and corn at the creation of the world. But the miracle was clearly intended to be one which Christians should hold in special remembrance. It is, at any rate, noteworthy that this is the only passage in Christ's life which all the four Gospel writers alike record. In this respect the

miracle stands alone. The attempts of Neologians to explain away this miracle are simply contemptible and ridiculous. It requires more faith to believe their explanations than to believe the miracle and take it as we find it. None but a person *determined* to disbelieve all miracles and cast them out of the sacred narrative would every try to make out (as some actually have tried) that the four times-repeated story of the miraculous feeding, which we have considered, only meant that the multitude brought out the hidden stores of provisions which they had carried with them and shared them with one another!

14.—[*Then those men.*] This probably means the whole crowd and multitude who had been fed on this occasion. [*When they had seen the miracle.*] Signs and wonders were expected to accompany the appearance of any prophet or messenger from God. Here was a mighty miracle, and at once the minds of all who saw it were excited. [*This is truly that prophet, etc.*] This meant, that "prophet like unto Moses," whom all well-instructed Jews expected to appear, and for whose speedy appearing the ministry of John the Baptist had prepared the minds of all the dwellers in Palestine. "Truly", *i.e.*, really and indeed. "That prophet" would be more literally "the prophet."

JOHN 6:15-21

Walking on Water

Then Jesus, because he knew they were going to come and seize him by force to make him king, withdrew again up the mountainside alone.

Now when evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, got into a boat, and started to cross the lake to Capernaum. (It had already become dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them.) By now a strong wind was blowing and the sea was getting rough. Then when they had rowed about three or four miles, they caught sight of Jesus walking on the lake, approaching the boat, and they were frightened. But he said to them, "It is I. Do not be afraid." Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat came to the land where they had been heading.

We should notice, in these verses, ***our Lord Jesus Christ's humility.*** We are told that, after feeding the multitude, He "perceived that they would come and take him by force to make him a king." At once He departed, and left them. He wanted no such honors as these. He had come, "not to be ministered unto, but, to minister and to give his life a ransom for many." (Matt. 20:28.)

We see the same spirit and frame of mind all through our Lord's earthly ministry. From His cradle to His grave He was "clothed with humility." (1 Pet. 5:5.) He was born of a poor woman, and spent the first thirty years of His life in a carpenter's house at Nazareth. He was followed by poor companions—many of them no better than fishermen. He was poor in his manner of living— "The foxes had holes, and the birds of the air their nests—but the Son of man had

not where to lay his head" (Matt. 8:20.) When He went on the Sea of Galilee, it was in a borrowed boat. When He rode into Jerusalem, it was on a borrowed donkey. When He was buried, it was in a borrowed tomb. "Though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor." (2 Cor. 8:9.)

The example is one which ought to be far more remembered than it is. How common are pride, and ambition, and high-mindedness! How rare are humility and lowly-mindedness! How few ever refuse greatness when offered to them! How many are continually seeking great things for themselves, and forgetting the injunction— "Seek them not!" (Jer. 45:5.) Surely it was not for nothing that our Lord, after washing the disciples' feet, said— "I have given you an example that you should do as I have done." (John 13:15.) There is little, it may be feared, of that feet-washing spirit among Christians. But whether men will hear or forbear, humility is the queen of the graces. "Tell me," it has been said, "how much humility a man has, and I will tell you how much religion he has." Humility is the first step toward heaven, and the true way to honor. "He that humbles himself shall be exalted." (Luke 18:14.)

We should notice, secondly, in these verses, ***the trials through which Christ's disciples had to pass.*** We are told that they were sent over the lake by themselves, while their Master tarried behind. And then we see them alone in a dark night, tossed about by a great wind on stormy waters, and, worst of all, Christ not with them. It was a strange transition. From witnessing a mighty miracle,

and helping it instrumentally, amid an admiring crowd, to solitude, darkness, winds, waves, storm, anxiety, and danger, the change was very great! But Christ knew it, and Christ appointed it, and it was working for their good.

Trial, we must distinctly understand, is part of the diet which all true Christians must expect. It is one of the means by which their grace is proved, and by which they find out what there is in themselves. Winter as well as summer—cold as well as heat—clouds as well as sunshine—are all necessary to bring the fruit of the Spirit to ripeness and maturity. We do not naturally like this. We would rather cross the lake with calm weather and favorable winds, with Christ always by our side, and the sun shining down on our faces. But it may not be. It is not in this way that God's children are made "partakers of His holiness." (Heb. 12:10.) Abraham, and Jacob, and Moses, and David, and Job were all men of many trials. Let us be content to walk in their footsteps, and to drink of their cup. In our darkest hours we may seem to be left—but we are never really alone.

Let us notice, in the last place, ***our Lord Jesus Christ's power over the waves of the sea.*** He came to His disciples as they were rowing on the stormy lake, "walking on" the waters. He walked on them as easily as we walk on dry land. They bore Him as firmly as the pavement of the Temple, or the hills around Nazareth. That which is contrary to all natural reason was perfectly possible to Christ.

The Lord Jesus, we must remember, is not only the Lord, but the Maker of all creation. “All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made.” (John 1:3.) It was just as easy for Him to walk on the sea as to form the sea at the beginning—just as easy to suspend the common laws of nature, as they are called, as to impose those laws at the first. Learned men talk solemn nonsense sometimes about the eternal fixity of the “laws of nature,” as if they were above God Himself, and could never be suspended. It is well to be reminded sometimes by such miracles as that before us, that these so-called “laws of nature” are neither immutable nor eternal. They had a beginning, and will one day have an end.

Let all true Christians take comfort in the thought that their Savior is Lord of waves and winds, of storms and tempests, and can come to them in the darkest hour, “walking upon the sea.” There are waves of trouble far heavier than any on the Lake of Galilee. There are days of darkness which test the faith of the holiest Christian. But let us never despair if Christ is our Friend. He can come to our aid in an hour when we do not think, and in ways that we did not expect. And when He comes, all will be calm.

Technical Notes:

15. When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force to make him a king, he departed again to a mountain himself alone. 16. *Now* when evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, 17. entered into a boat, and went over the sea toward

Capernaum. And it was now dark, and Jesus had not come to them. 18. And the sea arose because a great wind was blowing. 19. So when they had rowed about five and twenty or thirty furlongs, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and drawing near the boat; and they were afraid. 20. But he said to them, It is I; do not be afraid. 21. Then they willingly received him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land where they were going.

15.—[*When Jesus therefore perceived.*] This would be more literally rendered, "Jesus knowing," or "having known." It seems to imply Divine knowledge of the multitude's secret intentions. Jesus knew men's hearts and thoughts.

[*That they would come.*] This would be more literally, "that they are about to come."

[*Take him by force…king*.] The intention or wish was probably to place Him at their head and proclaim Him their king, with or without His consent, and then to hurry Him away to Jerusalem so as to arrive there at the Passover feast and announce Him as a Deliverer to the crowd assembled at that time. The idea evidently in their mind was, that one who could work such a mighty miracle must be a mighty temporal Redeemer, raised up, like the Judges of old, to break the bonds of the Romish government and restore the old independence and kingdom to Israel. There is no reason to suppose that there was any more spiritual feeling in the minds of the multitude. Of sense of

spiritual need and of faith in our Lord as a Savior from sin, there is no trace. Popularity and the good opinion of excited crowds are both worthless and temporary things.

Rollock remarks that the Jews were very sensitive about the tyranny and dominion of the Romans, while they did not feel the far greater tyranny and dominion of sin. He points out that we who are expecting the second advent of Christ in the present day should take care that we increasingly feel the burden and yoke of sin from which Christ's second advent will deliver the creation. Otherwise, Christ's second advent will do us no more good than His first advent did to the Jews.

[He departed…a mountain…alone.] This would be more literally rendered "the mountain" as at verse 3. St. Matthew and St. Mark both mention another reason why our Lord withdrew to the mountain, beside His desire to avoid the intention of the multitude. They tell us that He "sent the multitude away and departed to pray." (Matt. xiv.23; Mark vi.46.) Some think that a miracle must have been wrought when our Lord withdrew himself from the multitude, and that He must have passed through them invisibly, as after the miracle at Bethesda and at Nazareth. Yet it seems hardly necessary to suppose this.

It is worth noticing that after St. Luke's account of this miracle, he immediately relates that our Lord asked the disciples, "Whom say the people that I am?" (Luke ix.18.) It does not, however, follow that

He asked immediately, but after an interval of some days. But the wish of the multitude here related may have occasioned the question.
16.—[*When evening…to the sea.*] St. Matthew and St. Mark both say that our Lord "constrained" them to embark in the boat and depart. He "obliged" or "compelled" them. He probably saw that in their ignorance of the spiritual nature of His kingdom, they were ready to fall in with the wishes of the multitude and to proclaim Him a king.

17.—[*Entered into a boat.*] This would be more literally "the boat." It seems to mean that particular vessel or fishing boat which our Lord and His disciples always used on the lake of Galilee, and which probably was lent for His use by the relatives of those of His disciples who were fishermen, if not by the four themselves, viz., James, John, Andrew, and Peter. There is no necessity for supposing that when they left their calling to become disciples they gave up their boats so entirely as to have no more use of them when they wished. The last chapter of this very Gospel seems to prove the contrary. When Peter said, "I go a fishing," there was the boat ready for them at once. (John xxi.3.)

[*Went over the sea toward Capernaum.*] This would be more literally "were going," "were in the act of going." Capernaum lay on the northwest shore of the lake of Galilee, and the point where the disciples embarked was on the northeast shore. To reach Capernaum, they would pass the point where the Jordan ran into the lake and leave that point and the town of Bethsaida on their right hand. The place where the miracle was wrought was not at Bethsaida

itself, we must remember, but in the desert country and district lying to the east of Bethsaida. St. Luke specially mentions this (Luke ix.10), and unless we keep it in mind, we shall not understand St. Mark's words that our Lord made His disciples "go to the other side before unto Bethsaida." To go to Capernaum, they must need go "in the direction of" Bethsaida, though they would leave it on the right as they passed. Thomson, in the "Land and the Book," maintains this view, and Rollock, 250 years ago, held the same opinion.

I repeat the opinion that I see no necessity for the theory of Alford and other commentators that there were two Bethsaidas. Capernaum was the city where our Lord passed more time, and probably worked more miracles, than He did in any other place during His ministry. This is probably the reason why our Lord speaks of it as "exalted unto heaven." (Matt. xi.23.) No city had such privileges and saw so much of the Son of God while He was manifest in the flesh.

[*It was now dark...not come.*] The Greek word for "dark" is always rendered "darkness" in other places, except John xx.1. The simple circumstance of the disciples being alone in the boat, on the sea, and in darkness, has been felt in every age to be an instructive emblem of the position of the Church of Christ between the first and second advents. Like them, the Church is on a sea of trouble and separate from its Head. In estimating, however, the position and feelings of the disciples, we must not forget that four of them at least were fishermen and familiar from their youth with the management of boats and all the dangers of the lake. We must not therefore think of

them as inexperienced landsmen or as little children unable to take care of themselves.

We learn to know the value of Christ's company when we have it by the discomfort we experience when we have it not.

18.—[*And the sea arose…blowing*.] The Greek word rendered "arose" would be more literally rendered "was being raised or stirred." At first sight, it may seem surprising that the waters of an inland lake, like the sea of Galilee, could be so much agitated. But it is remarkable that the testimony of travelers in modern times is distinct that this lake is peculiarly liable to be visited by violent squalls of wind and to become very rough while they last. Thomson, the American traveler, says: "My experience in this region enabled me to sympathize with the disciples in their long night's contest with the wind. I have seen the face of the lake like a huge boiling cauldron. The wind howled down the valleys from the northeast and east with such fury that no efforts of rowers could have brought a boat to shore at any point along that coast. To understand the cause of these sudden and violent tempests, we must remember that the lake lies low (six hundred feet lower than the ocean), that watercourses have cut out profound ravines and wild gorges converging to the head of the lake, and that these act like gigantic funnels to draw down the cold winds from the mountains. On the occasion referred to, we pitched our tents on the shore and remained for three days and nights exposed to this tremendous wind. We had to double-pin all the tent ropes and frequently were obliged to hang with our whole weight upon them to

keep the quivering tabernacle from being carried up bodily into the air. No wonder the disciples toiled and rowed hard all that night." In another place he says, "Small as the lake is and placed in general as a molten mirror, I have repeatedly seen it quiver and leap and boil like a cauldron, when driven by fierce winds."— *Land and the Book*.

Burkitt remarks that the position of the disciples—immediately tempest tossed after witnessing and partaking in a mighty miracle—is an instructive type of the common experience of believers. After seasons of peculiar privileges, there often come sharp trials of faith and patience. This sudden trial of faith by danger was no doubt intended to be a lesson to the disciples as to what they must expect in the exercise of their ministry. Affliction and crosses are the grindstones on which God is constantly sharpening those instruments which He uses most.

19.—[So when...rowed...furlongs.] We might gather from the disciples "rowing" and not sailing, that the wind was against them, and we are expressly told, both by St. Matthew and St. Mark, that "the wind was contrary." From the distance they had rowed and the known width of the lake at that particular part of it, they were probably now about the middle of their passage. St. Matthew says they were "in the midst of the sea." (Matt. xiv.24.) This would make them at least two or three miles from shore, a fact which should be carefully noted with reference to what follows.

Let the expression "twenty-five or thirty" be noted. It is not necessary

to define to a hair's breadth distances and quantities in narrating an event. Even an inspired writer does not. He uses the common language of men and such language as those present on the occasion would have used. In a dark night, they could not possibly have spoken with precise accuracy. John was there himself and knew that excessive accuracy is sometimes suspicious and looks like a made-up story. (John ii.6 is a similar expression.) Bengel says, "The Holy Spirit knew and could have told John precisely how many furlongs there were. But in Scripture, he imitates popular modes of expression."

[*They saw Jesus walking, etc.*] This was undoubtedly as great a miracle as any that our Lord wrought. "Moses," says Theophylact, "as a servant, by the power of God divided the sea. But Christ, the Lord of all, by His own power walked on the sea." For a solid body to walk on the face of the water as on dry land is an entire suspension of what are called the laws of nature. It was, of course, as easy for Him by whom the waters were first created to walk upon them as to create them. But the whole proceeding was so entirely supernatural that we can thoroughly understand the disciples being "afraid." Nothing is found to alarm human nature so much as being suddenly brought into contact with anything apparently supernatural and belonging to another world, and especially in the night. The feelings called forth on such occasions, even in ungodly and irreligious men, are one of the strongest indirect proofs that all men's consciences recognize an unseen world.

That a mighty miracle really was wrought upon this occasion is the only reasonable account that can be given of the fact that we are told. St. Mark adds to St. John's account, that when Jesus came near the ship "He would have passed by them." (Mark vi.48.) St. Matthew adds another fact of even greater importance. He tells us that Peter said, "Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee on the water. And He said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water to go to Jesus." (Matt. xiv.28,29.) Such a fact as this cannot possibly be explained away. Not only did our Lord walk on the water Himself, but He also gave one of His twelve apostles power to do the same. To say in the face of such facts as these that there was in reality no miracle—that the disciples were mistaken, that our Lord was only walking on the shore near the vessel, that the superstitious fear of the disciples made them fancy that He was walking on the sea, that they finally put to shore and took Him on board—to say such things as these pleases some persons who profess not to believe any miracles at all! But such views cannot possibly be reconciled with the account of what really happened, given by two witnesses, Matthew and John, who were actually present on the occasion, and by another writer, viz., Mark, who was intimate with that very Peter who walked on the water himself.

If the disciples were "in the midst of the sea" and two or three miles from shore, how could they possibly have seen our Lord walking on the shore? If it was "dark" when these things happened, it stands to reason that they could not distinguish anyone on shore, even supposing that they were not two miles off. If there was a heavy gale

blowing and the waves were rough, it is absurd to suppose that they could hold a conversation with anyone walking on shore. The plain truth is that it requires far more faith to accept such improbable and preposterous explanations as these than to take the whole account simply as we find it and to believe that a real mighty miracle was wrought. Unless men are prepared to say that Matthew, Mark, and John wrote accounts of the events of this night which are incorrect and not trustworthy, it is impossible for any honest and unprejudiced person to avoid the conclusion that a miracle took place. Of course, if Matthew, Mark, and John give incorrect accounts and are not to be trusted here, they are not to be trusted anywhere, and all their records of our Lord's doings and sayings become utterly worthless. This, unhappily, is the very result to which many would be glad to lead us. From denying all miracles to downright infidelity is nothing but a regular succession of steps. If a man begins with throwing overboard the miracles, he cannot stop logically till he has given up the Bible and Christianity.

20.—[*But He said...not be afraid.*] Our Lord's tenderness for His disciples' feelings appears beautifully here. No sooner does He see fear than He proceeds to calm it. He assures them that the figure they see walking on the deep is no spirit or ghost, no enemy or object of dread. It is their own beloved Master. His voice, well-known as it must have been, would, of course, help to calm their fears. Yet even that was not enough till Peter had said, "If it be Thou, bid me come to Thee." The practical remark has often been made that many of the things which now frighten Christians and fill them with anxiety

would cease to frighten them if they would endeavor to see the Lord Jesus in all, ordering every providence and overruling everything so that not a hair falls to the ground without Him. They are happy who can hear His voice through the thickest clouds and darkness, and above the loudest winds and storms, saying, “It is I; do not be afraid.”

It has been thought by some that the words, “It is I,” might be more literally rendered, “I am,” and that they are intended to refer to the name of God so familiar to Jews, “I am.” But I doubt the correctness of the idea. It is a pious thought but hardly in keeping with the context and the circumstances of the occurrence. Our Lord desired first to relieve the fears of His disciples by showing them who it was that they feared, and the Greek words for “It is I” are the only words that He could well have used. It may be noted here that there seems to be no feeling or passion to which Christians are so liable as “fear.” There is none, certainly, against which our Lord so often exhorts His disciples. “Fear not,” “be not afraid,” “let not your heart be troubled,” are very common sayings of His.

21.—[*Then they willingly received…boat.*] This would be rendered more literally, “Then they were willing,” “they were glad and wished.” It evidently implies that at first the disciples were afraid of our Lord. But as soon as they recognized Him, their fears departed, and so far from wishing to be rid of the figure they had seen walking on the sea, their great desire now was to receive Him on board.

[Immediately…at the land…were going.] This sentence either means that shortly after our Lord joined the disciples in the boat they reached their destination, or that immediately—by miraculous agency—they arrived at the shore. There is, perhaps, no occasion to suppose any other miracle. Both Matthew and Mark distinctly say that "the wind ceased" as soon as our Lord entered the boat. The storm, according to the custom of storms on the lake, suddenly ceased, and the disciples consequently had no trouble in rowing to the shore. The wind was no longer against them, and the sea, in so small a compass as the lake of Galilee, would naturally soon go down. The old practical lesson still remains to be remembered. Christ's Church is now a tossed ship in the midst of a stormy sea. The great Master has gone up into heaven to intercede for His people, left alone for awhile, and to return. When Jesus returns again to His tossed and afflicted Church at the second advent, their troubles will soon be over. They will soon be in harbor. His voice, which will fill the wicked with terror, will fill His people with joy.

The place where they landed was evidently Capernaum, or close to it. The discourse which follows was at any rate finished (wherever it may have begun) in "the synagogue at Capernaum," and follows in unbroken succession after the events we have now been considering. The statement of St. Matthew and St. Mark, that our Lord and His disciples reached the shore in "the land of Genesaret," is quite reconcilable with St. John's account. The "land of Genesaret" was a plain on the northwest coast of the Lake of Galilee extending from

Magdala at the south to Capernaum at the north. In leaving this passage, I call the reader's attention to the very marked and peculiar position which the two miracles recorded by St. John in this chapter occupy. They immediately precede that wonderful discourse in the synagogue of Capernaum in which our Lord proclaims Himself to be "the living bread which came down from heaven and gives life to the world," and declares that, except we eat His flesh and drink His blood we have no life in us. I believe that the two miracles were intended to prepare the minds of the disciples to receive the mighty truths which the discourse contained. Did they stumble at the announcement that He was the "bread of God" and "gave life to the world"? It would surely help their weak faith to remember that the very day before they had seen Him suddenly supply the needs of a mighty multitude with five loaves and two fishes. Did they stumble at the doctrine that "His flesh was meat indeed and his blood drink indeed"? It would surely assist their feeble spiritual apprehension to remember that the very night before they had seen that body walking on the face of the sea. They had had ocular proof that there was a deep mystery about our Lord's human nature, and that although He was real and true man, there was at the same time something about Him far above man. These things I believe are worth noticing. The connection between our Lord's miracles and His teaching is often far closer than at first sight appears.

JOHN 6:22-27

Jesus' Discourse About the Bread of Life

The next day the crowd that remained on the other side of the lake realized that only one small boat had been there, and that Jesus had not boarded it with his disciples, but that his disciples had gone away alone. But some boats from Tiberias came to shore near the place where they had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. So when the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and came to Capernaum looking for Jesus.

When they found him on the other side of the lake, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?" Jesus replied, "I tell you the solemn truth, you are looking for me not because you saw miraculous signs, but because you ate all the loaves of bread you wanted. Do not work for the food that disappears, but for the food that remains to eternal life—the food that the Son of Man will give to you. For God the Father has put his seal of approval on him."

We should mark first, in this passage, ***what knowledge of man's heart our Lord Jesus Christ possesses.*** We see Him exposing the false motives of those who followed Him for the sake of the loaves and fishes. They had followed Him across the Lake of Galilee. They seemed at first sight ready to believe in Him, and do Him honor. But He knew the inward springs of their conduct, and was not deceived. "You seek me," He said, "not because you saw the miracles, but because you ate the loaves, and were filled."

The Lord Jesus, we should never forget, is still the same. He never changes. He reads the secret motives of all who profess and

call themselves Christians. He knows exactly why they do all they do in their religion. The reasons why they go to Church, and why they receive the sacrament—why they attend family prayers, and why they keep Sunday holy—all are naked and opened to the eyes of the great Head of the Church. By Him actions are weighed as well as seen. "Man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." (1 Sam. 16:7.)

Let us be *real, true, and sincere in our religion*, whatever else we are. The *sinfulness* of hypocrisy is very great, but its *folly* is greater still. It is not hard to deceive ministers, relatives, and friends. A little decent outward profession will often go a long way. But it is impossible to deceive Christ. "His eyes are as a flame of fire." (Rev. 1:14.) He sees us through and through. Happy are those who can say — "You, Lord, who know all things, know that we love you." (John 21:17.)

We should mark, secondly, in this passage, ***what Christ forbids.*** He told the crowds who followed Him so diligently for the loaves and fishes, "not to labor for the food that perishes." It was a remarkable saying, and demands explanation.

Our Lord, we may be sure, did not mean to encourage idleness. It would be a great mistake to suppose this hard labor was the appointed lot of Adam in Paradise. Labor was ordained to be man's occupation *after* the fall. Labor is honorable in all men. No one need be ashamed of belonging to "the working classes." Our Lord himself

worked in the carpenter's shop at Nazareth. Paul wrought as a tent-maker with his own hands.

What our Lord did mean to rebuke was, that excessive attention to labor for the body, while the soul is neglected, which prevails everywhere in the world. What He reproved was, the common habit of laboring only for the things of time, and letting alone the things of eternity—of minding only the life that now is, and disregarding the life to come. Against this habit He delivers a solemn warning.

Surely, we must all feel our Lord did not say the words before us without good cause. They are a startling caution which should ring in the ears of many in these latter days. How many in every rank of life are doing the very thing against which Jesus warns us! They are laboring night and day for "the food that perishes," and doing nothing for their immortal souls. Happy are those who early learn the respective value of soul and body, and give the first and best place in their thoughts to salvation. One thing is needful. He that seeks first the kingdom of God, will never fail to find "all other things added to him." (Matt. 6:33.)

We should mark, thirdly, in this passage, ***what Christ advises.*** He tells us to "labor for the food that endures to everlasting life." He would have us take pains to find food and satisfaction for our souls. That food is provided in rich abundance in Him. But he that would have it must diligently seek it.

How are we to labor? There is but one answer. We must labor in the use of all appointed means. We must read our Bibles, like men digging for hidden treasure. We must wrestle earnestly in prayer, like men contending with a deadly enemy for life. We must take our whole heart to the house of God, and worship and hear like those who listen to the reading of a benefactor's will. We must fight daily against sin, the world, and the devil, like those who fight for liberty, and must conquer, or be slaves. These are the ways we must walk in if we would find Christ, and be found of Him. This is "laboring." This is the secret of getting on about our souls.

Labor like this no doubt is very uncommon. In carrying it on we shall have little encouragement from man, and shall often be told that we are "extreme," and go too far. Strange and absurd as it is, the natural man is always fancying that we may take too much thought about religion, and refusing to see that we are far more likely to take too much thought about the world. But whatever man may say, the soul will never get spiritual food without labor. We must "strive," we must "run," we must "fight," we must throw our whole heart into our soul's affairs. It is "the violent" who take the kingdom. (Matt. 11:12.)

We should mark, lastly, in this passage, ***what a promise Christ holds out.*** He tells us that He himself will give eternal food to all who seek it— "The Son of man shall give you the food that endures unto everlasting life."

How gracious and encouraging these words are! Whatever we need for the relief of our hungering souls, Christ is ready and willing

to bestow. Whatever mercy, grace, peace, strength we require, the Son of man will give freely, immediately, abundantly, and eternally. He is "sealed," and appointed, and commissioned by God the Father for this very purpose. Like Joseph in the Egyptian famine, it is His office to be the Friend, and Benefactor, and Reliever of a sinful world. He is far more willing to give than man is to receive. The more sinners apply to Him, the better He is pleased.

And now, as we leave this rich passage, let us ask ourselves, what use we make of it? For what are we laboring ourselves? What do we know of lasting food and satisfaction for our inward man? Never let us rest until we have eaten of the food which Christ alone can give. Those who are content with any other spiritual food will sooner or later "lie down in sorrow." (Isa. 50:11.)

Technical Notes:

22. The following day, when the people who were standing on the other side of the sea saw that there was no other boat there, except that one which his disciples had entered, and that Jesus had not entered the boat with his disciples, but his disciples had gone away alone—23. however other boats came from Tiberias, near the place where they ate bread after the Lord had given thanks— 24. when the people therefore saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they also got into boats and came to Capernaum, seeking Jesus. 25. And when they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, Rabbi, when

did you come here? 26. Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say to you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye ate of the loaves and were filled. 27. Do not labor for the meat which perishes, but for that meat which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give you, because God the Father has set his seal on him.

22.—[*The following day, etc.*] In this and the three following verses, we have an instance of the extreme minuteness with which St. John describes all the particulars connected with any of the miracles of our Lord which he records. Here, for example, he tell us that our Lord's remaining behind and not accompanying His disciples when they went into the boat, was observed by the multitude; and that, nevertheless, they could not find our Lord the next morning and were puzzled to account for His being found at Capernaum when they got there. All these little things help to prove that the circumstance of our Lord's joining the disciples was something miraculous and cannot be explained away, as some Rationalists pretend to say. In particular, the question "When did you come here?" (ver. 25) is plain evidence that the multitude did not think it possible for our Lord to have walked along the shore, as some modern writers suggest, and did not understand how He got to Capernaum, except in a boat. In each of the seven great miracles recorded by St. John, this fullness and minuteness is very noticeable. Had he been inspired to relate as many miracles as we find in Matthew and Mark, his Gospel would have been fifty chapters

instead of twenty-one. Writing long after the other Gospel writers and at a time when many who witnessed our Lord's miracles were dead, there was a fitness and wisdom in his supplying the abundant particulars which characterize his descriptions.

[*The people who were standing on the other side of the sea.*] This means the multitude, or some of them, whom Jesus had fed on the northeast shore of the lake, and whom the disciples had left standing near the banks when they embarked before our Lord sent them away. Matthew and Mark both mention that our Lord first made the disciples embark, and *then* sent the multitude away and retired to the mountain to pray.

[*However other boats came, etc.*] This verse either means that other boats came from Tiberias the morning after the miracle of feeding the multitude, which were not there the evening that the disciples embarked, or else it means that there were other boats from Tiberias not far from the place where the miracle was worked, though they were not actually at the spot where the disciples embarked, except their one boat. The verse is carefully inserted parenthetically in order to account for the multitude following our Lord to Capernaum. Had it not been inserted, the infidel would have asked us triumphantly to explain how the people could have followed our Lord when they had no boats! We need not doubt that every apparent discrepancy and difficulty in the Gospel narrative would equally admit of explanation if we only knew how to fill up the gaps.

[*After the Lord had given thanks.*] This is purposely inserted to remind us that it was no common eating of bread that had taken place, but an eating of food miraculously multiplied after our Lord had blessed it.

24.—[*When the people.*] There is no occasion to suppose that this expression means the whole five thousand whom our Lord had fed. For one thing, we are distinctly told that our Lord "sent them away," and the greater part probably dispersed and went their way to their homes, or to Jerusalem to the Passover. For another thing, it is absurd to suppose that so large a multitude could find boats enough to convey them across the lake. It evidently means the remaining portion of the multitude, and probably included many who followed our Lord about from place to place wherever He went in Galilee, without any spiritual feeling, from a vague love of excitement and in the hope of ultimately getting something by it. [*They also got into boats.*] This means that they embarked in the boats which came from Tiberias and crossed over the lake.

25.—[*And when they found…sea.*] The place where they found our Lord was on the northwest side of the lake of Galilee, on the opposite side from where the miracle of feeding the multitude was worked. The precise spot, however, where they found Him is a point which it is not very easy to decide. Of course, if we read the discourse which follows as one unbroken discourse (all spoken at one time without breaks or pauses, except such as arise from the remarks of the people who heard our Lord), there can be no doubt where our

Lord was. The 59th verse settles the question: “These things said He in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum.” But if we suppose a break at the 40th verse (where the Jews begin “to murmur”) and a short interval before the discourse was resumed, it seems highly probable that the crowd found our Lord at the landing place of Capernaum or just outside the city—that the discourse began there and continued up to the 40th verse—and that then, after a short pause, it was resumed “in the synagogue of Capernaum. It certainly does seem rather abrupt and unnatural to suppose the crowd landing at Capernaum, going up to the synagogue, and *there* beginning the conversation with the question, “When did you come here?”
[*When did you come here?*] The question evidently implies surprise at finding our Lord, and inability to understand how He could possibly have got to Capernaum if He did not go in the boat with His disciples. It is a question, be it remarked, to which our Lord returned no answer. He knew the state of mind of those who asked it and knew that it would be of no use to tell them when He had come or how.

Wordsworth’s idea that there is a mystical reference in this question to the manner and time of Christ’s presence in the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper appears to me very fanciful and far-fetched.

26.—[Jesus answered, Verily…to you.] This solemn expression, as usual in St. John’s Gospel, introduces a series of sayings of the deepest importance. They very first was a sharp and cutting rebuke of the carnalmindedness of those whom our lord addressed.

[*Ye seek Me…miracles…filled.*] This was a severe saying and one which He, who knew all hearts and read all secret motives, could say with peculiar power. It is a sad exposure of the true reason why many followed our Lord, both on this occasion and on others. It was not now even desire to see miracles performed, as it had been the day before (see v.2). These, after a time when the novelty was past, would cease to astonish and attract. It was a lower and more carnal motive still; it was the mere wish to be fed again with loaves and fishes. They wanted to get something more out of our Lord. They had been fed once, and they would like to be fed again.

The poor, mean, and carnal motives which induce men to make some religious profession are painfully exhibited here. Perhaps we have but a faint motion how little the reasons of many for coming to public worship or communion would bear sifting and examination. We may be sure that all is not gold that glitters, and that many a professor is rotten at heart. It was so even under our Lord's ministry and much more now. Augustine remarks how seldom "Jesus is sought for the sake of Jesus." Our Lord's perfect knowledge of the secret springs of men's actions is strikingly exhibited here. We cannot deceive Him even if we deceive man; and our true characters will be exposed in the day of judgment if they are not found out before we die. Whatever we are in religion, let us be honest and true.

To follow Christ for the sake of a few loaves and fishes seems miserable work. To some who know nothing of poverty, it may

appear almost incredible that a crowd of people should have done it. Perhaps those only can thoroughly understand it who have seen much of the poor in pauperized rural parishes. They can understand the immense importance which a poor man attaches to having his belly filled and getting a dinner or a supper. Most of our Lord's followers in Galilee were probably very poor. To deal plainly with people about their spiritual condition and faithfully expose their false motives, if we know them, is the positive duty of ministers and teachers. It is no kindness or charity to flatter professing Christians and tell them they are children of God and going to heaven if we know that they only make a religious profession for the sake of what they can get.

Wisdom and discrimination in giving temporal relief to the poor are very necessary things in ministers, and indeed in all Christians. Unless we take heed what we do in such matters, we do more harm than good. To be always feeding the poor and giving money to those who make some profession of religion is the surest way to train up a generation of hypocrites, and to inflict lasting injury on souls.

27.—[*Do not labor…set His seal on Him.*] This verse is peculiarly full of instructive lessons. (1) There is something *forbidden*. We are not to labor exclusively or excessively for the satisfaction of our bodily wants, for that food which only perishes in the using and only does us a little temporary good. (2) There is something *commanded*. We ought to work hard and strive for that spiritual food—that supply for the needs of our souls which once obtained is an everlasting

possession. (3) There is something *promised*. The Son of man, even Jesus Christ, is ready to give to every one who desires to have it that spiritual food which endures forever. (4) There is something *declared*. The Son of man, Jesus Christ, has been designated and appointed by God the Father for this very purpose, to be the dispenser of this spiritual food to all who desire it.

The whole verse is a strong proof that however carnal and wicked men may be, we should never hesitate to offer to them freely and fully the salvation of the Gospel. Bad as the motives of these Jews were, we see our Lord, in the same breath, first exposing their sin and then showing them their remedy.

The figure of speech used by our Lord, which supplies the keynote to the whole subsequent discourse, is a beautiful instance of that Divine wisdom with which He suited His language to the mental condition of those He spoke to. He saw the crowd coming to Him for food. He seizes the idea and bids them labor not for bodily but spiritual food. Just so when He saw the rich young man come to Him, He bade him "sell all and give to the poor." Just so when the Samaritan woman met Him at the well, as she came to draw water, He told her of living water. Just so when Nicodemus came to Him, proud of his Jewish birth, He tells him of a new birth which he needed. When our Lord said "do not labor for the meat that perishes," we must not for a moment suppose that He meant to encourage idleness and the neglect of all lawful means in order to get our living. It is a kind of expression which is not uncommon in the Bible, when two things are

put in comparison. Thus, when our Lord says, “If any man come after Me and hate not his father and mother and wife and children, etc., he cannot be my disciple,” we see at a glance that these words cannot be taken literally. They only mean “If any man does not love Me more than father,” etc. (Luke xiv.26.) So here the simple meaning is that we ought to take far more pains about the supply of the needs of our souls than of our bodies. (See also 1 Cor. vii.29; 2 Cor. iv.18; 1 Sam. viii.7; John xii.44.)

When our Lord says “labor for the meat that endures,” etc., I think He teaches very plainly that it is the duty of everyone to use every means, and endeavor in every way, to promote the welfare of his soul. In the use of prayer, the Bible, and the public preaching of God’s Word, we are specially to labor. Our responsibility and accountableness, the duty of effort and exertion, appear to me to stand out unmistakably in the expression. It is like the commands, “Strive, Repent, Believe, Be converted, Save yourselves from this untoward generation, Awake, Arise, Come, Pray.” It is nothing less than wicked to stand still, splitting hairs, raising difficulties, and pretending inability, in the face of such expressions as these. What God commands, man must always try to obey. Whatever language Christ uses, ministers and teachers must never shrink from using likewise.

The “meat that endures to everlasting life” must doubtless mean that satisfaction of the cravings of soul and conscience, which is the grand need of human nature. Mercy and grace, pardon of sin and a new

heart, are the two great gifts which alone can fill the soul, and once given are never taken away but endure forever. Both here and in many other places, we must always remember that “meat” did not mean exclusively “flesh” in the days when the Bible was translated, as it does now. The Greek word rendered “meat” here means simply “food” of any kind.

When our Lord says, “The Son of man shall give you the meat that endures to everlasting life,” He appears to me to make one of the widest and most general offers to unconverted sinners that we have anywhere in the Bible. The men to whom He was speaking were, beyond question, carnal minded and unconverted men. Yet even to them Jesus says, “The Son of man shall give to you.” To me it seems an unmistakable statement of Christ’s willingness and readiness to give pardon and grace to any sinner. It seems to me to warrant ministers in proclaiming Christ’s readiness to save anyone, and in offering salvation to anyone, if he will only repent and believe the Gospel. The favorite notion of some—that Christ is to be offered only to the elect, that grace and pardon are to be exhibited but not offered to a congregation, that we ought not to say broadly and fully to all whom we preach that “Christ is ready and willing to save you”—such notions, I say, appear to me entirely irreconcilable with the language of our Lord. Election, no doubt, is a mighty truth and a precious privilege. Complete and full redemption, no doubt, is the possession of none but the elect. But how easy it is, in holding these glorious truths, to become more systematic than the Bible and to spoil the Gospel by cramping and limiting it!

When our Lord says, “Because God the Father has set His seal on Him,” He probably refers to the custom of setting apart for any specific purpose, and marking for any peculiar use, by a seal. So also deeds and public documents were sealed to testify their execution and validity and give them authority. So it is said in Esther: “The writing that is written in the king’s name and *sealed* with the king’s ring, may no man reverse.” (Esther viii.8.) The expression applied to our Lord in this place certainly stands alone, but I think there can be little doubt as to its meaning. It signifies that in the eternal counsels of God the Father, He has sealed, commissioned, designated, and appointed the Son of man, the Incarnate Word, to be the Giver of everlasting life to man. It is an office for which He has been solemnly set apart by the Father.

Parkhurst thinks that the word means “Him has God the Father authorized with sufficient evidence, particularly by the voice from heaven;” and he refers the sealing entirely to the testimony which the Father had borne to the Son’s Messiahship. This also is Suicer’s view and Alford’s. Stier remarks: “This sealing is not to be understood merely of miracles, but of the stamp of divinity which was impressed upon His whole life and teaching.” This is Poole’s view and Hutcheson’s. It has been thought by some that there is a tacit reference here to the history of Joseph, and that our Lord meant that as Joseph was appointed to be the great almoner and reliever of the Egyptians by the king of Egypt, so He is appointed by the King of kings to relieve the spiritual famine of mankind. At any rate, it is an

apt and suitable illustration. The idea of Hilary and some others, that the expression “sealed” refers to our Lord being the “express image of the Father’s presence,” appears to me far-fetched and without foundation.

The last words of the verse would be rendered more literally, “Him has the Father sealed, even God.” It almost suggests the idea that our Lord desired to prevent His hearers supposing that He referred to Joseph as His father. It is as if He said, “the Father I mean, remember, is not an earthly father, but God.”

Rollock remarks on this verse that our Lord does not confine Himself to showing the folly of only seeking “the meat that perishes,” but is careful to show the true food of the soul and to point out who alone can give it. He observes that this is an example to us in teaching man the Gospel. The remedy must be as plainly taught and lifted up as the disease. He observes, truly, that none can speak better of the vanity of earthly things and the glory of heaven than many Papists do. But it is when they come to the feeding of man’s soul that they fail. They try to feed him with man’s merits, the intercession of saints, purgatory, and the like, and do not show him Christ.

It is noteworthy that it was the remembrance of this verse which made Henry Martyn persevere in preaching to poor Hindus at Dinapore in India. He had found they only came for temporal relief and cared nothing for his preaching, and he was on the point of giving up in despair. But this verse came across his mind. “If the

Lord Jesus was not ashamed to preach to mere bread-seekers," he thought, "who am I, that I should give up in disgust?"

JOHN 6:28-34

So then they said to him, "What must we do to accomplish the deeds God requires?" Jesus replied, "This is the deed God requires—to believe in the one whom he sent." So they said to him, "Then what miraculous sign will you perform, so that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, just as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"

Then Jesus told them, "I tell you the solemn truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but my Father is giving you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." So they said to him, "Sir, give us this bread all the time!"

These verses form the beginning of one of the most remarkable passages in the Gospels. None, perhaps, of our Lord's discourses has occasioned more controversy, and been more misunderstood, than that which we find in the Sixth Chapter of John.

We should observe, for one thing, in these verses, ***the spiritual ignorance and unbelief of the natural man.*** Twice over we see this brought out and exemplified. When our Lord instructed his hearers to "labor for the food which endures to eternal life," they

immediately began to think of ‘works to be done’, and a goodness of their own to be established. “What shall we do that we might work the works of God?” Doing, doing, doing, was their only idea of the way to heaven. Again, when our Lord spoke of Himself as One sent of God, and the need of believing on Him at once, they turn round with the question, “What sign show you? what do you work?” Fresh from the mighty miracle of the loaves and fishes, one might have thought they had had a sign sufficient to convince them. Taught by our Lord Jesus Christ himself, one might have expected a greater readiness to believe. But alas! there are no limits to man’s dullness, prejudice, and unbelief in spiritual matters. It is a striking fact that the only thing which our Lord is said to have “marveled” at during His earthly ministry, was man’s “unbelief.” (Mark 6:6.)

We shall do well to remember this, if we ever try to do good to others in the matter of religion. We must not be cast down because our words are not believed, and our efforts seem thrown away. We must not complain of it as a strange thing, and suppose that the people we have to deal with are peculiarly stubborn and hard. We must recollect that this is the very cup of which our Lord had to drink, and like Him we must patiently work on. If even He, so perfect and so plain a Teacher, was not believed, what right have we to wonder if men do not believe us? Happy are the ministers, and missionaries, and teachers who keep these things in mind! It will save them much bitter disappointment. In working for God, it is of first importance to understand what we must expect in man. Few things are so little realized as the extent of human unbelief.

We should observe, for another thing, in these verses, ***the high honor Christ puts on faith in Himself.*** The Jews had asked Him— "What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?" In reply He says— "This is the work of God, that you believe on him whom he has sent." A truly striking and remarkable expression! If any two things are put in strong contrast, in the New Testament, they are faith and works. Not working, but believing, not of works, but through faith—are words familiar to all careful Bible-readers. Yet here the great Head of the Church declares that believing on Him is the highest and greatest of all "works!" It is "the work of God."

Doubtless our Lord did not mean that there is anything meritorious in believing. Man's faith, at the very best, is feeble and defective. Regarded as a "work," it cannot stand the severity of God's judgment, deserve pardon, or purchase heaven. But our Lord did mean that faith in Himself, as the only Savior, is the first act of the soul which God requires at a sinner's hands. Until a man believes on Jesus, and rests on Jesus as a lost sinner, he is nothing. Our Lord did mean that faith in Himself is that act of the soul which specially pleases God. When the Father sees a sinner casting aside his own righteousness, and simply trusting in His dear Son, He is well pleased. Without such faith it is impossible to please God. Our Lord did mean that faith in Himself is the root of all saving religion. There is no life in a man until he believes. Above all, our Lord did mean that faith in Himself is the hardest of all spiritual acts to the natural man. Did the Jews want something to do in religion? Let them know

that the greatest thing they had to do was, to cast aside their pride, confess their guilt and need, and humbly believe.

Let all who know anything of true faith thank God and rejoice. Blessed are those who believe! It is an attainment which many of the wise of this world have never yet reached. We may feel ourselves to be poor, weak sinners. But do we believe? We may fail and come short in many things. But do we believe? He that has learned to feel his sins, and to trust Christ as a Savior, has learned the two hardest and greatest lessons in Christianity. He has been in the best of schools. He has been taught by the Holy Spirit.

We shall observe, lastly, in these verses, ***the far greater privileges of Christ's hearers than of those who lived in the times of Moses.*** Wonderful and miraculous as the manna was which fell from heaven, it was nothing in comparison to the true bread which Christ had to bestow on His disciples. He himself was the bread of God, who had come down from heaven to give life to the world. The bread which fell in the days of Moses could only feed and satisfy the body. The Son of man had come to feed the soul. The bread which fell in the days of Moses was only for the benefit of Israel. The Son of man had come to offer eternal life to the world. Those who ate the manna died and were buried, and many of them were lost forever. But those who ate the bread which the Son of man provided, would be eternally saved.

And now let us take heed to ourselves, and make sure that we are among those who eat the bread of God and live. Let us not be content

with lazy waiting, but let us actually come to Christ, and eat the bread of life, and believe to the saving of our souls. The Jews could say— "Evermore give us this bread." But it may be feared they went no further. Let us never rest until, by faith, we have eaten this bread, and can say, "Christ is mine. I have tasted that the Lord is gracious. I know and feel that I am His."

Technical Notes:

28. Then they said to him, What shall we do, that we may work the works of God? 29. Jesus answered and said to them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he has sent. 30. Therefore they said to him, What sign do you show that we may see and believe you? What work will you do? 31. Our fathers ate manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat. 32. Then Jesus said to them, Verily, verily, I say to you, Moses did not give you that bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. 33. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. 34. Then they said to him, Lord, evermore give us this bread.

28.—[*Then they said to Him.*] These words begin one of the most important of our Lord's discourses and one about which the widest differences of opinion prevail. These differences it will be time enough to consider when we come to the passage out of which they

arise. In the meantime, let us remember that the speakers before us were men whom our Lord had miraculously fed the day before and on whom He had just urged the paramount importance of seeking food and satisfaction for their souls. For anything we can see, they were Jews in a state of great spiritual ignorance and darkness. Yet even with them our Lord patiently condescends to hold a long conversation. Teachers who desire to walk in Christ's steps must aim at this kind of patience and be willing to talk with and teach the darkest and most ignorant men. It needs wisdom, faith, and patience.

[*What shall we do…works of God?*] This question is the language of men who were somewhat aroused and impressed, but still totally in the dark about the way to heaven. They feel that they are in the wrong road and that they ought to do something. But they are utterly ignorant what to do, and their only notion is the old self-righteous one of the natural man: "I must do something. I must perform some works to please God and buy admission to heaven." This seems to me the leading idea of the question before us. "Your command to labor or work for the meat that endures pricks our conscience. We admit that we ought to do something. Tell us what we must do, and we will try to do it." It is a case of a conscience partially aroused and put on its defense, groping after light. It is like the rich young man who came running to our Lord and saying, "What good thing shall I do?" (Matt. xix.16.)

The expression "What shall we do?" would be more literally

rendered, “What do we?” or “What must we do?” or “What are we to do?” The expression “that we might work” might have been rendered “that we might labor.” It is the same Greek word that is translated in the previous verse “labor.” The expression “the works of God” cannot, of course, mean “the same works that God works.” It means “the works that please God, that are agreeable to God’s mind and in accordance with God’s will.” (Thus 1 Cor. xv.58 and xvi.10.) This is the view of Glassius.

This question, “What shall we do?”, we must remember, ought never to be despised. Though it may often be the lazy expression of languid religious feeling, just half awakened, it is, at any rate, much better than having no feeling at all. The worst part of many persons’ spiritual condition lies here—that they are quite indifferent about their salvation; they never ask “What shall we do?” Many, no doubt, content themselves with saying “What shall I do?” And like those of whom we are reading, never get any further. But, on the other hand, in many cases “What shall I do?” is the beginning of eternal life, the first step toward heaven, the first breath of grace, the first spiritual pulsation. The Jews on the day of Pentecost said, “What must we do?” Saul, when the Lord met him near Damascus, said, “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?” The Philippian jailer said, “What must I do to be saved?” Whenever, therefore, we hear a person ask the question about his soul— “What shall I do?”—we must try to help him and put him in the right way. We never know what it may lead to. It may, perhaps, end in nothing and prove a mere temporary feeling. But it may also come to something and end in the conversion

of a soul.

29.—[Jesus answered… This is the work…believe…sent.] In this verse our Lord takes hold of the expression used by the Jews about "work" and answers them according to their state of mind. Did they ask what work they should do? Let them know that the first thing God called them to do was to believe in His Son, the Messiah whom he had sent and whom they saw before them.

When our Lord calls faith "the work of God," we must not suppose He means here that it is the work of His Spirit and His gift. This is undoubtedly true, but not the truth of the text. He only means that believing is "the work that pleases God" and is most agreeable to God's will and mind. Of course, every well-instructed Bible reader will remember that, strictly speaking, believing is so far from being a "work" that it is the very opposite of working. "To him who works not, but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted to him for righteousness." (Rom. iv.5.) But it is evident that our Lord accommodates His manner of speaking to the ignorant minds with whom He had to deal. Thus St. Paul calls the doctrine of faith the "law of faith." (Rom. iii.27.) It is much the same as if we said to an ignorant but awakened inquirer after salvation, who fancies he can do great things for his soul, "You talk of doing; but know that the first thing to be done is to believe on Christ. This is the first step toward heaven. You have done nothing until you believe. This is the thing that pleases God most. Without faith it is impossible to please Him. This is the hardest thing after all. Nothing will test the reality of

your feelings so much as a willingness to believe on Christ and cease from your own works. Begin, therefore, by believing." The very attempt to believe, in such a case, might prove useful. Let us note in this verse the marvelous wisdom with which our Lord suited His language to the minds of those He spoke to. It should be the constant aim of a religious teacher not merely to teach truth, but to teach truth wisely and with tact so as to arrest the attention of those he teaches. Half the religious teaching in the churches and schools of our day is entirely thrown away for lack of tact and power of adaptation in imparting it. To profess truth is one thing; to be able to impart it wisely, quite another.

Let us note in this verse the high honor our Lord puts upon faith in Himself. He makes it the root of all religion, the foundation stone of His kingdom, the very first step toward heaven. Christians sometimes talk ignorantly about faith and works, as if they were things that could be compared with one another as equals, or opposed to one another as enemies. But let them observe here that faith in Christ is so immeasurably the first thing in Christianity that in a certain sense it is the great work of works. In a certain sense, it is the seed and root of all religion, and we can do nothing until we believe. In short, the right answer to "What must I do?" is "Believe."

30.—[*Therefore, they said to Him.*] The secret unbelief of the Jews begins to come out in this verse. Nothing so thoroughly reveals the hearts of men as a summons to believe on Christ. Exhortations to work excite no prejudice and enmity. It is the exhortation to believe

that offends. [*What sign do you show.*] The word "you" in this sentence is emphatic in the Greek. It is as though the Jews said, "Who are YOU indeed to talk in this way? What miraculous evidence of your Messiahship have YOU got to show?" There is an evident sneer or sarcasm in the question.

[*That we may see and believe you.*] This seems to mean "that we may see, in the miracle wrought, unanswerable proof that You are the Messiah, and seeing the miracle may thus be able to believe You." This is the common language of many unconverted hearts. They want to see first and then to believe. But this is inverting God's order. Faith must come first and sight will follow.

There is a difference that ought to be marked between the "believing You" of this verse and the "believing on Him whom He has sent," of the preceding verse. "Believing on" is saving faith. "Believing" alone is merely believing a person to speak the truth. The devils "believe Christ," but do not believe "on Christ." We believe John, but do not believe "on him."

[*What work will you do?*] It seems at first most extraordinary that men who had seen such a miracle as that of feeding the five thousand with five loaves and had been themselves of the number fed, and this only twenty-four hours before, could ask such a question as this! Our first thought is that no greater sign or miracle could have been shown. But they speak as if it was forgotten! Surely when we see such proofs of the extreme dullness and deadness of

man's heart, we have no reason to be surprised at what we see among professing Christians.

Bucer and Grotius suggest that the speakers here can hardly be those who were witnesses of the miracle of feeding the five thousand. But I see no need for the suggestion when we look round us and observe what human nature is capable of, or even look at the book of Exodus and see how soon Israel in the wilderness forgot the miracles they had seen. Let us remember that this demand for "a sign," or great miracle, was common during our Lord's ministry. It seems to have been a habit of mind among the Jews. St. Paul says, "The Jews require a sign." (1 Cor. i.22.) They were always deceiving themselves with the idea that they wanted more evidence and pretending that if they had this evidence they would believe. Thousands in every age do just the same. They live on waiting for something to convince them and fancying that if they were convinced they would be different men in religion. The plain truth is that it is lack of heart, not lack of evidence, that keeps people back from Christ. The Jews had signs, evidence, and proofs of Christ's Messiahship in abundance, but they would not see them. Just so, many a professed unbeliever of our day has plenty of evidence around him, but he will neither look at it nor examine it. So true it is that "none are so blind as those that will not see." Quesnel remarks, "The atheist is still seeking after proofs of a Deity, though he walks every day amidst apparent miracles." We should observe that the Jews were willing enough to honor Christ as "a prophet." It was the doctrine of faith in Him that they could not receive. Christ the "teacher" is always more popular than Christ the

"sacrifice and substitute."

31.—[Our fathers…written…to eat.] The intention of the Jews in saying what they do in this verse is plain. They evidently implied a disparaging comparison between our Lord and Moses, and our Lord's miracle of feeding the multitude and the feeding of Israel with manna. It is as though they said, "Although You did work a miracle yesterday, You have done nothing greater than the thing that happened in the days when our fathers were fed with manna in the wilderness. The sign You have given is not so great a sign as that which Moses gave our fathers when he gave them bread from heaven to eat. Why then should we be called on to believe You? What proof have we that You are a prophet greater than Moses?" The word "manna" would have been more correctly rendered "the manna," *i.e.*, "the well-known and famous manna."

Let us note in this verse how prone men are to refer back at once to things done in the days of their "fathers" when saving religion is pressed home on their consciences. The woman of Samaria began talking about "our father Jacob"— "Are You greater than our father Jacob?" (John iv.12.) The Pharisees "built the sepulchers of the prophets." (Luke xi.47.) Dead teachers have always more authority than living ones. Let us mark that the miraculous feeding of Israel in the wilderness with manna is spoken of by the Jews as a notorious historical fact. Our Lord, moreover, in the following verse entirely assumes the truth of the miracle. The modern attempts to deny or explain away the miraculous facts recorded in the Old Testament are

here, as well as elsewhere, entirely irreconcilable with the manner in which they are always spoken of in the New Testament. He that denies Old Testament miracles is assaulting the knowledge and veracity of Christ and the Apostles. They believed them and spoke of them as historical facts. We never need be ashamed of being on their side.

Let us observe the acquaintance with Scripture which the Jews exhibit. They quote the 78th Psalm (ver. 24,25) as a sufficient proof of the fact they had just mentioned. A certain knowledge of Scripture, unhappily, may often be found in a very unbelieving heart. Knowledge of the letter of Scripture, at any rate, seems to have been very common among the Jews. (See Deut. vi.6,7.)

Whether or not they applied the sentence they quoted to Moses rather than God, I think admits of a question. Our Lord's words in the following verse would rather lead one to think that they meant that "Moses gave them bread from heaven."

32.—[Then Jesus...verily... Moses did not...heaven.] The object of our Lord in this verse is very plain. He replies to the argument of the Jews, that the miracle of the manna was a greater miracle than any He had come into the world to work, and that Moses was consequently a greater prophet than He was. Yet in the words He uses, it is not very easy to settle where the stress should be laid and what is the precise word on which the point of the answer rests.

(a) Some think that it means, "It was not Moses who gave you the

bread from heaven, but God." They lay the stress on *Moses*.
(b) Some think that it means, "Moses did not give you bread from the real heaven of heavens where God the Father dwells, but on a material food from the upper part of that atmosphere which surrounds this earth." They lay the stress on *heaven*.
(c) Some think that it means, "Moses did not give the true spiritual bread from heaven, though he gave you bread." They lay the stress on "*that* bread."
The second of these opinions seems to me quite inadmissible. The distinction between the heaven where God dwells and the upper region of our atmosphere was not, I believe, in our Lord's mind when He used the language He uses here. Moreover, it cannot be denied that the manna, though only material food, was heavenly food: *i.e.*, food supplied by God's miraculous interposition.

The true view seems to me to be contained in the first and third opinions taken together. The Greek bears it out by putting the word "not" in the very forefront of the sentence. "It was not Moses who gave you that bread from heaven, and even the bread that was given you was not that true bread which endures to everlasting life."

[*But my Father…from heaven*.] The use of the present tense should be noticed in this sentence. The idea seems to be, "What Moses could not give you, even the true bread which feeds the soul, my Father does give you, and is actually giving you at this moment, in that He gives you myself." The expression "gives you" must not be supposed to imply actual reception on the part of the Jews. It rather means

"giving" in the sense of "offering" for acceptance a thing which those to whom it is offered may not receive. It is a very remarkable saying, and one of those which seems to me to prove unanswerably that Christ is God's gift to the whole world, that His redemption was made for all mankind, that He died for all and is offered to all. It is like the famous texts, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son" (John iii.16.), and "God has given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son." (1 John v.11.) It is a gift, no doubt, which is utterly thrown away, like many other gifts of God to man, and is profitable to none but those who believe. But that God nevertheless does in a certain sense actually "*give*" His Son, as the true bread from heaven, even to the wicked and unbelieving, appears to me incontrovertibly proved by the words before us. It is a remarkable fact that Erskine, the famous Scotch seceder, based his right to offer Christ to all on these very words and defended himself before the General Assembly of the Kirk of Scotland on the strength of them. He asked the Moderator to tell him what Christ meant when He said, "My Father gives you the true bread from heaven," and got no answer. The truth is, I venture to think, that the text cannot be answered by the advocates of an extreme view of particular redemption. Fairly interpreted, the words mean that in some sense or another the Father does actually "give" the Son to those who are not believers. They warrant preachers and teachers in making a wide, broad, full, free, unlimited offer of Christ to all mankind without exception.

Even Hutcheson, the Scotch divine, though a strong advocate of

particular redemption, remarks: “Even such as are, at present, but carnal and unsound, are not secluded from the offer of Christ, but upon right terms may expect that He will be gifted to them.”

The expression “true” in this place, when applied to bread, means “true” as opposed to that which is only typical, emblematical, and temporal. The manna was undoubtedly real true food for the body. But it was a type of a far better food and was itself a thing which could not benefit the soul. Christ was the true spiritual food of which the manna was the type. (Examples of “true” in this sense may be seen in John i.9; xv.1; Heb. viii.2; ix.24.)

33.—[*The bread of God is he, etc.*] At first sight this verse seems to mean that “Christ coming down from heaven and giving life to the world is the true bread of God, the Divine food of man’s soul.” But it may well be doubted whether this is the precise meaning of the Greek words. I think, with Rollock, Bengel, Scholefield, Alford, and others, they would be more correctly rendered, “The bread of God is that bread which comes down from heaven.”

(a) For one thing, the Jews do not appear to have understood our Lord as yet to speak directly of Himself or of any person. Else why should they have said, “Lord, give us this bread.” Moreover, they did not murmur when they heard these words.
(b) For another thing, our Lord does not appear as yet to reveal fully that He was the bread of God. He reserves this till the 35th verse, and then declares it. At present He only gives a general intimation of a

certain Divine life-giving bread.
(c) For another thing, it is more in keeping with the gradual unfolding of truth, which appears so strikingly in this chapter, to suppose that our Lord begins with a general statement than to suppose that He speaks at once of Himself personally. First (1), the bread generally; then (2), I am the bread; then (3), the bread is My flesh; then (4), except ye eat the flesh and drink the blood, no life, etc. Such seems the gradual steps by which our Lord leads on His hearers in this wonderful chapter. I freely admit that the point is doubtful. Happily, whether we read "the bread of God is He" or "the bread of God is that bread," the doctrine is sound, Scriptural, and edifying.

The expression, "the bread of God," seems equivalent to the expression of the preceding verse, "the true bread." It is that real satisfying food for the soul which God has provided.
The expression, which "comes down from heaven," is an assertion of the Divine origin of that spiritual food which God had provided. Like the manna, it came down from heaven, but in a far higher, fuller, and deeper sense than the manna did. It was "that personal bread" of which they would soon hear more distinctly.

The expression, "gives life to the world," implies a contrast between the "bread of God" and the manna. The manna only supplied the hunger of the twelve tribes of Israel: viz., 600,000 men and their families. The bread of God was for the whole world and provided eternal life for every member of Adam's family who would eat of it,

whether Jew or Gentile. We should mark, again, what a strong argument these words supply in favor of the doctrine of Christ being God's gift to all. That all the world has not life from Christ and does not believe in Him, is undoubtedly true. But that life is provided in Christ and salvation sufficient for all the world, appears to be the natural interpretation of the text.

34.—[Then they said...give us this bread.] There is a striking resemblance between the thought expressed in this verse and the thought of the Samaritan woman when she heard of the living water that Christ could give: "Sir, give me this water that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw." (John iv.15.) In both cases we see desire called forth and excited by our Lord's words. There is a vague sense of something great and good being close at hand and a vague wish expressed to have it. In the case of the Samaritan woman, the wish proved the first spark in a thorough conversion to God. In the case of the Jews before us, the wish seems to have been nothing more than the "desire of the slothful," and to have gone no further. Wishing and admiring are not conversion. Let us note, carefully, that there is nothing hitherto to show that the Jews understood our Lord to call *Himself* the "bread of God," or "the true bread." That there was such a thing as the true and satisfying bread, that it must be the same as that "meat which endures to everlasting life," they seem to have concluded. And that it was something which our Lord could give, they inferred. But there is not a word to make us think they saw it at present to mean Christ Himself. This is a weighty argument in favor of that view of the preceding verse which I have tried to

support: viz., that it ought to be translated “the bread of God is that bread,” not “He.” There is some probability in Lightfoot’s remark that our Lord’s hearers, like most Jews, had their minds stuffed with foolish and superstitious notions about great banquets and feasts which they expected Messiah to give them whenever He appeared. They had a tradition that Leviathan and Behemoth were to be slain and their flesh made into a great feast for Israel when Messiah came. Our Lord, possibly, had this tradition in His mind and desired to turn the minds of the Jews to the true food which Messiah had come to give.

JOHN 6:35-40

Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. The one who comes to me will never go hungry, and the one who believes in me will never be thirsty. But I told you that you have seen me and still do not believe. Everyone whom the Father gives me will come to me, and the one who comes to me I will never send away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of the one who sent me. Now this is the will of the one who sent me—that I should not lose one person of every one he has given me, but raise them all up at the last day. For this is the will of my Father—for every one who looks on the Son and believes in him to have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.”

Three of our Lord Jesus Christ’s great sayings are strung together, like pearls, in this passage. Each of them ought to be

precious to every true Christian. All taken together, they form a mine of truth, into which he that searches need never search in vain.

We have, first, in these verses, ***a saying of Christ about Himself.*** We read that Jesus said— "I am the bread of life—he that comes to me shall never hunger, and he that believes on me shall never thirst."

Our Lord would have us know that He himself is the appointed food of man's soul. The soul of every man is naturally starving and famishing through sin. Christ is given by God the Father, to be the Satisfier, the Reliever, and the Physician of man's spiritual need. In Him and His mediatorial office—in Him and His atoning death—in Him and His priesthood—in Him and His grace, love, and power—in Him alone will empty souls find their needs supplied. In Him there is life. He is "the bread of life."

With what divine and perfect wisdom this name is chosen! Bread is *necessary* food. We can manage tolerably well without many things on our table, but not without bread. So is it with Christ. We must have Christ, or die in our own sins. Bread is food that *suits all*. Some cannot eat meat, and some cannot eat vegetables. But all like bread. It is food both for the Queen and the pauper. So is it with Christ. He is just the Savior that meets the needs of every class. Bread is food that we need *daily*. Other kinds of food we take, perhaps, only occasionally. But we need bread every morning and evening in our lives. So is it with Christ. There is no day in our lives

but we need His blood, His righteousness, His intercession, and His grace. Well may He be called, “The bread of life!”

Do we know anything of spiritual hunger? Do we feel anything of craving and emptiness in conscience, heart, and affections? Let us distinctly understand that Christ alone can relieve and supply us, and that it is His office to relieve. We must come to Him by faith. We must believe on Him, and commit our souls into His hands. So coming, He pledges His royal word we shall find lasting satisfaction both for time and eternity. It is written— “He that comes unto me shall never hunger, and he that believes on me shall never thirst.”

We have, secondly, in these verses, ***a saying of Christ about those who come to Him.*** We read that Jesus said— “Him that comes to me I will never cast out.”

What does “coming to Christ” mean? It means that movement of the soul which takes place when a man, feeling his sins, and finding out that he cannot save himself, hears of Christ, applies to Christ, trusts in Christ, lays hold on Christ, and leans all his weight on Christ for salvation. When this happens, a man is said, in Scripture language, to “come” to Christ.

What did our Lord mean by saying— “I will never cast him out”? He meant that He will not refuse to save any one who comes to Him, no matter what he may have been. His past sins may have been very great. His present weakness and infirmity may be very great. But does he come to Christ by faith? Then Christ will receive him

graciously, pardon him freely, place him in the number of His dear children, and give him everlasting life.

These are golden words indeed! They have smoothed down many a dying pillow, and calmed many a troubled conscience. Let them sink down deeply into our memories, and abide there continually. A day will come when flesh and heart shall fail, and the world can help us no more. Happy shall we be in that day, if the Spirit witnesses with our spirit that we have really come to Christ!

We have, lastly, in these verses, ***a saying of Christ about the will of His Father.*** Twice over come the solemn words— "This is the will of him that sent me." Once we are told it is His will, "that every one that sees the Son may have everlasting life." Once we are told it is His will that, "of all which he has given to Christ he shall lose nothing."

We are taught by these words that Christ has brought into the world a salvation open and free to everyone. Our Lord draws a picture of it, from the story of the bronze serpent, by which bitten Israelites in the wilderness were healed. Every one that chose to "look" at the bronze serpent might live. Just in the same way, every one who desires eternal life may "look" at Christ by faith, and have it freely. There is no barrier, no limit, no restriction. The terms of the Gospel are wide and simple. Every one may "look and live."

We are taught, furthermore, that ***Christ will never allow any soul that is committed to Him to be lost and cast away.*** He

will keep it safe, from grace to glory, in spite of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Not one bone of His mystical body shall ever be broken. Not one lamb of His flock shall ever be left behind in the wilderness. He will raise to glory, in the last day, the whole flock entrusted to His charge, and not one shall be found missing.

Let the true Christian feed on the truths contained in this passage, and thank God for them. Christ the Bread of life—Christ the Receiver of all who come to Him—Christ the Preserver of all believers—Christ is for every man who is willing to believe on Him, and Christ is the eternal possession of all who so believe. Surely this is glad tidings and good news!

Technical Notes:

35. And Jesus said to them, I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall never hunger, and he who believes on me shall never thirst. 36. But I said to you that ye also have seen me and do not believe. 37. All that the Father gives me shall come to me; and he who comes to me I will by no means cast out. 38. For I came down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. 39. And this is the Father's will who has sent me, that of all which he has given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. 40. And this is the will of him who sent me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes on him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.

35.—[*Jesus said to them, I am the bread of life.*] In this verse our Lord begins to speak in the first person. Henceforth in this discourse, we hear directly of "I" and "Me" no less than thirty-five times. He drops all further reserve as to His meaning and tells the Jews plainly, "I am the bread of life"—the true bread from heaven, the bread of God which, coming down from heaven, gives life to the world.

The "bread of life" means that spiritual bread which conveys life to the soul; that living bread which does not merely feed the body, like common bread, but supplies eternal sustenance and nourishment to the eternal soul. It is like "the water of life" (Rev. xxii.17) and "living water" (John iv.10).

The reasons why Christ calls Himself "bread" appear to be such as these. He is intended to be to the soul what bread is to the body—its food. Bread is necessary food. When men can afford to eat nothing else, they eat bread. It is food that all need; the king and the pauper both eat bread. It is food that suits all; old and young, weak and strong, all like bread. It is the most nourishing kind of food. Nothing does so much good and is so indispensable to bodily health as bread. It is food that we need daily and are never tired of. Morning and night we go on all our lives eating bread. The application of these various points to Christ is too plain to need any explanation.

One great general lesson is doubtless intended to be drawn from Christ's selection of "bread" as an emblem of Himself. He is given to

be the great supply of all the needs of men's souls. Whatever our spiritual necessity may be, however starving, famished, weak, and desperate our condition, there is enough in Christ and to spare. He is "bread." Rollock remarks that as soon as the slightest spiritual desire is manifested by anyone, however ignorant and weak, he should be at once directed to Christ. It is what our Lord Himself did. As soon as the Jews said, "Lord, evermore give us this bread," He cried, "I am the bread of life." He never "quenched the smoking flax."

[*He who comes…never thirst.*] The words "comes" and "believes" in this sentence appear to mean very nearly one and the same thing. To "come" to Christ is to "believe" on Him, and to "believe" on Him is to "come" to Him. Both expressions mean that act of the soul whereby, under a sense of its sins and necessity, it applies to Christ, lays hold on Christ, trusts itself to Christ, casts itself on Christ. "Coming," is the soul's movement towards Christ. "Believing" is the soul's venture on Christ. If there is any difference, it is that "coming" is the first act of the soul when it is taught by the Holy Ghost, and that "believing" is a continued act or habit which never ends. No man "comes" who does not believe; and all who come go on believing.

When our Lord says "shall never hunger" and "shall never thirst," he does not mean that a believer in Christ shall no longer feel any need, emptiness, or deficiency within him. This would not be correct. The best of believers will often cry, like St. Paul, "Oh, wretched man that I am!" (Rom. vii.24.) The man who "hungers and thirsts after righteousness" is blessed. (Matt. v.6.) What our Lord does mean is

that faith in Christ shall supply a man's soul with a peace and satisfaction that shall never be entirely taken from him, that shall endure forever. The man who eats and drinks material food shall soon be hungry and thirsty as ever. But the man who comes to Christ by faith gets hold of something that is an everlasting possession. He shall never die of spiritual famine and perish for lack of soul nourishment. He may have his low feelings at seasons. He may even lose his sense of pardon and his enjoyment of religion. But once in Christ by faith, he shall never be cast away and starved in hell. He shall never die in his sins.

(a) Let us note in this verse how simple are the figures by which our Lord brings His own sufficiency within the reach of man's understanding. He calls Himself "bread." It was an idea that even the poorest hearer could understand. He that would do good to the poor need never be ashamed of using the simplest and most familiar illustrations. (b) Let us note that faith is a *movement* of the soul. Its first action is "coming" to Christ. It subsequent life is a constant daily repetition of its first action. To tell people to "sit still and wait" is poor theology. We should bid them arise and come.

(c) Let us note that coming to Christ is the true secret of obtaining soul satisfaction and inward peace. Until we take that step, our consciences are never easy. We "hunger and thirst" and find no relief.

(d) Let us note that true believers shall never be altogether cast off and forsaken of God. The man who comes to Christ shall "never hunger nor thirst." The text is one among many proofs of the perseverance of the saints.

(e) Let us finally note how simple are the terms of the Gospel. It is but coming and believing, that Christ asks at our hands. The most ignorant, the most sinful, the most hardened, need not despair. They have but to "come and believe."

Luther, quoted by Besser, remarks on this verse: "These are indeed dear and precious words which it is not enough for us merely to know. We must turn them to account and say, Upon these words I will go to sleep at night and get up in the morning; leaning upon them will I sleep and wake, and work and travel. For though everything were to go to ruin, and though father and mother, emperor and pope, princess and lords, all forsake me, though even Moses could not help me and I had only Christ to look to, yet He will help me. For His words are sure, and He says, 'Hold fast by Me; come thou to Me, and thou shalt live.' The meaning of these words is that whoever can believe on that one Man who is called Jesus Christ, shall be satisfied and cannot suffer either hunger or thirst."

36.—[*But I said…do not believe.*] It is not quite clear to what our Lord refers in this verse when He says, "I said." Some think that He is referring specially to His own words in the 26th verse: "Ye seek Me, not because ye saw the miracles," etc. Others think that He

refers generally to the testimony He had frequently borne against the unbelief of the Jewish people in almost every place where He preached. It seems to me most natural to connect the verse with the saying of the Jews in the 30th verse. They had there said, “What sign do You show then, that we may see and believe You?” Why should we not suppose our Lord, in this verse, to take up that saying and reply, “You talk of seeing and believing; I tell you again and have long told you, that ye have seen Me and yet do not believe”?

The connecting link with the preceding verse appears to be something of this kind: “I am quite aware that I speak in vain to many of you, of the bread of life and of believing. For I have said often, and now say it again, that many of you have both seen Me and my miracles and yet do not believe. Nevertheless, I am not discouraged. I know, in spite of your unbelief, that some will be saved.”

The unbelief of human nature is painfully exhibited in this verse. Some could even see and hear Christ himself, while He was on earth, and yet remain unbelieving! Surely we have no right to be surprised if we find like unbelief now. Men may actually see Christ with their bodily eyes and have no faith.

37.—[*All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me.*] The connection of this verse with the preceding one seems to be this: “Your unbelief does not move Me or surprise Me. I foresaw it and have been aware of it. Nevertheless, your unbelief will not prevent God’s purposes

taking effect. Some will believe though you remain unbelieving. Everything that the Father gives Me will come to Me in due time, believe, and be saved. In spite of your unbelief, all my sheep shall sooner or later come to Me by faith and be gathered within my fold. I see your unbelief with sorrow but not with anxiety and surprise. I am prepared for it. I know that you cannot alter God's purposes; and in accordance with those purposes, a people will come to Me though you do not."

Luther, quoted by Besser, supposes our Lord to say, "This sermon shall not on your account be of none effect and remain without fruit. If you will not, another will; if you do not believe, yet another does." The English language fails to give the full sense of the Greek in this sentence. The literal meaning of the Greek is not "all persons whom the Father gives shall come," but "everything—the whole thing." It is not a masculine plural, but a neuter singular. The idea is either, "that whole mystical body, the company of my believing people, shall come to Me," or else "every single part or jot or member of my mystical body shall come to Me, and not one be found missing at last."

We learn from these words the great and deep truth of God's election and appointment to eternal life of a people out of this world. The Father from all eternity has given to the Son a people to be His own peculiar people. The saints are given to Christ by the Father as a flock, which Christ undertakes to save completely and to present complete at the last day. (See John xvii.2,6,9,11,12; and xviii.9.) However wicked men may abuse this doctrine, it is full of comfort to

a humble believer. He did not begin the work of his [own] salvation. He was given to Christ by the Father, by an everlasting covenant.

We learn from these words the great mark of God's elect whom He has given to Christ. They all come to Christ by faith. It is useless for anyone to boast of his election unless he comes to Christ by faith. Until a man comes humbly to Jesus and commits his soul to Him as a believer, we have no dependable evidence of the man's election. Beza remarks, "Faith in Christ is a certain testimony of our election, and consequently of our future glorification."

Ferus says, "Cleaving to Christ by faith, you are sure of your predestination." We learn from these words the irresistible power of God's electing grace. All who are given to Christ shall come to Him. No obstacle, no difficulty, no power of the world, the flesh, and the devil can prevent them. Sooner or later they will break through all and surmount all. If "given," they will "come." To ministers the words are full of comfort. [*He who comes to me I will by no means cast out*.] These words declare Christ's willingness to save everyone that comes to Him. There is an infinite readiness in Christ to receive, pardon, justify, and glorify sinners. The expression, "I will by no means cast out," implies this. It is a very powerful form of negation. "So far from casting out the man that comes to Me, I will receive him with joy when he comes. I will not refuse him on account of past sins. I will not cast him off again because of present weaknesses and infirmities. I will keep him to the end by my grace. I will confess him before my Father in the judgment-day, and glorify him forever. In

short, I will do the very opposite of casting him out."

The distinction between the language of this clause of the text and that of the former clause should be carefully noticed. They who "shall come to Christ" are "that whole thing" which the Father gives. But is "each individual man" that comes, of whom Jesus says, "I will by no means cast him out."

To "cast out of the synagogue," to "cut off from the congregation of Israel," to "shut out of the camp," as the leper was shut out (Lev. xiii.46), were ideas with which all Jews were familiar. Our Lord seems to say, "I will do the very opposite of all this."

A. Clarke thinks that the idea is that of a poor person coming to a rich man's house for shelter and relief, who is kindly treated and not "cast out." But may we not suppose, after all, that the latent thought is that of the man fleeing to the city of refuge according to the law of Moses, who, once admitted, is safe and not "cast out"? (Num. xxxv.11,12.) We learn from these words that the one point we should look to is "whether we do really come to Christ." Our past lives may have been very bad. Our present faith may be very weak. Our repentance and prayers may be very imperfect and poor. Our knowledge of religion may be very scanty. But do we come to Christ? That is the question. If so, the promise belongs to us. Christ will not cast us out. We may remind Him boldly of His own word.

We learn from these words that Christ's offers to sinners are wide,

broad, free, unlimited, and unconditional. We must take care that we do not spoil and hamper them by narrow statements. God's election must never be thrust nakedly at unconverted sinners in preaching the Gospel. It is a point with which at present they have nothing to do. No doubt it is true that none will come to Christ but those who are given to Him by the Father. But who those are that are so given we cannot tell and must not attempt to define. All we have to do is to invite everyone, without exception, to come to Christ and to tell men that everyone who does come to Christ shall be received and saved. To this point we must carefully stick. Rollock observes how close this glorious promise stands to our Lord's words about God's election and predestination. Election should never be stated nakedly and baldly, without reminding those who hear it of Christ's infinite willingness to receive and save all.

Hutcheson remarks: "Saints do indeed oftimes complain of casting off, but they are the words of sense and not of faith. They may seem to be cast off when really it is not so."

38.—[*For I came…the will of him who sent me.*] The meaning of this verse appears to be as follows. "I did not become man and enter this world to do anything of my own independent will and volition, and without reference to the will of my Father. On the contrary, I have come to carry out His will. As God, my will is in entire harmony and unity with my Father's will, because I and my Father are one. As man, I have no other will and desire than to do that which is in entire accordance with the will of Him who has sent Me to be the Mediator

and Friend of sinners." What the Father's will about man is, our Lord goes on immediately to state in the two following verses. One part of the Father's will is that nothing should be lost that He has given to the Son. That "will" Christ came to carry out and accomplish. Another part of the Father's will is that everyone who trusts in Christ may be saved. That "will" again Christ came to carry out and accomplish. The verse before us and the two following are closely connected and should be looked at as one great thought. It was the Father's "will" that free salvation by Christ should be brought near and within the reach of everyone, and it was also His "will" that every believer in Christ should be completely and finally saved. To work out and accomplish this will of His Father was Christ's object in coming into the world.

The expression, "I came down from heaven," is a strong proof of the preexistence of Christ. It could not possibly be said of any prophet or apostle that he "came down from heaven." It is a heavy blow at the Socinian theory that Christ was nothing more than a man.

39.—[*This is the Father's will who has sent Me*.] In this verse and the following, Christ explains fully what was the Father's will concerning the Son's mission into the world. It was that He should receive all and lose none, that anyone might come to Him, and that no comer should be lost. It is a cheering and pleasant thought that free and full salvation and the final perseverance of believers should be so expressly declared to be "the will of the Father."

[*Of all…lose nothing*.] Here again there is the same form of speech as in the 37th verse. Literally rendered the sentence would be, “that of the whole thing which He has given Me, I should not lose anything out of it.” The “losing” must necessarily mean, that “I should let nothing be taken away by the power of Satan and allow nothing to come to ruin by its own inherent weakness.” The general sense of the sentence must be, “that I should allow no member of my mystical body to be lost.” We have in these words the doctrine of the final perseverance of true believers. It seems hard to imagine stronger words than these to express the doctrine. It is the Father’s will that no one whom He has given to Christ should be lost. His will must surely take effect. True believers may err and fail in many things, but they shall never finally be cast away. The will of God the Father and the power of Christ the Son are both engaged on their side.

We have in these words abundant comfort for all fearful and faint-hearted believers. Let such remember that if they “come” to Christ by faith, they have been “given” to Christ by the Father; and if given by the Father to Christ, it is the Father’s will that they should never be cast away. Let them lean back on this thought when cast down and disquieted— “It is the Father’s will that I should not be lost.”

[*Should raise…last day*.] We have in these words the Father’s will that all Christ’s members shall have a glorious resurrection. They shall not only not be lost and cast away while they live, they shall be raised again to glory after they die. Christ will not only justify and pardon, and keep and sanctify, but He will do even more. He will

raise them up at the last day to a life of glory. It is the Father's will that He should do so. The bodies of the saints are provided for no less than their souls The idea of some writers, which Bullinger mentions with some favor, that the "last day" means the day of each believer's death and the "raising" his translation in the hour of death to paradise, seems to me utterly destitute of foundation.

The words before us are a strong argument for the "first resurrection" as a peculiar privilege of believers. It is said here that believers shall be "raised again" as a special honor and mercy conferred upon them. Yet it is no less clearly said in the 5th chapter, verse 29, that "ALL that are in the graves shall come forth," both good and bad. It follows, therefore, that there is a resurrection of which saints alone are to be the partakers, distinct from the resurrection of the wicked. What can this be but the first resurrection? (Rev. xx.5.) It must, however, in fairness be remembered that resurrection is sometimes spoken of in Scripture as if it was the peculiar privilege of believers and a thing in which the wicked have no part. In the famous chapter in Corinthians, it is clear that the resurrection of the saints is the only thing in St. Paul's mind. (1 Cor. xv.) That the wicked will be raised again, as well as the righteous, is clearly asserted in several places. But it is sometimes a thing kept in the background.

40.—[*This is the will of Him who sent Me.*] These words are repeated in this verse to show that it is no less the Father's will that Christ should receive sinners than that Christ should preserve saints. Both things are alike the purpose and intention of God.

[Everyone…believes..everlasting life.] These words mean that "everyone, without exception, who by faith looks to Christ and trusts in Him for salvation, is allowed by God the Father's appointment to have part in the salvation Christ has provided." There is no barrier, difficulty, or objection. "Everyone" is the expression. No one can say he is excluded. "Seeing and believing" are the only things required. No one can say that the terms are too hard. Does he see and believe? Then he may have everlasting life.

The expression "sees the Son" in this sentence must evidently mean more than mere seeing with the bodily eyes. It is the looking with faith at Christ. (See John xii.45 where the same Greek word is used.) It is such a look as that of the Israelites who looked at the brazen serpent and, looking, were healed. (See John iii.14,15 and Num. xxi.9.) I believe that this was in our Lord's mind when He spoke the words of this verse. Just as every serpent-bitten Israelite might look at the brazen serpent and, as soon as he looked, was cured, so every sin-stricken man may look to Christ and be saved.

[*I will raise him up at the last day*.] These words are repeated, I believe, in order to make it sure that a glorious resurrection shall be the portion of everyone that only "looks" at Christ and believes, as well as of those who enjoy the "assurance" that they are given to Christ and shall never be cast away. The humblest believer shall be raised again by Christ at the first resurrection and eternally glorified, just as certainly as the oldest saint in the family of God.

Stier remarks: “This raising up at the last day, twice emphatically affirmed, points out to us the final goal of salvation and preserving power; after the attainment of which there is no more danger of perishing, or losing again that eternal life, which is now, the body being raised, consummate.”

Let us mark what abundant comfort there is in this verse for all doubting, trembling sinners who feel their sins and yet fancy there is no hope for them. Let such observe that it is the will of God the Father that “everyone” who looks at Christ by faith may have everlasting life. It would be impossible to open a wider door. Let men look and live. The will of God is on their side.

Calvin remarks on this verse: “The way to obtain salvation is to obey the Gospel of Christ. If it is the will of God that those whom He has elected shall be saved, and if in this manner He ratifies and executes His eternal decrees, whoever he be that is not satisfied with Christ but indulges in curious inquiries about eternal predestination, such a person desires to be saved contrary to the purposes of God. They are madmen who seek their own salvation, or that of others, in the whirlpool of predestination, not keeping the way of salvation which is exhibited to them.”— “To every man, therefore, his faith is a sufficient attestation of the eternal predestination of God.”

JOHN 6:41-51

Then the Jews who were hostile to Jesus began complaining about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven," and they said, "Isn't this Jesus the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?"

Jesus replied, "Do not complain about me to one another. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Everyone who hears and learns from the Father comes to me. (Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God—he has seen the Father.) I tell you the solemn truth, the one who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that has come down from heaven, so that a person may eat from it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats from this bread he will live forever. The bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

Truths of the weightiest importance follow each other in rapid succession in the chapter we are now reading. There are probably very few parts of the Bible which contain so many "deep things" as the Sixth Chapter of John. Of this the passage before as is a signal example.

We learn, for one thing, from this passage, that ***Christ's lowly condition, when He was upon earth, is a stumbling-block***

to the natural man. We read that "the Jews murmured, because Jesus said, I am the bread that came down from heaven. And they said, Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that he says, I came down from heaven?" Had our Lord come as a conquering king, with wealth and honors to bestow on His followers, and mighty armies in His train, they would have been willing enough to receive Him. *But a poor, and lowly, and suffering Messiah was an offence to them*. Their pride refused to believe that such an one was sent from God.

There is nothing that need surprise us in this. It is human nature showing itself in its true colors. We see the same thing in the days of the Apostles. Christ crucified was "to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness." (1 Cor. 1:23.) The cross was an offence to many wherever the Gospel was preached. We may see the same thing in our own times. There are thousands around us who loathe the distinctive doctrines of the Gospel on account of their humbling character. They cannot tolerate the atonement, and the sacrifice, and the substitution of Christ. His moral teaching they approve. His example and self-denial they admire. But speak to them of Christ's blood—of Christ being made sin for us—of Christ's death being the corner-stone of our hope—of Christ's poverty being our riches—and you will find they hate these things with a deadly hatred. Truly the offence of the cross is not yet ceased!

We learn, for another thing, from this passage, ***man's natural helplessness and inability to repent or believe.*** We find our

Lord saying— “No man can come unto me, except the Father who has sent me draws him.” Until the Father draws the heart of man by His grace, man will not believe.

The solemn truth contained in these words is one that needs careful weighing. It is vain to deny that without the grace of God no one ever can become a true Christian. We are spiritually dead, and have no power to give ourselves life. We need a new principle put in us from above. Facts prove it. Preachers see it. The Tenth Article of our own Church expressly declares it— “The condition of man after the fall of Adam is such that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and good works, to faith and calling upon God.” This witness is true.

But after all, of what does this inability of man consist? In what part of our inward nature does this impotence reside? Here is a point on which many mistakes arise. Forever let us remember that the *will* of man is the part of him which is in fault. His inability is not physical, but moral. It would not be true to say that a man has a real wish and desire to come to Christ, but no power to come. It would be far more true to say that a man has no power to come because he has no desire or wish. It is not true that he would come if he could. It is true that he could come if he would. The corrupt will—the secret disinclination—the lack of heart, are the real causes of unbelief. It is here the mischief lies. The power that we lack is a new will. It is precisely at this point that we need the “drawing” of the Father.

These things, no doubt, are deep and mysterious. By truths like these God proves the faith and patience of His people. Can they believe Him? Can they wait for a fuller explanation at the last day? What they see not now they shall see hereafter. One thing at any rate is abundantly clear, and that is—man's responsibility for his own soul. His inability to come to Christ does not make an end of his accountableness. Both things are equally true. If lost at last, it will prove to have been his own fault. His blood will be on his own head. Christ would have saved him, but he would not be saved. He would not come to Christ, that he might have life.

We learn, lastly, in this passage, that ***the salvation of a believer is a present thing.*** Our Lord Jesus Christ says— "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believes on me HAS everlasting life." Life, we should observe, is a present possession. It is not said that he shall have it at last, in the judgment day. It is now, even now, in this world, his property. He has it the very day that he believes.

The subject is one which it much concerns our peace to understand, and one about which errors abound. How many seem to think that forgiveness and acceptance with God are things which we cannot attain in this life—that they are things which are to be earned by a long course of repentance and faith and holiness—things which we may receive at the bar of God at last, but must never pretend to touch while we are in this world! It is a complete mistake to think so. The very moment a sinner believes on Christ he is justified and accepted. There is no condemnation for him. He has peace with God,

and that immediately and without delay. His name is in the book of life, however little he may be aware of it. He has a title to heaven, which death and hell and Satan can not overthrow. Happy are those who know this truth! It is an essential part of the good news of the Gospel.

After all, the great point we have to consider is whether we believe. What shall it profit us that Christ has died for sinners, if we do not believe on Him? “He that believes on the Son has everlasting life—and he that believes not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abides on him.” (John 3:36.)

Technical Notes:

41. The Jews then murmured at him, because he said, I am the bread which came down from heaven. 42. And they said, Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that he says, I came down from heaven? 43. Jesus therefore answered and said to them, Do not murmur among yourselves. 44. No man can come to me except the Father who has sent me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. 45. It is written in the Prophets, *And they shall all be taught by God*. Therefore, every man who has heard and has learned of the Father comes to me. 46. Not that any man has seen the Father, except he who is of God; he has seen the Father. 47. Verily, verily, I say to you, He who believes on me has everlasting life. 48. I am that bread of life. 49. Your fathers ate manna

in the wilderness and are dead. 50. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat of it and not die. 51. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If any man eats of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.

41.—[*The Jews then murmured at Him.*] The verb is here in the imperfect tense. It seems to mean, "the Jews were then murmuring, or beginning to murmur about Him." It was a murmuring that went on among themselves concerning our Lord and was not openly expressed. "At Him" would be more literally rendered "about Him."

I venture to think there is a break, pause, or slight interval implied at this point of the conversation. The speakers called here "the Jews" do not appear to be the same who followed our Lord over the lake after being fed with the loaves and fishes and began the conversation by saying, "When came thou hither?" (Ver. 25.) They would rather appear to be the principal people, or leaders, in the synagogue at Capernaum. They had probably heard our Lord's words to the people who had followed Him over the lake, and were murmuring at them. To my own mind, it is by no means clear that there was not at this point a change in the *place* where the conversation was carried on. Up to this point, it looks as if the conversation was carried on in the open air. At this point our Lord may have gone into the synagogue, and the rulers of it may have taken up the subject and been murmuring about it when He went in. I throw out this theory with

diffidence. It must at least be conceded that the expressions at verse 25— "when they had found Him at the other side of the sea…when came Thou hither?"—can hardly be supposed to mean that our Lord was *then* in the synagogue. On the other hand, it is perfectly clear from verse 59 that the latter part of His discourse, at any rate, was spoken "in the synagogue at Capernuam." Where, then, I ask, does the slight break come in which is necessary to reconcile these beginning and ending statements? I reply that it seems to me to come in here, at this very 41st verse. The language, I think, implies a slight pause in time and a change in the speaker. Stier, I am aware, calls this idea "highly artificial." But I cannot see any force in the objection, and I see much difficulty in any other view.

Cyril remarks that a readiness to murmur seemed to be hereditary with the Jews. From the days when they murmured in the wilderness, it was always the same.

[Because He said, I am the bread…from heaven.] It does not appear that our Lord had actually used these words. We must therefore suppose that the Jews constructed the saying out of three things that our Lord had said. One was, "I am the bread of life;" another, "I came down from heaven;" and another, "The bread of God is he (or it) which comes down from heaven."

42.—[*Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph?*] The word "this" in the Greek has a latent sneer of contempt about it which our English version cannot fully convey. It is as if they said, "Is not this fellow,"

etc. The expression “the son of Joseph” shows what was the impression that the Jews commonly had about our Lord’s birth. They believed Him to be the naturally begotten son of Joseph the husband of Mary. The annunciation by the angel Gabriel, the miraculous conception, the miraculous birth of our Lord, are matters of which the Jews apparently had not any knowledge. Throughout the whole of our Lord’s ministry, we never find them mentioned. For some wise reason a total silence was observed about them until after our Lord’s death, resurrection, and ascension. It was not probably till after the death of the Virgin Mary and all her family that this great and deep subject was allowed to be much brought forward in the Church. We can easily see that an unhallowed curiosity might have risen on questions connnected with the incarnation, which would only have done harm.

[*Whose father and mother we know*.] These words seem to show that Joseph was still living at this time. They could hardly have been used if Joseph was dead. They also show that Joseph and Mary were known at Capernaum, where this conversation was held. They had either removed there from Nazareth, or else were so connected with Capernaum and such frequent visitors there that the inhabitants knew them.

[*How is it then that he says*.] These words would have been more literally rendered, “How then does this fellow say?” Again, like the beginning of the verse, there is something scornful in the phrase.

[*I came down from heaven.*] The thing that seems to have vexed and angered the Jews was that our Lord should so openly declare His divine origin by talking of "coming down from heaven." They were offended at the idea of one so lowly in dress, circumstances, and position taking on Himself to say that He was one who had "come down from heaven." Here, as elsewhere, Christ's humiliation was the great stumbling-block. Human nature would not so much object to a conquering Christ—a Christ with a crown and an army, a Christ with wealth to shower on all His followers. But a Christ in poverty—a Christ preaching nothing but heart religion, a Christ followed by none but poor fishermen and publicans, a Christ coming to suffer and die and not to reign—such a Christ was always an offense to many in this world and always will be.

Rollock remarks, with great truth, that with many persons "reasoning" (so called) is the grand obstacle to conversion.

43.—[*Jesus answered and said.*] This phrase is almost the same as that used in chapter 5 verse 19, when our Lord began what many think was His formal defense of Himself before the Sanhedrim. It leads me to think, as I have already said, that there is a slight break at this point of the chapter, and a slight pause, if only of a few hours, in time. Our Lord knew by His divine knowledge that the Jews were murmuring and saying contemptuous things about Him, and He therefore took up their thoughts and made a reply to them.
[*Do not murmur among yourselves.*] This seems a mild hint that they need not waste their time in murmuring. It neither surprised

our Lord nor discouraged Him. It is as though He said, “Your murmuring is only what I am prepared to expect. I know what human nature is. I am not moved by it. Think not that your unbelief will shake my confidence in my divine mission or prevent my saying what I do. I know that you cannot naturally understand such things as I am speaking of, and I will proceed to tell you why. But cease from these useless murmurings, which neither surprise nor stop Me.”

Webster thinks that the idea is the same as that in John iii.7-12: “I have harder things still to say.” (See v.28.)

44.—[No man can come… Father…draws him.] The connection between this verse and the preceding one is not clear. Like many passages in St. John’s writings, the language is elliptical and the link must be supplied. But the precise link in the present case is not very evident. I believe it is something of this sort: “You are murmuring among yourselves because I speak of coming down from heaven, and you are making my apparently low origin an excuse for not believing on Me. But all the time the fault is not in my sayings but in your lack of grace and your unbelief. There is a deeper and more solemn truth to which you seem totally blind, and that is man’s need of God’s grace in order to believe on Me. You are never likely to believe until you acknowledge your own corruption and ask for grace to draw your souls to Me. I am aware that it needs something more than argument and reasoning to make anyone believe in Me. Your unbelief and murmuring do not surprise Me or discourage Me. I neither expect to

see you nor anyone else believe until you are drawn by my Father." This, or something like it, seems to me the connecting link. One thing, at any rate, is certain: our Lord did not mean to excuse the unbelief of His hearers. He rather desired to magnify their danger and guilt and to make them see that faith in Him was not so easy an affair as they supposed. It was not knowledge of His origin alone, but the drawing grace of God the Father which they needed. Let them awake to see that, and cry for grace before it was too late. The general lesson of the sentence, apart from the connection, is one of vast importance. Our Lord lays down the great principal "that no man whatsoever can come to Christ by faith, and really believe in Him, unless God the Father draws him so to come and inclines his will to believe." The nature of man since the fall is so corrupt and depraved that even when Christ is made known and preached to him, he will not come to Him and believe in Him without the special grace of God inclining his will and giving him a disposition to come. Moral suasion and advice alone will not bring him. He must be "drawn."

This is, no doubt, a very humbling truth, and one which in every age has called forth the hatred and opposition of man. The favorite notion of man is that he can do what he likes—repent or not repent, believe or not believe, come to Christ or not come—entirely at his own discretion. In fact, man likes to think that his salvation is in his own power. Such notions are flatly contradictory to the text before us. The words of our Lord here are clear and unmistakable and cannot be explained away.

(a) This doctrine of human impotence, whether man likes it or not, is the uniform teaching of the Bible. The natural man is dead and must be born again and brought to life. (Eph. ii.1.) He has neither knowledge, nor faith, nor inclination toward Christ until grace comes into his heart. Man never of himself begins with God. God must first begin with man. And this beginning is just the "drawing" of the text.
(b) It is the doctrine of the Church of England, as shown in the 10th Article, and of every protestant confession of faith which dates from the 16th and 17th centuries.
(c) Last, but not least, it is the doctrine of experience. The longer ministers of the Gospel live, the more do they find that there is something to be done in every heart which neither preaching, teaching, arguing, exhorting, nor means of grace can do. When all has been done, God must "draw" or there is no fruit. The more the holiest Christians are examined, the more general is their testimony found that without grace they never would have been converted, and that God "drew" them or else they never would have come to Christ. And it is a curious fact, moreover, that many who profess to deny man's impotence in theory often confess it in their prayers and praises, almost in spite of themselves. Many people are very low Armenians in print or in the pulpit, but excellent Calvinists on their knees.

When our Lord says, "No man can come to Me," we must carefully remember that it is *moral* inability and not *physical* inability that He speaks of. We are not to suppose that any man can have a sincere and hearty wish to come to Christ and yet be prevented by some

mysterious impotence. The impotence lies in man's will. He cannot come because he will not come. There is an Old Testament sentence which throws much light on the expression before us. It is said of Joseph's brethren that "they hated him and *could not* speak peaceably to him." (Gen. xxxvii.4.) Anyone must see at a glance what the "could not" means. They "could not" because they would not.

When our Lord says, "Except the Father draws him," we must not suppose that the "drawing" means such a violent drawing as the drawing of a prisoner to a jail or of an ox to the slaughterhouse—a drawing, in short, against a man's will. It is a drawing which the Father effects through the man's own will by creating a new principle within him. By the unseen agency of the Holy Ghost, He works on the man's heart (without the man himself knowing it at the time) and inclines him to think, induces him to feel, shows him his sinfulness, and so leads him at length to Christ. Everyone that comes to Christ is so drawn.

Scott remarks: "The Father, as it were, cures the fever of the soul; He creates the appetite; He sets the provisions before the sinner; He convinces him that they are wholesome and pleasant and that he is welcome; and thus the man is drawn to come and eat and live forever." The well-known quotation from Augustine, which seems so great a favorite with many commentators on this text, appears to me defective. He argues that God's drawing of men to Christ is so entirely a drawing through man's will that it is like drawing the sheep by offering it food, like drawing and alluring a child by offering him

nuts. But there is this wide difference—that both the sheep and the child have a natural taste and inclination for the thing offered; man, on the contrary, has none at all. God's first act is to give man a will to come to Christ. As the 10th Article of the Church of England says, we need "the grace of Christ preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working with us when we have that good will."

The theory that all members of the Church and all baptized people are "drawn by God" appears to me a most baseless theory, and practically a most mischievous one. It would reduce the "drawing" to nothing, and make it a thing which the majority of Christians resist. I believe the drawing is a thing that belongs to none but God's elect and is a part of the procedure by which their salvation is effected. They are chosen in Christ from all eternity and then drawn to Christ in time.

There are several very important principles of theology connected with this remarkable sentence, which it may be useful to put down together before we leave the passage.

(a) We must never suppose that the doctrine of this verse takes away man's responsibility and accountability to God for his soul. On the contrary, the Bible always distinctly declares that if any man is lost, it is his own fault. He "loses his own soul." (Mark viii.36.) If we cannot reconcile God's sovereignty and man's responsibility now, we need not doubt that it will be all plain at the last day.
(b) We must not allow the doctrine of this verse to make us limit or

narrow the offer of salvation to sinners. On the contrary, we must hold firmly that pardon and peace are to be offered freely through Christ to every man and woman without exception. We never know who they are that God will draw, and have nothing to do with it. Our duty is to invite all and leave it to God to choose the vessels of mercy.

(c) We must not suppose that we, or anybody else, are drawn unless we come to Christ by faith. This is the grand mark and evidence of anyone being the subject of the Father's drawing work. If "drawn," he comes to Christ, believes, and loves. Where there is no faith and love, there may be talk, self-conceit, and high profession. But there is no "drawing" of the Father.

(d) We must always remember that God ordinarily works by means, and specially by such means as He Himself has appointed. No doubt He acts as a Sovereign in drawing souls to Christ. We cannot pretend to explain why some are drawn and others are not drawn. Nevertheless, we must carefully maintain the great principle that God ordinarily draws through the instrumentality of His Word. The man that neglects the public preaching and private reading of God's Word has no right to expect that God will draw him. The thing is possible, but highly improbable.

(e) We must never allow ourselves or others to waste time in trying to find out, as a first question in religion, whether we are drawn of God the Father, elect, chosen, and the like. The first, and indeed the main, question we have to do with is whether we have come to Christ by faith. If we have, let us take comfort and be thankful. None come to Him unless they are drawn.

Augustine remarks: “If you do not desire to err, do not seek to determine whom God draws and whom He does not draw, nor why He draws one man and not another. But if you yourself are not drawn by God, pray to Him that you may be drawn.”

The words of the 17th Article of the Church of England are weighty and wise: “We must receive God’s promises in such wise as they are generally set forth to us in Holy Scripture; and in our doings, that will of God is to be followed, which we have expressly declared unto us in the Word of God.”

Whether the “drawing” of God the Father is irresistible or not is a point on which good men differ greatly. My own opinion is decided that it is irresistible. Those whom the Father draws and calls, always “obey the calling.” (See 17th Article of the Church of England.) As Rollock truly remarks, there is often a great fight and struggle when the drawing grace of God first begins to work on the soul, and the consequence is great distress and depression. But when grace once begins, it always wins the victory at last.

[*I will raise him up at the last day*.] This is the same sentence that we have had twice already and shall have once again. Whosoever does come to Christ and has the great mark of faith shall be raised by Christ to a life of eternal glory at the last day. None come but those who are “drawn;” but all who do come shall be raised.

45.—[*It is written…taught of God*.] Our Lord here confirms the

doctrine of the necessity of divine teaching by reference to the Scriptures. He had told the Jews nothing but what their own Scriptures taught and what they ought to have known themselves. It is not quite clear whether our Lord referred to one particular quotation or to the general testimony of the prophetical Scriptures. The words of Isaiah (liv.13) are most like the sentence before us: "All thy children shall be taught of God." The Greek of the Septuagint version of that text rather favors the idea that our Lord referred to it. On the whole, however, I incline to the opinion that no one particular text is referred to. It was the general doctrine of the prophets that in the days of the Gospel men should have the direct teaching of God.

The words do not mean that under the Gospel all mankind or all members of the professing Christian Church shall be "taught of God." It rather means that all who are God's children and come to Christ under the Gospel shall be taught of God. It is like "this is the true light that lights every man" (John i.9), where it does not mean that all are lighted, but that such as are lighted are lighted by Christ.

[Every man…learned…comes to Me.] The meaning of this sentence seems to be, "Every man that comes to Me has first heard and learned of the Father." It is useless to talk of being taught by God, and of God being our Father, if we do not come to Christ for salvation.

Bishop Hooper remarks: "Many men understand the words 'except the Father draws him' in a wrong sense—as though God did require

in a reasonable man no more than in a dead post—and do not mark the words that follow, 'every man who has heard Christ' God draws with His Word and the Holy Ghost. Man's duty is to hear and learn; this is to say, receive the grace offered, consent unto the promises, and not refuse the God that calls." *Hooper on Ten Commandments*

46.—[*Not that any man has seen the Father*.] This sentence seems put in by way of parenthesis, to prevent mistakes in the minds of our Lord's hearers both as to the kind of teaching He meant and the person He intended when He spoke of the Father. The Father was the eternal God whom no man had seen nor could see. The teaching was that inward teaching of the heart which the Father gave by His Spirit.

[*He who is of God, he has seen the Father*.] Our Lord plainly means Himself in this verse. It is like John i.18: "No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him." I cannot but think that one object our Lord has in view, both here and in ch. v.37, is to impress on the Jews' minds that all the appearances of God which are recorded in the Old Testament were appearances not of the First Person in the Trinity but of the Second. His object in both places, I suspect, was to prepare their minds for the great truth which as yet they were unable to receive—that, however unbelieving they now were, Christ who was now with them was that very Person who had appeared to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses.

47.—[Verily…believes on Me…life.] In this verse our Lord returns to the main thread of His discourse, which had been interrupted at the 40th verse. He now speaks out much more clearly and plainly about Himself, dropping all reserve, and revealing Himself as the object of faith openly and without figure. It is one of those great, broad, simple declarations of the Gospel way of salvation which we can never know too well. He who would have his sins pardoned and his soul saved must go to Christ for it. It is to "Me," says Christ, that he must apply. What are the terms held out? He must simply trust, lean back, rest on Christ, and commit his soul to His hand. In a word, he must "believe." What shall such a man get by believing? He "has everlasting life." The very moment he believes, life and peace with God are his own. Faith, the great object of faith, and the present privileges to which faith admits a man, are three subjects which, however often repeated in the Gospel, ought never to weary a Christian's ear.

The frequent repetition of this doctrine of "believing" is a strong proof of its great necessity and importance, and of man's infinite backwardness to see, understand, and receive it. "We must believe, we must believe," says Rollock, "is a truth that needs constant repetition."

48.—[*I am that bread of life.*] Here our Lord distinctly proclaims to the Jews that He Himself is that "bread of life," that soul-satisfying food, the true bread, the bread of God, of which He had spoken generally in the earlier part of His discourse. He had awakened their

curiosity by speaking of that bread as a real thing, and a thing worth their attention. He now unveils the whole truth to them and tells them plainly, “I am that bread.” “If you ask what it is, and where it is, you have only to look at Me.”

49.—[*Your fathers ate…dead.*] In this verse our Lord points out the inferiority of the manna which the Jews ate in the wilderness to the bread which He Himself offered. The manna not only could do nothing for the soul, but was unable to preserve from death those who ate it. Here, as before, we should observe how our Lord speaks of the miraculous feeding of Israel in the wilderness as an undoubted historical fact. Piscator remarks that our Lord here says emphatically “your fathers” and not “our fathers.” He thinks it was intentionally done to remind the Jews how little lasting good their fathers got from the manna, and how unbelieving they were even while they ate of it, for they all died in the wilderness. It was a tacit caution to beware of doing like them.

50.—[*This is the bread…and not die.*] The object of this verse is to show the superiority of the “true bread from heaven” to the manna. It is as though our Lord said, “This bread that comes down from heaven is bread of such a nature that he who eats of it shall never die. His soul shall not be hurt by the second death, and his body shall have a glorious resurrection.”

I am not without doubt whether our Lord did not point to Himself in speaking the words of this verse: “This person who now stands

before you is that bread which came down from heaven, that anyone eating of it should not die." But I throw out the conjecture with much diffidence. Lampe seems to favor the idea, saying, "the pronoun 'this' is here demonstrative and pointed to Himself." Trapp and Beza also take this view.

51.—[*I am the living bread…heaven*.] This sentence is a repetition of the idea that has been already given out in the 50th and 49th verses. The thought is repeated in order to impress it on the minds of the Jews and make it impossible for them to misunderstand our Lord's meaning. We must never be ashamed of repetition in religions teaching.

[*If any man eats…live forever*.] The thought here is only an expansion of the one contained in the 35th verse. There it is said, "He that comes to Christ shall never hunger." Here it is, "The eater of the bread of life shall live forever." The meaning is that the soul of the man who feeds on Christ by faith shall never die and be cast away in hell. There is no condemnation for him. His sins are put away. He shall not be hurt by the second death.

[*The bread that I will give is my flesh*.] In these words our Lord goes even further than He has gone yet in explaining the great theme of His discourse. When He speaks of "my flesh," I believe He means, "my body offered up in sacrifice on the cross as an atonement for man's sins." It is our Lord's death that is specially meant. It is not merely His human nature, His incarnation, that feeds souls. It is His

death as our substitute, bearing our sins and carrying our transgressions.

[*Which I will give for the life of the world.*] These words appear to me to make it certain that our Lord meant "His body offered in sacrifice as an atonement for sin," when he said "my flesh is the bread." For He does not say "I have given," or "I do give," but "I will give." That use of the future tense seems to me a conclusive proof that "my flesh" cannot mean only "my incarnation." The "giving" was about to take place, but had not taken place yet. It could only be His death.

When our Lord says, "I will *give* my flesh," it appears to me that He can only mean "I will give it to die, to suffer, to be offered up on the cross as a sacrifice for sin."
When our Lord says, "I will give my flesh *for the life* of the world," I believe He means, "I will give my body to death on account of, for the sake of, to procure, purchase, and obtain the life of the world. I will give my death to procure the world's life. My death shall be the ransom, the payment, and the redemption money by which eternal life shall be purchased for a world of sinners."

I hold strongly that the idea of substitution is contained in these words of our Lord, and that the great doctrine of His vicarious death, which is so directly stated elsewhere (Rom. v.6-8), is indirectly implied in this sentence.

When our Lord says, “I will give my flesh for the life of the world,” I can only see one meaning in the word “world.” It means all mankind. And the idea contained, I believe, is the same as we have elsewhere: viz., that Christ died for all mankind; not for the elect only, but for all mankind. (See John i.29 and iii.16 and my notes on each text.) That all the world is not saved is perfectly certain. That many die in unbelief and get no benefit from Christ’s death is certain. But that Christ’s death was enough for all mankind, and that when He died He made sufficient atonement for all the world, are truths which, both in this text and others like it, appear to my mind incontrovertible.

Let us note, in this verse, what a full and broad offer Christ holds out to sinners. He says, “If *any man*,” no matter who or what he may have been. “If any man eat of this bread he shall live forever.” Happy would it be for many, whose whole hearts are set on eating and drinking and feasting their poor perishable bodies, if they would only look at these words! It is only those who eat this bread who shall live forever. Let us remember how impossible it is for anyone to explain the end of this verse who denies the sacrificial character of Christ’s death. Once grant that Christ is only a great teacher and example and that His death is only a great pattern of self-denial, and what sense or meaning can be got out of the end of this verse?— “I will give my flesh for the life of the world”! I unhesitatingly say that the words are unintelligible nonsense if we receive the teaching of many modern divines about Christ’s death, and that nothing can make them

intelligible and instructive but the doctrine of Christ's vicarious death and satisfaction on the cross as our Substitute.

JOHN 6:52-59

Then the Jews who were hostile to Jesus began to argue with one another, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

Jesus said to them, "I tell you the solemn truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in yourselves. The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood resides in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so the one who consumes me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven; it is not like the bread your ancestors ate, but then later died. The one who eats this bread will live forever." Jesus said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

Few passages of Scripture have been so painfully twisted and perverted as that which we have now read. The Jews are not the only people who have striven about its meaning. A sense has been put upon it, which it was never intended to bear. Fallen man, in interpreting the Bible, has an unhappy aptitude for turning food into poison. The things that were written for his benefit, he often makes an occasion for falling.

Let us first consider carefully, ***what these verses do NOT mean.*** The "eating and drinking" of which Christ speaks do not mean any literal eating and drinking. Above all, the words were not spoken with any reference to the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. We may eat the Lord's Supper, and yet not eat and drink Christ's body and blood. We may eat and drink Christ's body and blood, and yet not eat the Lord's Supper. Let this never be forgotten.

The opinion here expressed may startle some who have not looked closely into the subject. But it is an opinion which is supported by three weighty reasons. For one thing, a literal "eating and drinking" of Christ's body and blood would have been an idea utterly revolting to all Jews, and flatly contradictory to an often-repeated precept of their law. For another thing, to take a literal view of "eating and drinking," is to interpose a *bodily* act between the soul of man and salvation. This is a thing for which there is no precedent in Scripture. The only things without which we cannot be saved are repentance and faith. Last, but not least, to take a literal view of "eating and drinking," would involve most blasphemous and profane consequences. It would shut out of heaven the penitent thief. He died long after these words were spoken, without any literal eating and drinking. Will any dare to say he had "no life" in Him? It would admit to heaven thousands of ignorant, godless communicants in the present day. They literally eat and drink, no doubt! But they have no eternal life, and will not be raised to glory at the last day. Let these reasons be carefully pondered.

The plain truth is, there is a melancholic anxiety in fallen man to put a carnal sense on Scriptural expressions, wherever he possibly can. He struggles hard to make religion a matter of forms and ceremonies—of doing and performing—of sacraments and ordinances—of sense and of sight. He secretly dislikes that system of Christianity which makes the state of the heart the principal thing, and labors to keep sacraments and ordinances in the second place. Happy is that Christian who remembers these things, and stands on his guard! Baptism and the Lord's supper, no doubt, are holy sacraments, and mighty blessings, when rightly used. But it is worse than useless to drag them in everywhere, and to see them everywhere in God's Word.

Let us next consider carefully, ***what these verses do mean.*** The expressions they contain are, no doubt, very remarkable. Let us try to get some clear notion of their meaning.

The "flesh and blood of the Son of man" mean that sacrifice of His own body, which Christ offered up on the cross, when He died for sinners. The atonement made by His death, the satisfaction made by his sufferings, as our Substitute, the redemption effected by His enduring the penalty of our sins in His own body on the tree—this seems to be the true idea that we should set before our minds.

The "eating and drinking," without which there is no life in us, means that reception of Christ's sacrifice which takes place when a man believes on Christ crucified for salvation. It is an inward and spiritual act of the heart, and has nothing to do with the body.

Whenever a man, feeling his own guilt and sinfulness, lays hold on Christ, and trusts in the atonement made for him by Christ's death, at once he "eats the flesh of the Son of man, and drinks His blood." His soul feeds on Christ's sacrifice, by faith, just as his body would feed on bread. Believing, he is said to "eat." Believing, he is said to "drink." And the special thing that he eats, and drinks, and gets benefit from, is the atonement made for his sins by Christ's death for him on Calvary.

The practical lessons which may be gathered from the whole passage are weighty and important. The point being once settled, that "the flesh and blood" in these verses means Christ's atonement, and the "eating and drinking" mean faith, we may find in these verses great principles of truth, which lie at the very root of Christianity.

We may learn, that faith in Christ's atonement is a thing of absolute necessity to salvation. Just as there was no safety for the Israelite in Egypt who did not eat the Passover-lamb, in the night when the first-born were slain, so there is no life for the sinner who does not eat the flesh of Christ and drink His blood.

We may learn that faith in Christ's atonement unites us by the closest possible bonds to our Savior, and entitles us to the highest privileges. Our souls shall find full satisfaction for all their needs— "His flesh is food indeed, and His blood is drink indeed." All things are secured to us that we can need for time and eternity— "Whoever

eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."

Last, but not least, we may learn that ***faith in Christ's atonement is a personal act, a daily act, and an act that can be felt.*** No one can eat and drink for us, and no one, in like manner, can believe for us. We need food every day, and not once a week or once a month—and, in like manner, we need to employ faith every day. We feel benefit when we have eaten and drunk, we feel strengthened, nourished, and refreshed; and, in like manner, if we believe truly, we shall feel the better for it, by sensible hope and peace in our inward man.

Let us take heed that we use these truths, as well as know them. The food of this world, for which so many take thought, will perish in the using, and not feed our souls. He only that eats of "the bread that came down from heaven" shall live forever.

Technical Notes:

52. The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, How can this man give us *his* flesh to eat? 53. Then Jesus said to them, Verily, verily, I say to you, Unless ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. 54. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. 55. For my flesh is meat indeed, and by blood is drink indeed. 56. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood dwells in me,

and I in him. 57. As the living Father has sent me, and I live by the Father, so he who eats me, even he shall live by me. 58. This is that bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats of this bread shall live forever. 59. These things he said in the synagogue as he taught in Capernaum.

52.—[The Jews...quarreled, etc.] This expression shows an increasingly strong feeling among the Jews. When our Lord talked of "coming down from heaven," they "murmured." When He speaks of giving His "flesh to eat," they "quarreled." (It is the word rendered "ye fight" in James iv.2.) In what way the Jews quarreled it is not very clear to see. We cannot suppose that there were two contending parties—one favorable to our Lord and one opposed to Him. It probably means that they began to reason and argue among themselves in an angry, violent, and excited manner, such as St. Paul forbids when he says, "The servant of the Lord must not strive." (2 Tim. ii.24.) The same word is used there as here.

[*How can this man...to eat?*] The likeness should be observed between this question and that of Nicodemus (John ii.4), and that of the Samaritan woman (John iv.11).

There is an implied scornful sense about the expression "this man." Cyril, in commenting on this verse, points out the unreasonableness and inconsistency of the Jews, above all men, in raising difficulties and denying the possibility of things because they are hard to explain and preternatural. He summons the Jew to explain the miracles in

Egypt and those in the wilderness, and he concludes, “There are innumerable things in which if you inquire ‘how’ they can be, you must overthrow the whole Scripture and despise Moses and the Prophets.”

53.—[*Jesus said… I say to you.*] We come now to one of the most solemn and important sayings that ever fell from our Lord’s lips. Having brought the Jews step-by-step up to this point, He now declares to them the highest and most startling doctrine of the Gospel.

[Unless ye eat the flesh…drink his blood, etc.] When our Lord uses this phrase “unless” at the beginning of a sentence, we generally find something of more than ordinary importance in it. Thus, “Unless a man be born again,” “Unless ye be converted and become as little children,” “Unless ye repent.” (John iii.3, Matt. xviii.3, Luke xiii.3.) Here He tells the Jews that they “have no life:” no spiritual life, no title to eternal life. They are, in fact, dead: legally dead, spiritually dead, and on the way to the second death, if they do not “eat the flesh and drink the blood” of the Son of man—that is of Himself. In a word, He lays down the principle that eating His flesh and drinking His blood is a thing not only possible but absolutely *necessary* to salvation. It is a thing without which no man can go to heaven.

Considering that the Jewish Passover was nigh at hand and that many of our Lord’s hearers were probably on their way to Jerusalem to attend it, it seems highly probable that our Lord desired to direct

the minds of those He addressed to Himself as the true Passover and sacrifice for sin. The latent idea of the sentence, I firmly believe, is that first Passover in the land of Egypt, which was kept on the night when the firstborn were slain. The flesh and blood of the lamb slain that night were the means of life, safety, and deliverance to the Israelites. In like manner, I believe, our Lord meant the Jews to understand that His flesh and blood were to be the means of life and deliverance from the wrath to come to sinners. To a Jewish ear, therefore, there would be nothing so entirely new and strange in the sentence as at first sight may appear to us. The thing that would startle them, no doubt, would be our Lord's assertion that eating *His* flesh and drinking *His* blood could be the means of life to their souls, as the flesh and the blood of the Passover lamb had been to their fathers the salvation of their bodies.

But what did our Lord mean when He spoke of "eating His flesh and drinking His blood" as things indispensably necessary to life? This is a point on which wide differences of opinion prevail, have prevailed in every age of the Church, and probably will prevail as long as the world stands.

(a) Some think that our Lord meant a literal "eating and drinking" with the mouth of our bodies, and that the "flesh and blood" mean the bread and wine in the sacrament of the Lord's supper. This is the opinion of almost all the Fathers, though occasional passages may be pointed out in the writings of some which seem irreconcilable with it. It is the opinion of most Roman Catholic writers, but certainly not of

all. It is the opinion of some modern English divines, such as Wordsworth and Burgon.

(b) Some think that the "eating and drinking" here mean the eating and drinking of heart and soul by faith, not of the body, and that the "flesh and blood" mean Christ's vicarious sacrifice of His body on the cross. They deny entirely that there is any reference whatever to the Lord's supper in the words. They consider that our Lord meant to teach the absolute necessity of feeding by faith on His atonement for sin on the cross. Unless a man's soul lays hold by faith on Christ's sacrifice of His body and blood as the only hope of his salvation, he has no title to or part in eternal life. This is the opinion of Luther, Melancthon, Zwingli, Calvin, Ecolampadius, Brentius, Gualter, Bullinger, Pelican, Beza, Musculus, Flacius, Calovius, Cocceius, Gomarus, Nifanius, Poole, Cartwright, Hammond, Rollock, Hutcheson, Lightfoot, Henry, Burkitt, Whitby, Leigh, Pearce, Lampe, Gill, Tittman, A. Clarke, Barnes, and most modern divines.

Among Romanist writers, this opinion is held by Cardinal Cajetan, Ferus, and Jansenius of Ghent. Even Toletus, one of the ablest Romanist Commentators on John, admits that the opinions of writers are not unanimous.

(c) Some think that our Lord did not mean any literal eating and drinking, and that He did not refer directly to the Lord's supper when He spoke of His flesh and blood. But they do think that our Lord had the sacrament in view and prospect when He spoke these words, and that He did tacitly refer to that peculiar communion with His flesh and blood, which He afterwards appointed the Lord's supper to be the means of imparting to believing communicants.

This is the opinion, *apparently*, of Trapp, Doddridge, Olshausen, Tholuck, Stier, Bengel, Besser, Scott, Alford, and some others. I decidedly agree with those who hold the second of these opinions. I believe that our Lord, both in this text and all through this chapter, did not either directly or indirectly refer to the Lord's supper; that by His flesh and blood He did not mean the bread and wine; that by eating and drinking He did not mean any bodily act. I believe that by "flesh and blood" He meant the sacrifice of His own body for us when He offered it up as our Substitute on Calvary. I believe that by "eating and drinking" He meant that communion and participation of the benefit of His sacrifice which faith—and faith only—conveys to the soul. I believe His meaning to be, "Unless ye believe on Me as the one sacrifice for sin, and by faith receive into your hearts the redemption purchased by my blood, ye have no spiritual life and will not be saved." The atonement of Christ, His vicarious death and sacrifice, and faith in it, these things are the key to the whole passage. I believe this must be kept steadily in view. It is easy to call the opinion to which I adhere Zwinglian and low and irreverent. Hard words are not arguments. It is easier to make such assertions than to prove them. I have already shown that many writers, wholly unconnected with Zwingli or Zwinglianism, maintain the opinion. But I submit that the following reasons are weighty and unanswerable:

(1) To say that our Lord meant the Lord's supper in this text is a most cruel and uncharitable opinion. It cuts off from eternal life all who do not receive the communion. At this rate, all who die in infancy and childhood, all who die of full age without coming to the communion,

the whole body of the Quakers in modern times, the penitent thief on the cross, all, all are lost forever in hell! Our Lord's words are stringent and exclusive. Such an opinion is too monstrous to be true. In fact, it was to avoid this painful conclusion that many early Christians in Cyprian's time held the doctrine of infant communion.

Ferus, the Roman Catholic commentator, who considers the eating and drinking here to be only spiritual and not to refer to the sacrament, sees this objection clearly and puts it strongly.

(2) To say that our Lord meant the Lord's supper in this text opens a wide door to formalism and superstition. Thousands would wish nothing better than to hear, "He that eats my flesh and drinks my blood (that is, eats the sacramental bread and drinks the sacramental wine) has eternal life." Here is precisely what the natural heart of man likes! He likes to go to heaven by formally using ordinances. This is the very way in which millions in the Romish Church have made and are making shipwreck of their souls.

(3) To say that our Lord meant the Lord's supper in the text is to make a thing absolutely necessary to salvation which Christ never intended to be so. Our Lord commanded us to use the Lord's supper, but He never said that all who did use it would be saved and all who did not use it would be lost. How many hundreds repent and are converted on their deathbeds, far away from ministers and sacraments, and never receive the Lord's supper! And will anyone dare to say they are all lost? A new heart and an interest in Christ's

cleansing blood are the two things needful to salvation. We must have the blood and the Spirit, or we have no life in us. Without them no heaven! But the Scripture never puts between a sinner and salvation an outward ordinance, over which the poor sinner may have no control, and may be unable to receive it without any fault of his own. Archbishop Cranmer remarks in his *Defense of the True Doctrine of the Sacrament*: "The Romanists say that good men eat the body of Christ and drink His blood only at that time when they received the sacrament; we say that they eat, drink, and feed on Christ continually so long as they are members of His body. They say that the body of Christ which is in the sacrament has its own proper form and quantity; we say that Christ is there sacramentally and spiritually without form or quantity. They say that the fathers and prophets of the Old Testament did not eat the body nor drink the blood of Christ; we say that they did eat His body and drink His blood, although He was not yet born or incarnate."

Ferus says: "We must take hold of Christ's flesh and blood, not with our hands, but with our faith. He therefore who believes that Christ has given up His body for us and has shed His blood for the remission of our sins, and through this places all his hope and confidence in Christ crucified, that man really eats the body and blood of Christ." Cardinal Cajetan, quoted by Ford, says: "To eat the flesh of Christ and to drink His blood is faith in the death of Jesus Christ. So that the sense is this: if ye use not the death of the son of God as meat and drink, ye have not the life of the Spirit in you."

The opinion which many hold—that although our Lord did not directly mean the Lord's supper in this text, He did refer to it indirectly and had it in view—seems to me very vague and unsatisfactory and only calculated to confuse our minds. Our Lord is speaking of something which He says is absolutely and indispensably necessary to eternal life. Where is the use of dragging in an ordinance which is not absolutely necessary and insisting that He had it in view? The truth of the matter, I believe, lies precisely in the opposite direction. I believe that *afterwards*, when our Lord appointed the Lord's supper, He had in view the doctrine of this text and used words intended to remind the disciples of the doctrine. But *here* I believe He was speaking of something far higher and greater than the Lord's supper. When He spoke of the lesser thing, I have no doubt that He intended to refer to the greater and to turn the disciples' minds back to it. But when He spoke as He did here of the greater thing, I am quite unable to believe that He intended to refer to the lesser. If our Lord did really refer to the Lord's supper when He spoke of eating His flesh and drinking His blood, it seems impossible to understand how Roman Catholics can deny the cup to the laity. "Drinking Christ's blood" is distinctly said to be as necessary to eternal life as "eating Christ's body." Yet the Romish Church will not allow the laity to drink Christ's blood! It is evidently the pressure of this argument which makes some Roman Catholic writers deny that this passage refers to the sacrament. It is a mistake to suppose that they are unanimous on the point. Rollock starts the question why our Lord did not plainly tell His hearers that by eating and drinking He meant not a bodily but a spiritual act: viz., believing.

He replies, that in this as in every case, our Lord did not strive so much to make men understand *words* as to beget feeling and experimental acquaintance with *things*. When the heart really begins to feel, words are soon understood.

The distinction that Alford and some others draw between the "flesh" and "blood" in this text appears to me very doubtful. They think that "eating the flesh" refers generally to participation in the benefits of Christ's incarnation and ascension with a human body into heaven; and that "drinking the blood" refers specially to an interest in the benefits purchased by His death. I am not satisfied that this is correct. At the 57th verse, our Lord, speaking briefly of the truth just before enunciated, only says, "He that eats Me, even he shall live by Me." Surely "eating" there stands for participation in the benefits of Christ's death as well as life! My own impression is that both "flesh and blood" are mentioned here by our Lord to make it certain to the Jews that He spoke of His *death* and of the offering of His whole body in sacrifice on the cross. The body of the sin offering was just as essential a part of the sacrifice as the blood. (See Lev. iv.1-12.) So also the body of the Passover lamb had to be eaten as well as the blood sprinkled. The "flesh and blood" are both mentioned here because our Lord had in view the offering of Himself as a sin offering, and because He would make it sure that He meant the "death" of His body to be the life of man's soul. It is not Christ incarnate merely, but Christ crucified as our atonement and sin offering that man must feed upon if he would have life.

54.—[Whoever eats…drinks…life.] This verse is just the converse of the preceding one. As it had been said that without eating and drinking there was no life, so it is now said that he who eats and drinks has life. These words, as I have already remarked, appear to me to make it impossible to interpret the passage of the Lord's supper. Myriads are communicants who have no spiritual life whatever. Every one, on the other hand, who by faith feeds his soul on Christ's sacrifice for sin has even now everlasting life. "He who believes on Him is not condemned." "He who believes on Me has everlasting life." (John iii.18; vi.47.)

The word "whoever" would have been more simply and literally rendered "He who." The "presentness" of a true Christian's privileges should be remarked here again: "He has eternal life." The Greek word for "eats" in this verse and 56 is quite a different word from that used in the 53rd verse. The reason of the difference is not very clear, and no commentator has hitherto explained it. Leigh, Parkhurst, and Schleusner all agree that the Greek word used in this verse ordinarily denotes the eating by an animal, in contradistinction to that of a man. Leigh observes that the word "notes a continuance of eating, as brute beasts will eat all day and some part of the night." I venture to suggest that the word is purposely used in order to show that our Lord meant the habit of continually feeding on Him all day long by faith. He did not mean the occasional eating of material food in an ordinance. The word is only used in this and the 56th, 57th, and 58th verses, and in Matt. xxiv.38 and John xiii.18.

[*I will raise him up at the last day*.] These words are a fourth time repeated, and purposely, in my judgment, to show who they are of whom Christ is speaking. He is not speaking of all who receive the Lord's supper, but of those persons who are "given to Him by the Father," "who see the Son and believe on Him," who "are drawn by the Father and come to Christ." (John vi.39,40,44.) These are the same persons who eat His flesh and drink His blood by faith. To them belongs the privilege of a part in that first and glorious resurrection when Christ shall call His people from the grave at His second coming.

55.—[For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.] The word "indeed" here would be more literally rendered "truly," and the word "meat" answers to our word "food." The meaning is, "My flesh is more truly food and my blood is more truly drink than any other food and drink can be. It is food and drink in the highest, fullest, noblest sense—food and drink for the soul, food and drink that satisfies, food and drink that endure to everlasting life." (See 35th verse.) Rollock remarks that the best way to understand this verse is to make trial of Christ and to feed on Him by faith. We shall soon discover how true the words are. Ferus suggests that there may be a latent reference here to the forbidden fruit that Satan promised should be "meat and drink indeed" to Adam and Eve. *This* stands out in contrast to *that* food. By eating the food Satan held out, came sin and death; by eating the food Christ holds out, comes life and heaven.

56.—[*He who eats…drinks, etc.*] These words are precisely the same as those at the beginning of the 54th verse, and there is no reason why "whoever" there should not have been "he who" as here. In the one case, the man who eats and drinks Christ's flesh and blood is said to possess eternal life, and in the other, to be intimately joined to Christ. But it is the same person.

[*Dwells in Me, and I in him.*] This expression is meant to convey to our minds the close and intimate union that there is between Christ and a true Christian. Such a man is said to dwell, or abide in Christ, and Christ to dwell, or abide in him. Christ is the house or home or hiding place within which the believer's soul, as it were, resides; and Christ dwells in the believer's heart by His Spirit, comforting, nourishing, and strengthening him. (See 1 John iii.24 and iv.15,16.) See also John xv.4 where "Abide in Me and I in you" might have been equally well rendered "Dwell in Me and I in you."

Just as "food and drink" received into a man's body become part of the man's self and are incorporated into his system and add to his heath, comfort, and strength, so when a man by faith feeds his soul on Christ's sacrifice for his sins, Christ becomes, as it were, part of himself and he becomes part of Christ. In a word, there is as intimate a union between Christ and the believer's soul as there is between a man's food and a man's body.

57.—[*As the living Father, etc.*] This verse explains the intimate union between Christ and the true believer by a far higher and more

mysterious figure than that of the union of our food and our body. The illustration used is drawn from that unspeakable and inexplicable union which exists between the two First Persons in the Trinity—God the Father and God the Son. It is as though our Lord said: "Just as the Father sent Me into the world to be born of a woman and take the manhood into God—and even though I am among you as man I live in the closest union and communion with God— even so the man that by faith feeds his soul on my sacrifice for sin shall live in the closest union and communion with Me." In a word, the union between Christ and the true Christian is as real and true and close and inseparable as the union between God the Father and God the Son. While the Son was in the world, the carnal eye discerned little or nothing of His union with the Father. Yet it was a true thing and existed. Just so the carnal eye may see little or nothing of the union between Christ and the man who feeds by faith on Christ. Yet it is a real true union. Just as the Son, though equal to the Father as touching His Godhead, does live in an ineffable and inscrutable way through and by the Father—the Son never being without the Father nor the Father without the Son—so in like manner the man that feeds on Christ enjoys spiritual life only through and by Christ. Is not this St. Paul's thought: "I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me." "To me to live is Christ." (Gal. ii.20; Phil. i.21.) Whether our Lord is here speaking of His human nature or of His Divine nature, is not quite clear. I incline to think, with Cyril and Chrysostom, that it is the Divine nature.

Rollock remarks that we have three living Ones spoken of here: The

living Father, the living Son, and the living believer. As we are sure of the life of the Father, so we may be sure of the life of the believer. The three lives are linked together.

Hutcheson remarks: "Christ's living by the Father is not only a pledge of our life, but our life holds also some proportion or similitude to His. For as He has life communicated by eternal generation, so by regeneration we are made partakers of the Divine nature."

Winer remarks that the Greek preposition rendered "by" in this verse means literally "on account of," and that the sentence means, strictly and properly, "I live owing to the Father." That is, "I live because the Father lives." Schleusner and Parkhurst say much the same. The "living Father" is a remarkable phrase. It is like the "living God." (John vi.69, Acts xiv.15, Rom. ix.26, 2 Cor. iii.3, vi.16, 1 Thess. i.9, 1 Tim. vi.17.) It must mean the Father who is the source of life, who "has life in Himself." (John v.26.)

58.—[*This is that bread, etc.*] Here our Lord sums up the whole discourse. He reverts to the saying with which the Jews had begun—about the fathers eating manna in the wilderness—and repeats the main points He would have His hearers carry away. These points were as follows: (1) That He Himself was the true bread which had come down from heaven to feed the world by the sacrifice of Himself. (2) That they must not cling to the idea that their fathers had ever eaten this true bread, for they all died in the wilderness and their

souls received no benefit from the manna. (3) And that those, on the contrary, who would eat of the bread He had come down to give, should live forever, have everlasting life, and their souls never die. It is as though He said, “This sacrifice of Myself is the true bread from heaven of which I spoke at the beginning. The eaters of this bread are in far better circumstances than your fathers when they ate manna in the wilderness. Your fathers died in spite of the manna, and beside that, received from it no spiritual benefit whatever. He, on the contrary, who by faith eats the bread of my sacrifice for sin, shall have everlasting live and his soul shall never die.” All the expressions in the verse, we should remark, have been used frequently in the discourse, and now all are grouped together and presented in one view.

59.—[These things he said…synagogue… Capernaum.] This verse is not sufficiently noticed, I venture to think. I ask anyone to compare it with the beginning of the discourse in this chapter at the 25th verse: “When they had found Him on the other side of the sea, they said,” etc. Are we to suppose that they found Him in the synagogue? I cannot think it. To me it seems that there must have been a slight break or pause in the discourse. It began at the landing place or outside the city. It was resumed, after a short interval of a few hours perhaps, in the synagogue. And, as I have said before, the break appears to me to be at verse 41. Both the discourse of this chapter and that of the preceding one have this point in common: that they seem to have been delivered before formal assemblies of Jews.

In concluding the notes on this very important passage, I take occasion to express my entire dissent from the common opinion held by many, that the sixth chapter of John was intended to teach the true doctrine of the Lord's supper as the third was intended to teach the truth about baptism. My own opinion is flatly contrary. I hold that in neither chapter are the sacraments referred to at all. I believe that the third chapter was intended to counteract erroneous views about baptism by teaching the far higher truth of spiritual regeneration. And I believe that the sixth chapter was intended to counteract erroneous views about the Lord's supper by teaching the far higher truth of the necessity of feeding on Christ's sacrifice by faith. In fact, the true antidote to wrong views of baptism and the Lord's supper is a right understanding of the 3rd and 6th chapters of St. John's Gospel and the whole of St. John's first Epistle. Writing, as St. John did, the last of the inspired writers, I believe he was divinely inspired to record things which the Church of Christ needed most to know. And I regard it as a most striking fact that while he altogether omits to describe the institution of the Lord's supper and says little or nothing about baptism in the Gospel, he dwells at the same time most strongly on these two mighty truths which he foresaw were in danger of being forgotten: viz., the new birth and faith in the Atonement. Surely it is possible to honor baptism and the Lord's supper without thrusting them in everywhere in our interpretation of Scripture.

JOHN 6:60-65

Many Followers Depart

Then many of his disciples, when they heard these things, said, "This is a difficult saying! Who can understand it?" When Jesus was aware that his disciples were complaining about this, he said to them, "Does this cause you to be offended? Then what if you see the Son of Man ascending where he was before? The Spirit is the one who gives life; human nature is of no help! The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life. But there are some of you who do not believe." (For Jesus had already known from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) So Jesus added, "Because of this I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him to come."

We learn from these verses that ***some of Christ's sayings seem hard to flesh and blood.*** We are told that "many" who had followed our Lord for a season, were offended when He spoke of "eating his flesh and drinking his blood." They murmured and said, "This is a hard saying; who can accept it?"

Murmurs and complaints of this kind are very common. It must never surprise us to hear them. They have been, they are, they will be as long as the world stands. To some Christ's sayings appear hard to understand. To others, as in the present case, they appear hard to believe, and harder still to obey. It is just one of the many ways in which the natural corruption of man shows itself. So long as the heart is naturally proud, worldly, unbelieving, and fond of self-indulgence, if not of sin, so long there will never be lacking people

who will say of Christian doctrines and precepts, “These are hard sayings; who can hear them?”

Humility is the frame of mind which we should labor and pray for, if we would not be offended by scriptural teaching. If we find any of Christ’s sayings hard to understand, we should humbly remember our present ignorance, and believe that we shall know more by and bye. If we find any of His sayings difficult to obey, we should humbly recollect that He will never require of us impossibilities, and that what He bids us do, He will give us grace to perform.

We learn, secondly, from these verses, that ***we must beware of putting a carnal meaning on spiritual words.*** We read that our Lord said to the murmuring Jews who stumbled at the idea of eating His flesh and drinking His blood, “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing—the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life.”

It is useless to deny that this verse is full of difficulties. It contains expressions “hard to be understood.” It is far more easy to have a general impression of the meaning of the whole sentence, than to explain it word by word. Some things nevertheless we can see clearly and grasp firmly. Let us consider what they are.

Our Lord says, “It is the Spirit who gives life.” By this He means that it is the Holy Spirit who is the special author of spiritual life in man’s soul. By His agency it is first imparted, and afterwards sustained and kept up. If the Jews thought He meant that man could

have spiritual life by bodily eating or drinking, they were greatly mistaken.

Our Lord says, “The flesh profits nothing.” By this He means that neither His flesh nor any other flesh, literally eaten, can do good to the soul. Spiritual benefit is not to be had through the mouth, but through the heart. The soul is not a material thing, and cannot therefore be nourished by material food.

Our Lord says, “the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life.” By this He signifies that *His words and teachings, applied to the heart by the Holy Spirit, are the true means of producing spiritual influence and conveying spiritual life*. By words thoughts are begotten and aroused. By words mind and conscience are stirred. And Christ’s words especially are spirit-stirring and life-giving.

The principle contained in this verse, however faintly we may grasp its full meaning, deserves peculiar attention in these times. There is a tendency in many minds to attach an excessive importance to the outward and visible or “doing” part of religion. They seem to think that the sum and substance of Christianity consists in Baptism and the Supper of the Lord, in public ceremonies and forms, in appeals to the eye and ear and bodily excitement. Surely they forget that it is “the Spirit who gives live,” and that the “flesh profits nothing.” It is not so much by noisy public demonstrations, as by the still quiet work of the Holy Spirit on hearts that God’s cause

prospers. It is Christ's words entering into consciences, which "are spirit and life."

We learn, lastly, from these verses, that ***Christ has a perfect knowledge of the hearts of men.*** We read that "He know from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him."

Sentences like this are found so frequently in the Gospels that we are apt to underrate their importance. Yet there are few truths which we shall find it so good for our souls to remember as that which is contained in the sentence before us. *The Savior with whom we have to do is one who knows all things!*

What light this throws on the marvelous patience of the Lord Jesus in the days of His earthly ministry! He knew the sorrow and humiliation before Him, and the manner of His death. He knew the unbelief and treachery of some who professed to be His familiar friends. But "for the joy that was set before Him" he endured it all. (Heb. 12:2.)

What light this throws on the folly of hypocrisy and false profession in religion! Let those who are guilty of it recollect that they cannot deceive Christ. He sees them, knows them, and will expose them at the last day, except they repent. Whatever we are as Christians, and however weak, let us be real, true, and sincere.

Finally, what light this throws on the daily pilgrimage of all true Christians! Let them take comfort in the thought that their Master knows them. However much unknown and misunderstood by the world, their Master knows their hearts, and will comfort them at the last day. Happy is he who, in spite of many infirmities, can say with Peter— "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." (John 21:17.)

Technical Notes:

60. Therefore many of his disciples, when they heard *this,* said, This is a hard saying; who can hear it? 61. When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said to them, Does this offend you? 62. *What* then if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before? 63. It is the Spirit who quickens; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and *they* are life. 64. But there are some of you who do not believe. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who should betray him. 65. And he said, Therefore I said to you that no man can come to me unless it has been granted to him by my Father.

60.—[*Therefore many of His disciples.*] It is plain that these were not true believers. Many who followed our Lord about and were called His "disciples" had no real grace in their hearts and followed Him from carnal motives. We must expect to see the same thing in

every age. Not all who come to church, nor all who profess to admire and follow popular preachers, are real Christians. This is far too much forgotten. [*This is a hard saying*.] This does not mean "hard" in the sense of being "difficult to understand." It is not so much "hard to the comprehension" as "hard to the feelings." Parkhurst defines it as "shocking to the mind." It is the same word that is used in the parable of the talents, "You are a hard man" (Matt. xxv.24), and in the Epistle of Jude, "the hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him" (Jude 15). Some think that the "hard saying" means the whole discourse. My own opinion is that it refers specially to our Lord's concluding words about eating His flesh and drinking His blood.

[*Who can hear it?*] The "hearing" here is evidently the hearing so as to believe, receive, and obey. "Who can believe, receive, and obey such a saying as this?" (See John v.24, viii.43, x.3,16,27, xviii.37, 1 John iv.6.)

61.—[*Jesus knew in Himself*.] This means that He knew by that divine knowledge through which He always "knew what was in man." (John ii.25.) [*His disciples murmured at it*.] This would be more literally rendered "His disciples are murmuring about this." He spoke at the very moment of their murmuring.

[*Does this offend you?*] This means, "Is this saying of mine a stumbling block to you? Is the doctrine of eating my flesh and

drinking my blood too humbling a doctrine for your hearts to receive?"

62.—[*What then... Son of Man ascend.*] This means, "What will ye think and say of my ascension into heaven?" What will your feelings be if you behold this body of mine going up to that heaven from whence I came down? "Will you not be much more offended?" (See John ii.12.) The first thing, we must remember, that the Jews "murmured" about was our Lord's saying that He "came down from heaven." The second thing was His saying that He would "give them His flesh to eat." Both times our Lord's human body was the subject. Here our Lord asks them what they would think if they saw that same body "ascending up" into heaven. Even then, after His ascension, they would have to "eat His flesh and drink His blood" if they desired eternal life. What would they think of that? Would they not find it even more difficult to receive and believe?

[*Where he was before.*] This is an expression which no Socinian can explain. It is a clear assertion of the "preexistence" of Christ. Some think, as Olshausen and Tholuck, that our Lord only means generally, "If you are offended and unbelieving even now while I am with you, how much more will ye be when I go away!" But this is a frigid and unsatisfactory interpretation.

It is fair to say that Stier thinks, with Chrysostom, Cyril, Theophylact, and others, that our Lord did not mean that His ascension would be a greater difficulty to His disciples, but that, on the contrary, it would

remove their doubts and weaken the offense which they now felt. Hutcheson and Alford seem to agree with this. But I cannot see it. Stier thinks our Lord implied, "Then, after my ascension, it will be disclosed to you how and in what way my human corporeity, become heavenly and glorified, may be given to be eaten and to be drunk." (Compare John viii.28.) 63.—[*It is the Spirit, etc.*] This text is, perhaps, one of the most difficult in the Gospel of St. John. It is easy to slur it over and be satisfied with a vague impression that it means "We are to put a spiritual sense on our Lord's words." That, no doubt, is a true idea. But when we come to a close examination of the words which compose the verse, I think no one can be satisfied with such a loose interpretation of Scripture. That our Lord's words "are to be taken spiritually" may be very true. But to say so is not to explain the verse.

What is meant by the expression, "It is the Spirit that quickens"?
(a) Some think that "the Spirit" here means "the divine nature of Christ" (as Rom. i.4, 1 Peter ii.18), in contradistinction to His human nature, here called His "flesh." (See 1 Cor. xv.45.) They consider our Lord to mean, "It is my divine nature, as God, which is the means of communicating spiritual benefit to men. My human nature, as flesh, could of itself do no good to souls. It is not, therefore, any carnal eating of my flesh that could be of use to you, and I did not mean any such eating." This is the opinion of Cyril, Cartwright, Poole, Bishop Hall, Trapp, Toletus, Rollock, Hutcheson, Leigh, Burkitt, Quesnel, Burgon, and Wordsworth.

(b) Some think that “the Spirit” here means “the Holy Spirit,” the Third Person of the Trinity. They consider our Lord to mean, “It is the Holy Spirit who alone can convey spiritual life to the soul of man. The mere eating of flesh, whether my flesh or any other flesh, cannot do good to the inner man. When, therefore, I spoke of ‘eating my flesh,’ I did not mean the bodily act of eating any literal flesh, but a very different kind of eating and a very different sort of flesh.” This is the opinion of Zwingle, Melancthon, Calvin, Bucer, Ecolampadius, Pellican, Flacius, Bullinger, Cocceius, Diodati, Piscator, Musculus, Baxter, Lampe, Henry, Scott, Stier, Besser, Alford.

(c) Some think that “the Spirit” here means “the spiritual doctrine or sense” as opposed to “the letter” or literal sense of scriptural language. (2 Cor. iii.6.) They consider the sentence to mean, “It is the spiritual sense of my words and not the literal which is quickening, or life-giving, to the soul. When I spoke of ‘my flesh,’ I did not mean my flesh literally but my flesh in a spiritual sense. My flesh literally could be of no use to anyone.” This seems to be the opinion of Chrysostom, Theophylact, Euthymius, Brentius, Beza, Ferus, Cornelius á Lapide, Schottgen, Pearce, Parkhurst, A. Clarke, Faber, Barnes, Webster. But it is not easy to make out clearly, in every instance, what is the precise meaning put on the words “the Spirit” by the interpreters who take this third view. There are not a few shades of variety in their opinions.

I must acknowledge that I find it difficult to give a decided opinion on the comparative merits of these three views of the expression

before us. There is something to be said for each of the three. On the whole, I think the second and third are more satisfactory that the first; and I incline to prefer the second to the third. But I say this with much hesitation. Rollock, who holds strongly that "the Spirit" means Christ's divine nature, maintains that "the flesh" means the whole human nature of Christ. He thinks that the meaning of "the flesh profits nothing" is that all the works of our Lord's body, whether in life or death—His fulfilling the law, His sufferings on the cross—derive their whole efficacy from the union of the two natures. "It is the divine nature that is life-giving. The human nature, alone and separate from the divine, is useless and unprofitable." He holds, therefore, that to eat the human nature of Christ alone (*i.e.* His flesh) could do us no good; as, unless we could eat His divine nature also, it would be unprofitable. He concludes, therefore, that the only eating of Christ that can be useful to the soul must of necessity be the spiritual eating of faith and not any carnal eating of the Lord's supper. Hutcheson agrees with this view.

The expression, "The words that I speak to you, they are spirit, and they are life," is just as difficult as the former part of the text. The word "spirit" here, at any rate, cannot mean the divine nature of Christ. If it were so taken, the sentence would be meaningless. The word Spirit must either mean the "Holy Spirit," or "the spiritual sense" as opposed to the letter. The sentence then might be paraphrased in either of the following ways: (1) "The words that I speak to you, received into your hearts and believed, are the Spirit's influence, the ministration of the Spirit, and the Spirit's means of

giving you life." This is Rollock's view. Or: (2) "The words that I speak to you are to be taken in a spiritual sense, or are spiritual words, and taken in that sense they are life-giving to the soul." This is Augustine's view.

I must honestly confess that neither of these explanations is quite satisfactory, but they are the nearest approach I can see to a satisfactory interpretation. The sentence is evidently a concise elliptical one, and it seems impossible to convey it in English without a paraphrase. Alford paraphrases the sentence thus: "The words that I have spoken, viz., the words 'my flesh and blood,' are spirit and life: spirit, not flesh only, living food, not carnal and perishable." I venture to think that this explanation is not more precise or satisfactory than either of those I have suggested.

The expression, "The words that I speak to you," must probably be confined to the words our Lord had spoken about eating His flesh and drinking His blood, and not referred to the whole discourse.

After all, however difficult and elliptical the sentence before us may be, there is a truth which throws light on it with which every true Christian must be familiar. It is the words of Christ brought home to the hearts of men by the Spirit, which are the great agents employed in quickening and giving spiritual life to men. The Spirit impresses Christ's words on a man's conscience. These words become the parent of thoughts and convictions in the man's mind. From these thoughts spring all the man's spiritual life. The soul is not benefited

by bodily actions, such as eating or drinking, but by spiritual impressions which the Holy Spirit alone can produce. In producing these spiritual impressions, the Spirit specially employs the agency of Christ's "words" and hence comes the great principle that "His words are spirit and life."

64.—[*There are some of you who do not believe.*] The connection of this sentence with the preceding verses seems to be this: "The true account of your murmuring and thinking my sayings 'hard' is your lack of faith. You do not really believe Me to be the Messiah, though you have followed Me and professed yourselves my disciples. And not really believing in Me, you are offended at the idea of eating my flesh and drinking my blood." [*Jesus knew…who did not believe.*] This is one of the many places which declares our Lord's Divine knowledge of all hearts and characters. He was never deceived by crowds and apparent popularity, as His ministers often are. When it says "from the beginning," it probably means "from the beginning of His ministry, and from the time when the unbelieving 'many' before Him first professed to be His disciples." Of course our Lord, as God, knew all things "from the beginning" of the world. But it does not seem necessary to suppose that this is meant here. Rollock remarks our Lord's example of patient teaching and preaching to all without exception, though He knew that many did not and would not believe. He points out what a pattern it is to ministers. Christ knew exactly who would believe. Ministers do not know.

[*Who should betray Him.*] We should not fail to notice in this

expression our Lord's marvelous patience in allowing one whom He knew to be about to betray Him to be one of His Apostles. It was doubtless meant to teach us that false profession must be expected everywhere and must not surprise us. How much we ought to tolerate and put up with if our Lord tolerated Judas near Him! The pain and sorrow which the fore-knowledge of the conduct of Judas must have caused to our Lord's heart is a circumstance in our Lord's sufferings which ought not to be forgotten.

65.—[And He said…no man can come…granted to him by the Father.] The connection of this verse seems to be as follows: "There are some of you who do not believe, and that is the reason why I said to you that no man can come to Me unless the Father gives him grace to come and draws his heart to Me. The Father has not given you grace and drawn you to Me, and therefore you do not believe."

JOHN 6:66-71

Peter's Confession

After this many of his disciples quit following him and did not accompany him any longer. So Jesus said to the twelve, "You don't want to go away too, do you?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom will we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God!"

Jesus replied, "Didn't I choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is the devil?" (Now he said this about Judas son of Simon Iscariot,

for Judas, one of the twelve, was going to betray him.)

These verses form a sorrowful conclusion to the famous discourse of Christ which occupies the greater part of the sixth chapter. They supply a melancholy proof of the hardness and corruption of man's heart. *Even when the Son of God was the preacher, many seem to have heard in vain.*

Let us mark in this passage ***what an old sin apostasy is.*** We read that when our Lord had explained what He meant by "eating and drinking his flesh and blood,"— "After this, many of his disciples quit following him and did not accompany him any longer."

The true grace of God no doubt is an *everlasting* possession. From this men never fall away entirely, when they have once received it. "The foundation of God stands sure." "My sheep shall never perish." (2 Tim. 2:19; John 10:28.) But there is *counterfeit grace* and unreal religion in the Church, wherever there is true; and from counterfeit grace thousands may, and do, fall away. Like the stony ground hearers, in the parable of the sower, many "have no root in themselves, and so in time of trial fall away." All is not gold that glitters. All blossoms do not come to fruit. All are not Israel which are called Israel. Men may have feelings, desires, convictions, resolutions, hopes, joys, sorrows in religion, and yet never have the grace of God. They may run well for a season, and bid fair to reach heaven, and yet break down entirely after a time, go back to the world, and end like Demas, Judas Iscariot, and Lot's wife.

It must never surprise us to see and hear of such cases in our own days. If it happened in our Lord's time and under our Lord's teaching, much more may we expect it to happen now. Above all, it must never shake our faith and discourage us in our course. On the contrary, we must make up our minds that there will be apostasy in the Church as long as the world stands. The sneering infidel, who defends his unbelief by pointing at them, must find some better argument than their example. He forgets that there will always be counterfeit coin where there is true money.

Let us mark, secondly, in this passage, ***the noble declaration of faith which the Apostle Peter made.*** Our Lord had said to the twelve, when many went back, "Will you also go away?" At once Peter replied, with characteristic zeal and fervor, "Lord, to whom shall we go? you have the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that you are that Christ, the Son of the living God."

The confession contained in these words is a very remarkable one. Living in a professedly Christian land, and surrounded by Christian privileges; we can hardly form an adequate idea of its real value. For a humble Jew to say of one whom Scribes, and Pharisees, and Sadducees agreed in rejecting, "You have the words of eternal life; you are the Christ," was an act of mighty faith. No wonder that our Lord said, in another place, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah—for flesh and blood has not revealed it unto you, but my Father who is heaven." (Matt. 16:17.)

But the question with which Peter begins, is just as remarkable as his confession. “To whom shall we go?” said the noble-hearted Apostle. “Whom shall we follow? To what teacher shall we betake ourselves? Where shall we find any guide to heaven to compare with you? What shall we gain by forsaking you? What Scribe, what Pharisee, what Sadducee, what Priest, what Rabbi can show us such words of eternal life as you show?”

The question is one which every true Christian may boldly ask, when urged and tempted to give up his religion, and go back to the world. It is easy for those who hate religion to pick holes in our conduct, to make objections to our doctrines, to find fault with our practices. It may be hard sometimes to give them any answer. But after all, “To whom shall we go,” if we give up our religion? Where shall we find such peace, and hope, and solid comfort as in serving Christ, however poorly we serve Him? Can we better ourselves by turning our back on Christ, and going back to our old ways? We cannot. Then let us hold on our way and persevere.

Let us mark, lastly, in this passage, ***what little benefit some men get from religious privileges.*** We read that our Lord said, “Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil.” And it goes on, “He spoke of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon.”

If ever there was a man who had great privileges and opportunities, that man was Judas Iscariot. A chosen disciple, a constant companion of Christ, a witness of His miracles, a hearer of His sermons, a commissioned preacher of His kingdom, a fellow and

friend of Peter, James, and John—it would be impossible to imagine a more favorable position for a man's soul. Yet if anyone ever fell hopelessly into hell, and made shipwreck at last for eternity, that man was Judas Iscariot. The character of that man must have been black indeed, of whom our Lord could say he is "a devil."

Let us settle it firmly in our minds, that the possession of religious privileges alone is not enough to save our souls. It is neither place, nor light, nor company, nor opportunities, but grace that man needs to make him a Christian. With grace we may serve God in the most difficult position—like Daniel in Babylon, Obadiah in Ahab's court, and the saints in Nero's household. Without grace we may live in the full sunshine of Christ's countenance, and yet, like Judas, be miserably cast away. Then let us never rest until we have grace reigning in our souls. Grace is to be had for the asking. There is One sitting at the right hand of God who has said— "Ask, and it shall be given you." (Matt. 7:7.) The Lord Jesus is more willing to give grace than man is to seek it. If men have it not, it is because they do not ask it.

Technical Notes:

66. From that *time* many of his disciples went back and walked with him no more. 67. Then Jesus said to the twelve, Will ye also go away? 68. Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. 69. And we believe and are sure that you are that Christ, the Son of the living God. 70. Jesus

answered them, Have I not chosen you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil? 71. He spoke of Judas Iscariot, *the son* of Simon, for he it was who should betray him, being one of the twelve.

66.-[*From that time.*] It is doubtful whether the Greek words here might not have been better translated, “Upon this,” “After this conversation.” [*Many of His disciples.*] This expression shows that the number of persons who followed our Lord about, and professed themselves His disciples, must have been large.

[*Went backward.*] This is a metaphorical expression, signifying “retreat, desertion, forsaking a position once occupied.” It is the same that is rendered in the account of the Jews coming to take our Lord in the garden, “they went backward and fell to the ground.” (John xviii.6.)

[*Walked with Him no more.*] The simplest view of this expression is that these deserters from our Lord walked no longer in His company as He went about teaching, as they had done, but returned to their own homes. No minister of the Gospel should feel surprised if the same thing happens to him.

Not a few of these very “disciples” probably had been forward in wishing to make our Lord a “king,” the day before. Such is popularity: here today and gone tomorrow!

67.—[*Then Jesus said…go away?*] We cannot suppose that our Lord asked this as if He did not know what the Apostles were going to do. We may be sure that He who "knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe" (verse 64), knew the hearts of His Apostles. The question was evidently asked to prove His chosen followers and to draw forth from them an expression of feeling. (See John vi.6.)

The word "will" here would be more accurately rendered, "Do you wish?" "Have you a will?"

We should note that this is the first time St. John speaks of "the twelve." We know, from the other Gospels, that "the twelve" were employed in distributing the loaves and fishes to the five thousand. (Luke ix.12,17.)

68.—[*Then Simon Peter answered Him.*] The fervor and impetuosity of Peter's character comes out here as in other places in the Gospels. He is the first to speak, and to speak for his brethren as well as himself. Only the night before this very scene, he had been the first, in the storm on the lake, to say "Lord, if it be You, bid me to come to You on the water." (Matt. xiv.28.) And here, in like manner, he is the first to profess loudly his determination not to go away, and his faith in Christ. [*To whom shall we go?*] This question is a strong burst of feeling. "To what teacher, to what master, to what leader shall we go, if we leave You? Where are we to find anyone like You? What could we gain by leaving You?" The question was one which

might well be asked, when we remember the state of the Jewish nation and the universal prevalence of Pharisaism or Sadduceeism. But this is not all. It may always be asked by true Christian men when tempted to give up Christ's service. True Christianity undoubtedly has its cross. It entails trial and persecution, But to whom shall we go if we give up Christ? Will Infidelity, Deism, Socinianism, Romanism, Formalism, Rationalism, or Worldliness give us anything better? There is but one answer: They cannot!
[*You have the words of eternal life.*] This would be more literally rendered, "You have words of eternal life." "You possess instruction about everlasting life such as we can hear nowhere else, and such as we find soul-comforting and edifying. The sayings that fall continually from Your lips, about eternal life, are such as we cannot leave." Our Lord's expression should be remembered, "I have given to them *the words* which Thou gavest Me." (John xvii.8.)

69.—[*And we believe and are sure.*] This would be more literally rendered, "We have believed and have known." Moreover, the "we" is emphatic. "Whatever others may please to think, however many may go away and forsake You after following You for a little, it is not so with us. We have believed and known, and do believe and know."

[*You are that Christ, the Son of the living God.*] This might equally well have been rendered, "You are the Christ." The sentence is a noble confession when we remember the time in which it was made and the universal unbelief of the leaders of the Jewish nation. We may remember that it is precisely the same confession that is

recorded to have been made by Peter, after which our Lord said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood has not revealed it to you, but my Father who is in heaven.” (Matt. xvi.17.)

We must not, however, misunderstand the extent of Peter’s confession. He declared his faith that our Lord was the Anointed Messiah, the Son of the living God. The Messiahship and divinity of Christ were the points on which he and the other apostles laid firm hold. But the sacrifice and death of Christ and His substitution for us on the cross were not things which he either saw or understood at present. (See Matt. xvi.22,23.) (a) We should notice that a man’s heart may be right towards God while he remains very ignorant of some great doctrine of the Christian faith. It certainly was so with Peter and the apostles at this time. (b) We should also notice that there is nothing man is so backward to see as the sacrifice of the death of Christ, the substitution, and the atonement. It is possible to be right about Christ’s divinity and Messiahship and yet be in the dark about His death. (c) We should notice how ignorant Christians often are of the state of others’ souls. Peter never suspected any one of the twelve to be a false apostle. It is a fearful proof that Judas must have been, in all outward demeanor and profession, just like the rest of the apostles.

70.—[*Have I not chosen you twelve?*] I do not think that the “choosing” here spoken of means anything more than selection for office. The word is evidently used in this simple sense in Luke vi.13: “Of them He chose twelve, whom He called apostles.” Acts vi.5:

“They chose Stephen, a man full of faith.” Acts xv.22: “It pleased the apostles…to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch.” I say confidently that in each one of these cases the Greek word rendered “chosen,” the very same word that is used here, can mean nothing more than “chosen or selected for an office.” This I believe, with Poole, Henry, and Hutcheson, is the meaning here. I disagree with Alford’s remark that “the selection of the twelve was the consequence of the giving of them to Him by the Father,” and that Christ’s “selecting, and the Father’s giving, and the Father’s giving and drawing, do not exclude final falling away.” This remark is built on the gratuitous assumption that Christ’s “choosing,” here spoken of, is the same as that “choosing unto salvation” which is the special privilege of believers. Of that “choosing unto salvation,” our Lord speaks in another place, where He carefully draws the distinction between the true disciples and the false:

“I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen.” (John xiii.18.) Of that choosing unto salvation, Judas was not a partaker. Of the other choosing unto office, as in the verse before us, undoubtedly he was a partaker.

Burgon and many others agree with Alford and dwell on the expression before us as an apparent proof that men “chosen to salvation” may fall away. But their reasoning appears to me inconclusive.

Even Quesnel, the Romanist Commentator, remarks: “The being

duly called to the ecclesiastical office is not sufficient, if a man live not suitably to that holy vocation." Toletus, and Spanish Jesuit, says much the same.

[*One of you is a devil.*] This is a singularly strong expression and gives an awfully vivid impression of the wickedness of Judas. Of course, he was not literally and really "a devil," but a man. The meaning is: "One out of your number is so completely under the influence of the devil, such a servant of the devil, that he deserves to be called nothing less than a devil." Our Lord, in another place, says of the wicked Jews, "Ye are of your father, the devil." (John viii.44.) So St. Paul says to Elymas, "You child of the devil." (Acts xiii.10.) When we read at a later period, "The devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot to betray Him" (John xiii.2), it must mean the final working out of a wicked purpose, which under the influence of the devil Judas had long had in his heart. Let us note that even now Judas is called "a devil," long before our Lord's betrayal and crucifixion. This helps to show that he never was a faithful disciple, even from the first.

Let us note that the only other expression of our Lord which at all approaches the one before us in strength, is the one which on another occasion our Lord applies to His zealous apostle Peter: "Get you behind Me, Satan." (Matt. xv.23.) While we condemn the wickedness of Judas, let us not forget that even a true-hearted apostle may so far err and be mistaken that he needs to be sharply rebuked and called "Satan." A thoroughly bad man is "a devil," but

even a good man may need to be called “Satan!” Rollock observes that Jesus never used so strong an expression about His open enemies who went about to slay Him. It was a hypocrite and a false apostle whom He called “a devil.” Nothing is so wicked as false profession.

71.—[*He spoke of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon.*] The word “Iscariot,” according to some, means “a man of Kerioth.” Kerioth was a town of Judah. (Josh. xv.25.) According to others, it means “a man of Issachar.” According to Lampe and others, it is a Syriac word meaning “the bearer of the purse.” We are told that “he had the bag.” (John xiii.29.) It is remarkable that four times in his Gospel St. John calls Judas “the son of Simon.” We do not exactly know why, unless it is that Simon was a person well known by name, or that St. John wished to make it quite clear that Judas Iscariot was not St. Jude, the faithful apostle and cousin of Christ, by naming his father. There is no proof whatever that Judas was the son of “Simon the Canaanite,” the apostle; though it is somewhat curious that in the list of apostles given by Matthew and Mark, Simon and Judas Iscariot are named in close juxtaposition. (Matt. x.4, Mark iii.18.) [*It was he who should betray Him.*] This would be more literally rendered, “He was about to betray Him.” The expression seems to imply that to betray such a master as Christ was so eminently a work of the devil, that the betrayer ought to be spoken of as “a devil.”

The frequency of our Lord’s warnings and hints addressed to Judas Iscariot is very remarkable. Rollock observes what an awful proof it

is of the hardness of the heart that a man so warned should not be consciencestricken and repent.

John – Chap. 7

JOHN 7:1-13

The Feast of Tabernacles

After this Jesus traveled throughout Galilee. He stayed out of Judea because the Jewish authorities wanted to kill him. Now the Jewish feast of Tabernacles was near. So Jesus' brothers advised him, "Leave here and go to Judea so your disciples may see your miracles that you are performing. For no one who seeks to make a reputation for himself does anything in secret. If you are doing these things, show yourself to the world." (For not even his own brothers believed in him.)

So Jesus replied, "My time has not yet arrived, but you are ready at any opportunity. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me, because I am testifying about it that its deeds are evil. You go up to the feast yourselves. I am not going up to this feast yet, because my time has not yet fully arrived." When he had said this, he remained in Galilee.

But when his brothers had gone up to the feast, then Jesus himself also went up, not openly but in secret. So the Jewish authorities were looking for him at the feast, asking, "Where is he?"

There was a lot of grumbling about him among the crowds. Some were saying, "He is a good man," but others, "He deceives the common people." However, no one spoke openly about him for fear of the Jewish authorities.

The chapter we now begin is divided from the preceding one by a wide interval of time. The many miracles which our Lord wrought, while He "walked in Galilee," are passed over by John in comparative silence. The events which he was specially inspired to record are those which took place in or near Jerusalem.

We should observe in this passage *the* ***desperate hardness and unbelief of human nature.*** We are told that even our Lord's "brethren did not believe in Him." Holy and harmless and blameless as He was in life, some of his nearest relatives, according to the flesh, did not receive Him as the Messiah. It was bad enough that His own people, "the Jews sought to kill Him." But it was even worse that "His brethren did not believe."

That great Scriptural doctrine, man's need of preventing and converting grace, stands out here, as if written with a sunbeam. It becomes all who question that doctrine to look at this passage and consider. Let them observe that seeing Christ's miracles, hearing Christ's teaching, living in Christ's own company, were not enough to make men believers. *The mere possession of spiritual privileges never yet made any one a Christian. All is useless without the effectual and applying work of God the Holy Spirit.* No wonder that

our Lord said in another place, “No man can come to me, except the Father who has sent me draw him.” (John 6:44.)

The true servants of Christ in every age will do well to remember this. They are often surprised and troubled to find that in religion they stand alone. They are apt to fancy that it must be their own fault that all around them are not converted like themselves. They are ready to blame themselves because their families remain worldly and unbelieving. But let them look at the verse before us. In our Lord Jesus Christ there was no fault either in temper, word, or deed. Yet even Christ’s own “brethren did not believe in Him.”

Our blessed Master has truly learned by experience how to sympathize with all his people who stand alone. This is a thought “full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort.” He knows the heart of every isolated believer, and can be touched with the feeling of his trials. He has drunk this bitter cup. He has passed through this fire. Let all who are fainting and cast down, because brothers and sisters despise their religion, turn to Christ for comfort, and pour out their hearts before Him. He “has suffered Himself being tempted” in this way, and He can help as well as feel. (Heb. 2:18.)

We should observe, for another thing, in this passage, ***one principal reason why many hate Christ.*** We are told that our Lord said to His unbelieving brethren, “The world cannot hate you; but me it hates, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil.”

These words reveal one of those secret principles which influence men in their treatment of Christ. They help to explain that deadly enmity with which many during our Lord's earthly ministry regarded Him and His Gospel. It was not so much the high doctrines which He preached, as the high standard of practice which He proclaimed, which gave offence. It was not even His claim to be received the Messiah which men disliked so much, as His witness against the wickedness of their lives. In short, they could have tolerated His opinions if He would only have spared their sins.

The principle, we may be sure, is one of universal application. It is at work now just as much as it was eighteen hundred years ago. The real cause of many people's dislike to the Gospel is the holiness of living which it demands. Teach abstract doctrines only, and few will find any fault. Denounce the fashionable sins of the day, and call on men to repent and walk consistently with God, and thousands at once will be offended. The true reason why many profess to be infidels, and abuse Christianity, is the witness that Christianity bears against their own bad lives. Like Ahab, they hate it, "because it does not prophesy good concerning them, but evil." (1 Kings 22:8.)

We should observe, lastly, in this passage, ***the strange variety of opinions about Christ, which were current from the beginning.*** We are told that "there was much murmuring among the people concerning him—for some said, He is a good man others said, No, but he deceives the people." The words which old Simeon had spoken thirty years before were here accomplished in a striking

manner. He had said to our Lord's mother, "This child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel—and for a sign which shall be spoken against—that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." (Luke 2:34, 35.) In the diversities of opinion about our Lord which arose among the Jews, we see the good old man's saying fulfilled.

In the face of such a passage as this, the endless differences and divisions about religion, which we see on all sides, in the present day, ought never to surprise us. The open hatred of some toward Christ—the carping, faultfinding, prejudiced spirit of others—the bold confession of the few faithful ones—the timid, man-fearing temperament of the many faithless ones—the unceasing war of words and strife of tongues with which the Churches of Christ are so sadly familiar—are only modern symptoms of an old disease. Such is the corruption of human nature, that Christ is the cause of division among men, wherever He is preached. So long as the world stands, some, when they hear of Him, will love, and some will hate—some will believe, and some will believe not. That deep, prophetical saying of His will be continually verified— "Do not think that I am come to send peace on earth; I came not to send peace, but a sword." (Matt. 10:34.)

What do we think of Christ ourselves? This is the one question with which we have to do. Let us never be ashamed to be of that little number who believe on Him, hear His voice, follow Him, and confess Him before men. While others waste their time in vain jangling and unprofitable controversy, let us take up the cross and give all

diligence to make our calling and election sure. The children of this world may hate us, as it hated our Master, because our religion is a standing witness against them. But the last day will show that we chose wisely, lost nothing, and gained a crown of glory that fades not away.

Technical Notes:

1. After these things Jesus walked in Galilee; for he would not walk in Judea, because the Jews sought to kill him. 2. Now the Jews' feast of tabernacles was at hand. 3. His brethren therefore said to him, Depart from here and go into Judea, that your disciples also may see the works that you do. 4. For *there is* no man *who* does anything in secret while he himself seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world. 5. For neither did his brethren believe in him. 6. Then Jesus said to them, My time is not yet come, but your time is always ready. 7. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify of it that its works are evil. 8. Ye go up to this feast. I will not go up yet, for my time is not yet fully come. 9. When he had said these words to them, he remained in Galilee. 10. But when his brethren had gone up, then he also went up to the feast, not openly, but as it were in secret. 11. Then the Jews sought him at the feast, and said, Where is he? 12. And there was much murmuring among the people concerning him. Some said, He is a good man; others said, No, but he

deceives the people. 13. However, no man spoke openly of him for fear of the Jews.

1.—[*After these things…Galilee.*] These words cover a space of about six months. The events of the last chapter took place about the time of the Passover, in spring. The events of the chapter we now begin took place in autumn, at the feast of tabernacles. What our Lord did in Galilee during these six months St. John passes over in silence. His Gospel, with the exception of the 1st, 2nd, 4th, and 6th chapters, is almost entirely taken up with our Lord's doings in or near Jerusalem. He was at this period of His ministry entirely absent from Jerusalem, it would seem, for about eighteen months.

The expression "walked" must be taken figuratively. It simply means that our Lord "lived, dwelt, sojourned, was going to and fro, and passing His time." The Greek word is in the imperfect tense and denotes a continuous action or habit.

[*He would not walk in Jewry.*] This would be more literally rendered, "He did not will, or desire, or choose to walk." The use of the word "Jewry" by our translators is to be regretted and seems uncalled for. The Greek word so rendered is the same that is rendered "Judea" in the third verse.

[*Because the Jews sought to kill Him.*] By "the Jews" we must understand the leaders and rulers of the Jewish nation. There is no proof that the lower orders felt the same enmity that the upper

classes did against our Lord. “The common people heard Him gladly.” (Mark xii.37.) The depth and bitterness of this hatred against Christ may be seen in their wish to kill Him. It seems to have been a settled plan with the Jews from the time when the miracle was wrought at the pool of Bethesda. (John v.16,18.) They could neither answer Him, nor silence Him, nor prevent the common people listening to Him. They resolved therefore to kill Him. Our Lord’s example recorded in this verse shows clearly that Christians are not meant to court martyrdom or willfully expose themselves to certain death under the idea that it is their duty. Many primitive martyrs seem not to have understood this.

2.—[*Jews’ feast of tabernacles.*] This expression, like many others in St. John’s Gospel, shows that he wrote for the Gentiles, who knew little of Jewish customs and feasts. Hence “the Jews’ feast.” The feast of tabernacles was one of the three great feasts in the Jewish year when, by God’s command, all pious Jews went up to Jerusalem. (Deut. xvi.16.) It was held in autumn, after the completion of the harvest, in the seventh month. The time of the Jewish “Passover” answered to our Easter, “Pentecost” to our Whitsuntide, and “Tabernacles” to our Michaelmas. The seventh month was remarkable for the number of ordinances which the law of Moses required the Jews to observe. On the first day was the feast of trumpets, on the tenth day was the day of atonement, and on the fifteenth began the feast of tabernacles.

There are several things peculiar to the feast of tabernacles which

ought to be remembered in reading this chapter, because some of them throw light on it. (1) It was an occasion of special mirth and rejoicing with the Jews. They were ordered to dwell in booths, or tabernacles made of branches, for seven days in remembrance of their dwelling in temporary booths when they came out of Egypt, and to "rejoice before the Lord." (Lev. xxiii.39-43.) (2) It was a feast at which more sacrifices were offered up than at any of the Jewish feasts. (Num. xxix.12-34.) (3) It was a feast at which, once every seven years, the law was publicly read to the whole people. (4) It was a feast at which water was drawn from the pool of Siloam every day, with great solemnity, and poured upon the altar while the people sung the 12th chapter of Isaiah. (5) It was a feast which followed close on the great day of atonement, when the peculiarly typical ordinances of the scapegoat and the High Priest going once in the year into the holy of holies, were fresh in the minds of the people. These things should be carefully noted and remembered as we read through the chapter. Josephus calls the feast of tabernacles "the holiest and greatest feast of the Jews." It was a Rabbinical saying, "The man who has not seen these festivities does not know what a jubilee is."

Whether this very year, when our Lord went to the feast of tabernacles, was the precise seventh year in which the public reading of the law took place, we cannot now know for certainty. Whether the custom of dwelling on booths was literally kept up when our Lord was on earth may also be matter of question. It certainly had not been observed for many years in the days of Nehemiah (Neh. viii.17).

But that this feast was kept up with extraordinary festivity and rejoicing in the latter days of the Jewish dispensation is testified by all Jewish writers.

It was in the middle of this public rejoicing and the concourse of Jews from every part of the world that the things recorded in this chapter took place. It stands to reason that all that our Lord said and did this week must have been more than usually public and would necessarily attract great attention.

Wordsworth, Burgon, and others consider the feast of tabernacles to have been a very significant type of our Lord's incarnation. I confess that I am unable to see it. If the feast was typical at all, which is not certain, I venture the conjecture that it was meant to be a type of our Lord's second advent. My reasons are these:

(a) It was the last in order of the Jewish feasts every year and formed the completion of the annual routine of Mosaic ordinances. It wound up all.
(b) It was kept at the end of harvest when the year's work was done and the fruits were all gathered in.
(c) It was an occasion of special rejoicing and festivity, more than any of the feasts. The dwelling in booths seems to have been a circumstance of the feast less essential than the rejoicing.
(d) It followed immediately after the feast of trumpets and the day of atonement. On that day the High Priest went into the holy of holies and then came out to bless the people. (See Isa. xxvii.13; 1 Thes.

iv.16.) (e) It followed immediately after the jubilee every fiftieth year. That jubilee, and proclamation of liberty to all, was in the seventh month. (f) It is that special feast which, after the Jews are restored and Jerusalem rebuilt, the nations are yet to keep in the future kingdom of Christ. (Zech. xiv.16.)

I venture this conjecture with much diffidence, but I think it deserves consideration. In the six points I have mentioned, I see much more of the second advent than of the first. To my eyes the feast of passover was a type of Christ crucified; the feast of pentecost—of Christ sending forth the Holy Ghost in this dispensation; the feast of tabernacles—of Christ coming again to gather His people in one joyous company, to reap the harvest of the earth, to wind up this dispensation, to come forth and bless His people, and to proclaim a jubilee to all the earth.

3.—[*His brethren*.] Who these "brethren" were is a matter of dispute. Some think, as Alford, Stier, and others, that they were literally our Lord's own brethren and the children of Mary by Joseph, born after our Lord's birth. (See Psalm lxix.8.) Some think, as Theophylact and others, that they were the children of Joseph by a former marriage and brought up by Mary under the same roof with our Lord. Others think, as Augustine, Zwingle, Musculus, and Bengel, that the word "brethren" does not necessarily mean more than cousins or kinsmen. (See 1 Chron. xxiii.22.) This is the most probable opinion. I take these "brethren" to have been relatives and kinsmen of Joseph and Mary, living at Nazareth or Capernaum or

elsewhere in Galilee, who naturally observed all our Lord's doings with interest and curiosity but at present did not believe on Him. To suppose, as some do, that these brethren were some of our Lord's Apostles, is to my mind a most improbable theory and flatly contrary to the 5th verse of this chapter.

If Mary really had sons after the birth of our Lord, it certainly seems strange that our Lord, on the cross, should commend her to the care of John and not to her own sons, His half-brethren. That at the later part of His ministry He had some "brethren" who were not Apostles but believed is clear from Acts i.14. But whether they were the "brethren" of the text before us, we have no means of ascertaining.

[*Depart…that your disciples, etc.*] This recommendation, as well as the next verse, looks like the advice of men who as yet were not convinced of our Lord's Messiahship. The expression, "that Your disciples may see," seems also to indicate that the speakers were not yet of the number of our Lord's disciples. The language is that of bystanders looking on, waiting to see how the question is to be settled before they make up their own minds. It is as though they said, "Make haste, rally a party round Yourself, show some public proof that You are the Christ, and gather adherents." The "works" here mentioned must evidently mean miracles. This speech seems to imply that our Lord had a party of disciples in Judea and at Jerusalem. Many, it should be remembered, "believed on Him" at the first passover He attended. (John ii.23.)

4.—[*For there is no man, etc.*] This sentence is a kind of proverbial saying. Everyone knows that if a man seeks to be known openly, it is no use to do his work secretly.

[*If…show Yourself to the world.*] There seems to be a latent sneer about this sentence. "If you really are doing miracles to prove Yourself the Messiah, do not continue to hide Yourself here in Galilee. Go up to Jerusalem and do miracles there." That the speakers said this from an honest zeal for God's glory and a sincere desire to have our Lord known by others as well as themselves, is a view that I cannot think probable. Some think that the words "if You do" mean "since You do," and see a parallel in Col. iii.1 where "if" does not imply any doubt whether the Colossians were "risen with Christ." Lampe thinks it means, "if You really and truly, not illusively, do miracles."

The false standard of an unconverted man is very manifest in this and the preceding verse. Such a one has no idea of waiting for man's praise and favor, and of being content without it if it does not come. He thinks that a religion should have the praise of the world, and labor to get it. The man of God remembers that true religion does not "cry, nor strive," nor court publicity.

5.—[*For neither did his brethren believe.*] These words appear to me to admit of only one meaning. They mean that these brethren of our Lord had at present no faith at all. They did not yet believe that Jesus was the Christ. They had no grace. They were not converted. The idea of some that the words mean, "His brethren did not fully and entirely

believe in Him," seems to me utterly without foundation. It cannot, moreover, be reconciled with the language that soon follows: "The world cannot hate you," etc. Such language cannot be applied to disciples. The whole teaching of the Bible shows clearly that it was quite possible to be a relative of Christ according to the flesh and yet not be converted. He that does God's will is as dear to Christ as "brother, or sister, or mother." (Mark iii.35.)

How frequently even the natural brethren of God's most eminent saints have been graceless and ungodly every Bible reader must often have observed. The cases of the brothers of Abel, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and David will occur to our minds.

We should learn from a verse like this the desperate hardness of man's heart, the absolute necessity of grace to make anyone a disciple, and the extreme danger of familiarity with high spiritual privileges. We should remember too that a man may be a truly good and holy man and yet not have converted relatives. No one can give grace to his own family. "A prophet is not without honor but in his own country." (Mark vi.4.) Even our Lord was not believed by all around Him. He can truly sympathize with all His people who are in a similar position.

6.—[*My time is not yet come.*] These words must mean that our Lord did everything during His earthly ministry according to a pre-ordained plan, and that He could take no step except in harmony

with that plan. He doubtless spoke with a Divine depth of meaning that none but Himself could comprehend, and that must have been unintelligible at the time to His "brethren." To them His words would probably convey nothing more than the idea that for some reason or other He did not think the present a favorable opportunity for going to Jerusalem.

[*Your time is always ready.*] This sentence must mean that to unconverted people, like our Lord's brethren, it could make no matter what time they went up. All times were alike. They would excite no enmity and run no risk.

A Christian not possessing foreknowledge can only pray for guidance and direction as to the steps of his life and the ways and times of his actions; and having prayed, then make the best use of his judgment, trusting that a faithful God will not let him make mistakes.

7.—[*The world cannot hate you.*] These words surely settle the question as to the present state of our Lord's brethren. They were yet unconverted. Our Lord says, in another place, "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own." (John xv.19.)

[*But it hates Me…its works are evil.*] The true reason of this enmity of many of the Jews against Christ is here distinctly indicated. It was not merely His claims to be received as the Messiah. It was not merely the high and spiritual doctrine He preached. It was rather His constant testimony against the sinful lives and wicked practices of

the many in His day. That adultery, covetousness, and hypocrisy were rife and common among the leading Pharisees is evident from many expressions in the Gospels. It was our Lord's witness against these darling sins that enraged His enemies. The wickedness of human nature is painfully shown in this sentence. Christ was "hated." It is an utter delusion to suppose that there is any innate response to perfect moral purity or any innate admiration of "the true, the pure, the just, the kind, the good, and the beautiful" in the heart of man. God gave man, 1800 years ago, a perfect pattern of purity, truth, and love, in the person of our Lord while He was upon earth. And yet we are told He was "hated."

True Christians must never be surprised if they are "hated" like their Lord. "The disciple is not above his Master." "Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hates you." (Matt. x.24, 1 John iii.13.) In fact, the more like Christ they are the more likely to be "hated." Moreover, they must not be cast down and make themselves miserable under the idea that it is their inconsistencies the world hates, and that if they were more consistent and lovely in life the world would like them better. This is a complete mistake and a common delusion of the devil. What the world hates about Christians is neither their doctrines nor their faults, but their holy lives. Their lives are a constant testimony against the world, which makes the men of the world feel uncomfortable, and therefore the world hates them.

Let us note that unpopularity among men is no proof that a Christian is wrong, either in faith or practice. The common notion of many—

that it is a good sign of a person's character to be well-spoken of by everybody—is a great error. When we see how our Lord was regarded by the wicked and worldly of His day, we may well conclude that it is a very poor compliment to be told that we are liked by everybody. There can surely be very little "witness" about our lives if even the wicked like us. "Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you." (Luke vi.26.) That sentence is too much forgotten.

Erasmus used to say that Luther might have had an easy life if he had not touched the Pope's crown and the monks' bellies. Bengel observes, "Those who please all men at all times ought deservedly to look on themselves with suspicion."

8.—[*Ye go up to this feast*.] These words can hardly be called a command. They rather mean, "If you wish to go at once, go, and do not tarry for Me." [*I will not...time is not yet fully come*.] Here the reason already given and commented on is repeated. Our Lord did not say He would not go to the feast, but, Not yet. There was "a time" for all His actions and every step of His ministry, and that time had not yet fully arrived; or, as the Greek literally means, was not "fulfilled." True Christians should remember that, like their Master on this occasion, they and worldly men cannot well work and act and move together. They will often find it so. Their principles are different. Their reasons and motives of action are different. They will often find that "two cannot walk together unless they are agreed."
It seems strange that any reasonable person should see difficulty in this passage, as if it threw a color of doubt on our Lord's veracity. Yet

Augustine has a Homily on the subject in defense of our Lord. Surely the simplest and most natural view is that our Lord meant, "I am not going up yet," and "am not going, at any rate, in the public caravan with yourselves." This is Chrysostom's view and Theophylact's. At an early period Porphyry tried to fasten on our Lord the charge of inconstancy of purpose, out of this passage. An enemy of Christianity must be sadly at a loss for objections if he can find no better than one founded on this place.

9.—[*When he said…remained in Galilee*.] This means that He stayed at the place where this conversation took place while His brethren started on their journey to Jerusalem. What the place in Galilee was we are not told.

10.—[But when his brethren…he also…feast.] We are not told what interval there was between our Lord's setting off for Jerusalem and His brethren's departure. The words before us would seem to indicate that He set off very soon after them. One reason, perhaps, for our Lord not going with them was His desire to avoid being made a public show by His relatives. They had very likely a carnal desire to call attention to Him and to rally a party of adherents round Him for their own worldly ends. To avoid affording any opportunity for this, our Lord would not go in their company. He had not forgotten, no doubt, that in Galilee there was a party who once would fain have "taken Him by force to make Him a king." (John vi.15.) He wished to keep clear of that party.

[*Not openly, but…in secret.*] This probably only means that our Lord did not go in the caravan or large company of His kinsmen who, according to custom, went up together from Galilee, but in a more private manner. How large the caravans or gatherings of fellow travelers going up to the three great feasts must have been, we may easily see from the account of our Lord being not missed by Mary and Joseph at first when He went up to Jerusalem with them at the age of twelve. "Supposing Him to have been *in their company,* they went a day's journey, and sought Him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance." (Luke ii.44.) Our Lord never sought publicity but once, and that was when He entered Jerusalem at the last passover, just before His crucifixion. Then he wanted to draw attention to the great sacrifice He was about to offer up on the cross. The contrast between His conduct on that occasion and the present one is very remarkable. When it says that "He went in secret," it does not necessarily mean that He went alone. There is no reason to suppose that His own chosen Apostles had gone without Him. It only means that He did not go up publicly in the company of all "His kinsfolk and acquaintance" from Galilee.

11.—[*Then the Jews sought Him.*] If, as usually is the case in St. John, the "Jews" here mean the rulers and Pharisees, there can be little doubt that they sought Jesus in order to kill Him, as the first verse tells us they wished to do. They naturally concluded that, like all devout Jews, He would come up to Jerusalem to the feast.

[*Where is He?*] Here, as in many other places, the Greek word

rendered “he” implies dislike and contempt. It is as if they said, “that fellow” (see Matt. xxvii.63), “that deceiver.”

12.—[*There was much murmuring*.] As a general rule, the Greek word rendered “murmuring” means an undercurrent of discontent or dislike not openly expressed. (Thus, Acts vi.1.) But here, and at verse 32, it does not seem to mean more than muttering and private conversation, implying only that people were not satisfied about our Lord and privately talked much to one another about Him.

[*The people*.] This word in the Greek is in the plural and evidently means the multitude, or crowd of persons who were gathered at Jerusalem on account of the feast, in contradistinction to the rulers who were called “the Jews.”

[*Some said…others said, etc*.] These expressions show the feeling of the common people towards our Lord and are doubtless indicative of the classes from which the two opinions came. The class of simple-minded, true-hearted Israelites, who had sufficient independence to think for themselves, would say of Our Lord, “He is a good man.” So also would the Galileans, probably, who had seen and heard most of our Lord’s ministry. On the other hand, the class of carnal Jews who thought nothing of true religion and were led like a mob at the beck of the priests and Pharisees, would probably take their cue from the rulers and say, “He deceives the people,” simply because they were told so. Such, probably, was the feeling of the lower orders at Jerusalem.

Let it be noted that Christ is and always has been the cause of division of opinion, wherever He has come or has been preached. To some He is a savor of "life," and to others of "death." (2 Cor. ii.16.) He draws out the true character of mankind. They either like Him or dislike Him. Strife and conflict of opinion are the certain consequences of the Gospel really coming among men with power. The fault is not in the Gospel but in human nature. Stillness and quiet are signs not of life but of death. The sun calls forth miasma and malaria from the swamps it shines upon, but the fault is not in the sun but in the land. The very same rays call forth fertility and abundance from the cornfield.

13.—[However no man spoke openly...fear of the Jews.] This expression, of course, applies specially to those who favored our Lord. Those who hated Him would not fear to say so openly. This verse shows the length to which the enmity of the Jewish rulers against our Lord had already gone. It was a notorious fact among the lower orders that the heads of the nation hated Jesus and that it was a dangerous thing to talk favorably of Him or to manifest any interest in Him. The fear of man is a powerful principle among most people. Rulers have little idea how many things are secretly talked of sometimes among subjects and kept back from them. Two hundred years ago the Stuarts could persecute all open and outspoken favorers of the English Puritans, but they could not prevent the lower orders secretly talking of them and imbibing prejudices in their favor.

JOHN 7:14-24

Teaching in the Temple

When the feast was half over, Jesus went up to the temple and began to teach. Then the Jewish authorities were astonished and said, "How does this man know so much when he has never had formal instruction?" So Jesus replied, "My teaching is not from me, but from the one who sent me. If anyone wants to do God's will, he will know about my teaching, whether it is from God or whether I speak from my own authority. The person who speaks on his own authority desires to receive honor for himself; the one who desires the honor of the one who sent him is a man of integrity, and there is no unrighteousness in him. Hasn't Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law! Why do you want to kill me?"

The crowd answered, "You're possessed by a demon! Who is trying to kill you?" Jesus replied, "I performed one miracle and you are all amazed. However, because Moses gave you the practice of circumcision (not that it came from Moses, but from the forefathers), you circumcise a male child on the Sabbath. But if a male child is circumcised on the Sabbath so that the law of Moses is not broken, why are you angry with me because I made a man completely well on the Sabbath? Do not judge according to external appearance, but judge with proper judgment."

We learn first in this passage, that ***honest obedience to God's will is one way to obtain clear spiritual knowledge.*** Our

Lord says, “If anyone wants to do God’s will, he will know about my teaching, whether it is from God or whether I speak from my own authority.”

The difficulty of finding out “what is truth” in religion is a common subject of complaint among men. They point to the many differences which prevail among Christians on matters of doctrine, and profess to be unable to decide who is right. In thousands of cases this professed inability to find out truth becomes an excuse for living without any religion at all.

The saying of our Lord before us is one that demands the serious attention of people in this state of mind. It supplies an argument whose edge and point they will find it hard to evade. It teaches that one secret of getting the key of knowledge is to practice honestly what we know, and that if we conscientiously use the light that we now have, we shall soon find more light coming down into our minds. In short, there is a sense in which it is true, that by *doing* we shall come to *knowing*.

There is a mine of truth in this principle. Well would it be for men if they would act upon it. Instead of saying, as some do— “I must first know everything clearly, and then I will act,”—we should say— “I will diligently use such knowledge as I possess, and believe that in the using fresh knowledge will be given to me.” How many mysteries this simple plan would solve! How many hard thing would soon become plain if men would honestly live up to their light, and “follow on to know the Lord!” (Hosea 6:3.)

It should never be forgotten that God deals with us as moral beings, and not as beasts or stones. He loves to encourage us to self-exertion and diligent use of such means as we have in our hands. The plain things in religion are undeniably very many. Let a man honestly attend to them, and he shall be taught the deep things of God.

Whatever some may say about their inability to find out truth, you will rarely find one of them who does not know better than he practices. Then if he is sincere, let him begin here at once. Let him humbly use what little knowledge he has got, and God will soon give him more. “If your eye be single, your whole body shall be full of light.” (Matt. 6:22.)

We learn, secondly, in this passage, that ***a self-exalting spirit in ministers of religion is entirely opposed to the mind of Christ.*** Our Lord says, “He that speaks of himself seeks his own glory; but he that seeks His glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him.”

The wisdom and truth of this sentence will be evident at once to any reflecting mind. The minister truly called of God will be deeply sensible of his Master’s majesty and his own infirmity, and will see in himself nothing but unworthiness. He, on the other hand, who knows that he is not “inwardly moved by the Holy Spirit,” will try to cover over his defects by magnifying himself and his office. The very desire to *exalt ourselves* is a bad symptom. It is a sure sign of something wrong within.

Does any one ask *illustrations* of the truth before us? He will find them, on the one side, in the Scribes and Pharisees of our Lord's times. If one thing more than another distinguished these unhappy men, it was their desire to get praise for themselves. He will find them, on the other side, in the character of the Apostle Paul. The keynote that runs through all his Epistles is personal humility and zeal for Christ's glory— "I am less than the least of all saints—I am not fit to be called an Apostle—I am chief of sinners—we preach not ourselves but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake." (Ephes. 3:8; 1 Cor. 15:9; 1 Tim. 1:15; 2 Cor 4:5.)

Does any one ask for a test by which he may discern the real man of God from the false shepherd in the present day? Let him remember our Lord's weighty words, and notice carefully what is the main object that a minister loves to exalt. Not he who is ever crying— "Behold the Church! behold the Sacraments! behold the ministry!" but he who says— "Behold the Lamb!"—is the pastor after God's own heart. Happy indeed is that minister who forgets SELF in his pulpit, and desires to be hid behind the cross. This man shall be blessed in his work, and be a blessing.

We learn, lastly, in this passage, ***the danger of forming a hasty judgment.*** The Jews at Jerusalem were ready to condemn our Lord as a sinner against the law of Moses, because He had done a miracle of healing on the Sabbath day. They forgot in their blind enmity that the fourth commandment was not meant to prevent works of necessity or works of mercy. A work on the Sabbath our

Lord had done, no doubt, but not a work forbidden by the law. And hence they drew down on themselves the rebuke, "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment."

The practical value of the lesson before us is very great. We shall do well to remember it as we travel through life, and to correct our estimate of people and things by the light which it supplies.

We are often too ready to be deceived by an appearance of GOOD. We are in danger of rating some men as very good Christians, because of a little outward profession of religion, and a decent Sunday formality—because, in short, they talk the language of Canaan, and wear the garb of pilgrims. We forget that all is not good that appears good, even as all is not gold that glitters, and that daily practice, choice, tastes, habits, conduct, private character, are the true evidence of what a man is. In a word, we forget our Lord's saying — "Judge not according to the appearance."

We are too ready, on the other hand, to be deceived by the appearance of EVIL. We are in danger of setting down some men as not true Christians, because of a few faults or inconsistencies, and "making them offenders because of a word." (Isa. 29:21.) We must remember that the best of men are but men at their very best, and that the most eminent saints may be overtaken by temptation, and yet be saints at heart after all. We must not hastily suppose that all is evil, where there is an occasional appearance of evil. The holiest man may fall sadly for a time, and yet the grace within him may finally get a victory. Is a man's general character godly? Then let us suspend our

judgment when he falls, and hope on. Let us "judge righteous judgment."

In any case let us take care that we pass fair judgment on OURSELVES. Whatever we think of others, let us beware of making mistakes about our own character. There, at any rate, let us be just, honest, and fair. Let us not flatter ourselves that all is right, because all is apparently right before men. "The Lord," we must remember, "looks on the heart." (1 Sam. 16:7.) Then let us judge ourselves with righteous judgment, and condemn ourselves while we live, lest we be judged of the Lord and condemned forever at the last day. (1 Cor. 11:31.)

Technical Notes:

14. Now about the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and taught. 15. And the Jews marveled, saying, How does this man know letters, having never learned? 16. Jesus answered them and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his who sent me. 17. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it is of God or *whether* I speak of myself. 18. He who speaks of himself seeks his own glory; but he who seeks the glory of him who sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him. 19. Did not Moses give you the law, and *yet* none of you keeps the law? Why do ye go about to kill me? 20. The people answered and said, You have a devil. Who goes about to kill you? 21. Jesus answered and said to them, I have done one

work, and ye all marvel. 22. Moses therefore gave to you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and ye on the sabbath day circumcise a man. 23. If a man on the sabbath day receives circumcision, so that the law of Moses should not be broken, are ye angry at me because I have made a man completely well on the sabbath day? 24. Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.

14.—[*About the middle of the feast*.] This would be about the fourth day of the week, as the feast lasted seven days. Some who consider the feast of tabernacles a type of Christ's incarnation think this circumstance is typical of our Lord's earthly ministry lasting three years and a half, answering to the three days and a half during which our Lord taught publicly here in Jerusalem. I doubt myself whether the circumstance is typical at all. If the feast of tabernacles it typical, I believe it points to the second advent of Christ much more than to the first.

[*Jesus went up into the temple*.] This means the outer court of the temple, where pious Jews were in the habit of assembling in order to hear the doctors of the law and others and to discuss religious subjects. This is the place where our Lord was when Joseph and Mary found Him at twelve years of age "in the temple." (Luke ii.46.) It was probably a large open courtyard with piazzas or verandas around it for shelter against heat and cold.

[*Taught*]. What our Lord taught we are not told. Expositions of Scripture, as Luke iv.17-21 and such lessons as those contained in the Sermon on the Mount and the parables, were most likely the kind of things that He "taught" first on such occasions as this. It admits of doubt whether He taught such deep things as those contained in the 5th and 6th chapters of St. John, unless publicly attacked, or put on His defense. Alford things this was "the first time" that our Lord "taught publicly at Jerusalem." Yet this seems at least questionable when we consider the 2nd and 5th chapters of John.

15.—[*The Jews marveled*.] The wisdom and knowledge of Scripture which our Lord showed must have been the principal cause of wonder. Yet, we may well believe, there was something wonderful in His manner and style of speaking. [*How does this Man know letters?*] The word rendered "letters" here must probably be taken in the sense of "learning." It is so used in Acts xxvi.24. In John v.47 it is rendered "writings." In 2 Tim. iii.15 it is "Scriptures." The original idea is a "written character, a letter of an alphabet." It is thus used in Luke xxiii.38 of the inscription on the cross, written "in letters of Greek," etc.

[*Having never learned*.] The Jews must have meant by this that our Lord had never attended any of the great theological schools which the scribes and Pharisees kept up in Jerusalem (to which St. Paul refers when he says that he was "brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel," Acts xxii.3.) They did not, of course, mean that anyone brought up at Nazareth must necessarily have been totally ignorant.

That our Lord could read and write is clear from Luke iv.16 and John viii.6. But the Jerusalem Jews, in their pride and self-conceit, set down anyone as comparatively ignorant who had not been trained in their great metropolitan schools. People are very apt to condemn anyone as "ignorant" who disagrees with them in religion. According to Tholuck, it was a rule of the Talmud "that no man could appear as a teacher who had not for some years been a colleague of a Rabbi."

16.—[*My doctrine is not mine, but his who sent me.*] Our Lord meant by these words, "My doctrine is not mine only. The teaching that I am proclaiming is not a thing of my own private invention and the product of my own isolated mind. It is the doctrine of my Father who sent Me. It deserves attention because it is His message. He who despises it despises not only Me, but He whose messenger I am." The great truth of His own inseparable and mysterious union with God the Father is here once more pointed at. It is like, "I can of my own self do nothing" (John v.30), and "I have not spoken of myself; but the Father who sent Me, He gave Me a commandment what I should say and what I should speak." (John xii.49.) Some think that our Lord only meant, "The sense of Scripture which I give is not my own, but the sense in which God at first gave it." But this is a very meager view of the sentence, though an Arian or Socinian may like it. Cyril remarks: "In saying that He was sent by the Father, He does not show Himself inferior to the Father. For this mission is not that of a servant, though it might be called so, as He 'took on Him the form of a servant.' But He is 'sent,—as a word is out of the mind, or a sunbeam out of the sun."

Augustine remarks: “This sentence undoes the Sabellian heresy. The Sabellians have dared to say that the Son is the same as the Father: the names two, the reality one. If the names were two and the reality one, it would not be said, ‘My doctrine is not mine.’ If Thy doctrine be not Thine, Lord, whose is it, unless there be another whose it may be?” Hengstenberg thinks that our Lord had in view the famous prophecy of Moses in which God says of Messiah, “I will put my words in His mouth.” (Deut. xviii.18.)

Let us carefully note with what peculiar reverence we should receive and study every word that fell from our Lord’s lips. When He spoke, He did not speak His own mind only, as one of His Apostles or prophets did. It was God the Father speaking with and through Him. No wonder, when we read such expressions as this, that St. John calls our Lord “the Word.”

17.—[*If any man will do his will.*] The English language here fails to give the full force of the Greek. It is literally, “If any man is willing to do, has a mind and desire and inclination to do God’s will.” It is not the simple future of the verb “do”. There are two distinct verbs. The stress, therefore, in reading the sentence must not be laid entirely on “*doing*” God’s will. It is “if any man is *willing* to do.”

[*He shall know of the doctrine.*] This means he shall know “concerning and about” the doctrine I am proclaiming.

[*Whether it is of God, or whether I speak of myself*.] This means, "whether the doctrine is from God, as I say it is—the doctrine of God the Father which He has commissioned and sent Me to proclaim to man,—or whether I speak from myself, on my own isolated responsibility without any license or commission." The translation "speak of myself" is unfortunately equivocal. The expression does not mean "about and concerning" myself, but "from" myself.

By "doing the will of God" our Lord must mean "obeying and performing as far as in us lies that will of God" which we have expressly declared to us in the Word of God." (17th Article.) Such "doing" He declares is the way to knowledge. It is the same idea as the "doing truth" of John iii.21. The principle here laid down is one of immense importance. We are taught that clear knowledge depends greatly on honest obedience, and that distinct views of Divine truth cannot be expected unless we try to practice such things as we know. Living up to our light, we shall have more light. Striving to do the few things we know, we shall find the eyes of our understanding enlightened and shall know more. Did the Jews profess to feel perplexed and not to know whether our Lord was sent from God? Let them honestly do God's will and seek knowledge in the path of sincere obedience in such matters as were clear and plain. So doing they would be guided into all truth and find their doubts removed. We learn from these words how greatly they err who profess to be waiting till their mental difficulties are removed before they become decided Christians. They must change their plan. They must understand that knowledge comes through humble obedience as well

as through the intellect. Let them begin by honestly doing God's will, as far as they know that will, and in so doing they will find their minds enlightened. We learn, furthermore, that God tests men's sincerity by making obedience part of the process by which religious knowledge is obtained. Are we really willing to do God's will so far as we know it? If we are, God will take care that our knowledge is increased. If we are not willing to do His will, we show clearly that we do not want to be God's servants. Our hearts and not our heads are in fault.

We learn, finally, the great principle on which many will be condemned at the last day. They did not live up to their light. They did not use such knowledge as they possessed and so were left dark and dead in sins. There is probably not one in a thousand among unconverted people who does not know far better than he practices. Such men surely, if lost, will have none to blame but themselves!

In interpreting this verse, I believe we must be careful not to lay more meaning on the expression "do His will" than our Lord meant it to bear. I say this because I observe many respectable commentators place such a very wide and comprehensive sense upon "doing God's will" that they miss entirely our Lord's purpose in speaking the words. They start with saying that to "do God's will" we must have faith in Christ, new hearts, grace reigning within us, and the like, and thus represent our Lord as saying in effect, "If any man will become a true believer and a converted man, he shall 'know of the doctrine,'" etc. I venture to think that such interpretation completely misses the mark and is going round in a circle. Of course, any true believer

knows true doctrine. I believe that our Lord's object was simply to encourage the honest-minded, sincere, singleeyed *inquirer* after truth. To such a man, though at present very ignorant, He says, "If you really have a desire to do God's will, to please Him, and to follow any light He gives you, you will be taught of Him, you will find out the truth. My doctrine may be hid from the wise and prudent, but it is revealed to babes." (Matt. xi.25.) I hold, in short, that we should take as simple a view as possible of the sentence "If any man will do His will" and be very careful that we do not mar its usefulness by putting more meaning on it than our Lord intended.

Bishop Hall thus paraphrases the text: "If any man shall, with a simple and honest heart, yield himself over to do the will of my Father, according to the measure of that he knows, God shall encourage and bless that man with further light so as he shall fully know whether my doctrine be of God or of myself."

Burgon remarks: "The perception of truth depends on the practice of virtue. It is a favorite maxim of the present day that increased knowledge will bring with it growth in godliness. Scripture at all events entirely reverses the process. The way to know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, is to do His will." (See John v.44, viii.12.)

Hengstenberg remarks: "Whosoever would lead souls to Christ should not tarry long about the specious argument with which the natural man seeks to disguise the hateful perversion of his state of

will, but should above all things try to excite willingness to do the will of God."

18.—[*He who speaks of himself, etc.*] In this verse, as in the preceding verses, "He who speaks of himself" would be more literally rendered "speaks from himself." The verse contains a general principle, applicable not only to our Lord's own case but to teachers of religion in every age. The meaning seems to be as follows: "He that undertakes on his own responsibility, and without being sent by God, to speak to men about religion, will naturally seek to advance his own importance and get honor for himself. Speaking *from* himself, he will speak *for* himself and try to exalt himself. He, on the contrary, who is a true messenger of God and in whom there is no dishonesty or unrighteousness, will always seek first the glory of the God who sent him." In short, it is one mark of a man being a true servant of God and really commissioned by our Father in heaven, that he ever seeks his Master's glory more than his own. The principle here laid down is a very valuable one. By it we may test the pretentions of many false teachers of religion and prove them to be unsound guides. There is a curious tendency in every system of heresy or unsound religion to make its ministers magnify themselves, their authority, their importance, and their office. It may be seen in Romanism and Brahminism to a remarkable extent.

Alford's remark, however, is very true: that in the highest and strictest sense "the latter part of the sentence is only true of the Holy One Himself, and that owing to human infirmity, purity of motive is

no sure guarantee for correctness of doctrine;" and therefore in the end of the verse it is not said "he who seeks God's glory," but "he who seeks His glory that sent Him", specially indicating Christ Himself. Burgon thinks that "true" is a word used intentionally, in contrast with the expression "He deceives the people."

19.—[*Did not Moses give you the law?*] Our Lord here appeals to the wellknown reverence with which all Jews regarded Moses and the law. But it is highly probable that He had in view the practice of publicly reading the law of Moses to the people during the seven days of the feast of tabernacles, which was observed once in very seven years at that feast. (Deut. xxxi.10.) If, as is possible, this was one of the seventh years in which the law was so read, there would be a singular significance and aptness in His appeal. "This very day you have been hearing that law which you profess to honor so much. But do you honor it in your lives?"

[*None of you keeps the law…kill me.*] This would be more literally rendered, "none of you *does* the law." It is the same word that is used in the expression, "if any man will do His will." (v. 17.) The meaning seems to be, "You reject Me and my doctrine and profess to be zealous for the honor of Moses and the law. And yet none of you really obey the law in heart and in spirit. For instance: why do you seek to kill Me? You are full of hatred of Me and want to put Me to death unjustly, in the face of the sixth commandment. This is not keeping the law." The Greek word rendered "go about" is the same that is rendered "seek" in v.1 of this chapter and in ch. v.16,18.

20.—[*The people answered, etc.*] It seems probable that those who said this were the common people, the multitude of Jews gathered from all parts of the world to many of whom our Lord was a stranger. We can hardly suppose that the rulers and leaders of Jerusalem would have spoken in this way.

The expression "You have a devil" may possibly be a repetition of the old charge that our Lord wrought His miracles by Beelzebub and was in league with the devil, as John viii.48. In that sense it would be the strongest form of reproach, blasphemy, and contempt. But considering who the speakers were, it is more likely that it simply means, "You are beside Yourself, and mad." (So. John x.20.)

The expression "who goes about to kill You?" can easily be understood if we suppose the speakers to be the common people and not the rulers. The common people probably knew nothing about the intention of the rulers to put Jesus to death and would think Him beside himself to say that anyone wanted to kill Him.

21.—[*Jesus answered… I have done one work.*] Our Lord can only refer here to the miracle He had wrought on a former occasion at the pool of Bethesda. (Ch. v.1, etc.) This was at present the only great miracle that had been publicly performed in Jerusalem; and from its having led to our Lord being brought before the Sanhedrim (or great Council of the Jews) and to His defense made before them, it would be a miracle that all would know.

[Ye all marvel.] This strong present tense seems to mean, “Ye are all still wondering” not only at the greatness of the miracle, but also at my working it on the Sabbath day. Schleusner maintains that the Greek word rendered “marvel” means here, “Ye are indignant, ye take amiss.” He thinks the word is used in this sense in Mark vi.6, John v.28, and Gal. i.6. 22.—

[*Moses therefore gave to you circumcision, etc.*] There is a difficulty in this verse in the expression we translate “therefore.” It is literally, “on this account—for this reason—on account of this.” It is not easy to say how the expression comes in and with what it is connected. (1) Some, as Theophylact, Beza, Poole, Whitby, Hammond, Maldonatus, Pearce, Doddridge, Bloomfield, Olshausen, Tholuck, Hengstenberg, and Stier propose to alter the stopping and to connect it with the end of the preceding verse: “Ye all marvel because of this one work.” (Compare Mark vi.6.). But it is doubtful whether the Greek language will fairly admit this. (2) Some would connect “therefore” with “are ye angry” in the following verse: “Are you really angry with Me on account of this one work when you yourselves break the Sabbath, in a sense, by circumcising on the Sabbath day?” But this connection seems very distant indeed. (3) Some, as Grotius, Calovius, Jansenius, and Webster think the expression altogether elliptical and would fill up the sense after “therefore” by supposing some such connection as this: “On account of this work and your anger at it, let me remind you of your own practice about circumcision.” (See Matt. xviii.22, xii.30, Luke xii.22.) (4) Some, as Chemnitius, Musculus, and DeDieu interpret “therefore” as “because” and make the sentence mean,

“Because Moses gave you circumcision, you circumcise a man on the Sabbath day,” etc. But it seems a violent strain to make the Greek word we render “therefore” mean “because.” (5) Some, finally, as Alford, Burgon, Barradius, Toletus, and Lyranus would connect “therefore” with the middle of this verse and would have it mean, “For this reason Moses gave you circumcision: viz., not because it was an ordinance appointed first by him, but because it was given to the Fathers,” *i.e.*, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This last is perhaps as tenable a view as any. But it is undeniably a difficulty and must remain so. Adopting this view, the whole verse may be paraphrased as follows: “Moses, whose name and law you highly reverence, gave you among other things the ordinance of circumcision. He gave it, remember, for this reason: because it was an old ordinance handed down to him by your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and not an ordinance first communicated to him like the Levitical law. Now you, in obedience to the ordinance of circumcision, which ought to be administered on the eighth day after a child’s birth, think it no breach of the fourth commandment to circumcise a child on the Sabbath day. In fact, you postpone the law of the Sabbath to the law of circumcision. You admit that a work of piety and necessity may be done on the Sabbath day. You admit that the fourth commandment which was given on Mount Sinai was not so important as the older law of circumcision.”

Burgon shows that “therefore” is used just in the same way as here, at the beginning of a sentence and pointing forward, in John v.16,18, viii.47, x.17, xii.18,39.

We should note how here, as elsewhere, our Lord refers to Moses as a real person and to the Old Testament history as real true history.

23.—[*If a man, etc.*] The argument in this verse is as follows: "Even among yourselves you circumcise a child on the Sabbath day, when it happens to be the eighth day after his birth, in order that the law of circumcision, which your great lawgiver Moses sanctioned and re-ordained, should not be broken. You thus admit the whole principle that there is some work which may be done on the Sabbath day. Is it then just and fair to be angry with Me because I have done a far greater work to a man on the Sabbath than the work of circumcision? I have not wounded his body by circumcision but made him perfectly whole. I have not done a purifying work to one particular part of him but have restored his whole body to health and strength. I have not done a work of necessity to one single member only but a work of necessity and benefit to the whole man." I cannot see any ground for the idea suggested by Alford that our Lord implies in this verse that the law of the Sabbath is a mere Judaical practice and comparatively a modern ordinance, and that as such it properly gave way to the older and higher law of circumcision which was "of the Fathers." It might be replied, firstly, that the Sabbath is so far from being a Judaical institution that it is actually older than circumcision and was appointed in Paradise. It might be replied, secondly, that our Lord seems purposely to guard against the idea by speaking of circumcision as "given by Moses" and as a part of "the law of Moses." In fact, He does this twice with such curious

particularity that one might think He meant to guard against anyone wresting this passage into an argument against the perpetual obligation of the Sabbath day. He is pleased for the occasion to speak both of circumcision and the Sabbath as part of "the law of Moses." He did this purposely because the minds of His hearers were full of Moses and the law at this particular period. And His argument amounts to this: that if they themselves allowed that the Mosaic law of the Sabbath must give way in a case of necessity to the Mosaic law of circumcision, they admitted that some works might be done on the Sabbath day, and therefore His work of healing an entire man on the Sabbath day could not be condemned as sinful.

The marginal reading, "without breaking the law of Moses," instead of "that the law of Moses should not be broken," appears to me inadmissible and unnecessary. It is inadmissible because it is a forced and unnatural interpretation of the Greek words. It is unnecessary because our Lord is evidently speaking of circumcision as part of "the law of Moses." The idea of some commentators as Trapp, Rollock, Hutcheson, Beza, and Stier, that "every whit whole" means "wholeness" of soul as well as body and implies conversion of heart as well as restoration to entire health and strength of the physical man, appears to me unlikely and far-fetched. It is a pious thought, but not apparently in our Lord's mind. Moreover, it is not quite certain that the man healed at Bethesda was healed in soul as well as body. There is no clear proof of it.

24.—[*Do not judge, etc.*] The sense of this verse must be sought in

connection with the subject of which our Lord has just been speaking. The Jews had condemned our Lord and denounced Him as a sinner against the fourth commandment because He had done a work on the Sabbath day. Our Lord refers to this and says, “Judge not the deed I did according to the appearance. I did a work on the Sabbath unquestionably. But what kind of a work was it? It was an act of necessity and mercy and therefore an act as lawful to be done as circumcision, which you yourselves perform on the Sabbath day. In appearance the Sabbath was broken. In reality it was not broken at all. Judge fair and just and righteous judgment. Do not hastily condemn an action, such as this, without looking below the surface.” There is perhaps a reference here to Isaiah’s prophecy about Messiah: “He shall not judge after the sight of His eyes.” (Isa. xi.3.) The principle here laid down is one of vast importance. Nothing is so common as to judge too favorably or too unfavorably of characters and actions from merely looking at the outward appearance of things. We are apt to form hasty opinions of others, either for good or evil, on very insufficient grounds. We pronounce some men to be good and others to be bad, some to be godly and others to be ungodly, without anything but appearance to aid our decision. We should do well to remember our blindness and to keep in mind this text. The bad are not always so bad, nor the good so good, as they appear. A potsherd may be covered over with gilding and look bright outside. A nugget of gold may be covered with dirt and look like worthless rubbish. One man’s work may look good at first and yet turn out, by and by, to have been done from the basest motives. Another man’s work may look very questionable at first and yet, at

last, prove Christ-like and truly godly. From rashly "judging by appearances" may the Lord deliver us!

Whether our Lord meant "judge not persons" or "judge not actions" according to appearance, is a point on which commentators do not agree. If we take the application to be to "persons," the sentence means: "Do not hastily suppose that Moses and I are at variance, and that, therefore, I must be wrong because Moses, the great lawgiver, must be right." But it seems far simpler and more natural to apply the expression to "actions:" "Judge not the thing done by the appearance only. Look below the surface and weigh it justly."

JOHN 7:25-36

Questions about Jesus' Identity

Then some of the residents of Jerusalem began to say, "Isn't this the man they are trying to kill? Yet here he is, speaking publicly, and they are saying nothing to him. Do the rulers really know that this man is the Christ? But we know where this man comes from. Whenever the Christ comes, no one will know where he comes from."

Then Jesus, while teaching in the temple courts, cried out, "You both know me and know where I come from! And I have not come on my own initiative, but the one who sent me is true. You do not know him, but I know him, because I have come from him and he sent me."

So then they tried to seize Jesus, but no one laid a hand on him, because his time had not yet come. Yet many of the crowd believed in him and said, "Whenever the Christ comes, he won't perform more miraculous signs than this man did, will he?"

The Pharisees heard the crowd murmuring these things about Jesus, so the chief priests and the Pharisees sent officers to arrest him. Then Jesus said, "I will be with you for only a little while longer, and then I am going to the one who sent me. You will look for me but will not find me, and where I am you cannot come."

Then the Jews who were hostile to Jesus said to one another, "Where is he going to go that we cannot find him? He is not going to go to the Jewish people dispersed among the Greeks and teach the Greeks, is he? What did he mean by saying, 'You will look for me but will not find me, and where I am you cannot come'?"

We see in these verses, ***the obstinate blindness of the unbelieving Jews.*** We find them defending their denial of our Lord's Messiahship, by saying, "But we know where this man comes from. Whenever the Christ comes, no one will know where he comes from." And yet in both these assertions they were wrong!

They were wrong in saying that they "knew where our Lord came from." They meant no doubt to say that He was born at Nazareth, and belonged to Nazareth, and was therefore a Galilean. Yet the fact was, that our Lord was born at Bethlehem, that He belonged legally to the tribe of Judah, and that His mother and Joseph were of the

house and lineage of David. It is incredible to suppose that the Jews could not have found this out, if they had honestly searched and inquired. It is notorious that pedigrees, genealogies, and family histories were most carefully kept by the Jewish nation. Their ignorance was without excuse.

They were wrong again in saying, “Whenever the Christ comes, no one will know where he comes from.” There was a well-known prophecy, with which their whole nation was familiar, that Christ was to come out of the town of Bethlehem. (Micah 5:2; Matt. 2:5; John 7:42.) It is absurd to suppose that they had forgotten this prophecy. But apparently they found it *inconvenient* to remember it on this occasion. *Men’s memories are often sadly dependent on their wills.*

The Apostle Peter, in a certain place, speaks of some as “willingly ignorant.” (2 Pet. 3:5.) He had good reason to use the expression. It is a sore spiritual disease, and one most painfully common among men. There are thousands in the present day just as blind in their way as the Jews. They shut their eyes against the plainest facts and doctrines of Christianity. They pretend to say that they do not understand, and cannot therefore believe the things that we press on their attention, as needful to salvation. But, alas! in nineteen cases out of twenty it is a willful ignorance. They do not believe what they do not like to believe. They will neither read, nor listen, nor search, nor think, nor inquire, honestly after truth. Can any one wonder if

such people are ignorant? Faithful and true is that old proverb—"There are none so blind as those who will not see."

We see, for another thing, in these verses, ***the overruling hand of God over all His enemies.*** We find that the unbelieving Jews "Sought to take our Lord—but no man laid hands on Him, because his hour was not yet come." They had the will to hurt him, but by an invisible restraint from above, they had not the power.

There is a mine of deep truth in the words before us, which deserves close attention. They show us plainly that all our Lord's sufferings were undergone voluntarily, and of His own free will. He did not go to the cross because He could not help it. He did not die because He could not prevent His death. Neither Jew nor Gentile, Pharisee nor Sadducee, Annas nor Caiaphas, Herod nor Pontius Pilate, could have injured our Lord, except power had been given them from above. All that they did was done under control, and by permission. The crucifixion was part of the eternal counsels of the Trinity. The sufferings and death of our Lord could not begin until the very hour which God had appointed. This is a great mystery. But it is a truth.

The servants of Christ in every age should treasure up the doctrine before us, and remember it in time of need. It is "full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort to godly people." Let such never forget that they live in a world where God overrules all times and events, and where nothing can happen but by God's permission. The very hairs of their heads are all numbered. *Sorrow and sickness,*

and poverty, and persecution, can never touch them, unless God sees fit. They may boldly say to every cross— "You could have no power against me, except it were given you from above." Then let them work on confidently. They are immortal, until their work is done. Let them suffer patiently, if needs be that they suffer. Their "times are in God's hand." (Psalm. 31:15.) That hand guides and governs all things here below, and makes no mistakes.

We see lastly, in these verses, ***the miserable end to which unbelievers may one day come.*** We find our Lord saying to His enemies— "You shall seek me, and shall not find me; and where I am there you cannot come."

We can hardly doubt that these words were meant to have a prophetical sense. Whether our Lord had in view individual cases of unbelief among His hearers, or whether He looked forward to the national remorse which many would feel too late in the final siege of Jerusalem, are points which we cannot perhaps decide. But that many Jews did remember Christ's sayings long after He had ascended into heaven, and did in a way seek Him and wish for Him when it was too late, we may be very sure.

It is far too much forgotten that there is such a thing as finding out truth too late. There may be convictions of sin, discoveries of our own folly, desires after peace, anxieties about heaven, fears of hell, but all too late. The teaching of Scripture on this point is clear and express. It is written in Proverbs— "Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find

me." (Prov. 1:28.) It is written of the foolish virgins in the parable, that when they found the door shut, they knocked in vain, saying, "Lord, Lord, open to us." (Matt. 25:11.) Dreadful as it may seem, it is possible, by continually resisting light and warnings, to sin away our own souls. It sounds frightening, but it is true.

Let us take heed to ourselves lest we sin after the example of the unbelieving Jews, and never seek the Lord Jesus as a Savior until it is too late. The door of mercy is still open. The throne of grace is still waiting for us. Let us give diligence to make sure our interest in Christ, while it is called today. Better never have been born than hear the Son of God say at last, "Where I am, there you cannot come."

Technical Notes:

25. Then some of them from Jerusalem said, Is this not he whom they seek to kill? 26. But, lo, he speaks boldly, and they say nothing to him. Do the rulers know indeed that this is the very Christ? 27. However, we know where this man is from; but when Christ comes, no man knows where he is from. 28. Then Jesus cried out in the temple as he taught, saying, Ye both know me, and ye know where I am from; and I have not come of myself, but he who sent me is true, whom ye do not know. 29. But I know him, for I am from him, and he sent me. 30. Then they sought to take him; but no man laid hands on him, because his hour was not yet come. 31. And many of the people believed on him, and said, When Christ comes, will he do more miracles

than these which this *man* has done? 32. The Pharisees heard that the people murmured such things concerning him, and the Pharisees and the chief priests sent officers to take him. 33. Then Jesus said to them, Yet a little while am I with you, and *then* I go to him who sent me. 34. Ye shall seek me, and shall not find *me;* and where I am *thither* ye cannot come. 35. Then the Jews said among themselves, Where will he go that we shall not find him? Will he go to the dispersed among the Gentiles and teach the Gentiles? 36. What *manner of* saying is this that he said, Ye shall seek me and shall not find *me*? and where I am, *thither* ye cannot come?

25.—[*Then some…said, etc.*] It is likely that these speakers were some of the lower orders who lived at Jerusalem and knew what the rulers wanted to do to our Lord. They can hardly be the same as "the people" at the 20th verse. They, being probably strangers to the plans of the priests and Pharisees, said, "Who goes about to kill You?" These, on the other hand, say, "Is not this He whom they seek to kill?"

Tittman remarks that the argument of the preceding verses "appears to have had great weight in the minds of our Lord's hearers."

26.—[*But, lo, He speaks boldly, etc.*] There appears to have been a restraining power put on our Lord's enemies at this juncture. (See verse 30.) It certainly seems to have struck the people before us as a

remarkable thing that our Lord should speak out so boldly, openly, and publicly, and yet no effort be made by the rulers to apprehend Him and stop His teaching. No wonder that they asked the question which immediately follows: “Have our rulers changed their mind? Are they convinced at last? Have they really found out that this is truly the Messiah, the Christ of God?”

The Greek words would be more literally rendered, “Have the rulers truly learned that this man is truly the Christ?”

27.—[*However, we know where this man is from.*] This means that they knew that our Lord was from Nazareth of Galilee. This, we must remember, was the universal belief of all the Jews. When our Lord rode into Jerusalem just before His crucifixion, the multitude said, “This is Jesus, the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.” (Matt. xxi.11.) When an inscription was put over His head on the cross in the letters of the three languages, it was “Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews.” (John xix.19. See also Matt. xiii.55, Mark vi.3, Luke iv.22.) Yet we know all this time that the Jews were mistaken and that our Lord was in reality born at Bethlehem, according to prophecy. (Micah v.2.) We can hardly doubt that the Jews might have found this out if they had taken the pains to inquire narrowly into the early history of our Lord’s life. In a nation so strict about pedigrees and birth places, such a thing could not be hid. But it seems as if they would not take the pains to inquire and satisfied themselves with the common story of His origin, as it gave them an additional excuse for not receiving Him as the Messiah.

The entire ignorance which appears to have prevailed among the Jews about all the circumstances of our Lord's miraculous conception and His birth at Bethlehem is certainly rather remarkable. Yet it should be remembered, (1) that thirty years had passed away between our Lord's birth and His public ministry, (2) that His mother and Joseph were evidently in a very humble position and might easily be overlooked, as well as all that happened to them, and (3) that living quietly at Nazareth, their journey to Bethlehem at the time of "the taxing" would soon be forgotten by others. After all, we must not forget that it is part of God's dealings with man not to *force* conviction and belief on anyone. The obscurity purposely left over our Lord's birthplace was a part of the moral probation of the Jewish nation. If, in their pride and indolence and self-righteousness, they would not receive the abundant evidence which our Lord gave of His Messiahship, it could not be expected that God would make unbelief impossible by placing His birth of a virgin at Bethlehem beyond the reach of doubt. In this, as in everything else, if the Jews had *honestly* desired to find out the truth, they might have found it.

[*When Christ comes, no man knows where He is from.*] It is rather difficult to see what the Jews meant by these words. Most writers think that they referred to the mysterious language of Isaiah about Messiah: "Who shall declare His generation" (Isa. liii.8); or to Micah's words, "Whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting" (Micah v.2); and that they had in view the Divine and

heavenly origin of Messiah which all Jews allowed would be a mystery. Yet it is hard to understand why they did not say, “When Christ comes, He shall be born in Bethlehem,” and why they should be supposed to speak of our Lord’s earthly origin in the beginning of the verse and of Messiah’s Divine origin in the end. There seems no explanation except to suppose that these speakers were singularly ignorant Jews who did not know that Messiah was to be born at Bethlehem and only knew that His birth was to be a mysterious thing. This is a possible view, if not a very probable one. The argument of the speakers before us would then be as follows: “When Messiah comes, He is to come suddenly, as Malachi foretold saying, ‘the Lord shall suddenly come to His temple’ (Mal. iii.1), unexpectedly, mysteriously, and taking people by surprise. This man, therefore, who is sitting in the temple among us cannot be the Messiah, because we know that He came from Nazareth in Galilee and has been living there for more than thirty years.” The prophecy about Messiah being born at Bethlehem they conveniently dropped out of sight, and, in fact, never dreamed that it was fulfilled by our Lord. The only prophecy they chose to look at was the one in Malachi (Mal. iii.1), and as the Lord did not appear to fulfill that, they concluded that He could not be the Christ. In religious matters people are easily satisfied with very imperfect and superficial reasoning when they want to be satisfied and to be spared further trouble. Men never lack reasons to confirm their will. This seems to have been the case with the Jews.

Rupertus mentions a common tradition of the Jews: that when

Christ came, He would come at midnight, as the angel came at midnight when the firstborn were destroyed in Egypt, and he thinks it may have been in their minds here.

Hutcheson observes that "not comparing Scripture with Scripture, but taking any single sentence that seems to plead for that we would be at, is a very great nursery and cause of error. Such is the Jews' reasoning here. They catch at one thing, speaking of Messiah's Divinity, and take no notice of other places."

Besser quotes a saying of Luther's: "The Jews are poor scholars. They have caught the sound of the prophet's clock (Micah v.2), but they have not noted the stroke aright. He who does not hear well imagines well. They heard that Christ was so to come that none should know from where He came. But they understood not rightly, that coming from God He was to be born of a virgin and come secretly into the world."

28.—[*Then Jesus cried…taught*.] This is a remarkable expression. We find our Lord departing from His usual practice when we read that He "cried," or raised His voice to a high pitch. Generally speaking, the words in St. Matthew apply strictly, quoted from Isa. xlii.2: "He shall not strive nor cry, neither shall any man hear His voice in the street." (Matt. xii.19.) Yet we see there were occasions when He did see it right to cry aloud and lift up His voice, and this is one. The perverse ignorance of the Jews, their persistence in blindness to all evidence, and the great opportunity afforded by the

crowds around Him in the temple courts were probably reasons why He "cried."

Our Lord is only said to have "cried" or lifted up His voice in four other passages in the Gospels: viz., Matt. xxvii.50, Mark xv.37, John vii.37, and xii.44. The Greek for "cried" in Matt. xxvii.46 is even a stronger word than that before us.

[*Ye both know Me…where I am from.*] This is an undeniably difficult expression, partly because it is hard to reconcile with John viii.14, and partly because it is not clear how the Jews could be said to "know our Lord" and "where He was from." The explanations suggested are various.

(1) Some, as Grotius, Lampe, Doddridge, Bloomfield, Tittman, and A. Clarke would have the sentence read as a question: "Do you both know Me, and do ye know whence I am? Are you quite sure that you are correct in saying this?" In this view it would be rather like the mode of expression used by our Lord in John xvi.31: "Do ye now believe?" where the interrogative forms the beginning of the sentence.
(2) Some, as Calvin, Ecolampadius, Beza, Flacius, Gualter, Rollock, Toletus, Glassius, Olshausen, Tholuck, Stier, and Webster think that the sentence is spoken ironically: "Truly you do know Me and whence I am, and poor miserable knowledge it is, worth nothing at all." Bengel and others object to this view, that our Lord never spoke ironically. Yet it would be hard to show that there is no irony in John

x.32, if not in Matt. xxvi.45 and Mark vii.9.
(3) Some think, as Chrysostom, Cocceius, Jansenius, Diodati, Bengel, Henry, Burkitt, Hengstenberg, Alford, Wordsworth, and Burgon, that the sentence is a simple affirmation: "It is true that you know Me and whence I am. I grant that in a certain sense you are right. You know where I have been brought up and who my relatives are according to the flesh. And yet in reality you know very little of Me. Of my Divine nature and my unity with my Father ye know nothing at all." On the whole, I prefer this last view to either of the other two.

[*I have not come of myself, etc.*] This sentence and the rest of the verse are evidently elliptical and must be paraphrased to give a full idea of the sense: "And yet ye do not really and thoroughly know Me; for I am not come of myself, independent of God the Father and without commission, but sent by the Father into the world. And He that sent Me has proved Himself true to His promises by sending Me, and is indeed a real true Person, the true and faithful God of Israel, whom ye, with all your profession, do not know."

Here, as elsewhere, our Lord's expression, "not come of myself," points directly to that intimate union between Himself and God the Father which is so constantly referred to in the Gospel of John.

Here too, as elsewhere, our Lord charges on the unbelieving Jews ignorance of the God whom they professed to serve and for whose honor they professed to be jealous. With all their boasted zeal for true religion and the true God, they did not really know God.

The word “true” here is of doubtful interpretation. It means “truthful” according to Cyril, Chrysostom, Theophylact, Lampe, Tholuck. But it is not clear that this is so. Alford maintains that it must mean “really existent.” Trench takes the same view in his “New Testament Synonyms.”

29.—[*But I know Him, etc.*] The knowledge of which our Lord here speaks is that peculiar and intimate knowledge which is necessarily implied in the unity of the three Persons of the Trinity in the Godhead. There is a high and deep sense in which the Son knows the Father, and the Father knows the Son, which we cannot pretend to explain because it is far above our capacities. (John x.15.) The Jews knew nothing rightly of God the Father. Jesus, on the contrary, could say “I know Him” as no one else could. “Neither knows any man the Father except the Son, and He to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him.” (Matt. xi.27.)

The expression “I am from Him” must not be confined and cramped down to mean only that our Lord had come like any prophet of old with a message and commission from God. It declares the relationship between God the Father and God the Son: “I am from Him by eternal generations, always one with Him—always equal with Him—but always a distinct person—always the only begotten Son—always from Him.”

The expression “He has sent Me” is, like the preceding one,

something far more than the mere assertion of a prophet's commission. It is a declaration that He was the Sent One—the Messiah, the Prophet greater than Moses, whom the Father had always promised to send. "I am the Seed of the woman sent to bruise the serpent's head. I am He whom the Father covenanted and engaged to send for the redemption of a lost world. I am He whom the Father has sent to be the Savior of lost man. I proclaim myself the Sent One—the Christ of God."

Bishop Hall paraphrases the two verses thus: "Ye mutter secretly that ye know Me and the place of my birth and parentage; but ye are utterly mistaken, for I have a Father in heaven whom ye know not. I came not of myself, but My Father is He who sent Me, who is the God of truth; of whom ye, after all your pretenses of knowledge, are utterly ignorant. But I do perfectly know Him, as I have good reason; for both I am from Him by eternal generation, and am by Him sent into the world to do the great work of redemption."

30.—[*They then sought to take Him.*] This last declaration seems to have raised the anger of the Jerusalem multitude who were listening to our Lord. With the characteristic keenness of all Jews, they at once detected in our Lord's language a claim to be received as the Messiah. Just as on a former occasion they saw, in His "calling God His Father," that He "made Himself equal with God" (John v.18), so here in His saying "I am from Him, He has sent Me," they saw an assertion of His right to be received as Messiah. [*But no man…hour was not yet come.*] This restraint on our Lord's enemies can only be

accounted for by direct Divine interposition. It is like John viii.20 and xviii.6. It is clear that they could do nothing against Him except by God's permission and when God, in His wisdom, was pleased to let it be done. Our Lord did not fall into His enemies' hands through inability to escape, but because the "hour had come" when He voluntarily undertook to die as a substitute.

The doctrine before us, let us note, is full of comfort to God's people. Nothing can hurt them except and until God permits. We are all immortal till our work is done. To realize that nothing happens in this world except by the eternal counsels of our Father and according to His eternal plans, is one grand secret of living a calm, peaceful, and contented life. Besser quotes a saying of Luther's: "God has appointed a nice, easy hour for everything, and that hour has the whole world for its enemy: it must attack it. The devil shoots and throws at the poor clock-hand, but in vain, for all depends on the hour. Till the hour comes and the hand has run its course, the devil and the world shall accomplish nothing."

31.—[*Many of the people*.] This means the common people—the lower orders, in contradistinction to the Pharisees and chief priests. [*Believed on Him*.] There seems no reason to think that this was not a true faith, so far as it went. But it would not be safe, perhaps, to conclude that it was more than a general belief that our Lord must be the Messiah, the Christ, and that He deserved to be received as such.

[When Christ comes…more miracles…has done?] This language

must clearly have been used by people who were familiar with many of our Lord's miracles wrought in Galilee, and who knew a good deal about His ministry. So few miracles probably had been wrought as yet in and around Jerusalem that the language would hardly be used by Jerusalem people. The word "more" probably means not only more in number but "greater" in character. The question raised by these people was a fair and reasonable one: "What greater evidence could anyone give that He is the Christ than this man has given? He could not work greater miracles, even if He worked more numerous ones. What then are we waiting for? Why should we not acknowledge this man as the Christ?"

32.—[The Pharisees heard…people murmured… Him.] This would be more literally translated, "The Pharisees heard the people murmuring." They actually heard with their own ears the common people, as they walked about the temple courts and gathered in the streets of Jerusalem at the crowded time of the feast, keeping up their under conversation about our Lord. Here, as at the twelfth verse, the word we render "murmuring" does not necessarily imply any finding fault, but only a dissatisfied and restless state of mind which found vent in much conversation and whispering among the people.

[*And the Pharisees…sent officers to take him.*] It would seem that the talk and stir of men's minds about our Lord so alarmed and irritated the rulers of the Jews that they resolved even now, in the midst of the feast, to arrest Him and so stop His preaching. What day

of the feast this was, and what interval elapsed between this verse and the 37th (where we are told of "the last day" of the feast), we are not told. It seems probable that the officers sought an opportunity for taking our Lord but could find none, partly because of the crowds that surrounded Him and partly because of a Divine restraint laid upon them. This was the state of things for three days at least.

Full well did these Pharisees justify our Lord's character of them in another place: "Ye neither go in yourselves into the kingdom; neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in." (Matt. xxiii.13.)

33.—[*Then Jesus said to them.*] The officers of the Pharisees and their supporters seem clearly to be the persons whom our Lord here addresses. Not only were they, through Divine restraint, unable to lay hands on Him, but they were obliged to stand by and listen to Him. They dared not seize Him for fear of the people, and yet dared not go away to report their inability to carry out their orders.

[*Yet a little while, etc.*] There is probably an undertone of sadness and tenderness about this and the following sentences. It is as though our Lord said, "Ye have come to lay hands on Me, and yet ye might well bear with Me. I am only a little time longer with you and then, when my time is come for leaving the world, I shall go back to my Father who sent Me." Or else it must mean, "Ye are sent to lay hands on Me, but it is useless at present; ye cannot do it because my hour is not yet come. I have yet a little longer time to minister on earth and then, and not till then, I go to Him who sent Me." Alford

takes this view.

The Jews, of course, could not understand whom our Lord meant by "Him who sent Me," and this saying must necessarily have seemed dark and mysterious to them.

34.—[*Ye shall seek Me and shall not find Me.*] These words seem addressed both to the officers and to those who sent them—to the whole body, in fact, of our Lord's unbelieving enemies. "A day will come when you will anxiously seek Me and bitterly lament your rejection of Me, but too late. The day of your visitation will be past and gone, and you will not find Me."

There is a great Bible truth taught here, as elsewhere, which is far too much overlooked by many. I mean the possibility of men seeking salvation when it is too late and crying for pardon and heaven when the door is shut forever. Men may find out their folly and be filled with remorse for their sins and yet feel that they cannot repent. No doubt true repentance is never too late; but late repentance is seldom true. Pharaoh, King Saul, and Judas Iscariot could all say, "I have sinned." Hell itself is truth known too late. God is unspeakably merciful, no doubt, but there is a limit even to God's mercy. He can be angry and may be provoked to leave men alone. People should often study Prov. i.24-34, Job xxvii.9, Isaiah l.15, Jer. xi.11, xiv.12, Ezek. viii.18, Hosea v.6, Micah iii.4, Zech. vii.13, and Matt. xxv.11,12.

These words very possibly received a most awful fulfillment during

the siege of Jerusalem, forty years after they were spoken. So think Chrysostom, Theophylact, and Euthymius.
But they were probably found true by many of our Lord's hearers long before that time. Their eyes were opened to see their folly and sin, after our Lord had left the world.
Burgon remarks that to this very day the Jews are, in a sense, seeking the Messiah and yet not finding Him.

[*Where I am.*] The place our Lord speaks of here is evidently heaven. Some have thought, as Bengel, that the words "where I am" should be translated "where I go." But it is neither a natural nor usual sense to put on the words. Nor is it necessary. There was a sense in which the Son of God could say with perfect truth, "Where I am thither ye cannot come." As God he never ceased to be in heaven, even when He was fulfilling His ministry on earth during His incarnation. As God He could truly say "Where I am" and not merely where "I was" or where "I shall be." It is like John iii.13 where our Lord, speaking to Nicodemus, calls Himself the "Son of man which IS in heaven." The expression is one of the many texts proving our Lord's divinity. No mere man speaking on earth could speak of heaven as a place "where I am." Augustine strongly maintains this view.

[*Ye cannot come.*] This is one of those expressions which show the impossibility of unconverted and unbelieving men going to heaven. It is a place where they "cannot come." Their own nature unfits them for it. They would not be happy if they were there. Without new hearts, without the Holy Ghost, without the blood of

Christ, they could not enjoy heaven. The favorite notion of some modern theologians—that all mankind are finally to go to heaven—cannot possibly be reconciled with this expression. Men may please themselves with thinking it is kind and loving and liberal and large-hearted to teach and believe that all men and women of all sorts will finally be found in heaven. One word of our Lord Jesus Christ's overturns the whole theory. "Heaven is a place," He says to the wicked, where "ye cannot come."

The word "ye" is emphatic and in the Greek stands out in strong contrast to the "I" of the sentence.

35.—[*Then the Jews said among themselves.*] The expression "Jews" here can hardly be confined to the Pharisees and rulers. It must mean, at any rate, those among them who heard our Lord say the words in the preceding verse. Whoever they were, they were probably not friendly to Him.

[*Where will He go that we shall not find Him?*] This would be more literally rendered, "Where is this man about to go?" They could put no meaning of a spiritual kind on our Lord's words.

[*Will He go... Gentiles, etc.*] This would be more literally rendered, "Is He about to go to the dispersion among the Greeks and to teach the Greeks?" The Greek language, Greek literature, and Greek philosophy had so thoroughly leavened Asia Minor, Syria, and Palestine that the expression "Greeks" in the New Testament is often

equivalent to Gentiles and stands for any people who are not Jews. Thus Rom. ii.9,10, iii.9, 1 Cor. x.32, xii.13. Yet it is a singular fact that this is the only passage in the New Testament where the word "Greek," standing alone and not in contradistinction to Jews, is rendered "Gentile."

The verse teaches two interesting things. One is the fact that the existence of a large number of Jews scattered all over the Gentile world was acknowledged as notorious in our Lord's time. The other is the impression that it proves to have prevailed among the Jews that a new teacher of religion might be expected to go to the Jews scattered among the Gentiles and, beginning with them, proceed to teach the Gentiles. This is in fact precisely what the Apostle Paul and his companions afterwards did. They did "go to the dispersed among the Gentiles and teach the Gentiles." The idea started here, of "teaching the Gentiles," was probably the suggestion of those who hated our Lord. We know from the Acts of the Apostles how much the Jews detested the opening of the door of salvation to the Gentiles.

Some, as Chrysostom, Theophylact, Hengstenberg, and many others, think that the words "dispersed among the Gentiles" mean the Gentiles themselves dispersed and scattered all over the world, and not the Jews. But our own version seems far more likely. There is an awkwardness in calling the Gentiles "the dispersion," and it is an expression nowhere else used. James calls the Jews "the twelve tribes scattered abroad." (James i.1.)

36.—[*What manner of saying, etc.*] This question of the Jews is the language of people who saw that there was probably some deep meaning in our Lord's words, and yet they were unable to make out what He meant. Hating our Lord bitterly as many of them did—determined to kill Him the first opportunity, vexed and annoyed at their own inability to answer Him or to stop His influence with the people—they suspected everything that fell from His lips. "Do not these words of His imply some mischief? Is there not some evil at the bottom of them? Do they not indicate that He is going to dishonor the law of Moses by pulling down the wall of partition between Jew and Gentile?"

JOHN 7:37-39

Teaching about the Spirit

On the last day of the feast, the greatest day, Jesus stood up and shouted out, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. Just as the scripture says, 'From within him will flow rivers of living water.'" (Now he said this about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were going to receive, for the Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.)

It has been said that there are some passages in Scripture which deserve to be printed in letters of gold. Of such passages the verses before us form one. They contain one of those wide, full, free

invitations to mankind, which make the Gospel of Christ so eminently the "good news of God." Let us see of what it consists.

We have, first, in these verses, ***a case supposed.*** The Lord Jesus says, "If any man thirst." These words no doubt were meant to have a spiritual meaning. The thirst before us is of a purely spiritual kind. It means anxiety of soul—conviction of sin—desire of pardon—longing after peace of conscience. When a man feels his sins, and wants forgiveness—is deeply sensible of his soul's need, and earnestly desires help and relief—then he is in that state of mind which our Lord had in view, when he said, "If any man thirst." The Jews who heard Peter preach on the day of Pentecost, and were "pierced in their hearts,"—the Philippian jailer who cried to Paul and Silas, "What must I do to be saved?" are both examples of what the expression means. In both cases there was "thirst."

Such thirst as this, unhappily, is known by few. All ought to feel it, and all would feel it if they were wise. Sinful, mortal, dying creatures as we all are, with souls that will one day be judged and spend eternity in heaven or hell, there lives not the man or woman on earth who ought not to "thirst" after salvation. And yet the many thirst after everything almost except salvation. Money, pleasure, honor, rank, self-indulgence—these are the things which they desire. There is no clearer proof of the fall of man, and the utter corruption of human nature, than the careless indifference of most people about their souls. No wonder the Bible calls the natural man "blind," and

“asleep,” and “dead,” when so few can be found who are awake, alive, and athirst about salvation.

Happy are those who know something by experience of spiritual “thirst.” The beginning of all true Christianity is to discover that we are guilty, empty, needy sinners. Until we know that we are lost, we are not in the way to be saved. The very first step toward heaven is to be thoroughly convinced that we deserve hell. That sense of sin which sometimes alarms a man and makes him think his own case desperate, is a good sign. It is in fact a symptom of spiritual life—“Blessed indeed are they which hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.” (Matt. 5:6.)

We have, secondly, in these verses, ***a remedy proposed.*** The Lord Jesus says, “If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.” He declares that He is the true fountain of life, the supplier of all spiritual necessities, the reliever of all spiritual needs. He invites all who feel the burden of sin heavy, to apply to Him, and proclaims Himself their helper.

Those words “let him come unto me,” are few and very simple. But they settle a mighty question which all the wisdom of Greek and Roman philosophers could never settle; they show how man can have peace with God. They show that peace is to be had in Christ by trusting in Him as our mediator and substitute, in one word, by believing. To “come” to Christ is to believe on Him, and to “believe” on Him is to come. The remedy may seem a very simple one, too simple to be true. But there is no other remedy than this; and all the

wisdom of the world can never find a flaw in it, or devise a better one.

To use this grand prescription of Christ is the secret of all saving Christianity. The saints of God in every age have been men and women who drank of this fountain by faith, and were relieved. They felt their guilt and emptiness, and thirsted for deliverance. They heard of a full supply of pardon, mercy, and grace in Christ crucified for all penitent believers. They believed the good news and acted upon it. They cast aside all confidence in their own goodness and worthiness, and came to Christ by faith as sinners. So coming they found relief. So coming daily they lived. So coming they died. Really to feel the sinfulness of sin and to thirst, and really to come to Christ and believe, are the two steps which lead to heaven. But they are mighty steps. Thousands are too proud and careless to take them. Few, alas! think, and still fewer believe.

We have, lastly, in these verses, ***a promise held out.*** The Lord Jesus says, "He that believes on me, from within him will flow rivers of living water." These words of course were meant to have a figurative sense. They have a double application. They teach, for one thing, that all who come to Christ by faith shall find in Him abundant satisfaction. They teach, for another thing, that believers shall not only have enough for the needs of their own souls, but shall also become fountains of blessings to others.

The fulfillment of the first part of the promise could be testified by thousands of living Christians in the present day. They would say,

if their evidence could be collected, that when they came to Christ by faith, they found in Him more than they expected. They have tasted peace, and hope, and comfort, since they first believed, which, with all their doubts and fears, they would not exchange for anything in this world. They have found grace according to their need, and strength according to their days. In themselves and their own hearts they have often been disappointed; but they have never been disappointed in Christ.

The fulfillment of the other half of the promise will never be fully known until the judgment-day. That day alone shall reveal the amount of good that every believer is made the instrument of doing to others, from the very day of his conversion. Some do good while they live, by their tongues; like the Apostles and first preachers of the Gospel. Some do good when they are dying; like Stephen and the penitent thief, and our own martyred Reformers at the stake. Some do good long after they are dead, by their writings; like Baxter and Bunyan and M'Cheyne. But in one way or another, probably, almost all believers will be found to have been fountains of blessings. By word or by deed, by precept or by example, directly or indirectly, they are always leaving their marks on others. They know it not now; but they will find at last that it is true. Christ's saying shall be fulfilled.

Do we ourselves know anything of "coming to Christ?" This is the question that should arise in our hearts as we leave this passage. The worst of all states of soul is to be without feeling or concern about

eternity—to be without "thirst." The greatest of all mistakes is to try to find relief in any other way than the one before us—the way of simply "coming to Christ." It is one thing to come to Christ's Church, Christ's ministers, and Christ's ordinances. It is quite another thing to come to Christ Himself. Happy is he who not only knows these things, but acts upon them!

Technical Notes:

37. On the last day, that great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirsts, let him come to me and drink. 38. He who believes on me, as the scripture has said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. 39. (But this he spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing on him should receive; for the Holy Ghost was not yet *given*, because Jesus was not yet glorified.)

37.—[*On the last day…feast*.] There seems to be in interval of three days between this verse and the preceding one. At any rate, it is certain that our Lord went to the temple and taught "about the midst of the feast." (v.14.) There seems no break from that point but a continuous narrative of teaching and argument up to this verse. There is, therefore, no account of what our Lord did during the three latter days of the feast. We can only conjecture that He taught on uninterrupted, and that a restraint was put by Divine interposition on His enemies so that they dared not interfere with Him.

Whether this “last day of the feast” means the eighth day or the seventh is a question not decided.

(1) Some, as Bengel and others, think it must be the seventh day, because in the account of the feast of tabernacles given by Moses there is no special mention of anything to be done on the eighth day (Lev. xxiii.33-43); while on each of the seven days of the feast there were special sacrifices appointed, a special reading of the law once every seven years, and also, according to the Jewish writers, a solemn drawing of water from the pool of Siloam to be poured on the altar in the temple.

(2) Others, as Lightfoot, Gill, Alford, Stier, Wordsworth, and Burgon, think it must be the eighth day, because in reality the feast could hardly be said to be finished till the end of the eighth day; and even in the account of the feast in Leviticus, it is said that the eighth day is to be “a holy convocation” and a “Sabbath.” (Lev. xxiii.36 and 39.) The point is of no practical importance, but of the two opinions I incline to prefer the second one. The words seem to me to indicate that all the ceremonial of the feast was over, the last offerings had been made, and the people were on the point of dispersing to their respective homes when our Lord seized the opportunity and made the grand proclamation which immediately follows. It was a peculiarly typical occasion. The last feast of the year was concluding, and before it concluded our Lord proclaimed publicly the great truth which was the commencement of a new dispensation, and Himself as the end of all sacrifices and ceremonies. The objection that no

drawing and pouring of water took place on the eighth day appears to me of no weight. That our Lord referred to it is highly probable. But I think He referred to it as a thing which the Jews had seen seven days running and remembered well. Now on the eighth day, when there was no water drawn, there seemed a peculiar fitness in His crying, "Come unto Me and drink. The water of life that I give may be drawn, though the feast is over."

[*Jesus stood and cried*.] These words must mean that our Lord chose some high and prominent position where He could "stand" and be seen and heard by many persons at once. If, as we may suppose, the worshipers at the feast of tabernacles were just turning away from the last of its ceremonies, one can easily imagine that our Lord "stood" in some commanding position close by the entrance of the temple. When it is said that "He cried," it means that He lifted up His voice in a loud, and to Him, unusual manner in order to arrest attention, like a herald making a public proclamation.

[*If any man thirsts, let him come to Me and drink*.] These words can have but one meaning: they are a general invitation to all who are athirst about their souls to come to Christ in order to obtain relief. He declares Himself to be the fountain of life, the reliever of man's spiritual needs, the giver of satisfaction to weary consciences, the remover and pardoner of sins. He recommends all who feel their sins and want pardon to come to Him, and promises that they shall at once get what they want. The idea is precisely the same as that in Matt. xi.28, though the image employed is different.

It is probable, as almost all commentators remark, that our Lord chose this figure and imagery because of the Jewish custom of drawing water from the pool of Siloam during the feast of tabernacles and carrying it in solemn procession to the temple. And it is thought that our Lord purposely refers to this ceremony of which the minds of many would doubtless be full. “Does anyone want true water of life, better than any water of Siloam? Let him come to Me and by faith draw out of Me living waters, even peace of conscience and pardon of sins.” But it is fair to remember that this is only conjecture. This custom of drawing water from Siloam at the feast was a human invention, nowhere commanded in the law of Moses or even mentioned in the Old Testament; and it admits of doubt whether our Lord would have sanctioned it. Moreover, it is evident from John iv.10 and vi.35 that the figures of “water” and “thirst” were not infrequently used by our Lord. The figures, at any rate, were familiar to all Jews, from Isaiah lv.1. Some have thought that because the feast of tabernacles was specially intended to remind the Jews of their sojourn in the wilderness, our Lord had in view the miraculous supply of water from the rock which followed Israel everywhere, and that He wished the Jews to see in Him the fulfillment of that type, the true Rock. (1 Cor. x.4.) The idea is deserving of attention.

The whole sentence is one of those golden sayings which ought to be dear to every true Christian, and is full of wide encouragement to all sinners who hear it. Its words deserve special attention.

We should note *the breadth* of the invitation. It is for “any man.” No matter who and what he may have been, no matter how bad and wicked his former life, the hand is held out and the offer made to him: “If any man thirsts, let him come.” Let no man say that the Gospel is narrow in its offers.

We should note *the persons* invited. They are those who “thirst.” That expression is a figurative one, denoting the spiritual distress and anxiety which anyone feels when he discovers the value of his soul, the sinfulness of sin, and his own guilt. Such a one feels a burning desire for relief, of which the distressing sensation of “thirst,” (a sensation familiar to all Eastern nations), is a most fitting emblem. No further qualification is named. There is no mention of repentance, amendment, preparation, conditions to fulfill, new heart to be got. One thing alone is named. Does a man “thirst”? Does he feel his sins and need of pardon? Then the Lord invites him.

We should note *the simplicity* of the course prescribed to a thirsting sinner. It is simply, “Let him come unto Me.” He has only to cast his soul on Christ, trust Him, lean on Him, believe on Him, commit his soul with all its burdens to Him, and that is enough. To trust Christ is to “come” to Christ. So “coming,” Christ will supply all his need. So believing, he is at once forgiven, justified, and received into the number of God’s children. (See John vi.35,37.)

The expression “drink” is, of course, figurative, answering to the word “thirst.” It means, “Let him freely take from Me everything that

his soul needs—mercy, grace, pardon, peace, strength. I am the Fountain of Life. Let him use Me as such, and I shall be well pleased." We do not read of any prophet or apostle in the Bible who ever used such language as this and said to men, "Come unto me and drink." None surely could use it but one who knew that He was very God.

38.—[*He who believes on Me, etc.*] This verse is undoubtedly full of difficulties and has received very various interpretations. Not the least difficulty is about the connection in which the several expressions of the verse ought to be taken.

(1) Some, as Stier, would connect "He who believes on Me" with the verb "drink" in the preceding verse. It would then run thus: "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and let him drink who believes on Me." I cannot think this is a right view. For one thing, it would be a violent strain of all grammatical usage of the Greek language to interpret the words thus. For another thing, it would introduce doctrinal confusion. Our Lord's invitation was not made to him "who believes," but to him who is "athirst."

(2) Some, as Chrysostom, Theophylact, Pellican, Heinsius, Gualter, DeDieu, Lightfoot, Trapp, and Henry, would connect "He who believes on Me" with the following words, "as the Scripture has said." It would then mean: "He who believes on Me after the manner that the Scripture bids him believe." I cannot think that this interpretation is correct. The expression "Believe as the Scripture has

said," is a very strange and vague one and unlike anything else in the Bible.

(3) Most commentators think that the words, "as the Scripture has said," must be taken in connection with those that follow, "out of his belly," etc. They think that our Lord did not mean to quote precisely any one text of Scripture, but only to give in His own words the general sense of several well-known texts. This, in spite of difficulties, I believe is the only satisfactory view.

One difficulty, of a grammatical kind, arises from the expression "He who believes on Me" having no verb with which it is connected in the verse. This cannot be got over. It must be taken as a nominative absolute, and the sentence must be regarded as an elliptical sentence which we must fill up.

Another difficulty arises from the fact that there is no text in the Old Testament Scriptures which at all answers to the quotation apparently given here. This difficulty is undeniable, but not insuperable. As I have already said, our Lord did not intend to give an exact quotation but only the general substance of several Old Testament promises. Wordsworth thinks Matt. ii.23 a similar case. Jerome also maintains that frequently the inspired writers contented themselves with giving the sense and not the precise words of a quotation. (See also Eph. v.14.) Another difficulty arises as to the application of the words, "Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." Some, as Rupertus, Bengel, and Stier, would apply this to our

Lord Himself and say that it means, “Out of Christ’s belly shall flow rivers of living water.” But it is a grave objection to this view that it totally disconnects the beginning of the verse from the end, makes the expression “He who believes on Me” even more elliptical than it needs to be, and throws the latter part of the verse in the form of a precise quotation of Scripture.

I venture to think that the true interpretation of the verse is as follows:

“He who believes on Me, or comes to Me by faith as his Savior, is the man out of whose belly shall flow rivers of living water, as the Scripture has said it should be.” It is a strong argument in favor of this view that our Lord said to the Samaritan woman, that the water He could give would be in him who drank it “a well of water springing up into everlasting life.” (John iv.14.) The full meaning of the promise is that every believer in Christ shall receive abundant satisfaction of his own spiritual needs; and not only that, but shall also become a source of blessing to others. From him instrumentally, by his word, work, and example, waters of life shall flow forth to the everlasting benefit of his fellowmen. He shall have enough for himself and shall be a blessing to others. The imagery of the figure used is still kept up, and “his belly” must stand for “his inner man.” His heart being filled with Christ’s gifts, shall overflow to others, and having received much shall give and impart much. The passages to which our Lord referred, and the substance of which He gives, are probably Isaiah xii.3, xxxv.6,7, xli.18, xliv.3, lv.1, lviii.11, Zech. xiv.8,16. Of these passages, our Lord gives the general sense but not

the precise words. This is the view of Calvin, Beza, Grotius, Cocceius, Diodati, Lampe, and Scott. It is a curious, confirmatory fact that the Arabic and Syriac versions of the text both have the expression "Scripture" in the plural, "As the *Scriptures* have said." It is a curious fact which Bengel mentions, that the 14th chapter of Zechariah was read in public in the temple on the first day of the feast of tabernacles. If this is correct, we can hardly doubt that our Lord must have had this in mind when He used the expression "As the Scripture has said." It is as though He said, "As you have heard, for instance, during this very feast from the book of your prophet Zechariah." That almost every believer whose life is spared after he believes becomes a fountain of blessing and good to others, is a simple matter of fact which needs no illustration. A truly converted man always desires the conversion of others and labors to promote it. Even the thief on the cross, short as his life was after he repented, cared for his brother thief, and from the words he spoke have flowed "rivers of living water" over this sinful world for more than eighteen hundred years. He alone has been a fountain of blessing.

Bloomfield quotes a Rabbinical sentence: "When a man turns to the Lord, he is like a fountain filled with living water, and rivers flow from him to men of all nations and tribes."

The favorite notion of some, that our Lord in this place only referred to the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost to be given on the day of Pentecost, is an idea that does not commend itself to me at all. The thing before us is a thing promised to *every believer*. But the miraculous gifts were certainly not bestowed on *every* believer.

Thousands were evidently converted through the Apostles' preaching who did not receive these gifts. Yet all received the Holy Ghost.

Luther paraphrases this verse thus: "He who comes to Me shall be so furnished with the Holy Ghost that he shall not only be quickened and refreshed himself and delivered from thirst, but he shall also be a strong stone vessel from which the Holy Ghost in all His gifts shall flow to others—refreshing, comforting, and strengthening them even as he was refreshed by Me. So St. Peter on the day of Pentecost, by one sermon as by a rush of water, delivered three thousand men from the devil's kingdom, washing them in an hour from sin, death, and Satan." Hengstenberg, after quoting this, adds: "That was only the first exhibition of a glorious peculiarity which distinguishes the Church of the New Testament from the Church of the Old. She has a living impulse which will diffuse the life within her, even to the ends of the earth."

39.—[*But this He spoke concerning the Spirit*.] This verse is one of those explanatory comments which are so common in St. John's Gospel. The opening words would be more literally rendered, "He spoke this concerning the Spirit."

Let it be noted that here, at any rate, there can be no doubt that "water" does not mean "baptism," but the Holy Spirit. St. John himself says so in unmistakable language.

[*Whom those believing on Him should receive*.] This means, "Whom

believers in Him were about to receive." There is an inseparable connection between faith in Christ and receiving the Holy Ghost. If any man has faith, he has the Spirit. If any man has not the Spirit, he has no saving faith in Christ. The effectual work of the Second and Third Persons in the Trinity is never divided.

Rupertus thinks that our Lord had specially in view that mighty outpouring of the Spirit on the Gentile world which was to take place after His own ascension into heaven, and the going forth of the Apostles into the world to preach the Gospel.

[*For the Holy Ghost was not yet given, etc.*] This sentence means that the Holy Ghost was not yet poured out on believers in all His fullness, because our Lord had not yet finished His work by dying, rising again, and ascending into heaven for us. It was not till He was "glorified" by going up into heaven and taking His seat at the right hand of God that the Holy Ghost was sent down in full influence on the Church. Then was fulfilled Psalm lxviii.18— "You have ascended on high, You have led captivity captive; You have received gifts for man, yes, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them." Before our Lord died and rose again and ascended, the Holy Ghost was and had been from all eternity one with the Father and the Son, a distinct Person of equal power and authority, very and eternal God. But He had not revealed Himself so fully to those whose hearts He dwelt in as He did after the ascension; and He had not come down in person on the Gentile world or sent forth the Gospel to all mankind with rivers of blessing as He did when Paul and

Barnabas were “sent forth by the Holy Ghost.” (Acts xiii.4.) In a word, the dispensation of the Spirit had not yet begun.

The expression “the Holy Ghost was not yet given” would be more literally rendered “the Holy Ghost was not.” This cannot, of course, mean that the Holy Ghost did not exist and was in no sense present with believers in the Old Testament dispensation. On the contrary, the Spirit strove with the men of Noah’s day, David spoke by the Holy Ghost, Isiah spoke of the Holy Spirit, and John the Baptist, now dead, was filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother’s womb. (Gen. vi.4, Mark xii.36, Isa. lxiii.10,11, Luke i.15.) What the expression does mean is this: The Holy Ghost was not yet with men in such fullness of influence on their minds, hearts, and understandings, as the Spirit of adoption and revelation, as He was after our Lord ascended up into heaven. It is clear as daylight, from our Lord’s language about the Spirit in John xiv.16,17,26, xv.26, and xvi.7-15, that believers were meant to receive a far more full and complete outpouring of the Holy Spirit after His ascension than they had received before. It is a simple matter of fact, indeed, that after the ascension the Apostles were quite different men from what they had been before. They both saw, spoke, and acted like men grown up, while before the ascension they had been like children. It was this increased light and knowledge and decision that made them such a blessing to the world, far more than any miraculous gifts. The possession of the gifts of the Spirit, it is evident, in the early Church was quite compatible with an ungodly heart. A man might speak with tongues and yet be like salt that had lost its savor. The possession of the fullness of the graces of

the Spirit, on the contrary, was that which made any man a blessing to the world.

Alford says: “St. John does not say that the words were a prophecy of what happened on the day of Pentecost, but of the Spirit which the believers were about to receive. Their first reception of Him must not be illogically put in the place of all His indwelling and working, which are here intended.”

I am quite aware that most commentators hold that the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost was specially meant by St. John in this passage. But after carefully considering the matter, I cannot subscribe to this opinion. To confine this verse to the day of Pentecost appears to me to cramp and narrow its meaning—to deprive many believers of their interest in a most precious promise and to overlook all the special language about the inward teaching of the Comforter as a thing to come on believers, which our Lord used the night before His crucifixion.

Bengel remarks that the use of “to be” instead of “to be present” is not uncommon in the Bible. Thus (2 Chron. xv.3.) When therefore we read “the Holy Ghost was not,” we need not be stumbled by the expression. It simply means “He was not fully manifested and poured out on the Church.” Peter, James, and John no doubt had the Spirit now, when our Lord was speaking. But they had Him much more fully after our Lord was glorified. This explains the meaning of the passage before us. We should note, in leaving these three verses,

what a striking example they supply to preachers, ministers, and teachers of religion. Let such learn from their Master to offer Christ boldly, freely, fully, broadly, unconditionally to all thirsting souls. The Gospel is too often spoiled in the presentation of it. Some fence it round with conditions and keep sinners at a distance. Others direct sinners wrongly and send them to something else beside or instead of Christ. He only copies his Lord who says, "If anyone feels his sins, let him come at once, straight, direct; not merely to church, or to the sacrament, or to repentance, or to prayer, but to Christ Himself."

JOHN 7:40-53

Differing Opinions About Jesus

When they heard these words, some of the crowd began to say, "This really is the Prophet!" Others said, "This is the Christ!" But still others said, "No, for the Christ doesn't come from Galilee, does he? Don't the scriptures say that the Christ is a descendant of David and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David lived?" So there was a division in the crowd because of Jesus. Some of them were wanting to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him.

Then the officers returned to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, "Why didn't you bring him back with you?" The officers replied, "No one ever spoke like this man!" Then the Pharisees answered, "You haven't been deceived too, have you? None of the rulers or the Pharisees have believed in him, have they? But this rabble who do not know the law are accursed!"

Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus before and who was one of the rulers, said, "Our law doesn't condemn a man unless it first hears from him and learns what he is doing, does it?" They replied, "You aren't from Galilee too, are you? Investigate carefully and you will see that no prophet comes from Galilee!" And every man went unto his own house.

These verses show us, for one thing, ***how useless is knowledge in religion, if it is not accompanied by grace in the heart.*** We are told that some of our Lord's hearers knew clearly where Christ was to be born. They referred to Scripture, like men familiar with its contents. "Has not the Scripture said that Christ comes of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was?" And yet the eyes of their understanding were not enlightened. Their own Messiah stood before them, and they neither received, nor believed, nor obeyed Him.

A certain degree of religious knowledge, beyond doubt, is of vast importance. Ignorance is certainly not the mother of true devotion, and helps nobody toward heaven. An "unknown God" can never be the object of a reasonable worship. Happy indeed would it be for Christians if they all knew the Scriptures as well as the Jews seem to have done, when our Lord was on earth!

But while we *value* religious knowledge, we must take care that we do not *overvalue* it. We must not think it enough to know the facts and doctrines of our faith, unless our hearts and lives are thoroughly influenced by what we know. The very devils know the

creed intellectually, and "believe and tremble," but remain devils still. (James 2:19.) It is quite possible to be familiar with the letter of Scripture, and to be able to quote texts appropriately, and reason about the theory of Christianity, and yet to remain dead in trespasses and sins. Like many of the generation to which our Lord preached, we may know the Bible well, and yet remain faithless and unconverted.

Heart-knowledge, we must always remember, is the one thing needful. It is something which schools and universities cannot confer. It is the gift of God. To find out the plague of our own hearts and hate sin—to become familiar with the throne of grace and the fountain of Christ's blood—to sit daily at the feet of Jesus, and humbly learn of Him—this is the highest degree of knowledge to which mortal man can attain. Let any one thank God who knows anything of these things. He may be ignorant of Greek, Latin, Hebrew, and mathematics, but he shall be saved.

These verses show us, for another thing, ***how eminent must have been our Lord's gifts, as a public Teacher of religion.*** We are told that even the officers of the chief priests, who were sent to take Him, were struck and amazed. They were, of course, not likely to be prejudiced in His favor. Yet even they reported— "Never man spoke like this Man."

Of the MANNER of our Lord's public speaking, we can of necessity form little idea. Action, and voice, and delivery are things that must be seen and heard to be appreciated. That our Lord's

manner was peculiarly *solemn, arresting, and impressive*, we need not doubt. It was probably something very unlike what the Jewish officers were accustomed to hear. There is much in what is said in another place— "He taught them as One having authority, and not as the Scribes." (Matt. 7:29.)

Of the matter of our Lord's public speaking, we may form some conception from the discourses which are recorded in the four Gospels. The leading features of these discourses are plain and unmistakable. The world has never seen anything like them, since the gift of speech was given to man. They often contain deep truths, which we have no line to fathom. But they often contain simple things, which even a child can understand. They are bold and outspoken in denouncing national and ecclesiastical sins, and yet they are wise and discreet in never giving needless offence. They are faithful and direct in their warnings, and yet loving and tender, in their invitations. For a combination of *power* and *simplicity*, of *courage* and *prudence*, of *faithfulness* and *tenderness*, we may well say, "Never man spoke like this Man!"

It would be well for the Church of Christ if ministers and teachers of religion would strive more to speak after their Lord's pattern. Let them remember that elegant bombastic language, and a sensational, theatrical style of address, are utterly unlike their Master. Let them realize, that an eloquent simplicity is the highest attainment of public speaking. Of this their Master left them a glorious example. Surely they need never be ashamed of walking in His steps.

These verses show us, lastly, ***how slowly and gradually the work of grace goes on in some hearts.*** We are told that Nicodemus stood up in the council of our Lord's enemies, and mildly pleaded that He deserved fair dealing. "Does our law judge any man," he asked, "before it hear him, and know what he does?"

This very Nicodemus, we must remember, is the man who, eighteen months before, had come to our Lord by night as an ignorant inquirer. He evidently knew little then, and dared not come to Christ in open day. But now, after eighteen months, he has got on so far that he dares to say something on our Lord's side. It was but little that he said, no doubt, but it was better than nothing at all. And a day was yet to come, when he would go further still. He was to help Joseph of Arimathaea in doing honor to our Lord's dead body, when even His chosen Apostles had forsaken Him and fled.

The case of Nicodemus is full of useful instruction. It teaches us, that *there are diversities in the operation of the Holy Spirit*. All are undoubtedly led to the same Savior, but all are not led precisely in the same way. It teaches us, that the work of the Spirit does not always go forward with the same speed in the hearts of men. In some cases it may go forward very slowly indeed, and yet may be real and true.

We shall do well to remember these things, in forming our opinion of other Christians. We are often ready to condemn some as graceless, because their experience does not exactly tally with our own, or to set them down as not in the narrow way at all, because

they cannot run as fast as ourselves. We must beware of hasty judgments. It is not always the fastest runner that wins the race. It is not always those who begin suddenly in religion, and profess themselves rejoicing Christians, who continue steadfast to the end. Slow work is sometimes the surest and most enduring. Nicodemus stood firm, when Judas Iscariot fell away and went to his own place. No doubt it would be a pleasant thing, if everybody who was converted came out boldly, took up the cross, and confessed Christ in the day of his conversion. But it is not always given to God's children to do so.

Have we any grace in our hearts at all? This, after all, is the grand question that concerns us. It may be small—but have we *any?* It may grow slowly, as in the case of Nicodemus—but does it grow at all? Better a little grace than none! Better move slowly than stand still in sin and the world!

Technical Notes:

40. Therefore many of the people, when they heard this saying, said, Truly this is the prophet. 41. Others said, This is the Christ. But some said, Shall Christ come out of Galilee? 42. Has not the Scripture said that Christ comes from the seed of David and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was? 43. So there was a division among the people because of him. 44. And some of them would have taken him, but no man laid hands on him. 45. Then the officers came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to

them, Why have ye not brought him? 46. The officers answered, No man ever spoke like this man! 47. Then the Pharisees answered them, Are ye also deceived? 48. Have any of the rulers of the Pharisees believed in him? 49. But this people who knows not the law are cursed. 50. Nicodemus (he who came to Jesus by night, being one of them) said to them, 51. Does our law judge *any* man before it hears him and knows what he does? 52. They answered and said to him, Are you also of Galilee? Search and look, for no prophet arises out of Galilee. 53. And every man went to his own house.

40.—[*Many of the people…said.*] The "people" here evidently mean the general multitude of common people who had come together to attend the feast, and not the chief priests and Pharisees. The "saying" which called forth their remarks appears to be the public proclamation that our Lord had just made inviting all thirsty souls to come to Him as the Fountain of Life. That any one person should so boldly announce himself as the reliever of spiritual thirst seems to have arrested attention; and taken in connection with the fact of our Lord's public teaching during the latter half of the feast, which many of the people must have heard, it induced them to say what immediately follows.

Brentius, Musculus, and others hold strongly that our Lord's words in the preceding three verses must have been greatly amplified at the time He spoke, and are in fact a sort of text or keynote to His

discourse; and that this is referred to in the expression “this saying.” Yet the supposition seems hardly necessary. The words were a conclusion to three days’ teaching and preaching.

[*Truly, this is the Prophet.*] This would be more literally rendered, “This man is truly and really the Prophet.” These speakers meant that He must be “the Prophet” like unto Moses, foretold in Deuteronomy. (Deut.xviii.15,18.)

41.—[*Others said, This is the Christ.*] These speakers saw in our Lord the Messiah, or anointed Savior, whom all pious Jews were eagerly expecting at this period and whose appearing the whole nation was looking for in one way or another, though the most part expected nothing more than a temporal Redeemer. (Psalm xlv.7, Isa. lxi.1, Dan. ix.25,26.) Even the Samaritan woman could say, “I know that Messiah comes.” (John iv.25.)

[*But some said…Galilee?*] This ought to have been rendered, “But others said.” It was not a few exceptional speakers only but a party probably as large as any. They raised the objection, which was not unnatural, that this new teacher and preacher, however wonderful He might be, was notoriously a Galilean of Nazareth and therefore could not be the promised Messiah. How utterly ignorant most persons were of our Lord’s birthplace we see here, as elsewhere.

42.—[*Has not the Scripture said, etc.*] We should note in this verse the clear knowledge which most Jews in our Lord’s time had of

Scripture prophecies and promises. Even the common people knew that Messiah was to be of the family of David and born at Bethlehem, the well-known birthplace of David. It may, indeed, be feared that myriads of Christians know far less of the Bible than the Jews did eighteen hundred years ago.

43.—[So…division…because of Him.] Here we see our Lord's words literally fulfilled: He did not bring "peace, but division." (Luke xii.51.) It will always be so as long as the world stands. So long as human nature is corrupt, Christ will be a cause of division and difference among men. To some He is a savor of life and to others of death. Grace and nature never will agree any more than oil and water, acid and alkali. A state of entire quiet and the absence of any religious division is often no good sign of the condition of a Church or a parish. It may even be a symptom of spiritual disease and death. The question may possibly be needful in such cases, "Is Christ there?"

44.—[*And some…taken Him.*] This would be more satisfactorily rendered, "Some out of those" who made up the crowd "were desirous and wished to take our Lord prisoner." These were no doubt the friends and adherents of the Pharisees, and very likely were the common people who dwelt at Jerusalem and knew well what their leaders wanted to do.

[*No man laid hands on Him.*] This must be accounted for primarily by the Divine restraint which was at present laid on our Lord's enemies because His hour was not yet come, and, secondarily, by the fear in which the Pharisees' party evidently stood of a rising in our

Lord's defense on the part of the Galileans and others who had come up to the feast. Thus we read that at the last Passover "the priests and Scribes sought how they might kill Him, for they feared the people." (Luke xxii.2.) Again: "They said, Not on the feast day lest there be an uproar of the people." (Mark xiv.2 and Matt. xxvi.5.)

45.—[*Then the officers came, etc.*] It is not clear what interval of time elapsed between verse 32 where we read that the officers were sent by the priests to take our Lord, and the present verse where we are told of their coming back to their masters. At first sight, of course, it all happened in one day. Yet, if we observe that between the sending them to take our Lord and the present verse there comes in the remarkable verse— "In the last day, that great day of the feast," it seems impossible to avoid the conclusion that an interval of two or three days must have elapsed. It seems highly probable that the officers had a general commission and warrant to take our Lord prisoner whenever they saw a fitting opportunity about the fourth day of the feast. They found, however, no opportunity on account of the temper and spirit of the crowd, and dared not make the attempt. And at last, at the end of the feast (when the multitude was even more aroused than at first by our Lord's open testimony), they were obliged to return to those who sent them and confess their inability to carry out their orders.

46.—[*The officers answered, etc.*] The answer of the officers has probably a double application. They themselves felt the power of our Lord's speaking. They had never heard any man speak like this man.

It tied their hands and made them feel incapable of doing anything against Him. They had, besides, marked the power of His speaking over the minds of the multitude which gathered round Him. They had never seen anyone exercise such an influence over His hearers. They felt it useless to attempt arresting one who had such complete command over His audience. We cannot doubt that they had heard much more "speaking" than the few things recorded between verses 32 and 46. These are only specimens of what our Lord said and furnish a keynote to us indicating the general tenor of His teaching. What it was precisely that the officers meant when they said "No man ever spoke like this man," we are left to conjecture. They probably meant that they had never heard anyone speak such deep and important truths in such simple yet striking language and in so solemn, impressive, and yet affectionate style. Above all, they probably meant that He spoke with a dignified tone of authority, as a messenger from heaven, to which they were entirely unaccustomed.

47.—[Then the Pharisees answered…also deceived?] The word rendered "deceived" means literally "led astray, or caused to err." Have you too been carried off by this new teaching? The question implies anger, sarcasm, ridicule, and displeasure.

48.—[Have any of the rulers…believed in Him?] This arrogant question was doubtless meant to be an unanswerable proof that our Lord could not possibly be the Messiah: "Can a person be deserving of the least credit as a teacher of a new religion if those who are the most learned and highest in position do not believe Him?" This is

precisely the common argument of human nature in every age. The doctrine which the great and learned do not receive is always assumed to be wrong. And yet St. Paul says, “Not many wise, not many noble are called.” (1 Cor. i.26.) The very possession of rank and learning is often a positive hindrance to a man’s soul. The great and the learned are often the last and most unwilling to receive Christ’s truth. “How hardly shall a rich man enter the kingdom of God.” (Matt. xix.23.)

It seems clear from this that at present the Pharisees did not know that one of their own number, Nicodemus, was favorably disposed to our Lord.

49.—[*But this people…cursed.*] This sentence is full of contempt and scorn throughout. “This people”—a mob, a common herd— “who knows not the law”—is not deeply read in the Scriptures and have no deep Rabbinical learning— “are cursed”—are under God’s curse and given over to a strong delusion. Their opinion is worthless, and what they think of the new Galilean teacher is of no moment or value. Charges like these have been made in every age against the adherents of all reformers and revivers of true religion. The multitude who followed Luther in Germany, our own Reformers in England, and the leaders of revived religion in the last century, were always attacked as ignorant enthusiasts whose opinion was worth nothing. When the enemies of vital religion cannot prevent people flocking after the Gospel and cannot answer the teaching of its advocates, they often fight with the weapons of the Pharisees in this verse. They content

themselves with the cheap and easy assertion that those who do not agree with themselves are ignorant and know nothing, and that therefore it matters nothing what they think. Yet St. Paul says, “God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty.” (1 Cor. i.27.) The poorer and humbler classes are often much better judges of “what is truth” in religion than the great and learned. The disposition of the Jews to pronounce those “accursed” who differed from themselves in religious controversy is exhibited in this verse. Jewish converts to Christianity in modern times are often sadly familiar with cursing from their own relatives.

50.—[*Nicodemus…came to Jesus by night*.] This would be more literally rendered, “He who came to *Him* by night.” The omission of our Lord’s name here is very peculiar. The fact of Nicodemus having come to see Jesus “by night” is always mentioned by St. John, where his name occurs. (See John xix.39.) It is, to my mind, a strong proof that he was a coward when he first came to our Lord and dared not come openly by day. [*Being one of them*] This means that he was a chief man, or ruler among the Pharisees, and as such was present at all their deliberations and counsels. His case shows that the grace of God can reach men in any position however unfavorable it may be to true religion. Even a chief Pharisee, one of that company of men who, as a body, hated our Lord and longed to kill Him, could believe and speak up for Him. We must never conclude hastily that there can be no Christians among a body of men because the great majority of them hate Christ and are hardened in wickedness. There was a Lot in

Sodom, an Obadiah in Ahab's house, a Daniel in Babylon, saints in Nero's palace, and a Nicodemus among the Pharisees. He was "one out of their number," but not one of them in spirit.

51.—[*Does our law judge any man, etc.*] This was undoubtedly speaking up for our Lord and pleading for His being treated justly and fairly, and according to law. At first sight it seems a very tame and cautious mode of showing his faith, if he had any. But it is difficult to see what more could have been said in the present temper of the Pharisees. Nicodemus wisely appealed to law. "Is it not a great principle of that law of Moses, which we all profess to honor, that no man should be condemned without first hearing from him what defense he can make, and without clear knowledge and evidence as to what he has really done? Is it fair and legal to condemn this person before you have heard from His own lips what He can say in His defense, and before you know from the testimony of competent witnesses what He has really done? Are you not flying in the face of our law by hastily judging His case and setting Him down as a malefactor before you have given Him a chance of clearing Himself?" (See Deut. i.17 and xvii.8, etc., and xix.15, etc.) Nicodemus, it will be observed, cautiously takes up his ground on broad general principles of universal application and does not say a word about the Lord's particular case. The Greek words would be more literally rendered, "Does our law condemn the man unless it hears from him first?"

I think there can be no reasonable doubt that these words show Nicodemus to have become a real, though a slow-growing disciple of

Christ, and a true believer. It required great courage to do even the little that he did here and to say what he said.

Let us carefully note that a man may begin very feebly and grow very slowly and seem to make very little progress, and yet have the true grace of God in his heart. We must be careful that we do not hastily set down men as unconverted because they get on slowly in the Christian life. All do not grow equally quick.

Let us learn to believe that even in high places and most unlikely positions Christ may have friends of whom we know nothing. Who would have expected a chief ruler among the Pharisees to rise at this juncture and plead for justice and fair dealing in the case of our Lord.

52.—[*They answered…you also of Galilee?*] This was the language of rage, scorn, and bitter contempt. "Are you too—a ruler, a learned man, a Pharisee, one of ourselves—become one of the Galilean party? Have you joined the cause of this new Galilean prophet?"

The tone of this bitter question seems to me to prove that Nicodemus had said as much as was possible to be said on this occasion. The temper and spirit of the Pharisees, from disappointment and vexation at our Lord's increasing popularity and their own utter inability to stop His course, made them furious at a single word being spoken favorably or kindly about Him. They must indeed have been in a violent frame of mind when the mere hint at the

desirability of acting justly, fairly, and legally made them ask a brother Pharisee whether he was a Galilean! Musculus remarks that Nicodemus got little favor from the Pharisees though his favorable feeling towards our Lord was so cautiously expressed. He observes that this is generally the case with those who act timidly as he did. People may just as well be outspoken and bold.

[*Search and look*.] This seems to be meant sarcastically. "Go and search the Scriptures again and look at what they say about the Messiah, before you say one word about this new Galilean prophet. Examine the prophets and see if you can find a tittle of evidence in favor of this Galilean whose cause you are patronizing."

[*No prophet arises out of Galilee*.] This would be rendered more literally, "a prophet out of Galilee has not been raised." About the meaning of the words, there are three very different opinions.

(1) Some think that the words only mean, no "prophet of great note or eminence has ever been raised up in Galilee." This, however, is a tame and unsatisfactory view.
(2) Some, as Bishop Pearce, Burgon, and Sir N. Knatchbull, think that the Pharisees only meant that "THE Prophet like unto Moses, the Messiah, has nowhere in the Scripture been foretold as coming out of Galilee." According to this view, the Pharisees said what was quite correct. (3) Others, as Alford, Wordsworth, Tholuck, and most other commentators, think that the Pharisees, in their rage and fury, either forgot or found it convenient to forget that prophets had

arisen from Galilee. According to this view, they made an ignorant assertion and said what was not true. I find it very difficult to receive this third opinion. To me it seems quite preposterous to suppose that men so thoroughly familiar with the letter of Scripture, as the Pharisees were, would venture on such a monstrous and ignorant assertion as to say that "no prophet had ever arisen out of Galilee!" Elijah, Elisha, Amos, Jonah, and perhaps Nahum are all thought by some to have been Galilean prophets. Moreover, Isaiah distinctly prophesied that in Messiah's times Zebulon and Napthali and Galilee of the Gentiles should be a region where "light should spring up." (Matt. iv.14-16.)

On the other hand, I must frankly admit that the Greek of the sentence must be much strained to make it mean "the true prophet is not to arise out of Galilee." I do not forget, moreover, that when men lose their tempers and fly into a passion, there is nothing too foolish and ignorant for them to say. Like a drunken man, they may talk nonsense and say things of which in calm moments they may be ashamed. It may have been so with the Pharisees here. They were no doubt violently enraged, and in this state of mind might say anything absurd.

The point, happily, is not one of first-rate importance, and men may afford to differ about it. Nevertheless, if I must give an opinion, I prefer the second of the three views I have given. The improbability of the Pharisees asserting anything flatly contrary to the letter and

facts of Scripture is, to my mind, an insuperable objection to the other views.

53.—[*And every man went to his own house.*] These words seem to indicate that the assembly of Pharisees, before whom the officers had appeared reporting their inability to take our Lord prisoner, broke up at once without taking any further action. They saw that they could do nothing. Their design to put our Lord to death at once could not be carried out and must be deferred. They therefore separated and went to their own houses. We may well believe that they parted in a most bitter and angry frame of mind, boiling over with mortified pride and baulked malice. They had tried hard to stop our Lord's course and had completely failed. The "Galilean" had proved for the time stronger than the Sanhedrim. Once more, as after the miracle of Bethesda, they had been ignominiously foiled and publicly defeated.

Hutcheson remarks: "There is no council nor understanding against Christ, but when He pleases He can dissipate all of it. Here every man went to his own house without doing anything."

Maldonatus thinks the verse proves that though the Pharisees sneered at Nicodemus and reviled him, they could not deny the fairness and justice of what he said. He thinks, therefore, that they dispersed in consequence of Nicodemus' interference. Even one man may do something against many when God is on his side.

Besser quotes a saying of Luther's: "Much as the Pharisees before had blustered, they dared do nothing to Jesus; they became still and silent. He goes up to the feast meek and silent and returns home with glory. They go up with triumph and come down weak." Trapp remarks: "See what one man may do against a mischievous multitude. It is good to be doing, though there be few or none to second us." Baxter remarks: "One man's words may sometimes divert a persecution."

John – Chap. 8

JOHN 8:1-11

A Woman Caught in Adultery

But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Early in the morning he came to the temple courts again. All the people came to him, and he sat down and began to teach them. The experts in the law and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught committing adultery. They made her stand in front of them and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of adultery. In the law Moses commanded us to stone to death such women. What then do you say?" (Now they were asking this in an attempt to trap him, so that they could bring charges against him.) Jesus bent down and wrote on the ground with his finger. When they persisted in asking him, he stood up straight and replied, "Whoever among you is guiltless may be the first to throw a stone at her." Then he bent over again and wrote on the ground.

Now when they heard this, they began to drift away one at a time, starting with the older ones, until Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?" She replied, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "I do not condemn you either. Go, and from now on do not sin any more."

The narrative which begins the eighth chapter of John's Gospel is of a rather peculiar character. In some respects it stands alone. There is nothing quite like it in the whole range of the four Gospels. In every age some scrupulous minds have stumbled at the passage, and have doubted whether it was ever written by John at all. But the justice of such scruples is a point that cannot easily be proved.

To suppose, as some have thought, that the narrative before us palliates the sin of adultery, and exhibits our Lord as making light of the seventh commandment, is surely a great mistake. There is nothing in the passage to justify such an assertion. There is not a sentence in it to warrant our saying anything of the kind. Let us calmly weigh the matter, and examine the contents of the passage.

Our Lord's enemies brought before Him a woman guilty of adultery, and asked him to say what punishment she deserved. We are distinctly told that they asked the question, "to trap Him." They hoped to entrap Him into saying something for which they might accuse Him. They fancied perhaps that He who preached pardon and salvation to "publicans and harlots" might be induced to say something which would either contradict the law of Moses, or His own words.

Our Lord knew the hearts of the malicious questioners before Him, and dealt with them with perfect wisdom, as He had done in the case of the "tribute-money." (Matt. 22:17.) He refused to be a "judge" and lawgiver among them, and specially in a case which their own law had already decided. He gave them at first no answer at all.

But “when they continued asking,” our Lord silenced them with a withering and heart-searching reply. “He that is without sin among you,” he said, “let him first cast a stone at her.” He did not say that the woman had not sinned, or that her sin was a trifling and excusable one. But He reminded her accusers that *they* at any rate were not the people to bring a charge against her. Their own motives and lives were far from pure. They themselves did not come into the case with clean hands. What they really desired was not to vindicate the purity of God’s law, and punish a sinner, but to wreak their malice on Himself.

Last of all, when those who had brought the unhappy woman to our Lord had gone out from His presence, “convicted by their own conscience,” He dismissed the guilty sinner with the solemn words, “Neither do I condemn you—go and sin no more.” That she did not deserve punishment He did not say. But He had not come to be a judge. Moreover, in the absence of all witnesses or accusers, there was no case before Him. Let her then depart as one whose guilt was “not proven,” even though she was really guilty, and let her “sin no more.”

To say in the face of these simple facts that our Lord made light of the sin of adultery is not fair. There is nothing in the passage before us to prove it. Of all whose words are recorded in the Bible there is none who has spoken so strongly about the breach of the seventh commandment as our divine Master. It is He who has taught that it may be broken by a look or a thought, as well as by an open act.

(Matt. 5:28.) It is He who has spoken more strongly than any about the sanctity of the marriage relation. (Matt. 19:5.) In all that is recorded here, we see nothing inconsistent with the rest of His teaching. He simply refused to usurp the office of the judge and to pronounce condemnation on a guilty woman, for the gratification of His deadly enemies.

In leaving this passage, we must not forget that it contains two lessons of great importance. Whatever difficulties the verses before us may present, these two lessons at any rate are clear, plain, and unmistakable.

We learn, for one thing, ***the power of conscience.*** We read of the woman's accusers, that when they heard our Lord's appeal, "being convicted by their own conscience, they went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even into the last." Wicked and hardened as they were, they felt something *within* which made them cowards. Fallen as human nature is, God has taken care to leave within every man a witness that will be heard.

Conscience is a most important part of our inward man, and plays a most prominent part in our spiritual history. It cannot save us. It never yet led any one to Christ. It is blind, and liable to be misled. It is lame and powerless, and cannot guide us to heaven. Yet conscience is not to be despised. It is the minister's best friend, when he stands up to rebuke sin from the pulpit. It is the mother's best friend, when she tries to restrain her children from evil and quicken them to good. It is the teacher's best friend, when he presses home

on boys and girls their moral duties. Happy is he who never stifles his conscience, but strives to keep it tender! Still happier is he who prays to have it enlightened by the Holy Spirit, and sprinkled with Christ's blood.

We learn, for another thing, ***the nature of true repentance.*** When our Lord had said to the sinful woman, "Neither do I condemn you," He dismissed her with the solemn words, "go and sin no more." He did not merely say, "go home and repent." He pointed out the chief thing which her case required—the necessity of immediate breaking off from her sin.

Let us never forget this lesson. It is the very essence of genuine repentance, as the Church catechism well teaches, to "forsake sin." That repentance which consists in nothing more than feeling, talking, professing, wishing, meaning, hoping, and resolving, is worthless in God's sight. Action is the very life of "repentance unto salvation not to be repented of." Until a man ceases to do evil and turns from his sins, he does not really repent. Would we know whether we are truly converted to God, and know anything of godly sorrow for sin, and repentance such as causes "joy in heaven"? Let us search and see whether we forsake sin. Let us not rest until we can say as in God's sight, "I hate all sin, and desire to sin no more."

Technical Notes:

1. Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. 2. And early in the morning he came again into the temple, and all the people

came to him; and he sat down and taught them. 3. And the Scribes and Pharisees brought to him a woman taken in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst, 4. they said to him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. 5. Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do you say? 6. This they said, tempting him, that they might have *something* of which to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with *his* finger, *as though he did not hear*. 7. So when they continued asking him, he raised himself up and said to them, He who is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. 8. And again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. 9. And those who heard *it*, being convicted by *their own* conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the eldest *even* to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. 10. When Jesus had raised himself up and saw no one but the woman, he said to her, Woman, where are your accusers? Has no man condemned you? 11. She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said to her, Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.

These eleven verses, together with the last verse of the preceding chapter, form perhaps the gravest critical difficulty in the New Testament. Their genuineness is disputed. It is held by many learned Christian writers—who have an undoubted right to be heard on such matters—that the passage was not written by St. John, that it was

written by an uninspired hand and probably at a later day, and that it has no lawful claim to be regarded as a part of canonical Scripture. It is held by others—whose opinions, to say the least, are equally entitled to respect—that the passage is a genuine part of St. John's Gospel, and that the arguments against it, however weighty they may appear, are insufficient and admit of an answer. A summary of the whole case is all that I shall attempt to give. In the list of those who think the passage either not genuine or at least *doubtful*, are the following names: Beza, Grotius, Baxter, Hammond, A. Clarke, Tittman, Tholuck, Olshausen, Hengstenberg, Tregelles, Alford, Wordsworth, Scrivener.

In the list of those who think the passage *genuine*, are the following names: Augustine, Ambrose, Euthymius, Rupertus, Zwingli, Calvin, Melancthon, Ecolampadius, Brentius, Bucer, Gualter, Musculus, Bullinger, Pellican, Flacius, Diodati, Chemnitius, Aretius, Piscator, Calovius, Cocceius, Toletus, Maldonatus, á Lapide, Ferus, Nifanius, Cartwright, Mayer, Trapp, Poole, Lampe, Whitby, Leigh, Doddridge, Bengel, Stier, Webster, Burgon.

Calvin is sometimes named as one of those who think the passage before us not genuine. But his language about it in his Commentary is certainly not enough to bear out the assertion. He says, "It is plain that this passage was unknown anciently to the Greek Churches; and some conjecture that it has been brought from some other place and inserted here. But as it has always been received by the Latin Churches and is found in many old Greek manuscripts and contains

nothing unworthy of an Apostle, there is no reason why we should refuse to apply it to our advantage." [A.] The arguments against the passage are as follows:

(1) That it is not found in some of the oldest and best manuscripts, now existing, of the Greek Testament.
(2) That it is not found in some of the earlier versions or translations of the Scriptures.
(3) That it is not commented on by the Greek Fathers, Origen, Cyril, Chrysostom, and Theophylact in their expositions of St. John, nor quoted or referred to by Tertullian and Cyprian.
(4) That it differs in style from the rest of St. John's Gospel and contains several words and forms of expression which are nowhere else used in his writings.
(5) That the moral tendency of the passage is somewhat doubtful, and that it seems to represent our Lord as palliating a heinous sin.
[B.] The arguments in favor of the passage are as follows:
(6) That it is found in many old manuscripts, if not in the very oldest and best.
(7) That it is found in the Vulgate Latin, and in the Arabic, Coptic, Persian, and Ethiopian versions.
(8) That it is commented on by Augustine in his exposition of this Gospel, while in another of his writings he expressly refers to and explains its omission from some manuscripts; that it is quoted and defended by Ambrose, referred to by Jerome, and treated as genuine in the Apostolical constitutions.
(9) That there is no proof whatever that there is any immoral

tendency in the passage. Our Lord pronounced no opinion on the sin of adultery but simply declined the office of a judge.

It may seem almost presumptuous to offer any opinion on this very difficult subject. But I venture to make the following remarks and to invite the reader's candid attention to them. I lean decidedly to the side of those who think the passage is genuine, for the following reasons:

1. The argument from manuscripts appears to me inconclusive. We possess comparatively few very ancient ones. Even of them some favor the genuineness of the passage. The same remark applies to the ancient versions. Testimony of this kind, to be conclusive, should be unanimous.

2. The argument from the Fathers seems to me more in favor of the passage than against it. On the one side, the reasons are simply *negative*. Certain Fathers say nothing about the passage but at the same time say nothing against it. On the other side, the reasons are *positive*. Men of such high authority as Augustine and Ambrose not only comment on the passage but defend its genuineness, and assign reasons for its omission by some mistaken transcribers.

Let me add to this that the negative evidence of the Fathers who are against the passage is not nearly so weighty as it appears at first sight. Cyril of Alexandria is one. But his commentary on the eighth chapter of John is lost, and what we have was supplied by the modern hand of Jodocus Clichtovoeus, a Persian doctor, who lived in

the year 1510 A. D. (See Dupin's Eccles. hist.) Chrysostom's commentary on John consists of popular public homilies, in which we can easily imagine that such a passage as this might possibly be omitted. Theophylact was notoriously a copier and imitator of Chrysostom. Origen, the only remaining commentator, is one whose testimony is not of first-rate value, and he has omitted many things in his exposition of St. John. The silence of Tertullian and Cyprian is perhaps accountable on the same principles by which Augustine explains the omission of the passage in some copies of this Gospel in his own time. Some, as Calovius, Maldonatus, Flacius, Aretius, and Piscator, think that Chrysostom distinctly refers to this passage in his Sixtieth Homily on John, though he passes it over in exposition.

3. The argument from alleged discrepancies between the style and language of this passage and the usual style of St. John's writing is one which should be received with much caution. We are not dealing with an uninspired but with an inspired writer. Surely it is not too much to say that an inspired writer may occasionally use words and constructions and modes of expression which he generally does not use, and that it is no proof that he did not write a passage because he wrote it in a peculiar way.

I leave the subject here. In cases of doubt like this, it is wise to be on the safe side. On the whole I think it safest to regard this disputed passage as genuine. At any rate, I prefer the difficulties on this side to those on the other.

The whole discussion may leave in our minds, at any rate, one

comfortable thought. If even in the case of this notoriously disputed passage (more controverted and doubted than any in the New Testament) so much can be said in its favor, how immensely strong is the foundation on which the whole volume of Scripture rests! If even against this passage the arguments of opponents are not conclusive, we have no reason to fear for the rest of the Bible.

After all, there is much ground for thinking that some critical difficulties have been *purposely* left by God's providence in the text of the New Testament in order to prove the faith and patience of Christian people. They serve to test the humility of those to whom intellectual difficulties are a far greater cross than either doctrinal or practical ones. To such minds it is trying, but useful, discipline to find occasional passages involving knots which they cannot quite untie and problems which they cannot quite solve. Of such passages the verses before us are a striking instance. That the text of them is "a hard thing" it would be wrong to deny. But I believe our duty is not to reject it hastily, but to sit still and wait. In these matters, "he who believes shall not make haste."

The following passage from Augustine (De conjug. Adult.) is worth notice. Having argued that it well becomes a Christian husband to be reconciled to his wife upon her repentance after adultery (because our Lord said "Neither do I condemn thee; go and sin no more"), he says: "This, however, rather shocks the minds of some weak believers —or rather unbelievers and enemies of the Christian faith—insomuch that, afraid of its giving their wives impunity of sinning, they struck

out of their copies of the Gospel this that our Lord did in pardoning the woman taken in adultery; as if He granted leave of sinning when He said, “Go, and sin no more.” Augustine, be it remembered, lived about 400 A. D.

Those who wish to look further into the subject of this disputed passage will find it fully discussed by Gomarus, Bloomfield, and Wordsworth. 1.—[*Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.*] The division of the chapter in this place is to be regretted. The last verse of the preceding chapter and the verse before us are evidently intended to be taken together. While the Pharisees and members of the Council “went every man to his own house,” our Lord, having no home of His own, retired “to the Mount of Olives” and there spent the night in the open air. In such a climate as that of Judea, there was nothing remarkable in His doing this. The garden of Gethsemane, at the foot of the mount, would supply sufficient shelter. That this was our Lord’s habitual practice, we are distinctly told in Luke xxi.37. Lampe remarks that we never read of our Lord lodging, sleeping, or tarrying a night in Jerusalem.

2.—[*And early in the morning.*] This expression is worth noticing because, according to some, it explains our Lord’s subsequent use of the figure “I am the light of the world.” They think that it refers to the break of day, or rising of the sun.

[*He came again into the temple.*] This means the outer courts of the temple where it was customary for the Jews to assemble and listen to teachers of religion. In eastern countries and in the times when there

was no printing, it must be remembered, much instruction was given in this way, by open air addresses or conversations. Thus Socrates taught at Athens.

[*All the people came to Him.*] "All" here must mean great multitudes of the people. After all that had happened in the last three or four days, we may easily understand that our Lord's appearance would at once attract a crowd. His fame as a teacher and speaker was established. [*He sat down and taught.*] That it was common for the teachers to sit and the hearers to stand is evident from other texts. "I sat daily with you teaching in the temple." (Matt. xxvi.55.) In the synagogues of Nazareth, when our Lord began to preach He first "gave the book to the minister and sat down." (Luke iv.20.) "He sat down and taught the people out of the ship." (Luke v.3.) "We sat down and spoke to the women." (Acts xvi.13.) 3.—[*The Scribes and Pharisees.*] This is the only place in St. John's Gospel where He mentions the "Scribes" at all. He names the Pharisees twenty times (sixteen times alone and four times in conjunction with the chief priests).

This fact is thought by some to be an argument against the genuineness of the passage, but without just cause. St. Mark, in his Gospel, speaks twelve times of the Pharisees and only twice mentions the Scribes in conjunction with them. Moreover, this is the only occasion recorded in St. John when a formal attempt was made to entrap our Lord by a subtle question. That being so, there may be a good reason why the Scribes should be mentioned as well as the

Pharisees as principal agents in the attempt. [*Brought…woman…adultery*.] It seems not improbable that this attempt to ensnare our Lord was one result of His enemies' failure to apprehend Him during the feast. Defeated in their effort to meet Him in argument, or to apprehend Him in the absence of any legal charge, they tried next to entrap Him into committing Himself in some way and so giving them a handle against Him. No times was to be lost. They had failed yesterday, and found their own officers unwilling to apprehend our Lord. They resolved to try another plan today. They would ensnare our Lord into doing something illegal or indiscreet and then get an advantage over Him.

[*Set her in the midst*.] This means in the middle of a ring or circle composed of themselves and their followers, our Lord and His disciples, and the crowd listening to His teaching.

4.—[They said…woman was taken in adultery, etc.] It throws some light on this charge to remember what immense crowds came up to Jerusalem at the great public feasts, and especially at the feast of tabernacles. At such a season, when every house was crowded as at a fair time, when many consequently slept in the open air and no small disorder probably ensued, we can well understand that such a sin as a breach of the seventh commandment would be very likely to be committed.

5.—[Now Moses…commanded…stoned.] This is the legitimate conclusion of the two texts, Lev. xx.10 and Deut. xxii.22, when

compared. There seems no ground for the comment of some writers that Moses did not command an adulteress to be put to death by stoning.

It is worth notice that the expression “Moses in the law” is not used either by Matthew, Mark, or Luke. But it is used by St. John both here and at chapter i.45.

[*But what do you say?*] This would be more literally rendered, “*Therefore* what do you say?” The Greek word rendered “but” by our translators is hardly ever so rendered in the New Testament, and in most places is either “therefore,” “then,” “so,” “ now,” or “and.” John ix.18 and Acts xxv.4 are the only parallel cases.

Ecolampadius thinks the Pharisees were especially sore and irritated because our Lord had said that “publicans and harlots” would enter the kingdom of God before Pharisees. (Matt. xxi.31.)

6.—[*This they said tempting…accuse Him.*] In what did this temptation consist? How did the Jews hope to find ground for an accusation? The answer seems easy. If our Lord replied that the woman ought NOT to be stoned, they would have denounced Him to the people as one that poured contempt on the law. If our Lord, on the contrary, replied that the woman *ought* to be stoned, they would have accused Him to the Romans as one who usurped the prerogative of putting criminals to death. See John xviii.31:

“It is not lawful for us to put any man to death.” Moreover, they would have published everywhere our Lord’s inconsistency in

offering salvation to publicans and harlots and yet condemning to death an adulteress for one transgression.

Let it be noticed that subtle ensnaring questions like these—putting the person questioned into an apparent dilemma or difficulty, whatever answer he might give—seem to have been favorite weapons of the Jews. The Pharisees' question about "tribute money," the lawyer's question about "the great commandment of the law," and the Sadducees' question about "the resurrection," are parallel cases. The question before us is therefore quite in keeping with other places in the Gospels.

Augustine remarks: "They said in themselves, 'Let us put before Him a woman caught in adultery. Let us ask what is ordered in the law concerning her. If He shall say stone her, He will not have the repute of gentleness. If He gives sentence to let her go, He will not keep righteousness.'" Euthymius says the same.

[*But Jesus stooped down, etc.*] Our Lord's intention in this remarkable sentence can hardly admit of doubt. He declined to answer the subtle question put to Him, partly because He knew the malicious motives of the questioners, partly because He had always announced that He did not come to be "a judge and divider" among men or to interfere in the slightest degree with the administration of the law. His silence was equivalent to a refusal to answer.

But the peculiar action that our Lord employed in "writing with His

finger on the ground" is undeniably a difficulty. St. John gives no explanation of the action, and we are left to conjecture both *why* our Lord wrote and *what* He wrote.

(1) Some think, as Bede, Rupertus, and Lampe, that our Lord wrote on the ground the texts of Scripture which settled the question brought before Him, as the seventh commandment, and Lev. xx.10 and Duet. xxii.22. The action would then imply, "Why do ye ask Me? What is written in the law, that law which God wrote with His own finger as I am writing now?"

(2) Some think, as Lightfoot and Burgon, that our Lord meant to refer to the law of Moses for the trial of jealousy, in which an accused woman was obliged to drink water into which dust from the floor of the tabernacle or temple had been put by the priest. (Num. v.17.) The action would then imply, "Has the law for trying such a one as this been tried? Look at the dust on which I am writing. Has the woman been placed before the priest and drunk of the dust and water?"

(3) Some think, as Augustine, Melancthon, Brentius, Toletus, and á Lapide, that our Lord's action was a silent reference to the text Jer. xvii.13:

"They that depart from Me shall be written in the earth."

(4) One rationalist writer suggests that our Lord "stooped down" from feelings of modesty, as if ashamed of the sight before Him and of the story told to Him. The idea is preposterous and entirely out of harmony with our Lord's public demeanor.

(5) Some think, as Euthymius, Calvin, Rollock, Chemnitius, Diodati, Flavius, Piscator, Grotius, Poole, and Hutcheson, that our Lord did

not mean anything at all by this writing on the ground, and that He only signified that He would give no answer and would neither listen to nor interfere in such matters as the one brought before Him. Calvin remarks: "Christ intended, by doing nothing, to show how unworthy they were of being heard; just as if anyone, while another was speaking to him, were to draw lines on the wall or to turn his back or to show by any other sign that He was not attending to what was said." I must leave the reader to choose which solution he prefers. To my eyes, I confess, there are difficulties in each view. If I must select one, I prefer the last of the five as the simplest.

Quesnell remarks: "We never read that Jesus Christ *wrote* but once in his life. Let men learn from hence never to write but when it is necessary or useful, and to do it with humility and modesty, on a principle of charity and not of malice."

7.—[So when they continued...said to them.] The Scribes and Pharisees

seem to have been determined to have an answer, and to have made it necessary for our Lord to speak at last. But His first silence and significant refusal to attend were a plain proof to all around that He did not wish to interfere with the office of the magistrate and had not come to be a judge of offenses against the law. If they got an opinion from Him about this case, they could not say that He gave it willingly but that it was extorted from Him by much importunity.

[*He who is without sin...stone at her.*] This solemn and weighty sentence is a striking example of our Lord's perfect wisdom. He

referred His questioners to Scripture—Deut. xvii.7 says, “The hands of the witnesses shall be first upon him to put him to death.” It sent their minds home to their own private lives. “Whatever the woman may deserve, are you the people to find fault with her?” It neither condemned nor justified the adulteress and yet showed our Lord’s reverence for the law of Moses. “I decline to pronounce sentence on this woman because I am not the judge. You know yourselves what the law is in such cases as well as I do. You have no right to assume that I do not reverence the law as much as yourselves. But since you profess to honor the law of Moses so much, I remind you that this same law requires the witnesses to be the executioners. Now are you the persons who ought to punish this woman, however guilty she may be? Do you yourselves come before Me with clear consciences about the seventh commandment?”

Many think that when our Lord said, “He that is without sin,” He meant the expression to be taken in a general sense. I cannot hold this view. It would involve the awkward conclusion that no one could be a judge at all or punish a criminal, because no one is altogether and absolutely “without sin.” I am decidedly of the opinion that our Lord referred to sin against the seventh commandment. There is too much reason to think that such sin was very common among the Jews in our Lord’s time. The expression “an adulterous generation” (Matt. xii.39; xvi.4; and Mark viii.38) is full of meaning. (See also Rom. ii.22, Luke xviii.11, and James iv.4.) [*And again He stooped down, etc.*] This repeated act would greatly add to the weighty solemnity of the sentence which had just fallen from our Lord’s lips.

“I have given my opinion; now what are you going to do? I wait for your reply.”

9.—[*And those who heard…conscience.*] This sentence seems to me to confirm the opinion that when our Lord said “He who is without sin,” He referred to sin against the seventh commandment. A general charge would hardly have produced the effect here described. A charge of breaking the seventh commandment would be just such a one as a man would shrink from, if made publicly. The sin is peculiarly one which brings with it afterwards a certain sense of shame. It is commonly a deed of darkness and one in secret, and the doer of it dreads the light.

The power of conscience stands out here in a very striking manner. It is a part of man’s inward nature which is far too little remembered by ministers and teachers. Fallen and corrupt as man is, we must never forget that God has left him a certain sense of right and wrong, called conscience. It has no power to save or convert or lead to Christ. But it has a power to accuse and prick and witness. Such texts as Rom. ii.15 and 2 Cor. iv.2 should be carefully considered.

[*Went out one by one, etc.*] The words “eldest” and “last” in this sentence are in the plural number, which does not appear in the English version. The oldest would probably have the greatest number of sins on their minds. [*Jesus was left alone, and the woman, etc.*] This must, of course, mean that the Scribes and Pharisees who accused the woman were all gone away. It does not necessarily follow

that the crowd of hearers who were about our Lord when the case was brought to Him had gone away. They must have stood by and seen and heard all that passed.

10.—[*When Jesus had raised Himself up, etc.*] How long the pause must have been during which our Lord stooped down and wrote on the ground a second time, we are not told. But it must probably have been several minutes. When it says that our Lord "saw none but the woman," it must mean "none of the party who came and interrupted His teaching, except the woman." The accusers had disappeared, and the accused alone remained. The question that our Lord put to the woman must have been for the satisfaction of the crowd around. Let them mark, from the question and answer, that the case had fallen to the ground. No evidence was offered. No accuser appeared. No sentence therefore could be pronounced, and none was needed.

11.—[*She said, No man, Lord.*] We may observe here that our Lord, with merciful consideration, did not ask the woman whether she was guilty or not. Thus she could with truth reply to His question and yet not incriminate herself.

[Jesus said... Neither do I...sin no more.] The mingled kindness and perfect wisdom of this sentence deserve special notice. Our Lord says nothing of the question whether the woman deserved punishment and what kind of punishment. He simply says, "I do not condemn you." It is not my province or office to judge or pronounce any sentence." Nor yet does He tell the woman that she may go away

without stain or blemish on her character. On the contrary, He implies that she has sinned and was guilty. But in the absence of witnesses, she might go away clear of punishment.

Nor yet does He say, “Go in peace,” as in Luke vii.50 and viii.48. “Go,” He says, “and *sin no more*.” How anyone, in the face of this text, can say that our Lord palliates and condones the woman’s sin it is rather hard to understand. That He refused to condemn her is clear and plain, because it was not His office. That He ignored or connived at her sin, as Hengstenberg says (in his argument against the genuineness of the whole passage), can never be proved. The very last words show what He thought of her case: “Sin no more.” She had sinned and had only escaped from lack of evidence. Let her remember that and “sin no more.” Augustine remarks: “How Lord? Do you then favor sin? Not so, assuredly. Mark what He says. ‘Go: henceforth sin no more.’ You see them that the Lord condemned, but He condemned sin, not man. For were He a favorer of sin, He would say, ‘Neither will I condemn you. Go: live as you will.’” The remark of Euthymius, that our Lord considered the public shame and exposure sufficient punishment for the woman’s sin, is thoroughly unsatisfactory and not warranted by anything in the context. The view of Bullinger and some others, that one principal object of the passage is to teach our Lord’s mercy and readiness to pardon great sinners, appears to me quite destitute of foundation. Christ’s abounding mercy is a great truth, but not the truth of this passage. There seems no parallel between this woman and the Samaritan woman in John iv.

Poole observes that our Lord does not merely say, “Commit adultery no more, but, Sin no more. No partial repentance or sorrow for any particular sin will suffice a penitent that hopes for mercy from God, but a leaving off all sin, of what kind soever it is.”

JOHN 8:12-20

Jesus as the Light of the World

Then Jesus spoke out again, “I am the light of the world. The one who follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” So the Pharisees objected, “You testify about yourself; your testimony is not true!” Jesus answered, “Even if I testify about myself, my testimony is true, because I know where I came from and where I am going. But you people do not know where I came from or where I am going. You people judge by outward appearances; I do not judge anyone. But if I judge, my evaluation is accurate, because I am not alone when I judge, but I and the Father who sent me do so together. It is written in your law that the testimony of two men is true. I testify about myself and the Father who sent me testifies about me.”

Then they began asking him, “Who is your father?” Jesus answered, “You do not know either me or my Father. If you knew me you would know my Father too.” (Jesus spoke these words near the offering box while he was teaching in the temple courts. No one seized him because his time had not yet come.)

The conversation between our Lord and the Jews, which begins with these verses, is full of difficulties. The connection between one part and another, and the precise meaning of some of the expressions which fell from our Lord's lips, are "things hard to be understood." In passages like this it is true wisdom to acknowledge the great imperfection of our spiritual vision, and to be thankful if we can glean a few handfuls of truth.

Let us notice, for one thing, in these verses, ***what the Lord Jesus says of Himself.*** He proclaims, "I am the light of the world."

These words imply that the world needs light, and is naturally in a dark condition. It is so in a moral and spiritual point of view—and it has been so for nearly 6,000 years. In ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome, in modern England, France, and Germany, the same report is true. The vast majority of men neither see nor understand the value of their souls, the true nature of God, nor the reality of a world to come! Notwithstanding all the discoveries of art and science, "darkness still covers the earth, and gross darkness the people." (Isaiah. 60:2.)

For this state of things, the Lord Jesus Christ declares Himself to be the only remedy. He has risen, like the sun, to diffuse light, and life, and peace, and salvation, in the midst of a dark world. He invites all who want spiritual help and guidance to turn to Him, and take Him for their leader. What the sun is to the whole solar system—the

center of light, and heat, and life, and fertility—that He has come into the world to be to sinners.

Let this saying sink down into our hearts. It is weighty and full of meaning. False lights on every side invite man's attention in the present day. Reason, philosophy, earnestness, liberalism, conscience, and the voice of the Church, are all, in their various ways, crying loudly that they have got "the light" to show us. Their advocates know not what they say. Wretched are those who believe their high professions! He only is the true light who came into the world to save sinners, who died as our substitute on the cross, and sits at God's right hand to be our Friend. "In His light we shall see light." (Psalm 36:9.)

Let us notice, secondly, in these verses, ***what the Lord Jesus says of those who follow Him.*** He promises, "He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

To follow Christ is to commit ourselves wholly and entirely to Him as our only leader and Savior, and to submit ourselves to Him in every matter, both of doctrine and practice. "Following" is only another word for "believing." It is the same act of soul, only seen from a different point of view. As Israel followed the pillar of cloud and fire in all their journeyings—moving whenever it moved, stopping whenever it tarried, asking no questions, marching on in faith—so must a man deal with Christ. He must "follow the Lamb wherever He goes." (Rev. 14:4.)

He that so follows Christ shall "not walk in darkness." He shall not be left in ignorance, like the many around him. He shall not grope in doubt and uncertainty, but shall see the way to heaven, and know where he is going. He "shall have the light of life." He shall feel within him the light of God's countenance shining on him. He shall find in his conscience and understanding a living light, which nothing can altogether quench. The lights with which many please themselves shall go out in the valley of the shadow of death, and prove worse than useless. But the light that Christ gives to every one that follows Him shall never fail.

Let us notice, lastly, in these verses, ***what the Lord Jesus says of His enemies.*** He tells the Pharisees that, with all their pretended wisdom, they were ignorant of God. "You neither know Me nor my Father—if you had known Me, you would have known my Father also."

Ignorance like this is only too common. There are thousands who are conversant with many branches of human learning, and can even argue and reason about religion, and yet know nothing really about God. That there is such a Being as God they fully admit. But His character and attributes revealed in Scripture, His holiness, His purity, His justice, His perfect knowledge, His unchangeableness, are things with which they are little acquainted. In fact, the subject of God's nature and character makes them uncomfortable, and they do not like to dwell upon it.

The grand secret of knowing God is to draw near to Him through Jesus Christ. Approached from this side, there is nothing that need make us afraid. Viewed from this standpoint, God is the sinner's friend. God, out of Christ, may well fill us with alarm. How shall we dare to look at so high and holy a Being? God in Christ is full of mercy, grace, and peace. His law's demands are satisfied. His holiness need not make us afraid. Christ in one word is the way and door, by which we must ever draw near to the Father. If we know Christ, we shall know the Father. It is His own word— "No man comes unto the Father but by Me." (John 14:6.) Ignorance of Christ is the root of ignorance of God. Wrong at the starting-point, the whole sum of a man's religion is full of error.

And now, where are we ourselves? Do we know? Many are living and dying in a kind of fog. Where are we going? Can we give a satisfactory answer? Hundreds go out of existence in utter uncertainty. Let us leave nothing uncertain that concerns our everlasting salvation. Christ, the light of the world, is for us as well as for others, if we humbly follow Him, cast our souls on Him, and become His disciples. Let us not, like thousands, waste our lives in doubting, and arguing, and reasoning, but simply follow. The child that says. "I will not learn anything until I know something," will never learn at all. The man that says. "I must first understand everything before I become a Christian," will die in his sins. Let us begin by "following," and then we shall find light.

Technical Notes:

12. Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, I am the light of the world. He who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. 13. The Pharisees therefore said to him, You bear witness of yourself; your witness is not true. 14. Jesus answered and said to them, Though I bear witness of myself, *yet* my witness is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going; but ye do not know where I come from and where I am going. 15. Ye judge according to the flesh; I judge no man. 16. And yet if I judge, my judgment is true; for I am not alone, but I *am* with the Father who sent me. 17. It is also written in your law that the testimony of two men is true. 18. I am one who bears witness of myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness of me. 19. Then they said to him, Where is your Father? Jesus answered, Ye neither know me nor my Father. If ye had known me, ye should have known by Father also. 20. These words Jesus spoke in the treasury, as he taught in the temple; and no man laid hands on him, for his hour had not yet come.

Before beginning the notes on this section, I will ask anyone who doubts the genuineness of the first eleven verses of the chapter to consider how very awkwardly the twelfth verse would come in if it immediately followed the 52nd verse of the seventh chapter. The omission of the disputed passage about the woman taken in adultery, however necessary some may think it, undoubtedly makes a breach in the connection which cannot be reasonably explained. *Omit* the

passage, and our Lord appears to break in upon the angry council of the Pharisees, foiled in their attempt to take Him and vexed with Nicodemus for pleading for Him. This is surely very improbable, to say the least. *Retain* the disputed passage, on the other hand, and the whole connection seems plain. A night has passed away. A sunrise is over the whole party assembled in the temple court. And our Lord beings again to teach by proclaiming a beautiful truth appropriate to the occasion: "I am the light of the world."

12.—[*Then Jesus spoke to them again*.] The expression "spoke again" exactly fits in with the preceding narrative. It carries us back to the 2nd verse, where we read that our Lord was sitting in the temple and teaching the people when the woman taken in adultery was brought before Him. This, naturally, interrupted and broke off His teaching for a time. But when the case was settled and both accuser and accused had gone away, He resumed His teaching. Then the expression comes in most naturally, "He spoke again." Once admit that the narrative of the woman is not genuine and must be left out, and there is really nothing with which to connect the words before us. We are obliged to look back as far as the 37th verse of the last chapter.

The same remark applies to the word "them." The natural application of it is to "the people" whom our Lord was teaching in the 2nd verse when the Scribes and Pharisees interrupted Him. Leave out the narrative of the woman, and there is nothing to which the word "them" can be referred except the angry council of the

Pharisees at the end of the seventh chapter.

[*I am the light of the world.*] In this glorious expression our Lord, we cannot doubt, declares Himself to be the promised Messiah or Savior of whom the prophets had spoken. The Jews would remember the words, "I will give Thee for a light of the Gentiles." (Isa. xlii.6, xlix.6.) So also Simeon had said He would be "a light to lighten the Gentiles." (Luke ii.32.) Why He used this figure and what He had in His mind in choosing it, is a point on which commentators do not agree. That He referred to something before His eyes is highly probable and in keeping with His usual mode of teaching. (1) Some think, as Aretius, Musculus, Ecolampadius, Bullinger, and Bp. Andrews, that He referred to the sun, then rising while He spoke. What the sun was to the earth, that He came to be to mankind. (2) Some think, as Stier, Olshausen, Besser, D. Brown, and Alford, that He referred to the great golden lamps which used to be kept burning in the temple courts. He was the true light, able to enlighten men's hearts and minds; they were nothing but ornaments, or at most, emblems. (3) Some think, as Cyril and Lampe, that He referred to the pillar of cloud and fire which gave light to the Israelites and guided them through the wilderness. He was the true guide to heaven through the wilderness of this world.

The first of these three views seems to me most probable and most in harmony with the context. Rupertus remarks that two grand declarations of Christ followed each other on two successive days at Jerusalem. On the last day of the feast He said, "If any man thirst, let

him come to Me and drink." (John vii.37.) The very next day He said, "I am the light of the world."

[*He who follows Me.*] This means "following" as a disciple, servant, traveler, soldier, or sheep. What the teacher is to the scholar, the master to the servant, the guide to the traveler, the general to the soldier, the shepherd to the sheep, that is Christ to true Christians. "Following" is the same as "believing." See Matt. xvi.24, xix.21, John x.27, xii.26. Following here, we must always remember, does not mean copying and imitating, but trusting, putting faith in another. Musculus and Henry observe that it is of no use that Christ is the light of the world if we do not follow Him. "Following" is the point on which all turns. It is not enough to gaze upon and admire the light. We must "follow" it.

[*Shall not walk in darkness.*] The expression "darkness" in the New Testament sometimes denotes sin, as 1 John i.6, and sometimes ignorance and unbelief, as 1 Thes. v.4. Some have thought that our Lord referred to the woman taken in adultery and to such deeds of moral darkness as she had been guilty of. The meaning would then be, "He who follows Me and becomes my disciple shall be delivered from the power of darkness and shall no longer commit such sins as you have just heard of." Others, on the contrary, think that our Lord only referred to the intellectual darkness and ignorance of man's mind, which He had come to illuminate. The meaning would then be, "He who follows Me as my disciple shall no longer live in ignorance and darkness about his soul." I decidedly prefer this second view.

The promise seems to me to have a special reference to the ignorance in which the Jews were about everything concerning Christ, as shown in the preceding chapter.

[*Shall have the light of life*.] This expression means, "He shall possess living light. He shall have spiritual light, as much superior to the light of any lamp or even of the sun, as the living water offered to the Samaritan woman was superior to the water of Jacob's well." The spiritual light that Christ gives is independent of time or place, is not affected by sickness or death, burns on forever and cannot be quenched. He who has it shall feel light within his mind, heart, and conscience; shall see light before him on the grave, death, and the world to come; shall have light shining round him, guiding him in his journey through life, and shall reflect light by his conduct, ways, and conversation. Chrysostom thinks that one purpose of this promise was to draw on and encourage Nicodemus, and to remind him of the former saying Jesus had used about light and darkness, John iii.20,21.

Augustine remarks on this verse: "What it is our duty to do, Christ puts in the present tense; what He promises to them that do it, He has denoted by a future time. He who follows *now* shall have *hereafter*, who follows now by faith shall have hereafter by sight. When by sight? When we shall have come to the vision yonder; when this night of ours shall have passed away." I should be sorry, however, to confine the promise to so limited an interpretation as this; and though I have no doubt it will only be completely fulfilled at

the second advent, I still think that it is partially and spiritually fulfilled now to every believer. Calvin remarks, that in this verse "Benefit is offered not only to one person or another, but to the whole world. By this universal statement, Christ intended to remove the distinction not only between Jews and Gentiles but between learned and ignorant, between persons of distinction and common people." He also says, "In the latter clause of the verse, the perpetuity of light is stated in express terms. We ought not to fear, therefore, lest it leave us in the middle of our journey." Brentius remarks that if a man could continually "follow" the sun, he would always be in broad daylight in every part of the globe. So it is with Christ and believers. Always following Him, they will always have light. In this most precious and interesting verse, there are several things which deserve our special attention.

(a) We should note the great assumed truth which lies underneath the whole verse. That truth is the fall of man. The world is in a state of moral and spiritual darkness. Men in their natural state know nothing rightly of themselves, God, holiness, or heaven. They need light.

(b) We should note the full and bold manner of our Lord's declaration. He proclaims Himself to be "the light of the world." None could truly say this but One, who knew that He was very God. No Prophet or Apostle ever said it.

(c) We should note how our Lord says that He is "the light of the world." He is not for a few only, but for all mankind. Like the sun, He shines for the benefit of all, though all may not value or use His light.

(d) We should note the man to whom the promise is made. It is to him "who follows Me." To follow a leader—if we are blind, ignorant, in the dark, or out of the way—requires trust and confidence. This is just what the Lord Jesus requires of sinners who feel their sins and want to be saved. Let them commit themselves to Christ, and He will lead them safe to heaven. If a man can do nothing for himself, he cannot do better than trust another and follow him.
(e) We should note the thing promised to him who follows Jesus: viz., deliverance from darkness and possession of light. This is precisely what Christianity brings to a believer. He feels, and sees, and has a sense of possessing something he had not before. God "shines into his heart and gives light." He is "called out of darkness into marvelous light." (2 Cor. iv.4-6, 1 Pet. ii.9.)

Melancthon thinks that this verse is only a brief summary of what our Lord said, and must be regarded as the text or keynote of a long discourse. Bullinger remarks how useful it is to commit to memory and store up great sentences and maxims of Christ, list this verse.

13.—[*The Pharisees therefore said to Him.*] These "Pharisees" were probably some of the multitude who had come together to hear our Lord's teaching, and not those who brought the woman taken in adultery to Him. The Pharisees were a powerful and widely-spread sect, and members of their body would be found in every crowd of hearers, ready to raise objections and find fault with anything our Lord said wherever they thought there was an opportunity.

[*You bear witness of Yourself.*] This would be more literally rendered, “You do witness about Yourself.”

[*Your witness is not true.*] This means, “Your testimony is not trustworthy and deserving of attention.” The Pharisees evidently could not mean “Your testimony is false.” They only meant that it was an acknowledged principle among men that a man’s testimony to his own character is comparatively worthless. Our Lord Himself had admitted this on a former occasion, when He said before the Council, “If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true.” (John v.31.) Solomon had said, “Let another praise thee and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips.” (Prov. xxvii.2.)

14.—[Jesus answered…though I bear witness…true.] Our Lord meant by these words that even if He did testify of Himself and make assertions about His own office and mission, His testimony ought not to be despised and disregarded as not trustworthy. Whether His enemies would hear it or not, what He said deserved credit and was worthy of all acceptation. “The testimony that I bear is not the testimony of a common witness, but of one who is thoroughly to be depended on.”

[*For I know where I came from, etc.*] Our Lord here gives a solemn and weighty reason why His testimony to Himself ought to be reverently received by the Jews and not refused. That reason was His divine nature and mission. He came to them and stood before them not as a common prophet and an everyday witness, but as one who

knew the mysterious truth that He was the Divine Messiah who should come into the world. “I know where I came from:

I came forth from the Father to be His Messenger to a lost world. I know where I go: I am about to return to my Father when I have finished His work, and to sit down at His right hand after my ascension. Knowing all this, I have a right to say that my testimony is trustworthy. You, on the other hand, are utterly ignorant about Me. You neither know nor believe My Divine origin nor mission. Justly, therefore, I may say that it matters little whether you think my testimony deserving of credit or not. Your eyes are blinded, and your opinion is worthless.” Chrysostom observes that our Lord “might have said, I am God. But He ever mingles lowly words with sublime, and even these He veils.” Bucer, Chemnitius, and Quesnel observe that our Lord’s argument is like that of an ambassador from a king, who says, “I know my commission and who sent Me, and therefore I claim attention to my message.” Webster paraphrases the sentence: “I speak in the full consciousness of my previous and future existence in the glory of the Father; and I therefore feel and assert my right to be believed on my own testimony. If you knew where I came from and where I go, you would not want any other witness than myself. And this you might know if you were spiritual; but you are carnal and judge after the flesh.”

15.—[*Ye judge after the flesh.*] The meaning of this sentence seems to be, “You judge and decide everything on fleshly and worldly principles, according to the outward appearance. You estimate Me

and my mission according to what you see with the eye. You presume to despise Me and set light by Me, because there is no outward grandeur and dignity about Me. Judging everything by such a false standard, you see no beauty in Me and my ministry. You have already set Me down in your own minds as an impostor, and worthy to die. Your minds are full of carnal prejudices, and hence my testimony seems worthless to you."

Calvin thinks that "flesh" is here used in opposition to "spirit," and that the meaning is, "You judge on carnal wicked principles;" and not, You judge after the outward appearance. Most commentators think that the expression refers to our Lord's humble appearance.

[*I judge no man*.] In these words our Lord puts in strong contrast the difference between Himself and His enemies. "Unlike you, I condemn and pass judgment on no man, even on the worst of sinners. It is not my present business and office, though it will be one day. I did not come into the world to condemn, but to save." (John iii.17.) It is useless, however, to deny that the connection between the beginning and end of the verse is not clear. It seems to turn entirely on the twice-repeated word "judge," and the word appears to be used in two different senses. Some have thought that our Lord refers to the case of the woman taken in adultery and contrasts His own refusal to be a judge in her case with the malicious readiness of the Pharisees to judge Him and condemn Him even when innocent. "I refuse to condemn even a guilty sinner. You, on the contrary, are ready to condemn Me in whom you can find no fault, on carnal and

worldly principles."

Some, as Bullinger, Jansenius, Trapp, Stier, Gill, Pearce, and Barnes, have thought that the sentence before us means, "I judge no man according to the flesh, as you do." But this view does not seem to harmonize with the following verse.

Bishop Hall paraphrases the verse thus: "Ye presume to judge according to your own carnal affections and follow your outward senses in the judgment ye pass on Me. In the meantime ye will not endure Me, who do not challenge or reconcile that power which I might in judging you."

16.—[*And yet if I judge, my judgment, etc.*] This verse seems to come in parenthetically. It appears intended to remind the Jews that if our Lord did not assume the office of a judge now, it was not because He was not qualified. The sense is as follows: "Do not however suppose, because I say that I judge no man, that I am not qualified to judge. On the contrary, if I do pass judgment on any person's actions or opinions, my judgment is perfectly correct and trustworthy. For I am not alone. There is an inseparable union between Me and the Father who sent Me. When I judge, it is not I alone, but the Father with Me who judges. Hence, therefore, my judgment is and must be trustworthy." The reader should compare John v.19 and 30. The doctrine is the same. That mighty truth—the inseparable union of the Father and the Son—is the only key that unlocks the deep expression before us. Our Lord's frequent reference

to that truth, in St. John's Gospel, should be carefully noted.

17.—[*It is also written, etc.*] Our Lord, in this verse, reminds the Jews of an admitted principle of the law of Moses—that the testimony of two witnesses deserved credit. (Deut. xvii.6, xix.15.) "You will admit that the testimony of two witnesses deserves credit at any rate, although one witness alone may prove nothing. Now admitting this, hear what testimony I can adduce to the divine character of my mission." Let it be noted that where our Lord says "in *your* law," He did not mean that He was above the law and did not recognize its authority. He only intended, by laying stress on the word "your," to remind the Jews that it was their own honored law of Moses (to which they were continually professing to refer) that laid down the great principle to which He was about to direct their attention. "It is written in the law that *you* speak of so much, and that *you* so often quote."

It admits of consideration whether our Lord did not mean to use the expression "of two men" emphatically. It may be that He would put in strong contrast the testimony of two mere *men*, with the testimony of Himself and His Father in heaven. It is like the expression, "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater." (1 John v.9.) At any rate, the word rendered "men" is emphatic in the Greek.

18.—[*I am one, etc.*] The connection and sense of this verse are as follows: "Admitting that the testimony of two witnesses is trustworthy, I bid you observe that there are two witnesses to my

Divine nature and mission. I myself, the Eternal Son, am one of these witnesses; I am ever testifying concerning myself. The Father who sent Me into the world is the other witness; He is ever testifying concerning Me. He has testified by the mouth of the Prophets in the Old Testament. He is testifying now by the miraculous works which He is continually doing by my hands. The reader should compare John v.31-39.

There is undeniably something very remarkable about this verse. It seems a singular condescension on our Lord's part to use the train of argument that it contains. The true solution probably lies in the very high dignity of the two witnesses, whom He places together before the Jews. The Greek words beginning the verse are peculiar and can hardly be rendered in English. They will almost bear to be translated, "I, the great I am, am the person witnessing about myself; and the Father," etc. Chrysostom and Theophylact both remark that our Lord here claims equality of honor with the Father by putting His testimony and the Father's side by side.

Poole remarks: "Our Savior must not be understood here to distinguish himself from His Father in respect of His Divine being, for so He and His Father are one; but in respect of His office as He was sent, and His Father was He who sent Him."

19.—[*Then they said... Where is your Father?*] This question of the Jews was probably not asked in a tone of serious inquiry or from real desire to know. It was more likely sneering and sarcastic. Calvin observes: "By these words they meant that they did not so highly value Christ's Father as to ascribe anything to the Son on His account." Hengstenberg bids us observe that they did not ask, "Who

is thy Father?" but, "Where is thy Father?" It sounds as if they looked round in contempt, as if scornfully expecting an earthly father to stand forth and testify to Christ.

[*Jesus answered, Ye neither know Me nor my Father*.] Our Lord here tells His enemies that they were ignorant both of Himself and of His Father in heaven. With all their pride of knowledge and fancied high attainments, they knew nothing rightly either of the Father or the Son. The expression certainly favors the idea that the expression "Ye know Me" (John vii.28), must be taken as a slight sarcasm.

Let it be noted that great familiarity with the letter of Scripture is perfectly compatible with gross spiritual darkness. The Pharisees knew the Old Testament prophecies well; but they neither knew God nor Christ.

[*If ye had known Me...my Father also*.] These words teach plainly that ignorance of Christ and ignorance of God are inseparably connected. The man who thinks he knows anything rightly of God while he is ignorant of Christ is completely deceived. The God whom he thinks he knows is not the God of the Bible, but a God of his own fancy's invention. At any rate, he can have a most imperfect conception of God but little idea of His perfect holiness, justice, and purity. The words teach also that Christ is the way by which we must come to the knowledge of God. In Him, through Him, and by Him, we may come boldly into the Father's presence and behold His high attributes without fear.

He who would have saving, soul-satisfying religion and become a friend and servant of God, must begin with Christ. Knowing Him as his Savior and Advocate, he will find it easy and pleasant to know God the Father. Those who reject Christ, like the Jews, will live and die in ignorance of God however learned and clever they may be. But the poorest, humblest man who lays hold on Christ and begins with Him, shall find out enough about God to make him happy forever. In the matter of becoming acquainted with God, it is the first step to know Jesus Christ, the Mediator, and to believe on Him.

Augustine and others think that the thought here is the same as that in the words spoken to Philip, when in reply to Philip's question ("Lord, show us the Father"), Jesus said, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father." (John xiv.8,9.) I think this is at least doubtful. The thing that Philip needed to know was the precise relation between the Father and the Son. The thing that the Jews needed was a right knowledge of God altogether. 20.—[*These words spoke Jesus…temple.*] This sentence seems meant to mark a pause or break in the discourse, and to show also how publicly and openly our Lord proclaimed His Messiahship. It was in a well known part of the temple called the treasury that He declared Himself to be "the light of the world," and defended His testimony.

Calvin thinks that "the treasury was a part of the temple where the sacred offerings were laid up, and therefore a much frequented place." [*No man laid hands on Him.*] The remark made on a former occasion applies here. (John vii.30.) A divine restraint was laid on

our Lord's enemies. They felt unable to lift a finger against Him. They had the will to hurt, but not the power.

[*His hour had not yet come.*] The same deep thought that we remarked in ch. vii.30 comes up here again. There was a certain fixed time during which our Lord's ministry was to last, and till that time was expired His enemies could not touch Him. When the time had expired, our Lord said, "This is your hour, and the power of darkness." (Luke xxii.53.) The expression should be carefully noticed and remembered by all true Christians. It teaches that the wicked can do no harm to Christ and His members until God gives them permission. Not a hair of a believer's head can be touched until God in His sovereign wisdom allows it. It teaches that all times are in God's hand. There is an allotted "hour" both for doing and for suffering. Till the hour comes for dying, No Christian will die. When the hour comes, nothing can prevent his death. These are comfortable truths and deserve attention. Christ's members are safe and immortal till their work is done. When they suffer, it is because God wills it and sees it good.

Quesnel remarks: "A man enjoys the greatest peace of mind when he has once settled himself in a firm and steadfast belief of God's providence and an absolute dependence upon His design and will."

JOHN 8:21-30

Then Jesus said to them again, "I am going away, and you will look for me but will die in your sin. Where I am going you cannot come." So the Jewish leaders began to say, "Perhaps he is going to kill himself, because he says, 'Where I am going you cannot come.'" Jesus replied, "You people are from below; I am from above. You people are from this world; I am not from this world. Thus I told you that you will die in your sins. For unless you believe that I am the Christ, you will die in your sins."

So they said to him, "Who are you?" Jesus replied, "What I have told you from the beginning. I have many things to say and to judge about you, but the Father who sent me is truthful, and the things I have heard from him I speak to the world." (They did not understand that he was telling them about his Father.)

Then Jesus said, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and I do nothing on my own initiative, but I speak just what the Father taught me. And the one who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, because I always do those things that please him." While he was saying these things, many people believed in him.

This passage contains deep things, so deep that we have no line to fathom them. As we read it we should call to mind the Psalmist's words— "Your thoughts are very deep." (Psalm 92:5.) But it also contains, in the opening verses, some things which are clear, plain, and unmistakable. To these let us give our attention and root them firmly in our hearts.

We learn, for one thing, ***that it is possible to seek Christ in vain.*** Our Lord says to the unbelieving Jews, "You shall seek Me, and shall die in your sins." He meant, by these words, that the Jews would one day seek Him in vain.

The lesson before us is a very painful one. That such a Savior as the Lord Jesus, so full of love, so willing to save, should ever be sought "in vain," is a sorrowful thought. Yet so it is! A man may have many religious feelings about Christ, without any saving religion. Sickness, sudden affliction, the fear of death, the failure of usual sources of comfort—all these causes may draw out of a man a good deal of "religiousness." Under the immediate pressure of these he may say his prayers fervently, exhibit a strong spiritual feelings, and profess for a season to "seek Christ," and be a different man. And yet all this time his heart may never be touched at all! Take away the peculiar circumstances that affected him, and he may possibly return at once to his old ways. *He sought Christ "in vain," because he sought Him from false motives, and not with his whole heart.*

Unhappily this is not all. There is such a thing as a settled habit of resisting light and knowledge, until we seek Christ "in vain." Scripture and experience alike prove that men may reject God until God rejects them, and will not hear their prayer. They may go on stifling their convictions, quenching the light of conscience, fighting against their own better knowledge, until God is provoked to give them over and let them alone. It is not for nothing that these words are written— "Then shall they call upon Me, but I will not answer;

they shall seek Me early, but they shall not find Me—for they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord." (Prov. 1:28, 29.) Such cases may not be common; but they are possible, and they are sometimes seen. Some ministers can testify that they have visited people on their deathbeds who seem to seek Christ, and yet to seek in vain.

There is no safety but in seeking Christ while He may be found, and calling on Him while He is near—seeking Him with a true heart, and calling on Him with an honest spirit. Such seeking, we may be very sure, is never in vain. It will never be recorded of such seekers, that they "died in their sins." He that really comes to Christ shall never be "cast out." The Lord has solemnly declared that "He has no pleasure in the death of him that dies,"—and that "He delights in mercy." (Ezekiel 18:32; Micah 7:18.)

We learn for another thing, ***how wide is the difference between Christ and the ungodly.*** Our Lord says to the unbelieving Jews— "You are from beneath, I am from above—you are of this world, I am not of this world."

These words, no doubt, have a special application to our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. In the highest and most literal sense, there never was but One who could truly say, "I am from above—I am not of this world." That One is He who came forth from the Father, and was before the world—even the Son of God.

But there is a lower sense, in which these words are applicable to all Christ's living members. Compared to the thoughtless multitude around them, they are "from above," and "not of this world," like their Master. The thoughts of the ungodly are about things beneath; the true Christian's affections are set on things above. The ungodly man is full of this world; its cares, and pleasures, and profits, absorb his whole attention. The true Christian, though in the world, is not of it; his citizenship is in heaven, and his best things are yet to come.

The true Christian will do well never to forget this line of demarcation. If he loves his soul, and desires to serve God, he must be content to find himself separated from many around him by a gulf that cannot be passed. He may not like to seem peculiar and unlike others; but it is the certain consequence of grace reigning within him. He may find it brings on him hatred, ridicule, and hard speeches; but it is the cup which his Master drank, and of which his Master forewarned all His disciples. "If you were of the world the world would love His own, but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." (John 15:19.). Then let the Christian never be ashamed to stand alone and show his colors. He must carry the cross if he would wear the crown. If he has within him a new principle "from above," it must be seen.

We learn, lastly, ***how dreadful is the end to which unbelief can bring man.*** Our Lord says to his enemies, "If you believe not that I am He, you shall die in your sins."

These solemn words are invested with peculiar solemnity when we consider from whose lips they came. Who is this that speaks of men dying “in their sins,” unpardoned, unforgiven, unfit to meet God—of men going into another world with all their sins upon them? He that says this is no other than the Savior of mankind, who laid down His life for His sheep—the loving, gracious, merciful, compassionate Friend of sinners. It is Christ Himself! Let this simple fact not be overlooked.

They are greatly mistaken who suppose that it is harsh and unkind to speak of hell and future punishment. How can such people get over such language as that which is before us? How can they account for many a like expression which our Lord used, and specially for such passages as those in which He speaks of the “worm that dies not, and the fire that is not quenched”? (Mark 9:46.) They cannot answer these questions. Misled by a false charity and a morbid amiability, they are condemning the plain teaching of the Scripture, and are wise above that which is written.

Let us settle it in our minds, as one of the great foundation truths of our faith, that there is a hell. Just as we believe firmly that there is an eternal heaven for the godly, so let us believe firmly that there is an eternal hell for the wicked. Let us never suppose that there is any lack of charity in speaking of hell. Let us rather maintain that it is the highest love to warn men plainly of danger, and to beseech them to “flee from the wrath to come.” It was Satan, the deceiver, murderer, and liar, who said to Eve in the beginning, “You shall not surely die.”

(Gen. 3:4.) To shrink from telling men, that except they believe they will "die in their sins," may please the devil, but surely it cannot please God.

Finally, let us never forget that ***unbelief is the special sin that ruins men's souls.*** Had the Jews believed on our Lord, all manner of sin and blasphemy might have been forgiven them. But unbelief bars the door in mercy's face, and cuts off hope. Let us watch and pray hard against it. *Immorality slays its thousands, but unbelief its tens of thousands*. One of the strongest sayings ever used by our Lord was this— "He that believes not shall be damned." (Mark 16:16.)

Technical Notes:

21. Then Jesus said to them again, I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins. Where I go ye cannot come. 22. Then the Jews said, Will he kill himself? because he says, Where I go ye cannot come. 23. And he said to them, Ye are from beneath; I am from above. Ye are of this world; I am not of this world. 24. Therefore I said to you that ye shall die in your sins; for if ye do not believe that I am *he*, ye shall die in your sins. 25. Then they said to him, Who are you? And Jesus said to them, Even *the same* that I said to you from the beginning. 26. I have many things to say and to judge concerning you, but he who sent me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I have heard of him. 27. They did not understand that he

spoke to them of the Father. 28. Then Jesus said to them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am *he*, and *that* I do nothing of myself; but as my Father has taught me, I speak these things. 29. And he who sent me is with me. The Father has not left me alone, for I always do those things that please him. 30. As he spoke these words, many believed on him.

21.—[*Then Jesus said to them again*.] There seems a break or pause between this verse and the preceding one. It is as if our Lord resumed His discourse with a new leading thought or keynote. The other idea, viz., that "again" refers to chap. vii.34 and means that our Lord impressed on his hearers a *second time* that He would soon leave them, does not seem probable. It seems not unlikely that in the first instance our Lord spoke to the officers of the priests and Pharisees of "going", and that here He speaks to their masters, or at least to a different set of hearers. [*I go my way*.] This must mean, "I am soon about to leave this world. My mission is drawing to a close. The time of my decease and sacrifice approaches, and I must depart and go back to my Father in heaven, from where I came." The leading object of the sentence appears to be to excite in the minds of the Jews thought and inquiry about His divine nature. "I am one who came from heaven and am going back to heaven. Ought you not to inquire seriously who I am?"

Chrysostom thinks our Lord said this partly to shame and terrify the Jews, and partly to show them that His death would not be effected

by their violence but by His own voluntary submission.

[*Ye shall seek Me…die in your sins.*] This means that His hearers would seek Him too late, having discovered too late that He was the Messiah whom they ought to have received. But the door of mercy would then be shut. They would seek in vain, because they had not known the day of their visitation. And the result would be that many of them would die miserably "in their sins"—with their sins upon them unpardoned and unforgiven.

[*Where I go ye cannot come.*] This must mean heaven, the everlasting abode of glory which the Son had with the Father before He came into the world, which He left for a season when He became incarnate, and to which He returned when He had finished the work of man's redemption. To this a wicked man cannot come. Unbelief shuts him out. It is impossible in the nature of things that an unforgiven, unconverted, unbelieving man can go to heaven. The words in Greek are emphatic: "Ye *cannot* come." The notion of Augustine and others, that "Ye shall seek Me" only means "Ye shall seek Me in order to kill Me, as ye are wishing to do now, but at last I shall be withdrawn from your reach," seems to be quite untenable. The "seeking," to my mind, can only be the too-late seeking of remorse. The theory of some, that it refers exclusively to the time of the siege of Jerusalem by the Romans, seems to me equally untenable. My belief is that from the time that our Lord left the world down to this day, the expression has been peculiarly true of the Jewish nation. They have been perpetually, in a sense, "seeking" and

hungering after a Messiah, and yet unable to find Him because they have not sought aright. In saying this we must carefully remember that our Lord did not mean to say that any of His hearers were too *sinful* and bad to be forgiven. On the contrary, not a few of them that crucified Him found mercy on the day of Pentecost, when Peter preached. (Acts ii.22-41.) But our Lord did mean to say prophetically that the Jewish nation, as a nation, would be specially hardened and unbelieving, and that many of them, though an elect remnant might be saved, would "die in their sins." In proof of this peculiar blindness and unbelief of the Jewish nation, we should study Acts xxviii.25-27, Rom. xi.7, and 1 Thes. ii.15,16. The Greek expression for "sins" in this verse confirms the view. It is not, literally rendered, "sins," but "sin:" your special sin of unbelief.

Let us note that it is possible to seek Christ too late or from a wrong motive, and so to seek Him in vain. This is a very important principle of Scripture. True repentance, doubtless, is never too late, but late repentance is seldom true. There is mercy to the uttermost in Christ, but if men willfully reject Him, turn away from Him, and put off seeking Him in earnest, there is such a thing as "seeking Christ" in vain. Such passages as Proverbs i.24-32, Matt. xxv.11-12, Luke xiii.24-27, Heb. vi.4-8, and x.26-31, ought to be carefully studied.

Let us note that our Lord teaches plainly that it is possible for men to "die in their sins," and never come to the heaven where He has gone. This is flatly contrary to the doctrine taught by some in the present day, that there is no hell and no future punishment, and all will finally go to heaven.

It is worthy of remark that our Lord's words, "Ye shall seek Me" and "Where I go ye cannot come," are used three times in this Gospel: twice to the unbelieving Jews (here and at vii.34), and once to the disciples (xiii.33). But the careful reader will observe that in the two first instances the expression is coupled with "Ye shall not find Me" and "Ye shall die in your sins." In the last, it evidently means the temporary separation between Christ and His disciples which would be caused by His ascension. Melancthon observes that nothing seems to bring on men such dreadful guilt and punishment as neglect of the Gospel. The Jews had Christ among them and would not believe, and so when afterward they sought they could not find.

Rollock observes that the "seeking" which our Lord here foretells was like that of Esau, when he sought too late for the lost birthright. Burkitt observes: "Better a thousand times to die in a ditch than to die in our sins! They that die in their sins shall rise in their sins and stand before Christ in their sins. Such as lie down in sin in the grave shall have sin lie down with them in hell to all eternity. The sins of believers go to the grave before them; sin dies while they live. The sins of unbelievers go to the grave with them."

22.—[*Then the Jews said, etc.*] It is plain that this last saying of our Lord perplexed His enemies. It evidently implied something which they did not understand. In the preceding chapter (vii.34) they began speculating whether it meant that our Lord was going forth into the world to teach the Gentiles. Here they start another conjecture and

begin to suspect that our Lord must mean His going into another world by death. But by what death did He think of going? Did He mean to "kill Himself"? It seems strange that they should start such an idea. But may it not be that their minds were occupied with their own plan of putting Him to death? "Will He really anticipate our plan by committing suicide and thus escape our hands?" Origen suggests that the Jews had a tradition about the manner in which Messiah would die: viz., "that He would have power to depart at His own time and in a way of His own choosing."

Rupertus observes that afterwards at the siege of Jerusalem by Titus, many of the desperate Jews did the very thing they here said of our Lord—they killed themselves in madness of despair.

Melancthon remarks that nothing seems to anger wicked men so much as to be told they cannot come where Christ is.

23.—[*And He said… Ye are from beneath, etc.*] Our Lord's argument in this case appears to be as follows. "There is no union, harmony, or fellowship between you and Me. Your minds are entirely absorbed and buried in earth and objects of a mere earthly kind. You are from beneath and of this world, while I came from heaven and my heart is full of the things of heaven and my Father's business. No wonder, therefore, that I said you cannot come where I go and will die in your sins. Unless your hearts are changed and you learn to be of one mind with Me, you are totally unmeet for heaven and must at last die in your sins."

The expressions “from beneath” and “from above” are strong figurative phrases, intended to put in contrast earth and heaven. See Col. iii.1,2. The Greek phrases literally rendered would be, “Ye are from the things beneath; I am from the things above.”

The expression “of this world” means bound up with and inseparably connected, by tastes, aims, and affections, with this world and nothing else but this world. It is the character of one utterly dead and graceless, who looks at nothing but the world and lives for it. It is a character utterly at variance with that of our Lord, who was eminently “not of this world;” and therefore those who were of this character were incapable of union and friendship with Him.

Let it be noted that what our Lord says of Himself here is the very same thing that is said of His true disciples elsewhere. If a man has grace, he is “not of this world.” (See John xv.19, xvii.16, and 1 John iv.5.) Christ’s living members always have more or less of their Master’s likeness in this respect. They are always more or less separated from and distinct from this world. He that is thoroughly worldly has the plainest mark of not being a member of Christ and a true Christian. Theophylact observes that the strange notion of the Apollinarian heretics, that our Lord’s body was not a real human body but came down from heaven, was built on this verse for one of its reasons. But, as he remarks, they might as well say the Apostles had not common human bodies since the same thing is said of them: “not of this world.”

24.—[*Therefore I said, etc.*] This verse seems elliptical and must be filled up in some such manner as this: “It is because you are thoroughly earthly and of this world that I said, Ye cannot come where I go. You are not heavenly minded and cannot go to heaven but must go to your own place. The end will be that you will die in your sins. Not believing in Me as the Messiah, you cut yourselves off from all hope and must die in your sins. This, in short, is the root of all your misery—your unbelief.” Let it be noted that unbelief was the secret of the Jews being so thoroughly “of the world.” If they would only have believed in Christ, they would have been “delivered from this present evil world.” The victory that overcomes the world is faith. Once believing on a heavenly Savior, a man has a portion and a heart in heaven. (Gal. i.4, 1 John v.4,5.) Let it be noted that there is nothing hard or uncharitable in warning men plainly of the consequences of unbelief. Never to speak of hell is not acting as Christ did.

The expression “Believe not that I am He” would be more literally rendered “Believe not that I am.” Hence, some think that our Lord refers to the great name, well known to the Jews, under which God revealed Himself to Israel in Egypt: “Say to the children of Israel I AM has sent you.” (Ex. iii.14.)

Augustine remarks that “the whole unhappiness of the Jews was not that they had sin, but to die in sins.” He also observes, “In these words, ‘Except ye believe that I am,’ Jesus meant nothing short of

this, 'Except ye believe that I am God, ye shall die in your sins.' It is well for us, thank God, that He said except ye *believe*, and not except ye *understand*." Quesnel remarks: "It is a mistaken prudence to hide these dreadful truths from sinners for fear of casting them into despair by the force of God's judgments. We ought, on the contrary, to force them, by the sight of danger, to throw themselves into the arms of Christ, the only refuge for sinners."

25.—[*Then they said to Him, Who are You?*] This question cannot have been an honest inquiry about our Lord's nature and origin. Our Lord had spoken so often of His Father—in the 5th chapter, for instance, when before the Council—that the Jews of Jerusalem must have known well enough who and what He claimed to be. It is far more likely that they hoped to elicit from Him some fresh declaration which they could lay hold of and make the ground of an accusation. Anger and malice seem at the bottom of the question: "Who are You that says such things of us? Who are You that undertakes to pronounce such condemnation on us?" Ecolampadius thinks the question was asked sarcastically: "Who are you, indeed, to talk in this way?"

[And Jesus said…even the same…beginning.] Our Lord's reply here seems so guarded and cautious that it increases the probability of the Jews' question being put with a malicious intention. He knew their thoughts and designs, and answered them by reminding them what He had always said of Himself: "Why ask Me who I am? You know well what I have always said of myself. I am the same that I said to

you from the beginning. I have nothing new to say."

Scott thinks it simply means, "I am the same that I told you at the beginning of this discourse—the Light of the World." There is an undeniable difficulty and obscurity about the sentence before us, and it has consequently received three different interpretations. The difficulty arises chiefly from the word "beginning."

(a) Some think, as our own English version, Chrysostom, Calvin, Bucer, Gualter, Cartwright, Rollock, and Lightfoot, that "beginning" means the beginning of our Lord's ministry. "I am the same person that I told you I was from the very first beginning of my ministry among you." This view is confirmed by the Septuagint rendering of Gen. xliii.18,20.

(b) Some think, as Theophylact, Melancthon, Aretus, and Musculus, that "beginning" is an adverb and means simply, "as an opening or beginning statement." "First of all, as a commencement of my reply, I tell you that I am what I always said I was."

(c) Some think, as Augustine, Rupertus, Toletus, Ferus, Jansenius, Lampe, and Wordsworth, that "beginning" is a substantive and means the Beginning of all things, the personal Beginning, like "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the end." (Rev. i.8, xxi.6, xxii.13.) It would then mean, "I am the great beginning of all things, the eternal God, as I always said."

The reader must exercise his own judgment on these three views. The extreme brevity and conciseness of the Greek words make it very hard to give a decided opinion upon them. On the whole, I prefer the view taken by our translators. In three other places in St. John's Gospel our Lord speaks of His early ministry as "the beginning." (John vi.64, xv.27, xvi.4.) In no place in St. John's Gospel does He ever call Himself "the beginning." As to the second view, that it only means "First of all, as an opening statement," it seems to be so meager, flat, and bald that I cannot think it is correct.

Rollock, who takes the view of our English version, observes what a bright example our Lord here sets to all Christians, and especially to ministers, of always telling the same story and witnessing one and the same confession without variation.

26.—[*I have many things, etc.*] This verse, again, is very elliptical. The meaning seems to be as follows: "You marvel and are angry at my saying that you are from beneath and will die in your sin and cannot come where I go. You ask who I am who speaks and judges in this manner. But I tell you that I have many other things that I might say, and other judgments that I might pronounce about you. But I forbear now. Yet I tell you that He who sent Me is the one true God, and I only speak to the world things which I have heard of Him and am commissioned by Him to proclaim. He who sent Me will prove them to be true one day."

The general idea seems to be, that our Lord defends His right to

speak decidedly and pronounce judgment on His enemies' conduct on the ground of His divine mission. "I have a right to say what I have said, and I might say much more, because I am not a common prophet but am commissioned and sent as the Word of the Father."

The frequency with which our Lord speaks of Himself as "sent by the Father," in St. John's Gospel, should be carefully noticed. When our Lord speaks of Himself as "hearing" things from the Father, we must remember that His language is accommodated to our understanding. The relation between the Father and the Son in the Trinity is something too mysterious for us fully to comprehend. The Son does not really and literally need the Father to "speak" to Him and does not himself need to "hear" Him. The first and second Persons in the Trinity are ineffably united, though two distinct Persons.

Lightfoot thinks the latter part of this verse means: "He who sent Me has of old said and judged of you, and He is true, and they are true things that He said. Of this kind are the passages Isaiah xi.10 and xxix.10, and from such predictions Christ concludes thus, 'Ye shall die in your sins.'"

27.—[*They did not understand, etc.*] Why the Jews who heard these words did not comprehend that our Lord spoke of the "Father" is not clear. They must have thought that "He who sent Me" meant some earthly sender. The extent to which our Lord's hearers sometimes understood Him, as in John v.18, and sometimes did not understand Him, as here, is a curious subject. Alford observes,

“There is no accounting for the ignorance of unbelief, as any minister of Christ knows by painful experience.”

28.—[*Then Jesus said, etc.*] This verse is prophetical. Our Lord predicts that after His crucifixion the Jews would know that He was the Messiah, that He had done all He had done not of His own private authority but by God’s commission, and that He had spoken to the world only such things as the Father had taught and appointed Him to speak. But whether our Lord meant that His hearers would really believe with the heart and really confess His Messiahship, or that they would know it too late and be convinced when the day of grace was past and gone, is a nice and difficult question.

My own opinion, judging from the context and the analogy of other places, is in favor of the latter view: viz., that our Lord predicted the Jewish nation would know the truth and discover their own mistake too late. I think so because our Lord seems so frequently to allude to the light which would come on the minds of the Jewish nation at large after His death. They would be convinced though not converted. Chrysostom thinks that our Lord meant: “Do you expect that you shall certainly rid yourselves of Me, and slay Me? I tell you that then ye shall most surely know that I am, by reason of the miracle of my resurrection, and the destruction of Jerusalem. When ye have been driven away from your place of worship, and it is not even allowed you to serve God as hitherto, then ye shall know that He does this to avenge Me, and because He is wroth with those who would not hear Me.”

Augustine takes the other side and says: “Without doubt Jesus saw there some whom He knew, whom in His foreknowledge He had elected together with His other saints before the foundation of the world, that after His passion they should believe.”

Euthymius (agreeing with Chrysostom) remarks how the crowds that saw our Lord crucified and returned home smiting their breasts, the centurion who superintended His crucifixion, the chief priests who tried in vain to stifle the report of His resurrection, and Josephus the historian who attributed the misfortunes of the nation to their murder of Christ, were all witnesses to the truth of this verse. When too late, they knew who our Lord was.

Alford thinks that the words admit of a double fulfillment and that the Jews were to “know” that Jesus was the Christ in two different ways. Some would know by being converted, some by being punished and judged. The expression “lifted up” both here and elsewhere in St. John’s Gospel can mean nothing but our Lord’s crucifixion and lifting up on the cross. (John iii.14 and xii.32.) It is never used in any other sense, and the modern habit of talking of Christ as “lifted up” when magnified and exalted in the pulpit, is a total misapprehension and a play upon words. Rollock and others think that the phrase “lifted up” may fairly include all the consequences and effects of our Lord’s crucifixion, such as His second advent to judge the world, and that this will be the time when the unbelieving will at last know and be convinced that Christ is Lord of all. But the idea seems far-fetched.

The expression “then ye shall know” may possibly refer both to our Lord’s resurrection as well as His crucifixion. Certainly the rising again from the dead silenced our Lord’s enemies in a way that nothing else ever did. The expression “that I am He” here as elsewhere might be equally well rendered “that I am:” that I am the great “I AM,” the Messiah. The phrase “that I do nothing of myself” is the same that we have had frequently before, as in John v.19,30. It means, “that I do nothing of my own independent authority.” The reference is to the perfect union between the Son and the Father.

The expression, “as my Father has taught Me I speak these things,” again bears special reference to the divine commission of our Lord and the perfect union between Himself and His Father. “I do not speak the things I speak of myself and by my own authority only. I speak nothing but what my Father has taught, commissioned, and appointed Me to speak.” (Compare the 7th, 16th, and 26th verses of this chapter.)

Augustine says here: “Do not, as it were, represent to yourselves two men: the one father, the other son, and the father speaking to the son as you do when you say certain words to your son, advising and instructing him how to speak that whatever he has heard from you he may commit to memory, and having committed to memory utter also with the tongue. Do not so conceive. Stature and motion of the body, the office of the tongue, distinction of sounds, do not go about to conceive them in the Trinity.” Again: “Incorporeally the Father

spoke to the Son, because incorporeally the Father begat the Son. And He taught Him not as if He had begotten Him ignorant and in need of teaching; but this 'taught' is the same as 'begat Him knowing.'"

29.—[*And He who sent Me, etc.*] This verse contains, once more, that deep and oft-repeated truth—the entire unity between God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the consequent entire and complete harmony between the mind of the Father and the mind of the Son. It contains, moreover, that entire and complete performance of the Father's will by the Son and that perfect righteousness, obedience, and holiness, wherewith the Father is well-pleased.

When we read such words as "He who sent Me is with Me" and "has not left Me alone," we must remember that there is much in them which we cannot fully explain. We must be content to believe that the Father was "with" the Son and never "left" Him during the whole period of His incarnation, in an ineffable and inscrutable manner. Perhaps also there is a reference to Isaiah 1.7,8,9.

Augustine remarks: "Albeit both are together, yet one was sent and the other did send. The Father sent the Son, yet quitted not the Son." When we read such words as "I always do those things that please Him," we must see in the expression a description of that spotless perfection with which the Son during His incarnation constantly pleased the eternal Father. Let Christians never forget the practical

lesson: that in this verse, as in many other places, Christ is their example and their encouragement. Like Him, however short they may come, let then aim at "always doing what pleases God." Like Him, let them be sure that by so doing they will find the Father "with them," and will never be left quite "alone." Calvin remarks: "This is the courage with which we ought to be animated in the present day: that we may not give way on account of the small number of believers. For though the whole world be opposed to His doctrine, still we are not alone. Hence, it is evident how foolish is the boasting of the Papists who ,while they neglect God, proudly boast of their vast numbers."

30.—[*As He spoke these words, many believed on Him.*] There can be little doubt that "these words" in this place refer to the whole discourse which was delivered at this time, and not to the single verse which immediately precedes this one. It is possible that the reference to Isa. 1.7,8,9 may have brought light to the Jews' minds, and explained our Lord's relation to the Father and His claim to be received as the Messiah. Otherwise, it is not very clear what it was that made "many believe" on Him at this juncture. There is, however, no reason to think that the "belief" here was anything more than a head belief that our Lord was the Messiah. That many did so believe whose hearts remained unchanged, there can be little doubt. The same expression occurs at x.42 and xi.45 and xii.42. The extent to which men may be intellectually convinced of the truth of religion and know their duty, while their hearts are unrenewed and they continue in sin, is one of the most painful phenomena in the history

of human nature. Let us never be content with believing things to be true, without a personal laying hold on the living Person, Christ Jesus, and actually following Him. Chrysostom observes: "They believed, yet not as they ought, but carelessly and by chance, being pleased and refreshed by the humility of the words. For that they had not perfect faith, the Evangelist shows by their speeches after this, in which they insult Him again. Theophylact, Zwingli, and Calvin take the same view.

JOHN 8:31-36

Abraham's Children and the Devil's Children

Then Jesus said to those Jewish people who had believed him, "If you continue to follow my teaching, you are really my disciples and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." "We are descendants of Abraham," they replied, "and have never been anyone's slaves! How can you say, 'You will become free'?" Jesus answered them, "I tell you the solemn truth, everyone who practices sin is a slave of sin. The slave does not remain in the family forever, but the son remains forever. So if the son sets you free, you will be really free."

These verses show us, for one thing, ***the importance of steady perseverance in Christ's service.*** There were many, it seems, at this particular period, who professed to believe on our Lord, and expressed a desire to become His disciples. There is nothing to show that they had true faith. They appear to have acted

under the influence of temporary excitement, without considering what they were doing. And to them our Lord addresses this instructive warning— "If you continue in My word, then are you My disciples indeed."

This sentence contains a mine of wisdom. To make a beginning in religious life is comparatively easy. Not a few mixed motives assist us. The love of novelty, the praise of well-meaning but imprudent professors, the secret self-satisfaction of feeling "how good I am," the universal excitement attending a new position—all these things combine to aid the young beginner. Aided by them he begins to run the race that leads to heaven, lays aside many bad habits, takes up many good ones, has many comfortable frames and feelings, and gets on splendidly for a time. But when the newness of his position is past and gone, when the freshness of his feelings is rubbed off and lost, when the world and the devil begin to pull hard at him, when the weakness of his own heart begins to appear, then it is that he finds out the real difficulties of vital Christianity. Then it is that he discovers the deep wisdom of our Lord's saying now before us. It is not beginning, but "continuing" a religious profession, that is the test of true grace.

We should remember these things in forming our estimate of other people's religion. No doubt we ought to be thankful when we see any one ceasing to do evil and learning to do well. We must not "despise the day of small things." (Zech. 4:10.) But we must not forget that to begin is one thing, and to go on is quite another.

Patient continuance in well-doing is the only sure evidence of grace. Not he that runs fast and furiously at first, but he that keeps up his speed, is he that "runs so as to obtain." By all means let us be hopeful when we see anything like conversion. But let us not make too sure that it is real conversion, until time has set its seal upon it. Time and wear test metals, and prove whether they are solid or plated. Time and wear, in like manner, are the surest tests of a man's religion. Where there is spiritual life there will be continuance and steady perseverance. It is the man who goes on as well as begins, that is "the disciple indeed."

These verses show us, for another thing, ***the nature of true slavery.*** The Jews were fond of boasting, though without any just cause, that they were politically free, and were not in bondage to any foreign power. Our Lord reminds those who there was another bondage to which they were giving no heed, although enslaved by it. "He that commits sin is the slave of sin."

How true that is! How many on every side are total slaves, although they do not acknowledge it! They are led captive by their besetting corruptions and infirmities, and seem to have no power to get free. Ambition, the love of money, the passion for drink, the craving for pleasure and excitement, gambling, gluttony, illicit relationships—all these are so many tyrants among men. Each and all have crowds of unhappy prisoners bound hand and foot in their chains. The wretched prisoners will not admit their bondage. They will even boast sometimes that they are eminently *free*. But many of

them know better. There are times when the iron enters into their souls, and they feel bitterly that they are slaves.

There is no slavery like this. Sin is indeed the hardest of all taskmasters. Misery and disappointment in the way, despair and hell in the end—these are the only wages that sin pays to its servants. To deliver men from this bondage, is the grand object of the Gospel. To awaken people to a sense of their degradation, to show them their chains, to make them arise and struggle to be free—this is the great end for which Christ sent forth His ministers. Happy is he who has opened his eyes and found out his danger. To know that we are being led captive, is the very first step toward deliverance.

These verses, show us, lastly, ***the nature of true liberty.*** Our Lord declares this to the Jews in one comprehensive sentence. He says, "If the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed."

Liberty, most Englishmen know, is rightly esteemed one of the highest temporal blessings. Freedom from foreign dominion, a free constitution, free trade, a free press, civil and religious liberty—what a world of meaning lies beneath these phrases! How many would sacrifice life and fortune to maintain the things which they represent! Yet, after all our boasting, there are many so-called freemen who are nothing better than slaves. There are many who are totally ignorant of the highest, purest form of liberty. The noblest liberty is that which is the property of the true Christian. Those only are perfectly free people whom the Son of God "makes free." All else will sooner or later be found slaves.

Wherein does the liberty of true Christians consist? Of what is their freedom made up? They are freed from the *guilt and consequences of sin* by the blood of Christ. Justified, pardoned, forgiven, they can look forward boldly to the day of judgment, and cry "Who shall lay anything to our charge? Who is he that condemns?" They are freed from *the power of sin* by the grace of Christ's Spirit. Sin has no longer dominion over them. Renewed, converted, sanctified, they mortify and tread down sin, and are no longer led captive by it. Liberty, like this, is the portion of all true Christians in the day that they flee to Christ by faith, and commit their souls to Him. That day they become free men. Liberty, like this, is their portion forevermore. Death cannot stop it. The grave cannot even hold their bodies for more than a little season. Those whom Christ makes free are free to all eternity.

Let us never rest until we have some personal experience of this freedom ourselves. Without it all other freedom is a worthless privilege. Free speech, free laws, political freedom, commercial freedom, national freedom—all these cannot smooth down a dying pillow, or disarm death of his sting, or fill our consciences with peace. Nothing can do that but the freedom which Christ alone bestows. He gives it freely to all who seek it humbly. Then let us never rest until it is our own.

Technical Notes:

31. Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed.

32. And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. 33. They answered him, We are Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man. How can you say, Ye shall be made free? 34. Jesus answered them, Verily, verily I say to you, whoever commits sin is the servant of sin. 35. And the servant does not abide in the house forever, but the Son abides forever. 36. Therefore, if the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.

31.—[Then Jesus said…believed on Him.] It is clear, I think, from the tone of the conversation that runs from this verse uninterruptedly to the end of the chapter, that this "believing" was not faith of the heart. These Jews only "believed" that our Lord was One sent from heaven and deserved attention. But they were the same Jews to whom He says by and by, "Ye are of your father the devil."

[If ye continue…disciples indeed.] This sentence does not mean that these Jews had really begun to receive Christ's word into their hearts. Such a sense would be contradictory to the context. It must mean, "If you take up a firm stand on that Gospel and Word of Truth which I have come to proclaim and go on sticking firmly to it in your hearts and lives, not merely convinced and wishing but actually following Me, then you are truly my disciples." The word rendered "indeed" is more literally "truly." The converse throws light on our Lord's meaning: "You are not truly disciples unless you continue steadfast in my doctrine."

Our Lord teaches the great principle that steady continuance is the only real and safe proof of discipleship. No perseverance, no grace! No continuance in the word, no real faith and conversion! This is one of the meeting points between Calvinist and Arminian. He who has true grace will not fall away. He who falls away has no true grace and must not flatter himself that he is a disciple.

Let us note that it is not the "word continuing in us," but "our continuing in the word" which makes us true disciples. The distinction is very important. The word "might continue in us" and not be seen. If we "continue in the word," our lives will show it. In John xv.7 we have both expressions together: "If ye abide in Me, and my words abide in you." 32.—[And ye shall know the truth.] The expression "the truth" here cannot, I think, mean the Personal Truth, the Messiah. It must be "the whole doctrinal truth concerning myself, my nature, my mission, and my Gospel. Steady continuance in my Service shall lead to clear knowledge." It is a parallel saying to the sentence, "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine." (vii.17.) Honest obedience and steady perseverance in acting up to our light and doing what we learn, are one grand secret of obtaining more knowledge.

Chrysostom, however, thinks that our Lord means by "truth," Himself. "Ye shall know Me, for I am the truth." So also does Augustine, Theophylact, Euthymius, and Lampe.

[The truth shall make you free.] This freedom can only mean spiritual freedom—freedom from the guilt, burden, and dominion of

sin; freedom from the heavy yoke of Pharisaism, under which many Jews were laboring and heavy laden. (Matt. xi.28.) “The Gospel I preach, and its good news, shall deliver you from spiritual bondage and make you feel like men set at liberty.”

I think these words must have been spoken with special reference to the bondage and spiritual slavery in which the Jews were kept by their principal teachers, when our Lord came among them. In the synagogue at Nazareth, He had said that He came “to preach deliverance to the captives.” (Luke iv.18.) This, however, is the first place in the Gospels where He openly declares that His Gospel will give men freedom.

Until truth comes into a man’s heart, he never really knows what it is to feel true spiritual liberty.

Augustine says: “To Christ let us all flee. Against sin let us call on God to interpose as our Liberator. Let us ask to be taken on sale, that we may be redeemed by His blood.”

33.—[They answered him, We are Abraham’s seed.] Here we see the usual pride of carnal descent coming out in the Jewish mind. It is just what John the Baptist told them when he preached, “Think not to say that we have Abraham for our father.” (Matt. iii.19.)

[And were never in bondage to any man.] This is the blindness of pride in its strongest form. The seed of Abraham was in bondage to the Egyptians and Babylonians for many years, to say nothing of the

frequent bondages to the Philistines and other nations as recorded in the book of Judges. Even now, while they spoke, they were in subjection to the Romans. The power of self-deception in unconverted man is infinite. These Jews were not more unreasonable than many nowadays who say, “We are not dead in sin; we have grace, we have faith, we are regenerate, we have the Spirit,” while their lives show plainly that they are totally mistaken.

[How can you say…made free?] This question was partly asked in anger and resentment and partly in curiosity. Angry as the Jews were at the idea of being subject to anyone, they yet caught at the expression “be made free.” It made them think of the glorious kingdom of Messiah, foretold in the Prophets. “Are You going to restore the kingdom to Israel? Are You going to set us free from the Romans?”

We should observe here, as elsewhere, the readiness of our Lord’s hearers to put a carnal sense on spiritual language. Nicodemus misunderstanding the new birth, the Samaritan woman and the living waters, the Capernaites and the bread from heaven, are all illustrations of what I mean. (See John iii.4, iv.11, vi.34.)

Pearce thinks the Jews here spoke of themselves individually and not of the Jewish nation. Yet surely even when they spoke, they were subject to the Romans.

Henry observes: “Carnal hearts are sensible of no other grievances than those that molest the body and injure their secular

affairs. Talk to them of encroachments on their civil liberty and property, tell of waste committed on their lands or damage done to their houses, and they understand you very well and can give you a sensible answer; the thing touches and affects them. But discourse to them of the bondage of sin or captivity to Satan and a liberty by Christ, tell them of wrong done to their souls, and you bring strange things to them."

34.—[Jesus answered, etc.] In this verse our Lord shows His hearers what kind of freedom He had meant by showing the kind of slavery from which He wished them to be delivered. Did they ask in what sense He meant they should be made free? Let them know, first of all, that in their present state of mind—wicked, worldly, and unbelieving—they were in a state of bondage. Living in habitual sin, they were the "servants of sin." This was a general proposition which they themselves must admit. The man who lived willfully in habits of sin was acknowledged by all to be the slave of sin. Sin ruled over him, and he was its servant. This was an axiom in religion which they could not dispute, for even heathen philosophers admitted it. See Rom. vi.16-20 and 2 Pet. ii.19.

"Commits," we must remember here, does not mean "commits an act of sin" but habitually lives in the commission of sin. It is in this sense that St. John says, "He who commits sin is of the devil," and "He who is born of God does not commit sin." (1 John iii.8,9.)

35.—[And the servant does not abide, etc.] This is a difficult (because a very elliptical) verse. The leading object in our Lord's

mind seems to be to show the Jews the servile and slavish condition in which they were so long as they rejected Him, the true Messiah, and the free and elevated position which they would occupy if they would believe in Him and become His disciples. “At present, living under the bondage of the ceremonial law and content with it and Pharisaic traditions, you are no better than slaves and servants, liable, like Hagar and Ishmael, to be cast out of God’s favor and presence at any moment. Receiving Me and believing on Me as the Messiah, you would at once be lifted to the position of sons and would abide forever in God’s favor as adopted children and dear sons and daughters. You know yourselves that the servant has no certain tenure in the house and may be cast out at any time, while the son is heir to the father and has a certain tenure in the house forever. Know that I wish you to be raised from the relation of servants to that of sons. Now, under the bondage you are in, you are like slaves. Receiving Me and my Gospel, you would become children and free.”

Something like this seems the leading idea in our Lord’s mind. But it is vain to deny that it is a dark and difficult sentence and requires much filling up and paraphrasing to complete its meaning. The simplest plan is to take it as a parenthesis. Then it becomes a comment on the word “servant,” which to a Jew familiar with the story of Hagar and Ishmael, would be very instructive and would convey the latent thought that our Lord wished them to be not servants but sons. I cannot for a moment think that “the Son” in the last clause means the Son of God, or that the whole clause was meant to teach His eternity.

It is certainly possible that a deep mystical sense may lie under the words “servant” and “son” in this verse. “Servant” may mean the Jew content with the inferior and servile religion of Moses. “Son” may mean the believer in Christ who receives the adoption and enjoys Gospel liberty. He who is content with Judaism will find his system and religion soon pass away. He who enters into Christ’s service will find himself a son forever. But this is at best only conjectural and a somewhat questionable interpretation.

One thing, at any rate, is very clear to my mind. The latent thought in our Lord’s mind is a reference to the story of Hagar and her son Ishmael being cast out as bondservants while Isaac, the son and heir, abode in the house. He wished to impress on His hearers’ minds that He desired them, like Isaac, to have the privilege of sons forever and to be free to all eternity. Keeping this thought in view and regarding the verse as a parenthesis, its difficulties are not insuperable.

Chrysostom says: “‘Abides not’ means ‘has not power to grant favors, as not being master of the house;’ but the son is master of the house.” The Jewish priests were the servants, and Christ was the Son. The priests had no power to set free, the Son of God had. Theophylact and Euthymius take the same view.

Maldonatus calls attention to the expression in Hebrews where Moses and Christ are put in contrast, and each in connection with the word “house”— Moses as a servant, Christ as a Son. St. Paul certainly seems there to refer to this passage. (Heb. iii.2,5,6.)

36.—[If the Son shall make you free, etc.] In this verse our Lord explains what He had meant by freedom. It was a freedom from sin—its guilt, power, and consequences—which believers in Him were to receive. “If I, the Son of man, make you free in the sense of delivering you from the burden of sin, then you will be free indeed!” This was the freedom that He wished them to obtain. Here, as elsewhere, our Lord carefully avoids saying anything to bring on Himself the charge of rebelling against
constituted authorities and of heading a popular rise for liberty. The word rendered “indeed” here is not the word so rendered at the 31st verse. Here it means “really, in reality,” from the participle of the verb “to be.” There is means “truly.”

Let us not forget in these days that the only liberty which is truly valuable in God’s sight is that which Christ gives. All political liberty, however useful for many purposes, is worthless unless we are children of God and heirs of the kingdom by faith in Jesus. He only is perfectly free who is free from sin; all beside are slaves. He who would be free in this fashion has only to apply to Christ for freedom. It is the peculiar office and privilege of the Lord Jesus to enfranchise forever all who come to Him.

Augustine carries the freedom here promised far into the future. He remarks: “When shall there be full and perfect liberty? When there shall be no enemies; when the last enemy shall be destroyed, even death.”

JOHN 8:37-47

“I know that you are Abraham’s descendants. But you want to kill me, because my teaching makes no progress among you. I am telling you the things I have seen while with my Father, but you are practicing the things you have heard from your father.”

They answered him, “Abraham is our father!” Jesus replied, “If you were Abraham’s children, you would be doing the deeds of Abraham. But now you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth I heard from God. Abraham did not do this! You people are doing the deeds of your father.”

Then they said to Jesus, “We were not born as a result of immorality! We have only one Father, God himself.” Jesus replied, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I have come from God and am now here. I have not come on my own initiative, but he sent me. Why don’t you understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot accept my teaching. You people are from your father the devil, and you want to do what your father desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not uphold the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, because he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I am telling you the truth, you do not believe me. Who among you can prove me guilty of any sin? If I am telling you the truth, why don’t you believe me? The one who belongs to God listens and responds to God’s words. You don’t listen and respond, because you don’t belong to God.”

There are things taught in this passage of Scripture which are peculiarly truth for the times. Well would it be for the Churches if all Christians would ponder carefully the matter which it contains.

We are taught for one thing ***the ignorant self-righteousness of the natural man.*** We find the Jews pluming themselves on their natural descent from Abraham, as if that must of necessity, cover all deficiencies— "Abraham is our father." We find them going even further than this, and claiming to be God's special favorites and God's own family— "We have one Father, even God." They forgot that fleshly relationship to Abraham was useless, unless they shared Abraham's grace. They forgot that God's choice of their father to be head of a favored nation was never meant to carry salvation to the children, unless they walked in their father's footsteps. All this in their blind self-conceit they refused to see. "We are Jews. We are God's children. We are the true Church. We are in the covenant. We must be all right." This was their whole argument!

Strange as it may seem, there are multitudes of so-called Christians who are exactly like these Jews. Their whole religion consist of a few notions neither wiser nor better than those propounded by the enemies of our Lord. They will tell you "that they are regular Church people; they have been baptized; they go to the Lord's table"—but they can tell you no more. Of all the essential doctrines of the Gospel they are totally ignorant. Of faith, and grace, and repentance, and holiness, and spiritual mindedness they know nothing at all. Unquestionably they are Churchmen, and so they

hope to go to heaven! There are myriads in this condition. It sounds sad, but unhappily it is only too true.

Let us settle firmly in our minds that connection with a good Church and good ancestors is no proof whatever that we ourselves are in a way to be saved. We need something more than this. We must be joined to Christ himself by a living faith. We must know something experimentally of the work of the Spirit in our hearts. "Church principles," and "sound Churchmanship," are fine words and excellent party cries. But they will not deliver our souls from the wrath to come, or give us boldness in the day of judgment.

We are taught for another thing ***the true marks of spiritual sonship.*** Our Lord makes this point most plain by two mighty sayings. Did the Jews say, "We have Abraham to our father"? He replies, "If you were Abraham's children you would do the work of Abraham." Did the Jews say, "We have one Father, even God"? He replies, "If God were your Father you would love Me."

Let these two sayings of Christ sink down into our hearts. They supply an answer to two of the most mischievous, yet most common, errors of the present day. What more common, on one side, than vague talk about the universal Fatherhood of God? "All men," we are told, "are God's children, whatever be their creed or religion; all are finally to have a place in the Father's house, "where there are many mansions." What more common, on another side, than high-sounding statements about the effect of baptism and the privileges of Church-membership?

“By baptism,” we are confidently told, “all baptized people are made children of God; all members of the Church, without distinction, have a right to be addressed as sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty.”

Statements like these can never be reconciled with the plain language of our Lord in the passage before us. If words mean anything, no man is really a child of God, who does not love Jesus Christ. The charitable judgment of a baptismal service, or the hopeful estimate of a catechism, may call him by the name of a son, and reckon him among God’s children. But the reality of sonship to God, and all its blessings, no one possesses who does not love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. (Ephes. 6:24.) In matters like these we need not be shaken by mere assertions. We may well afford to despise the charge of undervaluing the sacraments. We have only to ask one question— “What is written? What says the Lord?” And with this saying before us, we can only come to one conclusion— “Where there is no love to Christ, there is no sonship to God.”

We are taught, lastly, in these verses, ***the reality and character of the devil.*** Our Lord speaks of him as one whose personality and existence are beyond dispute. In solemn words of stern rebuke He says to His unbelieving enemies, “You are of your father the devil”—led by him, doing his will, and showing unhappily that you are like him. And then He paints his picture in dark colors, describing him as a “murderer” from the beginning, as a “liar” and the father of lies.

There is a devil! We have a mighty invisible enemy always near us—one who never slumbers and never sleeps—one who is about our path and about our bed, and spies out all our ways, and will never leave us until we die. He is a murderer! His great aim and object is, to ruin us forever and kill our souls. To destroy, to rob us of eternal life, to bring us down to the second death in hell, are the things for which he is unceasingly working. He is ever going about, seeking whom he may devour. He is a liar! He is continually trying to deceive us by false representations, just as he deceived Eve at the beginning. He is always telling us that good is evil and evil good—truth is falsehood and falsehood truth—the broad way good and the narrow way bad. Millions are led captive by his deceit, and follow him, both rich and poor, both high and low, both learned and unlearned. Lies are his chosen weapons. By lies he slays many.

These are dreadful things; but they are true. Let us live as if we believed them. Let us not be like many who mock, and sneer, and scoff, and deny the existence of the very being who is invisibly leading them to hell. Let us believe there is a devil, and watch, and pray, and fight hard against his temptations. Strong as he is, there is One stronger than him, who said to Peter, "I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not," and who still intercedes at God's right hand. Let us commit our souls to Him. (Luke 22:32.) With such a being as the devil going to and fro in the world, we never need wonder to see evil abounding. But with Christ on our side, we need not be afraid. Greater is He that is for us than he that is against us. It is written,

“Resist the devil, and he shall flee from you.” “The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.” (James 4:7; Rom. 16:20.)

Technical Notes:

37. I know that ye are Abraham’s seed, but ye seek to kill me, because my word has no place in you. 38. I speak what I have seen with my Father, and ye do what ye have seen with your father. 39. They answered and said to him, Abraham is our father. Jesus said to them, If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham. 40. But now ye seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth which I have heard from God. This did not Abraham. 41. Ye do the deeds of your father. Then they said to him, We were not born of fornication; we have one father, *even* God. 42. Jesus said to them, If God were your Father, ye would love me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither did I come of myself, but he sent me. 43. Why do ye not understand my speech? *even* because ye cannot hear my word. 44. Ye are of *your* father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks of his own, for he is a liar and the father of it. 45. And because I tell *you* the truth, ye do not believe me. 46. Which of you convinces me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me? 47. He who is of God hears God’s words;

therefore ye do not hear *them*, because ye are not of God.

37.—[*I know that ye are Abraham's seed.*] In this verse our Lord takes up the arrogant boast of the Jews that they were Abraham's seed. He had replied to their assertion— "We were never in bondage to any man"—by showing the nature of true bondage and true liberty. He now returns to their opening statement "We are Abraham's seed," and begins by telling them that He knew and fully admitted their carnal descent from Abraham.

[*But ye seek to kill Me.*] This must mean, "Your relation to Abraham does you no good, for ye are seeking to murder Me at this very moment, though I have come to fulfill the promises made to Abraham." Here, as well as at the 40th verse and chapter vii.19, our Lord shows His perfect knowledge of all the designs of His enemies. He gives us an example of steady perseverance in God's work, even though we know our lives are in peril.

[*Because my word has no place in you.*] This means, "Because the Gospel I preach, the message I brought from my Father, makes no way or progress in your hearts or among you." The Greek word, which our translators have rendered "has place," is never so rendered elsewhere. The idea here seems to be that of "going forward, spreading, and marching on." This describes literally the condition of many who hear Christ's word in every age. It seems to come to a dead standstill or halt in their hearts, and to make no way with them.

38.—[*I speak, etc.*] The sense of this verse appears to be filled up thus: “The truth is, that there is an entire gulf and breach between you and Me. I speak and am ever speaking the doctrine which I have seen with my Father in our eternal councils about mankind, and which I am sent by Him to proclaim to the world. You, on the other hand, do and are always doing the things which your father the devil presents to your minds, and which you have seen and imbibed into your characters under his influence.” When our Lord speaks of what He has “seen” with His Father, we must remember, as elsewhere, that He uses language accommodated to our weak capacities to describe the relation between Himself and the first Person in the Trinity. Compare John iii.32 and v.19.

There can be no doubt, when we read the verses following, that the “father” of the Jews to whom our Lord here refers is “the devil.” It conveys an awful idea of the state of unbelieving and wicked men, that they are doing what they have seen and learned from the devil. There may, however, be special reference to the design of the Jews to kill Christ. Our Lord’s meanings may be, “Ye are doing what ye have seen with the devil your father. He has suggested to you to kill Me, and you are listening to his suggestion.”

39.—[*They answered... Abraham is our Father.*] This is a repetition of what the Jews had already said. Startled at what our Lord said about their “father,” they reassert emphatically their relationship to Abraham. “What do you mean by thus speaking of our father? Abraham is our father.”

[*Jesus said…works of Abraham.*] Our Lord here tells them that it is possible to be Abraham's children according to the flesh and yet not Abraham's children according to the Spirit. "If ye were true spiritual descendants of Abraham, you would show it by doing such things as Abraham did. Your works would be like his, because springing from a like faith." The distinction here drawn by our Lord is a very important one for Christians to notice. The utter uselessness of carnal relationship, or formal outward succession, is a truth which man does not like to admit, but one that needs to be constantly taught in the Churches. How common to hear men say, "We belong to the one true Church, we are in the direct succession from the Apostles." Such claims are utterly useless if not accompanied by "works."

We must never forget the importance of "works," if put in their right place. "They cannot justify us. They are at best full of imperfection. But they are useful evidences and serve to show whose we are and what our religion is worth."

40.—[*But now ye seek to kill Me, etc.*] Our Lord in this verse confirms the charge made in the preceding one, that His enemies were not Abraham's spiritual children although carnally descended from Abraham. "At this very moment you are wishing and endeavoring to put Me to death, not for any crime, but simply because I have spoken to you that mighty message of truth which I heard from my Father, and am sent to proclaim to the world as the Messiah. This is the very opposite of what your great forefather

Abraham would have done. He longed to see my day. He rejoiced in the prospect of it. He would have hailed my appearance and message with delight. Your conduct, therefore, is an unanswerable proof that you are not Abraham's spiritual children."

Our Lord's argument is the same that St. Paul uses to the Romans. "He is not a Jew which is one outwardly." "They which are the children of the flesh are not the children of God." (Rom. ii.28,29; ix.8.) The importance of it cannot be overrated. It establishes the great principle that fleshly relationship or ecclesiastical connection is nothing without grace in the heart, and indeed only adds to a man's condemnation. The expression "this did not Abraham" is a Hebraism. Of course, literally Abraham could not "seek to kill" Christ, because he never lived with Him on earth. The meaning must be, "Your conduct is the very opposite of what Abraham would have done and utterly contrary to the general tenor of what he did while he lived." Compare Deut. xvii.3, Jer. vii.22-31, xix.5, xxxii.35, where the same form of speech is used.

When our Lord calls Himself here simply "a man," He uses an expression which He nowhere else employs in the Gospels. As a rule, He calls Himself "the Son of man" when speaking of His human nature. Here, however, He seems to speak of Himself in the point of view in which His unbelieving enemies ought to have regarded Him, if they could not yet acknowledge His divinity. "I am among you a man speaking the truth, and yet ye seek to kill Me." The attempt of Jews and Socinians to show that our Lord was not really God,

founded on this text, is futile. Our Lord's real and true humanity no sound Trinitarian thinks of denying.

41.—[*Ye do the deeds of your father*.] This means, "You are doing the things that your father the devil approves and suggests to you. You are showing yourselves genuine children of the devil by doing his works." The word "ye" in the Greek is emphatic and may possibly be intended to contrast with "I" at the beginning of the 35th verse.

[*Then they said…fornication*.] These words can hardly be taken literally. Our Lord was speaking to the Jews, not as individuals but as a nation and a class, and was speaking of their descent in a religious point of view. The question was, "Who was their father? From whom did they get their spiritual character? To whom were their proclivities and tendencies to be traced?" This our Lord's hearers understood and said, "We are not born of fornication; we are not heathens and idolaters, at any rate, even if we are not as good as Abraham." That idolatry was called fornication, because it was unfaithfulness to the covenant God—a forsaking Him for false gods—is, I think, clear from many places in the Old Testament. See for instance Jeremiah ii.1-20 and iii.1-3. I think this was in the minds of the Jews when they spoke to our Lord here. This is Augustine's view. The notion of Euthymius, Rupertus, and others, that the Jews refer to other children of Abraham by Hagar and Keturah and boast themselves his true children by Sarah, is not satisfactory. It is surely too much to charge Abraham with the sin of fornication because he took Hagar to be his wife at the insistence of Sarah and married

Keturah after Sarah's death! The notion of some, that the Jews refer here to the many marriages between Jews and Gentiles in the Old Testament times (as seen in Ezra x.1, etc.) and repudiate them, is not probable.

Some have thought that the Jews insinuated wicked doubts of our Lord's legitimate birth in this phrase. But it seems unlikely.

[*We have one Father, even God.*] The Jews here lay claim to be regarded as God's children. That God is called "the Father" of Israel in several places in the Old Testament is undeniable. See Deut. xxxii.6, 1 Chron. xxix.10, Isa. lxiii.16, lxiv.8, and Mal. i.6. But it is very clear that these texts specially refer to God's relation to Israel as a nation and not to Israelites as individuals. The Jews, however, in their pride and self-righteousness, made no such nice distinction. They did not see that national sonship and covenant sonship without spiritual sonship are worth nothing. Hence they brought on themselves the stern rebuke of the next verse.

42.—[Jesus said... If God were your Father...love me.] Our Lord here tells the Jews that although they might be children of God by covenant and nationality, they were evidently not God's children by grace and spiritual birth. If God was really their Father, they would show it by loving the Son of God, even Himself.

Let us note carefully the great principle contained in this sentence. Love to Christ is the infallible mark of all true children of God.

Would we know whether we are born again, whether we are children of God? There is one simple way of finding out: Do we love Christ? If not, it is vain and idle to talk of God as our Father and ourselves as God's children. No love to Christ, no sonship to God!

The favorite notion of many—that baptism makes us sons and daughters of God and that all baptized people should be addressed as God's children—is utterly irreconcilable with this sentence. Unless a baptized person loves Christ, he has no right to call God "Father" and is not God's child. He has yet to be born again and brought into God's family. Before the point and edge of these words, the doctrine —that spiritual regeneration always accompanies baptism—cannot stand.

The modern notion about God's universal Fatherhood, which finds such favor with many, is no less irreconcilable with this sentence than baptismal regeneration. That God the Father is full of love, mercy, and compassion to all is no doubt true. But that God is really and truly the spiritual Father of anyone who does not love Christ can never be maintained without contradicting our Lord's words in this place.

The sentence is full of condemnation to all who know nothing experimentally of Christ, and neither think, nor feel, nor care anything about Him. Crowds of so-called Christians are in this unhappy state and are plainly not God's children, whatever they may think. The sentence is equally full of comfort for all true believers,

however weak and feeble. If they feel drawn towards Christ in heart and affection and can truly say "I do love Him," they have the plainest mark of being God's children, and "if children, then heirs." (Rom. viii.17.)

[*For I proceeded forth, etc.*] Our Lord here shows the Jews His own divine nature and mission. He had proceeded forth and come from God, the eternal Son from the eternal Father. He had not come of His own independent will and without commission, but specially sent and appointed by the Father as His last and dearest Messenger to a lost world. Such was His nature. Such was His position and relation to the Father. If, therefore, they really were children of God the Father, they would love Him as the Father's Son, the Father's Messenger, the Father's promised Messiah. Not loving Him, they gave the plainest proof that they were not God's children. A true child of God will love everything belonging to God, and especially he will love God's only begotten and beloved Son. He can see and find nothing nearer to the Father than the Son, who is the "brightness of His glory and the express image of His person." (Heb. i.3.) If, therefore, he does not love the Son, it is clear that he is no true child of the Father. Calvin remarks: "Christ's argument is this: Whoever is a child of God will acknowledge his first-born Son. 'But you hate Me, and therefore you have no reason to boast that you are God's children.' We ought carefully to observe in this passage that there is no piety and no fear of God where Christ is rejected. Hypocritical religion presumptuously shelters itself under the name of God; but how can they agree with the Father who disagree with His only Son?"

43.—[*Why do ye not understand, etc.*] In this verse our Lord seems to me to draw a distinction between "speech" and "word." The expression "word" is deeper than "speech." By "speech" He means "my manner of speaking and expressing myself." By "word" He means generally "my doctrine." The sense is, "How is it that ye do not understand my manner of expressing myself to you when I speak of such things as freedom and of 'your father'? It is because ye will not receive and attend to my whole message—the word that I bring to you from my Father." Lightfoot takes this view. This explanation seems to me to describe most accurately the state of things between our Lord and His hearers. They were continually misunderstanding, misinterpreting, and stumbling at the expressions and language that He used in teaching them. Did He speak of "bread"? They thought He meant literal bread. Did He speak of "freedom"? They thought He meant temporal and political freedom. Did He speak of "their Father"? They thought He meant Abraham. How was it that they so misunderstood His language and dialect? It was simply because their hearts were utterly hardened and closed against the whole "word of salvation" which He came to proclaim. Having no will to listen to and receive His doctrine, they were ready at every step to misconstrue the words and figures under which it was conveyed and placed before them.

Anyone who preaches the Gospel now must often observe that precisely the same thing happens in the present day. Hearers who are strongly prejudiced against the Gospel are constantly perverting, wresting, and misinterpreting the language of the preacher. None are

so blind as those who will not see, and none so stupid as those who do not want to understand. The “cannot” here is a moral inability. It is like “No man can come unto Me,” and “His brethren could not speak peaceably unto him.” (John vi.44 and Gen. xxxvii.4.) It means, “Ye have no will to hear with your hearts.” Chrysostom remarks, “Not to be able, here, means not to be willing.”

44.—[*Ye are of your father the devil, etc.*] This verse deserves special attention, both for the sternness of the rebuke it contains and the deep subject which it handles. The general sense is as follows: “Ye are so far from being spiritual children of Abraham or true children of God, that, on the contrary, ye may be rightly called the children of the devil; and ye show it by having a will set on doing the evil things which your father suggests to you. He, from the beginning of creation, was a being set on the destruction of man and did not abide in the original truth and righteousness in which he was created; for now truth is not in his nature. When he now speaks and suggests a lie, he speaks out of his own peculiar inward nature, for he is eminently a liar and the father of a lie.” When our Lord says to the wicked Jews, “Ye are of your father the devil,” He does not mean that the wicked are made wicked by the devil in the same sense that the godly are made godly by God, created anew and begotten of God. But He uses a common Hebraism by which persons, who are closely connected with or entirely under the influence of another, are called “his children.” It is in this sense that the wicked and unbelieving are truly the children of the devil. This must be carefully remembered. The devil has no power to “create” the wicked. He only finds them

born in sin and, working upon their sinful nature, obtains such an influence that he becomes practically the "father of the wicked." (See Matt. xiii.38, 1 John iii.10, Matt. xiii.19, Luke xvi.8, xx.34, Isa. lvii.4, Num. xvii.10.) Augustine says, "Whence are those Jews sons of the devil? By imitation, not by birth." He also refers to Ezek. xvi.3 as a parallel case. When our Lord says "Ye will do the lusts of your father," we must remember that "Ye will" is emphatic in the Greek. "Ye have a will, mind, purpose, and disposition." By "doing the lusts" He means, "Ye follow those evil inclinations and desires" which are peculiarly characteristic of the devil and according to his mind—such as to commit murder and to love and tell a lie. The desire of the devil can only be for that which is evil. When our Lord says the devil was a "murderer from the beginning," I do not think He refers exclusively to Cain's murder of Abel, though I think it was in His mind. (See 1 John iii.23.) I rather think He means that the devil, from the beginning of creation, was set on bringing death into the world and murdering man, both body and soul.

Origen remarks: "It was not one man only that the devil killed, but the whole human race, inascmuch as in Adam all die. So that he is truly called a murderer." When our Lord says that the "devil abode not in the truth," I think He teaches that the devil is a fallen spirit, and that he was originally made very good and "perfect," like all other works of God's hands. But he did not continue in that state of truth and righteousness in which he was originally created. He kept not his first estate but fell away. "Truth" seems to stand for all righteousness and holiness, and conformity to the mind of God who

is “Truth itself.” This verse, and Jude 6, are the two clearest proofs in the Bible that the devil fell and was not created evil at the beginning.

The word “abode” would be more literally rendered “stood.” When our Lord says “Because there is no truth in him,” He does not mean that this was the reason why the devil “abode not in the truth.” If this had been His meaning, He would have said “Truth *was* not in him.” But He says “is.” His words are meant to describe the present nature of the devil. “He is now a being in whom truth is not.” It seems to me a somewhat similar expression to that of St. Paul when he says, “I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly,” where “because” does not mean the *reason* why he obtained mercy. (1 Tim. i.13.) The Greek word for “because in both cases is the same.

Calvin remarks: “As we are called the children of God not only because we resemble Him but because He governs us by His Spirit (because Christ lives and is vigorous in us so as to conform us to His Father’s image), so, on the other hand, the devil is said to be the father of those whose understandings he blinds, whose hearts he moves to commit all unrighteousness, and on whom, in short, he acts powerfully and exercises his tyranny.”

When our Lord says that “the devil speaks of his own,” He does not mean that he “speaks about his own” but that he speaks “out of his own things.” It is like, “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.” (Matt. xii.34.) He speaks out of those things of which he is full. When our Lord says that the devil “is a liar,” I think He refers to

the great original lie by which he deceived Eve at the beginning: “Ye shall not surely die.” (Gen. iii.4)

When our Lord says here of the devil that “he is a liar and the father of it,” I think the most likely and natural meaning is, that “he is the father of every lie.” A lie is specially the result and work of the devil. The expression “of it” is undeniably difficult and is variously interpreted. (a) Some think that it means “he is the father of him:” viz., of the liar— of everyone that tells a lie. This is the view of Brentius, Bengel, Stier, Hengstenberg, and Alford.

(b) Some think that it means “he is a liar, and his father.” This was an error of the Manicheans and justly reproved by Augustine. Yet Grotius seems to hold this view and maintains that he who deceived Adam and Eve was not the prince of the devils but one of his messengers! (See 2 Cor. xii.7.) This seems an untenable idea.

Neither of these views is at all natural and satisfactory, and the one I have given— “father of a lie”—seems to me much more probable. It is the view of Augustine, Theophylact, Rupertus, Calvin, Bucer, Beza, Bullinger, Rollock, Burgon, Wordsworth, and the great majority of all commentators. Let us note, in this verse, how strongly and directly our Lord rebukes His enemies. There are times when strong condemnation becomes a positive duty, and we must not refrain from it through fear of being charged with severity, personality, and harshness.

Let us note how clearly this verse establishes the personality of the devil. The expression before us can never be explained by those who think he is only a vague evil influence.
Let us note how the fall of angels is recognized and taught by our Lord as one of the great truths that we must believe.

Let us note how murder and lying are specially mentioned as characteristics of the devil. They are sins most opposite to the mind of God, however lightly regarded—and lying especially—by man. An indifference to the sin of lying, whether among old or young, rich or poor, is one of the most unmistakable symptoms of an ungodly condition.
Luther says: "The world is a den of murderers subject to the devil. If we desire to live on earth, we must be content to be guests in it; and to lie in an inn where the host is a rascal, whose house has over the door this sign or shield—'For murder and lies.' For this sign and escutcheon Christ Himself hung over the door of his house when He said, 'He is a murderer and a liar.'"

45.—[*And because I tell you, etc.*] Our Lord in this verse puts in strong contrast His own teaching and the lying suggestions of the devil, and the readiness of the wicked Jews to disbelieve Him and believe the devil. "The reason why you do not believe Me is your thorough dislike to the truth of God. You are genuine children of your father the devil. If I told you things that are false, ye would believe Me. But because I tell you things that are true, you do not believe Me."

We see here how little cause faithful ministers of Christ have to feel surprise at the unbelief of many of their hearers. If they preach the truth, they must make up their minds not to be believed by many. It is only what happened to their Master. “If they have kept my saying, they will keep your’s also.” (John xv.20.)

46.—[*Which of you convinces me of sin? etc.*] Our Lord in this verse asks two questions to which it was impossible for them to give an answer: “Which of you can reprove or convince Me as an offender concerning sin of any kind? You know that you cannot lay any offense to my charge. Yet if I am free from any charge, and at the same time speak to you nothing but what is right and true, what is the reason why ye do not believe Me?” Let us note here the perfect spotlessness and innocence of our Lord’s character. None but He could ever say, “I have no sin. I challenge anyone to find out any imperfection or fault in Me.” Such a complete and perfect Sacrifice and Mediator is just what sinful man needs.

47.—[*He who is of God, etc.*] Our Lord in this verse supplies an answer to His own questions, and conclusively proves the wickedness and ungodliness of His hearers. “He who is a true child of God hears with pleasure, believes and obeys God’s words, such as I bring to you from my Father. You, by not hearing, believing, and obeying them, prove plainly that you are not God’s children. If you were, you would hear gladly, believe, and obey. Your not hearing proves conclusively that you are what I said— children, not of God,

but of the devil."

Let us note here that the disposition to hear and listen to truth is always a good sign, though not an infallible one, about a person's soul. It is said in another place, "My sheep hear my voice." (John x.16,27.) When we see people obstinately refusing to listen to counsel and attend to the Gospel, we are justified in regarding them as not God's children, not born again, without grace, and needing yet to be converted. Let us note here, as elsewhere, how carefully our Lord speaks of His teaching as "God's words." It consisted of words and truths which God the Father had commissioned Him to preach and proclaim to man. It was not "His own words" only, but His Father's as well as His own. Rollock observes that there is no surer mark of an unsanctified nature than dislike to God's Word.

Musculus, Bucer, and others maintain here that the phrase "He who is of God hears God's words" must be confined to God's election, and means "He who was chosen of God from all eternity." I cannot, however, see reason for confining the sense so closely. I prefer to consider "of God" as including not only election, but calling regeneration, adoption, conversion, and sanctification. This is Rollock's view.

JOHN 8:48-59

The Jewish people who had been listening to him replied, "Aren't we correct in saying that you are a Samaritan and are possessed by

a demon?" Jesus answered, "I am not possessed by a demon, but I honor my Father and yet you dishonor me. I am not trying to get praise for myself. There is one who demands it, and he also judges. I tell you the solemn truth, if anyone obeys my teaching, he will never see death."

Then the Jewish people who had been listening to him responded, "Now we know you're possessed by a demon! Both Abraham and the prophets died, and yet you say, 'If anyone obeys my teaching, he will never taste of death.' You aren't greater than our father Abraham who died, are you? And the prophets died too! Who do you claim to be?" Jesus replied, "If I glorify myself, my glory is worthless. The one who glorifies me is my Father, about whom you people say, 'He is our God.' Yet you do not know him, but I know him. If I say that I do not know him, I will be a liar like you. But I do know him, and I obey his teaching. Your father Abraham was overjoyed to see my day, and he saw it and was glad."

Then the Jewish people who had been listening to him replied, "You are not yet fifty years old! Have you seen Abraham?" Jesus said to them, "I tell you the solemn truth, before Abraham came into existence, I am!" Then they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out from the temple area.

We should observe, first, in this passage, ***what blasphemous and slanderous language was addressed to our Lord by His enemies.*** We read that the Jews "Aren't we correct in saying that you are a Samaritan and are possessed by a demon?" Silenced in

argument, these wicked men resorted to *personal abuse*. To lose temper, and call names, is a common sign of a defeated cause.

Nicknames, insulting epithets, and violent language, are favorite weapons with the devil. When other means of carrying on his warfare fail, he stirs up his servants to smite with the tongue. Grievous indeed are the sufferings which the saints of God have had to endure from the tongue in every age. Their characters have been slandered. Evil reports have been circulated about them. Lying stories have been diligently invented, and greedily swallowed, about their conduct. No wonder that David said, "Deliver my soul, O Lord, from lying lips, and from a deceitful tongue." (Psalm 120:2.)

The true Christian in the present day must never be surprised to find that he has constant trials to endure from this quarter. Sinful human nature never changes. So long as he serves the world, and walks in the broad way, little perhaps will be said against him. Once let him take up the cross and follow Christ, and there is no lie too monstrous, and no story too absurd, for some to tell against him, and for others to believe. But let him take comfort in the thought that he is only drinking the cup which his blessed Master drank before him. The lies of his enemies do him no injury in heaven, whatever they may on earth. Let him bear them patiently, and not fret, or lose his temper. When Christ was reviled, "He reviled not again." (1 Peter 2:23.) Let the Christian do likewise.

We should observe, secondly, ***what glorious encouragement our Lord holds out to His believing people.*** We read that He

said, “I tell you the solemn truth, if anyone obeys my teaching, he will never see death.”

Of course these words do not mean that true Christians shall never die. On the contrary, we all know that they must go down to the grave, and cross the river just like others. But the words do mean, that they shall not be hurt by the second death—that final ruin of the whole man in hell, of which the first death is only a faint type or figure. (Rev. 21:8.) And they do mean that the *sting* of the first death shall be removed from the true Christian. His flesh may fail, and his bones may be racked with strong pain; but the bitter sense of *unpardoned sins* shall not crush him down. This is the worst part of death—and in this he shall have the “victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Cor. 15:57.)

This blessed promise, we must not forget to notice, is the peculiar property of the man who “obeys Christ’s teachings.” That expression, it is clear, can never be applicable to the mere outward professing Christian, who neither knows nor cares anything about the Gospel. It belongs to him who receives into his heart, and obeys in his life, the message which the Lord Jesus brought from heaven. It belongs, in short, to those who are Christians, not in name and form only, but in deed and in truth. It is written— “He that overcomes shall not be hurt of the second death.” (Rev. 2:11.)

We should observe, thirdly, in this passage, ***what clear knowledge of Christ Abraham possessed.*** We read that our

Lord said to the Jews, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day—and he saw it and was glad.”

When our Lord used these remarkable words, Abraham had been dead and buried at least 1850 years! And yet he is said to have seen our Lord’s day! How astonishing that sounds! Yet it was quite true. Not only did Abraham “see” our Lord and talk to Him when He “appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre,” the night before Sodom was destroyed, (Gen. 18:1,) but by faith he looked forward to the day of our Lord’s incarnation yet to come, and as he looked he “was glad.” That he saw many things, through a glass darkly, we need not doubt. That he could have explained fully the whole manner and circumstances of our Lord’s sacrifice on Calvary, we are not obliged to suppose. But we need not shrink from believing that he saw in the far distance a Redeemer, whose advent would finally make all the earth rejoice. And as he saw it, he “was glad.”

The plain truth is, that we are too apt to forget that there never was but one way of salvation, one Savior, and one hope for sinners, and that Abraham and all the Old Testaments saints looked to the same Christ that we look to ourselves. We shall do well to call to mind the Seventh Article of the Church of England— “The Old Testament is not contrary to the New—for both in the Old and New Testament everlasting life is offered through Christ, who is the only Mediator between God and man, being both God and man. Wherefore they are not to be heard, who assume that the old Fathers did look only for transitory promises.” This is truth that we must

never forget in reading the Old Testament. This is sound speech that cannot be condemned.

We should observe, lastly, in this prophecy, ***how distinctly our Lord declares His own pre-existence.*** We read that He said to the Jews, “Before Abraham was, I am.”

Without a controversy, these remarkable words are a great deep. They contain things which we have no eyes to see through, or mind to fathom. But if language means anything, they teach us that our Lord Jesus Christ existed long before He came into the world. Before the days of Abraham He was. Before man was created He was. In short, they teach us that the Lord Jesus was no mere man like Moses or David. He was One whose goings forth were from everlasting, the same yesterday, today, and forever, very and eternal God.

Deep as these words are, they are full of practical comfort. They show us the length, and breadth, and depth, and height of that great foundation, on which sinners are invited to rest their souls. He to whom the Gospel bids us come with our sins, and believe for pardon and peace, is no mere man. He is nothing less than very God, and therefore “able to save to the uttermost” all who come to Him. Then let us begin coming to Him with confidence. Let us continue leaning on Him without fear. The Lord Jesus Christ is the true God, and our eternal life is secure.

Technical Notes:

48. Then the Jews answered and said to him, Do we not say rightly that you are a Samaritan and have a devil? 49. Jesus answered, I do not have a devil; but I honor my Father, and ye dishonor me. 50. And I do not seek my own glory; there is one who seeks and judges. 51. Verily, verily, I say to you, If a man keeps my word he shall never see death. 52. Then the Jews said to him, Now we know that you have a devil. Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and you say, If a man keeps my word he shall never taste of death. 53. Are you greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? And the prophets are dead. Who do you make yourself out to be? 54. Jesus answered, If I honor myself, my honor is nothing. It is my Father who honors me, of whom ye say that he is your God. 55. Yet ye have not known him; but I know him. And if I should say, I do not know him, I shall be a liar like you; but I know him and keep his word. 56. Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw *it* and was glad. 57. Then the Jews said to him, You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham? 58. Jesus said to them, Verily, verily I say to you, before Abraham was, I am. 59. Then they took up stones to cast at him; but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.

48.—[*Then the Jews answered…devil.*] This verse seems to contain nothing but personal abuse and blasphemous slander. Unable to answer our Lord's arguments, the unbelieving Jews lost their temper

and resorted to the last weapon of a disputant—senseless invective and calling of names. The extent to which calling names is carried by Oriental people, even in the present day, is something far greater than we can imagine in this country. When the Jews called our Lord "a Samaritan," they meant much the same as saying that He was no true Jew and little better than a heathen. "The Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans." (John iv.9.) When they said, "You have a devil," I think it meant rather more than "You are mad," as in John vii.20, if we observe the following verse. It probably implied, "You act and speak under the influence of the devil. The power You have is from Satan and not from God."

Let us learn here how little cause Christians have to be surprised if hard names and insulting epithets are applied to them. It is only what was done to their Master and is no ground for discouragement in doing God's work.

49.—[*Jesus answered, I have not a devil, etc.*] Our Lord's answer to the coarse invective of His enemies amounts to this: "In saying that I have a devil, you say that which is not true. I am simply honoring my Father in heaven by delivering His message to man; and you, by your violent language, are dishonoring Me and in effect dishonoring and insulting my Father. Your insults do not strike Me only, but my Father also." Let us note our Lord's calmness and equanimity under insult. A solemn denial of the blasphemous charge laid against Him and an equally solemn reminder that He was

honoring the God whom they themselves professed to worship, are the only reply He condescends to make.

50.—[*And I do not seek my own glory*.] This sentence seems to arise out of the last verse. “Ye dishonor Me; but you do not move or hurt Me, for I did not come to seek my own glory but the glory of Him who sent Me. I receive not honor from men.” (See John vii.18 and v.41.) Here, as elsewhere, our Lord points to the great principle “that a true messenger from heaven will never seek his own glory but his Master’s.”

[*There is one that seeks and judges*.] There is a very solemn warning in these words. They mean: “There is One, however, even my Father in heaven, who does seek and desire my glory; and not only seeks but judges the conduct of all who dishonor Me, with deep displeasure, and will punish it at the last day.”

There is comfort here for all Christ’s members, as well as for their Head. Though they may not think of it, there is One in heaven who cares deeply for them, sees all they go through, and will one day plead their cause. The latent thought seems the same as in Eccl. v.8: “He who is higher than the highest regards.” A believer may cheer himself with the thought, “There is One who judges. There is One who sees all, who cares for me and will set all right at the last day.”

Euthymius remarks on this verse that we should not heed things said against ourselves, but should vindicate the honor of God if things are

said against God.

51.—[Verily…keeps my word…never see death.] The mighty promise contained in this verse seems intended to wind up the whole conversation. All that our Lord had said had produced no effect. He therefore closes His teaching for the present by one of those mighty sayings which tower above everything near them, and of which St. John's Gospel contain so many:

"Whether you will hear or not, whether you choose to know Me or not, I solemnly tell you that if any man receives, believes, and keeps my doctrine, he shall never see death. Despised and rejected as I am by you, life or death, heaven or hell, blessing or cursing depends and hinge on accepting the message I proclaim to you. I am the way, the truth, and the life." It is like Moses taking leave of Israel and saying, "I call heaven and earth to record against you that I have set before you life and death." (Deut. xxx.15,19.) Just so our Lord seems to say, "I tell you once more, for the last time, that to keep my saying is the way to escape death." The expression is parallel to the one our Lord uses in the synagogue of Capernaum. There He says, "He who believes in Me has everlasting life." Here it is "shall never see death." (John vi.47.)

We should note here, as elsewhere, that when our Lord uses the expression, "Verily, verily, I say to you," which is familiar to all careful readers of St. John's Gospel, He is always about to say something of peculiar gravity and solemnity. See John i.51, ii.3,5,11,

v.19,24,25, vi.26,32,47,53, viii.34,51,58, x.1,7, xii.24, xiii.16,20,21,38, xiv.12, xvi.20,23, xxi.18. The expression “keeps my saying,” means “receive into his heart, believe, embrace, obey, and hold fast the doctrine or message which I am commissioned to teach.” The phrase “my saying,” means much more than the “words I am speaking at this moment.” It is rather “the whole doctrine of my Gospel.”

The expression “never see death” cannot be taken literally. Our Lord did not mean that His disciples would not die and be buried like other children of Adam. We know that they did die. The meaning is probably three-fold.

(1) “He shall be completely delivered from that spiritual death of condemnation under which all mankind are born: his soul is alive and can die no more. (2) He shall be delivered from the sting of bodily death: his flesh and bones may sink under disease and be laid in the grave, but the worst part of death shall not be able to touch him, and the grave itself shall give him up one day. (3) He shall be delivered entirely from the second death, even eternal punishment in hell: over him the second death shall have no power.

The width and greatness of this promise are very remarkable. Ever since the day of Adam’s fall, death has been man’s peculiar enemy. Man has found the truth of the sentence, “In the day you eat, you shall surely die.” (Gen. ii.17.) But our Lord boldly and openly proclaims that in keeping His saying there is complete deliverance from death. In fact, He proclaims Himself the One greater than

death. None could say this but a Redeemer who was very God.

Augustine says: “The death from which our Lord came to deliver us was the second death, eternal death, the death of hell, the death of damnation with the devil and his angels. That is indeed death; for this death of ours is only a migration. What is it but a putting off a heavy load, provided there be not another load carried by which the man shall be cast headlong into hell. This is the death of which the Lord says, ‘He shall not see death.’”

Let us note the breadth and fullness of this promise. It is for anyone who keeps Christ’s word: “If a man,” or as it rather should be rendered, “If any man.”

Let us beware of putting a meaning on this promise which it was not intended to convey. The idea of some—that it means “believers shall be so completely delivered from death that they shall neither feel bodily pain nor mental conflict”—is one that cannot be supported. It is not borne out by other passages of Scripture, and as a matter of fact it is contradicted by experience. The Gospel delivers believers from that “fear of death” which unbelievers feel, no doubt. (Heb. ii.15.) But we have no right to expect believers to have no bodily conflict, no convulsion, no struggle, and no suffering. Flesh and blood must and will feel. “I groan” said holy Baxter on his deathbed, “but I do not grumble.” Death is a serious thing, even though the sting is taken away.

Parkhurst thinks the expression here is like Luke ii.26, where it was said of Simeon that he should not "see death." But the Greek for "see" there is a different word, and the phrase there seems to mean nothing more than "die," which does not come up to the full promise here. He also quotes Psalms xlix.9 and lxxxix.49. But neither of these places seem parallel. The Greek word rendered "see" is so peculiar that one might almost think the phrase meant, "He shall not gaze upon and behold death forever to all eternity, as the wicked shall." But I prefer the threefold sense already given.

52.—[*Then the Jews said, etc.*] The argument of the Jews in this verse seems to be as follows. "We know now by Your own words that You are mad and have a devil. Our great father Abraham and the prophets, holy and good as they all were, are all dead; and yet You presume to say that if a man keeps Your word he will never die. In short, You make Yourself greater than Abraham for Abraham could not escape death, while keeping Your word enables a man to escape death. To talk in this way is a plain proof that you are mad."
The phrase "to have a devil" in this place can hardly mean anything but "to be mad or crazy."

The Jews, it will be observed, do not quote our Lord's words correctly. He had said, "shall never see death." They report Him as saying "shall never taste of death." Whether this was a willful perversion of His words is rather difficult to decide. Some think that the Jews intentionally exaggerated the promise and put "taste" for "see" in order to magnify the offense our Lord had committed.

Others think that the difference means nothing, and that it only shows how thoroughly the Jews misunderstood our Lord and thought that He referred to nothing but bodily death. Here, as elsewhere, we may remark how ready the Jews were to pervert and warp our Lord's meaning and to put a carnal and gross sense on spiritual language.

53.—[*Are You greater, etc.*] The question in this verse shows that our Lord had again succeeded in arousing the curiosity of the Jews and stirring them to inquire about His nature and person. "Who are You who talks in this way? Whom do You make Yourself out to be? To say that those who keep Your word shall never die is to make Yourself superior to Abraham and the prophets, who are all dead. Who and what are You? Are You really someone greater than Abraham?"

Chrysostom observes that the question of the Jews reminds us of the Samaritan woman's question: "Are you greater than our father Jacob?" (John iv.12.)

54.—[*If I honor myself, etc.*] Our Lord's meaning in this verse seems to be as follows: "If at any time I take to myself and claim honor, such honor would be worthless. He who puts honor on Me and commissions Me to say that keeping my word shall deliver a man from death is my Father in heaven—that very Being whom you profess to call your God. It is your own God—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—who has put such honor on Me that life or death turn on keeping my word and believing on Me." Here, as elsewhere,

we should mark the carefulness with which our Lord disclaims all self-exaltation and desire for glory and honor from man. If in claiming for Himself to hold the keys of life and death He seems to claim honor, He carefully reminds the Jews that it is an honor put on Him by the Father in heaven, even by their own God. He desired no honor independent of Him or in rivalry to Him.

When our Lord says "My Father honors Me," the expression must include all the works, signs, and miracles which the Father gave Him to do, as well as the words which He gave Him to speak. (John v.36, xiv.10,11.)

55.—[*Yet ye have not known Him, etc.*] The meaning of this verse seems to be as follows: "Although you say of my Father in heaven that He is your God, you do not really know Him and are plainly ignorant of His character, will, and purposes. Professing to know Him, in works you deny Him. But I, on the contrary, know Him perfectly, for I am indeed one with Him from all eternity and came forth from Him. So perfectly do I know Him, that I should be a liar and a child of the devil, like yourselves, if I said I did not know Him. But I repeat that I know Him perfectly, and in all my words and works here on earth I carefully keep His word and observe the commission He gave Me."

There is undeniably a great peculiarity in the language of this verse. But it is probably a Hebrew mode of putting in strong contrast the Jews' thorough ignorance of God, notwithstanding their high

profession of being His chosen people, and our Lord's perfect knowledge of God, notwithstanding the repeated assertions that He had a devil, was a Samaritan, and was consequently an enemy to the God of Israel. The phrase, "I should be a liar, like yourselves, if I said I did not know the Father," was just the phrase to convey the strongest idea to the Jews' minds of our Lord's knowledge. In arguing with some men, nothing but the strongest language and the most paradoxical expressions have any effect. Even God himself thinks it good to make such an asseveration as "I swear by myself" and "as I live" in order to command attention. (Jer. xxii.5, Heb. vi.13, Ezek. xxxiii.11.) Those who blame ministers and preachers for using strong language, and say that they should never use any but gentle, tame, and mild phrases, can hardly have studied human nature or the style of Scripture with thorough attention.

56.—[*Your father Abraham, etc.*] Our Lord in this verse takes up the question of the Jews as to His being greater than Abraham and boldly gives an answer. "You ask Me whether I am greater than Abraham. I tell you in reply that I am He whose coming and whose day of glory Abraham rejoiced to think he should see. Moreover, by faith he even saw it; and when he saw it he was glad."

The precise meaning of the words of this verse is rather difficult to discover, though the general idea of it is plain and unmistakable. It is clear that our Lord implies that He is the promised Messiah, the Seed of Abraham, in whom all the generations of the earth should be

blessed, and of whom when Abraham first heard, “he laughed” for joy. (Gen. xvii.17.)

(a) Some think, as most of the Fathers and Reformers, that it means:

“Abraham rejoiced in the prospect of seeing, at some future time, my day, the day of Messiah; and by faith he did see it afar off.”

(b) Some think, as Maldonatus, Lampe, Stier, and Bloomfield, that it means:

“Abraham rejoiced when he was told that he should see my day; and he actually has seen it in Paradise, and has been gladdened there in the separate state by the sight.”

(c) Some think, as Brown, Olshausen, Alford, Webster, and Hengstenberg, that it means: “Abraham’s great desire and joyful expectation was to see my day, and he actually saw Me when I appeared to him and talked with him on earth.”

Of these three views, the first appears to me the most probable and most in keeping with the history of Abraham in Genesis. It should be carefully observed that our Lord does ***not*** say that “Abraham saw ME,” but that “he saw my day.” The cause of Abraham’s joy seems to have been that there was to be of his seed a Messiah, a Savior; and that he should see His day—the day of the Lord, the triumphant day of Messiah’s complete victory and restitution of all things. This day

he even saw by faith afar off, and was glad at the sight. Our Lord's object does not seem to me to be to tell the Jews that Abraham had seen Him, but that He was "the Seed," the Messiah who was promised to their father Abraham. The Jews had asked whether he was greater than Abraham. "Yes!" he replies, "I am. I am that very Messiah whose day Abraham rejoiced to hear of and saw afar off by faith. If you were like Abraham, you would rejoice to see Me." Chrysostom and Euthymius think that "my day" in this verse means "the day of the crucifixion, which Abraham foreshowed typically by offering the ram in Isaac's place." This, however, seems a very cramped and limited view. Rupertus thinks that Abraham "saw the day of Christ" when he entertained the three angels who came to him.

Augustine thinks it may refer to both advents of Christ: first in humiliation, and second in glory.

57.—[*Then the Jews said...not yet fifty, etc.*] It is plain that the Jews here put a wrong meaning on our Lord's words and suppose Him to say that Abraham had seen Him, and He had seen Abraham. Yet our Lord had only said, "Abraham saw my day." It is another instance of their readiness to pervert His words. When the Jews said, "You are not yet fifty years old," I believe they only meant, "You are not yet a middle-aged man." Fifty years old was the turning point in life, at which the Levites and priests were excused from
further active service in the tabernacle. (Numbers iv.4.) I fancy the reference is to this. Our Lord was at this time about thirty-three

years old, or at most thirty-four. The notion of Irenaeus and Papias, that He really was fifty before He was crucified, is utterly without warrant and absurd.

Some think that our Lord's countenance was so marred and aged by sorrow and care that He looked much older than He really was, and that hence the Jews supposed Him to be nearly fifty. But I prefer the former view. Euthymius thinks that the Jews thought our Lord was fifty years old on account of His great wisdom and experience. This, however, seems a weak and untenable view.

58.—[Jesus said…before Abraham was, I am.] This famous verse, I believe, can only receive one honest interpretation. It is a distinct assertion of our Lord's eternity—His existence before all creation. "I solemnly declare to you that before Abraham was and existed I was, the great I AM; the same yesterday, today, and forever: the eternal God." All attempts to evade this explanation appear to me so preposterous that it is a waste of time to notice them. The man who can think the words only mean "I am He who was promised to Adam before Abraham was born," seems past the reach of reasoning. The name "I AM," we must remember, is the very name by which God revealed Himself to the Jews when He sent Moses to them: "Say unto the children of Israel, I AM has sent me." (Exod. iii.14.) Let us carefully note what a strong proof we have here of the pre-existence and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. He applies to Himself the very name by which God made Himself known when He undertook to redeem Israel. It was "I AM" who brought them out of the land of

Egypt. It was “I AM” who died for us upon the cross. The amazing strength of the foundation of a sinner’s hope appears here. Believing on Jesus we rest on divinity, on One who is God as well as man.

There is a difference in the Greek verbs here employed which we should carefully notice. The Greek for “was” is quite different from the Greek for “am.” It is as if our Lord said, “Before Abraham was born, I have an existence individual and eternal.”

Chrysostom observes: “He said not before Abraham was, I was, but I am. As the Father uses this expression I AM, so also does Christ, for it signifies continuous being, irrespective of all time; on which account the expression seemed to the Jews blasphemous.”

Augustine says: “In these words acknowledge the Creator and discern the creature. He that spoke was made the Seed of Abraham; and that Abraham might be, He was before Abraham.”

Gregory remarks: “Divinity has no past or future, but always the present; and therefore Jesus does not say, Before Abraham was I *was*, but I *am*.”

59.—[*Then they took up stones to cast at him.*] It is clear that the Jews, at any rate, had no doubt what our Lord meant in the preceding verse, whatever modern Socinians may think. They saw and knew at once that He who spoke to them boldly claimed to be Jehovah, and One far greater than Abraham, being very God. This

they did not believe, and therefore regarded Him as a blasphemer who ought at once to be stoned. In their rage and fury, they immediately took up stones, which were probably lying about on account of repairs to the temple, in order to stone Him. The whole proceeding appears to have been a tumultuous and disorderly one, not regularly conducted but sudden and unauthorized, like the stoning of Stephen afterwards. (Acts vii.58.)

[*But Jesus hid Himself, etc.*] I think this withdrawal can only be regarded as miraculous. The Greek word rendered "hid Himself" is literally "was hid." It seems most improbable that our Lord could "pass by" and "go through the midst" of an angry crowd, whose eyes had for a long time been fixed and concentrated on Him, without being seen and stopped, unless there was a miraculous interposition. I believe that the eyes of His enemies were holden, and that they did not know Him for a season, or that by His own almighty power He rendered Himself temporarily invisible. It is only what He did at Nazareth on a similar occasion (Luke iv.30); and if we once concede that our Lord could work miracles at His will, there seems no reason to suppose that He would not work one on this occasion. Let us note that our Lord's enemies could do nothing to Him until His hour was come for suffering. When He was at last taken prisoner, brought before Pilate, and crucified, it was not because He could not escape, but because He would not. What He did here He might have done there. Let us note that it is not always the path of duty and of real obedience to God's will to sit still and submit to sufferings and death. It may be the will of God that we should "flee to some other city" and

avoid death. (Matt. x.23.) To court martyrdom and throw away life when it might be saved is not always the duty of a servant of Christ. Some of the martyrs of the primitive Church appear to have forgotten this. Augustine says: “Jesus did not hide Himself in a corner of the temple as if He were afraid, or take refuge in a house or run behind a wall or a pillar. But by His heavenly power He made Himself invisible to His enemies and went through the midst of them.”

The argument of Maldonatus, that this verse proves the possibility of Christ being corporally present in the Lord’s Supper in the bread, is so preposterous that it requires no refutation. There is no positive proof that our Lord was actually invisible here. It is quite possible that the eyes of His enemies were “holden that they could not know Him.” (Luke xxiv.16.) If He was invisible, Maldonatus proves too much. The bread in the Lord’s Supper is seen, and after consecration the Roman Catholic says its substance is changed. But it is not invisible.

In leaving this remarkable chapter, we should not fail to notice the difficulties under which our Lord’s public ministry was carried on. Ten times between the 12th verse and the 59th we find His enemies interrupting, contradicting, or reviling Him. Our Master’s calm dignity and perfect meekness under all this “contradiction of sinners” ought to be a neverforgotten example to His disciples.

It is a wise remark of Pascal that our Lord’s enemies, by their incessant cavilling and interruption both here and elsewhere, have supplied us unintentionally with a strong proof of the truth of His

teaching. If our Lord's doctrines had only been delivered privately to a prejudiced audience of kind and loving disciples, they would not come down to us with the same weight that they do now. But they were often proclaimed in the midst of bitter enemies, learned Scribes and Pharisees who were ready to detect any flaw or defect in His reasoning. That the enemies of Christ could never answer or silence Him is a strong evidence that His doctrine was God's own truth. It was from heaven and not from men.

John – Chap. 9

JOHN 9:1-12

Healing a Man Born Blind

Now as Jesus was passing by, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who committed the sin that caused him to be born blind, this man or his parents?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but he was born blind so that the acts of God may be revealed through what happens to him. We must perform the deeds of the one who sent me as long as it is daytime. Night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." Having said this, he spit on the ground and made some mud with the saliva. He smeared the mud on the blind man's eyes and said to him, "Go wash in the pool of Siloam" (which is translated "sent"). So the blind man went away and washed, and came back seeing.

Then the neighbors and the people who had seen him previously as a beggar began saying, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" Some people said, "This is the man!" while others said, "No, but he looks like him." The man himself kept insisting, "I am the one." So they asked him, "How then were you made to see?" He replied, "The man called Jesus made mud, smeared it on my eyes and told me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' So I went and washed, and

was able to see." They said to him, "Where is that man?" He replied, "I don't know."

The chapter we now begin records one of the few great works of Christ which John has reported. It tell us how our Lord gave sight to a man who had been "blind from his birth." Here, as elsewhere in this Gospel, we find the circumstances of the miracle narrated with peculiar fullness, minuteness, and particularity. Here too, as elsewhere, we find the narrative rich in spiritual lessons.

We should observe, first, in this passage, ***how much sorrow sin has brought into the world.*** A sorrowful case is brought before us. We are told of a man "who was blind from his birth." A more serious affliction can hardly be conceived. Of all the bodily crosses that can be laid on man, without taking away life, none perhaps is greater than the loss of sight. It cuts us off from some of the greatest enjoyments of life. It shuts us up within a narrow world of our own. It makes us painfully helpless and dependent on others. In fact, until men lose their eyesight, they never fully realize its value.

Now blindness, like every other bodily infirmity, is one of the fruits of sin. If Adam had never fallen, we cannot doubt that people would never have been blind, or deaf, or mute. The many ills that flesh is heir to, the countless pains, and diseases, and physical defects to which we are all liable, came in when the curse came upon the earth. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin." (Rom. 5:12.)

Let us learn to hate sin with a godly hatred, as the root of more than half of our cares and sorrows. Let us fight against it, mortify it, crucify it, and abhor it both in ourselves and others. There cannot be a clearer proof that man is a fallen creature than the fact that he can love sin and take pleasure in it.

We should observe, secondly, in this passage, ***what a solemn lesson Christ gives us about the use of opportunities.*** He says to the disciples who asked Him about the blind man, "I must work while it is called today—the night comes, when no man can work."

That saying was eminently true when applied to our Lord Himself. He knew well that his own earthly ministry would only last three years altogether, and knowing this He diligently redeemed the time. He let slip no opportunity of doing works of mercy, and attending to His Father's business. Morning, noon, and night He was always carrying on the work which the Father gave Him to do. It was His food and drink to do His Father's will, and to finish His work. His whole life breathed one sentiment— "I must work—the night comes, when no man can work."

The saying is one which should be remembered by all professing Christians. The life that we now live in the flesh is our day. Let us take care that we use it well, for the glory of God and the good of our souls. Let us work out our salvation with fear and trembling, while it is called today. There is no work nor labor in the grave, toward which we are all fast hastening. Let us pray, and read, and keep our

Sabbaths holy, and hear God's Word, and do good in our generation, like men who never forget that "the night is at hand." Our time is very short. Our daylight will soon be gone. Opportunities once lost can never be retrieved. A second lease of life is granted to no man. Then let us resist procrastination as we would resist the devil. Whatever our hand finds to do, let us do it with our might. "The night comes, when no man can work."

We should observe, thirdly, in this passage, ***what different means Christ used in working miracles on different occasions.*** In healing the blind man He might, if He had thought fit, have merely touched Him with his finger, or given command with His tongue. But He did not rest content with doing so. We are told that "He spit on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay." In all these means of course there was no inherent healing virtue. But for wise reasons the Lord was pleased to use them.

We need not doubt that in this, as in every other action of our Lord, there is an instructive lesson. It teaches us, we may well believe, that the Lord of heaven and earth will not be tied down to the use of any one means or instrumentality. In conferring blessings on man, He will work in His own way, and will allow no one to prescribe to Him. Above all, it should teach those who have received anything at Christ's hands, to be careful how they measure other men's experience by their own. Have we been healed by Christ, and made to see and live? Let us thank God for it, and be humbled. But

let us beware of saying that no other man has been healed, except he has been brought to spiritual life in precisely the same manner. The great question is— "Are the eyes of our understanding opened? Do we see? Have we spiritual life?"—Enough for us if the cure is effected and health restored. If it is, we must leave it to the great Physician to choose the instrument, the means, and the manner—the clay, the touch, or the command.

We should observe, lastly, in this passage, ***the almighty power that Christ holds in His hands.*** We see Him doing that which in itself was impossible. Without medicines He cures an incurable case. He actually gives eyesight to one who was born blind.

Such a miracle as this is meant to teach an old truth, which we can never know too well. It shows us that Jesus the Savior of sinners "has all power in heaven—and earth." Such mighty works could never have been done by one that was merely man. In the cure of this blind man we see nothing less than the finger of God.

Such a miracle, above all, is meant to make us hopeful about our own souls and the souls of others. Why should we despair of salvation while we have such a Savior? Where is the spiritual disease that He cannot take away? He can open the eyes of the most sinful and ignorant, and make them see things they never saw before. He can send light into the darkest heart, and cause blindness and prejudice to pass away.

Surely, if we are not saved, the fault will be all our own. There lives at God's right hand One who can heal us if we apply to Him. Let us take heed lest those solemn words are found true of us— "Light has come into the world but men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." "You will not come to Me that you might have life." (John 3:19; 5:40)

Technical Notes:

1. And as *Jesus* passed by, he saw a man who was blind from birth. 2. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? 3. Jesus answered, Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be made manifest in him. 4. I must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; the night is coming when no man can work. 5. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world. 6. When he had thus spoken he spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva; and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay. 7. And he said to him, Go wash in the pool of Siloam (which is translated, Sent). He went his way therefore and washed, and came seeing. 8. The neighbors therefore and those who previously had seen that he was blind said, Is not this he who sat and begged? 9. Some said, This is he. Others *said*, He is like him. *But* he said, I am *he*. 10. Therefore they said to him, How were your eyes opened? 11. He answered and said, A man who is called

Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and said to me, Go to the pool of Siloam and wash. And I went and washed, and I received sight. 12. Then they said to him, Where is He? He said, I do not know.

1.—[*And as Jesus passed by*.] The Greek word rendered "passed by" is the same as the word so rendered in the preceding verse, at the end of the last chapter. Some think from this repetition that the miracle recorded here took place immediately after the events of the last chapter without the least break or interruption, and that it was as our Lord was retiring from the temple after the attempt of the Jews to stone Him that He saw the blind man. Others, however, think that an interval of time must have elapsed, partly because it seems improbable that our lord and His disciples would all be able to withdraw themselves quietly from an angry mob and calmly stand still near the scene of attempted violence to attend to a blind man, and partly because it is the manner of St. John's Gospel to pass from one event to another, sometimes without intimating that there is any change of time or place. Thus, John v.19, vi.25,43,59, vii.28-33. The point, however, is not one of any practical importance.

Chemnitius holds strongly that an interval of two months comes in here, and that our Lord spent that time in a visitation of the towns and villages of Judea, as related in Luke xiii.22. He thinks that He thus occupied the two months after the feast of tabernacles and that He returned to Jerusalem shortly before the feast of dedication, in winter. The main objection to this theory seems to be that it is not

the natural conclusion we should draw from the text.

Gualter, Ferus, Ecolampadius, and Musculus maintain, on the other hand, that there is a close and intentional connection between this chapter and the preceding one. They think that our Lord desired to show by deed as well as work that He was "the Light of the world." (John viii.14.) Bucer says, "This chapter is a sermon in act and deed on the words 'I am the Light of the world.'"

In the miracle which occupies the whole of this chapter, the following special circumstances deserve notice: (1) It is only related by St. John. (2) Like each of the few miracles in St. John, it is described with great minuteness and particularity. (3) It is one of the four miracles wrought in Judea, or near Jerusalem, mentioned in St. John. He records eight great miracles altogether: four in Galilee—turning the water into wine, healing the nobleman's son, feeding the multitude, and walking on the water (chap. ii, iv, and vi.), and four in Judea—purifying the temple, healing the impotent man, restoring sight to the blind, and raising Lazarus (chap. ii, v, vi, and ix). (4) It is one of those miracles which the Jews were especially taught to expect in Messiah's time: "In that day shall the eyes of the blind see out of obscurity." (Isa. xxix.18.) (5) It is one of those signs of Messiah having come, to which Jesus particularly directed John the Baptist's attention: "The blind receive their sight." (Matt. xi.5.) (6) It was a miracle worked in so public a place, and on a man so well known, that it was impossible for the Jerusalem Jews to deny it. It is hardly necessary, perhaps, to bid any well-instructed Christian to observe

the singularly instructive and typical character of each of the eight miracles which John was inspired to record. Each was a vivid picture of spiritual things.

Hengstenberg observes that three of the four great miracles wrought by Christ in Judea exactly represent the three classes of works referred to in Matt. xi.5: “The lame walk, the blind see, the dead are raised up.” (John v, ix, and xi.)

[*He saw a man who was blind from birth.*] The man was probably sitting near the temple gateway to attract the notice of worshipers going to and fro, like the man described in Acts. (Acts iii.2.) Being blind, he would naturally be dependent on charity. The Jewish law specifies the blind as peculiarly deserving of attention (Lev. xix.14, Deut. xxvii.18.) To give sight to one who had not lost the use of his eyes by disease or accident, but had never seen at all, was, of course, a mighty miracle. Let it be noted that our Lord “saw” the blind man and healed him of His own free will, unasked and unexpectedly. As in the case of the impotent man (John v.6), He did not wait to be entreated but was Himself the first to move. Let it however be noted at the same time, that if the man had not been by the wayside, our Lord would not have seen him. Chrysostom observes that when the Jews “would not receive our Lord’s sayings and tried to kill Him, He went out of the temple and healed the blind, mitigating their rage by His absence, and by working a miracle both softening their hardness and proving His affections. And it is clear that He proceeded intentionally to this work on leaving the temple, for it was He who

saw the blind man and not the blind man who came to Him." Gualter observes that this passage shows how the eyes of the Lord are in every place and how He sees His own people even when they think not of Him. Alford thinks it possible that the blind man was constantly proclaiming that he had been born blind, to excite pity.

Burgon observes: "More of our Savior's miracles are recorded as having been wrought on blindness than on any other form of human infirmity. One deaf and dumb man is related to have had speech and hearing restored to him; one case of palsy and one of dropsy find special record; twice was leprosy and twice was fever expelled by the Savior's word; three times were dead persons raised to life; but the records of His cures wrought on blindness are four in number at least, if not five." (See Matt. xii.22.) Isaiah seems to foretell the recovery of sight by the blind as "an act of mercy specially symbolical of Messiah's day." (Isa. xxix.18, xxxii.3, xxxv.5, xlii.7.)

2.—[*And his disciples asked Him.*] This expression seems to show that our Lord was surrounded and accompanied by His usual followers, and favors the idea that there was some break or interval between the beginning of this chapter and the end of the last. Though He by Divine power could hide Himself and go through the midst of His enemies, it is hardly reasonable to suppose that within a few minutes He would be surrounded again by His disciples. Yet it is, of course, possible.

[*Master, who sinned...born blind?*] This curious question has given

rise to much unprofitable discussion. It is repeatedly asked, “Why did the disciples ask this? What put it into their minds to start the inquiry?”

(a) Some think that the Jews had imbibed the common oriental notion of the pre-existence and transmigration of souls from one body to another, and that the disciples supposed that in some previous state of existence this blind man must have committed some great sin for which he was now punished.

(b) Some think that the question refers to a strange notion current among some Jews that infants might sin before they were born. In support of this view, they quote Gen. xxv.22 and Gen. xxxviii.28,29.

(c) The most probable view is that the question arose from a misapplication of such passages of Scripture as the second Commandment where God speaks of “visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children” (Exod. xx.5), and from a forgetfulness of Ezek. xviii.20, etc. There are few notions that men seem to cling to so naturally as the notion that bodily sufferings and all afflictions are the direct consequences of sin, and that a diseased or afflicted person must necessarily be a very wicked man. This was precisely the short-sighted view that Job’s three friends took up when they came to visit him, and against which Job contended. This was the idea of the people at Melita when Paul was bitten by a viper after the shipwreck: “This man is a murderer.” (Acts xxviii.4.) This appears to have been at the bottom of the question of the disciples: “There is suffering;

then there must have been sin. Whose sin was it?"

Chrysostom thinks that the disciples remembered our Lord's words to the paralytic whom He healed (chap. v.14), "You are made whole; sin no more," and asked now to what sin this man's blindness might be traced. This, however, seems very improbable considering the length of time between the two miracles.

Hengstenberg observes that the fallacy of supposing that special afflictions are the result of some special sins, "commends itself to low and common spirits by its simplicity and palpableness. It has the advantage of rendering it needless to weep with them that weep. It saves a man from the obligation, when he sees heavy affliction, of smiting on his breast and saying 'God be merciful to me a sinner.' It gives the natural man the comfortable feeling that he is so much the better than the sufferer, as he is more fortunate." Those who wish to go more deeply into the subject will find it fully discussed by the great Dutch divine, Gomarus.

It is worth notice that the word here rendered "Master" is the same that is rendered "Rabbi" in five other places in St. John. (i.38,49, iii.2,26, and vi.25.) Why our translators did not observe uniformity in their translation of the word throughout this Gospel is not very clear.

3.—[*Jesus answered, Neither...sinned.*] This first part of our Lord's answer is elliptical. The sense, of course, must be supplied

from the context. Our Lord did not mean that neither this blind man nor his parents had committed any sin at all, but that it was not any special sin of his or theirs which had caused his blindness. Nor yet did our Lord mean that the sins of parents could never entail disease on children, but that the case before Him, at any rate, was not such a case. Of course, He did not mean us to forget that sin is the great primeval cause of all the evils that are in the world.

[*But that the works of God…manifest in him*.] The meaning of this must be that the man's blindness was permitted and overruled by God in order that His works of mercy in healing him might be shown to men. This blindness was allowed and ordained by God, not because the man was specially wicked, but in order to furnish a platform for the exhibition of a work of Divine mercy and power.

A deep and instructive principle lies in these words. They surely throw some light on that great question of the origin of evil. God has thought fit to allow evil to exist in order that He may have a platform for showing His mercy, grace, and compassion. If man had never fallen, there would have been no opportunity of showing Divine mercy. But by permitting evil, mysterious as it seems, God's works of grace, mercy, and wisdom in saving sinners have been wonderfully manifested to all His creatures. The redeeming of the Church of elect sinners is the means of "showing to principalities and powers the manifold wisdom of God." (Eph. iii.10.) Without the fall, we should have known nothing of the cross and the Gospel. Melancthon, on this verse, suggests no less than ten reasons why God permits evil to

come on the Church, which contain much food for thought. Brentius and Chemnitius also say many excellent things on the same theme. Bucer remarks that this verse should teach us to bear ills patiently and cheerfully, since all that happens to us tends, in some way, to the glory of God.

Gualter remarks that even wicked men like Pharaoh subserve the glory of God (Rom. ix.17); much more may men's afflictions and diseases. Ecolampadius remarks that God allows nothing whatever to happen without some good reason and cause.

Henry observes: "The intention of Providence often does not appear till a great while after the event, perhaps many years after. The sentences in the book of Providence are sometimes long, and you must read a great way before you understand the meaning."

Jones of Nayland, on this text, remarks: "The best way to answer the great question of the origin of evil is to consider the end of it—'What good comes out of it?' This makes the subject plain and useful. Why was this man born blind? That the works of God might appear and Christ might cure him. Why did man fall? That God might save him. Why is evil permitted in the world? That God may be glorified in removing it. Why does the body of man die? That God may raise it up again. When we philosophize in this manner, we find light, certainty, and comfort. We have a memorable example of it in the case before us."

Barnes remarks that “Those who are afflicted with blindness, deafness, or any deformity, should be submissive to God. It is His appointment, and is right and best. God does no wrong; and when all His works are seen, the universe will see and know that He is just.”

4.—[*I must work the works, etc.*] The connection between this verse and the preceding one seems to be in the word “works.” It is as though our Lord said: “Healing the blind man is one of the great ‘works’ which God has appointed for Me to do, and I must do it during the ‘day’ or short period of my ministry. This blindness was ordained by my Father to be a means of showing forth my divine power.”

The expressions “while it is day”, and “the night comes,” must probably be interpreted with special reference to our Lord’s ministry upon earth. While He was with His disciples speaking, teaching, and working miracles, it was comparatively “day.” His little Church basked in the full sunlight of His Divine presence, and saw and learned countless wonderful things. When He ascended up on high it became comparatively “night.” Just as in night “no man can work,” so when Christ left the world the visible proof of His Divine mission which the disciples had so long enjoyed and seen could no longer be given. The proverbial saying “No man can work in the night” would be verified.

These limits to the application of the figure must be carefully remembered. Of course our Lord did not mean that the Church, after

His ascension, would not enjoy far more spiritual light than it did before He came; nor yet that the disciples, after the day of Pentecost, would not see many truths far more clearly even than when Christ was with them. But the words "day and night" here have a special reference to our Lord's bodily presence with His Church. As long as He was visibly with them, it was "day." When He left them, it was "night." It is well to remark that St. Paul uses the same figures when comparing time present with time to come, at the second advent. He says, "The night is far spent, and the day is at hand." (Rom. xiii.12.) There the night is Christ's bodily absence and the day Christ's bodily presence.

Melancthon points out what an example Christ supplies to Christians in this place. The hatred, opposition, and persecution of the world, and the failures and infirmities of professing Christians, must not make us give way to despondency. Like our Master, we must work on. Calvin observes: "From these words we may deduce the universal rule, that to every man the course of his life may be called his day." Beza and others think that there is a primary prophecy here of the withdrawal of light and privilege from the Jews, which was in the mind of our Lord, as well as the general principle that to all men day is the time for work and not night.

5.—[*As long as I am in the world, etc.*] This verse seems to be a general broad assertion of our Lord's purpose in coming into the world and His position while in it. "I came into the world to be its Sun and spiritual Guide, and to deliver men from the natural

darkness in which they are. And so long as I am in the world, I wish to be its Light in the fullest sense, the Deliverer of men's souls and the Healer of men's bodies." Cocceius suggests that in these words our Lord had respect to the fact that He was going to work a work on the Sabbath and that it would be disapproved by the Jews as a breach of the Sabbath. Foreseeing this, He defends what He is about to do by reminding His disciples that during the short time of His earthly ministry, He must seize every opportunity of doing good. Alford observes that just as Jesus said before He raised Lazarus, "I am the Resurrection and the Life," so here, before giving sight to the blind, He said "I am the Light."

6.—[When...spoken...made clay...anointed the eyes, etc.] The action here used by our Lord is the same that we find used on two other occasions—once when He healed one deaf and dumb (Mark vii.33), and once when He healed a blind man (Mark viii.23). The making of the "clay," however, is quite peculiar to this miracle. The reason why our Lord used the action we cannot tell. There is, of course, no special virtue either in spittle or in clay made from spittle which could cure a man born blind. Why then did Jesus use this means? Why did He not heal the man with a word or a touch? The only answer to such inquiries is that our Lord would teach us, by His peculiar mode of proceeding here, that He is not tied to any one means of doing good, and that we may expect to find variety in His methods of dealing with souls as well as with bodies. May He not also wish to teach us that He can, when He thinks fit, invest material things with an efficacy which is not inherent in them? We are not to

despise Baptism and the Lord's Supper because water, bread, and wine are mere material elements. To many who use them, no doubt they are nothing more than mere material things and never do them the slightest good. But to those who use the sacraments rightly, worthily, and with faith, Christ can make water, bread, and wine instruments of doing real good. He who was pleased to use clay in healing a blind man may surely use material things, if He thinks fit, in His own ordinances. The water in Baptism and the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper, while they are not to be treated as idols, ought not to be treated with irreverence and contempt. It was, of course, not the clay that healed the blind man, but Christ's word and power. Nevertheless the clay was used. So the brazen serpent in itself had no medicinal power to cure the bitten Israelites. But without it they were not cured. The selection of clay for anointing the blind man's eyes is thought by some to be significant and to contain a possible reference to the original formation of man out of the dust. He who formed man with all his bodily faculties out of the dust could easily restore one of those lost faculties, even sight, when He thought fit. He who healed these blind eyes with clay was the same Being who originally formed man out of the clay. Ecolampadius thinks that the spittle was an emblem of Christ's Divinity, and the clay of His humanity, and that the union of the two represented the union of the two natures in Christ's person whereby healing came to a sinsick world. To say the least, this seems fanciful.

Barradius suggests that our Lord actually formed new eyes for the man, as He at first formed man's body out of the dust. This, however,

seems needlessly improbable.
Poole thinks that our Lord used spittle to make clay simply because there was no water nigh at hand to make it with.

Wordsworth observes that Christ's manner of working the miracle was "tenderness to the Jews. They would see the clay on the man's eyes and see him going to Siloam."
He also observes: "God loves to effect His greatest works by means tending under ordinary circumstances to produce the very opposite of what is to be done. God walls the sea with sand. God clears the air with storms. God warms the earth with snow. So in the world of grace, He brings water in the desert, not from the soft earth, but the flinty rock. He heals the sting of the serpent of fire by the serpent of brass. He overthrows the wall of Jericho by ram's horns. He slays a thousand men with the jawbone of an ass. He cures saltwater with salt. He fells the giant with a sling and stone. And thus does the Son of God work in the Gospel. He cures the blind man by that which seemed likely to increase his blindness—by anointing his eyes with clay. He exalts us to heaven by the stumbling block of the cross."

7.—[*And said... Go, etc.*] The direction here given to the blind man would remind any pious Jew of Elisha's directions to Naaman, "Go wash in Jordan." (2 Kings v.10.) The water of this pool had no inherent healing efficacy any more than other water. But the command was a test of faith, and in obeying, the blind man found what he wanted. It is the great principle which runs through Scripture: "Believe and obey, and all will be right." The pool of

Siloam was a well-known reservoir, or artificial pond, in a valley close to Jerusalem, remarkable for a supply of water from an intermittent spring. It is pointed out in the present day, and there seems no reason to doubt that it is the same pool that was so called eighteen hundred years ago. It is first mentioned in Nehemiah iii.15 and afterwards in Isaiah viii.6.

Lightfoot asserts that the pool of Bethesda and the pool of Siloam were both supplied from one spring.

[*Which is translated, Sent.*] There is undeniable difficulty about this sentence. It is naturally asked, Why is this parenthetical explanation inserted by St. John? Why are we specially told that the word Siloam means Sent, or He that was sent? The most probable answer seems to be that the name of the fountain was meant to refer the blind man's mind to the Messiah, whom God had "sent." All pious Jews would understand the expression which so frequently occurs in John's Gospel, "He whom God has sent," to point to Messiah. When therefore Jesus said, "Go wash in Siloam," the naming of that particular fountain would be a silent hint that He who gave the command was the Sent One of God, the great Healer of all diseases. St. John's parenthesis would then mean, when expounded, "This was a most suitable and proper pool for Jesus to name. It was fitting that He who was 'Sent of God' should work a miracle in the pool called 'Sent.'" This is the view of Chrysostom and Augustine.

It is impossible to help feeling that the clause looks very much like

the insertion of some ignorant early copyist who wished to show his own knowledge of etymology, and perhaps found it in an old copy as a marginal gloss. The Syriac and Persian versions do not contain the clause. Yet it certainly is found in most manuscripts and versions. Hutcheson thinks that John inserted this clause for no other end than to remind readers that this fountain was a special gift "sent" by God, among the hills near Jerusalem, for the benefit of the Jews. Hengstenberg says, "As Jesus represents Himself and His Church as the real Pool of Bethesda, in chap. v., so here He declares Himself the real Sent One, or Siloam, the Fountain of blessings."

[*He went…washed…came seeing*.] The blind man, as is often the case with people born blind, was probably able to find his way about Jerusalem without trouble, and the road from the temple gate to the pool of Siloam was likely to be much frequented. His implicit faith and obedience contrast favorably with the conduct of Naaman when told to go and wash in Jordan. (2 Kings v.14.) The word "came" must either mean "to his own home" or simply "came back to the temple gate." The miracle of healing seems to have taken place in the act of washing in Siloam.

Let us remember that the blind man's conduct is meant to be a pattern to us. He did not stumble at Christ's command, but simply obeyed, and in obeying he was healed. We must do likewise.

Melancthon thinks it likely that a crowd of curious and jeering spectators accompanied the man to Siloam to see the result of our

Lord's prescription. Scott remarks that the immediate power of using the eyes was no small part of the miracle. When people recover sight now after surgical operations, it requires a considerable time to learn the use of the newly-acquired sense.

8.—[*The neighbors.*] This would seem to show that he "came" to his own house as soon as he was healed of his blindness. The word before us naturally means the people who lived near to him.

[Those who...had seen...blind.] This expression includes all persons in Jerusalem who knew the blind man by sight, though they did not live near him but had often seen him near the temple and become familiar with his appearance. There are generally blind beggars in the chief thoroughfares of large cities and near large public buildings whom all residents know well by sight. The slow, uncertain, feeble gait of a blind man always makes him conspicuous.

[*Is not this he who sat and begged?*] This question seems to settle that the blind man was one of the poorest and humblest class of Jews. None are so likely to come to poverty and be dependent on charity as the blind, who of course cannot work for their own support.

9.—[*Some said, This is he.*] This probably was the saying of the blind man's neighbors, who naturally knew him best.

[*Others said, He is like him.*] This was probably the saying of people living in Jerusalem, who knew the blind man by sight but did not live near him and were not, therefore, so familiar with his appearance. The difference between the look and demeanor of the man before and after his miraculous cure would necessarily be very great. One can quite understand that some would hardly know him again. Augustine remarks, "The opened eyes had altered his looks." Musculus observes how much the expression of a face depends on the eyes.

[*He said, I am he.*] This was the saying of the man when he heard people doubting his identity and looking at him with hesitation. "I assure you," he says, "that I am he who used to sit at the temple gate and beg."

10.—[*Therefore they said, etc.*] Those who asked this question appear to have been the people who came together round the blind man when he returned from the pool of Siloam with his sight restored. Some were his neighbors and others were inhabitants of Jerusalem, drawn together by the miracle. The inquiry was the natural one that such a wonderful cure would first call forth.

11.—[*He answered and said, etc.*] This verse is a simple unvarnished account of the facts of the cure. How the blind man knew that our Lord's name was "Jesus" does not appear. It is not unlikely that some of the bystanders, when our Lord first told him to go to the pool of Siloam, told him that Jesus of Nazareth, the person whose preaching

was making such stir in Jerusalem, was the speaker. We cannot doubt that our Lord was well known by this time to all dwellers in Jerusalem. Yet there is no proof that the beggar recognized Him as anything more than "a man called Jesus." The accuracy with which he recites all the facts of his cure is well worthy of notice. "He first put clay on my eyes; then He bid me go and wash in Siloam. I went; I was cured."

12.—[Then they said... Where...do not know.] The desire to see the worker of this wonderful miracle was natural, but the question "Where is He?" was probably asked with a mischievous intention. Those who asked it wished to lay hands on our Lord and bring Him before the rulers. The man's answer certainly seems to show that he did not return to the place where he had sat and begged, but to his house. Had he gone back to the temple gate, he might have replied that Jesus was here only a short time before and was probably not far off. The questioners seem to suppose that the worker of such a miracle and the subject of it could not be far apart. They did not understand that our Lord always avoided, rather than courted, public notice.

JOHN 9:13-25

The Pharisees' Reaction to the Healing

They brought the man who used to be blind to the Pharisees. (Now the day on which Jesus made the mud and caused him to see was a Sabbath.) So the Pharisees asked him again how he had

gained his sight. He replied, "He put mud on my eyes and I washed, and now I am able to see."

Then some of the Pharisees began to say, "This man is not from God, because he does not observe the Sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such miraculous signs?" Thus there was a division among them. So again they asked the man who used to be blind, "What do you say about him, since he caused you to see?" "He is a prophet," the man replied.

Now the Jewish authorities refused to believe that he had really been blind and had gained his sight until at last they summoned the parents of the man who had become able to see. They asked the parents, "Is this your son, whom you say was born blind? Then how does he now see?" So his parents replied, "We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. But we do not know how he is now able to see, nor do we know who caused him to see. Ask him, he is a mature adult. He will speak for himself." (His parents said these things because they were afraid of the Jewish authorities. For the Jewish authorities had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Christ would be put out of the synagogue. For this reason his parents said, "He is a mature adult, ask him.")

Then they summoned the man who used to be blind a second time and said to him, "Promise before God to tell the truth. We know that this man is a sinner." He replied, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. I do know one thing—that although I was blind, now I can see."

These verses show us ***how little the Jews of our Lord's time understood the right use of the Sabbath day.*** We read that some of the Pharisees found fault because a blind man was miraculously healed on the Sabbath. They said, "This man is not of God, because He keeps not the Sabbath day." A good work had manifestly been done to a helpless fellow-creature. A heavy bodily infirmity had been removed. A mighty act of mercy had been performed. But the blind-hearted enemies of Christ could see no beauty in the act. They called it a breach of the Fourth Commandment!

These would-be wise men completely mistook the intention of the Sabbath. They did not see that it was "made for man," and meant for the good of man's body, mind, and soul. It was a day to be set apart from others, no doubt, and to be carefully sanctified and kept holy. But its sanctification was never intended to prevent works of necessity and acts of mercy. To heal a sick man was no breach of the Sabbath day. In finding fault with our Lord for so doing, the Jews only exposed their ignorance of their own law. They had forgotten that it is as great a sin to add to a commandment, as to take it away.

Here, as in other places, we must take care that we do not put a wrong meaning on our Lord's conduct. We must not for a moment suppose that the Sabbath is no longer binding on Christians, and that they have nothing to do with the Fourth Commandment. This is a great mistake, and the root of great evil. Not one of the ten commandments has ever been repealed or put aside. Our Lord never

meant the Sabbath to become a day of pleasure, or a day of business, or a day of traveling and idle dissipation. He meant it to be "kept holy" as long as the world stands. It is one thing to employ the Sabbath in works of mercy, in ministering to the sick, and doing good to the distressed. It is quite another thing to spend the day in visiting, feasting, and self-indulgence. Whatever men may please to say, the way in which we use the Sabbath a sure test of the state of our religion. By the Sabbath may be found out whether we love communion with God. By the Sabbath may be found out whether we are in tune for heaven. By the Sabbath, in short, the secrets of many hearts are revealed. There are only too many of whom we may say with sorrow, "These men are not of God, because they keep not the Sabbath day."

These verses show us, secondly, ***the desperate lengths to which prejudice will sometimes carry wicked men.*** We read that the "Jews agreed that if any man did confess that Jesus was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue." They were determined not to believe. They were resolved that no evidence should change their minds, and no proofs influence their will. They were like men who shut their eyes and tie a bandage over them, and refuse to have it untied. Just as in after times they stopped their ears when Stephen preached, and refused to listen when Paul made his defense, so they behaved at this period of our Lord's ministry.

Of all states of mind into which unconverted men can fall, this is by far the most dangerous to the soul. So long as a person is open,

fair, and honest-minded, there is hope for him, however ignorant he may be. He may be much in the dark at present. But is he willing to follow the light, if set before him? He may be walking in the broad road with all his might. But is he ready to listen to any one who will show him a more excellent way? In a word, is he teachable, childlike, and unfettered by prejudice? If these questions can be answered satisfactorily, we never need despair about the man's soul.

The state of mind we should always desire to possess is that of the noble-minded Bereans. When they first heard the Apostle Paul preach, they listened with attention. They received the Word "with all readiness of mind." They "searched the Scriptures," and compared what they heard with God's Word. "And therefore," we are told, "many of them believed." Happy are those who go and do likewise! (Acts 17:11, 12.)

These verses show us, lastly, that ***nothing convinces a man so thoroughly as his own senses and feelings.*** We read that the unbelieving Jews tried in vain to persuade the blind man whom Jesus healed, that nothing had been done for him. They only got from him one plain answer— "One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see." How the miracle had been worked, he did not pretend to explain. Whether the person who had healed him was a sinner, he did not profess to know. But that something had been done for him he stoutly maintained. He was not to be reasoned out of his senses. Whatever the Jews might think, there were two distinct facts of which he was conscious— "I was blind—now I see."

There is no kind of evidence so satisfactory as this to the heart of a real Christian. His knowledge may be small. His faith may be feeble. His doctrinal views may be at present confused and indistinct. But if Christ has really wrought a work of grace in his heart by His Spirit, he feels within him something that you cannot overthrow. "I was dark, and now I have light. I was afraid of God, and now I love Him. I was fond of sin, and now I hate it. I was blind, and now I see." Let us never rest until we know and feel within us some real work of the Holy Spirit. Let us not be content with the name and form of Christianity. Let us desire to have true experimental acquaintance with it. Feelings no doubt, are deceitful, and are not everything in religion. But if we have no inward feelings about spiritual matters, it is a very bad sign. The hungry man eats, and feels strengthened; the thirsty man drinks, and feels refreshed. Surely the man who has within him the grace of God, ought to be able to say, "I feel its power."

Technical Notes:

13. They brought to the Pharisees him who was formerly blind. 14. And it was the sabbath day when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes. 15. Then the Pharisees also asked him again how he had received his sight. He said to them, He put clay on my eyes, and I washed and do see. 16. Therefore some of the Pharisees said, This man is not from God, because he does not keep the sabbath day. Others said, How can a man who is a sinner do such miracles? And

there was a division among them. 17. They said to the blind man again, What do you say about Him who has opened your eyes? He said, He is a prophet. 18. But the Jews did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind and received his sight, until they called the parents of him who had received his sight. 19. And they asked them saying, Is this your son, whom ye say was born blind? How then does he now see? 20. His parents answered them and said, We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; 21. but by what means he now sees, we do not know, or who has opened his eyes we do not know. He is of age; ask him. He shall speak for himself. 22. These *words* spoke his parents, because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if any man confessed that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue. 23. Therefore his parents said, He is of age; ask him. 24. Then again they called the man who was blind and said to him, Give God the praise! We know that this man is a sinner. 25. He answered and said, Whether he is a sinner *or not*, I do not know. One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see.

13.—[*They brought…formerly blind.*] The prime movers in this matter seem to have been the neighbors of the blind man. They thought that so marvelous an event as this sudden cure demanded investigation. The “Pharisees” in this passage, if we may judge by the context, must have been the great council, or Sandehrim, of the

Jewish nation—the same body before whom our Lord made His defense in the fifth chapter of this Gospel. At any rate, we can hardly imagine any other body at Jerusalem "excommunicating" a man. (See verse 34.)

Whitby observes hows wonderfully the providence of God ordered things that the Pharisees should be put to silence and open shame by a poor blind man!

14.—[*And it was the Sabbath day, etc.*] This seems specially mentioned by the Evangelist parenthetically for two reasons.

(a) It proved our Lord's unvarying readiness to do works of mercy on the Sabbath day.

(b) It explains the bitter enmity of the Jews against our Lord in this chapter. They regarded Him as a breaker of the Sabbath. Assuming that there was no interval of time between the end of the last chapter and the beginning of this, it is remarkable how much our Lord did and said on this Sabbath day. From the beginning of the eighth chapter down to the thirty-fifth verse of the ninth, the narrative at first sight seems to run on without a break. It certainly makes it rather doubtful whether there should not be a break or pause assumed at the end of the eighth chapter.

Burkitt remarks that one object of our Lord in working so many miracles on the Sabbath was "to instruct the Jews in the true doctrines and proper duties of the Sabbath, and to let them know

that works of necessity and mercy are very consistent with the due sanctification of the Sabbath. It is hard to find any time wherein charity is unseasonable; for as it is the best of graces, so its works are fittest for the best of days. Whitby thinks that our Lord frequently did miracles on the Sabbath to impress on believing Jews the folly of the superstitious observance of it, and to prevent the misery they would run into if they persisted in an extravagant scrupulosity about the Sabbath when days of vengeance came on Jerusalem."

15.—[*Then the Pharisees…sight*.] The question asked of the healed man by the council of Pharisees was precisely the same that had been asked by his neighbors: "Your eyes have been opened suddenly, though you were born blind. Tell us how it was done."

It is worthy of remark that the Greek word which we render here and all through the chapter as "received sight" means literally no more than "looked up, or saw again." This, of course, could not be precisely true and correct in the case of this man, as he had never seen or used his eyes at all and could not therefore see a second time. But it is useful to notice how here and elsewhere in Scripture the Holy Ghost uses the language which is most familiar and easily understood, even when it is not precisely and scientifically correct. And it is what we all do every day. We talk of the sun "rising" though we know well that, strictly speaking, he does not rise, and that what we see is the effect of the earth moving round the sun.

Barnes observes: "The proper question to have been asked was whether he had in fact been cured, and not in what way. The

question about a sinner's conversion is, whether in fact it has been done, and not about the mode or manner in which it has been effected. Yet no small part of disputes among men are about the *mode* in which the Spirit renews the heart and not about the *fact* that it is done."

[*He said to them, etc.*] The answer of the healed man is an honest, bold, plain repetition of the same story he had told already. The only difference is that he does not name "Jesus" here but says "He" put clay, as if he knew his examiners would understand whom he meant. Or it may be that his mind was so full of his Benefactor that he omits to name Him and takes for granted that all would know who He was.

The simple straightforward boldness of this man, standing before the most formidable court of the Jews and telling out his story, is very noteworthy. It is, moreover, a complete statement of facts and consequences. "He put clay; I washed; I see."

16.—[*Therefore some of the Pharisees said, etc.*] This verse brings forward prominently the existence of two classes among the Pharisees. The one was the great majority, consisting of hundreds of bigoted enemies of our Lord ready to catch at any pretext for injuring His reputation and damaging His character. They said, "This Man is not from God. He is a wicked man because He does not keep the Sabbath day. A Prophet sent from God would not have done any work on the Sabbath." This assertion, of course, was based on the false and groundless principle that works of mercy to the sick were a

violation of the Fourth Commandment. According to Lightfoot, the Rabbins expressly forbid saliva to be applied to the eyelids on the Sabbath day.

The other class, consisting of a small minority, raised the grave question, “How could a man not sent by God, a wicked man, work such an astonishing miracle as this? If He were not commissioned and enabled by God, He could not possibly give sight to the blind. Surely He must be from God.” These must have been Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, Gamaliel, and others. Their line of argument is precisely that of Nicodemus in the famous visit to our Lord by night, when he said “No man can do these miracles except God be with him.” (John iii.2.)

Three times in John’s Gospel we find that expression, “There was a division among them.” (Here, vii.43, and x.19.) The hesitating manner in which the better class of the council raise the question here, “How can a man,” etc., is strongly indicative of a timid minority, who felt that the stream of feeling was all against them. It strikingly resembles the question of Nicodemus (John vii.51), “Does our law judge any man,” etc. One might almost think it was Nicodemus speaking here.

In large assemblies of men convened to consider ecclesiastical and religious questions, we may confidently assume that there are always some present whose hearts are right and who are willing to support the truth, even though they sit in bad company, and are for the

present silenced and overawed. Gamaliel's conduct, in Acts v.34, is an illustration of this. There is no warrant for staying away from assemblies and councils merely because we happen to be in a minority.

Chrysostom remarks how "none of the assembly dared say what he wished openly, or in the way of assertion, but only in the way of doubt. One party wanted to kill our Lord and the other to save Him. Neither spoke out."

Bullinger observes that "all divisions are not necessarily evil, nor all concord and unity necessarily good."

17.—[*They said to the blind man again*.] This division among the members of the council had at least this good affect: that they found it necessary to go into the whole case more fully and ask further questions. These very questions brought the reality of the miracle into fuller light than before.

[*What do you say…opened your eyes?*] This question must evidently mean, "What do you think about this Person who, you say, has opened your eyes? Whom do you believe Him to be seeing that He has wrought this cure?" The question is an inquiry not about the reality of the miracle, but about the Person who is said to have performed it. It looks, according to some, like an intention to entrap the poor man into saying something about Jesus for which they could condemn Him. On the other hand, Chrysostom, Ferus, and

Toletus argue that those who made the inquiry of this text must have been the party which favored our Lord.

[*He said, He is a prophet*.] This expression was the beginning of faith in the healed man. It was a declaration of his own belief that the Person who had wrought such a great cure must be a Person specially raised by God to do great works, like Elijah or Elisha. We must not forget that in the present day we are apt to confine the word "prophet" to a man who foretells things to come. But the Bible use of the word is much wider. The "prophets" raised up in the Old Testament were by no means all foretellers of things to come. Preaching, warning, and miracle-working were the whole business of not a few. In this sense the man seems to have called our Lord "a Prophet." It was for what He had *done* rather than for what He had *said*. We should carefully note that the first idea about our Lord which the Jewish mind seemed ready to embrace was that He was a "Prophet." Thus the multitude which escorted Him into Jerusalem said, "This is Jesus the Prophet of Nazareth" (Matt. xxi.11); and again, "The multitude took Him for a Prophet" (Matt. xxi.46); and again, "Others said it is a Prophet" (Mark vi.15); and again, "A great Prophet is risen up among us" (Luke vii.16).

Even the two disciples going to Emmaus were only positive on one point: that Jesus had been "a Prophet mighty in word and deed" (Luke xxiv.19). But it was a higher step of faith to say that Jesus was "the Prophet" promised by Moses—the Messiah. This the healed man did not yet say. As yet he only got so far as "a Prophet," not "the

Prophet." Chemnitius remarks on this poor man's clear view of our Lord's greatness, that "you will often find more solid theological piety among tailors and shoemakers than among cardinals, bishops, and abbots." Adam Clarke says it was "a Jewish maxim that a prophet might dispense with the observance of the Sabbath." If the healed man referred to this, his answer was a silencing one, and put the Pharisees in a dilemma. Lampe also remarks that many things were allowed to prophets sent by God on an extraordinary mission, even about the observance of the ceremonial law, as we see in the history of David and Elijah. This gives great weight to the man's reply, "He is a Prophet."

18.—[*But the Jews did not believe, etc.*] Here, as elsewhere, we should mark the extraordinary unbelief of the Jewish people and their obstinate determination to shut their eyes against light. It teaches the folly of supposing that mere evidence alone will ever make men Christians. It is the lack of will to believe and not the lack of reasons for believing that makes men infidels.

"The Jews" here, as in other places in John's Gospel, mean the teachers of the Jewish nation at Jerusalem, and especially the Pharisees. The expression "until they called" deserves special notice. We should remark that it does not mean that "after they called the man's parents, they believed; that they were unbelieving up to the time that they called them and then began to believe." On the contrary, the context shows that even after they had called them, they continued unbelieving. Parkhurst observes that it is a form of

speaking “signifying an interval, but not necessarily excluding the time following.” The expression throws light on Matt. i.25. That well-known text must not be pressed too far. It is no certain proof that Mary had other children after Jesus was born. Compare 1 Sam. xv.35, 2 Sam. vi.23, Job xxvii.5, Isa. xxii.14, Matt. v.26 and xviii.34.

The word “called” probably implies the public call or summons of the man’s parents to appear before the council, just as witnesses are called aloud by name to appear in our courts of justice.

Gualter observes how close the resemblance was between the conduct of the Pharisees in this case and that of the Romish Inquisition. The pertinacious determined effort to condemn the innocent, and to deprive Christ of His glory, is painfully the same.

Besser quotes a saying of the infidel Voltaire: “If in the market of Paris, before the eyes of a thousand men and before my own eyes, a miracle should be performed, I would much rather disbelieve the two thousand eyes and my own two than believe it!”

19.—[*They asked them, etc.*] The enemies of our Lord overreached themselves by their summoning the parents of the healed man. They brought publicly forward the two best possible witnesses as to the fact of the man’s identity, as to the fact that he was born blind, and as to the fact that he now had his sight. So true is the saying, “He takes the wise in their own craftiness.” (1 Cor. iii.19.)

Chrysostom thinks that the expression “whom ye say,” insinuated that they supposed the parents to be impostors, and that “they were acting deceitfully and plotting on behalf of Christ” by spreading a report that their son was born blind.

The language of the verse seems to show that the healed man and his parents were at first confronted, and that the Pharisees pointed to him and asked, “Is this your son?”

20.—[*His parents answered, etc.*] The father and mother of the blind man made a plain statement of facts that could not be contradicted. They placed it beyond a doubt that the man now standing before the Sanhedrim was one who, from the best possible evidence, they knew had been born blind. The fact of having a blind child is one about which no parent could be mistaken.

21.—[But by what means…or who…we do not know.] These words of the healed man’s parents were probably the simple truth. The time was so short since the cure was wrought that they might well be ignorant of the manner of it. Hastily summoned before the Sanhedrim, they might well have had no opportunity of conversing with their son, and as yet may have known nothing of the miracle.

[*He is of age, etc.*] These words show the determination of the parents to have nothing more to do with their son’s case than they could possibly help. They evidently regarded the council with the same undefined dread with which men at one time regarded the

Inquisition in Spain. The word “age” is the same Greek word that in Matt. vi.27 is translated “stature.” It is highly probable that in that text it would have been better rendered “age,” as here.

The words “he,” “him,” and “himself” in this clause are all emphatic, and all might be rendered “himself.” A man was reckoned “of age” by the Jews when he was thirty.

22.—[*These words spoke…feared the Jews.*] This sentence must refer to the latter part of the preceding verse. Fear of the leading Jews in the council of Pharisees made the parents refer their inquirers to their son. Four times in John’s Gospel we have special mention made of the “fear of the Jews.” Here, and vii.13, xii.42, and xix.38.

[*The Jews had already agreed, etc.*] This is a striking example of the extreme littleness of unbelief and the lengths to which hatred of Christ will go. To resolve on such a decision as this shows a settled determination not to be convinced. The punishment of being “put out of the synagogue” was a heavy one to the Jew. It was equivalent to being cut off from all communion with other Jews and tantamount to excommunication.

Those only who do anything for evangelizing the Jews now can form any adequate idea of the trials which conversion to Christianity entails on them, and the dread in which they stand of being cut off from Israel. Trench says: “We must not understand that the

Sanhedrim had formally declared Jesus to be an impostor and a false Christ, but only that so long as the truth or falsehood of His claim to be the Messiah was not clear, and they, the great tribunal had not given a decision, none were to anticipate that decision, and the penalty of premature confession was to be excommunicated."

23.—[*Therefore his parents said, etc.*] It was the fear of running the slightest risk of excommunication, or being even suspected of favoring the Healer of their son, that made the parents refer all inquiries to him and refuse to offer any opinion about the means of his cure, whatever they may have felt.

24.—[*Then again…blind.*] This was a second summons into court. Very possibly the healed man had been carefully removed out of court while his parents were being examined. But when nothing could be got out of them, there was no alternative but to submit him to a second process of crossexamination and intimidation.

[And said… Give God the praise, etc.] This sentence admits of two interpretations.

(a) Some, as Calvin, Chemnitius, Gualter, Ecolampadius, Beza, Piscator, Diodati, Aretius, Ferus, Maldonatus, Jansenius, Rollock, Alford, and Trench, regard it as a solemn form of adjuration and think it parallel to Joshua's words to Achan (Josh. vii.19): "You stand in God's presence. Give glory to Him by speaking the truth." This, however, makes the clause that follows rather unmeaning and

renders it necessary to supply a good deal to fill up the sense.

(b) Others, as Chrysostom, Brentius, Musculus, Pellican, Vatablus, and Barradius, regard it as specially referring to the cure which had been performed. “Give God the honor and glory of your healing. He must have wrought the cure and not this man who anointed your eyes with clay. He could not have wrought this cure because he is a Sabbath-breaker, and therefore a sinner. A sinner like him could not have healed you.” I rather prefer this view.

Gualter and Musculus point out the odious affectation of zeal for God’s glory which characterizes the conduct of many wicked persons in every age. Even the Spanish Inquisition professed a zeal for God’s glory. This “we” here is emphatic in the Greek: “We, who are learned men, and ought to know best.”

25.—[*He answered…sinner or not, etc.*] The healed man’s answer is a very simple and yet very striking one. He tells his inquirers that the question whether Jesus is a sinner is one he knows nothing about. But he does know the fact that he himself was blind up to that very day, and that now he can see. He carefully avoids at present saying a word about the character of his Healer. The one point he sticks to is the reality of the miracle. He must believe his own senses. His senses told him that he was cured. The expression in every age has been regarded as a happy illustration of a true Christian’s experience of the work of grace in his heart. There may be much about it that is mysterious and inexplicable to him and of which he knows nothing.

But the result of the Holy Ghost's work he does know and feel. There is a change somewhere. He sees what he did not see before. He feels what he did not feel before. Of that he is quite certain. There is a common and true saying among true Christians of the lower orders: "You may silence me and beat me out of what I know; but you cannot beat me out of what I feel."

The English translation of the last clause rather misses the brevity and force of the Greek. It would be more literally rendered, "Being blind, now I see."

JOHN 9:26-41

Then they said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he cause you to see?" He answered, "I told you already and you didn't listen. Why do you want to hear it again? You people don't want to become his disciples too, do you?"

They heaped insults on him, saying, "You are his disciple! We are disciples of Moses! We know that God has spoken to Moses! We do not know where this man comes from!" The man replied, "This is a remarkable thing, that you don't know where he comes from, and yet he caused me to see! We know that God doesn't listen to sinners, but if anyone is devout and does his will, God listens to him. Never before has anyone heard of someone causing a man born blind to see. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." They replied, "You were born completely in sinfulness, and yet you presume to teach us?" So they threw him out.

Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, so he found the man and said to him, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" The man replied, "And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?" Jesus told him, "You have seen him; he is the one speaking with you." He said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him. Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that those who do not see may gain their sight, and the ones who see may become blind."

Some of the Pharisees who were with him heard this and asked him, "We are not blind too, are we?" Jesus replied, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin, but now because you claim that you can see, your guilt remains."

We see in these verses ***how much wiser the poor sometimes are than the rich.*** The man whom our Lord healed of his blindness was evidently a person of very humble condition. It is written that he was one who "sat and begged." (See v. 8.) Yet he saw things which the proud rulers of the Jews could not see, and would not receive. He saw in our Lord's miracle an unanswerable proof of our Lord's divine commission. "If this Man were not of God," he cries, "He could do nothing." In fact, from the day of his cure his position was completely altered. He had eyes, and the Pharisees were blind.

The same thing may be seen in other places of Scripture. The servants of Pharaoh saw "the finger of God" in the plagues of Egypt, when their master's heart was hardened. The servants of Naaman saw the wisdom of Elisha's advice, when their master was turning

away in a rage. The high, the great, and the noble are often the last to learn spiritual lessons. Their *possessions* and their *position* often blind the eyes of their understanding, and keep them back from the kingdom of God. It is written that "not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called." (1 Cor. 1:26.)

The Christian poor man never need be ashamed of his poverty. It is a sin to be proud, and worldly-minded, and unbelieving; but it is no sin to be poor. The very riches which many long to possess are often veils over the eyes of men's souls, and prevent their seeing Christ. The teaching of the Holy Spirit is more frequently to be seen among men of low degree than among men of rank and education. The words of our Lord are continually proved most true, "How hard it is for *rich* people to get into the Kingdom of God!" "You have hid these things from the *wise* and prudent, and have revealed them unto babes." (Mark 10:23; Matt. 11:25.)

We see, secondly, in these verses, ***how cruelly and unjustly unconverted men will sometimes treat those who disagree with them.*** When the Pharisees could not frighten the blind man who had been cured, they expelled him from the Jewish Church. Because he manfully refused to deny the evidence of his own senses, they excommunicated him, and put him to an open shame. They cast him out "as a heathen man and a tax-collector."

The temporal injury that such treatment did to a poor Jew was very great indeed. It cut him off from the outward privileges of the Jewish Church. It made him an object of scorn and suspicion among

all true Israelites. But it could do no harm to his soul. That which wicked men bind on earth is not bound in heaven. “The curse causeless shall not come.” (Prov. 26:2.)

The children of God in every age have only too frequently met with like treatment. Excommunication, persecution, and imprisonment have generally been favorite weapons with ecclesiastical tyrants. Unable, like the Pharisees, to answer arguments, they have resorted to violence and injustice. Let the child of God console himself with the thought that there is a true Church out of which no man can cast him, and a Church-membership which no earthly power can take away. He only is blessed whom Christ calls blessed; and he only is accursed whom Christ shall pronounce accursed at the last day.

We see, thirdly, in these verses, ***how great is the kindness and condescension of Christ.*** No sooner was this poor blind man cast out of the Jewish Church than Jesus finds him and speaks words of comfort. He knew full well how heavy an affliction excommunication was to an Israelite, and at once cheered him with kind words. He now revealed Himself more fully to this man than He did to any one except the Samaritan woman. In reply to the question, “Who is the Son of God?” He says plainly, “You have both seen Him, and it is He that talks with you.”

We have here one among many beautiful illustrations of the mind of Christ. He sees all that His people go through for His sake, and feels for all, from the highest to the lowest. He keeps account of all

their losses, crosses, and persecutions. “Are they not all written in His book?” (Psalm. 56:8.) He knows how to come to their hearts with consolation in their time of need, and to speak peace to them when all men seem to hate them. The time when men forsake us is often the very time when Christ draws near, saying, “Fear not, for I am with you—be not dismayed, for I am your God—I will strengthen you —yes, I will help you; yes, I will uphold you with the right hand of my righteousness.” (Isaiah. 41:10.)

We see, lastly, in these verses, ***how dangerous it is to possess knowledge, if we do not make a good use of it.*** The rulers of the Jews were fully persuaded that they knew all religious truth. They were indignant at the very idea of being ignorant and devoid of spiritual eyesight. “Are we blind also?” they cried. And then came the mighty sentence, “If you were blind, you should have no sin —but now you say, ‘We see’; therefore your sin remains.”

Knowledge undoubtedly is a very great blessing. The man who cannot read, and is utterly ignorant of Scripture, is in a pitiable condition. He is at the mercy of any false teacher who comes across him, and may be taught to take up any absurd creed, or to follow any vicious practice. Almost any education is better than no education at all.

But when knowledge only sticks in a man’s head, and has no influence over his heart and life, it becomes a most perilous possession. And when, in addition to this, its possessor is self-conceited and self-satisfied, and imagines he knows everything, the

result is one of the worst states of soul into which man can fall. There is far more hope about him who says, “I am a poor blind sinner and want God to teach me,” than about him who is ever saying, “I know it, I know it, I am not ignorant,” and yet cleaves to his sins. The sin of that man “remains.”

Let us use diligently whatever religious knowledge we possess, and ask continually that God would give us more. Let us never forget that the devil himself is a creature of vast head-knowledge, and yet none the better for it, because it is not rightly used. Let our constant prayer be that which David so often sent up in the hundred and nineteenth Psalm. “Lord, teach me your statutes give me understanding—unite my heart to fear Your name.”

Technical Notes:

26. Then they said to him again, What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes? 27. He answered them, I have told you already, and ye did not listen. Why would ye hear *it* again? Will ye also be his disciples? 28. Then they reviled him and said, You are his disciple, but we are Moses’ disciples. 29. We know that God spoke to Moses; *as for* this *fellow*, we do not know where he is from. 30. The man answered and said to them, Why here is a marvelous thing, that ye do not know where he is from; and *yet* he has opened my eyes! 31. Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if any man is a worshiper of God and does his will, him he hears. 32. Since the world began it was not

heard that any man opened the eyes of one who was born blind. 33. If this man were not of God, he could no nothing. 34. They answered and said to him, You were completely born in sins, and do you teach us? And they cast him out. 35. Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him, he said to him, Do you believe in the Son of God? 36. He answered and said, Who is he Lord, that I might believe in him? 37. And Jesus said to him, You have both seen him and it is he who talks with you. 38. And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshiped him. 39. And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that those who do not see might see, and that those who see might be made blind. 40. And *some* of the Pharisees who were with him heard these words, and said to him, Are we blind also? 41. Jesus said to them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin; but now ye say, We see. Therefore your sin remains.

26.—[*Then they said... How did he open your eyes?*] The enemies of our Lord renewed their examination of the healed man by inquiries into the manner in which our Lord had opened his eyes. Their previous inquiry had been directed to the point "Who did this miracle?" They now ask "How was it done?"

The folly of wicked men comes out remarkably in this renewed examination. Had they let the matter drop at this point, they would not have exposed their own malevolent and unreasoning spirit. They madly rush on headlong and are put to open shame by a poor and

humble Jew. Let it be noted that the word we have translated “then” is not so strong in the Greek, and does not mark time but simply connects the verse with the preceding one. “And they said to him again.”

Let it be noted that faith only looks to the *result* and does not trouble itself about the *manner* in which it is brought about. Unbelief, on the contrary, refuses to look at the *result* and excuses itself by raising difficulties about the *manner*.

Let it be noted that in every age Satan never so completely outwits himself and defeats his own purpose as when he presses persecution and annoyance against weak Christians. Hundreds learn lessons under the pressure of incessant attacks which otherwise they would never learn at all. The very fact of being attacked calls out latent thought, energy, and courage.

27.—[*He answered them, etc.*] The patience of the healed man evidently began to be exhausted at this stage of the proceedings. This senseless repetition of questions, this redoubled effort to make him disbelieve his own senses, became more than he could bear. He seems to say, “I have told the whole story once, and I have nothing to add to it. Yet when I told it, you evidently did not listen to me. What is the use of telling it again? Why do you want to hear it a second time?” “Ye would not listen” is, of course, equivalent to “ye would not believe.”

The expressions “would ye” and “will ye” are both the same verb in the Greek and would be more literally rendered as a distinct verb, “do ye will.”

The last clause can hardly be taken in any other sense than a sarcastic one. It could hardly be a grave question. It was the natural sarcastic remark of a man wearied, irritated, and provoked by a long-drawn teasing repetition of questions. “One might almost think, from your repeated anxious questions, that you yourselves want to be Christ’s disciples.” Chrysostom remarks: “How strong is truth and how weak is falsehood! Truth, though she take hold only of ordinary men, makes them appear glorious; falsehood, even with the strong, makes them appear weak.”

28.—[*Then they reviled him, etc.*] Here we see how one sharp word leads to another. Sarcasm from the lips of the healed man produces abuse and reviling from his examiners. They were evidently indignant at the very idea of such wise men as themselves becoming disciples of Jesus. “You, poor ignorant creature, and such as you, are disciples of Jesus. But we are not such fools. We are disciples of Moses and want no other teacher.” And yet in their blindness they did not see and would not understand that Jesus was the very Savior of whom Moses had written, and that every true disciple of Moses must necessarily be a disciple of Jesus. So easy it is to talk high-sounding ignorant phrases in religion and yet be utterly in the dark!

Brentius remarks how ready men are to maintain that they hold the old religion of their fathers while in reality they do not know what it

was. Thus the Pharisees talked of Moses, as if Moses was contrary to Christ. The Romanist does just the same when he talks of the "old religion." He does not know what the old religion was. Ferus points out how many of the words of Moses' law these men forgot and despised, even while they boasted of being his "disciples;" as Lev. xix.14 and Exod. xxiii.7.

29.—[*We know that God spoke, etc.*] The meaning of this sentence seems to be: "We know that God commissioned Moses to be a lawgiver and teacher, and that in following Moses, we are pleasing God. But as for this Jesus, we know not who has commissioned Him, or who sent Him to teach, or by what authority He preaches and works miracles. In a word, we see no proof that He has come from God. We are not satisfied that He has any Divine commission."

The expression "where He is from" in this place cannot be interpreted as meaning "from what place." It must signify our Lord's commission—who sent Him and by whose authority He acts. So in another place, "the baptism of John, where was it from?" (Luke xx.4), means, "from where had it authority?"

We should note here how firmly implanted it was in the Jewish mind that Moses had received a revelation from God. "God spoke unto Moses." 30.—[*The man answered, etc.*] In this verse the healed man begins a simple yet unanswerable argument, which completed silenced his examiners. "There is something very wonderful in this. It is an unmistakable fact that this Person has opened my eyes. He has,

in short, worked an astonishing miracle. And yet, in the face of this miracle, you say that you do not know where He is from or who gave Him His power!" The word "ye" is here emphatic. "You, who are learned men and rulers and teachers, might have been expected to know where this man comes from." 31.—[*Now we know that, etc.*] In this verse the healed man continues his chain of reasoning. "We all know, and it is an admitted principle among us, that God does not hear the prayer of wicked people and give wicked people power to work miracles. The only people whom He hears and enables to do great works are people who fear God and habitually do God's will." The word "now" in this verse, perhaps conveys too strong an idea of the meaning of the Greek word. It would be more literally rendered "and we know" and would thus simply carry on one unbroken chain of argument. The principle that "God does not hear sinners" is here stated by the man as a great incontrovertible doctrine which all Jews knew and admitted. It is hardly necessary to say that it did not mean that God is unwilling to hear the prayers of sinners who feel their sins and cry to Him for pardon. It applies to sinners who do not feel their sins, are living in sin, and are impenitent. Such persons God does not look on with favor and will not enable to do miracles. That God will not hear impenitent sinners is taught in such texts as Job xxxvii.9, xxxv.12; Psalm xviii.41, xxxiv.15, lxvi.18; Prov. i.28, xv.29, xxviii.9; Isa. i.15; Jer. xi.11, xiv.12; Ezek. viii.18; Micah iii.4; Zech. vii.13. The Pharisees knew this and could not possibly deny it.

The expression "a worshiper of God" means something far more than mere outward worship. It is equivalent to a God-fearing man—one

who really honors and reverences God.
The expression “does His will” means one who habitually lives in the practice of God’s preceptive will—the things that God commands. Brentius illustrates this verse by contrasting God’s readiness to hear Elijah when he worked a miracle on Mt. Carmel with the useless cries of the worshipers of Baal on the same occasion.

Ecolampadius observes that hitherto the healed man evidently saw nothing higher in our Lord than a very good man, whose prayers God would hear. He did not yet see in Him one who wrought miracles by His own Divine power. Musculus observes that it is the man who not only “knows” God’s will but practically “does” it and obeys it, whom God hears.

32,33.—[*Since the world began, etc.*] These two verses contain the conclusion of the healed man’s argument. The sense is as follows: “To open the eyes of one born blind is a work so entirely beyond the power of man that no man has ever done it since the world began. Divine power alone could effect it. But this Man has done this work and therefore must evidently be one sent and commissioned by God. If He were not of God, He could do nothing miraculous, and at any rate nothing so miraculous as my cure.”

The expression “since the world began” would be more literally rendered “from the age of the world:” *i.e.*., from the beginning of. It is like Acts iii.21, xv.18 and Eph. iii.9.
The concluding argument of the healed man is precisely that of

Nicodemus when he came to our Lord by night. “No man can do these miracles except God be with him.” (John iii.2.)
Augustine remarks: “This was frankly, firmly, and truly spoken. These things that were done by the Lord, how should they be done by any but God?” Brentius shows here the value of miracles as an evidence of Christ’s Divine mission. He also shows that the miracles so-called, said to be worked by magicians and false teachers, are either impositions or else are wrought in support of something contrary to Scripture, and are therefore not worthy of attention. He finally remarks that if we are not to believe an angel speaking against the Gospel, much less should we believe a miracle if worked to confirm something contrary to Scripture. Toletus remarks that at any rate there is no case in Scripture of any open sinner procuring a miracle to be worked in reply to his prayer. Whitby remarks: “We see here a blind man and unlearned, judging more rightly of Divine things than the whole learned Council of the Pharisees! Hence we learn that we are not always to be led by the authority of councils, popes, or bishops, and that it is not absurd for laymen sometimes to vary from their opinions, these great overseers being sometimes guilty of great oversights.”

There is no weight in the objection raised by some modern German critics that eminent surgeons have effected the restoration of sight to people born blind. If they have, it has certainly never been done instantaneously and without the use of outward means, as in this man’s case.

34.—[*They answered, etc.*] The argument of the healed man was one which the Pharisees felt to be unanswerable. Silenced before the whole Council, they turn on the speaker with anger and abuse. “You are a miserable wicked creature, entirely born in sin, and do you pretend to know better than us and to teach us?” They then proceeded at once to excommunicate him. The expression “they cast him out” must surely mean much more than merely turning him out of the room or place where they were assembled. To my mind it means nothing less than a formal expulsion from the commonwealth of Israel, and the consequent degradation of the man. It must be admitted that Maldonatus and some others think it only means that “they turned him out of the room” where they were. But this does not agree with the context, and almost all commentators think “excommunication” is meant.

It is held by many that the expression “born in sin” was used with special reference to the healed man’s old infirmity of blindness. “Your very blindness shows you to have been a very wicked man. It is God’s stamp on your wickedness. Body and soul are both polluted by sin.” There may be a latent reference to the vulgar error referred to at verse 2, that blindness was an evidence of God’s special displeasure.

The expression, “Do you teach us?” is precisely one of those which wicked people in possession of place, rank, dignity, and income are fond of using about Reformers of the Church and independent thinkers. “How can such an ignorant person as you pretend to know better than us and teach us? We are high in office and must know better than you!”

Let us note that this resort to personal abuse and violent language is often a sure mark of a failing cause in religion. Inability to reply to argument is often the true cause of ill-temper and personalities. Truth can afford to be patient; error cannot.

Let us note that persecution and excommunication are common weapons with the enemies of spiritual religion. When men cannot answer arguments, they often try to silence and intimidate those who use them. The dread of excommunication with a Jew was second only to the dread of death. Calvin remarks: “It is certain that those who are not subject to Christ are deprived of the lawful power of excommunicating. Nor ought we to dread being excluded from their assemblies since Christ, our Life and Salvation, was banished from them.”

Musculus observes that this excommunication could not have been without the vote of the majority of the Council. Truth is too often with minorities. Pellican remarks that “to be shut out from the communion of the wicked is no dishonor or loss.”

Ferus, a Romanist, says that this verse should teach the leaders of churches not to be hasty in excommunicating people, lest they commit as great a mistake as the Pharisees.
Barradius, a Portuguese Romanist, makes strong remarks here on the great sin of unjust excommunication. He quotes the text in Samuel which says that the sons of Eli made men “abhor the offering of the Lord;” and applies to the same point the text in Canticles

where the bride complains that the keeper and watchmen who ought to have helped, “smote and wounded her.” Quesnel remarks that wicked pastors are always impatient that anyone should remind them of their duty.

Lightfoot observes that this man was the first confessor who suffered for Christ’s sake, as John the Baptist was the first martyr. Trench observes that the Pharisees in their rage forgot “that the two charges —one, that the man had not been born blind and was and impostor; the other, that he bore the mark of God’s anger in blindness reaching back to his birth—will not agree together.”

35.—[*Jesus heard…cast him out*.] An interval of time most probably elapsed between the last verse and the present one. Where our Lord was, at Jerusalem or elsewhere, and what He was doing during the interval, we are not told. We can hardly suppose that the events related in the present and following verses, and the former part of the tenth chapter, took place on the same day that the blind man was cured. There must have been a break. Moreover, the very expression before us shows that the excommunication had had time to be reported and known in Jerusalem. Making every allowance for the public notoriety of everything done by the Sanhedrim, we can hardly suppose that in a day when there was no newspaper, the treatment of the blind man would be public news and reported without some interval of time. As God, our Lord doubtless knew all that happened to the sufferer, but He did nothing till his excommunication was publicly reported. Burkitt observes: “O happy man! Having lost the

synagogue, he finds heaven."

Wordsworth observes: "If those who sit in Moses' seat teach things contrary to the law of Moses and proceed to impose their false doctrines as terms of communion, if they will not receive Him of whom Moses wrote and threaten with excommunication those who confess Jesus to be the Christ, then no desire of unity, no love of enemies, no fear of separation from parents and spiritual superiors, no dread of spiritual censures and penalties must deter the disciples of Christ from confessing Him. Our Lord Himself has set the seal of His divine sanction on these principles."

[*And when He had found, etc.*] We should note in this sentence our Lord's kindness and compassion. As soon as His people suffer for His name's sake, He is ready to visit them and speak words of comfort and give special consolation. We see too an example of His zeal to turn temporal trials to spiritual gain. Like Him, we should be ready to say to sufferers, "Do you believe on the Son of God? The world fails you. Turn to Christ and seek rest."

Chrysostom remarks: "They who for the sake of the truth and confession of Christ suffer anything and are insulted, these are especially honored. So it was here with the blind man. The Jews cast him out of the temple, and the Lord of the temple found him. He was dishonored by those who dishonor Christ, and was honored by the Lord of angels."

We should note that this is one of the very few occasions on which our Lord called Himself directly "the Son of God." (See John iii.18,

v.25, x.36, and xi.4.)

The word “you” here is emphatic. “Others are unbelieving. Do you believe?” 36.—[*He answered and said, etc.*] This is the language of a mind ignorant of many things yet willing to be instructed. It is like Saul crying, “Who are You, Lord?” and the jailer saying, “What must I do?” When a man begins to inquire about Christ and ask who He is, it is always a hopeful symptom of his state of soul.

It may be doubted whether “Lord” here would not have been better rendered “Sir.” Chrysostom says, “The expression is that of a longing, inquiring soul.” 37.—[*And Jesus said, etc.*] We should carefully notice the extraordinary fullness of the revelation which our Lord here made of Himself. In no case but this and that of the Samaritan woman do we find Him so unreservedly declaring His own Divinity and Messiahship. So true it is, that “the meek He will guide in judgment” and things “hid to the wise and prudent are revealed to babes.” The poor and despised and friendless among mankind are often those whom He favors with special revelations of His kindness and mercy. (John iv.26; Matt. v.10-12.)

38.—[*And he said, Lord, I believe.*] This immediate profession of faith seems to indicate that the man’s mind had been prepared by the Holy Ghost during the interval of time since His cure. The more he thought over his miraculous healing and the Person who had wrought it, the more ready he was to believe in Him as the Messiah. We must not perhaps estimate too highly the extent of this man’s faith. At any rate, it had the germ and nucleus of all justifying faith about it—a belief in our Lord as the Messiah.

[*And he worshiped Him*.] This seems to have been something more than an action of respect and reverence to a man. It looks like the worship given to One who was felt to be very God. Our Lord accepts it and says not one word to check it. We cannot suppose that Paul or Peter or John would have allowed a fellowman to give them "worship." (See Acts x.25,26 and xiv.14,15; Rev. xix.10 and xxii.9.)

Chrysostom remarks how few of those whom our Lord miraculously healed worshiped Him as this man did. Cocceius remarks that when we consider that this act of worship follows immediately on a full profession of faith in Jesus as the "Son of God," it cannot be lightly passed over as a mere mark of respect. Ferus observes that there is a thing said of this worshiper which is said of no one else who "worshiped" Christ: he said, "I believe" before he did it, and I believe in the "Son of God."

Poole observes that "although the word 'worshiped' in the Greek is a word used sometimes to signify the civil respect which men show to their superiors, yet it cannot be so interpreted in this place, considering what went before."

39.—[*And Jesus said, For judgment, etc.*] We must not suppose that there is any contradiction between these words and those in John iii.18 and xii.47. It was quite true that our Lord had not come into the world to be a Judge, but a Savior. Yet He had come to produce a judgment, or distinction, or division between class and class of

characters, and to be the cause of light breaking in on some minds which before His coming could not see, and of blindness covering other minds which before His coming flattered themselves that they were full of light. In that, the expression is very parallel to that of Simeon (Luke ii.35), "The thoughts of many hearts were revealed by His coming." Humble-minded ignorant people had light revealed to them. Proud self-righteous people were given over to judicial blindness. (See Matt. xi.25.)

And is not this judgment a common consequence of Christ's Gospel coming to a place or a people for the first time? Minds previously quite dead receive sight. Minds previously self-satisfied and proud of their own light are given over to utter darkness and left behind. Those who once saw not, see. Those who fancied themselves clear-sighted are found blind. The same fire which melts wax hardens the clay.

Let it be noted that the Greek word rendered "might be made" would be more literally translated "might become." I do not mean to say that in no case does God ever give over people to blindness by a kind of judgment on account of their hardness and impenitence. But we should carefully observe how rarely Scripture speaks of it as God's act. Thus here it is not literally true that He *makes* them blind, but that they *"became"* blind. Augustine remarks: "Who are those that see? Those who think they see, who believe they see." He also says, "The judgment which Christ has brought into the world is not that wherewith He shall judge the quick and the dead in the end of the

world. It is a work of discrimination rather, by which He discerns the cause of them who believe from that of the proud who think they see, and therefore are worse blinded."

Zwingli remarks: "Judgment is here taken for discrimination, or separation into classes." Ferus says much the same. Chemnitius thinks that our Lord spoke these words with special reference to the false and unjust judgment of excommunication which the Pharisees had just passed. It is as though He could say, "True judgment, a right discrimination into classes, is my prerogative. The excommunication of a Pharisee is worthless."

Musculus and Gualter think that "judgment" here means the eternal decree of God. "I came into the world to carry out God's eternal purposes, which are that the wise and prudent should remain in darkness, and truth should be revealed to babes." But this seems far-fetched.

Poole says: "The best notion of 'judgment' here is theirs who interpret it of the spiritual government of the world, committed to Christ and managed by Him with perfect rectitude and equity. One eminent part of this was His publishing the Gospels, the law of faith; the result of which is that many spiritually blind and wholly unable to see the way to eternal life might be enlightened with saving knowledge, and that many who think they see should by their obstinate infidelity become more blind than they were from their birth. Not that I cast any such evil influence on them, but this

happens through their own sore eyes."

Whitby remarks that the Greek conjunction here rendered "that" is not causal but only consequential; as when Christ said, "I came not to send peace but a sword," meaning, the consequence and result of my coming will be to send a sword, and not the object of my coming. He also thinks that the verse has a wide application to the Gentiles sitting in darkness being enlightened by Christ's coming, while the Jews were blinded. Hengstenberg says, "Those that see are the Jews, in contradistinction to the Gentiles."

Burgon remarks: "Judgment is not used here in an active sense. It is the condemnation implied by severing men into good and bad, which was one consequence (not the purpose) of Christ's coming into the world. When Christ came into the world, men promptly showed themselves to belong to the state of darkness or of light, and by their arranging themselves in two great classes, anticipated their own final sentence." "The blind (that is, simple and ignorant, yet meek and faithful men) saw; while the seeing (that is, vain pretenders to discernment, proud presumptuous persons) were made blind."

40.—[And some of the Pharisees…heard these words.] This sentence literally rendered would be, "Those of the Pharisees who were with Him heard." It seems to show that here, as on all other occasions, some of the party of the Pharisees were in the crowd which hung round our Lord, narrowly watching all He said and did, and eagerly catching at anything which might give them an advantage against

Him. It ought to make us feel the immense difficulty of our Lord's position. He was always attended by enemies, and spoke and acted under the eyes of people desiring to do Him harm. It also teaches us that we must not cease from efforts to do good, because many of our hearers are unbelieving.

[*And said to Him, Are we blind also?*] This question cannot possibly be taken as a humble, anxious inquiry. It is rather the sarcastic, sneering inquiry of men whose consciences were pricked by our Lord's words, and who felt that He was condemning them: "And in what class do you place us? Are we among those whom you call blind? Do you mean to say that we, who are Doctors of the Law, see and understand nothing?" St. Paul's words to the unbelieving Jew should be remembered here: "You are confident that you are a guide of the blind, a light of them who are in darkness." (Rom. ii.17.) Blindness was probably the last thing which the Pharisees would allow could be predicated of them.

Augustine remarks: "There are many who, according to common usage, are called good people: good men, good women, harmless, honoring their parents, not committing adultery, doing no murder, not stealing, not bearing false witness and, in a sort, observing the other duties commanded in the law— and yet are not Christians. And these commonly give themselves airs like the Pharisees here, saying, 'Are we blind also?'"

Ferus observes, "This is just the ancient arrogance of the Jews."

Jones of Nayland makes the pious remark: “Give us, O Lord, the sight of this man who had been blind from birth, and deliver us from the blindness of his judges, who had been learning all their lives and yet knew nothing. And if the world should cast us out, let us be found of Thee, whom the world crucified.”

41.—[*Jesus said to them, etc.*] Our Lord’s answer to the Pharisees is a very remarkable and elliptical one. If may be thus paraphrased: “Well would it be for you if you were really blind and ignorant. If you were really ignorant, you would be far less blameworthy than you are now. If you were really blind, you would not be guilty of the sin of willful unbelief as you are now. But, unhappily, you say that you know the truth and see the light and are not ignorant, even while you are rejecting Me. This self-satisfied state of mind is the very thing which is ruining you.”

It makes your sin abide heavily on you.” It is needless to say that our Lord did not mean that ignorance makes a man entirely free from guilt. He only meant that a really ignorant man is much less guilty than one who has light and knowledge but does not improve and use them. No man’s case is so hopeless as that of the self-confident man who says that he knows everything and wants no light. Such a man’s sin abides on him, and, unless repented of, will sink him into the pit. Let us note what a heavy condemnation this text contains for those professing Christians who are constantly comforting themselves by saying, “We know,” “We are not ignorant,” “We see the truth,” while yet they lazily sit still in irreligion and make no attempt to obey. Such

persons, however little they think it, are far more guilty before God than the poor heathen who never hears truth at all. The more light a man has, the more sin if he does not believe.

To infer from this text the salvation of all the unconverted heathen would be unwarrantable and going much too far. The worst heathen man has sufficient light to judge and condemn him at last, and far more than he lives up to. But it is not too much to say that an ignorant heathen is in a far more hopeful condition than a proud, self-satisfied, self-righteous, unconverted Christian.

Brentius thinks that the expression “if ye were blind” means “if ye would confess your blindness,” and that to say “we see” is equivalent to a “refusal to acknowledge ignorance and need.”

Chemnitius observes that the expression of this verse teaches that there are two sorts of sinners in this world—those who sin from ignorance and infirmity, and those who sin against light and knowledge—and that they must be regarded and dealt with accordingly.

Musculus remarks that nothing seems to gall men so much as the imputation of ignorance and lack of knowledge of the truth. The very men who are unmoved if charged with immoral actions such as simony, adultery, gluttony, or misuse of ecclesiastical property, are furious if told that they are dark and blind about *doctrine*.

The expression “your sin remains” is very worthy of notice. It teaches the solemn truth that the sins of impenitent and unconverted people are upon them, unforgiven and not taken away. It condemns the modern idea that all sins are already forgiven and pardoned on account of Christ’s death and all men justified, and that the only thing required is to believe it and know it. On the contrary, our sins are upon us and remain upon us until we believe. Ferus calls it “a terrible saying.”

Tholuck remarks on the whole chapter: “The narrative of this miracle has a special value in apologetics. How often do we hear the wish expressed, that Christ’s miracles had been put on documentary record and had been subjected to a thorough judicial investigation. Here we have the very thing that is desired: judicial personages—and these, too, the avowed enemies of Christ—investigate a miracle in repeated hearings and yet they hold their ground. A man blind from his birth was made to see!” No wonder that German skeptics, like Strauss and Bauer, are driven to assert that the whole narrative is a fabrication.

In leaving this chapter, it is worth remembering that this is one of our Lord’s miracles about which nearly all commentators have agreed that it has a spiritual signification and is emblematic of spiritual truth. Lampe remarks that even those writers who are ordinarily most averse to spiritualizing and accommodating, admit that the healing of this blind man is a picture of the illumination of a sinner’s soul. His healing is a lively figure of conversion.

It is curious that we hear no more of this man who was healed. It is pleasant, however, to bear in mind the thought that there were many who believed in Christ and were true disciples, whose names and lives have never come down to us. We must not suppose that there were none saved but those whose histories are recorded in the New Testament. The last day, we may well believe, will show that this man was only a type of a large class whose names were written in the Book of Life, though not recorded for our learning by the inspired writers.

John – Chap. 10

JOHN 10:1-9

Jesus as the Good Shepherd

"I tell you the solemn truth, the one who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs in some other way, is a thief and a robber. The one who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. The doorkeeper opens the door for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought all his own sheep out, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they recognize his voice. They will never follow a stranger, but will run away from him, because they do not recognize the stranger's voice." Jesus told them this parable, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

So Jesus said to them again, "I tell you the solemn truth, I am the door for the sheep. All who came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. If anyone enters through me, he will be saved, and will come in and go out, and find pasture.

The chapter we have now begun is closely connected with the preceding one. The parable before us was spoken with direct reference to the blind teachers of the Jewish Church. The Scribes and

Pharisees were the people our Lord had in view, when He described the false shepherd. The very men who had just said “We see,” were denounced with holy boldness, as “thieves and robbers.”

We have, for one thing, in these verses, ***a vivid picture of a false teacher of religion.*** Our Lord says that he is one who “enters not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbs up some other way.”

The “door,” in this sentence, must evidently mean something far more than outward calling and commission. The Jewish teachers, at any rate, were not deficient in this point—they could probably trace up their orders in direct succession to Aaron himself. Ordination is no proof whatever that a man is fit to show others the way to heaven. He may have been regularly set apart by those who have authority to call ministers, and yet all his life may never come near the door, and at last may die nothing better than “a thief and a robber.”

The true sense of the “door” must be sought in our Lord’s own interpretation. It is Christ Himself who is “the door.” The true shepherd of souls is he who enters the ministry with a single eye to Christ, desiring to glorify Christ, doing all in the strength of Christ, preaching Christ’s doctrine, walking in Christ’s steps, and laboring to bring men and women to Christ. The false shepherd of souls is he who enters the ministerial office with little or no thought about Christ, from worldly and self-exalting motives, but from no desire to exalt Jesus, and the great salvation that is in Him. Christ, in one word, is the grand touchstone of the minister of religion. The man

who makes much of Christ is a pastor after God's own heart, whom God delights to honor. The minister who makes little of Christ is one whom God regards as an impostor—as one who has climbed up to his holy office not by the door, but by "some other way."

The sentence before us is a sorrowful and humbling one. That it condemns the Jewish teachers of our Lord's time all men can see. There was no "door" in their ministry. They taught nothing rightly about Messiah. They rejected Christ Himself when He appeared—but all men do not see that the sentence condemns thousands of so-called Christian teachers, quite as much as the leaders and teachers of the Jews. Thousands of ordained men in the present day know nothing whatever about Christ, except His name. They have not entered "the door" themselves, and they are unable to show it to others. Well would it be for Christendom if this were more widely known, and more seriously considered! Unconverted ministers are the dry-rot of the Church. "When the blind lead the blind" both must fall into the ditch. If we would know the value of a man's ministry, we must never fail to ask, Where is the Lamb? Where is the Door? Does he bring forward Christ, and give Him his rightful place?

We have, for another thing, in these verses, ***a peculiar picture of true Christians.*** Our Lord describes them as sheep who "hear the voice of a true Shepherd, and know His voice;" and as "sheep who will not follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they know not the voice of strangers."

The thing taught in these words is a very curious one, and may seem “foolishness” to the world. There is a spiritual instinct in most true believers, which generally enables them to distinguish between true and false teaching. When they hear unsound religious instruction, there is something within them that says, “This is wrong.” When they hear the real truth as it is in Jesus, there is something in their hearts which responds, “This is right.” The careless man of the world may see no difference whatever between minister and minister, sermon and sermon. The poorest sheep of Christ, as a general rule, will “distinguish things that differ,” though he may sometimes be unable to explain why.

Let us beware of despising this spiritual instinct. Whatever a sneering world may please to say, it is one of the peculiar marks of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. As such, it is specially mentioned by John, when he says, “You have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things.” (1 John 2:20.) Let us rather pray for it daily, in order that we may be kept from the influence of false shepherds. To lose all power of distinguishing between bitter and sweet is one of the worst symptoms of bodily disease. To be unable to see any difference between law and gospel, truth and error, Protestantism and Popery, the doctrine of Christ and the doctrine of man, is a sure proof that we are yet dead in heart, and need conversion.

We have, lastly, in these verses, ***a most instructive picture of Christ Himself.*** He utters one of those golden sayings which ought to be dear to all true Christians. They apply to people as well as to

ministers. “I am the door—by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.” We are all by nature separate and far off from God. Sin, like a great barrier-wall, rises between us and our Maker. The sense of guilt makes us afraid of Him. The sense of His holiness keeps us at a distance from Him.

Born with a heart at enmity with God, we become more and more alienated from Him, by practice, the longer we live. The very first questions in religion that must be answered, are these— “How can I draw near to God? How can I be justified? How can a sinner like me be reconciled to my Maker?”

The Lord Jesus Christ has provided an answer to these mighty questions. By His sacrifice for us on the cross, He has opened a way through the great barrier, and provided pardon and peace for sinners. He has “suffered for sin, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God.” He has opened a way into the holiest, through His blood, by which we may draw near to God with boldness, and approach God without fear. And now He is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by Him. In the highest sense He is “the door.” No one “can come to the Father” but by Him.

Let us take heed that we use this door, and do not merely stand outside looking at it. It is a door free and open to the chief of sinners — “If any man enter in by it, he shall be saved.” It is a door within which we shall find a full and constant supply for every need of our souls. We shall find that we can “go in and out,” and enjoy liberty and peace. The day comes when this door will be shut forever, and

men shall strive to enter in, but not be able. Then let us make sure work of our own salvation. Let us not stand tarrying outside, and halting between two opinions. Let us enter in and be saved.

Technical Notes:

1. Verily, verily, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. 2. But he who enters in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. 3. To him the porter opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4. And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. 5. And a stranger they will not follow, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers. 6. This parable Jesus spoke to them, but they did not understand the things which he spoke to them. 7. Then Jesus said to them again, Verily, verily, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. 8. All who ever came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. 9. I am the door. If any man enters by me, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out and find pasture.

1.—[*Verily, verily, I say to you*.] Three things must be carefully remembered if we would rightly understand the first nine verses of this chapter. Inattention to them has caused much confused and inconsistent interpretation.

(a) For one thing, the passage is closely connected with the last chapter. The opening sentence should be read on, without break or separation between, together with the 41st verse of the ninth chapter. Our Lord is still speaking to the hostile Pharisees who asked, “Are we blind also?” and got the answer, “Ye say, We see; therefore your sin remains.” It is to them that He goes on to say, “I say to *you*, he who enters not in by the door is a thief and a robber.” He is not so much comforting His disciples now, as rebuking and exposing His enemies.

(b) For another thing, the passage is entirely a parable, or allegory. (See sixth verse.) In interpreting it, like almost all our Lord’s parables, the one great lesson should be kept in view, which is the keynote to the whole. We must not press every detail and little point too far and try to attach a spiritual meaning to the lesser parts of the picture. Those who do so always run aground in their exposition and get into difficulties. To this parable, if any, the old quaint sayings are applicable: “No parable stands on four legs.” “Squeeze parables too far, and you will draw blood from them and not milk.”

Calvin remarks wisely: “It is useless to scrutinize too closely every part of this parable. Let us rest satisfied with this general view, that as Christ states a resemblance between the Church and a fold (a sheepfold in which God assembles all His people), so He compares Himself to a door because there is no other entrance into the Church but by Himself. Then it follows that they are good shepherds, who lead men straight to Christ; and that they are truly gathered into

Christ's fold so as to belong to His flock, who devote themselves to Christ alone.

(c) For another thing, the object that our Lord had in view, in speaking this parable, must be kept steadily before our eyes. That object was to show the entire unfitness of the Pharisees to be pastors and teachers of the Jews, because they had not taken up their office in the right spirit and with a right understanding of the work they had to do. He is not in this part speaking of Himself as "the Shepherd" but as "the Door"—only as the Door. What Christ is as a "Shepherd" comes afterward; what Christ is as "the Door" is the one point of the first nine verses. The "progressive" character of our Lord's discourses recorded in St. John is strikingly illustrated in this chapter. Starting from a very simple statement, our Lord goes on to speak of the highest truths. We see the same in the fourth, fifth, and sixth chapters.

This is one of the twenty-four places in St. John's Gospel where the double "verily" comes in. Here, as elsewhere, it always prefaces some statement of more than ordinary importance and solemnity.

[*He who does not enter, etc.*] Our Lord here appeals to the common experience of His hearers. They all knew well that anyone who was seen entering a sheepfold by climbing over the wall or fence of enclosure, and not by going through the door, would be justly suspected of being a thief. Every true shepherd, as a matter of course, makes use of the door. The "door" He afterwards interprets to mean

Himself. The latent thought evidently is, that any teacher of religion who does not take up and discharge his office with faith in Christ and His atonement, and with an aim to glorify Christ, is unfit for his business and unable to do any good. Instead of being a shepherd who helps and feeds, he is no better than a "robber" who does harm. Instead of saving souls, he kills them. Instead of bringing life, he brings death to his hearers.

Some, as Chrysostom, Euthymius, Theophylact, and Maldonatus, think the "door" means the Scriptures. Others, as Tholuck and Hengstenberg, think the "door" means a proper divine call to office. Both views seem to me unnatural and incorrect.

Augustine observes: "Christ's fold is the Catholic Church. Whoso would enter the fold, let him enter in by the door: let him preach very Christ. Let him not only preach very Christ, but seek Christ's glory, not his own." He says, again, "I, seeking to enter into your hearts, preach Christ. If I preach other than that, I shall be striving to climb in some other way. Christ is my Door; through Christ I win your hearts." Language borrowed from the care of sheep and sheepfolds would be much more intelligible in Palestine than it is here in England. Keeping sheep was much more common there than in our climate. Folds, doors, shepherds, thieves climbing over some other way, would be points familiar to most Jews. Moreover, the use of such language in speaking of spiritual things would be peculiarly intelligible to all who had read Jer. xxiii, Ezek. xxxiv, and Zech. xi.

Brentius remarks on the condescension of our Lord in borrowing spiritual lessons from such humble sources: “What is more low than a shepherd’s condition? Every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians. What more dull and stupid than a sheep? Yet here is a picture of Christ and believers!”

Sir Isaac Newton (in his book on Daniel) supposes that our Lord, in choosing the subject of this parable, had before His eyes the many sheepfolds near the temple and about Jerusalem where sheep were kept ready to be sold for sacrifice.

The expression “some other way” seems to me purposely very wide. Men may become teachers of the Church from many different motives, and in many different frames of mind. Some may be skeptical, some formalists, some worldly; but all alike are wrong if they do not enter office “through the Door,” viz., by Christ.

The word rendered “the same” would be more literally translated “that man.” The expression “thief and robber” is very strong and supplies a striking instance of the use of a parable to convey indirectly a sharp and severe rebuke. Of course, our Lord could hardly have said to the Pharisees, “You are thieves and robbers.” Yet by use of a parable, He says what is tantamount to it.

Let it be noted that these strong epithets show plainly that there are times when it is right to rebuke sharply. Flattering everybody and complimenting all teachers who are zealous and earnest, without

reference to their soundness in the faith, is not according to Scripture. Nothing seems so offensive to Christ as a false teacher of religion, a false prophet, or a false shepherd. Nothing ought to be so much dreaded in the Church and, if needful, be so plainly rebuked, opposed, and exposed. The strong language of our Reformers, when writing against Romish teachers, is often blamed more than it ought to be.

The Greek word rendered "thief" implies secret fraud and dishonesty. The word rendered "robber" implies more open violence. There are false teachers of both sorts: open Papists and open skeptics, semi-Papists and semi-skeptics. All are alike dangerous.

Augustine observes: "Let the pagans, the Jews, the heretics say, 'We lead a good life.' If they enter not by the door, what does it avail? A good life only profits if it leads to life eternal. Indeed, those cannot be said to lead a good life who are either blindly ignorant of, or willfully despise, the end of good living. No one can hope for eternal life who knows not Christ—who is the life—and by that door enters the fold." Hammond alone among commentators applies this verse and the four following entirely to Christ Himself, and considers "the door" to mean the proper evidence of miracles and doctrine. I cannot see this at all. Bishop Burnet remarks that this parable is the passage above all others which both Fathers and modern writers have chiefly used in order to show the difference between good and bad ministers. Wordsworth calls the whole chapter "a divine pastoral to Bishops, priests, and deacons."

2.—[*He who enters in by the door, etc.*] This verse contains the converse of the preceding verse. He who is seen entering the sheepfold by the one proper entrance, the door, may be set down as a true shepherd. Such a man, being duly commissioned by the owner of the flock and recognized by the sheep as their pastor and friend, has no need to enter clandestinely like a thief, or by violence as a robber.

The word "the" before shepherd is not in the Greek. It should be simply "a shepherd." The omission of the article seems intentional, to show that our Lord is describing true "shepherds of sheep" generally and not Himself.

3.—[*To him the porter opens, etc.*] The whole of this verse is meant to show the character of a true shepherd of sheep in four respects: (1) The porter opens the gate to him, knowing by his step and manner of approach, that he is a friend and not an enemy. (2) The sheep recognize his voice and attend to what he says. (3) He, knowing all his flock individually, calls each sheep by his own peculiar name. (4) He leads them out to feed, desiring daily to promote their health and well-being. In all these four points he is unlike the thief and robber.

The different customs of Eastern countries, as compared to our own, must be carefully kept in mind to understand the expressions of this verse. A fold in Palestine was a space enclosed by high walls, not by low hurdles. It had a gate guarded by a porter at night, since the sheep could not be safely left alone. An Eastern shepherd knows each

sheep in his flock and often has a name for each one. The sheep are led and not driven. About “the porter who opens” in this verse, opinions differ. Most commentators hold that the “porter” means the Holy Ghost, who calls true ministers into the Church and “opens hearts”. The sense is: “To a true pastor, the Holy Ghost gives a call to his office and makes a way into the hearts of hearers.” This, no doubt, is excellent divinity, but I cannot think our Lord meant anything of the kind. The “porter” here is not said to call the pastor but to open when the pastor comes; nor yet to open hearts but the door of the fold, through which the true pastor enters. The view of Wordsworth, also held by Augustine, Rupertus, Bullinger, and Flacius—that the “porter” is Christ Himself, who is not only “Door” but “Porter” also—does not appear to me necessary. I prefer, with Glassius, Grotius, Hutcheson, and Bloomfield, regarding the whole sentence as a subordinate feature in the parable, signifying that a true shepherd of sheep not only enters by the lawful door but that every facility is made for his entrance.

Some, as Chrysostom, Euthymius, and Theophylact, think the “porter” may mean “Moses.”

Others, as Ecolampadius, Lampe, Webster, think the “porter” means the ministers and teachers of the Church, who have the power of the keys and the right to admit pastors.

Others, as Gomarus, Brentius, Maldonatus, Hall, Whitby, Bengel, and Hengstenberg, think the “porter” is God the Father. The expression “his own sheep” must not be pressed too far. It simply means that a real shepherd, according to Eastern custom, knowing

his own flock individually by name, calls them at once by their names and proves his relation to them by so doing. If not his own, he could not do so.

4.—[*And when he brings out, etc.*] This verse is simply a continuation of the description of a true and faithful shepherd of sheep. Whenever such a one takes his flock out to pasture, he walks before them (as an Eastern shepherd always does), never requiring them to go where he does not first go himself. Such a shepherd the sheep follow with implicit confidence, and knowing his voice, go wherever he calls them.

The words of Moses should be read: "Let the Lord set a man over the congregation, who may go out before them and who may go in before them, and who may lead them out and who may bring them in; that the congregation of the Lord be not as sheep which have no shepherd." (Num. xxvii.16,17.) That Eastern shepherds "lead" their sheep is clear from Exod. iii.1, "He led the flock," and Psalm xxiii.2, "He leads me."

5.—[*And a stranger they will not follow, etc.*] This verse concludes the picture of a true shepherd and his flock. It was a fact well-known to all our Lord's hearers that sheep accustomed to one shepherd's voice would not obey a stranger's voice, but would rather be frightened at it. Just so, true Christians have a spiritual taste and discernment by which they distinguish a false teacher and will not hear him. "Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and know all

things." (1 John ii.20.) The poor and illiterate believers often illustrate this in a very extraordinary way. Brentius observes here the singular faculty which sheep possess of always knowing and recognizing the voice of their own shepherd. He also notices the extraordinary knowledge that the lamb has of its own mother's bleat among a thousand others, as a curious characteristic of an animal in many respects dull and stupid.

Scott observes that this verse justifies true Christians in not listening to false teachers. In leaving their parish church, perhaps, under these circumstances, many reproach them. Yet the very men who reproach them would not trust their worldly affairs to an ignorant and dishonest lawyer, or their bodies to an incompetent doctor! Can it be wrong to act on the same principles for our souls?

Besser observes: "Sheep flee from a false shepherd. They will not say, it is enough if we do not follow this strange preacher in those points in which he holds forth unsound teaching. They will have nothing at all to do with him. They will flee from him as from a contagious disease." (2 Tim. ii.17.)

Bickersteth observes that this verse, and the third, throw light on the pastoral office of ministers. "How much of ministerial influence depends on personal knowledge. Great is the hindrance to the influence when an overgrown population renders it impossible."

6.—[*This parable Jesus spoke to them.*] The word rendered "parable"

here hardly bears the sense of the expression. It is rather "allegory," or figurative picture. However, it clearly settles that the whole passage must be taken as a picture of spiritual things, and must be carefully handled and not interpreted too literally. The Greek word used by John for "parable" is not used in any other Gospel.

[*But they did not understand, etc.*] The Pharisees appear to have failed in seeing the application of the parable. This is curious when we remember how quickly they saw the application to themselves of the parable of the husbandmen who killed the heir of the vineyard. But nothing seems to blind men's eyes so much as pride of office. Wrapped up in their conceit of their own knowledge and dignity, they did not see that they themselves, who pretended to be leaders and teachers of the Jewish flocks, were not shepherds but "thieves and robbers" doing more harm than good. They did not see that the fatal defect in their own qualification for office was ignorance of Christ and lack of faith in Him. They did not see that no true sheep of Christ could be expected to hear, follow, or obey their teaching. Above all, they did not see that in excommunicating the poor blind man whom our Lord had healed, they were just proving themselves to be "thieves and robbers" and injuring one whom they ought to have helped. If even One who "spoke as never man spoke" was not always understood, ministers cannot be surprised if they find they are often not understood now. How little of a sermon is understood, few preachers have the least idea!

Ferus remarks that our Lord's hearers must have been blind not to

see that their own prophet Ezekiel had already shown the application of the parable. (Chap. xxxiv.)
Lampe thinks they knew that our Lord was speaking of them, but could not fully comprehend the application of the parable. 7.—[*Then Jesus said to them again*.] Here we see the condescension and patience of our Lord. Seeing His hearers not able to understand Him, He proceeds to explain His meaning more fully. This is an example for all teachers of religion. Without frequent repetition and simplification, spiritual lessons can never be taught.

[*Verily, verily…you*.] Once more this solemn expression is used and again to the same hearers, the Pharisees.

[*I am the door of the sheep*.] Here is plain exposition. Jesus here declares that He Himself is the Door through whom, and by faith in whom, both shepherd and sheep must pass if they would go inside God's fold. "Every single sheep must enter through Me if he would join God's flock. Every teacher who wishes to be a shepherd over God's flock must enter his office looking to Me."

This high claim of dignity must have sounded startling to the Pharisees! A higher claim we can hardly conceive. None but One, even the Divine Messiah, could have used such an expression. No prophet or apostle ever did.

At first sight it seems strange that our Lord says, "I am the Door of the sheep" and not simply "the Door." But I think it is meant to teach

that the Door is for the benefit of the sheep more than the shepherd, and that He Himself is given more particularly for all His people than for His ministers. Ministers are only servants. The flock might possibly do without them, but they could not do without the flock. Bullinger calls attention to the many beautiful figures under which our Lord represented Himself and His office to the Jews in St. John's writings. The Bread, the Living Water, the Light of the World, the Door, the Shepherd, are all in five chapters of this Gospel. Musculus observes that the simple view of Christ being "the Door" is that He is the Mediator between God and man.

Webster observes: "It is worthy of remark that in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. vii.13-17), the description of the strait gate and narrow way immediately precedes the warning against false prophets and ravening wolves." The same also may be seen here.

8.—[*All who ever came before Me, etc.*] These words, "All, before Me," must evidently be limited or qualified. They cannot be taken in their fullest sense. The prophets and John the Baptist were not thieves and robbers. It cannot well be taken to mean "All who have claimed to be the Messiah." There is no evidence that many claimants did appear before our Lord, if any. Besides, the word "are" in the present tense seems to exclude those who lived before our Lord's time.

The great knot of the difficulty lies in the words "came before Me." The Greek word rendered "before" has only four meanings: (1) before

in point of time, (2) before in point of place, (3) before in point of dignity and honor, and (4) before in the way of substitution. Of these, the first two seem out of the question, and we are shut up to the last two. I can only conjecture that the sentence must be paraphrased in this way: "All who have come into the Church professing to be teachers, claiming honor for themselves instead of Me, or honoring anything in preference to Me, such as you Pharisees—all such are not true shepherds but thieves and robbers." I can see no better solution, and I admit that the sentence is a difficulty. Some, as Chrysostom and Theophylact, think "thieves and robbers" mean Theudas, Judas of Galilee (Acts v.36,37), and others like them. Euthymius remarks that "all" here must not be taken literally, but is a Hebraism meaning, "Anyone who does not come by Me is a thief," etc. Theophylact observes that the Manichean heretics wrested this text into a proof of their fanatical view that the Old Testament prophets were not sent by God!

Luther says: "These thieves and robbers form at all times the great majority in the world, and nothing better can they be as long as they are not in Christ. In fact, the world will have such wolf's preaching, and indeed desires no better, because it hears not Christ nor regards Christ. It is no wonder that true Christians and their pastors are so few." Calvin remarks: "That no man may be moved by the consideration that there have been teachers in all ages who gave themselves no concern whatever about directing men to Christ, Christ expressly states that it is no matter how many there may have been of this description, or how early they began to appear. There is

but *one Door,* and all who leave it and make openings or breaches in the walls are thieves."

Lightfoot thinks that our Lord refers to the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes, who had long misled the Jews before Christ came, and that they were the three false shepherds whose final casting off is foretold in Zechariah xi.8.

The expression, "The sheep did not hear them," must mean that true believers, when our Lord came on earth (such as Simeon, Anna, and others), had ceased to put any confidence in the commissioned teachers of the Jews, and were like sheep without a shepherd.

The word "sheep" in this explanatory verse must evidently be taken in a spiritual sense and can only mean true believers. Mere outward members of the Church, without faith and grace, are not "sheep." "Sheep," says Hengstenberg, "in the discourses of Christ are always the faithful members of God's kingdom, the company of believers." Alford says: "The sheep throughout this parable are not the mixed multitude of good and bad, but the real sheep—the faithful, who are what all in the fold should be. The false sheep, the goats, do not appear." Brentius remarks that we must not hastily assume, from our Lord's saying "the sheep did not hear them," that godly people will never be led away temporarily by false teachers. They may be deceived and seduced, but will return to the truth at last.

9.—[*I am the door, etc.*] This verse is one of those wide, broad, grand

statements which our Lord sometimes makes, stretching far beyond the subject of which He is immediately speaking. It is like, “I am the Bread, I am the Light, I am the Way.” The primary meaning is, “I am He through whom and by whom alone true pastors must enter the Church. All such pastors, entering by Me, shall find themselves at home in the fold and enjoy the confidence of my flock, and find food for the souls of my sheep, their hearers.” The secondary or fuller meaning is, “I am the Way of access to God. All who come to the Father by Me, whether pastors or hearers, shall find through Me safety and liberty, and possess continual food for their souls.” Strictly speaking, the sentence appears to belong specially to the true ministers of the flock of Christ. But I dare not confine it to them alone. It is a grand, wide promise to all who enter in. Melancthon sees, in this verse, a most excellent picture of a true pastor in four respects: (1) he shall be saved personally, (2) he shall go in to close and intimate communion with God, (3) he shall go forth furnished with gifts and be useful to the Church, and (4) he shall find food and refreshment for his own soul.

Musculus observes that our Lord does not say “If any learned, or righteous, or noble, or rich, or Jewish man enters by Me,” but “any man”—no matter who, great or small, however wicked in times past — “any man” that enters by Me shall be saved.

The expression “go in and out” implies a habit of using familiarly a dwelling and treating it as a home. It is a Hebraism. It expresses beautifully the habitual communion and happy intercourse with

Christ which a true believer enjoys. (See Acts i.21, ix.28, John xiv.23, and Rev. iii.20.)

Augustine suggests that “go in” means entering by faith, and “going out,” dying in faith and the result of it having life in glory. He says, “We come in by believing; we got out by dying.” But this seems far-fetched. Euthymius thinks that “going out” refers to the Apostles going out into the world to preach the Gospel.

The “finding pasture” implies the satisfaction, comfort, and refreshment of soul which everyone who uses Christ as his Door into heaven shall experience. The latent thought is evidently Psalm xxiii.1,2,etc. Burgon remarks: “The concluding words describe the security and enjoyment which are the privilege of Gods people. To go in and out is to transact the business of each day’s life: its rest and labor, the beginning and end of every work. The Hebrew phrase denotes a man’s whole life and conversation. The promises connected therewith seem to imply that in their daily walk (it may be in the world’s dusky lane and crowded mart), the people of God will find spiritual support and consolation, even meat for the souls which the world knows not of. Elsewhere the phrase is often ‘go out and come in.’ Here, not without meaning, the expressions are transposed. The former is the order of nature, the latter the order of grace.”

In leaving this difficult passage, it is well to remember that though our Lord is not speaking of Himself as a Shepherd here, and is only giving a descriptive picture of a good shepherd, there is a latent

application to Himself. There is no one to whom the various features of the picture apply so literally, clearly, and exactly as they do to the great Shepherd of believers. “Every expression,” says Burgon, “has a marked reference to Christ; yet it is plain that it is not of Himself that He is primarily speaking.”

Throughout the passage it is noteworthy how much stress is laid on the “voice” of the shepherd and on hearing his voice. I cannot but regard this as intentional. It is the “voice in teaching” which makes the great difference between one earthly pastor and another. “The shepherd,” says Burgon, “must not be silent while among his sheep.” It is hearing the voice of the Chief Shepherd which is one great mark of all true believers.”

JOHN 10:10-18

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come so that they may have life, and may have it abundantly.

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand who is not a shepherd and does not own sheep, sees the wolf coming and abandons the sheep and runs away. So the wolf attacks the sheep and scatters them. Because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep, he runs away.

“I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me — just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not come

from this sheepfold. I must bring them too, and they will listen to my voice, so that there will be one flock and one shepherd. This is why the Father loves me—because I lay down my life, so that I may take it back again. No one takes it away from me, but I lay it down of my own free will. I have the authority to lay it down, and I have the authority to take it back again. This commandment I received from my Father."

These verses show us, for one thing, ***the great object for which Christ came into the world.*** He says, I have come that men "might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly."

The truth contained in these words is of vast importance. They supply an antidote to many crude and unsound notions which are abroad in the world. Christ did not come to be only a teacher of new morality, or an example of holiness and self-denial, or a founder of new ceremonies, as some have vainly asserted. He left heaven, and dwelt for thirty-three years on earth for far higher ends than these. He came to procure eternal life for man, by the price of His own vicarious death. He came to be a mighty fountain of spiritual life for all mankind, to which sinners coming by faith might drink; and, drinking, might live for evermore. By Moses came laws, rules, ordinances, ceremonies. By Christ came grace, truth, and eternal life.

Important as this doctrine is, it requires to be fenced with one word of caution. We must not overstrain the meaning of our Lord Jesus Christ's words. We must not suppose that eternal life was a thing entirely unknown until Christ came, or that the Old Testament

saints were in utter darkness about the world to come. The way of life by faith in a Savior was a way well known to Abraham and Moses and David. A Redeemer and a Sacrifice was the hope of all God's children from Abel down to John the Baptist; but their vision of these things was necessarily imperfect. They saw them afar off, and not distinctly. They saw them in outline only, and not completely. It was the coming of Christ which made all things plain, and caused the shadows to pass away. Life and immortality were brought into full light by the Gospel. In short, to use our Lord's own words, even those who had life had it "more abundantly," when Christ came into the world.

These verses show us, for another thing, ***one of the principal offices which Jesus Christ fills for true Christians.*** Twice over our Lord uses an expression which, to an Eastern hearer, would be singularly full of meaning. Twice over he says emphatically, "I am the Good Shepherd." It is a saying rich in consolation and instruction.

Like a good shepherd, Christ KNOWS all His believing people. Their names, their families, their dwelling-places, their circumstances, their private history, their experience, their trials—with all these things Jesus is perfectly acquainted. There is not a thing about the least and lowest of them with which He is not familiar. The children of this world may not know Christians, and may count their lives folly; but the Good Shepherd knows them thoroughly, and, wonderful to say, though He knows them, does not despise them.

Like a Good Shepherd, Christ CARES tenderly for all His believing people. He provides for all their needs in the wilderness of this world, and leads them by the right way to a city of habitation. He bears patiently with their many weaknesses and infirmities, and does not cast them off because they are wayward, erring, sick, footsore, or lame. He guards and protects them against all their enemies, as Jacob did the flock of Laban; and of those that the Father has given Him He will be found at last to have lost none.

Like a Good Shepherd, Christ LAYS DOWN HIS LIFE for the sheep. He did it once for all, when He was crucified for them. When He saw that nothing could deliver them from hell and the devil, but His blood, He willingly made His soul an offering for their sins. The merit of that death He is now presenting before the Father's throne. The sheep are saved for evermore, because the Good Shepherd died for them. This is indeed a love that passes knowledge! "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:13.)

Let us only take heed that this office of Christ is not set before us in vain. It will profit us nothing at the last day that Jesus was a Shepherd, if during our lifetime, we never heard His voice and followed Him. If we love life, let us join His flock without delay. Except we do this, we shall be found at the left hand in the day of judgment, and lost for evermore.

These verses show us, lastly, that ***when Christ died, He died of His own voluntary free will.*** He uses a remarkable

expression to teach this— "I lay down my life that I might take it again. No man takes it from Me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again."

The point before us is of no small importance. We must never suppose for a moment that our Lord had no power to prevent His sufferings, and that He was delivered up to His enemies and crucified because He could not help it. Nothing could be further from the truth than such an idea. The treachery of Judas, the armed band of priests' servants, the enmity of Scribes and Pharisees, the injustice of Pontius Pilate, the crude hands of Roman soldiers, the scourge, the nails, and the spear—all these could not have harmed a hair of our Lord's head, unless He had allowed them. Well might He say those remarkable words, "Do you think that I cannot now pray to my Father, and He shall presently give Me more than twelve legions of angels? But how, then, shall the Scripture be fulfilled?" (Matt. 26:53.)

The plain truth is, that our Lord submitted to death of His own free will, because He knew that His death was the only way of making atonement for man's sins. He poured out His soul unto death with all the desire of His heart, because He had determined to pay our debt to God, and redeem us from hell. For the joy set before Him He willingly endured the cross, and laid down His life, in order that we, through His death, might have eternal life. His death was not the death of a *martyr*, who sinks at last overwhelmed by enemies, but

the death of a *triumphant conqueror*, who knows that even in dying he wins for himself and his people a kingdom and a crown of glory.

Let us lean back our souls on these mighty truths, and be thankful. A willing Savior, a loving Savior, a Savior who came specially into the world to bring life to man, is just the Savior that we need. If we hear His voice, repent and believe, He is our own.

Technical Notes:

10. The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I am come that they might have life, and that they might have *it* more abundantly. 11. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives his life for the sheep. 12. But he who is a hireling, and not the shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. 13. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. 14. I am the good shepherd and know my *sheep*, and am known by my own. 15. As the Father knows me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. 16. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold *and* one shepherd. 17. Therefore does my Father love me, because I lay down my life that I might take it again. 18. No man takes it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This

commandment I have received from my Father.

10.—[*The thief…destroy*.] In this passage our Lord entirely drops the figure of "the door" and presents Himself under a new aspect, as "the Shepherd." And the first thing He does is to show the amazing difference between Himself and the false teachers who bore rule among the Jews. He had already told the Pharisees that they were no better than "thieves and robbers." He now contrasts their objects with His own. A thief does not come to the fold to do good to the flock but harm, for his own selfish advantage and for the injury of the sheep. Just so the Pharisees only became teachers of the Jewish Church for their own advantage and interest and taught doctrine which was only calculated to ruin and destroy souls. A. Clarke observes: "How can worldly-minded hirelings, fox-hunting, card—playing priests, read these words without trembling to the center of their souls!"

Bickersteth suggests that "the thief in the singular number may remind us of the prince of darkness, the great chief robber and thief of souls."

[I am come…life…abundantly.] Our Lord here puts in strong contrast with the false teachers of the Jews His own purpose and object in coming into the world. He drops the figure of "the door" and says plainly and distinctly, stating it in the widest broadest way, that as a personal Savior He came that men might have life. The thief came to take life; He came to give it. He came that the way to eternal

life might be laid open, the life of justification purchased by His blood, the life of sanctification provided by the grace of His Spirit. He came to buy this life by His sacrifice on the cross. He came to proclaim this life and offer it to a lost world. To bring life and hope to a lost, dead, perishing world was the grand object of His incarnation. The ministry of the Pharisees was death, but that of Christ was life. The word "they" before "might have" must be taken generally here for "men." There is nothing else to which it can apply.

But this was not all. Our Lord came that men who had life already "might have it more abundantly." That is, that they might see the way of life more clearly and have no uncertainty about the way of justification before God; and that they might feel the possession of life more sensibly and have more conscious enjoyment of pardon, peace, and acceptance. This seems to me by far the simplest view of the text. Of course, there were millions in the world who before Christ came knew nothing of life for their souls. To them Christ's coming brought "life." But there were also many believing Jews who had life already when Christ came, and were walking in the steps of Abraham. To them Christ's coming brought "life more abundantly." It enlarged their vision and increased their comfort. So Paul tells Titus that "Christ's appearing brought life and immortality to light." (2 Tim. i.10.)

Most commentators do not admit the comparative idea in "more abundantly," but interpret it as simply meaning the abundance of grace and mercy which Christ brings into the world, as Rom. v.20,21.

This is true, but I venture to think it is not all the truth.

Chemnitius, following Augustine, thinks that "more abundantly" may refer to the life of glory hereafter, which saints will have after the life of faith here. But I cannot see this.

11.—[*I am the Good Shepherd.*] Here our Lord declares that He Himself is the great Head Shepherd of God's people, of whom all ministers—even the best—are only faint imitators. It is as if He said: "I am towards all who believe in Me, what a good shepherd is to his sheep—careful, watchful, and loving." The article in the Greek is twice used to increase the emphasis:

"I am the Shepherd, the good or excellent One." In the second verse of the chapter, before the word "Shepherd" in the Greek, we may remember there is no article at all.
It is probable that the name "shepherd," in Jewish ears, would convey much more clearly than it does in ours a claim to be regarded as the Messiah or Shepherd of souls. (See Gen. xlix.24, Psalm xxiii, Ezek. xxxiv.)

[*The good shepherd gives his life for the sheep.*] Our Lord here shows the distinguishing mark of a good shepherd. Such a one will lay down his life for his sheep, to save, protect, and defend them. He will die rather than lose one. He will peril his life, like David attacking the lion and the bear, rather than let one be taken from him. "All this," our Lord implies, "I have come to do for my spiritual

sheep. I have come to shed my lifeblood to save their souls; to die that they may live." The word "gives" here should have been translated "lays down." It is so rendered in the 15th verse.

Flacius observes how our Lord here, as elsewhere, always brings round His discourse to His own atoning death. Hengstenberg observes: "This expression, 'laying down the soul or life' for anyone, does not occur anywhere else independently in the New Testament. It is never found in profane writers. It must be referred back to the Old Testament, and specially to Isa. liii.10 where it is said of Messiah, 'He shall make, or place, His soul an offering for sin.'" Tittman says: "Those who maintain that Christ died only to confirm the truth of His doctrine, or to confirm the certainty of the promises of pardon and acceptance with God, are under a mistake. The death of Christ was not necessary for either of those purposes. The truth of His doctrine and the certainty of His promises must be established by other evidence. Neither does our Lord say that He laid down His life for His *doctrines*, but for His sheep."

12,13.—[*But he who is a hireling, etc.*] Our Lord in these two verses illustrates the subject He has taken up by showing the wide difference between a mere hired shepherd and one who feels a special interest in his sheep, because they are his own. A mere hired servant who has not spent his money in buying the sheep, but only takes charge of a flock for pay and cares little so long as he gets his money—such a one, as a general rule, will make no sacrifice and run no risk for the sheep. If he sees a wolf coming, he will not meet him

and fight but will run away and leave the flock to be scattered and devoured. He acts in this way because his whole heart is not in his work. He feeds the flock for money and not for love, for what he can get by it and not because he really cares for the sheep. Of course, the picture must be taken as *generally* true. We cannot suppose our Lord meant that no paid servant was trustworthy. Jacob was a hired shepherd, yet trustworthy. But doubtless His Jewish hearers knew many such "hirelings" as He here describes. The picture of a faithless shepherd in Ezekiel xxxiv would also occur to those who were familiar with Old Testament Scripture.

It is worth remembering that St. Paul specially warns the Ephesian elders, in Acts 20, that "grievous wolves" would enter in among them, not sparing the flock. Our Lord also in the Sermon on the Mount compares false prophets to "ravening wolves." (Matt. vii.15.)

Musculus observes how great a misfortune it is to Christ's sheep when they are deserted by ministers and left without regular means of grace. It has a scattering weakening effect. The best of ministers are poor weak creatures. But churches cannot keep together, as a rule, without pastors; the wolf scatters them. The ministry, no doubt, may be overvalued; but it may also be undervalued.

We cannot doubt that the latent thought of our Lord's language here was as follows. The Pharisees and other false teachers were no better than hired shepherds. They cared for nothing but themselves and their own honor or profit. They cared nothing for souls. They were

willing to have the name and profession of shepherds, but they had no heart in their work. They had neither will nor power to protect their hearers against any assault which that wolf, the devil, might make against them. Hence the Jews, when our Lord came on earth, were without help for their souls, fainting, and scattered like sheep without a shepherd, a prey to every device of the devil.

Let it be noted that the great secret of a useful and Christlike ministry is to love men's souls. He who is a minister merely to get a living, or to have an honorable position, is "the hireling" of these verses. The true pastor's first care is for his sheep. The false pastor's first thought is for himself.

Our Lord's strong language about the false teachers of the Jews ends here. Those who think that unsound ministers ought never to be exposed and held up to notice, and men ought never to be warned against them, would do well to study this passage. No class of character throughout our Lord's ministry seems to call forth such severe denunciation as that of false pastors. The reason is obvious. Other men ruin themselves alone; false pastors ruin their flocks as well as themselves. To flatter all ordained men and say they never should be called unsound and dangerous guides, is the surest way to injure the Church and offend Christ. Chrysostom, Theophylact, and most commentators think that the "wolf" here means the devil, even as he is called elsewhere a roaring lion, a serpent, and a dragon.

Lampe, on the other hand, thinks that the wolf signifies the same as

the thief and robber, and that it must mean the false prophet, the wolf in sheep's clothing. (See Zeph. iii.3 and Matt. vii.15.) In interpreting this whole passage, we must be careful not to strain it too far. Our Lord did not mean that in no case is flight from danger lawful in a pastor. He Himself says elsewhere, "When they persecute you in one city, flee ye to another." (Matt. x.23.) So Paul left Damascus by stealth to escape the Jews. (Acts. ix.25.)

Calvin remarks: "Ought we to reckon that man a hireling who for any reasons whatever shrinks from encountering the wolves? This was anciently debated as a practical question, when tyrants raged cruelly against the Church. Tertullian and others were, in my opinion, too rigid on this point. I prefer greatly the moderation of Augustine, who allows pastors to flee on certain conditions."

No unbending rule can be laid down. Each case must be decided by circumstances. There are times when, like St. Paul or Jewell, a man may see it a duty to flee and await better days; and times when, like Hooper, he may feel called to decline flight and to die with his sheep. Barnabas and Paul were specially commended to the Church at Antioch (Acts xv.25) as those who had "hazarded their lives for the name of the Lord Jesus." St. Paul tells the Ephesian elders, "I count not my life dear unto myself so that I may finish my course with joy." (Acts xx.24.) Again he says, "I am ready to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." (Acts xxi.13.)

14.—[*I am the Good Shepherd.*] These words are repeated to show the importance of the office our Lord fills as the Good Shepherd, and to bring into stronger light the wide difference between Him and the Pharisees. [*And know my sheep, and am known by my own.*] These words express the close and intimate union there is between Christ and all His believing people, a union understood fully by those alone who feel it, but to the world foolishness. Our Lord, like a good earthly shepherd, knows every one of His people—knows them with a special knowledge of love and approval; knows where they dwell and all about them, their weaknesses, trials, and temptations; and knows exactly what each one needs from day to day. His people, on the other hand, know Him with the knowledge of faith and confidence, and feel in Him a loving trust of which an unbeliever can form no idea. They know Him as their own sure Friend and Savior and rest on the knowledge. The devils know that Christ is *a* Savior. The sheep know and feel that He is *their* Savior.

I fancy the fullness of this verse would be far more plain to Jews accustomed to Oriental shepherds and their flocks, to the care of a good shepherd and the confidence of a flock, than it is to us in this Northern climate. At any rate, it teaches indirectly the duty of every Christlike pastor to be personally acquainted with all his people, just as a good shepherd knows each one of his sheep.

Musculus points out the strong contrast between “I know my sheep” and the solemn saying to the virgins “I know you not,” and to the

false professors “I never knew you” in Matt. xxv.7 and vii.23.

Besser remarks that “I am known of mine” is a sharp rebuke to those doubters who in voluntary humility refuse to be sure of their salvation.

15.—[*As the Father knows me, even so I know the Father.*] I believe this sentence ought to be read in close connection with the last verse, and without any full stop between. There is nothing in the Greek against this view. The sense would then be: “I know my sheep and am known of mine, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father.” The meaning will then be that the mutual knowledge of Christ and His sheep is like the mutual knowledge of the Father and the Son—a knowledge so high, so deep, so intimate, so ineffable, that no words can fully convey it. The full nature of that knowledge which the First Person of the Trinity has of the Second and the Second has of the First, is something far beyond finite man’s understanding. It is, in short, a deep mystery. Yet the mutual knowledge and communion of Christ and believers is something so deep and wonderful that it can only be compared, though at a vast distance, to that which exists between the Father and the Son.

To understand this knowledge a little, we should read carefully the language used in Proverbs viii.22-30.

[*And I lay down my life for the sheep.*] Our Lord, to show how truly He is the Good Shepherd, declares that like a good shepherd He not

only knows all His sheep, but lays down His life for them. By using the present tense He seems to say, “I am doing it. I am just about to do it. I came into the world to do it.” This can only refer to His own atoning death on the cross, the great propitiation He was about to make by shedding His life blood. It was the highest proof of love. “Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” (John xv.13.) Taken alone and by itself, this sentence undoubtedly contains the doctrine of particular redemption. It declares that Christ “lays down His life for the sheep.” That He does so in a special sense I think none can deny. The “sheep” alone, or true believers, obtain any saving benefit from His death. But to argue from this text that in no sense and in no way did Christ die for any beside His “sheep” is to say what seems to me to contradict Scripture. The plain truth is that the extent of redemption is not the leading subject of this verse. Our Lord is saying what He does for His sheep; He loves them so that He dies for them. But it does not follow that we are to conclude that His death was not meant to influence and affect the position of all mankind. I venture to refer the reader to my own notes, in this commentary, on John i.28; iii.16, and vi.32 for a full discussion of the subject.

Both here and in the 11th verse, I do not think the Greek word translated “for” should be pressed too far, as if it necessarily implied the doctrine of substitution or the vicariousness of Christ’s death. That doctrine is a blessed and glorious truth, and is taught plainly and unmistakably elsewhere. Here, however, we are reading parabolic figurative language, and I doubt whether it is quite fair to explain it as meaning more than “on account of” or “in behalf of” the

sheep. Of course it comes to the same thing at last. If the Shepherd did not die, the sheep would die. But I do not quite think "vicariousness," at any rate, is the primary idea of the sentence.

I fully agree with Parkhurst, at the same time, that the Greek expression for "dying for anyone" in Rom. v.6-8 never has any signification other than that of "rescuing the life of another at the expense of our own." 16.—[*And other sheep…this fold.*] In this sentence our Lord declares plainly the approaching conversion of the Gentiles. The sheep He specially died for were not merely the few believing Jews, but the elect Gentiles also. They are the "other sheep;" "this fold" means the Jewish Church. It reads as though He would show the real measure and size of His flock. It was one much larger than the Jewish nation, of which the scribes and Pharisees were so proud.

Let it be noted here that our Lord uses the present tense. The heathen sheep were as yet heathen and not brought in; yet He says, "I have them." They were already given to Him in the eternal counsels, and foreknown from the beginning of the world. So it was with the Corinthians before their conversion: "I have much people in this city." (Acts xviii.10.) Augustine remarks: "They were yet without, among the Gentiles, predestinated, not yet gathered in. These He knew who had predestinated them. He knew who had come to redeem them with the shedding of His own blood. He saw them who did not yet see Him. He knew them who yet believed not in Him."

[*Them also I must bring*.] Our Lord here declares that it is necessary for Him, in order to fulfill the prophecies of the Old Testament and to carry out the great purpose of His coming, to bring in and add to His flock other believers beside the Jewish sheep. “It is part of my work, office, and mission to gather them out from the heathen by the preaching of my Apostles.”

The prediction here made was contrary to Jewish prejudices. The Jews thought they alone were God’s flock and favored people. Even the Apostles afterwards were slow to remember these words. Hutcheson observes: “Christ Himself is chief in bringing in His elect, whatever instruments He employs; and He is at pains to seek them and gain their consent, as being bound in the covenant of redemption to present all that are given Him blameless before the Father.” Saints are “the called of Jesus Christ.” (Rom. i.6.)

[*They shall hear my voice*.] This is a prophecy and a promise combined. It was a prophecy that the elect among the heathen, however unlikely it might appear, would hear Christ’s voice speaking to them in the Gospel preached; and hearing, would believe and obey. It was a promise that would encourage His Apostles to preach to the heathen: “They will listen, and be converted, and follow Me.” It is a saying that was wonderfully forgotten by the Apostles afterwards. They were backward to bring in the other sheep after their Master left the world. It is a sentence that should nerve and cheer the missionary. Christ has said it: “The sheep who are scattered among the heathen will hear.”

The text “He who hears you hears Me” (Luke x.16), is the Divine explanation of the expression “hear my voice.”

[*And there shall be one fold and one shepherd.*] This sentence contains one word which ought to have been differently translated. It ought to be, as Tyndale renders it, “one *flock* and one shepherd.” There is an evident difference. Christ’s universal Church is a mighty company of which the members may be found in many different visible churches, or ecclesiastical “folds;” but it composes only one “flock.” There is only “One Holy Catholic Church” which is the blessed company of all faithful people; but there are many various visible churches.

The sentence is true of all believers now. Though differing in various points, such as government or ceremonies, true believers are all sheep of one flock, and all look up to one Savior and Shepherd. It will be more completely fulfilled at Christ’s second coming. Then shall be exhibited to the world one glorious Church under one glorious Head. In the view of this promise, unity with all true Christians should be sought and striven for my every true sheep.

Gualter remarks that there never has been, or can be, more than one Holy Catholic Church, and unless we belong to it we cannot be saved. And he warns us against the pernicious error that all men shall get to heaven if sincere, whether they belong to the Holy Catholic Church or not. Chemnitius observes that we must be careful not to make this

one Church either too narrow or too broad. We make it too narrow when, like the Jews and the Papists, we exclude any believer who does not belong to our particular fold. We make it too broad when we include every professing Christian, whether he hears Christ's voice or not. It is a flock of "sheep."

In every other place in the New Testament the word here wrongly translated "fold" is rendered "flock." (Matt. xxvi.31, Luke ii.8, 1 Cor. ix.7.) The word "fold" before us is evidently an oversight of our translators.

17.—[*Therefore does my Father love me, etc.*] This is a deep and mysterious verse, like all verses which speak of the relation between the First and Second Persons of the Trinity. We must be content to admire and believe what we cannot fully understand. When, as in John v.20 and here, our Lord speaks of "the Father loving the Son," we must remember that He is using language borrowed from earthly affection to express the mind of one Person of the Trinity towards another, and accordingly we must interpret it reverently. Yet we may surely gather from this verse that our Lord's coming into this world to lay down His life for the sheep by dying on the cross, and to take it again for their justification by rising again from the dead, was a transaction viewed with infinite complacency and approbation by God the Father. "I am about to die, and after death to rise again. My so doing, however strange it may seem to you Pharisees, is the very thing which my Father in heaven approves, and for which He specially loves Me." It is like the Father's words "In whom I am well

pleased," and St. Paul's "Wherefore God has highly exalted Him" (Matt. iii.17, Phil. ii.29), and Isaiah's "I will divide Him a portion with the great, because He has poured out His soul unto death" (Is. liii.12). Our Lord, by mentioning His resurrection, seems to remind His hearers that in one respect He was different from the best of shepherds. They might lay down their lives; but then there would be an end of them. He meant to lay down His life, but after that to take it again. He would not only die for His people but also rise again.

Guyse thinks the true meaning is: "I cheerfully lay down my life for the expiation of my sheep's offenses, in order that I may rise again for their justification."
Let it be noted here that there is no part of Christ's work for His people that God the Father is said to regard with such special complacency as His dying for them. No wonder that ministers ought to make Christ crucified the principal subject of their teaching.

Gualter thinks these words were specially meant to prevent the offense of the ignominious death of Christ on the cross. That death, whatever the Jews might think, was part of Christ's plan and commission, and one reason why the Father loved Him.

Brentius thinks that there is here a reference to the story of Abraham offering Isaac, when the words were used, "Because thou hast done this thing, and not withheld thy son, therefore blessing I will bless thee." (Gen. xxii.)

Hengstenberg remarks that the Father's love "was the very opposite of that wrath of God, of which the Jews regarded Christ's death as a proof and sign." They thought that God had forsaken Him and given Him up to be crucified in displeasure, when in reality God was well pleased.

18.—[*No man takes…of myself.*] In this sentence our Lord teaches that His own death was entirely voluntary. An earthly shepherd may die for his flock, but against his own will. The great Shepherd of believers made His soul an offering for sin of His own free will. He was not obliged or compelled to do it by superior force. No one could have taken away His life had He not been willing to lay it down; but He laid it down "of Himself" because He had covenanted to offer Himself as a propitiation for our sins. His own love to sinners, and not the power of the Jews or Pontius Pilate's soldiers, was the cause of His death. The word "I" is inserted emphatically in the Greek. "I myself" lay down my life "of myself."

Henry observes: "Christ could, when He pleased, slip the knot of union between body and soul, and without any act of violence done to Himself could disengage them from each other. Having voluntarily taken up a body, He could voluntarily lay it down again. This appeared when He cried with a loud voice and 'gave up' the ghost."

[I have power…down…take it again.] Our Lord here amplifies His last statement and magnifies His own Divine nature by declaring that He has full power to lay down His life when He pleases and to

take it again when He pleases. This last point deserves special notice. Our Lord teaches that His resurrection, as well as His death, was in His own power. When our Lord rose again, He was not passive and raised by the power of another only, but rose by His own Divine power. It is noteworthy that the resurrection of our Lord in some places is attributed to His Father's act (as Acts ii.24-32), once, at least, to the Holy Spirit (as 1 Pet. iii.18), and here and in John ii.19 to Christ Himself. All leads to the same great conclusion—that the resurrection of our Lord, as well as every part of His mediatorial work, was an act in which all three Persons of the Trinity concurred and cooperated.

Hutcheson observes that if Christ had power to take life again when He pleased, "so He can put a period to the sufferings of His own when He pleases, without any help of their crooked ways."

[*This…received from my Father*.] Chrysostom, and most other commentators, apply these words strictly to the great work which our Lord has just declared He had power to do: viz., to lay down His life and to take it again. "This is part of the commission I received from my Father on coming into the world, and one of the works He gave Me to do." No doubt this is good exposition and good divinity. Yet I am rather inclined to think that our Lord's words refer to the whole doctrine which He had just been declaring to the Jews: viz., His office as a Shepherd, His being the true Shepherd, His laying down His life for the sheep and taking it again, His having other sheep who were to be brought into the fold, His final purpose to exhibit to the

world one flock and one Shepherd. Of all this truth He says, "I received this doctrine in charge from my Father to proclaim to the world, and I now declare it to you Pharisees." I suspect that both here and elsewhere the word "commandment" has a wide, deep meaning and points to that solemn and mysterious truth—the entire unity of the Father and the Son in the work of redemption—to which John frequently refers: "I am in the Father, and the Father in Me. The *words* that I speak to you, I speak not of myself, but the Father who dwells in Me, He does the works." (John xiv.10.) "The Father gave Me a commandment what I should speak." (John xii.49.) Our Lord's object in these often repeated expressions seems to be to keep the Jews in mind that He was not a mere human Prophet, but one who was God as well as man, and in whom, both speaking and working, the Father always dwelt. When our Lord speaks of "receiving a commandment," we must take care that we do not suppose the expression implies any inferiority of the Second Person of the Trinity to the First. We must reverently remember the everlasting covenant between Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, for the salvation of man, and interpret "commandment" as meaning a part of the charge or commission with which the Second Person, Christ, was sent into the world— to carry out the purposes of the Eternal Trinity.

JOHN 10:19-30

Another sharp division took place among the Jewish authorities because of these words. Many of them were saying, "He is possessed

by a demon and has lost his mind. Why do you listen to him?" Others said, "These are not the words of someone possessed by a demon. A demon cannot cause the blind to see, can it?"

Then came the feast of the Dedication in Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple area in Solomon's Portico. The Jewish religious leaders surrounded him and said, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." Jesus replied, "I told you and you do not believe. The deeds I do in my Father's name testify about me. But you refuse to believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish; no one will snatch them from my hand. My Father who has given them to me is greater than all, and no one can snatch them from my Father's hand. The Father and I are one."

We should notice, first, in this passage, ***what strife's and controversies our Lord occasioned when He was on earth.*** We read that "there was a division among the Jews for His sayings"—and that "many of them said He has a devil, and is mad," while others took an opposite view. It may seem strange, at first sight, that He who came to preach peace between God and man should be the cause of contention. But herein were His own words literally fulfilled — "I came not to send peace, but a sword." (Matt. 10:34.) *The fault was not in Christ or His doctrine, but in the carnal mind of His Jewish hearers.*

Let us never be surprised if we see the same thing in our own day. Human nature never changes. So long as the heart of man is without grace, so long we must expect to see it dislike the Gospel of Christ. Just as oil and water, acids and alkalies, cannot combine, so in the same way unconverted people cannot really like the people of God. “The carnal mind is enmity against God.” “The natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God.” (Rom. 8:7; 1 Cor. 2:14)

The servant of Christ must think it no strange thing if he goes through the same experience as his Master. He will often find his ways and opinions in religion the cause of strife in his own family. He will have to endure ridicule, harsh words, and petty persecution, from the children of this world. He may even discover that he is thought a fool or a madman on account of his Christianity. Let none of these things move him. The thought that he is a partaker of the afflictions of Christ ought to steel him against every trial. “If they have called the Master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household.” (Matt. 10:25)

One thing, at any rate, should never be forgotten. We must not allow ourselves to think the worse of religion because of the strife’s and dissensions to which it gives rise. Whatever men may please to say, it is human nature, and not religion, which is to blame. We do not blame the glorious sun because its rays draw forth noxious vapors from the marsh. We must not find fault with the glorious Gospel, if it stirs up men’s corruptions, and causes the “thoughts of many hearts to be revealed.” (Luke 2:35.)

We should notice, secondly, ***the name which Christ gives to true Christians.*** He uses a figurative expression which, like all His language, is full of deep meaning. He calls them, "My sheep."

The word "sheep," no doubt, points to something in the character and ways of true Christians. It would be easy to show that weakness, helplessness, harmlessness, usefulness, are all points of resemblance between the sheep and the believer. But the leading idea in our Lord's mind was the entire dependence of the sheep upon its Shepherd. Just as sheep hear the voice of their own shepherd, and follow him, so do believers follow Christ. By faith they listen to His call. By faith they submit themselves to His guidance. By faith they lean on Him, and commit their souls implicitly to His direction. The ways of a shepherd and his sheep are a most useful illustration of the relation between Christ and the true Christian.

The expression, "My sheep," points to the close connection that exists between Christ and believers. They are His by gift from the Father, His by purchase, His by calling and choice, and His by their own consent and heart-submission. In the highest sense they are Christ's property; and just as a man feels a special interest in that which he has bought at a great price and made his own, so does the Lord Jesus feel a peculiar interest in His people.

Expressions like these should be carefully treasured up in the memories of true Christians. They will be found cheering and heart-strengthening in days of trial. The world may see no beauty in the ways of a godly man, and may often pour contempt on him. But he

who knows that he is one of Christ's sheep has no cause to be ashamed. He has within him a "well of water springing up into everlasting life." (John 4:14.)

We should notice, lastly, in this passage, ***the vast privileges which the Lord Jesus Christ bestows on true Christians.*** He uses words about them of singular richness and strength. "I know them. I give unto them eternal life. They shall never perish—neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." This sentence is like the cluster of grapes which came from Eshcol. A stronger form of speech perhaps can hardly be found in the whole range of the Bible.

Christ "knows" his people with a special knowledge of approbation, interest, and affection. By the world around them they are comparatively unknown, uncared for, or despised. But they are never forgotten or overlooked by Christ.

Christ "gives" his people "eternal life." He bestows on them freely a right and title to heaven, pardoning their many sins, and clothing them with a perfect righteousness. Money, and health, and worldly prosperity He often wisely withholds from them. But He never fails to give them grace, peace, and glory.

Christ declares that His people "shall never perish." Weak as they are they shall all be saved. Not one of them shall be lost and cast away—not one of them shall miss heaven. If they err, they shall be brought back; if they fall, they shall be raised. The enemies of their

souls may be strong and mighty, but their Savior is mightier; and none shall pluck them out of their Savior's hands.

A promise like this deserves the closest attention. If words mean anything, it contains that great doctrine, the perseverance, or continuance in grace, of true believers. That doctrine is literally hated by worldly people. No doubt, like every other truth of Scripture, it is liable to be abused. But the words of Christ are too plain to be evaded. He has said it, and He will make it good— "My sheep shall never perish."

Whatever men may please to say against this doctrine, it is one which God's children ought to hold fast, and defend with all their might. To all who feel within them the workings of the Holy Spirit, it is a doctrine full of encouragement and consolation. Once inside the ark, they shall never be cast out. Once converted and joined to Christ, they shall never be cut off from His mystical body. Hypocrites and false professors shall doubtless make shipwreck forever, unless they repent. But true "sheep" shall never be confounded. Christ has said it, and Christ cannot lie— "they shall never perish."

Would we get the benefit of this glorious promise? Let us take care that we belong to Christ's flock. Let us hear His voice and follow Him. The man who, under a real sense of sin, flees to Christ and trusts in Him, is one of those who shall never be plucked out of Christ's hand.

Technical Notes:

19. Therefore there was a division again among the Jews because of these sayings. 20. And many of them said, He has a devil and is mad. Why do ye listen to him? 21. Others said, These are not the words of one who has a devil. Can a devil open the eyes of the blind? 22. Now it was the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem, and it was winter, 23. And Jesus walked in the temple, in Solomon's porch. 24. Then the Jews surrounded him and said to him, How long do you keep us in doubt? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly. 25. Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me. 26. But ye do not believe, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said to you. 27. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. 28. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand. 29. My Father, who gave *them* to me, is greater than all; and no *man* is able to pluck *them* out of my Father's hand. 30. I and *my* Father are one.

19.—[*Therefore…division again, etc.*] This is the third time that we find our Lord's words causing a division, or schism, among His hearers. Each time it occurred at Jerusalem. At chap. 7:43 it was among "the people;" at 9:16, among the "Pharisees." Here it was among the "Jews," an expression in St. John's Gospel generally applied to our Lord's enemies among the Pharisees.

The special "sayings" which caused the division were probably our

Lord's words about His Father, His claim to have power to lay down His life and take it again, and His proclamation of Himself as "the Good Shepherd." Words like these from a Galilean teacher of humble appearance were likely to offend the proud Pharisees of Jerusalem.
That our Lord would be a cause of division—a stone of stumbling to some, and set for the rise and fall of many in Israel—had been foretold by Isaiah 8:14 and by Simeon, Luke 2:34. Divisions among His hearers are therefore no proof that He was not the Messiah, and divisions among hearers of the Gospel in the present day are no argument against the truth of the Gospel. Even now the same Gospel is a savor of death to some and of lie to others, calls forth love in some and hatred in others. The same fire which melts wax hardens clay.

20.—[*And many of them said, etc.*] This is the sort of profane remark which we can well imagine many unconverted hearers of our Lord making: "What! A humble Galilean like this man call Himself the only good Shepherd, and talk of having power to lay down His life and take it again, and of having a special commission from His Father in heaven. He must surely have a devil or be out of his senses. He must be mad. Why do you waste your time in listening to Him?" Thousands talk in this way now against Christ's servants. They would probably have talked in the same way against their Master!

Let us note what blasphemous and slanderous things were said against our Lord. True Christians, and specially ministers, must never wonder if they are treated in the same manner.

21.—[*Others said, These are not, etc.*] Here we see that there were some among the Pharisees who took our Lord's part and were disposed to believe on Him. Such probably were Gamaliel, Nicodemus, and Joseph of Arimathea. They defend Him on the score both of His words and works. As to His words, they argue that no one of common sense could call such words as our Lord had just spoken the words of a man possessed with a devil. The devil and his agents do not desire to do good to man or to glorify God. The calm, solemn, loving, God-glorifying language just used was the very opposite to that which might be expected from a demoniac. As to His works, they argue that no devil, however powerful, could work such a miracle as to open the eyes of the blind. Some wonderful works the devil might do, but no such work as that of giving sight. It is worth noticing that the Jews held that to give sight to the blind was one of the special miracles which Messiah would work. "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened" (Isa. 35:5). The Greek word here rendered "words" is not the same as that rendered "sayings" in verse 19. Webster says it is a stronger expression and means "the whole transaction" as well as the things said. The word "blind" here in the Greek is plural and would be more accurately translated "of blind persons."

22.—[*Now it was the Feast of Dedication.*] This Jewish festival is one which is nowhere else mentioned in the Bible. It is, however, a matter of history, according to most commentators, that it was first appointed by Judas Maccabeus to commemorate the purging of the temple and the rebuilding of the altar after the Syrians were driven

out. Its appointment is recorded in the Apocrypha in 1 Maccabees 4:52-59. The Apocryphal books are, no doubt, uninspired. But there is no reason to question the accuracy of their historical statements. The passage before us is often referred to as proving that our Lord recognized, and tacitly sanctioned, a man-made and man-appointed festival. "The Church has power to decree rites and ceremonies," and so long as it ordains nothing against God's Word, its appointments deserve respect. At any rate, our Lord did not denounce the Feast of Dedication or refuse to be present at it. Chrysostom and others think that the Feast of Dedication was appointed to commemorate the rebuilding of the temple after the Babylonian captivity in Ezra's time (Ezra 6:16).

Some think that it was to commemorate the dedication of Solomon's temple (2 Chr. 7:9). There is, however, no warrant for this view. Pearce remarks that John alone of all the evangelists records our Lord's attendance at four of the great feasts of the Jews: viz., Passover (John 2:13), Pentecost (5:1), Tabernacles (7:2), and dedication here. [*In Jerusalem*.] Many think that an interval of time comes in between this verse and the preceding one. I doubt it. From chapter 7:2, where we are told it was the Feast of Tabernacles, the narrative runs on at first sight continuously; yet if we look at John 9:35, there must have been one break of time. If there was any interval before the verse we are now considering, I think it must have been very short. The following verses show that the discourse about "the sheep" must have been fresh in the minds of the Jews, as our Lord refers to it as a thing they could remember. He would hardly

have done so if the interval had been very long. At any rate, I can see no proof that our Lord left Jerusalem between the discourse about "the sheep" and the verse before us.

[*It was winter*.] This shows that three months had passed since the miracle of healing the blind man, which was worked at the Feast of Tabernacles. That was about Michaelmas, by our reckoning. The season of winter is mentioned here to explain why our Lord walked under cover, "in a porch." The mention of winter goes far to prove that the Feast of Dedication must have been appointed in commemoration of the work of Judas Maccabeus. Solomon's dedication was at Michaelmas, in the seventh month; Ezra's about Easter, in the first month.

23.—[*And Jesus walked*.] This must either mean that "it was the habit" of our Lord to walk, or else that "one day Jesus was walking." The latter seems the more likely sense.
[*In the temple*.] This means in the outer court, or area around the temple, which was a common place of resort for the Jews, and especially upon festivals. Here teachers expounded, and discussions on religious questions seem to have taken place. Here probably our Lord was found "among the doctors" hearing and asking questions when he was twelve years old (Luke 2:4-6).

[*In Solomon's porch*.] The word "porch" rather means what we should call a veranda, or colonnade. It was one of those long covered walks under a roof supported by columns, on one side at least, which

the inhabitants of hot countries appear to find absolutely needful. Singularly enough, one sect of heathen philosophers at Athens was called “Stoics” from its meeting in a place called “Stoa,” here rendered a porch; while another was called “Peripatetics” from its habit of “walking about” during its discussions, just as our Lord did in this verse. The cloisters of a cathedral or abbey, perhaps, are most like the building called a “porch” here. Josephus says this porch was one of the buildings which remained partly undestroyed from Solomon’s temple.

Tacitus expressly mentions it as one of the defenses of the temple at the siege of Jerusalem.

24.—[*Then the Jews…said to him.*] This would be more literally rendered “encircled Him,” or surrounded Him in a circle.

[*How long do you keep us in doubt.*] This would be more literally rendered, “Until what time do You lift up our souls? How long do You keep us in a state of suspense and excitement?” Elsner thinks it means, “How long do You take away our life (as at verse eighteen), or kill us with doubt and perplexity?” Suicer, Schleusner, and Parkhurst, however, prefer “hold us in suspense.” (See marginal reading in Luke 12:29).

[*If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.*] The Jews had no right to say they had not sufficient evidence that our Lord was the Christ. But nothing is more common with hardened and wicked men than to

allege a lack of evidence and to pretend willingness to believe if only more evidence was supplied.

"Plainly" here does not mean in plain language and easily understood, but openly, boldly, unreservedly, and without mystery. 25.—[*Jesus answered…ye do not believe.*] To what does our Lord refer here? I believe He refers to what He had said in the fifth chapter before the Sanhedrim, and in the eighth chapter in the discourse beginning, "I am the Light," etc. The words would be more literally rendered, "I have told you, and ye do not believe."

Henry observes: "The Jews pretended that they only *doubted*, but Christ tells them that they did not believe. Skepticism in religion is no better than downright infidelity."
Hengstenberg thinks that "I have told you" especially refers to our Lord's recent proclamation of Himself as "the Good Shepherd." To a Jewish ear it would sound like a claim to be the Messiah.

[*The works…bear witness of me.*] Here, as in other places, our Lord appeals to His miracles as the grand proof that He was the Christ. (Compare 3:2, 5:36, 7:31, and 9:33,34; also Acts 2:22.) It is as though our Lord said, "The miracles I have done are more than sufficient proof that I am the Messiah. Nothing can account for them but the fact that I am the promised Messiah."

We should observe how our Lord says, "The works which I do in my Father's name;" that is, by my Father's commission and

appointment, and as His Messenger. Here, as elsewhere, He carefully reminds the Jews that He does not act independently of His Father, but in entire harmony and unity with Him. His works were works which "the Father gave Him to finish." We should observe how our Lord always and confidently appeals to the evidence of His miracles. Those who try to depreciate and sneer at miracles seem to forget how often they are brought forward as good witnesses in the Bible. This, in fact, is their great object and purpose. They were not so much meant to convert as to prove that He who did them was from God and deserved attention.

"Of Me" would be more literally rendered "concerning or about Me."
26.—[*But ye do not believe…not of my sheep.*] I doubt whether the word "because" does not put a meaning on this verse which it hardly bears in the Greek. It should rather be, "Ye neither believe my words nor my works, FOR ye are not in the number of my sheep. If ye were my sheep, ye would believe; faith is one of their marks." Not being Christ's sheep was not the CAUSE of the unbelief of the Jews, but their unbelief was the EVIDENCE that they were not Christ's sheep.

Tyndale and others think that the full stop should be after the word "sheep," and that "as I said to you" should be taken with the following verse; but I see no necessity for this.

[*As I said to you.*] I think these words refer to two sayings of our Lord which He had used in speaking to the Jews. One is in chapter 8:47: "He who is of God hears God's words. Ye therefore hear them

not because ye are not of God." The other is at the third and fourth verses of this chapter:
"The sheep hear His voice;" "the sheep follow Him, for they know His voice."

27.—[*My sheep hear my voice, etc.*] Having told the Pharisees that they were not His sheep, our Lord goes on to describe the character of those who were His sheep; that is, of His own true people and servants. This He does in a verse of singular richness and fullness. Every word is instructive. Christ calls His people "sheep." He does so because they are in themselves singularly helpless and dependent on their Shepherd; because comparatively they are the most harmless and helpless of animals; because even at their best they are weak, foolish, and liable to go astray. Chemnitius gives thirteen distinct reasons why believers are called sheep. They are too long to quote here, but will repay the examination of anyone who has access to his commentary.

He calls them "My sheep." They are His by God the Father's gift; His by redemption and purchase; His by calling and choosing; His by feeding, keeping, and preserving; and His by their own consent and will. They are His peculiar property.

He says, "They hear my voice." By this He means that they listen to His invitation when He calls them to repent, believe, and come to Him. This supposes that Christ first speaks, and then they hear. Grace begins the work. They, through grace, obey His calling and

willingly do as He bids them. The ears of unconverted people are deaf to Christ's call, but true Christians hear and obey.

He says, "I know them." This means that He knows them with a special knowledge of approbation, complacency, love, and interest. (See the word "know" in Psalm 1:6, 31:8, and Amos 3:2.) Of course He knows the secrets of all men's hearts and all about all wicked people. But He knows with a peculiar knowledge those who are His people. The world knows them not, but Christ knows and care for them (1 John 3:1).

He says, "They follow Me." This means that His people, like sheep, obey, trust, and walk in the steps of their Divine Master. They follow Him in holy obedience to His commandments; they follow Him in striving to copy His example; and they follow Him in trusting implicitly His providential leadings—going where He would have them go and taking cheerfully all He appoints for them.

It is almost needless to remark that this description belongs to none but true Christians. It did not belong to the Pharisees to whom our Lord spoke. It does not belong to multitudes of baptized people in our own day. Luther says: "The sheep, though the most simple creature, is superior to all animals in this: that he soon hears his shepherd's voice and will follow no other. Also he is clever enough to hang entirely on his shepherd and to seek help from him alone. He cannot help himself, nor find pasture for himself, nor heal himself, nor guard against wolves, but depends wholly and solely on the help

of another."

In the Greek of this verse, there is a nice distinction between the number of the verb "hear" and the verb "follow" which the English language cannot convey. It is as though our Lord had said, "My sheep are a body which *"hears"* my voice" (in the singular), and of which the individual members *"follow"* Me (in the plural).

28.—[*And I give, etc.*] From the character of Christ's sheep the Good Shepherd goes on to describe their privileges. He gives to them eternal life, the precious gift of pardon and grace in this world and a life of glory in the world to come. He says, "I give," in the present tense. Eternal life is the present possession of every believer. He declares that they shall never perish or be lost unto all eternity, and that no one shall ever pluck them out of His hand.

We have here the divinity and dignity of our Lord Jesus Christ. None but one who was very God could say "I give eternal life." No Apostle ever said so. We have here the perpetuity of grace in believers and the certainty that they shall never be cast away. How anyone can deny this doctrine, as the Arminians do, and say that a true believer may fall away and be lost in the face of this text, it is hard to understand. It is my own deliberate opinion that it would be almost impossible to imagine words in which a saint's "perseverance" could be more strongly asserted. We have here a distinct promise that "no one"—man, angel, devil, or spirit—shall be able to tear from Christ His sheep. The Greek literally is not "any man," but "any person" or

"any one." The doctrine plainly taught in this text may be called "Calvinism" by some, and "of dangerous tendency" by others. The only question we ought to ask is whether it is scriptural. The simplest answer to that question is that the words of the text, in their plain and obvious meaning, cannot be honestly interpreted in any other way. To thrust in, as some enemies of perseverance do, the qualifying clause— "They shall never perish *so long as they continue my sheep"*—is adding to Scripture and taking unwarrantable liberties with Christ's words.

So, again, Whitby's interpretation, "They shall never perish through any defect on my part," though they may fall away by their own fault, is a sad instance of unfair handling of Scripture.

Let it only be remembered that the character of those who shall never perish is most distinctly and carefully laid down in this place. It is those who hear Christ's voice and follow Him, who alone are "sheep." It is "His sheep" and His sheep alone who shall never perish. The man who boasts that he shall never be cast away and never perish while he is living in sin, is a miserable self-deceiver. It is the perseverance of *saints*, and not of sinners and wicked people, that is promised here. Doubtless the doctrine of the text may be misused and abused, like every other good thing. But to the humble penitent believer, who puts his trust in Christ, it is one of the most glorious and comfortable truths of the Gospel. Those who dislike it would do well to study the 17th Article of the Church of England and Hooker's sermon on the "Perpetuity of Faith in the Elect." Let it be noted that

the last clause of the text plainly implies that many will try to pluck away Christians from Christ and draw them back to sin. To feel that something is always "plucking" and "pulling" at us must never surprise believers. There is a devil, and saints will always feel and find his presence.

Let it be noted that to *be* safe in Christ's hand, and so never to perish, is one thing; but to *feel* that we are safe is quite another. Many true believers *are* safe who do not realize and *feel* it. Musculus observes that our Lord does not say in this verse that His sheep shall lose nothing in this world. They may lose property, liberty, and life for Christ's sake. But their souls cannot be lost. He also observes that all Christ's sheep are in Christ's hand. *His* hand holding them, and not *their* hand holding Him, is the true secret of their safety and perseverance.

The importance of the doctrine contained in this text cannot, in my judgment, be overrated. The Christian who does not hold it is a great loser. It is one of the grand elements of the good news of the Gospel. It is a safeguard against much unsound doctrine. Perseverance can never be reconciled with baptismal regeneration. The advocates of an extravagant view of baptismal grace, it may be observed, always have a special dislike to the doctrine of this text.

Hengstenberg wisely remarks: "It is cold consolation to say, 'If so long as they remain my sheep, they are secure and shall never perish.' The whole strength of our soul's desire is for a guarantee

against *ourselves*. That there is such a guarantee is here assured to us."

29.—[*My Father who gave, etc.*] Our Lord here strengthens the mighty promise just made by declaring that His sheep are not His only but His Father's. His Father gave them to Him. "My Father," He declares, "is almighty, greater than all, the possessor of all power. No one is able to pluck *anything* out of my Father's hand, so that my sheep's safety is doubly secured." Let it be noted that the word "them" in the last clause of our English version is not in the Greek.

It is probable that both in this verse and the preceding one there is a latent reference to the case of the man whom the Pharisees had lately "cast out" of the church, or excommunicated. Our Lord seems to say, "You may cut off and tear away from your outward church membership whom you will, but you can never pluck away any of my people from Me." Let it be noted here that the Father is just as much interested in the safety of believers as the Son. To leave out of sight the Father's love in our zeal for the glory of Christ, is very poor theology. Melancthon dwells on this promise in a passage of singular beauty. He specially dwells on it as a ground of comfort against the invasion of Europe by the Turks, the persecution of truth by so-called Christian princes, and the furious strife's and controversies of teachers of the Church. There is a Church which nothing can harm. Calvin remarks: "Our salvation is certain because it is in the hand of God. Our faith is weak, and we are prone to waver. But God, who has taken us under His protection, is sufficiently powerful to scatter with

a breath all the power of our adversaries. It is of great importance to turn our eyes to this."

Musculus observes that it is said the Father "gave" the sheep to Me, in the past tense. Believers were given to Christ before the foundation of the world.

30.—[*I and the Father are one.*] In order to explain how it is that the Father should take as much interest in the sheep as the Son, our Lord here declares in the plainest and most explicit terms the deep truth of the essential unity between Himself and His Father. Literally translated the sentence is, "I and my Father are one thing." By this, of course, He did not mean that His Father and He were one Person. This would overthrow the doctrine of the Trinity. But He did mean, "I and my eternal Father, though two distinct Persons, and not to be confounded, are yet one in essence, nature, dignity, power, will, and operation. Hence, in the matter of securing the safety of my sheep, what I do my Father does likewise. I do not act independently of Him."

This is one of those deep and mysterious texts which we must be content to receive and believe without attempting to pry too curiously into its contents. The cautious and exact words of the Athanasian Creed should be often remembered: "Neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the substance. There is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost; but the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy

Ghost is all one, the glory equal, the majesty co-eternal." Augustine remarks that this text alone overthrows both the doctrine of the Sabellians and the Arians. It silences the Sabellians, who say there is only one Person in the Godhead, by speaking of two distinct Persons. It silences the Arians, who say the Son is inferior to the Father, by saying that Father and Son are "one."

Let it be noted that the doctrine of this verse is precisely the same that our Lord had maintained on a former occasion (in the fifth chapter) before the Sanhedrim. There it was expounded fully; here it is briefly asserted. And the interpretation put on His meaning, in both cases by the Jews, was exactly the same. They regarded it as a claim to be regarded as "God." The practical use of the text to a believer in Christ is far too much overlooked. It shows the entire childlike confidence with which such a one may look at the Father. "He who has the Son has the Father." The remark is only too true, that while some ignorantly talk of the Father as if there was no Christ crucified, others with no less ignorance talk of Christ crucified as if there was no God and Father of Christ, who loved the world! Chrysostom observes: "That you may not suppose that Christ is weak and the sheep are in safety through the Father's power, He adds, 'I and the Father are one.' As though He had said, 'I did not assert that on account of the Father no man plucks them away, as though I were too weak to keep the sheep. For I and the Father are one.' He speaks here with reference to power, for concerning this was all His discourse; and if the power be the same, it is clear that the essence is also."

Ecolampadius remarks: “He does not say we are one in the masculine gender, that is, one person; but he says one in the neuter gender, that is, one in nature, power, and majesty. If you were to say one Person, you would take away both and leave neither Father nor Son.”

Maldonatus quotes a saying of Augustine’s, “that it is invariably found in Scripture that things called ‘one’ are things of the same nature.” It is fair to admit that Erasmus, Calvin, and a few others think the “oneness” here only means unity of consent and will. But the vast majority of commentators think otherwise, and the Jews evidently thought so also.

JOHN 10:31-42

The Jewish authorities picked up rocks again to stone him to death. Jesus said to them, “I have shown you many good deeds from the Father. For which one of them are you going to stone me?” The Jewish authorities replied, “We are not going to stone you for a good deed but for blasphemy, because you, a man, are claiming to be God.”

Jesus answered, “Is it not written in your law, ‘I said, you are gods’? If those people to whom the word of God came were called ‘gods’ (and the scripture cannot be broken), do you say about the one whom the Father set apart and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God’? If I do not

perform the deeds of my Father, do not believe me. But if I do them, even if you do not believe me, believe the deeds, so that you may come to know and understand that I am in the Father and the Father is in me." Then they attempted again to seize him, but he escaped their clutches.

Jesus went back across the Jordan River again to the place where John had been baptizing at an earlier time, and he stayed there. Many came to him and began to say, "John performed no miraculous sign, but everything John said about this man was true!" And many believed in Jesus there.

We should observe, in these verses, ***the extreme wickedness of human nature.*** The unbelieving Jews at Jerusalem was neither moved by our Lord's miracles, nor by His preaching. They were determined not to receive Him as their Messiah. Once more it is written that "they took up stones to stone Him."

Our Lord had done the Jews no injury. He was no robber, murderer, or rebel against the law of the land. He was one whose whole life was love, and who "went about doing good." (Acts 10:38.) There was no fault or inconsistency in His character. There was no crime that could be laid to His charge. So perfect and spotless a man had never walked on the face of this earth. But yet the Jews hated Him, and thirsted for His blood. How true are the words of Scripture — "They hated Him without a cause." (John 15:25.) How just the remark of an old divine— "Unconverted men would kill God Himself if they could only get at Him."

The true Christian has surely no right to wonder if he meets with the same kind of treatment as our blessed Lord. In fact, the more like he is to his Master, and the more holy and spiritual his life, the more probable is it that he will have to endure hatred and persecution. Let him not suppose that any degree of consistency will deliver him from this cross. It is not his faults, but his graces, which call forth the enmity of men. The world hates to see anything of God's image. The children of the world are vexed and pierced in conscience when they see others better than themselves. Why did Cain hate his brother Abel, and slay him? "Because," says John, "his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous." (1 John 3:12.) Why did the Jews hate Christ? Because He exposed their sins and false doctrines; and they knew in their own hearts that he was right and they were wrong. "The world," said our Lord, "hates Me, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil." (John 7:7.) Let Christians make up their minds to drink the same cup, and let them drink it patiently and without surprise. There is One in heaven who said, "If the world hate you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you." (John 15:18.) Let them remember this and take courage. The time is short. We are traveling on towards a day when all shall be set right, and every man shall receive according to his works. "There is an end—and our expectation shall not be cut off." (Prov. 23:18.)

We should observe, secondly, in these verses, ***the high honor that Jesus Christ puts on the Holy Scriptures.*** We find Him using a text out of the Psalms as an argument against His enemies, in which the whole point lies in the single word "gods." And then having

quoted the text, He lays down the great principle, “the Scripture cannot be broken.” It is as though He said, “Wherever the Scripture speaks plainly on any subject, there can be no more question about it. The cause is settled and decided. Every jot and tittle of Scripture is true, and must be received as conclusive.”

The principle here laid down by our Lord is one of vast importance. Let us grasp it firmly, and never let it go. Let us maintain boldly the complete inspiration of every word of the original Hebrew and Greek Scriptures. Let us believe that not only every *book* of the Bible, but every *chapter*—and not only every chapter, but every *verse*, and not only every verse, but every *word*, was originally given by inspiration of God. Inspiration, we must never shrink from asserting, extends not only to the thoughts and ideas of Scripture, but to the least words.

The principle before us, no doubt, is rudely assaulted in the present day. Let no Christian’s heart fail because of these assaults. Let us stand our ground manfully, and defend the principle of *plenary inspiration* as we would the pupil of our eye. There are difficulties in Scripture, we need not shrink from conceding, things hard to explain, hard to reconcile, and hard to understand. But in almost all these difficulties, the fault, we may justly suspect, is not so much in Scripture as in our own weak minds. In all cases we may well be content to wait for more light, and to believe that all shall be made clear at last. One thing we may rest assured is very certain—if the difficulties of plenary inspiration are to be numbered by

thousands, the difficulties of any other view of inspiration are to be numbered by tens of thousands. The wisest course is to walk in the old path—the path of faith and humility; and say, "I cannot give up a single word of my Bible. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God. The Scripture cannot be broken."

We should observe, lastly, in these verses, ***the importance which our Lord Jesus Christ attaches to His miracles.*** He appeals to them as the best evidence of His own Divine mission. He bids the Jews look at them, and deny them if they can. "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though you believe not Me, believe the works."

The mighty miracles which our Lord performed during the three years of His earthly ministry are probably not considered as much as they ought to be in the present day. These miracles were not few in number. *Forty times* and more we read in the Gospels of His doing things entirely out of the ordinary course of nature—healing sick people in a moment, raising the dead with a word, casting out devils, calming winds and waves in an instant, walking on the water as on solid ground. These miracles were not all done in private among friends. Many of them were wrought in the most public manner, under the eyes of unfriendly witnesses. We are so familiar with these things that we are apt to forget the mighty lesson they teach. They teach that He who worked these miracles must be nothing less than very God. They stamp His doctrines and precepts with the mark of Divine authority. He only who created all things at the beginning

could suspend the laws of creation at His will. He who could suspend the laws of creation must be One who ought to be thoroughly believed and implicitly obeyed. To reject One who confirmed His mission by such mighty works is the height of madness and folly.

Hundreds of unbelieving men, no doubt, in every age, have tried to pour contempt on Christ's miracles, and to deny that they were ever worked at all. But they labor in vain. Proofs upon proofs exist that our Lord's ministry was accompanied by miracles; and that this was acknowledged by those who lived in our Lord's time. Objectors of this sort would do well to take up the one single miracle of our Lord's resurrection from the dead, and disprove it if they can. If they cannot disprove that, they ought, as honest men, to confess that miracles are possible. And then, if their hearts are truly humble, they ought to admit that He whose mission was confirmed by such evidence must have been the Son of God.

Let us thank God, as we turn from this passage, that Christianity has such abundant evidence that it is a religion from God. Whether we appeal to the internal evidence of the Bible, or to the lives of the first Christians, or to prophecy, or to miracles; or to history, we get one and the same answer. All say with one voice, "Jesus is the Son of God, and believers have life through His name."

Technical Notes:

31. Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him. 32. Jesus answered them, Many good works I have shown you

from my Father. For which of those works do ye stone me? 33. The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we do not stone you, but for blasphemy, and because you, being a man, make yourself God. 34. Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? 35. If he called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the scripture cannot be broken), 36. Say ye of him, whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world, You blaspheme, because I said, I am the Son of God? 37. If I do not the works of my Father, do not believe me; 38. but if I do, though you do not believe me, believe the works, that ye may know and believe that the Father *is* in me, and I in him. 39. Therefore they sought again to take him, but he escaped out of their hand. 40. And went away again beyond Jordan to the place where John at first baptized, and there he abode. 41. And many came to him and said, John did no miracle, but all things that John spoke about this man were true. 42. And many believed in him there.

31.—[*The the Jews…to stone him.*] The conduct of the Jews is just the same as it was when our Lord said "Before Abraham was I am" (John 8:59). They regarded His words as blasphemy and proceeded to take the law into their own hands, as they did in Stephen's case, and to inflict the punishment due to blasphemy. (See Lev. 24:14-16.) "He who blasphemes the name of the Lord, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him". (So Num. 15:36, 1 Kings 21:13.) The Jews, of course, had no power to put any

man to death, being under the dominion of the Romans, and if they did stone anyone it would have been a sudden tumultuary proceeding, or act of lynch-law.

Let it be noted that the Greek word for “took up” here is not the same that is used at 8:59. Here it rather means “they carried.” Parkhurst thinks this implies the great size of the stones they brought. No doubt the stones used in stoning to death were not pebbles, but large stones. Yet I rather incline to think that it shows that they had to carry stones from some little distance for their murderous purpose. We can hardly suppose there were suitable stones lying about within an old finished building like Solomon’s porch, though there might be stones at a little distance, on account of the repairs of the temple.

Augustine remarks, “Behold the Jews understood what Arians do not understand.”

32.—[*Jesus answered them, Many good works, etc.*] Our Lord here appeals to the many miracles He had publicly wrought before the Jews in discharging His commission as sent by the Father to be the Messiah, all good and excellent works in which none could find any fault, and He asks whether they proposed to stone Him for any of them. They had often asked for signs and proofs of His being the Messiah. Well, He had wrought many such signs. Did they really mean to kill Him for His works? He had gone about only doing good. Did they intend to stone Him for this? The expression “I have shown” is curious, and we should have expected rather “I have worked.” It probably means, “I have publicly exhibited before your

eyes and not in a corner, but in such a manner as to court the fullest public observation, many wonderful proofs of my Messiahship." (Compare John 2:18: "What sign showest Thou?") So St. Paul says that "God shall in His own time show the appearing of Jesus Christ" (1 Tim. 6:15). The expression is probably a Hebraism. (Compare Psalm 4:6, 60:3, 71:20, and Exod. 7:9.)

The expression "from my Father" points to the great truth continually brought forward by our Lord in this Gospel: viz., that all His works as well as words were given to Him by the Father, to be worked and spoken in the world, and ought therefore to be held in special reverence. Hengstenberg observes that the expression "many good works" evidently supposes that John knew of many other miracles which he does not record, and that many had been done at Jerusalem beside the few that are recorded.

[*For which...stone Me?*] This could be literally rendered, "On account of which work of all these are you stoning Me?" Some, as Gualter and Tholuck, have thought that there is a slight tinge of sarcasm about the question. "Is it so that you are actually going to stone Me for good actions? Are not men generally stoned for evil doings?" Yet this seems an unlikely idea and is needless. Is not the meaning made clear by simply inverting the order of words? "For what work or action are you going to stone Me? Justice requires that criminals should be punished for doing evil works, but all the many wonderful works I have done among you have been good and not evil. You surely will not stone Me for any of these. Reason and your

laws teach that this would be wrong. It is not, therefore, for my works and life that you are going to stone Me. I challenge you to prove that I have done evil. Which of you convicts Me of sin?" Taken in this view, the verse is simply a strong assertion made by our Lord of His own entire innocence of any crime for which He could be stoned. Hutcheson thinks that "some stones were already cast at Christ, and therefore He says, Do you stone Me?" Yet this seems needless. The present tense here implies only, "Are ye on the point of stoning Me?"

33.—[*The Jews answered, etc.*] Our Lord's confident challenge, as in chapter 8:46, seems to have been found unanswerable by the Jews. They could not prove any evil work against Him. They therefore reply that they do not propose to stone Him for His *works*, but for having spoken blasphemous *words*. The precise nature of the blasphemy, they say, is that "being nothing but a mere man, He made Himself God, or spoke of Himself in such a way as showed that He claimed to be God." This is a very remarkable verse. It is like chapter 5:18: "The Jews sought to kill Him, because He said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God." It shows clearly that the Jews in our Lord's time attached a much higher and deeper sense to our Lord's frequently used language about God being His Father than modern readers are apt to do. In fact, they regarded it as nothing less than a claim to equality with God. Modern Arians and Socinians, who profess to see nothing in our Lord's Sonship but a higher degree of that relationship which exists between all believers and God, would do well to mark this verse. What they say they

cannot see, the Jews who hated Christ could see, This "cotemporaneous exposition," to use a legal phrase, of our Lord's words deserves great respect and carries with it great weight and authority. As a man our Lord was a Jew, educated and trained among Jews. Common sense points out that the Jews who lived in His times were more likely to put a correct sense on His words than modern Socinians.

Gualter observes how frequently wicked men and persecutors of Christ's people have affected a zeal for God's glory and pretended a horror of blasphemy. The accusers of Naboth and Stephen are examples; so also the Spanish Inquisition.

A. Clarke observes "that had the Jews, as many called Christians do, understood our Lord only to mean that by being 'one with the Father' He had unity of *sentiment* with the Father, they would not have attempted to treat Him as a blasphemer. In this sense Abraham, Isaac, Moses, David, and all the prophets were one with God. But what irritated them was that they understood him to speak of unity of *nature*. Therefore they say, 'You make Yourself God.'"

34.—[*Jesus answered them, etc.*] Our Lord's defense of His own language against the charge of blasphemy is very remarkable. It is an argument from a lesser to a greater. If princes, who are merely men, are called gods, He who was the eternal Son of the Father could surely not be justly chargeable with blasphemy for calling Himself the "Son of God." The expression "your law" means the Scriptures.

Sometimes our Lord speaks of two great divisions into which the Jews divided the Old Testament: the law and the prophets (Matt. 22:40). The "law" then included not the books of Moses only, but everything down to the end of the Song of Solomon. Sometimes He distributes the Scriptures into three parts: the law, the psalms, and the prophets (Luke 22:44). Here He uses one word for all the Old Testament and calls it "the law." By saying "your law," our Lord reminds His hearers that He appeals to *their own* honored sacred writings. The expression "I said ye are gods" is drawn from the 82nd Psalm, in which Asaph is speaking of princes and rulers and their position and duties. Their elevation above other men was so great, and their consequent responsibility for the state of nations so great, that compared to other men it might be said "You are as gods." A King is called "the Lord's anointed (2 Sam. 1:14). So "Ye judge not for man, but for the Lord" (2 Chr. 19:6). Princes and magistrates are ordained of God, derive their power from God, act for God, and stand between the people and God. Hence, in a sense, they are called "gods." Those who wish to see this subject fully worked out will see it in Hall and Swinnock's Exposition of the 82nd Psalm.

We should observe how our Lord appeals to Scripture as the judge of controversy: "Is it not written?" A plain text ought to settle every disputed point. He might have argued; he simply quotes a text. By so doing He puts peculiar honor on Scripture.

It is worth noticing that the Hebrew word rendered "judges" in our version of Exodus 22:8,9 might have been rendered "gods."

(Compare Exodus 22:28 and 21:6.)

35.—[*If he called them gods.*] Here our Lord proceeds to show what was the edge and point of His argument. All turned on the use of the single word "gods" in one single verse of a Psalm. It is not very clear what governs the word we render "called" in this sentence. Our translators evidently thought it meant "God." But why should it not refer direct to "your law" in the last verse: "If your own book of the law in a Psalm has called certain persons gods." Chrysostom observes: "What He says is of this kind: 'If those who have received this honor by grace are not found fault with for calling themselves gods, how can He deserve to be rebuked who has this by nature?'" Theophylact says the same.

[*To whom the Word of God came.*] This is a rather difficult expression. Some, as Bullinger and Burgon, think that it refers to the commission from God which rulers receive: "they are persons to whom God has spoken, and commanded them to rule for Him." Some, as Alford, think it simply means "if He called them gods, to whom God spoke in these passages." But it may justly be replied that it does not say "God spoke," but "There was the Word of God." Of the two views, the former seems best. The Greek is almost the same as that of Luke 3:2: "The word of God came to John," meaning a special commission.

Heinsius suggests that the sentence means "*against* whom the word of God was" spoken in the 82nd Psalm, that Psalm containing a

rebuke of princes. But this seems doubtful.
Pearce thinks that it means “with whom was the word of judgment?” and refers to the Septuagint version of 2 Chr. 19:6.

It deserves notice that it is never said of Christ Himself that the “Word of God came to Him.” He was above all other commissioned judges. [*And the Scripture cannot be broken*.] In this remarkable parenthesis our Lord reminds His Jewish hearers of their own acknowledged principle that the “Scripture cannot be annulled or broken.” That is, that everything which it says must be received reverently and unhesitatingly, and that not one jot or tittle of it ought to be disregarded. Every word of Scripture must be allowed its full weight and must neither be clipped, passed over, nor evaded. If the 82nd Psalm calls princes who are mere men “gods,” there cannot be any impropriety in applying the expression to persons commissioned by God. The expression may seem strange at first. Never mind, it is in the Scripture, and it must be right.

Few passages appear to me to prove so incontrovertibly the plenary inspiration and divine authority of every word in the original text of the Bible. The whole point of our Lord’s argument hinges on the divine authority of a single word. Was that word in the Psalms? Then it justified the application of the expression “gods” to men. Scripture cannot be broken. The theories of those who say that the writers of the Bible were inspired but not all their writings, or that the ideas of the Bible were inspired but not all the language in which these ideas are conveyed, appear to be totally irreconcilable with our Lord’s use

of the sentence before us. There is no other standing ground, I believe, about inspiration excepting the principle that it is plenary and reaches to every syllable. Once leaving that ground, we are plunged into a sea of uncertainties. Like the carefully composed language of wills, settlements, and conveyances, every word of the Bible must be held sacred and not a single flaw or slip of the pen admitted.

Let it be noted that the literal meaning of the word rendered "broken" is "loosed" or "untied." Gill observes: "This is a Jewish way of speaking, much used in the Talmud. When one doctor has produced an argument, another says, 'It may be broken,' or objected to, or refuted. But the Scripture cannot be broken." Hengstenberg says: "It cannot be doubted that the Scripture is broken by those who assert that the Psalms breathe a spirit of revenge, that Solomon's song is a common Oriental love song, that there are in the Prophets predictions never to be fulfilled, or by those who deny the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch."

36.—[*Say ye of Him, etc.*] Our Lord in this verse presses home on the Jews the force of the expression in the 82nd Psalm. "If princes are called gods, do you mean to call Me, whom the Father sanctified from eternity to be Messiah and sent into the world in due time, a blasphemer because I have said I am the Son of God?"
"Say ye of *Him*" would have been better rendered, "Say ye of *Me*." The Greek leaves it open.

The expression “sent into the world” means that *mission* of Christ’s to be the Savior, which took place when He became incarnate and came among us in the form of a man. He was the Father’s “sent One,” the “Apostle” of our profession. (See Heb. 3:1, John 3:17, and 1 John 4:14.) He who was so “sanctified” and “sent” might well speak of Himself as the Son of God and equal with God.

Calvin remarks: “There is a sanctification that is common to all believers. But here Christ claims for Himself something far more excellent, namely, that He alone was separated from all others, that the grace of the Spirit and majesty of God might be displayed in Him; as He said formerly, “Him has God the Father sealed” (John 6:27).

37.—[*If I do not the works, etc.*] Here our Lord once more appeals to the evidence of His miracles and challenges attention to them. “I do not ask you to believe that I am the Son of God and the Messiah if I do not prove it by my works. If I did no miracles, you might be justified in not believing Me to be the Messiah, and in calling Me a blasphemer.” Here again we should observe how our Lord calls His miracles the “works of His Father.” They were works given to Him by His Father to do. They were such works as none but God the Father could possibly perform. Gualter observes what a proof this verse indirectly supplies of the nullity of the Pope’s claim to be God’s vice-gerent and head of the Church. What are his works? What evidence of a divine mission does he give? Musculus also remarks that the Pope’s high claims and great sounding titles are useless so long as his works contradict his words. 38.—[*But if I do, etc.*] Our Lord here

concludes His reply to the Jews:

"If I do the works of my Father, then, though ye may not be convinced by what I say, be convinced by what I do. Though ye resist the evidence of my words, yield to the evidence of my works. In this way learn to know and believe that I and my Father are indeed one, He in Me and I in Him, and that in claiming to be His Son I speak no blasphemy." We should note here, as elsewhere, our Lord's strong and repeated appeals to the evidence of His miracles. He sent to John the Baptist and desired him to mark His works, if he would know whether He was "the coming One." "Go and tell John what ye have seen and heard; the blind receive their sight," etc. (Matt. 11:4). Just so He argues here. Let us note the close and intimate union that exists between the First and Second Persons of the Trinity: "The Father is in Me, and I in Him." Such language can never be reconciled with the views of Socinians. "By these words," says Bloomfield, "our Lord meant communion of mind and equality of power. It is plain that the Jews clearly understood that He claimed and ascribed to Himself the attributes of Godhead and made Himself equal with the Father."

Chrysostom remarks that our Lord seems to say, "I am nothing different from what the Father is, so however as that I remain Son; and the Father is nothing different from what I am, so however as that He remains Father. He who knows Me has known the Father, and learned the Son."

39.—[*Therefore they sought again to take Him.*] Here we see the utter insensibility of our Lord's hardened enemies to any argument or appeal to their reason. In spite of what He had now said, they showed a determination to go on with their wicked designs, and tried again to lay violent hands on Him. Nothing seems to harden the heart and take away the reasoning faculty so completely as obstinate resistance to plain evidence.

[*But He escaped out of their hand.*] This would be literally rendered, "And He came forth out of their hand," as in Luke 4:30 and 8:59 of this Gospel. The escape seems to have been effected by miracle. A restraint was put on the hands of His enemies, and their eyes were temporarily blinded.

40.—[And went away…where John…baptized.] I know not to what the expression "again" can refer here except to the time when our Lord began His ministry by coming to be baptized by John at Bethabara beyond Jordan (see John 1:28). I do not find that He had been there again during the three years of His ministry. There is something touching and instructive in the choice of this place. Where our Lord began His ministry, there He resolved to end it. It would remind His Jewish hearers that John the Baptist had repeatedly proclaimed Him as "the Lamb of God," and they could not deny John's divine mission. It would remind His own disciples of the first lessons which they learned under their Master's teaching and recall old things to their minds. It is good to revisit old scenes sometimes. The flesh needs many helps to memory.

Henry makes the quaint remark: “The Bishop of our souls came not to be fixed in one See, but to go about from place to place doing good.”

[*And there He abode.*] Our Lord must evidently have remained here between three and four months—from the feast of dedication to the last Passover, when he was crucified; that is, from winter to Easter. Where precisely and with whom He stayed we do not know. It must have been a solemn and quiet season to Himself and His disciples.

Musculus observes that this verse teaches us that it is lawful to regard localities in which great spiritual works have been done, with more than ordinary reverence and affection.

41.—[*And many came to him, etc.*] Our Lord’s choice of an abode seems to have had an excellent effect. It was not so far from Jerusalem but that “many” could come to hear Him, as they did to hear John the Baptist. There, on the very spot where John, now no longer living, used to preach to enormous crowds and baptize, they could not help being reminded of John’s repeated testimony to Christ. And the consequence was that they said, “John, whom we believe to have been a prophet, certainly did no miracles, but everything that he said of this Jesus as the coming One, whose shoes he was not worthy to wear, was true. We believed John to be a prophet sent of God. Much more ought this man to be believed.” Let

us observe that John's preaching was not forgotten after his death, though it seemed to produce little effect during his life. Herod could cut short his ministry, put him in prison, and have him beheaded; but he could not prevent his words being remembered. Sermons never die. The Word of God is not bound (2 Tim. 2:9).

We never read of any miracle or mighty work being performed by John. He was only "a voice." Like all other ministers, he had one great work—to preach and prepare the way for Christ. To do this is more lasting work than to perform miracles, though it does not make so much outward show. Besser remarks: "John is a type of every servant of Christ. The gift of working miracles, imparted but to few, we can do without if only one hearer testify of us, 'All things that they spoke of Christ are true.' If only our preaching, though it may last longer than three years, is sealed as the true witness of Christ through the experience of those who believe and are saved, then we shall have done miracles enough."

42.—[*And many believed in him there.*] Whether this was head belief—the faith of intellectual conviction, or heart belief—the faith of reception of Christ as a Savior, we are left in doubt. We have the same expression in 8:30 and 11:45. Yet we need not doubt that very many Jews, both here and elsewhere, were secretly convinced of our Lord's Messiahship, and after His resurrection came forward and confessed their faith and were baptized. It seems highly probable that this accounts for the great number converted at once on the day of Pentecost and at other times. (See Acts 4:4, 6:7, and 21:20.) The

way had been prepared in their hearts long before by our Lord's own preaching, though at the time they had not courage to avow it. The good that is done by preaching is not always seen immediately. Our Lord sowed, and His Apostles reaped, all over Palestine. Chrysostom has a long and curious comment on this verse. He draws from it the great advantage of privacy and quiet to the soul, and the benefit that women especially derive from living a retired life at home compared to men. His exhortation to wives to use their advantages in this respect, and to help their husbands' souls, is very singular when we consider the times in which he wrote and the state of society at Constantinople. "Nothing," he says, "is more powerful than a pious and sensible woman to bring a man into proper order and to mold his soul as she will."

Henry observes: "Where the preaching of repentance has had success, there the preaching of reconciliation and Gospel grace is most likely to be prosperous. Where John has been acceptable, Jesus will not be unacceptable. The jubilee trumpet sounds sweetest in the ears of those who in the day of atonement have afflicted their souls for sin."

John – Chap. 11

JOHN 11:1-6

The Death of Lazarus

Now a certain man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village where Mary and her sister Martha lived. (Now it was Mary who anointed the Lord with perfumed oil and wiped his feet dry with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.) So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, look, the one you love is sick." When Jesus heard this, he said, "This sickness will not lead to death, but to God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." (Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.) So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he remained in the place where he was for two more days.

The chapter we have now begun is one of the most remarkable in the New Testament. For grandeur and simplicity, for pathos and solemnity, nothing was ever written like it. It describes a miracle which is not recorded in the other Gospels—the raising of Lazarus from the dead. Nowhere shall we find such convincing proofs of our Lord's Divine power. As God, He makes the grave itself yield up its tenants. Nowhere shall we find such striking illustrations of our Lord's ability to sympathize with His people. As man, He can be touched with the feelings of our infirmities. Such a miracle well

became the end of such a ministry. It was fit and right that the victory of Bethany should closely precede the crucifixion at Calvary.

These verses teach us that ***true Christians may be sick and ill as well as others.*** We read that Lazarus of Bethany was one "whom Jesus loved," and a brother of two well-known holy women. Yet Lazarus was sick, even unto death! The Lord Jesus, who had power over all diseases, could no doubt have prevented this illness, if He had thought fit. But He did not do so. He allowed Lazarus to be sick, and in pain, and weary, and to languish and suffer like any other man.

The lesson is one which ought to be deeply engraved in our memories. Living in a world full of disease and death, we are sure to need it some day. Sickness, in the very nature of things, can never be anything but trying to flesh and blood. Our bodies and souls are strangely linked together, and that which vexes and weakens the body can hardly fail to vex the mind and soul. But sickness, we must always remember, is no sign that God is displeased with us; no, more, it is generally sent for the good of our souls. It tends to draw our affections away from this world, and to direct them to things above. It sends us to our Bibles, and teaches us to pray better. It helps to prove our faith and patience, and shows us the real value of our hope in Christ. It reminds us that we are not to live always, and tunes and trains our hearts for our great change. Then let us be patient and cheerful when we are laid aside by illness. Let us believe

that the Lord Jesus loves us when we are sick no less than when we are well.

These verses teach us, secondly, that ***Jesus Christ is the Christian's best Friend in the time of need.*** We read that when Lazarus was sick, his sisters at once sent to Jesus, and laid the matter before Him. Beautiful, touching, and simple was the message they sent. They did not ask Him to come at once, or to work a miracle, and command the disease to depart. They only said, "Lord, he whom You love is sick," and left the matter there, in the full belief that He would do what was best. Here was the true faith and humility of saints! Here was gracious submission of will!

The servants of Christ, in every age and climate, will do well to follow this excellent example. No doubt when those whom we love are sick, we are to use diligently every reasonable means for their recovery. We must spare no pains to obtain the best medical advice. We must assist nature in every possible manner to fight a good fight against its enemy. But in all our doing, we must never forget that the best and ablest and wisest Helper is in heaven, at God's right hand. Like afflicted Job our first action must be to fall on our knees and worship. Like Hezekiah, we must spread our matters before the Lord. Like the holy sisters at Bethany, we must send up a prayer to Christ. Let us not forget, in the hurry and excitement of our feelings, that none can help like Him, and that He is merciful, loving, and gracious.

These verses teach us, thirdly, that ***Christ loves all who are true Christians.*** We read that "Jesus loved Martha, and her sister,

and Lazarus." The characters of these three good people seem to have been somewhat different. Of Martha, we are told in a certain place, that she was "anxious and troubled about many things," while Mary "sat at Jesus' feet, and heard His word." Of Lazarus we are told nothing distinctive at all. Yet all these were loved by the Lord Jesus. They all belonged to His family, and He loved them all.

We must carefully bear this in mind in forming our estimate of Christians. We must never forget that there are varieties in character, and that the grace of God does not cast all believers into one and the same mold. Admitting fully that the foundations of Christian character are always the same, and that all God's children repent, believe, are holy, prayerful, and Scripture-loving, we must make allowances for wide varieties in their temperaments and habits of mind. We must not undervalue others because they are not exactly like ourselves. The flowers in a garden may differ widely, and yet the gardener feels interest in all. The children of a family may be curiously unlike one another, and yet the parents care for all. It is just so with the Church of Christ. There are degrees of grace, and varieties of grace; but the least, the weakest, the feeblest disciples are all loved by the Lord Jesus. Then let no believer's heart fail because of his infirmities; and, above all, let no believer dare to despise and undervalue a brother.

These verses teach us, lastly, that ***Christ knows best at what time to do anything for His people.*** We read that "when He had heard that Lazarus was sick, He abode two days still in the same

place where He was." In fact, He purposely delayed His journey, and did not come to Bethany until Lazarus had been four days in the grave. No doubt He knew well what was going on; but He never moved until the time came which He saw was best. For the sake of the Church and the world, for the good of friends and enemies, He kept away.

The children of God must constantly school their minds to learn the great lesson now before us. Nothing so helps us to bear patiently the trials of life as an abiding conviction of the perfect wisdom by which everything around us is managed. Let us try to believe not only that all that happens to us is well done, but that it is done in the best manner, by the right instrument, and at the right time. We are all naturally impatient in the day of trial. We are apt to say, like Moses, when beloved ones are sick, "Heal her now, Lord, we beseech you." (Num. 12:13.) We forget that Christ is too wise a Physician to make any mistakes. It is the duty of faith to say, "My times are in Your hand. Do with me as You will, how You will, what You will, and when You will. Not my will, but Your be done." The highest degree of faith is to be able to wait, sit still, and not complain.

Let us turn from the passage with a settled determination to trust Christ entirely with all the concerns of this world, both public and private. Let us believe that He by whom all things were made at first is He who is managing all with perfect wisdom. The affairs of kingdoms, families, and private individuals are all alike overruled by Him. He chooses all the portions of His people. When we are sick, it

is because He knows it to be for our good; when He delays coming to help us, it is for some wise reason. The hand that was nailed to the cross is too wise and loving to smite without a needs-be, or to keep us waiting for relief without a cause.

Technical Notes:

1. Now a certain *man* was sick, *named* Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. 2. It was *that* Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. 3. Therefore his sisters sent to him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom you love is sick. 4. When Jesus heard *that*, he said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified through it. 5. Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. 6. So, when he heard that he was sick, he stayed two more days in the same place where he was.

The raising of Lazarus, described in this chapter, is one of the most wonderful events recorded in the Gospels and demands more than ordinary attention. In no part of our Lord's history do we see Him so distinctly both man and God at the same time: man in sympathy, and God in power. Like each of the few incidents in our Lord's ministry related by St. John, it is placed before us with peculiar minuteness and particularity. The story is singularly rich in delicate, tender, and beautiful expressions. Before entering upon it, I venture to offer the

following preliminary remarks.

(a) The raising of Lazarus was manifestly intended to supply the Jews with one more incontrovertible proof that Jesus was the Christ of God, the promised Messiah. In the tenth chapter, at the Feast of Dedication, our Lord had been asked, “If You are the Christ, tell us plainly” (John 10:24). In reply He had distinctly appealed to His “works” as the best evidence of His Messiahship. He had deliberately challenged attention to those works as witnesses to His commission. And now, after a short interval, we find Him for the last time within two miles of Jerusalem, before many eyewitnesses, doing such a stupendous work of Divine power that a man might have thought any skeptic would have been silenced forever. After the raising of Lazarus, the Jews of Jerusalem, at any rate, could never say that they were left destitute of proofs of Christ’s Messiahship.

(b) The raising of Lazarus was meant to prepare the minds of the Jews for our Lord’s own resurrection. It took place between Christmas and Easter, and probably within two months of His own crucifixion. It proved incontrovertibly that a person dead four days could be raised again by Divine power, and that the restoration to life of a corpse was not an impossibility with God. I think it impossible not to see in this a latent design to prepare the minds of the Jews for our Lord’s own resurrection. At any rate, it paved the way for men believing the event to be not incredible. No one could say on Easter Sunday, when the grave of Jesus was found empty and the body of Jesus was gone, that His resurrection was an impossibility. The mere

fact that between winter and Easter in that very year a man dead four days had been restored to life within two miles of Jerusalem, could silence such remarks. Though improbable, it could not be called impossible.

(c) The raising of Lazarus is of all our Lord's miracles the one which is most thoroughly credible and supported by most incontrovertible evidence. The man who disbelieves it may as well say plainly that he does not believe anything in the New Testament and does not allow that a miracle is possible. Of course, there is no standing ground between denying the possibility of miracles and denying the existence of a creating God. If God made the world, He can surely change the course of nature at any time, if He thinks fit.
The famous skeptic, Spinosa, declared that if he could be persuaded of the truth of the miracle before us, he would forsake his own system and embrace Christianity. Yet it is extremely difficult to see what evidence of a fact a man can desire if he is not satisfied with the evidence that Lazarus really was raised from the dead. But, unhappily, none are so blind as those who will not see.

The following passage from Tittman, the German Commentator, is so sensible that I make no apology for giving it at length, though somewhat condensed. "The whole story," he says, "is of a nature calculated to exclude all suspicion of imposture and to confirm the truth of the miracle. A well-known person of Bethany, named Lazarus, falls sick in the absence of Jesus. His sisters send a message to Jesus announcing it; but while He is yet absent Lazarus dies, is

buried, and kept in the tomb for four days, during which Jesus is still absent. Martha, Mary, and all his friends are convinced of his death. Our Lord, while yet remaining in the place where He had been staying, tells His disciples in plain terms that He means to go to Bethany to raise Lazarus from the dead, that the glory of God may be illustrated and their faith confirmed. At our Lord's approach, Martha goes to meet Him and announces her brother's death, laments the absence of Jesus before the event took place, and yet expresses a faint hope that by some means Jesus might yet render help. Our Lord declares that her brother shall be raised again and assures her that He has the power of granting life to the dead. Mary approaches, accompanied by weeping friends from Jerusalem. Our Lord Himself is moved, and weeps, and goes to the sepulcher attended by a crowd. The stone is removed. The stench of the corpse is perceived. Our Lord, after pouring forth audible prayer to His Father, calls forth Lazarus from the grave in the hearing of all. The dead man obeys the call, comes forth to public view in the same dress that he was buried in, alive and well, and returns home without assistance. All persons present agree that Lazarus is raised to life and that a great miracle has been worked, though not all believe the person who worked it to be the Messiah. Some go away and tell the rulers at Jerusalem what Jesus has done. Even these do not doubt the truth of the fact. On the contrary, they confess that our Lord by His works is becoming every day more famous, and that He would probably be soon received as Messiah by the whole nation. And *therefore* the rulers at once take counsel how they may put to death both Jesus and Lazarus. The people, in the mean time, hearing of this prodigious transaction,

flock in multitudes to Bethany, partly to see Jesus and partly to view Lazarus. And the consequence is that, by and by, when our Lord comes to Jerusalem, the population goes forth in crowds to meet Him and show Him honor, and chiefly because of His work at Bethany. Now if all these circumstances do not establish the truth of the miracle, there is no truth in history." I only add the remark that when we consider the place, the time, the circumstances, and the singular publicity of the raising of Lazarus, it really seems to require more credulity to deny it than to believe it. It is the unbeliever, and not the believer, of this miracle who seems to me the credulous man. The difficulties of disbelieving it are far greater than those of believing it.

(d) The raising of Lazarus is not mentioned by Matthew, Mark, or Luke.

This has stumbled many persons. Yet the omission of the story is not hard to explain. Some have said that Matthew, Mark, and Luke purposely confine themselves to miracles done in Galilee. Some have said that when they wrote their Gospels Lazarus was yet alive, and the mention of his name would have endangered his safety. Some have said that it was thought better for the soul of Lazarus not to draw attention to him and surround him with an unhealthy celebrity till after he had left the world. In each and all of these reasons there is some weight. But the best and simplest explanation probably is that each Evangelist was inspired to record what God saw to be best and most suitable. No one, I suppose, imagines that the Evangelists

record a tenth part of our Lord's miracles, or that there were not other dead persons raised to life of whom we know nothing at all. "The dead are raised up" was our Lord's own message, at an early period of His ministry, to John the Baptist (Matt. 11:5). "If the works that Jesus did should be written every one," says John, "the world itself could not contain the books that should be written" (John 21:25). Let it suffice us to believe that each Evangelist was inspired to record exactly those events which were most likely to be profitable for the Church in studying his Gospel. Our Lord's ministry and sayings at Jerusalem were specially assigned to John. What wonder, then, that he was appointed to record the mighty miracle which took place within two miles of Jerusalem and proved incontrovertibly the guilt of the Jerusalem Jews in not receiving Jesus as the Messiah?

Bucer remarks that there is a continually ascending greatness and splendor in those miracles which John was inspired to record in his Gospel, and that the raising of Lazarus was the most illustrious of all. He also observes that our Lord specially chose the great feasts at Jerusalem as occasions of working miracles.

Chemnitius remarks: "There is not in the whole Evangelical narrative a more delightful history, and one more abundant both in doctrine and consolation, than this of the raising of Lazarus. It therefore ought to be studied most closely and minutely by all pious minds."

1.—[*Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus.*] These simple words are the keynote to the whole chapter. All turns on the bodily

illness of an obscure disciple of Christ. How much in the history of our lives hinges on little events, and especially on illnesses! Sickness is a sacred thing and one of God's great ordinances.

This illness took place between winter and Easter during the time that our Lord was at Bethabara, beyond Jordan. The nature of the disease we are not told, but from its rapid course, it is not unlikely that it was a fever, such as is common even now in Palestine.

This is the first time that Lazarus is mentioned in the New Testament, and we know nothing certain of his history. Some have conjectured that he was the young ruler who came to our Lord asking what he must do to obtain eternal life, and went away sorrowful at the time but was afterwards converted. Some have conjectured that he is the young man who followed our Lord when he was taken prisoner, mentioned by St. Mark, and fled away naked. But these are mere guesses, and there is really no solid foundation for them. That he was not a poor man, but comparatively rich, seems highly probable from the "feast" in John 12, the number of friends who came to mourn him, the alabaster box of precious ointment used by his sister, and the sepulcher hewn out of rock. But even this is only a conjecture. The name "Lazarus," no doubt, is a Greek form of the Hebrew name "Eleazar." It is worth noticing that it survives to this day in the modern name of Bethany: "El-Azarizeh." (See *Smith's Biblical Dictionary*.) [*Of Bethany, etc.*] The word "town" in this sentence would have been better translated "village" as it is in sixteen other texts in the New Testament. Bethany, in truth, was only a small

village a short two miles from Jerusalem on the east side, and its situation is perfectly known now. It lies on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives, on the road to Jericho. It is not once mentioned in the Old Testament and owes its fame to its being the place where Lazarus was raised, the place where our Lord rested at night just before the passion, the place from which He commenced His triumphant entry into Jerusalem, the place from which He finally ascended into heaven (Luke 24:10), and the dwelling-place of Mary and Martha. Let it be noted that the presence of God's elect children is the one thing which makes towns and countries famous in God's sight. The village of Martha and Mary is noticed, while Memphis and Thebes are not named in the New Testament. A cottage where there is grace is more pleasant in God's sight than a cathedral town where there is none. Let it be noted that this verse supplies internal evidence that St. John's Gospel was written long after the other historical parts of the New Testament. He speaks of Martha and Mary as persons whose names and history would be familiar to all Christian readers.

There is a peculiarity in the Greek of this verse which is hardly conveyed in our English translation. Literally it would be rendered, "Lazarus *from* Bethany, *out of* the town of Mary," etc. That "from" Bethany means exactly what we render it, is clear from Acts 17:13 and Heb. 13:24. But why "out of the village, or town of Mary" is said, is not quite so clear. It is open to the conjecture that it may mean "Lazarus was now a man of Bethany, but was originally out of the town of Mary and Martha:" viz., some other place. But this seems unlikely. Webster suggests that "out of" is added by way of emphasis

to show that Lazarus not only lived there, but that it was also the place of his nativity. Greswell says much the same. It is noteworthy that John 1:44 contains exactly the same form of expression about Philip and Bethsaida.

It is noteworthy that Mary is named before Martha, though Martha was evidently the older sister and head of the house. The reason, I suppose, is that Mary's name and character were better known of the two. Chemnitius thinks it possible that all Bethany belonged to Martha and Mary, and that this accounts for the consideration in which they were held and the number of mourners, etc. It is worth remembering that Bethany was a very small place. Yet Bethsaida was called the "town of Andrew and Peter" (John 1:44) and clearly did not belong to two poor fishermen.

2.—[*It was that Mary, etc.*] This verse is a parenthetical explanation inserted by St. John, after his manner, to make it certain what Mary he refers to as the sister of Lazarus. Christians knew there were in our Lord's time no less than four Maries: (1) The Virgin Mother of our Lord, (2) the wife of Cleophas, (3) Mary Magdalene, and (4) Mary the sister of Martha. To prevent, therefore, any mistake, John says "It was that Mary who anointed our Lord, whose brother Lazarus was dead." Simple as these words seem, there is a singular diversity of opinion as to the question who Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus was, and how many times our Lord was anointed.

(a) Some, as Chrysostom, Origen, and Chemnitius, maintain that the anointing took place three times: once in Luke 7 at the house of Simon the Pharisee; once in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper; and once in Bethany at the house of Martha and Mary. Others, as Ferus, while agreeing with Chrysostom that our Lord was anointed three times, think Mary was the woman who twice did it.

(b) Some maintain that our Lord was anointed twice: once at the Pharisee's house (in Luke 7), and once in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, where Martha and Mary and Lazarus lived for some cause which we do not know.

(c) Some, as Augustine, Bede, Toletus, Lightfoot, Maldonatus, Cornelius à Lapide, and Hengstenberg, maintain that our Lord was only once anointed, concluding that the narrative in Luke 7 was inserted out of chronological order, Simon the Pharisee and Simon the leper were the same person, and the one anointing took place at Bethany. Hengstenberg supports his theory very ingeniously, and boldly suggests: (1) that Simon the Pharisee was also called Simon the leper, (2) that he was the husband of Martha and not friendly to Christ, (3) that this accounts for Martha being more "careful and troubled" than Mary, (4) that this explains the presence of unfriendly Pharisees at the raising of Lazarus, (5) that Mary Magdalene was the same as Mary of Bethany, and (6) that Mary of Bethany was the "sinner" in Luke chapter 7.

Toletus frankly admits that the Romish Church holds that there was

only one anointing by one person, as it is plainly declared in one of her formularies: viz., the Breviary.

My own opinion is decidedly against the last of these views. I hold that there were *at least* two anointings: one at a comparatively early period of our Lord's ministry and another at the close of it; one in the house of an unfriendly Pharisee named Simon and another at the house of Simon the leper in Bethany; one by a woman who had been pre-eminently a sinner and another by Mary the sister of Martha, against whose moral character we know nothing. Why the house of Martha and Mary at Bethany is called the house of Simon the leper, I admit I cannot explain. I can only surmise that there was some relationship of which we know nothing. But this difficulty is nothing, in my eyes, compared to that of supposing (with Augustine and his followers) that the event described in Luke 7 took place just at the end of our Lord's ministry. There is strong internal evidence, to my mind, that it did not. Surely at the end of our Lord's ministry people would not have said with wonder, "Who is this who forgives sins?" Surely Mary would not be spoken of as a notorious "sinner."

On the other hand, if we hold the view that our Lord was only anointed twice—once at the house of Simon the Pharisee and once at Bethany, it must be frankly admitted that there is a very grave difficulty to be got over. That difficulty is that St. Mark says that a woman anointed our Lord "two days" before the Passover and poured the ointment on His "head," while John says He was anointed "six days before the Passover" and the ointment poured on His "feet." I do not see how this difficulty can be got over. If,

however, we hold that our Lord was anointed twice in the last week before He was crucified—once "six days" before and once "two days" before, and on each occasion by a woman—the whole thing is clear. That such a thing should be done more than once in those days does not strike me as any objection, considering the customs of the age. That our Lord's language in defense of the woman should on each occasion be the same is somewhat remarkable; but it is only a minor difficulty. On the whole, therefore, if I must give an opinion, I incline to agree with Chrysostom that there were three anointings. I also think there is something in the view of Ferus that Mary, sister of Lazarus, anointed our Lord twice—once six days before the Passover and once again two days before.

The use of the past participle in the verse before us seems to me no difficulty at all. It is, of course, true that at this time Mary had not anointed our Lord. But it is no less true that John evidently mentions it by anticipation, as a historical fact long past and well known in the Church when he wrote his Gospel, which his readers would understand. "It was that Mary who afterwards anointed Christ's feet." Let us note in this verse that the good deeds of all Christ's saints are carefully recorded in God's book of remembrance. Men are forgetful and ungrateful. Nothing done for Christ is ever forgotten. Let us note that sickness comes to Christ's people as well as to the wicked and worldly. Grace does not exempt us from trial. Sickness, on the contrary, is one of God's most useful instruments for sanctifying His saints and making them bear fruit of patience, and for showing the world that His people do not serve Him merely for

what they got of bodily ease and comfort in this life. “Job does not serve God for nothing,” was the devil’s sneer in the days when Job prospered. “Lazarus and his sisters make a good thing of their religion” might have been said if they had had no trials.

Brentius remarks, “God does not go away when bodily health goes away. Christ does not depart when life departs.”

3.—[*Therefore his sisters…saying*.] This is an example of what all Christians should do in trouble. Like Mary and Martha, we should first send a message to Christ. By prayer we can do it as really as they did. This is what Job did in his trouble; he first of all “worshiped” and said, “Blessed be the name of the Lord.” This is what Asa did not do; “He sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians.” (Job 1:20 and 2 Chr. 15:12.) Let it be noted that the Greek would be more literally rendered “the sisters” and not “his.” This message, from the expression “heard” in the next verse, would seem to have been a verbal and not a written one.

[*Lord…love is sick*.] This is a very touching and beautiful message. Its humble and respectful confidence is noteworthy: “He whom You love is sick.” They do not say, “Do something,” or “Heal him,” or “Come at once.” They simply spread the case before the Lord and leave Him to do what He thinks wisest and best. It is like Hezekiah spreading Sennacherib’s letter before God (2 Kings 19:14). The name given to Lazarus is noteworthy. They do not say “our brother” or “Your disciple,” or even “one who loves You,” but simply

“he whom You love,” one whom You have been pleased to treat graciously and kindly as a beloved friend. Christ’s love to us and not our love to Christ is the blessed truth which we ought continually to keep before our minds. His love never changes; ours is wavering and uncertain. The idea of some, that sending a message to Christ was a mark of weak faith in the two sisters, as if it showed doubt of Christ’s omniscience, is absurd. At this rate we might never pray, and might say there is no need because God knows all!

The word “behold” seems either to indicate something “sudden” in the illness of Lazarus, like Mark 2:21, and to be used adverbially, or else we must take it as an imperative verb. “Behold a case of great affliction; look upon it and see. He whom You love is sick.” This would be like Hezekiah’s prayer, “Open Your eyes and see” (2 Kings 19:16). We can hardly suppose that such disciples as Martha and Mary would think it a strange or surprising thing that a disciple of Christ should be ill; yet it is possible they did. However, Theophylact and Ferus suppose that “Behold implies a degree of wonder and surprise.”

Rupertus remarks on the message containing no request: “To a loving friend it was quite enough to announce the fact that Lazarus was sick.” Affectionate friends are not verbose or lengthy in descriptions. Brentius remarks that the message is like all true prayer: it does not consist in much speaking and fine long sentences. Musculus and Chemnitius both remark that when a man’s child falls into a well or pit, it is enough to tell a loving father the simple fact in the shortest manner possible, without dwelling on it verbosely and

rhetorically.

Rollock observes how useful it is to have praying sisters. Let us note that Christ's friends may be sick and ill just like other people. It is no proof that they are not beloved and specially preserved and cared for by God. "Whom the Lord loves He chastens." The purest gold is most in the fire; the most useful tools are oftenest ground. Epaphroditus and Timothy were both of weak health, and Paul could not prevent it.

4.—[*When Jesus heard that, he said.*] This verse seems to contain the reply which our Lord gave to the messenger. It was to him probably, though in the hearing of all His disciples, that He addressed the words which follow. It is as though He said, "Go, return to your mistress, and say as follows."

[*This sickness is not unto death, etc.*] The meaning of this sentence must evidently be taken with qualification. Our Lord did not mean that Lazarus would not in any sense die. It is as though He said, "The end of this sickness is not Lazarus' death and entire removal from this world, but generally the glory of God, and specially the glorifying of Me, His Son, which will be effected by my raising him again." Death's temporary victory over us is not complete till our bodies perish and return to dust. This was not allowed in the case of Lazarus, and hence death had not full dominion over him though he ceased to breathe and became unconscious. It is undeniable that there was something dark and mysterious about our Lord's message. He might, of course, have said plainly "Lazarus will die, and then I will raise him again." Yet there is a wonderful likeness between the

style of His message and many an unfulfilled prophecy. He said enough to excite hope and encourage faith and patience and prayer, but not enough to make Mary and Martha leave off praying and seeking God. And is not this exactly what we should feel about many an unfulfilled prediction of things to come? Men complain that prophecies are not so literally fulfilled as to exclude doubt and uncertainty. But they forget that God wisely permits a degree of uncertainty in order to keep us watching and praying. It is just what He did with Martha and Mary here. Let us remember that the final result of Lazarus' sickness is what we should desire as the result of any sickness that comes on us and our families—that God and Christ may be glorified in us. We cannot say, "It shall not end in death," but we can say "By God's help, it shall be for God's glory."

Chrysostom observes: "The expression *that* in this passage denotes not cause but consequence. The sickness happened from other causes. Christ used it for the glory of God."
Calvin remarks that God wishes to be honored by Christ being glorified.

"He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father" (John 5:23.)

5.—[*Now Jesus loved Martha, etc.*] This verse is meant to show that all the members of the family at Bethany were disciples of Jesus and beloved by Him, the brother as well as the sisters, and one sister as well as the other. "A happy family," Lampe remarks, "in which all

the members were objects of Christ's special love!"

We do not know where Lazarus was at the time when Jesus stopped at Martha's house in Luke 10. Perhaps he was not converted at that time. But this is only conjecture.

We are generally apt to undervalue the grace of Martha and overvalue that of Mary because of what happened when Jesus was at Martha's house before. Many foolish things are sometimes lightly said against mothers and mistresses as being Marthas— "careful and troubled about many things." Yet people should remember that different positions call out different phases of character. Mary certainly shines more brightly than Martha in the 10th of Luke; but it is a grave question whether Martha did not outshine her in the 11th of John. Active-minded Christians come out better under some circumstances; quiet-minded Christians in others. Our Lord teaches us here that He loves all who have grace, though their temperaments differ. Let us learn not to judge others rashly and not to form hasty estimates of Christians, until we have seen them under every sort of circumstances—in winter as well as summer, in dark days as well as bright. Let it be noted that the Greek word here rendered "loved" is not the same that is rendered "loves" in the third verse. The word describing the love of Jesus to the three in this verse is a word expressing a high, deep, excellent, and noble affection. It is the same as Mark 10:21 and John 3:16. The word used in the message of the sisters is a lower word, such as is used to describe the affection between a parent and child or husband and wife. It is the word used for "kiss" in Matt. 26:48, Mark 14:44, and Luke 22:47. It is very noticeable that this word is carefully avoided here, when the two

sisters are mentioned. The Holy Ghost inspired John to abstain even from the appearance of evil. What a lesson this ought to be to us!

Let it be noted that we see here an example of the broad distinction that ought to be drawn between Christ's general love of compassion which He feels towards all mankind, and His special love of election which He feels towards His own members. He loved all sinners to whom He came to preach the Gospel, and He wept over unbelieving Jerusalem. But He specially loved those who believed on Him.

6.—[*So, when He had heard, etc.*] It is impossible not to remark an intentional and most instructive connection between this verse and the preceding one. Our Lord loved the family of Bethany, all three of them; and yet when He heard Lazarus was sick, instead of hastening at once to Bethany to heal him, He quietly remained at Bethabara for two days, without moving.

We cannot doubt that this delay was intentional and of purpose, and it throws immense light on many of God's providential dealings with His people. We know that the delay caused immense mental pain and suffering to Martha and Mary, and obliged Lazarus to go through all the agony of death and the sorrow of parting. We can easily imagine the grief and suspense and perplexity in which the household at Bethany must have been kept for four days, when their loving Master did not appear; and we know that our Lord could have prevented it all, but did not. But we know also that if He had at once hurried to Bethany and healed Lazarus, or spoken a word from a

distance at Bethabara and commanded his healing (as in John 4:50), the mighty miracle of raising him would never have been wrought, and the wonderful sayings of Bethany would never have been spoken. In short, the pain of a few was permitted for the benefit of the whole Church of Christ. We have here the simplest and best account of the permission of evil and suffering. God could prevent it. God does not love to make His creatures suffer, but God sees there are lessons which mankind could not learn unless evil was permitted. Therefore, God permits it. The suffering of some tends to the good of many. "He who believes shall not make haste." We shall see at the last day that all was well done. Even the delays and long intervals which puzzle us in God's dealings are wisely ordered and are working for good. Like children, we are poor judges of half-finished work. Chrysostom says: "Christ tarried that none might be able to assert that He restored Lazarus when not yet dead, saying it was a lethargy, a fainting, a fit, but not death. He therefore tarried so long that corruption began." Calvin observes: "Let believers learn to suspend their desires if God does not stretch out His hand to help as soon as they think necessity requires. Whatever may be His delays, He never sleeps and never forgets His people." Quesnel remarks: "God permits evil, that He may make the power of His grace and the might of His love more conspicuous in the conversion of a sinner." Poole remarks: "We must not judge of Christ's love to us by His mere external dispensations of providence, nor judge that He does not love us because He does not presently come to our help at our time, and in such ways and methods as we think reasonable."

JOHN 11:7-16

Then after this, he said to his disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." The disciples replied, "Rabbi, the Jewish authorities were just now trying to stone you to death! Are you going there again?" Jesus replied, "Are there not twelve hours in a day? If anyone walks about in the daytime, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if anyone walks about in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him."

After he said this, he added, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep. But I am going there to awaken him." Then the disciples replied, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover." (Now Jesus had been talking about his death, but they thought he had been talking about real sleep.)

Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus has died, and I am glad for your sake that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." So Thomas (called Didymus) said to his fellow disciples, "Let us go too, so that we may die with him."

We should notice, in this passage, ***how mysterious are the ways in which Christ sometimes leads His people.*** We are told that when He talked of going back to Judea, His disciples were perplexed. It was the very place where the Jews had lately tried to stone their Master—to return there was to plunge into the midst of danger. These timid Galileans could not see the necessity or prudence of such a step. "Are You going there again?" they cried.

Things such as these are often going on around us. The servants of Christ are often placed in circumstances just as puzzling and perplexing as those of the disciples. They are led in ways of which they cannot see the purpose and object; they are called to fill positions from which they naturally shrink, and which they would never have chosen for themselves. Thousands in every age are continually learning this by their own experience. The path they are obliged to walk in is not the path of their own choice. At present they cannot see its usefulness or wisdom.

At times like these a Christian must call into exercise his faith and patience. He must believe that his Master knows best by what road His servant ought to travel, and that He is leading him, by the right way, to a city of habitation. He may rest assured that the circumstances in which be is placed are precisely those which are most likely to promote his graces and to check his besetting sins. He need not doubt that what he cannot see now, he will understand hereafter. He will find one day that there was wisdom in every step of his journey, though flesh and blood could not see it at the time. If the twelve disciples had not been taken back into Judea, they would not have seen the glorious miracle of Bethany. If Christians were allowed to choose their own course through life, they would never learn hundreds of lessons about Christ and His grace, which they are now taught in God's ways. Let us remember these things. The time may come when we shall be called to take some journey in life which we greatly dislike. When that time comes, let us set out cheerfully, and believe that all is right.

We should notice, secondly, in this passage, ***how tenderly Christ speaks of the death of believers.*** He announces the fact of Lazarus being dead in language of singular beauty and gentleness — "Our *friend* Lazarus sleeps." Every true Christian has a Friend in heaven, of almighty power and boundless love. He is thought of, cared for, provided for, defended by God's eternal Son. He has an unfailing Protector, who never slumbers or sleeps, and watches continually over his interests. The world may despise him, but he has no cause to be ashamed. Father and mother even may cast him out, but Christ having once taken him up will never let him go. He is the "friend of Christ" even after he is dead! The friendships of this world are often fair-weather friendships, and fail us like summer-dried fountains, when our need is the greatest; but the friendship of the Son of God is stronger than death, and goes beyond the grave. The Friend of sinners is a Friend that sticks closer than a brother.

The death of true Christians is "sleep," and not annihilation. It is a solemn and miraculous change, no doubt, but not a change to be regarded with alarm. They have nothing to fear for their souls in the change, for their sins are washed away in Christ's blood. *The sharpest sting of death is the sense of unpardoned sin*. Christians have nothing to fear for their bodies in the change; they will rise again by and by, refreshed and renewed, after the image of the Lord. The grave itself is a conquered enemy. It must render back its tenants safe and sound, the very moment that Christ calls for them at the last day.

Let us remember these things when those whom we love fall asleep in Christ, or when we ourselves receive our notice to depart this world. Let us call to mind, in such an hour, that our great Friend takes thought for our bodies as well as for our souls, and that He will not allow one hair of our heads to perish. Let us never forget that the grave is the place where the Lord Himself lay, and that as He rose again triumphant from that cold bed, so also shall all His people. To a mere worldly man death must needs be a terrible thing; but he that has Christian faith may boldly say, as he lays down life, "I will lay me down in peace, and take my rest—for it is You, Lord, that make me dwell in safety."

We should notice, lastly, in this passage, ***how much of natural temperament clings to a believer even after conversion.*** We read that when Thomas saw that Lazarus was dead, and that Jesus was determined, in spite of all danger, to return into Judea, he said, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him." There can only be one meaning in that expression—it was the language of a despairing and desponding mind, which could see nothing but dark clouds in the picture. The very man who afterwards could not believe that his Master had risen again, and thought the news too good to be true, is just the one of the twelve who thinks that if they go back to Judea they must all die!

Things such as these are deeply instructive, and are doubtless recorded for our learning. They show us that the grace of God in conversion does not so re-mold a man as to leave no trace of his

natural bent of character. The sanguine do not altogether cease to be sanguine, nor the desponding to be desponding, when they pass from death to life, and become true Christians. They show us that we must make large allowances for natural temperament, in forming our estimate of individual Christians. We must not expect all God's children to be exactly one and the same. Each tree in a forest has its own peculiarities of shape and growth, and yet all at a distance look one mass of leaf and verdure. Each member of Christ's body has his own distinctive bias, and yet all in the main are led by one Spirit, and love one Lord. The two sisters Martha and Mary, the apostles Peter and John and Thomas, were certainly very unlike one another in many respects. But they had all one point in common—they loved Christ, and were His friends.

Let us take heed that we really belong to Christ. This is the one thing needful. If this is made sure, we shall be led by the right way, and end well at last. We may not have the cheerfulness of one brother, or the fiery zeal of another, or the gentleness of another. But if grace reigns within us, and we know what repentance and faith are by experience, we shall stand on the right hand in the great day. Happy is the man of whom, with all his defects, Christ says to saints and angels, "This is our friend."

Technical Notes:

7. Then after this he said to *his* disciples, Let us go to Judea again. 8. *His* disciples said to him, Master, lately the Jews sought to stone you, and are you going there again? 9.

Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. 10. But if a man walks in the night, he stumbles, because there is no light in him. 11. These things he said, and after that he said to them, Our friends Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up. 12. Then his disciples said, Lord, if he sleeps, he shall do well. 13. However, Jesus spoke of his death, but they thought that he had spoken of taking rest in sleep. 14. Then Jesus said to them plainly, Lazarus is dead. 15. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe. Nevertheless let us go to him. 16. Then Thomas, who is called Didymus, said to his fellow disciples, Let us also go, that we may die with him.

7.—[*Then…said to his disciples*.] The Greek words which begin this sentence mark an interval of time even more emphatically than our English version does. The word translated “then” is the same that is translated “after that” in 1 Cor. 15:6,7.

[*Let us go to Judea again*.] This is the language of the kind and loving Head of a family and the Chief in a party of friends. Our Lord does not say “I shall go to” or “Follow Me to Judea,” but “Let us go.” It is the voice of a kind Master and Shepherd proposing a thing to His pupils and followers, as though He would allow them to express their opinions about it. How much depends on the manner and language of a leader! The familiar, easy manner in which our Lord is

said here to tell His disciples what He proposes to do, gives a pleasant idea of the terms on which they lived with Him.

8.—[*His disciples said to him, Master*.] The answer of the disciples is an interesting illustration of the easy terms on which they were with their Master. They tell Him frankly and unreservedly their feelings and fears. Let it be noted that the word rendered "Master" here is the well known word "Rabbi." The use of it shows that there is nothing necessarily insulting, sneering, or discourteous about the term. It was the title of honor and respect given by all Jews to their teachers. Thus John the Baptist's disciples said to him, when jealous for his honor, "Rabbi, he who was with thee," etc. (John 3:26).

[*Lately the Jews...stone you*.] The "Jews" here means especially the leaders or principal persons among the Scribes and Pharisees at Jerusalem, as it generally does in St. John's Gospel. The word rendered "lately" is generally translated "now" or "at this time." There is not another instance of its being translated "of late" in the New Testament. Hence the sentence would be more literally rendered, "The Jews even now were seeking to stone You." They allude to the attempt made at the Feast of Dedication a few weeks before. The attempt was so recent that it seemed "even now."

[*And are You going there again?*] This question indicates surprise and fear. "Do we hear aright? Do You really talk of going back again to Judea? Do You not fear another assault on Your life?" We can easily detect fear for their own safety, as well as their

Master's in the question of the disciples; yet they put it on "You" and not on "us." Let us note how strange and unwise our Lord's plans sometimes appear to His short-sighted people. How little the best can understand His ways!

9,10.—[Jesus answered…twelve hours, etc.] The answer which our Lord makes to the remonstrance of His timid disciples is somewhat remarkable. Instead of giving them a direct reply (bidding them not to be afraid), He first quotes a proverbial saying, and then draws from that saying general lessons about the time which any one who is on a journey will choose for journeying. He draws no conclusion and leaves the application to be made by the disciples themselves. To an English ear the answer seems far more strange than it would to an Eastern one. To quote a proverb is, even now, a common reply among Orientals. To fill up the sense of our Lord's elliptical reply and draw the conclusions He meant to be drawn, but did not express, is, however, not very easy. The following may be taken as a paraphrase of it:

"Are not the working hours of the day twelve? You know they are, speaking generally. If a man on a journey walks during these twelve daylight hours, he sees his road and does not stumble or fall because the sun, which is the light of the world, shines on his path. If, on the contrary, a man on a journey chooses to walk in the unreasonable hour of night, he is likely to stumble or fall for lack of light to guide his feet. It is even so with Me. My twelve hours of ministry, my day of work, is not yet over. There is no fear of my life being cut off before

the time. I shall not be slain until my work is done. Until my hour is come, I am safe and not a hair of my head can be touched. I am like one walking in the full light of the sun who cannot fall. The night will soon be here when I shall walk on earth no longer; but the night has not yet come. There are twelve hours in my day of earthly ministry, and the twelfth with Me has not arrived."

This seems to me substantially the correct explanation of our Lord's meaning. The idea of ancient writers, as Hugo and Lyranus, that by mentioning the twelve hours of the day our Lord meant that men often change their minds as the day goes on, and that the Jews, perhaps, no longer wished to kill Him, is very improbable and unsatisfactory. I grant that the conclusion of the tenth verse, "there is no light in him," presents some difficulty. The simplest explanation is that it only means "because he has no light."

Pearce conjectures that the clause should be rendered, "Because there is no light in it: viz., the world." The Greek will perhaps bear this interpretation. Let us note that the great principle underlying the two verses is the old saying in another form, "Every man is immortal until his work is done." A recollection of that saying is an excellent antidote against fears of danger. The missionary in heathen lands and the minister at home, pressed down by unhealthy climate or over-abundant work, may take comfort in it, after their Lord's example. Let us only, by way of caution, make sure that our dangers meet us in the path of duty, and that we do not go out of the way to seek them.

Rupertus suggests that our Lord had in His mind His own doctrine, that He was the Light and Sun of the world. Now as the sun continues shining all the twelve hours of the day, and no mortal power can stop it, so He would have the disciples know that until the evening of His own course arrived, no power of the Jews could possibly check, arrest, or do Him harm. As to the disciples He seems to add, "So long as I am shining on you with my bodily presence, you have nothing to fear; you will not fall into trouble. When I am taken from you, and not till then, you will be in danger of falling into the hands of persecutors and even of being put to death." Ecolampadius takes the same view.

Melancthon thinks that our Lord uses a proverbial mode of speech in order to teach us the great broad lesson that we must attend to the duties of our day, station, and calling, and then leave the event to God. In the path of duty all will turn out right. Calvin, Bullinger, Gualter, and Brentius take much the same view.

Leigh remarks: "Christ comforts from God's providence. God made the day twelve hours. Who can make it shorter? Who can shorten man's life?" Does it not come to this, that our Lord would have the disciples know that He Himself could not take harm till His day of work was over, and that they could take no harm while He was with them? (Compare Luke 13:32,33.) Bishop Ellicot suggests that this was the very time in our Lord's ministry when He said to the Pharisee, "I do cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I shall

be perfected. Nevertheless I must walk today and tomorrow and the day following." But I doubt this.

It is certain that there came a time when our Lord said "This is your hour and the power of darkness" to His enemies. Then He was taken, and His disciples fled.

11.—[These things... Lazarus sleeps...wake him up.] In this verse our Lord breaks the fact that Lazarus is dead to His disciples. He does it in words of matchless beauty and tenderness. After saying "these things" about the twelve hours of the day, which we have considered in the last verse, He seems to make a slight pause. Then, "after that," comes the announcement, which would be more literally rendered, "Lazarus, the friend of us, has been laid asleep."

The word "sleeps" means "is dead." It is a gentle and pathetic way of expressing the most painful of events that can befall man, and a most suitable one when we remember that after death comes resurrection. In dying we are not annihilated. Like sleepers, we lie down to rise again. Estius well remarks: "Sleeping, in the sense of dying, is only applied to men because of the hope of the resurrection. We read no such thing of brutes."

The use of the figure is so common in Scripture that it is almost needless to give references. (See Deut. 31:16, Daniel 12:2, Matt. 27:52, Acts 7:60, 13:36, 1 Cor. 7:39, 11:30, 15:6-18, and 1 Thess. 4:13,14.) But it is a striking fact that the figure is frequently used by

great heathen writers, showing clearly that the tradition of a life after death existed even among the heathen. Homer, Sophocles, Virgil, and Catullus supply instances. However, the Christian believer is the only one who can truly regard death as sleep, that is, as a healthy, refreshing thing which can do him no harm. Many among ourselves, perhaps, are not aware that the figure of speech exists among us in full force in the word “cemetery,” applied to burial ground. That word is drawn from the very Geek verb which our Lord uses here. It is literally a “sleeping place.”

The word “friend” applied to Lazarus gives a beautiful idea of the relation between the Lord Jesus and all His believing people. Each one is His “friend:” not servant, or subject only, but “friend.” A poor believer has no cause to be ashamed. He has a Friend greater than kings and nobles who will show Himself friendly to all eternity. A dead saint lying in the grave is not cut off from Christ’s love; even in his grave, he is still the friend of Christ.

The expression “our” attached to friend teaches the beautiful lesson that every friend of Christ is or should be the friend of all Christians. Believers are all one family of brothers and sisters and members of one body. Lazarus was not “my” friend, but “our” friend. If anyone is a friend of Christ, every other believer should be ready and willing to hold out his hand to him and say “You are my friend.” When our Lord says “I go that I may awaken him out of sleep,” He proclaims His deliberate intention and purpose to raise Lazarus from the dead. He boldly challenges the attention of the disciples, and declares that

He is going to Bethany to restore a dead man to life. Never was bolder declaration made. None surely would make it but One who knew that He was very God.

"I go" is equivalent to saying, "I am at once setting forth on a journey to Bethany." The expression, "that I may awake him up" is one word in Greek and is equivalent to "that I may unsleep him." What our Lord went to do at Bethany He is soon coming to do for all our friends who are asleep in Christ. He is coming to awaken them.

Some commentators have thought that Lazarus died in the very moment that our Lord said "Our friend sleeps," and that it means "Lazarus has just fallen asleep and died." But this is only conjecture, though doubtless our Lord knew the moment of his decease.

Let it be noted that our Lord says "I go" in the singular number, and not "Let us go." Does it not look as if He meant, "Whether you like to go or not, I intend to go"? Hall remarks: "None can awaken Lazarus out of this sleep but He that made Lazarus. Every mouse or gnat can raise us up from that other sleep; none but an omnipotent power from this."

12.—[*Then his disciples said…do well.*] It seems strange that the disciples should misunderstand our Lord's words, considering how commonly death was called sleep. But their unwillingness to go into Judea probably made them shut their eyes to our Lord's real meaning. Most writers think that the disciples referred to the general

opinion that sleep in a sickness is a sign of amendment. Some, however, suggest that they had gathered from the messenger sent by Martha and Mary what was the precise nature of Lazarus' illness, and therefore knew that it was one in which sleep was a favorable symptom.

The Greek word for "he shall do well" is curious. It is the same that is often rendered "shall be made whole." Sometimes it is "healed," and generally "saved."
The latent thought is manifest: "If Lazarus sleeps, he is getting better, and there is no need of our going to Judea."

13.—[*However, Jesus spoke, etc.*] This verse is one of those explanatory glosses which St. John frequently puts into his narrative parenthetically. The three first words of the verse would be more literally rendered, "But Jesus had spoken."

How the disciples could have "thought" or "supposed" that our Lord meant literal sleep and not death seems strange when we remember that Peter, James, and John had heard Him use the same expression after the death of the ruler's daughter— "The maid sleeps" (Matt. 9:24). Two probable reasons may be assigned. One is that they had heard from the messenger that Lazarus' recovery turned on his getting sleep, and that if he only got some sleep he might do well. The other is that they were so afraid of returning to Judea that they determined to believe Lazarus was getting better and to construe our Lord's words in the way most agreeable to their fears. It is common

to observe that men will not understand what they do not want to understand.

Quesnel remarks here: “The misunderstanding of the Apostles was a great instance of stupidity, and shows plainly how sensual and carnal their minds still were. The knowledge of this is useful in order to convince incredulous persons that the Apostles were not of themselves capable either of converting the world or of inventing the wonderful things and sublime discourses which they relate.”

The readiness of the disciples to misunderstand figurative language is curiously shown in two other places—where our Lord spoke of “leaven” and “meat” (Matt. 16:6 and John 4:32).

14.—[*Then Jesus said to them plainly, Lazarus is dead.*] Here at last our Lord breaks the fact of Lazarus’ death to His disciples openly and without any further reserve. He had approached the subject gently and delicately and thus prepared their minds for something painful by steps. First he said simply “Let us to into Judea” without assigning a reason. Secondly He said “Lazarus sleeps.” Lastly He says “Lazarus is dead.” There is a beautiful consideration for feelings in these three steps. It is a comfortable thought that our mighty Savior is so tender-hearted and gentle. It is an instructive lesson to us on the duty of dealing gently with others, and specially in announcing afflictions.
The word rendered “plainly” is the same as in John 10:24. Here, as there, it does not mean “in plain, intelligible language” so much as “openly, unreservedly, and without mystery.”

15.—[*And I am glad…ye may believe*.] This sentence would be more literally rendered, “And I rejoice on account of you, in order that ye may believe, that I was not there.” Our Lord evidently means that He was glad that He was not at Bethany when Lazarus became ill and had not healed Him before his death, as in all probability He would have done. The result now would be most advantageous to the disciples. Their faith would receive an immense confirmation by witnessing the stupendous miracle of Lazarus being raised from the dead. Thus great good, on one respect, would come out of great evil. The announcement they had just heard might be very painful and distressing, but He, as their Master, could not but be glad to think how mightily their faith would be strengthened in the end. Let us note that our Lord does not say, “I am glad Lazarus is dead,” but “I am glad I was not there.” Had He been there, He seems to say, He could not have refused the prayer of Martha and Mary to heal His friend. We are not intended to be so unfeeling as to rejoice in the death of Christian friends, but we may rejoice in the circumstances attending their deaths, and the glory redounding to Christ, and the benefit accruing to saints from them.

Let us note that our Lord does not say “I am glad for the sake of Martha and Mary and Lazarus that I was not there,” but “for your sakes.” It is no pleasure to Him to see His individual members suffering, weeping, and dying, but He does rejoice to see the good of many spring out of the suffering of a few. Hence He permits some to be afflicted in order that many may be instructed through their

afflictions. This is the key to permission of evil in the world: it is for the good of the many. When we ourselves are allowed of God to suffer, we must remember this. We must believe there are wise reasons why God does not come to our help at once and take the suffering away.

Let us note our Lord's desire that His disciples "may believe." He did not mean that they might believe now for the first time, but that they might believe more firmly, heartily, and unhesitatingly; that their faith, in short, might receive a great increase by seeing Lazarus raised. We see here the immense importance of faith. To believe on Christ and trust God's word is the first step towards heaven. To believe more and trust more is the real secret of Christian growth, progress, and prosperity. To make us believe more is the end of all Christ's dealings with us. (See John 14:1.)

[*Nevertheless let us go to him.*] The first word here would be more literally rendered "but." It is as though our Lord said, "But let us delay no longer; let us cast aside all fears of danger; let us go to our friend." It is noteworthy that our Lord says "Let us go to Lazarus," though he was dead and would be buried by the time they reached Bethany. Can it be that the disciples thought He had David's words about his dead child in His mind, "I shall go to him"? The words of Thomas, in the next verse, seem to make it possible.

We may notice three gradations in our Lord's language about going to Bethany. The first in the seventh verse, where we says in the plural "Let us all go into Judea." The second in verse 11 where He says in

the singular “I go that I may wake him up,” as though He was ready to go alone. The third is here in the plural, “Let us all go.”

Toletus thinks that by these words our Lord meant to hint His intention of raising Lazarus.

Burkitt remarks: “O love, stronger than death! The grave cannot separate Christ and His friends. Other friends accompany us to the brink of the grave, and then they leave us. Neither life nor death can separate from the love of Christ.”

Bengel remarks: “It is beautifully consonant with divine propriety that no one is ever read of as having died while the Prince of Life was present.”

16.—[Then Thomas…said…we may die with him.] The disciple here named is also mentioned in John 16:5 and John 20:24-27. On each occasion he appears in the same state of mind—ready to look at the black side of everything, taking the worst view of the position and raising doubts and fears. In John 14:5 he does not know where our Lord is going. In John 20:25 he cannot believe our Lord has risen. Here he sees nothing but danger and death if his Master returns to Judea. Yet He is true and faithful nevertheless. He will not forsake Christ, even if death is in the way. “Let us go,” he says to his fellow disciples, “and die with our Master. He is sure to be killed if He does go, but we cannot do better than be killed with Him.”

Some, as Brentius, Grotius, Leigh, Poole, and Hammond think that "with him" refers to Lazarus. But most commentators think that Thomas refers to our Lord. With them I entirely agree.

Let it be noted that a man may have notable weaknesses and infirmities of Christian character and yet be a disciple of Christ. There is no more common fault among believers, perhaps, than despondency and unbelief. A reckless readiness to die and make an end of our troubles is not grace but impatience.

Let us observe how extremely unlike one another Christ's disciples were. Peter, for instance, overrunning with zeal and confidence, was the very opposite of desponding Thomas. Yet both had grace and both loved Christ. We must not foolishly assume that all Christians are exactly like one another in details of character. We must make large allowances when the main features are right.

Let us remember that this same Thomas, so desponding in our Lord's lifetime, was afterwards the very Apostle who first preached the Gospel in India, according to ecclesiastical history, and penetrated further East than any whose name is recorded. Chrysostom says: "The very man who dared not go to Bethany in Christ's company afterwards ran alone through the world, and dwelt in the midst of nations full of murder and ready to kill him."

Some have thought that his Greek name "Didymus," signifying "two" or "double," was given him because of his character being double:

viz., part faith and part weakness. But this is very doubtful. In the first three Gospels, in the catalog of the twelve, he is always named together with Matthew the publican. But why we do not know. The Greek word for “fellow disciple” is never used in the New Testament excepting here.

JOHN 11:17-29

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had been in the tomb four days already. (Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, so many of the Jewish people who lived in Jerusalem had come to Martha and Mary to console them over the loss of their brother.) So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary was sitting in the house. Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will grant you.”

Jesus replied, “Your brother will come back to life again.” Martha said, “I know that he will come back to life again in the resurrection at the last day.” Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live even if he dies, and the one who lives and believes in me will never die. Do

you believe this?" She replied, "Yes, Lord, I have believed that you are the Christ, the Son of God who comes into the world."

And when she had said this, Martha went and called her sister Mary, saying privately, "The Teacher is here and is asking for you." So when Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him.

There is a grand simplicity about this passage, which is almost spoiled by any human exposition. To comment on it seems like gilding gold or painting lilies. Yet it throws much light on a subject which we can never understand too well; that is, *the true character of Christ's people*. The portraits of Christians in the Bible are faithful likenesses. They show us saints just as they are.

We learn, firstly, ***what a strange mixture of grace and weakness is to be found even in the hearts of true believers.***

We see this strikingly illustrated in the language used by Martha and Mary. Both these holy women had faith enough to say, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." Yet neither of them seems to have remembered that the death of Lazarus did not depend on Christ's absence, and that our Lord, had He thought fit, could have prevented his death with a word, without coming to Bethany. Martha had knowledge enough to say, "I know, that even now, whatever You will ask of God, God will give it to You—I know that my brother shall rise again at the last day—I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God." But even she could get no further. Her

dim eyes and trembling hands could not grasp the grand truth that He who stood before her had the keys of life and death, and that in her Master dwelt "all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." (Colos. 2:9.) She saw indeed, but through a glass darkly. She knew, but only in part. She believed, but her faith was mingled with much unbelief. Yet both Martha and Mary were genuine children of God, and true Christians.

These things are graciously written for our learning. It is good to remember what true Christians really are. Many and great are the mistakes into which people fall, by forming a false estimate of the Christian's character. Many are the bitter things which people write against themselves, by expecting to find in their hearts what cannot be found on this side of heaven. Let us settle it in our minds that saints on earth are not perfect angels, but only converted sinners. They are sinners renewed, changed, sanctified, no doubt; but they are yet sinners, and will be until they die. Like Martha and Mary, their faith is often entangled with much unbelief, and their grace compassed round with much infirmity. Happy is that child of God who understands these things, and has learned to judge rightly both of himself and others. Rarely indeed shall we find the saint who does not often need that prayer, "Lord, I believe—help my unbelief."

We learn, secondly, ***what need many believers have of clear views of Christ's person, office, and power.*** This is a point which is forcibly brought out in the well-known sentence which our Lord addressed to Martha. In reply to her vague and faltering

expression of belief in the resurrection at the last day, He proclaims the glorious truth, “I am the resurrection and the life;”— “I, even I, your Master, am He that has the keys of life and death in His hands.” And then He presses on her once more that old lesson, which she had doubtless often heard, but never fully realized— “He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.”

There is matter here which deserves the close consideration of all true Christians. Many of them complain of lack of sensible comfort in their religion. They do not feel the inward peace which they desire. Let them know that *vague and indefinite views of Christ* are too often the cause of all their perplexities. They must try to see more clearly the great object on which their faith rests. They must grasp more firmly His love and power toward those who believe, and the riches He has laid up for them even now in this world. We are, many of us, sadly like Martha. A little general knowledge of Christ as the only Savior is often all that we possess. But of the fullness that dwells in Him, of His resurrection, His priesthood, His intercession, His unfailing compassion, we have tasted little or nothing at all. They are things of which our Lord might well say to many, as he did to Martha, “Do you believe this?”

Let us take shame to ourselves that we have named the name of Christ so long, and yet know so little about Him. What right have we to wonder that we feel so little sensible comfort in our Christianity? Our slight and imperfect knowledge of Christ is the true reason of

our discomfort. Let the time past suffice us to have been lazy students in Christ's school; let the time to come find us more diligent in trying to "know Him and the power of His resurrection." (Philip. 3:10.) If true Christians would only strive, as Paul says, to "comprehend what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passes knowledge," they would be amazed at the discoveries they would make. They would soon find, like Hagar, that there are wells of water near them of which they had no knowledge. They would soon discover that there is more heaven to be enjoyed on earth than they had ever thought possible. *The root of a happy religion is clear, distinct, well-defined knowledge of Jesus Christ.* More knowledge would have saved Martha many sighs and tears. Knowledge alone no doubt, if unsanctified, only "puffs up." (1 Cor. 8:1.) Yet without clear knowledge of Christ in all His offices we cannot expect to be established in the faith, and steady in the time of need.

Technical Notes:

17. So when Jesus came, he found that he had already been in the grave four days. 18. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about fifteen furlongs off. 19. And many of the Jews came to Martha and Mary to comfort them concerning their brother. 20. Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him, but Mary sat *still* in the house. 21. Then Martha said to Jesus, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22.

But I know, that even now, whatever you ask of God, God will give you. 23. Jesus said to her, Your brother shall rise again. 24. Martha said to him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. 25. Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. 26. And whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this? 27. She said to him, Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who should come into the world. 28. And when she had said these things, she went her way and secretly called Mary her sister, saying, The Master has come and calls for you. 29. As soon as she heard *that*, she arose quickly and came to him.

17.—[*So when Jesus came.*] We are left entirely to conjecture as to the time spent by our Lord in His journey from Bethabara to Bethany. We do not know anything certain of the place where He was abiding, except that it was beyond Jordan. Probably it was between twenty and thirty miles from Bethany, and this distance, to those who traveled on foot, would be at least a day's journey.

[*He found...in the grave four days.*] The Greek form of language here is peculiar, and a literal translation would be impossible. It would be, "He found him being already four days in the grave." It is highly probable that Lazarus was buried the same day that he died. In a country like Palestine, with a hot climate, it is quite impossible to keep corpses long unburied without danger and discomfort to the

living. A man may talk to his friend one day and find him buried the next day. One thing is abundantly proved by this verse. Lazarus must certainly have been dead and not in a trance or swoon. A person lying in a grave for four days, all reasonable people would admit, must have been a dead man. The various forms of death which our Lord is recorded to have triumphed over should not be forgotten. Jairus' daughter was just dead; the son of the widow of Nain was being carried to the grave; Lazarus, the most extraordinary case of all, had been four days in the tomb. The expression "He found" in this verse must not be thought to imply any surprise. We know that our Lord began His journey from Bethabara with a full knowledge that Lazarus was dead. What "he found" applies to Lazarus therefore, and to the precise length of time that he had been in the grave. He was not only dead, but buried.

We can well imagine what a sorrowful time those four days must have been to Martha and Mary, and how many thoughts must have crossed their minds as to the reason of our Lord's delay, as to the day He would come, and the like. Nothing so wears us down as suspense and uncertainty. Yet of all graces, there is none so glorifying to God and sanctifying to the heart as that of patience or quietly waiting. How long Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and David were kept waiting. Jesus loves to show the world that His people can wait. Martha and Mary had to exemplify this. Well if we can do likewise! Gomarus discusses at length the curious question, where the soul of Lazarus was during those four days. He dismisses as unscriptural the idea that it was yet in the body and seems to hold that it was in

Paradise. The “four days” are easily accounted for if we remember the time occupied by the messenger from Bethany, the two days’ delay at Bethabara, and the journey to Bethany.

18.—[*Now Bethany…fifteen furlongs off.*] This verse shows that John wrote for readers who were not acquainted with Palestine. According to his manner, he gives a parenthetical description of the situation of Bethany, partly to show how very near to Jerusalem the wonderful miracle he relates was worked—within a walk of the temple and almost within view—and partly to account for the number of the Jews who came from Jerusalem to comfort Martha and Mary.

The distance, fifteen furlongs, is rather less than two miles. The use of the expression “about” shows that the Holy Ghost condescends to use man’s common form of language in describing things, and that such expressions are not inconsistent with inspiration. (See John 2:6 and 6:19.)

19.—[And many…came… Mary.] This sentence would be more literally rendered, “Many from among the Jews had come to those around Martha and Mary.” Who these Jews were it is impossible to say, except that they evidently came from Jerusalem. One can hardly suppose that they were the leaders and rulers of the Pharisees. Such men would not be likely to care for friends of Jesus and would hardly have condescended to visit Martha and Mary, who were doubtless known to be His disciples. Of course, it is possible that Simon the

leper, in whose house Lazarus died, may have been a man of consideration, and that the Jews may have come out of respect to him. At any rate, it is clear that those who saw the stupendous miracle of this chapter were Jerusalem Jews and were “many” and not few. The expression, “Those around Martha and Mary,” is a form of language not uncommon in Greek, and is probably rightly translated in our version. It can hardly mean “the women who had come to mourn with Martha and Mary,” though it is well known that women were the chief mourners at funerals. It is, however, only fair to say that Beza decidedly holds that the women and female friends who had come to mourn with Mary and Martha are meant in this verse.

[*To comfort them concerning their brother*.] This appears to have been a common practice among the Jews. When anyone died, friends and neighbors assembled for several days at the house of the deceased to mourn with and comfort the relatives. Lightfoot specially mentions it. The same custom prevails in many parts of the world at the present day; Hindostan and Ireland are instances.

We cannot doubt that many of these Jews came to Martha and Mary from form and custom and not from any genuine sympathy or kind feeling, much less from any unity of spiritual taste. Yet it is striking to observe how God blesses even the semblance of sympathy. By coming, they saw Christ’s greatest miracle. If unbelief can sympathize, how much more should grace. One thing, at any rate, seems very clearly proved by this verse. Whatever was the rank or

position of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, they were well-known people, and anything that happened in their house at Bethany was soon public news in Jerusalem. Had they been strangers from Galilee, the thing named in this verse would not have been written. Chrysostom thinks the Evangelist mentioned the Jews coming to comfort Martha and Mary as one of the many circumstances proving that Lazarus was really dead. They evidently thought him dead or they would not have come. Lightfoot gives a long and curious account of the customs of the Jews about comforting mourners. He says that "thirty days were allotted for the time of mourning. The three first days were for weeping, seven days for lamentation, and thirty days for intermission from washing or shaving. The beds in the house of mourning were all taken down and laid on the ground as soon as the coffin left the house. The comforter sat on the floor, the bereaved sat chief. The comforter might not say a word till the chief mourner broke silence."

Poole observes that the mourning for Jacob was forty days, for Aaron and Moses thirty days. (Gen. 50:3, Num. 2:29, Deut. 34:8.) 20.—[*Then Martha…went and met him.*] The Greek word for "was coming" would have been more literally translated "is coming" or "comes" in the present tense. It then gives the idea that Martha received from some friend, servant, or watchman, who was on the lookout on the road from Jordan, the message long looked for—"Jesus is in sight," "He is coming." She then hurried out and met our Lord outside the village. The Greek is simply "met Him," and "went" is needless.

Bullinger thinks that Martha, with characteristic activity, was bustling after domestic duties, and heard from someone that Jesus was coming and ran to meet Him without going to tell Mary.

[*But Mary was sitting in the house.*] While Martha hurried out to meet Jesus, Mary continued sitting in the house. Martha's "met" is a perfect tense; Mary's "sat" is an imperfect. It is impossible not to see the characteristic temperament of each sister coming out here, and doubtless it is written for our learning. Martha—active, stirring, busy, demonstrative—cannot wait but runs impulsively to meet Jesus. Mary— quiet, gentle, pensive, meditative, contemplative, meek—sits passively at home. Yet I venture to think that of the two sisters, Martha here appears to most advantage. There is such a thing as being so crushed and stunned by our affliction that we do not adorn our profession under it. Is there not something of this in Mary's conduct throughout this chapter? There is a time to stir as well as to sit still; and here, by not stirring, Mary certainly missed hearing our Lord's glorious declaration about Himself. I would not be mistaken in saying this. Both these holy women were true disciples, yet if Mary showed more grace on a former occasion than Martha, I think Martha here showed more than Mary.

Let us never forget that there are differences of temperament among believers, and let us make due allowance for others if they are not quite like ourselves. There are believers who are quiet, passive, silent, and meditative; there are believers who are active, stirring,

and demonstrative. The well-ordered Church must find room, place, and work for all. We need Mary's as well as Marthas, and Marthas as well as Mary's. Nothing brings out character so much as sickness and affliction. It we would know how much grace believers have, we should see them in trouble. Let us remember that "sitting" was the attitude of a mourner among the Jews. Thus Job's friends "sat down with him on the ground" (Job 2:13). Henry remarks: "In the day of affliction Mary's contemplative and reserved temper proved a snare to her, made her less able to grapple with grief, and disposed her to melancholy. It will be our wisdom to watch against the temptations, and improve the advantages of our natural temper."

21.—[*Then Martha said…not have died.*] This is the first account of Martha's feelings. It was the uppermost thought in her mind, and with honest impulsiveness she brings it out at once. It is easy to detect in it a strange mixture of emotions. Here is passion, not unmixed with a tinge of reproach. "I wish you had been here. Why did you not come sooner? You might have prevented my brother's death." Here is love, confidence, and devotion creeping out. "I wish you had been here. We loved you so much. We depended so entirely on your love. We felt if you had been here all would be ordered well." Here is faith. "I wish you had been here. I believe you could have healed my brother and kept death from him."

Nevertheless, there is something of unbelief at bottom. Martha forgets that the bodily presence of Jesus was not necessary in order to cure her brother or to prevent his death. She must have known what our Lord did for the Centurion's servant and the ruler of

Capernaum. He had but to speak the word anywhere and Lazarus would have recovered. But memories often fail in time of trouble.

Ferus remarks how apt we all are to say, as Martha, "If God had been here, if Christ had been present, this would not have happened; as if Christ was not always present and everywhere near His people!" Henry remarks that in cases like Martha's "we are apt to add to our trouble by fancying what might have been. If such a method had been taken, such a physician employed, my friend had not died!—which is more than we know. And what good does it do? When God's will is done, our business is to submit."

22.—[*But I know… God will give you.*] In these words poor Martha's faith and hope shine clearly and unmistakably, though not without serious blemishes. "Even now," she says, "though my brother is dead and lying in the grave, I know and feel confident, from the many proofs I have seen of Your power, that whatever things You may ask of God, God will give them to You. I must therefore, even now, cling to the hope that in some way or other You will help us."

The faith of these words is plain and unmistakable. Martha hopes desperately against hope that somehow all will be right, though she knows not how. She has strong confidence in the efficacy of our Lord's prayers. The presence of dim views and indistinct apprehensions of Christ in Martha's mind is as evident as her faith. She speaks as if our Lord was a human prophet only and had no independent power of His own, as God, to work a miracle, and as if

He could not command a cure but must ask God for it, as Elisha did. She must have strangely forgotten the manner which our Lord had often worked His miracles. Chrysostom remarks that she speaks as if Christ was only "some virtuous and approved mortal." Let us note here that there may be true faith and love toward Christ in a person and yet much dimness and ignorance mixed up with it. Love to Christ, in Christian women especially, is often much clearer than faith and knowledge. Hence women are more easily led astray by false doctrine than men. It is of the utmost importance to remember that there are degrees of faith and knowledge. How small a degree of faith may save, and how much of ignorance may be found even in one who is on the way to heaven, are deep points which probably the last day alone will fully disclose. Let us do Martha the justice to observe that she shows great confidence in the value and efficacy of prayer.

23.—[*Jesus said…rise again.*] These words, the first spoken by our Lord after arriving at Bethany, are very remarkable. They sound as if He saw the vague nature of Martha's faith and would gradually lead her on to clearer and more distinct views of Himself, His office, and Person. He therefore begins by the broad, general promise, "Your brother shall be raised up." He does not say when or how. If His disciples heard him say this, they might have some clue to His meaning, as He had said "I go that I may awake him out of sleep." But Martha had not heard that. Let us note that our Lord loves to draw out the faith and knowledge of His people by degrees. If He told us everything at once, plainly and without any room for

misunderstanding, it would not be good for us. Exercise is useful for all our graces.

Rollock sees in this verse a signal example of our Lord's unwillingness to "break the bruised reed or quench the smoking flax." He nourishes and encourages the little spark of faith which Martha had.

24.—[Martha said…resurrection at the last day.] Martha here reveals the extent of her faith and knowledge. She knows and feels sure that her brother will be raised again from the dead in the last day when the resurrection takes place. This, as a pious Jewess, she had learned from the old Testament Scriptures, and as a Christian believer, she had gathered even more distinctly from the teaching of Jesus. But she does not say "I know and feel confident" of anything more. She may perhaps have had some glimmering of hope that Jesus would do something, but she does not say "I know." General faith is easier than particular.

We see from this verse that the resurrection of the body formed part of the creed of the Jewish Church and of the faith of our Lord's disciples. Martha's "*I know*" sounds as if she remembered the words of Job, "I know that my Redeemer lives." What she did not understand, or had failed to remember, was our Lord's peculiar office as Lord of the resurrection. We cannot now understand how she can have failed to hear what our Lord had said before the Sanhedrim (John 5:25-29). If she had, she evidently had not

comprehended it. Even our Lord's teaching was often not taken in by His people. How much less must His ministers expect all their sermons to be understood.

To my eyes there is an evident tone of disappointment about Martha's speech. It is as though she said, "I know, of course, that he will rise again at last; but that is cold comfort. It is a far distant event. I want nearer and better consolation."

Hutcheson remarks: "It is no uncommon thing to see men believing great things that are far off and about which they have no present exercise, when yet their faith proves weak in the matter of a present trial, though less difficult than that which they profess to believe."

25.—[Jesus said... I am the resurrection and the life.] In this and the following verses, our Lord corrects Martha's feeble and inadequate notions and sets before her more exalted views of Himself. As Chrysostom says, "He shows her that He needed none to help Him." He tells her that He is not merely a human teacher of the resurrection, but the Divine Author of all resurrection, whether spiritual or physical, and the Root and Fountain of all life. "I am that high and holy One who by taking man's nature upon Me have ennobled his body and made its resurrection possible. I am the great First Cause and Procurer of man's resurrection, the Conqueror of death, and the Savior of the body. I am the great Spring and Source of all life, and whatever life anyone has—eternal, spiritual, physical—is all owing to me. All that are raised from the grave will be raised by

Me. All that are spiritually quickened are quickened by Me. Separate from Me there is no life at all. Death came by Adam; life comes by Me." All must feel that this is a deep saying; so deep that we see but a little of it. One thing only is very clear and plain: none could use this language but one who knew and felt that He was very God. No prophet or Apostle ever spoke in this way.

I do not feel sure that the two first words of this verse do not contain a latent reference to the great title of Jehovah, "I am." The Greek quite permits it.

[He who believes...dead...live.] This sentence receives two interpretations. Some, as Calvin and Hutcheson, hold that "dead" here means *spiritually* dead. Others, as Bullinger, Gualter, Brentius, Musculus, hold that "dead" means *bodily* dead. With these last I entirely agree, partly because of the point that our Lord is pressing on Martha, partly because of the awkwardness of speaking of a believer as "dead." Moreover, the expression is a verb— "though he has died," and not an adjective— "is a dead person." The sense I believe to be this: "He who believes in Me, even if he has died and been laid in the grave, like your brother, shall yet live and be raised again through my power. Faith in Me unites such a one to the Fountain of all life, and death can only hold him for a short time. As surely as I, the Head, have life and cannot be kept a prisoner by the grave, so surely all my members, believing in Me, shall live also."

26.—[*And whoever...never die.*] In this verse our Lord seems to me to speak of living believers, as in the last verse. He had spoken of

dead ones. Here, then, He makes the sweeping declaration that "everyone who believes in Him shall never die;" that is, "he shall not die eternally," as the Burial Service of the Church of England has it. The second death shall have no power over him. The sting of bodily death shall be taken away. He partakes of a life that never ends from the moment that he believes in Christ. His body may be laid in the grave for a little season, but only to be raised after a while to glory; and his soul lives on uninterruptedly for evermore and, like the great risen Head, dies no more. That there are great depths in this and the preceding sentence, every reverent believer will always admit. We feel that we do not see the bottom. The difficulty probably arises from the utter inability of our gross, carnal natures to comprehend the mysteries of life, death, and resurrection of any kind. One thing is abundantly clear, and that is the importance of faith in Christ. "He who believes" is the man who, though dead, shall live and shall never die. Let us take care that we believe, and then all shall one day be plain. The simple questions, "What is life, and what is death?" contain enough to silence the wisest philosopher.

[*Do you believe this*?] This searching question is the application to Martha of the great doctrines just laid down. "You believe that the dead will rise. It is well. But do you believe that I am the Author of resurrection and the source of life? Do you realize that I, your Teacher and Friend, am very God and have the keys of death and the grave in my hands? Have you yet got hold of this? If you have not and only know me as a prophet sent to teach good and comfortable things, you have only received half the truth."

Some questions like these are very useful. How little most of us know what we really believe and what we do not; what we have grasped and made our own and what we hold loosely. Above all, how little we know what we really believe about Christ.

Melancthon points out how immensely important it is to know whether we really have faith and believe what we hold.

27.—[*Se said... I believe*.] Poor Martha, pressed home with the mighty question of the last verse, seems hardly able to give any but a vague answer. In truth, we cannot expect that she would speak distinctly about that which she only understood imperfectly. She therefore falls back on a general answer in which she states simply, yet decidedly, what was the extent of her creed.

Our English word "I believe" hardly gives the full sense of the Greek. It would be literally, "I have believed, and do believe." This is my faith and has been for a long time.
Augustine, Bede, Bullinger, Chemnitius, Gualter, Maldonatus, Quesnel, and Henry think that the first word of Martha's reply is a full and explicit declaration of faith in everything our Lord had just said. "Yes, Lord, I do believe You are the resurrection and the life," etc. I cannot see this myself. The idea seems contradicted by Martha's subsequent conduct at the grave.

Musculus strongly maintains that Martha's confession, good as it was, was vague and imperfect. Lampe takes much the same view.

[*You are the Christ…come into the world.*] Here is Martha's statement of her belief. It contains three great points: (1) that Jesus was the Christ, the anointed One, the Messiah; (2) that He was the Son of God; (3) that He was the promised Redeemer who was to come into the world. She goes no further, and probably she could not. Yet considering the time in which she lived, the universal unbelief of the Jewish nation, and the wonderful difference in the views of believers before the crucifixion and after, I regard it as a noble and glorious confession, and even fuller than Peter's in Matthew 16:16. Melancthon points out the great superiority of Martha's faith to that of the most intellectual heathen, in a long and interesting passage.

It is easy to say that Martha's faith was rather vague and that she ought to have seen everything more clearly. But we at this period of time and with all our advantages are very poor judges of such a matter. Dark and dim as her views were, it was a great thing for a solitary Jewish woman to have got hold of so much truth, when within two miles in Jerusalem all who held such a creed as hers were excommunicated and persecuted. Let us note that people's views of truth may be very defective on some points, and yet they may have the root of the matter in them. Martha evidently did not yet fully realize that Christ was the resurrection and the life; but she had learned the alphabet of Christianity—Christ's Messiahship and

Divinity—and doubtless learned more in time. We must not condemn people hastily or harshly because they do not see all at once. Chrysostom says: “Martha seems to me not to understand Christ’s saying. She was conscious it was some great thing but did not perceive the whole meaning, so that when asked one thing she answered another.” Toletus remarks: “Martha thought she believed everything Christ said, while she believed Him to be the true promised Messiah. And she did truly believe, but her faith was implicit and general. It is just as if some rustic, being questioned about some proposition of faith which he does not quite comprehend, replies, ‘I believe in the Holy Church.’ So here Martha said, ‘I believe, Lord, that You are the true Christ, and that all things You say are true;’ and yet she did not distinctly perceive them.” This is a remarkable testimony from a Romanist.

Ought we not, perhaps, to make some allowance for the distress and affliction in which Martha was when she made her confession? Is it fair to expect a person in her position to speak as distinctly and precisely as one not in trouble?

28.—[*And when she had said, etc.*] The affection of Martha for her sister appears here. Once assured that her Master was come, and perhaps somewhat cheered by the few words He spoke, she hastens home to tell Mary that Jesus was come and had called for her. We are not told expressly that Jesus had mentioned Mary, but we may suppose that He did and had asked where she was. The word “secretly” may be applied to the word which follows, if we like, and it

would then mean that “Martha called Mary, saying secretly.” This is probably the correct rendering.

The words rendered “has come” would be more literally translated “is present, is actually here.” The expression “the Master” is probably the name by which our Lord was familiarly known by the family at Bethany. It is literally, “the Teacher.” Bullinger remarks that the word “secretly” is purposely inserted to show that the Jews who followed Mary had no idea that Jesus was come. Had they known it, he thinks, they would not have followed her and so would not have seen the miracle.

Hall evidently thinks that Martha told Mary “secretly” for fear of the unbelieving Jews who were among the comforters. He remarks: “Christianity does not bid us abate anything of our wariness and honest policy; yea, it requires us to have no less of the serpent than of the dove.” 29.—[*As soon as she heard, etc.*] The two last words in this sentence are both in the present tense. It would be more literally rendered, “She, when she heard, arises quickly and comes to Him.” It is evident, I think, that the sudden movement of Mary was not caused by hearing that Jesus was come but that Jesus called for her.

It is not unlikely, from the word “arose,” that Mary was lying or sitting prostrate on the ground under the pressure of grief. We may also well suppose that our Lord, who doubtless knew her state, asked for her in order to rouse her to exertion, as when David heard that his child was dead and nothing was left for him to do but to be resigned, he “arose from off the earth” (2 Sam. 12:20).

JOHN 11:30-37

Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still in the place where Martha had come out to meet him. Then the Jewish people from Jerusalem who were with Mary in the house consoling her saw her get up quickly and go out. They followed her, because they thought she was going to the tomb to weep there.

Now when Mary came to the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jewish people who had come with her weeping, he was intensely moved in spirit and greatly distressed. He asked, "Where have you laid him?" They replied, "Lord, come and see." ***Jesus wept.*** *Thus the Jewish people who had come to mourn said, "Look how much he loved him!" But some of them said, "This is the man who caused the blind man to see! Couldn't he have done something to keep Lazarus from dying?"*

Not many passages in the New Testament are more wonderful than the simple narrative contained in these eight verses. It brings out, in a most beautiful light, the sympathizing character of our Lord Jesus Christ. It shows us Him who is "able to save to the uttermost all who come to God by Him," as able to feel as He is to save. It shows us Him who is One with the Father, and the Maker of all things, entering into human sorrows, and shedding human tears.

We learn, for one thing, in these verses, *how great a blessing God sometimes bestows on actions of kindness and sympathy*.

It seems that the house of Martha and Mary at Bethany was filled with mourners when Jesus arrived. Many of these mourners, no doubt, knew nothing of the inner life of these holy women. Their faith, their hope, their love to Christ, their discipleship, were things of which they were wholly ignorant. But they felt for them in their heavy bereavement, and kindly came to offer what comfort they could. By so doing they reaped a rich and unexpected reward. They beheld the greatest miracle that Jesus ever wrought. They were eye-witnesses when Lazarus came forth from the tomb. To many of them, we may well believe, that day was a spiritual birth. The raising of Lazarus led to a resurrection in their souls. *How small sometimes are the hinges on which eternal life appears to depend!* If these people had not sympathized they might never have been saved.

We need not doubt that these things were written for our learning. To show sympathy and kindness to the sorrowful is good for our own souls, whether we know it or not. To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, to weep with those who weep, to try to bear one another's burdens, and lighten one another's cares—all this will make no atonement for sin, and will not take us to heaven. Yet it is healthy employment for our hearts, and employment which none ought to despise. Few perhaps are aware that one secret of being miserable is to live only for ourselves, and one secret of being happy is to try to make others happy, and to do a little good in the world. It

is not for nothing that these words were written by Solomon, “It is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting.” “The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.” (Eccl. 7:2, 4.) The saying of our Lord is too much overlooked— “Whoever shall give to drink to one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you he shall in no wise lose his reward.” (Matt. 10:42.) The friends of Martha and Mary found that promise wonderfully verified. In an age of inordinate selfishness and self-indulgence, it would be well if they had more imitators.

We learn, for another thing, ***what a depth of tender sympathy there is in Christ’s heart towards His people.*** We read that when our Lord saw Mary weeping, and the Jews also weeping with her, “He groaned in the spirit and was troubled.” We read even more than this. He gave outward expression to His feelings —He “wept.” He knew perfectly well that the sorrow of the family of Bethany would soon be turned into joy, and that Lazarus in a few minutes would be restored to his sisters. But though he knew all this, he “wept.”

This weeping of Christ is deeply instructive. It shows us that it is not sinful to sorrow. Weeping and mourning are sadly trying to flesh and blood, and make us feel the weakness of our mortal nature. But they are not in themselves wrong. Even the Son of God wept. It shows us that deep feeling is not a thing of which we need be ashamed. To be cold and stoical and unmoved in the sight of sorrow

is no sign of grace. There is nothing unworthy of a child of God in tears. Even the Son of God could weep. It shows us, above all, that the Savior in whom believers trust is a most tender and feeling Savior. He is one who can be touched with sympathy for our infirmities. When we turn to Him in the hour of trouble, and pour out our hearts before Him, He knows what we go through and can pity. And He is One who never changes. Though He now sits at God's right hand in heaven, His heart is still the same that it was upon earth. We have an Advocate with the Father, who, when He was upon earth, could weep.

Let us remember these things in daily life, and never be ashamed of walking in our Master's footsteps. Let us strive to be men and women of a tender heart and a sympathizing spirit. Let us never be ashamed to weep with those who weep, and rejoice with those who rejoice. Well would it be for the Church and the world if there were more Christians of this stamp and character! The Church would be far more beautiful, and the world be far more happy.

Technical Notes:

30. Now Jesus had not yet come into the town, but was in that place where Martha met him. 31. Then the Jews who were with her in the house, and comforting her, when they saw that Mary rose up hastily and went out, followed her, saying, She is going to the tomb to weep there. 32. Then when Mary came where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying to him, Lord if you had been here,

my brother would not have died. 33. Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he groaned in the spirit and was troubled. 34. And he said, Where have ye laid him? They said to him, Lord, come and see. 35. Jesus wept. 36. Then the Jews said, Behold how he loved him! 37. And some of them said, Could not this man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying?

30.—[*Now Jesus had not yet come, etc.*] The Greek word for "come" is in the preter-perfect tense. The sentence, translated literally, would be, "Jesus had not yet come into the town" when Martha left Him to tell Mary, but was still waiting or remaining in the place outside Bethany where Martha at first met Him. The word "town" would be more correctly rendered "village" according to our present acceptation of the word. Yet it is fair to remember that words change their meaning with lapse of time. Even at this day a little Suffolk village of 1,400 people is called a "town" by many of its inhabitants.

Calvin thinks that Jesus remained outside Bethany by Martha's request, that His life might not be endangered.

31.—[*Then the Jews…followed her.*] It is probable that the persons here mentioned formed a considerable number, as many as could crowd into the house. "Comforted" in the Greek is the present participle and implies that they were actually employed in comforting Mary. Concerning the manner of comforting on such

occasions, we know nothing certain. People who only talk commonplaces are miserable comforters, and far worse than Job's friends who sat for seven days saying nothing at all. It may be that among the Jews the mere presence of courteous and sympathizing people was thought a kind attention and soothed the feelings of the bereaved. The customs of nations differ widely in such matters.

It is evident these Jews did not hear Martha's message and knew nothing of Jesus being near. Some of them, perhaps, had they known it, would not have followed Mary; not knowing, they all followed without exception, and unexpectedly became eyewitnesses of a stupendous miracle. All they knew was that Mary went out hastily. They followed in a spirit of kind sympathy, and by so doing reaped a great blessing.

Rupertus shrewdly remarks that the Jews did not follow Martha when she ran to Meet Jesus, but did follow Mary. He conjectures that Mary's affliction was deeper and more overwhelming than Martha's, and her friends devoted themselves more to comfort her, as needing most consolation. Yet the simpler reason seems to be that when *both* sisters had left the house, the friends could hardly do anything else but go out and follow.

[*She is going to the tomb to weep there.*] We must suppose from this sentence that weeping at the grave of dead friends was a custom among the Jews in our Lord's time. In estimating such a custom, which to most thinking persons may seem as useless as rubbing a wound and very likely to keep up pain without healing, it is only fair

to remember that Old Testament views of the state after death were not nearly so well lighted and comfortable as ours. The removal of death's sting and the resurrection and paradise were things not nearly so well understood even by the best saints before Christ, as they were after Christ rose again. To most of the Jews in our Lord's time, we can well believe that death was regarded as the end of all happiness and comfort, and the state after death as a dreary blank. When Sadducees, who said there was "no resurrection," were chief rulers and high priests, we may well suppose that the sorrow of many Jews over the death of friends was a "sorrow without hope." Even at this day "the place of wailing" at Jerusalem, where the Jews assemble to weep over the foundation stones of the old temple, is a proof that their habit of weeping over crushed hopes is not yet extinct.

32.—[*Then when Mary, etc.*] We see in this verse that as soon as Mary met our Lord, the first thing she said was almost exactly what Martha had said in the twenty-first verse, and the remarks made there need not be repeated. The similarity shows, at any rate, that throughout the illness of Lazarus the thoughts of the two sisters had been running in one and the same direction. Both had built all their hopes on Jesus coming. Both had felt confidence that His coming would have saved their brother's life. Both were bitterly disappointed that He did not come. Both had probably kept saying the same words repeatedly, "If our Master would only come, Lazarus would not die." There are, however, one or two touches of difference between the two sisters, here as elsewhere. Let us note them. Mary "fell down" at our Lord's feet, and Martha did not. She was made of softer, feebler

character than Martha and was more completely crushed and overcome than her sister.

Mary fell down at our Lord's feet when she "saw" Him. Up to that moment, probably, she had borne up and had run to the place where Martha told her Jesus was waiting. But when she actually saw her Master and remembered how she had longed for a sight of Him for some days, her feelings overcame her, and she broke down. The eyes have a great effect on the feelings of the heart. People often bear up pretty well till they *see* something that calls up thoughts.

I do not perceive any ground for thinking, as Calvin does, that this "falling at our Lord's feet" was an act of worship, a recognition of our Lord's divinity. It is much more natural and reasonable to regard it as the mere expression of Mary's state of feeling.

Trapp remarks that the words of Mary in this verse and of Martha in the former one show that we are all naturally disposed to make too much of Christ's bodily presence.

33.—[*Therefore, when Jesus saw her, etc.*] This is one of those verses which bring out very strongly the real humanity of our Lord and His power to sympathize with His people. As a real man, He was specially moved when He saw Mary and the Jews weeping. As God, He had no need to hear their plaintive language and to see their tears in order to learn that they were afflicted. He knew perfectly all their feelings. Yet as man He was like ourselves, peculiarly stirred by the

sight of sorrow; for human nature is so constituted that grief is eminently contagious. If one in a company is deeply touched and begins to weep, it is extremely likely that others will weep also. This power of sympathy our Lord evidently had in full possession. He *saw* weeping, and He wept.

Let us carefully remark that our Lord never changes. He did not leave behind Him His human nature when He ascended up into heaven. At this moment, at God's right hand, He can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities and can understand tears as well as ever. Our great High Priest is the very Friend that our souls need, able to save as God, able to feel as man. To talk of the Virgin Mary feeling for sinners more than Jesus is to say that which is ignorant and blasphemous. To teach that we can need any other priest when Jesus is such a feeling Savior is to teach what is senseless and absurd.

[*He groaned in the spirit*.] There is considerable difficulty about this expression. The word rendered "groaned" is only used five times in the New Testament. In Matt. 9:30 and Mark 1:43 it is "straitly charged." In Mark 14:5 it is "murmured." Here and at the thirty-eighth verse following, it is "groaned." Now what is precisely meant by the phrase?

(a) Some, as Ecolampadius, Brentius, Chemnitius, Flacius, and Ferus, maintain firmly that the notion of anger, indignation, and stern rebuke is inseparable from the word "groaned." They think that

the latent idea is the deep and holy indignation with which our Lord was moved at the sight of the ravages which death had made and the misery sin and the devil had brought into the world. They say it implies the stern and righteous wrath with which the deliverer of a country, tyrannized over and trampled down by a rebel, regards the desolation and destruction which the rebel has caused.

(b) Some add to this view the idea that "in spirit" means that our Lord groaned through the Holy Ghost, or by the Divine Spirit which dwelt in Him without measure, or by the power of His Godhead.

(c) Some, as Chrysostom, Theophylact, and Euthymius, think "groaned in spirit" means that Christ rebuked His own natural feelings by His Divine nature, or restrained His trouble and in so doing was greatly disturbed.

(d) Some, as Gomarus and Lampe, consider that our Lord was moved to holy sorrow and indignation at the sight of the unbelief even of Martha and Mary (expressed by their immoderate grief as if the case of Lazarus was hopeless) as well as at the sight of the unbelief of the Jews.

(e) Some, as Bullinger, Gualter, Diodati, Grotius, Maldonatus, Jansenius, Rollock, and Hutcheson, consider that the phrase simply expresses the highest and deepest kind of inward agitation of mind—an agitation in which grief, compassion, and holy detestation of sin's work in the world were all mingled and combined. This agitation,

however, was entirely inward at present; it was not bodily but spiritual, not in the flesh but in the spirit. As Burgon says, the "spirit" here means Christ's *inward* soul. I prefer this opinion to the former ones, though I fully admit it has difficulties. But it is allowed by Schleusner and Parkhurst, and seems the view of Tyndall, Cranmer, and the Geneva version, as well as of our own.

[*And was troubled*.] This expression is, to my mind, even more difficult than the one which immediately precedes it. It would be literally translated, as our marginal reading has it, "He troubled Himself." In fact, Wycliffe translates it so. Now what can this mean? Some maintain that in our Lord's mysterious Person the human nature was so entirely subordinated to the Divine that the human passions and affections never moved unless influenced and actuated by the Divine nature, and that here, to show His sympathy, He "troubled Himself." Thus Rupertus remarks that "if He had not troubled Himself, no one else could have troubled Him." I confess that I regard with view with a little suspicion. It seems to me to imply that our Lord's human nature was not like ours, and that His humanity was like an instrument played upon by His divinity, but in itself dead and passive until its music was called out. To my mind there is something dangerous in this.

I prefer to think that our Lord as man had all the feelings, passions, and affections of a man, but all under such perfect control that they never exceeded, as ours do, and were never even very demonstrative excepting on great occasions. As Beza says, there was no "disorder"

in His emotions. Here, I think, He saw an occasion for exhibiting a very deep degree of sorrow and sympathy, partly from the sorrowful sight He beheld, and partly from His love to Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Therefore, He greatly disturbed and "troubled Himself."

It still admits of a question whether the phrase may not be simply a Hebraism for "He was troubled." (Compare 1 Sam. 30:6 and 2 Sam. 12:18.) Hammond says it is a Hebrew idiom.

When all has been said, we must not forget that the phrase touches a very delicate and mysterious subject. That subject is the precise nature of the union of two natures in our Lord's Person. That He was at the same time perfect God and perfect Man is an article of the Christian faith, but how far the Divine nature acted on the human, and to what extent it checked and influenced the action of human passions and feelings, are very deep points which we have no line completely to fathom. After all, not the least part of our difficulty is that we can form no clear and adequate conception of a human nature entirely without sin.

One thing, at any rate, is abundantly clear from this passage: there is nothing wrong or wicked in being greatly moved by the sight of sorrow, so long as we keep our feelings under control. To be always cold, unfeeling, and unsympathizing may appear to some very dignified and philosophical. But though it may suit a Stoic, it is not consistent with the character of a Christian. Sympathy is not sinful but Christ-like. Theophylact observes that Christ "teaches us by His own example the due measure of joy and grief. The absence altogether of sympathy and sorrow is brutal; the excess of them is

womanly."

Melancthon observes that none of Christ's miracles seem to have been done without some great mental emotion (Luke 8:46). He supposes that here at this verse there was a great conflict with Satan in our Lord's mind, and that He wrestled in prayer for the raising of Lazarus, and then thanked God afterwards that the prayer was heard. Calvin takes much the same view. Ecolampadius observes that we must not think Christ had a human body only and not a human soul. He had a soul like our own in all things, sin only excepted, and capable of all our feelings and emotions. Piscator and Trapp compare the trouble of spirit which our Lord went through to the disturbance and agitation of perfectly clear water in a perfectly clear glass vessel. However great the agitation, the water remains clear.

Musculus reverently remarks that, after all, there is something about this "groaning in spirit and troubling Himself" which cannot be fully explained.

34.—[*And he said, Where have ye laid him?*] We cannot suppose that our Lord, who knew all things—even to the moment of Lazarus' death—could really need to be informed where Lazarus was buried. He asks what He does here partly as a kind friend to show His deep sympathy and interest in the grave of His friend, and partly to give further proof that there was no collusion in the matter of Lazarus' burial and that He had nothing to do with the choice of his tomb (in order to concert an imposture about raising him). In short, those

who heard Him publicly ask this question would see that this was no pre-arranged and pre-contrived miracle Quesnel remarks: “Christ does not ask out of ignorance any more than God did when He said “Adam, where are you?”

[*They said…come and see*.] Who they were that said this we do not exactly know. It was probably the common saying of all the party of mourners who stood around while Jesus talked with Mary. They did not know why our Lord wished to see the grave. They may possibly have supposed that He wished to accompany Mary and Martha and to weep at the grave. At any rate, the question and answer secured a large attendance of companions as the disciples and our Lord went to the place where Lazarus was buried. 35.—[*Jesus wept*.] This wonderful little verse has given rise to an enormous amount of comment. The difficulty is to select thoughts and not to overload the subject.

The Greek word rendered “wept” is not the same as that used for “weeping” in the thirty-third verse, but totally different. There the weeping is a weeping accompanied by demonstrative lamentation. Here the word would be more literally and accurately rendered “shed tears.” In fact, it is the only place in the New Testament where this word for “weep” is used. There are three occasions where our Lord is recorded in the Gospels to have wept: once when He beheld the city (Luke 19:41), once in the garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:39 and Heb. 6:7), and here. We never read of His laughing and only once of His rejoicing (Luke 10:21). The reasons assigned by commentators

why our Lord wept here, before He raised Lazarus, are various and curious.

(a) Some think that He wept to see the ravages made by death and sin.
(b) Some, as Hilary, think that He wept to think of the unbelief of the Jews.
(c) Some think that He wept to see how weak and feeble was the faith of Mary and Martha.
(d) Some, as Jerome and Ferus, think that He wept at the thought of the sorrow Lazarus would go through by returning to a sinful world.
(e) Some think that He wept out of sympathy with the affliction of His friends at Bethany, in order to give an eternal proof to His church that He can feel with us and for us.
I believe this last opinion is the true one.

We learn the great practical lesson from this verse that there is nothing unworthy of a Christian in tears. There is nothing unmanly, dishonorable, unwise, or feeble in being full of sympathy with the afflicted, and ready to weep with them that weep. Indeed, it is curious to gather up the many instances we have in Scripture of great men weeping. We may draw great comfort from the thought that the Savior in whom we are bid to trust is one who can weep, and is as able to feel as He is able to save.

We may learn the reality of our Lord's humanity very strongly from this little verse. He was one who could hunger, thirst, sleep, eat,

drink, speak, walk, groan, be wearied, wonder, feel indignant, rejoice —like any of ourselves, and yet without sin; and above all, He could weep. I read that there is "joy in the presence of the angels of God" (Luke 15), but I never read of angels weeping. Tears are peculiar to flesh and blood. Chrysostom remarks that "John, who enters into higher statements about our Lord's nature than any of the evangelists, also descends lower than any in describing His bodily affections."

36.—[*Then the Jews said, Behold, how He loved him!*] This sentence is the expression partly of surprise, which comes out in the word "behold," and partly of admiration, "What a loving and tender-hearted Teacher this is!" It gives the idea that those who said this were the few unprejudiced Jews who had come to Bethany to comfort Mary and Martha, and afterward believed when they saw Lazarus raised.

Let us observe that of all graces, love is the one which most arrests the attention and influences the opinion of the world. 37.—[*And some of them said, etc.*] This sentence sounds to me like the language of enemies determined to believe nothing good of our Lord and prepared to pick a hole or find a fault if possible in anything that He did. Does not a sarcastic sneer ring throughout it? "Could not this Man, if He really did open the eyes of that blind person at Jerusalem last autumn, have prevented this friend of His from dying? If He really is the Messiah and the Christ and really does work such wonderful works, why has He not prevented all this sorrow? If He

really loved Lazarus and his sisters, why did He not prove His love by keeping him back from the grave? Is it not plain that He is not Almighty? He cannot do everything. He could open the eyes of a blind man, but He could not prevent death carrying off His friend. If He was able to prevent Lazarus dying, why did He not do it? If He was not able, it is clear there are some things He cannot do." We should note that "the blind" is a word in the singular number. It is evidently the blind man at Jerusalem whose case is referred to. Let us note that nothing will convince, satisfy, or silence some wicked men. Even when Christ is before them, they are caviling, doubting, and finding fault. What right have Christ's ministers to be surprised if they meet with the same treatment?

Musculus remarks on the Satanic malice which this sentence displays. It is the old skeptical spirit of caviling and questioning. Unbelief is always saying, "Why, why, why?". "If this Man was such a friend of Lazarus and loved him so much, why did He let him die?"

JOHN 11:38-46

Lazarus Raised from the Dead

Jesus, intensely moved again, came to the tomb. (Now it was a cave, and a stone was placed across it.) Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the deceased, replied, "Lord, by this time the body will have a bad smell, because he has been buried four days." Jesus responded, "Didn't I tell you that if you believe, you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you that you have listened

to me. I knew that you always listen to me, but I said this for the sake of the crowd standing around here, that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said this, he shouted in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The one who had died came out, his feet and hands tied up with strips of cloth, and a cloth wrapped around his face. Jesus said to them, "Unwrap him and let him go."

Then many of the Jewish people from Jerusalem, who had come with Mary and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and reported to them what Jesus had done.

These verses record one of the greatest miracles the Lord Jesus Christ ever worked, and supply an unanswerable proof of His divinity. He whose voice could bring back from the grave one that had been four days dead, must indeed have been very God! The miracle itself is described in such simple language that no human comment can throw light upon it. But the *sayings* of our Lord on this occasion are peculiarly interesting, and demand special notice.

We should mark, first, ***our Lord's words about the STONE which lay upon the grave of Lazarus.*** We read that He said to those around Him, when he came to the place of burial, "Take you away the stone."

Now why did our Lord say this? It was doubtless as easy for Him to command the stone to roll away untouched as to call a dead body from the tomb. But such was not His mode of proceeding. Here, as in

other cases, He chose to give man something to do. Here, as elsewhere, He taught the great lesson that *His almighty power was not meant to destroy man's responsibility*. Even when He was ready and willing to raise the dead, He would not have man stand by altogether idle.

Let us treasure up this in our memories. It involves a point of great importance. In doing spiritual good to others—in training up our children for heaven—in following after holiness in our own daily walk—in all these things it is undoubtedly true that we are weak and helpless. "Without Christ we can do nothing." But still we must remember that *Christ expects us to do what we can*. "Take you away the stone" is the daily command which He gives us. Let us beware that we do not stand still in idleness, under the pretense of humility. Let us daily try to do what we can, and in the trying Christ will meet us and grant His blessing.

We should mark, secondly, ***the words which our Lord addressed to MARTHA, when she objected to the stone being removed from the grave.*** The faith of this holy woman completely broke down, when the cave where her beloved brother lay was about to be thrown open. She could not believe that it was of any use. "Lord," she cries, "by this time there is a bad smell." And then comes in the solemn reproof of our Lord— "Said I not unto you that if you would believe you should see the glory of God?"

That sentence is rich in meaning. It is far from unlikely that it contains a reference to the message which had been sent to Martha

and Mary, when their brother first fell sick. It may be meant to remind Martha that her Master had sent her word, “This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God.” But it is perhaps more likely that our Lord desired to recall to Martha’s mind the old lesson He had taught her all through His ministry, the duty of always believing. It is as though He said, “Martha, Martha, you are forgetting the great doctrine of faith, which I have always taught you. Believe, and all will be well. Fear not—only believe.”

The lesson is one which we can never know too well. How apt our faith is to break down in time of trial! How easy it is to talk of faith in the days of health and prosperity, and how hard to practice it in the days of darkness, when neither sun, moon, nor stars appear! Let us lay to heart what our Lord says in this place. Let us pray for such stores of inward faith, that when our turn comes to suffer, we may suffer patiently and believe all is well. The Christian who has ceased to say, “I must see, and then I will believe,” and has learned to say, “I believe, and ‘by and by’ I shall see,” has reached a high degree in the school of Christ.

We should mark, thirdly, ***the words which our Lord addressed to God the FATHER, when the stone was taken from the grave.*** We read that He said, “Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I knew that You hear Me always—but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that You have sent Me.”

This wonderful language is totally unlike anything said by Prophets or Apostles, when they worked miracles. In fact, it is not prayer, but praise. It evidently implies *a constant mysterious communion* going on between Jesus and His Father in heaven, which it is past the power of man either to explain or conceive. We need not doubt that here, as elsewhere in John, our Lord meant to teach the Jews the entire and complete unity there was between Him and His Father, in all that He did, as well as in all that He taught. Once more He would remind those who he did not come among them as a mere Prophet, but as the Messiah who was sent by the Father, and who was one with the Father. Once more He would have them know that as the words which He spoke were the very words which the Father gave Him to speak, so the works which He wrought were the very works which the Father gave Him to do. In short, He was the promised Messiah, whom the Father always hears, because He and the Father are One.

Deep and high as this truth is, it is for the peace of our souls to believe it thoroughly, and to grasp it tightly. Let it be a settled principle of our religion, that the Savior in whom we trust is nothing less than eternal God, One whom the Father hears always, One who in very deed is God's Fellow. A clear view of the dignity of our Mediator's Person is one secret of inward comfort. Happy is he who can say, "I know whom I have believed, and that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him." (2 Tim. 1:12.)

We should mark, lastly, ***the words which our Lord addressed to LAZARUS when he raised him from the grave.*** We read that "He cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth!" At the sound of that voice, the king of terrors at once yielded up his lawful captive, and the insatiable grave gave up its prey. At once "He that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave-clothes."

The greatness of this miracle cannot possibly be exaggerated. The mind of man can scarcely take in the vastness of the work that was done. Here, in open day, and before many hostile witnesses, a man, four days dead, was restored to life in a moment. Here was public proof that our Lord had absolute power over the material world! A corpse, already corrupt, was made alive!—Here was public proof that our Lord had absolute power over the world of spirits! A soul that had left its earthly tenement was called back from Paradise, and joined once more to its owner's body. Well may the Church of Christ maintain that He who could work such works was "God over all blessed forever." (Rom. 9:5.)

Let us turn from the whole passage with thoughts of comfort and consolation. Comfortable is the thought that the loving Savior of sinners, on whose mercy our souls entirely depend, is one who has all power in heaven, and earth, and is mighty to save. Comfortable is the thought that there is no sinner too far gone in sin for Christ to raise and convert. He that stood by the grave of Lazarus can say to the vilest of men, "Come forth loose him, and let him go." Comfortable,

not least, is the thought that when we ourselves lie down in the grave, we may lie down in the full assurance that we shall rise again. The voice that called Lazarus forth will one day pierce our tombs, and bid soul and body come together. “The trumpets shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.” (1 Cor. 15:52.)

Technical Notes:

38. Then Jesus, again groaning in himself, came to the grave. It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it. 39. Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to him, Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been *dead* four days. 40. Jesus said to her, Did I not say to you that if you would believe you should see the glory of God? 41. Then they took away the stone *from the place* where the dead was lying. And Jesus lifted up *his* eyes and said, Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 42. And I know that you always hear me, but because of the people who are standing by I said *it*, that they may believe that you have sent me. 43. And when he had said these things, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth! 44. And he who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with grave-clothes, and his face was wrapped with a napkin. Jesus said to them, Loose him, and let him go. 45. Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in him. 46. But some of them went away to the

Pharisees and told them the things Jesus had done.

38.—[*Then Jesus…came to the grave*.] The word rendered "groaning" is the same that was used at the 32nd verse, and the same remarks apply to it. The only difference is that here it is "groaning in Himself" and there "groaning in the spirit." This, however, confirms my impression that in the former verse "in the spirit" simply means "inwardly and spiritually," and that the general idea is "under the influence of very strong inward emotion."

The site of the grave, we need not doubt, was outside the village of Bethany. There was no such thing as interment within a town allowed among the Jews, or indeed among ancient nations generally. The practice of burying the dead among the living is a barbarous modern innovation, reflecting little credit on Christians.

Calvin remarks: "Christ approaches the sepulcher as a champion preparing for a contest; and we need not wonder that He groans as the violent tyranny of death, which He had to conquer, is placed before His eyes." Ecolampadius and Musculus think that the unbelieving, sneering remark of the Jews in the preceding verse is the reason why our Lord "again groaned." Bullinger thinks that the renewed emotion of our Lord was simply occasioned by the sight of the grave.

[*It was a cave…upon it*.] Graves among the Jews seem to have been of three kinds. (1) Sometimes, but rarely, they were holes dug down

into the ground like our own (see Luke 11:44). (2) Most frequently they were caves hewn horizontally into the side of a rock, with a stone placed against the mouth. This was most probably the kind of new tomb in which our Lord was laid. (3) Sometimes they were caves in which there was a sloping, downward descent. This appears to have been the description of grave in which Lazarus was buried. It says distinctly that "a stone lay *upon* it." No doubt these particulars are specified to supply incidental proof of the reality of Lazarus' death and burial.

39.—[*Jesus said, Take ye away the stone.*] The expression here conveys the idea of "lifting up" to take away. It is the same word that is rendered "lifted up" in verse 41.

The use of this word greatly strengthens the idea that the grave was a descending cave and not a horizontal one. When our Lord rose again, the stone was "rolled away from the door," and not lifted up (Matt. 28:2). By calling on the crowd of attendants to take away the stone, our Lord effected two things. Firstly, He impressed on the minds of all engaged the reality and truth of the miracle He was about to perform. Everyone who lent a hand to lift the huge stone and remove it would remember it and become a witness. He would be able to say, "I myself helped to lift up the stone. I myself am sure there was no imposture. There was a dead body inside the grave." In fact, we cannot doubt that the smell rising from the bottom of the cave would tell anyone who helped to lift the stone what there was there. Secondly, our Lord teaches us the simple lesson that He would have man do what he can. Man cannot raise the soul and give life, but he

can often remove the stone.

Flacius points out the likeness between this command and the command at Cana to fill the waterpots with water (John 2:7).

That the stones placed at the mouth of graves in Palestine were very large and not easily moved, we may see from Mark 16:3. [*Martha, the sister of him, etc.*] This is a remarkable sentence and teaches several important things.

(a) It certifies, for the last time, the reality of Lazarus' death. He was not in a swoon or a trance. His own sister, who had doubtless seen him die and closed his eyes, declares before the crowd of onlookers that Lazarus had been dead four days and was fast going to corruption. This we may well believe in such a climate as that of Palestine.

(b) It proves beyond a reasonable doubt that there was no imposture, no collusion, no concerted deception arranged between the family of Bethany and our Lord. Here is the sister of Lazarus actually questioning the propriety of our Lord's order and publicly saying in effect that it is no use to move the stone, that nothing can now be done to deliver her brother from the power of death. Like the eleven Apostles, after Jesus Himself rose, Martha was not a willing and prepared witness but a resisting and unwilling one.

(c) It teaches, not least, how much unbelief there is in a believer's

heart at the bottom. Here is holy Martha, with all her faith in our Lord's Messiahship, shrinking and breaking down at this most critical point. She cannot believe that there is any use in removing the stone. She suggests, impulsively and anxiously, her doubt whether our Lord remembers how long her brother has been dead.

It is not for nothing that we are specially told it was "Martha, the sister of him that was dead," who said this. If even she could say this and raise objections, the idea of imposture and deception becomes absurd. Some writers object to putting the full literal meaning on the Greek word rendered "stench." But I can see nothing in the objection. We need not suppose that the body of Lazarus was different to other bodies. Moreover, it was just as easy for our Lord to raise a corpse four days' dead as one only four hours' dead. In either case, the grand difficulty to be overcome would be the same: viz., to change death into life. Indeed, it is worth considering whether this fact about Lazarus is not specially mentioned in order to show our Lord's power to restore man's corrupt and decayed body at the last day, and to make it a glorious body.

Let us note here what a humbling lesson death teaches. So terrible and painful is the corruption of a body, when the breath leaves it, that even those who love us most are glad to bury us out of sight (Gen. 23:4). Musculus suggests that Martha had so little idea what our Lord was going to do that she supposed He only wanted to see Lazarus' face once more. This is perhaps going too far.

The Greek for “dead four days” is a singular expression and one that cannot be literally rendered in English. It would be, “He is a person of four days,” and it may possibly mean, “He has been buried four days.” Raphelius gives examples from Herodotus and Xenophon which make it possible that it means either dead or buried.

Lightfoot mentioned a very curious tradition of the Jews: “They say after death the spirit hovers about the sepulchre, waiting to see if it may return to the body. But when it sees the look of the face of the corpse changed, then it hovers no more but leaves the body to itself.” He also adds: “They do not certify of the dead, except within three days after decease, for after three days the countenance changes.” 40. —[*Jesus said to her, Did I not, etc.*] This gentle but firm reproof is remarkable. It is not clear to what our Lord refers in the words “Did I not say.”

(a) Some think, as Rupertus, that He refers to the message He sent at the beginning: “This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God.”

(b) Some think that He refers to the conversation He had with Martha when she first met Him outside Bethany.

(c) Some think that He refers to words He had often used in discoursing with Martha and Mary on former occasions.

The point is one which must be left open, as we have no means of

settling it. My own impression is that there is probably a reference to the message which our Lord sent back to the sisters at first, when Lazarus was sick. I fancy there must have been something more said at that time which is not recorded, and that our Lord reminded Martha of this. At the same time I cannot doubt that our Lord constantly taught the family of Bethany, and all His disciples, that believing is the grand secret of seeing God's glorious works. "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes." "He did not many mighty works because of their unbelief." (Mark 9:23, Matt. 13:58.) Unbelief, in a certain sense, seems to tie the hands and limit the power of omnipotence.

Let us note that even the best believers need reminding of Christ's sayings and are apt to forget them. "Said I not unto thee." It is a little sentence we should often call to mind.

41.—[Then they took away the stone...lying.] Martha's interruption seems to me to have caused a little pause in the proceedings. She being the nearest relative of Lazarus, and having probably arranged everything concerning his burial, and provided his tomb, we may well believe that her speech made the bystanders hesitate to move the stone. When, however, they heard our Lord's solemn reply and observed that she was silenced and made no further objection, "then" they proceeded to do what our Lord desired. Hall remarks: "They that laid their hands to the stone doubtless held still awhile, when Martha spoke, and looked one while on Christ, another while on Martha, to hear what issue of resolution would follow so important

an objection."

[*And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said.*] We now reach a point of thrilling and breathless interest. The stone had been removed from the mouth of the cave. Our Lord stands before the open grave, and the crowd stands around awaiting anxiously to see what would happen next. Nothing appears from the tomb. There is no sign of life at present, but while all are eagerly looking and listening, our Lord addressed His Father in heaven in a most solemn manner, lifting up His eyes and speaking audibly to Him in the hearing of all the crowd. The reason He explains in the next verse. Now, for the last time, about to work His mightiest miracle, He once more makes a public declaration that He did nothing separate from His Father in heaven, and that in this and all His works there is a mysterious and intimate union between Himself and the Father. We should note how He suits the action to the word. "He lifted up His eyes." (Compare John 17:1.) He showed that He was addressing an unseen Father in heaven.

[*Father, I thank...heard me.*] This is a remarkable expression. Our Lord begins with "thanks" when man would have expected Him to offer prayer. How shall we explain it?

(a) Some think that our Lord refers to prayer He had put up to the Father concerning the death of Lazarus, from the moment that He heard of his illness, and to His present firm conviction that those prayers had been heard and were going to receive a public answer.

(b) Others think that there is no reason to suppose that our Lord refers to any former or remote prayer; that there was a constant, hourly, minutely communication between Himself and His heavenly Father, and that to pray and return thanks for the answer to prayer were actions which in His experience were very closely connected.

The subject is a deep and mysterious one, and I shrink from giving a very positive opinion about it. That our Lord constantly prayed on all occasions we know from the Gospels. That He prayed sometimes with great agony of mind and with tears we also know (Heb. 5:7). But how far He could know anything of that peculiar struggle which we poor sinners have to carry on with doubt, fear, and anxiety in our prayers, is another question altogether and very hard to answer. One might suppose that One who was as man, entirely holy, humble, and without sin, might be able to thank for prayer heard almost as soon as prayer was offered. Upon this theory the sentence before us would be plain: "I pray that Lazarus may be raised, and I thank You at the same time for hearing my prayer, as I know You do." And yet we must not forget two of our Lord's prayers not granted, apparently: "Father, save Me from this hour;" "Father, let this cup pass from Me." (John 12:47 and Mark 26:29.) It is, however, only fair to say that the first of these prayers is greatly qualified by the context, and the second by the words "If it be possible."

We may note here as elsewhere what an example of thankfulness as well as prayerfulness our Lord always supplies. Well if it was followed! His people are always more ready to ask than to thank. The

more grace in a heart the more humility, and the more humility the more praise. Chrysostom remarks: “Who now ever prayed in this manner? Before uttering any prayer, He said ‘I thank Thee,’ showing that He needed not prayer.” He also says that the real cause of our Lord saying this was to show the Jews He was no enemy of God but did all His works according to His will. Origen observes: “If to those who pray worthily is given the promise in Isaiah, ‘You shall cry, and He shall say, Here I am,’ what answer think we could our Lord receive? He was about to pray for the resurrection of Lazarus. He was heard by the Father before He prayed; His request was granted before it was made; and, therefore, He begins with thanks.” Musculus, Flacius, and Glassius think that our Lord refers to prayer He had been putting up secretly when He was “groaning in spirit and troubled,” and that He was then wrestling and agonizing in prayer, though those around Him knew it not. We may remember that at the Red Sea we are not told of any audible prayer Moses offered, and the Lord says, “Why do you cry to Me?” (Exodus 14:15.)

Quesnel observes: “Christ being about to conclude His public life and preaching by the last and most illustrious of His miracles, returns solemn thanks to His Father for the power given to His human nature to prove the authority of His mission by miracles.”

Hall observes: “Words express our hearts to men, thoughts to God. Well did You know, Lord, out of the self-sameness of Your will with the Father’s, that if You did but think in Your heart that Lazarus should rise, he was now raised. It was not for You to pray vocally and

audibly, lest those captious hearers should say, You did all by entreaty, and nothing by power."

42.—[*And I know that You always hear me, etc.*] This verse is so elliptical that the meaning can hardly be seen without a paraphrase. "I do not give Thee these thanks as if I had ever doubted Thy willingness to hear Me; on the contrary, I know well that Thou always hearest Me. Thou dost not only hear all my prayers as Man, both for myself and my people; Thou dost also ever hear Me, even as I hear Thee, from the mystical union there is between the Father and the Son. But I have now said this publicly for the benefit of this crowd of people standing by the grave, in order that they may see and believe for the last time that I do no miracle without Thee, and that I am the Messiah whom Thou hast sent into the world. I would have them publicly hear Me declare that I work this last great work as Thy Sent One, and as a last evidence that I am the Christ." I cannot but think there is a deep meaning about the expression, "Thou hearest Me always." (Compare John 5:30.) But I admit the difficulty of the phrase and would speak with diffidence.

It is impossible to imagine a more thorough open challenge to the attention of the Jews than the language which preceded the raising of Lazarus. Before doing this stupendous work, our Lord proclaims that He is doing and speaking as He does to supply a proof that the Father sent and commissioned Him as the Christ. Was He the "Sent One" or not? This, we must always remember, was the great question of which He undertook to give proof. The Jews, moreover, said that

He did His miracles by Beelzebub; let them hear that He did all by the power of God.

Bullinger remarks that our Lord seems to say, “The Jews do not all understand that union and communion between Me and Thee by which we are of the same will, power, and substance. Some of them even think that I work by the power of the devil. Therefore, that all may believe that I come from Thee, am sent by Thee, am Thy Son, equal to Thee, light of light, very God of very God, I use expressions of this sort.” Poole remarks: “There is a great difference between God’s hearing of Christ and hearing us. Christ and His Father have one essence, one nature, and one will.”

The following miracles were wrought by Christ without audible prayer and with only an authoritative word: Matt. 8:8, 9:6, Mark 5:41, 9:25, and Luke 7:14.
Wordsworth observes: “Christ prayed to show that He was not against God nor God against Him, and that what He did was done with God’s approval.” 43.—[*And when…cried…come forth.*] In this verse we have the last and crowning stage of the miracle. Attention was concentrated on the grave and our Lord. The crowd looked on with breathless expectation. And then, while they looked (having secured their attention), our Lord bids Lazarus come forth out of the grave. The Greek word for “He cried” is only in this place applied to any voice or utterance of our Lord. In Matt. 12:19 it is used, where it is said of our Lord, “He shall *not cry*.” Here it is evident that He purposely used a very loud, piercing cry, that all around might hear

and take notice.

Theophylact thinks that Jesus "cried aloud to contradict the Gentile fable that the soul remained in the tomb with the body. Therefore the soul of Lazarus is called to as if it were absent, and a loud voice were necessary to summon it back." Euthymius suggests the same reason. This, however, seems an odd idea.

On the other hand, Brentius, Grotius, and Lampe suggest that Jesus "cried with a loud voice" to prevent the Jews from saying that He muttered or whispered some magical form or words of enchantment, as witches did. Ferus observes that our Lord did not say, "In the name of my Father come forth," or "Raise Him, O my Father," but acts by His own authority.

44.—[*And he who had died came forth.*] The effect of our Lord's words was seen at once. As soon as He "cried," Lazarus was seen coming up out of the cave before the eyes of the crowd. A more plain, distinct, and unmistakable miracle it would be impossible for man to imagine. That a dead man should hear a voice, obey it, rise up and move forth from his grave alive is utterly contrary to nature. God alone could cause such a thing. What first began life in him, how lungs and heart began to act again suddenly and instantaneously, it would be a waste of time to speculate. It was a miracle, and there we must leave it. The idea of some, that Lazarus moved out of the grave without the use of his legs, passing through air like a spirit or ghost, seems to me needless and unreasonable. I agree with Hutcheson,

Hall, and Pearce that, though "bound hand and foot," there is no certain proof that his legs were tied together so tightly that he could not move out of the grave, though slowly and with difficulty like one encumbered, on his own feet. The tardy, shuffling action of such a figure would strike all. Pearce remarks, "He must have come forth crawling on his knees." We are surely not required to multiply miracles. Yet the idea that Lazarus came out with a supernatural motion seems to be held by Augustine, Zwingli, Ecolampadius, Bucer, Gualter, Toletus, Jansenius, Lampe, Lightfoot, and Alford, who think it part of the miracle. I would not press my opinion positively on others, though I firmly maintain it. My own private feeling is that the slow, gradual, tottering movements of a figure encumbered by grave clothes would impress a crowd far more than the rapid, ghostlike gliding out in air of a body of which the feet did not move.

[*And his face was wrapped with a napkin*.] This is mentioned to show that he had been really dead and his corpse treated like all other corpses. If not dead, he would have been unable to breathe through the napkin for four days.

[*Jesus said to them, Loose him, and let him go*.] This command was given for two reasons: partly that many around might touch Lazarus and see for themselves that it was not a ghost but a real body that was raised, and partly that he might be able to walk to his own house before the eyes of the multitude as a living man. This, until he was freed from grave clothes and his eyes were unbandaged, would have

been impossible. Very striking is it to remark how in the least minute particulars the objections of infidels and skeptics are quietly forestalled and met in Gospel narrative! Thus Chrysostom remarks that the command to "loose him" would enable the friends who bore Lazarus to the grave to know from the grave clothes that it was the very person they had buried four days before. They would recognize the clothes. They could not say, as some had said in the case of the blind man, "This is not he." He also remarks that hands, eyes, ears, and nostrils would all convince the witnesses of the truth of the miracle.

45.—[Then many of the Jews…believed in him.] This verse describes the good effect which the raising of Lazarus had on many of the Jews who had come from Jerusalem to comfort Mary and Martha. Their remaining prejudices gave way. They were unable to resist the extraordinary evidence of the miracle they had just seen. From that day, they no longer denied that Jesus was the Christ. Whether their belief was faith unto salvation may well be doubted; but at any rate they ceased to oppose and blaspheme. And it is more than probable that on the day of Pentecost many of those very Jews whose hearts had been prepared by the miracle of Bethany came boldly forward and were baptized.

We should observe in this verse what a signal blessing God was pleased to bestow on sympathy and kindness. If the Jews had not come to comfort Mary under her affliction, they would not have seen the mighty miracle of raising Lazarus and perhaps would not have

been saved. Lampe remarks on these Jews: “They had come as the merciful, and they obtained mercy.”

Besner observes the beautiful delicacy with which St. John draws a veil over the effect on Martha and Mary of this miracle, while he dwells on the effect it had on strangers.

46.—[*But some of them went… Jesus had done.*] We see in this verse the bad effect which the raising of Lazarus had on some who saw it. Instead of being softened and convinced, they were hardened and enraged. They were vexed to see even more unanswerable proofs that Jesus was the Christ, and irritated to feel that their own unbelief was more than ever inexcusable. They therefore hurried off to the Pharisees to report what they had seen and to point out the progress that our Lord was making in the immediate neighborhood of Jerusalem.

The amazing wickedness of human nature is strikingly illustrated in this verse. There is no greater mistake than to suppose that seeing miracles will necessarily convert souls. Here is a plain proof that it does not. Never was there a more remarkable confirmation of our Lord’s words in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus: “If they believe not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.” Musculus observes what a wonderful example we have here of the sovereign grace of God, choosing some and leading them to repentance and faith, and not choosing others. Here is the same miracle, seen under the same

circumstances and with the same evidence, by a large crowd of persons. Yet while some believe, others believe not! It is like the case of the two thieves on the cross both seeing the same sight, one repenting and the other impenitent. The same fire which melts wax hardens clay. In leaving this wonderful miracle, there are three things which demand special notice.

(a) We should observe that we are not told of anything that Lazarus said about his state while in the grave and nothing of his after history. Tradition says that he lived for thirty years after and was never known to smile; but this is probably a mere apocryphal invention. As to his silence, we can easily see there is a Divine wisdom about it. If St. Paul "could not utter" the things that he saw in the third heaven and called them "unspeakable things," it is not strange that Lazarus should say nothing of what he saw in Paradise (2 Cor. 12:4). But there may be always seen in Scripture a striking silence about the feelings of men and women who have been the subjects of remarkable Divine interposition. God's ways are not man's ways. Man loves sensation and excitement, and likes to make God's work on his fellow creatures a gazing-stock and a show, to their great damage. God almost always seems to withdraw them from the public, both for their own good and His glory.

(b) We should observe that we are told nothing of the feelings of Martha and Mary after they saw their brother raised to life. The veil is drawn over their joy, though it was not over their sorrow. Affliction is a more profitable study than rejoicing.

(c) We should observe, lastly, that the raising of Lazarus is one of the most signal instances in the Gospels of Christ's Divine power. To Him who could work such a miracle, nothing is impossible. He can raise from the death of sin any dead soul, however far gone and corrupt. He will raise us from the grave at His own second appearing. The voice which called Lazarus from the tomb is almighty. "The dead shall hear the voice of the Son of Man, and they that hear shall live" (John 5:25).

JOHN 11:47-57

Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called the council together and said, "What are we doing? For this man is performing many miraculous signs. If we allow him to go on in this way, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away our sanctuary and our nation."

Then one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said, "You know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is more to your advantage to have one man die for the people than for the whole nation to perish." (Now he did not say this on his own, but because he was high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the Jewish nation, and not for the Jewish nation only, but to gather together into one the children of God who are scattered.) So from that day they planned together to kill him.

Thus Jesus no longer walked about publicly among the Jewish people of Jerusalem, but went away from there to the region near the wilderness, to a town called Ephraim, and stayed there with his disciples. Now the Jewish feast of Passover was near, and many people went up to Jerusalem from the rural areas before the Passover to cleanse themselves ritually. Thus they were looking for Jesus, and saying to one another as they stood in the temple courts, "What do you think? That he won't come to the feast?" (Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that anyone who knew where Jesus was should report it, so that they could arrest him.)

These concluding verses of the eleventh chapter of John contain a melancholy picture of human nature. As we turn away from Jesus Christ and the grave at Bethany, and look at Jerusalem and the rulers of the Jews, we may well say, "Lord, what is man?"

We should observe, for one thing, in these verses, ***the desperate wickedness of man's natural heart. A*** mighty miracle was wrought within an easy walk of Jerusalem. A man four days dead was raised to life, in the sight of many witnesses. The fact was unmistakable, and could not be denied; and yet the chief priests and Pharisees would not believe that He who did this miracle ought to be received as the Messiah. In the face of overwhelming evidence they shut their eyes, and refused to be convinced. "This man," they admitted, "does many miracles." But so far from yielding to this

testimony, they only plunged into further wickedness, and "took counsel to put Him to death." Great, indeed, is the power of unbelief!

Let us beware of supposing that miracles alone have any power to convert men's souls, and to make them Christians. The idea is a complete delusion. To fancy, as some do, that if they saw something wonderful done before their eyes in confirmation of the Gospel, they would at once cast off all indecision and serve Christ, is a mere idle dream. It is the grace of the Spirit in our hearts, and not miracles, that our souls require. The Jews of our Lord's day are a standing proof to mankind that men may see signs and wonders, and yet remain hard as stone. It is a deep and true saying, "If men believe not Moses and the Prophets, neither would they be persuaded though one rose from the dead." (Luke 16:31.)

We must never wonder if we see abounding unbelief in our own times, and around our own homes. It may seem at first unexplainable to us, how men cannot see the truth which seems so clear to ourselves, and do not receive the Gospel which appears so worthy of acceptance. But the plain truth is, that man's unbelief is a far more deeply seated disease than it is generally reckoned. It is proof against the logic of facts, against reasoning, against argument, against moral persuasion. Nothing can melt it down but the grace of God. If we ourselves believe, we can never be too thankful. But we must never count it a strange thing, if we see many of our fellows just as hardened and unbelieving as the Jews.

We should observe, for another thing, ***the blind ignorance with which God's enemies often act and reason.*** These rulers of the Jews said to one another, "If we let this Christ alone we shall be ruined. If we do not stop His course, and make an end of His miracles, the Romans will interfere, and make an end of our nation." Never, the event afterward proved, was there a more short-sighted and erring judgment than this. They rushed madly on the path they had chosen, and the very thing they feared came to pass. They did not leave our Lord alone, but crucified and slew Him. And what happened then? After a few years, the very calamity they had dreaded took place—the Roman armies did come, destroyed Jerusalem, burned the temple, and carried away the whole nation into captivity.

The well-read Christian need hardly be reminded of many such like things in the history of Christ's Church. The Roman emperors persecuted the Christians in the first three centuries, and thought it a positive duty not to let them alone. But the more they persecuted them, the more they increased. The blood of the martyrs became the seed of the Church. The English Papists, in the days of Queen Mary, persecuted the Protestants, and thought that truth was in danger if they were let alone. But the more they burned our forefathers, the more they confirmed men's minds in steadfast attachment to the doctrines of the Reformation. In short, the words of the second Psalm are continually verified in this world— "The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord." But "He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall

have them in derision." God can make the designs of His enemies work together for the good of His people, and cause the wrath of man to praise Him. In days of trouble, and rebuke, and blasphemy, believers may rest patiently in the Lord. The very things that at one time seem likely to hurt them, shall prove in the end to be for their gain.

We should observe, lastly, ***what importance unsaved men sometimes attach to outward ceremonies, while their hearts are full of sin.*** We are told that many Jews "went up out of the country to Jerusalem, before the Passover, to purify themselves." The most of them, it may be feared, neither knew nor cared anything about inward purity of heart. They made much ado about the washings, and fasting's, and ascetic observances, which formed the essence of popular Jewish religion in our Lord's time; and yet they were willing in a very few days to shed innocent blood. Strange as it may appear, these very sticklers for outward ceremonies were found ready to do the will of the Pharisees, and to put their own Messiah to a violent death.

Extremes like this meeting together in the same person are, unhappily, far from uncommon. Experience shows that a bad conscience will often try to satisfy itself, by a show of zeal for the cause of religion, while the "weightier matters" of the faith are entirely neglected. The very same man who is ready to compass sea and land to attain ceremonial purity is often the very man, who, if he had fit opportunity, would not shrink from helping to crucify Christ.

Startling as these assertions may seem, they are abundantly borne out by plain facts. The cities where Lent is kept at this day with the most extravagant strictness are the very cities where the carnival after Lent is a season of glaring excess and immorality. The people in some parts of Christendom, who make much ado one week about fasting and priestly absolution, are the very people who another week will think nothing of murder! These things are simple realities. The hideous inconsistency of the Jewish formalists in our Lord's time has never been without a long succession of followers.

Let us settle it firmly in our minds that a religion which expends itself in zeal for outward formalities is utterly worthless in God's sight. The purity that God desires to see is not the purity of bodily washing and fasting, of holy water and self-imposed asceticism, but purity of heart. External worship and ceremonialism may "satisfy the flesh," but they do not tend to promote real godliness. The standard of Christ's kingdom must be sought in the sermon on the Mount—"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." (Matt. 5:8; Col. 2:23.)

Technical Notes:

47. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, What shall we do? For this man does many miracles. 48. If we thus let him alone, all *men* will believe in him, and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation. 49. And one of them *named* Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said to

them, Ye know nothing at all, 50. nor consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation perish. 51. And this he spoke not of himself, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; 52. and not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad. 53. Then, from that day forth, they took counsel together to put him to death. 54. Jesus therefore walked no more openly among the Jews, but went from there into a country near the wilderness, to a city called Ephraim, and there remained with his disciples. 55. And the Jews' Passover was near at hand, and many went from the country up to Jerusalem before the Passover, to purify themselves. 56. Then they sought Jesus, and spoke among themselves as they stood in the temple, What think ye—that he will not come to the feast? 57. Now both the chief priests and the Pharisees had given a command, that if any man knew where he was, he should report *it*, that they might seize him.

47.—[*Then the chief priests…council.*] This council was probably the great Sanhedrim, or consultative assembly of the Jewish Church. It was for purely ecclesiastical and not for civil or political purposes. It is the same assembly before which, it is conjectured with much show of reason, our Lord made His defense in the fifth chapter of this gospel. On receiving the tidings of the astounding miracle which had

been worked at Bethany, our Lord's bitterest enemies, the chief priests and Pharisees, seem to have been alarmed and enraged and to have felt the absolute necessity of taking decided measures to check our Lord's progress. Ecclesiastical rulers, unhappily, are often the foremost enemies of the Gospel.

[*And said, What shall we do?*] This question indicates perplexity and irritation. "What are we about? Are we going to sit still and let this new Teacher carry all before Him? What is the use of trifling with this new heresy? We are doing nothing effectual to check it. It grows, and we let it alone."

[*For this man does many miracles.*] This is a marvelous admission. Even our Lord's worst enemies confess that our Lord did miracles, and many miracles. Can we doubt that they would have denied the truth of His miracles if they could? But they do not seem to have attempted it. The miracles were too many, too public, and too thoroughly witnessed for them to dare to deny them. How, in the fact of this fact, modern infidels and skeptics can talk of our Lord's miracles as being impostures and delusions they would do well to explain! If the Pharisees who lived in our Lord's time, and who moved heaven and earth to oppose His progress, never dared to dispute the fact that He worked miracles, it is absurd to begin denying His miracles now after eighteen centuries have passed away. Let us note the desperate hardness and wickedness of man's heart. Even the sight of miracles will not convert anyone, without the renewing grace of the Holy Ghost.

Brentius remarks that the simple answer to the question of this verse ought to have been, “Our duty is to believe at once that this worker of many miracles is the Christ of God.”

48.—[*If we thus let him alone.*] This means, “If we continue to treat Him as we do now and take no more active measures to put Him down,—if we only dispute and reason and argue and cavil and denounce Him but let Him have His liberty, let Him go where He pleases, let Him do what He pleases, and preach what He pleases.” “Thus” can only mean “as at present, and hitherto.”

[*All men will believe in him.*] This means the bulk of the population will believe that He is what He *professes* to be—the promised Messiah. The number of His adherents will increase, and faith in His Messiahship will become contagious and spread all over Palestine. The word “all” in this sentence must evidently not be taken literally. It only means “the great mass of the people.” It is like “all men come to Him,” said by the angry disciples of John the Baptist about Christ (John 3:36). When men lose their tempers and talk in passion, they are very apt to use exaggerated expressions.

[The Romans…take away…nation.] The process of reasoning by which the Pharisees arrived at this conclusion was probably something of this kind: “This man, if let alone, will gather round Him a crowd of adherents who will proclaim Him a Leader and King. This our governors, the Romans, will hear and consider it a rebellion against their authority. Then they will send an army, deal with us as

rebels, destroy Jerusalem and the temple, and carry away the whole Jewish nation, as the Babylonians did, into captivity."
In this wretched argument, it is difficult to say which appears most prominent, ignorance or unbelief.

It was an *ignorant* argument. The Pharisees ought to have known well that nothing was further from our Lord's teaching than the idea of an earthly kingdom, supported by an armed force. He always proclaimed that His kingdom was not of this world and not temporal, like Solomon's or David's. He had never hinted at any deliverance from Roman authority. He distinctly taught men to render to Caæsar the things that were Cæser's and had distinctly refused, when appealed to, to be "a Judge or divider" among the Jews. Such a person, therefore, was not the least likely to excite the jealousy of the Romans.

It was an *unbelieving* argument. The Pharisees ought to have believed that the Romans could never have conquered and put down our Lord and His adherents, if He really was the Messiah and could work miracles at His will. The Philistines could not overcome David, and the Romans could not have overcome David's greater Son. By their own showing, the Jewish nation would have had protection enough in the miracle-working power of our Lord. That there was an exception throughout the East, at the time of our Lord's ministry, that some remarkable person was about to arise and become a great leader, is mentioned by Roman historians. But there is no evidence that the Roman government ever showed jealousy of anyone who

was merely a religious teacher, like our Lord, and did not interfere with the civil power.

The plain truth is that this saying of the Pharisees looks like an excuse, caught up as a weapon against our Lord, and a pretext for stirring up enmity against Him. What they really hated was our Lord's doctrine, which exposed their own system and weakened their authority. They felt that their craft was in danger, but not daring to say this publicly, they pretended a fear that He would excite the jealousy of the Romans and endanger the whole nation. They did just the same when they finally accused Him to Pilate as One that stirred up sedition and made Himself a King. It is no uncommon thing for wicked people to assign very untrue reasons for their conduct and to keep back and conceal their true motives. Demetrius, and his friends at Ephesus, said that the temple of the great goddess Diana was in danger when in reality it was their own craft and their own wealth. The Jews at Thessalonica who persecuted Paul pretended great zeal for "the decrees of Cæsar," when their real motive was hatred of Christ's Gospel. The Pharisees here pretended fear of the Romans when in reality they found the growing influence of Jesus pulling down their own power over the people.

Calvin observes: "They double their wickedness by a plausible disguise— their zeal for the public good. The fear that chiefly distressed them was that their own tyranny should be destroyed; but they pretend to be anxious about the temple and worship of God."

Bucer compares the Pharisees' pretended fear of the Romans to the absurd fears of the consequence of printing and literature, which the Papists used to express at the period of the Reformation.

Flacius remarks that "through fear of Cæsar, God is despised and His Son crucified, and this under pretext of preserving religion, the temple, and the nation. Human wisdom preserves itself by appeasing man and offending God!"

Ferus remarks that the council entirely forgot that "rulers, whether the Romans or any others, are not a terror to good works, but to evil. If the Jews had believed and obeyed God, they had nothing to fear." That the leading Jews at Jerusalem had a strong suspicion that Jesus really was the Messiah, in spite of all their outrageous enmity and unbelief, is evident not only from comparison of other places, but from their nervous anxiety to get rid of Him. They knew that Daniel's seventy weeks were run out. They could not deny the miracles that Jesus did. But they dared not follow out their conviction and draw the conclusion they ought to have drawn. They willingly shut their eyes against light. How miserably mistaken the policy of the Pharisees proved to be, it is needless to say. If they had let Jesus alone and allowed His Gospel to be received and believed, Jerusalem, humanly speaking, might have stood to this day, and the Jews might have been more mighty and prosperous than in the days of Solomon. By not letting Jesus alone and by killing Him, they filled up the measure of their nation's sin, and brought destruction on the temple, and scattering on the whole people.

"Take away," applied to place here, must mean "destroy." Thus Matt. 24:39: "The flood took them all away."

Some, as Heinsius and Bloomfield, think that "our place" means the city, Jerusalem.

Some, as Olshausen and Alford, think that "our place" means "our country." Others, as Maldonatus, Hutcheson, Poole, and Hammond, with whom I entirely agree, think "our place" means the temple (compare Acts 6:13,14). Lampe thinks this view is proved by Micah 1:3.

Calvin observes, how many people in his day were always hanging back from helping the Protestant Reformation, from the very same motives as these Jews—the fear of consequences. "We must consult public tranquility. There are dangers in the way."

49.—[*And one of them, named Caiaphas.*] This man, by comparing Acts 5:17, would seem to have been of the sect of the Sadducees. We also know that he was son-in-law to Annas, of whom Josephus specially mentions that he was a Sadducee. If this view be correct (and Guyse, Gill, Scott, and Lampe agree with me in it), it rather accounts for the contemptuous way in which he seems to speak in replying here to the saying of the Pharisees. It is remarkable, however, to observe how Pharisees and Sadducees, who disagreed on so many points, were agreed in hating and opposing Christ.

Formalists and skeptics, in all ages, make common cause against the Gospel.

[*Being the high priest that same year*.] This expression shows the disorder and irregularity which prevailed in the Jewish Church in our Lord's time. According to the law of Moses, the office of high priest was tenable for life. In the last days of the Jews, the office seems to have been obtainable by election and to have been held with great variety of term. Caiaphas was high priest when John the Baptist began his ministry, and Annas with him (Luke 3:2). He was also high priest after the Day of Pentecost and before the persecution of Stephen. No wonder St. Paul says, on a subsequent occasion, of Ananias, "I did not know that he was the high priest" (Acts 23:2).

Poole remarks: "After Herod's time, there was no regard to the family of Aaron, but the Romans made what high priests they pleased. Josephus tells us that the Jews had thirteen high priests from Aaron to Solomon, which was 612 years; eighteen from Solomon to the Babylonian captivity, which was 460 years; fifteen from the captivity to Antiochus, which was 414 years; but they had no less than twenty-eight between the time that Herod began to reign and Jerusalem was destroyed, which was less than a century." [*Said… Ye know nothing at all*.] The word rendered "ye" is here emphatic in the Greek. It seems not unlikely that it expresses Caiaphas' contempt for the ignorance and helplessness of the Pharisees' question. "You and all your party do not understand what the situation of things requires. You are wasting time in complaints

and expressions of vexation when a sterner, severer policy is imperatively demanded."

Chrysostom remarks: "What others made matter of doubt and put forth in the way of deliberation, this man cried aloud shamelessly, openly, and *audaciously—One must die."*
Pearce thinks that some of the Jews in council must have talked of only putting a stop to Christ's preaching, as they afterward tried to stop the Apostles (Acts 4:18), but that Caiaphas ridiculed such weak counsel and advised more violent measures. May we not suppose that Nicodemus and others spoke in favor of our Lord?

50.—[*Nor consider*.] The word thus rendered is almost always translated "reason" and is nowhere "consider" except here. It seems to imply that Caiaphas wished the Pharisees to know that they had not reasoned out and properly weighed the right thing to be done. Hence this perplexity. He would now show them the conclusion they ought to have come to.

[*It is expedient…nation perish*.] Caiaphas' conclusion is short and decisive. He gives it elliptically. "This Man must die. It is far better that one should die, whether innocent or not, for the benefit of the whole nation than that the whole nation should be brought into trouble and perish. You are thinking that if we do not let this Man alone, and interfere, we are injuring an innocent person. Away with such childish scruples. Let Him be put out of the way. It is expedient to kill Him. Better He should die to save the nation from further

trouble than live and the nation be brought into trouble by Him."

I cannot suppose that Caiaphas meant anything more than this. He simply argues that Christ's death would be a public benefit, and that to spare Him might bring destruction on the nation. Of the full meaning that His words were capable of bearing, I do not believe he had the least idea. Let us carefully note here what crimes and sins may be committed on the ground of *expediency*. None are so likely to be tempted to commit such sins as rulers and governors. None are so likely to do things unjust, dishonest, and oppressive as a Government under the pressure of the spurious argument that it is expedient that the few should suffer rather than the many should take harm. For political expediency Christ was crucified. What a fact that is! Ought we not rather to ask always what is just, what is right, what is honorable in the sight of God? That which is morally wrong can never be politically right. To govern only for the sake of pleasing and benefiting the majority, without any reference to the eternal principles of justice, right, and mercy, may be *expedient* and please man; but it does not please God.

Calvin observes: "Let us learn never to separate what is useful and expedient from what is lawful, since we ought not to expect any prosperity and success but from the blessing of God."

Ecolampadius remarks that we must never do evil that good may come. "If you could by the slaying of one good man work the saving of many, it would be unlawful."

Poole observes: “Never was anything more diabolical spoken. Like a wretched politician, concerned for nothing but the people’s safety, Caiaphas said not that it is lawful, but that it is expedient for us that one Man, be He never so good, never so innocent and just, should die.” Doddridge remarks: “When will the politicians of this world learn to trust, God in His own ways, rather than to trust themselves and their own wisdom, in violation of all rules of truth, honor, and conscience?”

51,52—[*And this he spoke not of himself, etc.*] These two verses contain a parenthetical comment by St. John, on the address of Caiaphas to the Pharisees. It is a peculiar passage and not without difficulty. That a man like Caiaphas should be said to prophesy, and that his prophecy should be of so wide and extensive a character, is undoubtedly strange. I offer a few remarks that may help throw light on the passage. That God can employ a wicked man to declare prophetical truth is clearly proved by the case of Balaam. But the positions of Balaam and Caiaphas were very different.

That the Jewish high priest at any time possessed, by virtue of his office, the power of predicting things to come, I can nowhere find. David certainly speaks of Zadok as “a seer” (2 Sam. 15:27). The high priest’s ephod conveyed a certain mysterious power to the wearer, of foreseeing things immediately near (1 Sam. 23:9). The “Urim and Thummim,” whatever they were, which dwelt in the breastplate of the high priest, appear to have given the wearer peculiar powers of discernment. But even they were withdrawn at the destruction of the

first temple. In short, there is an utter absence of proof that a Jewish high priest, in the time of our Lord, had any power of prophesying.

I believe that the verses before us are very elliptical and require much to be supplied in order to convey the meaning of St. John. The only satisfactory sense I can put upon the passage will be found in the following free paraphrase.

[*This spake he not of himself.*] He spoke these words, though he was not aware of it, under the influence of an overruling power, making him say things of far deeper meaning than he was conscious of himself. As Ecolampadius says, "God used him as an instrument." (See Isa. 10:15.) [*But being high priest that year, he prophesied.*] He spoke words which, as the event showed afterward, were eminently prophetical; and the fact that they fell from his lips when he was high priest made them more remarkable, when afterward remembered and noted.

[*That Jesus should die for that nation.*] He actually foretold, though the fulfillment was in a manner very different from his intentions, that Jesus would die for the benefit of the Jewish nation.

[*And not for that nation only, etc.*] And He also foretold what was practically fulfilled afterward, though in a way marvelously unlike what he thought, that Jesus would not only die for the Jewish nation, but for the benefit of all God's children at present scattered all over the world. The utmost, in fact, that I can make of John's explanatory

comment is that he remarks on the extraordinary manner in which Caiaphas' words proved true, though in a way that he never intended, wished, or expected. He lets fall a saying on a great public occasion, which comes from his lips with great authority on account of his office as high priest. That saying was afterward fulfilled in the most marvelous manner by the overruling providence of God, but in a way that the speaker never dreamed of. The thing was afterward remembered and remarked on; and it seemed, says St. John, as if being high priest that year, he was miraculously compelled by the Holy Ghost to prophesy the redemption of mankind at the very time that he thought he was only speaking of putting Christ to death. Caiaphas, in short, meant nothing but to advise the murder of Christ. But the Holy Ghost obliged him unconsciously to use words which were a most remarkable prediction of Christ's death bringing life to a lost world. The Greek word rendered "should die" would be more literally "was about to die." It simply expresses a future coming event.

The "children of God scattered abroad," I believe, means the elect of God among the Gentiles. They are put in contrast with "that nation" or "the nation," as it would be more literally rendered.

The "gathering together in one" I believe to be that final gathering of all Christ's members, which is yet to come at His second advent. (See Eph. 1:10, John 12:32, and Gen. 49:10.)
Lightfoot says that the Jews thought the greatest work of Messiah was to be the "reduction, or gathering together of the captivities." I

leave the passage with a very deep sense of its difficulty, and desire not to press my views on others dogmatically if they are not satisfied with them.

Chrysostom remarks: “Caiaphas prophesied, not knowing what he said; and the grace of God merely made use of his mouth, but touched not his accursed heart.”
Musculus and Ferus remark how striking the resemblance is between Caiaphas unintentionally using language fulfilled in a sense totally unlike what he meant, and the Jews saying of Christ to Pilate, “His blood be on us and on our children.” They little knew the awful and tremendous extent of the saying.

The absurdity of the Roman Catholic claim—that the Pope’s words and decrees are to be received as partially inspired because of his office on the ground of this passage—is noted and exposed by all the Protestant commentators of the seventeenth century.

Lightfoot thinks we should lay great emphasis on the expression “that same year,” and justly so. He observes that it was the very year when the high priest’s office ended, the veil was rent, the Jewish dispensation wound up, and the Mosaic priesthood was abrogated by Christ’s becoming manifestly our Priest. He thinks that when St. Paul said “I did not know that he was the high priest” (in Acts 23:5), he may have meant “that he did not know there was any high priest at all.” He also observes that this very year at Pentecost the Holy Ghost was poured out as the spirit of prophecy and revelation in an

extraordinary measure. What wonder if "that year" the last high priest, like Balaam, should prophesy.

53.—[*Then, from that day forth…death.*] We see here the result of Caiaphas' counsel. His stern, bold, outspoken proposal carried all the council with him, and even if Gamaliel, Nicodemus, and Joseph were there, their voices were silenced. From that very day it became a settled thing with the Jewish leaders at Jerusalem that Jesus was to be put to death. The only difficulty was to find the way, the time, and the means of doing it without creating a tumult. The great miracle just wrought at Bethany would doubtless increase the number of our Lord's adherents and make it necessary to use caution in carrying out the murderous plan. The conclusions of great ecclesiastical councils are seldom wise and good, and sometimes are wicked and cruel. Bold, forward, unscrupulous men, like Caiaphas, generally silence the quieter members and carry all before them.

54.—[*Jesus therefore walked… Jews.*] From this time our Lord found it necessary to give up appearing openly at Jerusalem and came there no more till the week of his crucifixion. He knew the result of the council just held, either from His own Divine knowledge or from the information of friends like Nicodemus. And as His time was not fully come, he retired from Judea for a season.

The expression "no more" is literally "not yet." It must mean "no more at present." May we not learn from our Lord's conduct that it may be a duty sometimes not to court danger or death? There are

seasons when it is a duty to retire as well as seasons for going forward. There are times to be silent as well as times to speak.

Hutcheson remarks: “It is lawful for Christ’s servants to flee when their death is decreed by enemies and the persecution is personal.”

[But went from there… Ephraim…disciples.] Nothing whatever is known for certain of the distinct locality to which our Lord retired or of the city here named. It seems, purposely, to have been a quiet, isolated, and little frequented place. The probability is that it was beyond Jordan, in Perea, because when our Lord came to Jerusalem the last time, He passed through Jericho.

Ellicott suggests that Ephraim was a town also called Ophrah, about twenty miles north of Jerusalem on the borders of Samaria. He also thinks that on leaving Ephraim those words of St. Luke (chapter 17:11) come in, which say that our Lord “passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee.” After that he thinks He went through Perea to Jericho. But I am not satisfied that he proves these points.

It is worth noticing that our Lord chose a scene of entire quiet and seclusion as His last abode before going up to His last great season of suffering at the crucifixion. It is well to get alone and be still before we take in hand any great work for God. Our Savior was not above this. How much more should His disciples remember it! In saying this, I would not be thought to commend the ostentatious “retreats” of the Romish Church and its followers. It is of the very essence of

Christian retirement, if it is to be profitable, that it should be without parade and should not attract the notice of men. The life of the Eremite has no warrant in Scripture.

When it says that our Lord continued or tarried at Ephraim "with His disciples," it is worth noticing that we do not hear a word of any public works that he did there. It looks as if He devoted the last few quiet days that remained before His crucifixion to uninterrupted communion with the Father and private instruction of His disciples.

55.—[*And the Jews' Passover was near at hand.*] This expression, like many others in John's Gospel, shows that he wrote for the Church generally, and for many readers who were not familiar with Jewish feasts and customs.

[*And many went…before the Passover.*] This seems mentioned as a simple matter of custom among the Jews and not as a thing done this year more than any other. They always did so, and thus drew together for seven days before the Passover a larger collection of people at Jerusalem than at any other time of the year. Hence the crowds and expectation when our Lord appeared—He had been talked of by people from all parts of Palestine.

[*To purify themselves.*] This refers to the ceremonial washings, purifications, and atonements for ceremonial uncleanness, which all strict Jews were careful to go through before eating the Passover (see 2 Chr. 30:18,19). It is impossible to read the book of Leviticus

carefully and not be struck with the almost endless number of ways in which an Israelite could become ceremonially unclean and need going to the priest to have an atonement made. (See Numbers 9:6-11.) That the Pharisees, in such matters, added to legal strictness by their absurd scrupulosity (such as "straining at a gnat") we cannot doubt; but the simple law as it stood was a yoke that was very hard to bear. No wonder that thousands of devout Jews came anxiously to Jerusalem before the Passover to be made ceremonially clean and fit for the feast.

It is worth noting how singular particular men are sometimes about forms and ceremonies and outward correctness while they coolly plan and execute enormous crimes. The Jews, zealous about "purifying" themselves while they were planning the murder of Christ, have had imitators and followers in every age of the Church. Strictness about forms and ceremonies, and utter recklessness about gross sin, are found quite compatible in many hearts.

56.—[*Then they sought Jesus, etc.*] The persons here mentioned seem to me to have been the Jews from all parts of Palestine, mentioned in the last verse, who had come up to prepare for the Passover. The fame and history of our Lord were probably so great throughout Palestine that one of the first inquiries the comers would make of one another would be about Him. And as they stood in the temple court waiting for their turn to go through ceremonial purification, or talking with old friends and acquaintances who had come up, like themselves, from the country, Jesus would probably be

a principal topic of conversation.

[*What think ye…feast?*] This is mentioned as one of the principal inquiries made by the Jews of one another. Our Lord, on a former occasion, had not come up to the Passover (see John 6). They might, therefore, naturally feel doubtful whether He would come now. It is noteworthy that the question admits of being taken as one, or divided into two distinct ones.
Some think that it means, "What think ye of the question, whether He will come to the feast or not?"

Others hold that it means, "What think ye of Christ, and especially of His position at this time? Do you think that He will not come to the feast?" I myself prefer this view.
It is noteworthy that the very question with which our Lord confounded the Pharisees a few days after, as recorded in St. Matthew 22:42, begins with precisely the same Greek words as those here used: "What think ye of Christ?"

57.—[Now both the chief priests…command…seize him.] This verse shows the first steps which had been taken after the session of the council which adopted the advice of Caiaphas to kill Jesus. A general order had been given that if any man knew where Jesus lodged in Jerusalem, he was to give information in order that He might be apprehended. I cannot help thinking myself that this order must only have referred to Jerusalem and the house where our Lord might lodge when He came to the Passover, if He did come. I cannot

suppose that our Lord's enemies could be ignorant where He was between the miracle of Bethany and the Passover. But I fancy they dared not run the risk of a tumult or rebellion, which might be caused, if they sent into the rural districts to apprehend Him. Indeed, it is doubtful whether the jurisdiction of the priests and Pharisees extended beyond the walls of Jerusalem, and whether they could lay hands upon our Lord anywhere outside the city. This might have been the reason why He often lodged at Bethany.

Musculus here discusses the question whether obedience to the powers that be obliges us to give up a man to those who are seeking to apprehend him. He answers, "Decidedly not, if we believe him to be an innocent man."

John – Chap. 12

JOHN 12:1-11

Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom he had raised from the dead. So they prepared a dinner for Jesus there. Martha was serving, and Lazarus was among those present at the table with him. Then Mary took three quarters of a pound of expensive aromatic oil from pure nard and anointed the feet of Jesus. She then wiped his feet dry with her hair. (Now the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfumed oil.) But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was going to betray him) said, "Why wasn't this oil sold for three hundred silver coins and the money given to the poor?" (Now Judas said this not because he was concerned about the poor, but because he was a thief. As keeper of the money box, he used to steal what was put into it.) So Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She has kept it for the day of my burial. For you always have the poor with you, but you don't always have me."

Now the large crowd of Jewish people from Jerusalem learned that Jesus was there, and so they came not only because of him but also to see Lazarus whom he had raised from the dead. So the chief priests planned to kill Lazarus too, for on account of him many of

the Jewish people from Jerusalem were going away and believing in Jesus.

The chapter we have now begun finishes a most important division of John's Gospel. Our Lord's *public* addresses to the unbelieving Jews of Jerusalem are here brought to an end. After this chapter, John records nothing but what was said in *private* to the disciples.

We see, for one thing, in this passage, ***what abounding proofs exist of the truth of our Lord's greatest miracles.***

We read of a supper at Bethany, where Lazarus "sat at the table" among the guests—Lazarus, who had been publicly raised from the dead, after lying four days in the grave. No one could pretend to say that his resurrection was a mere optical delusion, and that the eyes of the bystanders must have been deceived by a spirit or vision. Here was the very same Lazarus, after several weeks, sitting among his fellow-men with a real material body, and eating and drinking real material food. It is hard to understand what stronger evidence of a fact could be supplied. He that is not convinced by such evidence as this may as well say that he is determined to believe nothing at all.

It is a comfortable thought, that the very same proofs which exist about the resurrection of Lazarus are the proofs which surround that still mightier fact, the resurrection of Christ from the dead. Was Lazarus seen for several weeks by the people of Bethany, going in and coming out among them? So was the Lord Jesus seen by His

disciples. Did Lazarus take material food before the eyes of his friends? So did the Lord Jesus eat and drink before His ascension. No one, in his sober senses, who saw Jesus take "broiled fish," and eat it before several witnesses, would doubt that He had a real body. (Luke 24:42.)

We shall do well to remember this. In an age of abounding unbelief and skepticism, we shall find that the resurrection of Christ will bear any weight that we can lay upon it. Just as He placed beyond reasonable doubt the rising again of a beloved disciple within two miles of Jerusalem, so in a very few weeks He placed beyond doubt His own victory over the grave. If we believe that Lazarus rose again, we need not doubt that Jesus rose again also. If we believe that Jesus rose again, we need not doubt the truth of His Messiahship, the reality of His acceptance as our Mediator, and the certainty of our own resurrection. Christ has risen indeed, and wicked men may well tremble. Christ has risen from the dead, and believers may well rejoice.

We see, for another thing, in this passage, ***what unkindness and discouragement Christ's friends sometimes meet with from man.***

We read that, at the supper in Bethany, Mary, the sister of Lazarus, anointed the feet of Jesus with precious ointment, and wiped them with the hair of her head. Nor was this ointment poured on with a niggardly hand. She did it so liberally and profusely that "the house was filled with the odor of the ointment." She did it under

the influence of a heart full of love and gratitude. She thought nothing too great and good to bestow on such a Savior. Sitting at His feet in days gone by, and hearing His words, she had found peace for her conscience, and pardon for her sins. At this very moment she saw Lazarus, alive and well, sitting by her Master's side—her own brother Lazarus, whom He had brought back to her from the grave. Greatly loved, she thought she could not show too much love in return. Having freely received, she freely gave.

But there were some present who found fault with Mary's conduct, and blamed her as guilty of wasteful extravagance. One especially, an apostle, a man of whom better things might have been expected, declared openly that the ointment would have been better employed if it had been sold, and the price "given to the poor." The heart which could conceive such thoughts must have had low views of the dignity of Christ's person, and still lower views of our obligations to Him. A cold heart and a stingy hand will generally go together.

There are only too many professing Christians of a like spirit in the present day. Myriads of baptized people cannot understand zeal of any sort, for the honor of Christ. Tell them of any vast outlay of money to push trade or to advance the cause of science, and they approve of it as right and wise. Tell them of any expense incurred for the preaching of the Gospel at home or abroad, for spreading God's Word, for extending the knowledge of Christ on earth, and they tell you plainly that they think it waste. They never give a farthing to

such objects as these, and count those people fools who do. Worst of all, they often cover over their own backwardness to help purely Christian objects, by a pretended concern for the poor at home. Yet they find it convenient to forget the well known fact that those who do most for the cause of Christ are precisely those who do most for the poor.

We must never allow ourselves to be moved from "patient continuance in well-doing," by the unkind remarks of such people. It is vain to expect a man to do much for Christ, when he has no sense of debt to Christ. We must pity the blindness of our unkind critics, and work on. He who pleaded the cause of loving Mary, and said, "Let her alone," is sitting at the right hand of God, and keeps a book of remembrance. A day is soon coming when a wondering world will see that every cup of cold water given for Christ's sake, as well as every box of precious ointment, was recorded in heaven, and has its rewards. In that great day those who thought that anyone could give too much to Christ will find they had better never have been born.

We see, lastly, in this passage, ***what desperate hardness and unbelief there is in the heart of man.***

Unbelief appears in the chief priests, who "consulted that they might put Lazarus to death." They could not deny the fact of his having been raised again. Living, and moving, and eating, and drinking within two miles of Jerusalem, after lying four days in the grave, Lazarus was a witness to the truth of Christ's Messiahship, whom they could not possibly answer or put to silence. Yet these

proud men would not give way. They would rather commit a murder than throw down the arms of rebellion, and confess themselves in the wrong. No wonder that the Lord Jesus in a certain place "marveled" at unbelief. Well might He say, in a well-known parable, "If they believe not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead." (Mark 6:6; Luke 16:31.)

Hardness appears in Judas Iscariot, who, after being a chosen Apostle, and a preacher of the kingdom of heaven, turns out at last a thief and a traitor. So long as the world stands this unhappy man will be a lasting proof of the depth of human corruption. That anyone could follow Christ as a disciple for three years, see all His miracles, hear all His teaching, receive at His hand repeated kindnesses, be counted an Apostle, and yet prove rotten at heart in the end, all this at first sight appears incredible and impossible! Yet the case of Judas shows plainly that the thing can be. Few things, perhaps, are so little realized as the extent of what desperate hardness and unbelief there is in the heart of man.

Let us thank God if we know anything of faith, and can say, with all our sense of weakness and infirmity, "I believe." Let us pray that our faith may be real, true, genuine, and sincere, and not a mere temporary impression, like the morning cloud and the early dew. Not least, let us watch and pray against the love of the world. It ruined one who basked in the full sunshine of privileges, and heard Christ Himself teaching every day. Then "let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." (1 Cor. 10:12.)

Technical Notes:

1. Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead. 2. There they made him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with him. 3. Then Mary took a pound of very costly ointment of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment. 4. Then said one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's *son*, who would betray him, 5. Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence and given to the poor? 6. This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put in it. 7. Then Jesus said, Let her alone; against the day of my burying she has kept this. 8. For the poor ye have with you always, but me ye have not always. 9. Now a great many of the Jews knew that he was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. 10. But the chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus to death also, 11. because that by reason of him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus.

1.—[*Then six days…Bethany*.] Every intelligent reader of the Gospel will see that John purposely omits at this point certain events which are recorded by Matthew, Mark, and Luke. He passes at once

from our Lord's retirement to the city called Ephraim, to His return to Bethany for the last time. In this interval will be found the things related in Matthew 10:17-34; Mark 10:32-52; Luke 18:31-19:28. In whatever part of Palestine this city Ephraim was, it is almost certain that between it and Bethany Jesus passed through Jericho, healed two blind men there, converted the publican Zaccheus, and spoke the parable of the nobleman who went into a far country, after giving to his ten servants ten pounds. Why St. John did not record these facts we do not know, and it is mere waste of time to inquire. A reverent mind will be content to remember that John wrote by inspiration of God and was guided by infallible direction, both as to what he recorded and what he did not record. Reason and common sense, moreover, tell us that if the four Evangelists had all narrated exactly the same things, their value as independent witnesses would have been greatly damaged. Their variations and diversities are a strong direct proof of their credibility. Too close an agreement would raise a suspicion of collusion and look like an attempt to deceive. The expression "six days before the Passover" is remarkable, because at first sight it seems to contradict Mark's narrative of the anointing, which Mark expressly says was "two days before the Passover" (Mark 14:1). Hence some maintain that the Greek words should be translated "before the six days of the Passover feast," leaving the precise day indefinite and uncertain. To this, however, it is reasonably objected that the Passover feast was more than six days, and that the proposed translation is not a probable rendering of the Greek words. To this I must add that in my opinion there seems no necessity for departing from the English version. It is not only

possible but probable, as Lightfoot maintains, that there were two distinct anointings of our Lord, one six days before the Passover and the other two days before.

[The reader is requested to refer back to the notes on John 2:2 where he will find this point fully discussed.] The Passover was slain on the Thursday evening. At this rate, our Lord must have arrived at Bethany on Friday, the afternoon or evening before the Sabbath. Thus he must have spent His last earthly Sabbath with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, at Bethany.

The disciples must have journeyed to Bethany with a full impression that a great crisis was at hand and the end of their Master's ministry approaching, one can hardly doubt after reading the plain warnings recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. But whether they really thought their Master would be put to death, or whether they did not secretly expect He would soon manifest His Divine power, take His kingdom and reign, is more than questionable.

A more deliberate, voluntary, calm walking up to death than our Lord's last journey into Judea, it is impossible to conceive.

[*Where Lazarus…raised from the dead.*] These words seem to show that Lazarus lived at Bethany and was not merely a visitor or lodger there. They also show the immense importance of the miracle wrought on him. Within two miles of Jerusalem and the temple there lived for weeks, if not for months, a man well known to many Jews, who had been actually raised from his grave after being four days

buried. He had not been raised only, and then disappeared from public notice, but he lived where he was raised. Lightfoot draws out the following interesting scheme of our Lord's disposal of time during the last six days before His crucifixion: (1) On Saturday He supped with Lazarus. (2) On Sunday He rode into Jerusalem publicly on an ass. This was the day when the Jews used to take out a lamb from the flock, for each family, and to keep it separate for the Passover. On this day the Lamb of God publicly presented Himself in Zion. (3) On Monday He went to Jerusalem again and cursed the barren fig tree on the way. (4) On Tuesday He went again to Jerusalem and spoke for the last time to the people. Returning, He sat on the Mount of Olives and delivered the famous prophecy of Matthew 24 and 25, and supped that night with Simon the leper. (5) On Wednesday He tarried in Bethany. (6) On Thursday He went to Jerusalem, ate the Passover, appointed the Lord's Supper, and the same night was taken before the priests as a prisoner. (7) On Friday He was crucified.

2.—[*There they made him a supper*.] These words show the joyful hospitality with which the Master was received by the disciples. The expression "they" may perhaps be used indefinitely, according to a common Hebraism. (Compare Matthew 5:15, 10:10, 13:48, and John 15:6.) It then simply means "a supper was made." If not so used, it evidently can apply to none but Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Whether the supper was on Friday evening when our Lord arrived, after the Sabbath began, or on the Saturday, or the Sabbath Day, is immaterial. It is evident that hospitality was thought no breach of

the Sabbath among the Jews. Lightfoot says the feast of the Jews, on this particular day six days before the Passover, was always peculiarly liberal and sumptuous. Hutcheson observes: “It is not unlawful at some times to enjoy the liberal use of the creatures in a sober manner. Christ does not decline this supper; sometimes He went to the feasts of Pharisees and sometimes of Publicans.” (Luke 7:36; Matt. 9:11.)

[*And Martha served.*] The natural temperament of this good woman comes out here as elsewhere. She could not sit still and do nothing while her Lord was in her house. She must be actively stirring and trying to do something. Grace does not take away our peculiar characteristics.

[*But Lazarus...table with him.*] This appears to most commentators, from Chrysostom downwards, to be purposely mentioned in order to show the reality of Lazarus’ resurrection. He was not a ghost or a spirit. He had really been raised to life with a real body, and flesh and bones, and all the needs and conditions of a body. Thus we are practically taught that though a man’s body dies, it may yet live again. Is not this feast a faint type of the Marriage Supper of the Lamb? Jesus Christ will be there; those believers who died and are raised again at His second advent will be there; and those who never died but are found alive and believing when He comes will be there. Then the number of guests will be complete.

3.—[Then Mary took...anointed, etc.] This remarkable action of

Mary, which, according to our Lord's saying in Matthew and Mark, is related all over the world, deserves our special consideration. The action itself was not an uncommon one in Eastern countries where the heat is very great, and where the feet exposed to it by wearing sandals are liable to suffer much from dryness and scorching. There was nothing, moreover, out of the common way in a woman doing this service. To "wash the saints' feet," St. Paul names among the good works of a Christian widow (1 Tim. 5:10).

The motive of Mary in doing what she did was evidently strong and grateful love to her Lord and Savior. Not only from what she had learned from Him for her own spiritual benefit, but also for what He had done for her brother Lazarus, she felt there was nothing too great or too good to do for Him. Her feelings made her anxious to do her Master the highest honor, regardless of expense, and indifferent to any remark that witnesses might make.

The extent of her gratitude is shown by the lavish profuseness with which she used the ointment on this occasion, although it was very costly. This seems indicated by her "wiping our Lord's feet with her hair," having poured on them so much ointment that they needed wiping; and also by the "house being filled with the fragrance of the ointment." She poured out so much ointment that the scent of it filled the whole apartment and the whole house where the guests were. Anyone who knows the powerful odor of otto of roses, in the present day, will easily understand this. What this "ointment of spikenard" was has puzzled the commentators in every age, as the

Greek word throws no certain light on the question. Some think that it means “potable” ointment, that might be drunk; some that it means perfectly “pure” ointment, that might be trusted as genuine and unadulterated. Augustine thinks that the expression denotes the place from which the ointment came. The question is of no importance and must be left unexplained for lack of materials to explain it. Enough for us to know that it was something very valuable and costly. How costly an ointment might be, anyone can guess who knows the value of pure otto of roses. I can only repeat the opinion already expressed that this anointing was certainly not the anointing which is described in Luke 7, and most probably was not the anointing of Mark 14. The anointing in Mark was two days before the Passover while this was six. In Mark the ointment was poured on the head, and here it was poured on the feet. In Matthew and Mark several “disciples” murmured, but here only Judas is named. These discrepancies, in my judgment, are insuperable and make it necessary to believe that there were two distinct anointings at Bethany during the last six days preceding the crucifixion. I grant that it is a choice between difficulties, and that there are difficulties in the view I maintain. But I do not think them so weighty as those of the other view. At any rate, I am supported by the great authority of Chrysostom, Chemnitius, and Lightfoot as well as of Whitby and Henry.

What the significance of Mary’s wiping our Lord’s feet with the hairs of her head may be is a difficult question. Perhaps, from our ignorance of Eastern customs in the days of our Lord’s earthly

ministry, we are hardly qualified to give an opinion about it now. On points like these, where we are ignorant, it is wisest not to conjecture.

Calvin says: “The usual practice was to anoint the head, and on this account Pliny reckons it an instance of excessive luxury that some anointed the ankles. What John says about the feet amounts to this, that the whole body of Christ, down to the feet, was anointed.”

Rollock observes that at this time Mary seems to have had a deeper and more intimate perception of what there was in Christ, and of the real dignity of His person, than any of His disciples.

4.—[Then said… Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son.] We know nothing of this Simon, who he was or why he is specially mentioned here. It is worth notice that hardly any name occurs so frequently in the New Testament as this. We have the following:
The Apostle Simon, called also Peter.
The Apostle Simon, called also Zelotes and the Canaanite.
Simon the brother of our Lord (Matthew 13:55).
Simon the leper, in whose house the anointing took place (Matt. 26:6).
Simon the Cyrenian, who carried the cross (Matt. 27:32).
Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7:40).
Simon the sorcerer at Samaria (Acts 8:9).
Simon the tanner (Acts 9:43).

It would, of course, be interesting to know if Judas Iscariot was son of any of these. But we have no clue to guide us. Wordsworth sees in the mention of Judas by name a strong internal evidence of the late date of St. John's Gospel. Compare with this the fact that John alone mentions Peter and Malchus by name (John 18:10).

[*Who would betray him.*] These words would be more literally rendered, "the one who was about to betray Him." On the occasion of the anointing related in Matthew 26 and Mark 14, it is worth noticing that "some of the disciples," and not Judas only, found fault with the action. It rather adds probability to the theory that there were two anointings at Bethany.

Chrysostom remarks that Jesus knew from the beginning that Judas was a traitor and often rebuked him with such words as, "One of you is a devil" (John 6:64). Augustine also remarks that we must not suppose Judas never fell till he received money from the Jews. He was false from the beginning. He also says that he was present at the institution of the Lord's Supper and was a communicant.

5.—[*Why was not…poor?*] This carping question is a specimen of the way in which wicked men often try to depreciate a good action, and specially in the matter of giving money. When the deed is done, they do not say downright that it ought not to have been done, but suggest that something better might have been done! Those who do good must be prepared to find their actions carped at and their motives depreciated, and themselves charged with neglecting one class of duties in over-zealousness for doing others. If we do nothing until

everybody commends and praises us, we shall never do any good in the world.

We may learn from this verse the costly nature of Mary's ointment. If workman's wages were "a penny a day," (Matt. 20:2), about 7½ d. of our money, this holy woman must have poured on our Lord's feet what was worth between £9 and £10 of our money, according to the estimate of Judas. But allowances must perhaps be made for an exaggerated statement being made by an envious and wicked man.

We may note here that giving to the poor was evidently assumed to be a part of every Christian's duty. Compare this with Gal. 2:10. In a country like England, where there is a poor law, Christians are sadly apt to forget this. The duty of "giving to the poor," and not merely paying rates in obedience to law, is just as obligatory now as it was 1800 years ago. Ecolampadius remarks that the more wicked and graceless people are, the more ready they are to find fault with and blame others and to see no beauty in what they do.
Quesnel remarks that Judas made a great ado about 300 pence, viz., £10 and a little ointment, when he was about to sell the Son of God for 30 pieces of silver, viz., £3 15s.
Henry observes: "Coldness of love to Christ and a secret contempt of serious piety, when they appear in professors of religion, are sad presages of final apostasy."

Stier remarks: "We have in the words of Judas an example of those judgments which have their foundation in the favorite principles of

utilitarianism, and which may too often be applied falsely to the wounding of pious hearts." "This lays bare the root of that suspicion with which missionary offerings for the extension of Christ's kingdom are looked at, because of the poor whom we have at home." "We have here, furthermore, an example of all cold judgments passed on the virtuous emotions of warm hearts, of all more or less conscious or unconscious censures of the artless outgoings and acts of honest feelings, and of all narrow-hearted criticism of others according to our own mind and temper."

6.—[*This he said...poor*.] This is one of those parenthetical explanations or glosses which are so frequent in St. John's Gospel. The Evangelist tells us the true character of Judas and the reason he said what he did. He did not really care about the poor, but put their interest forward as a special and plausible argument for depreciating Mary's action and discouraging such actions in others.

There is something very instructive in this. The argument of Judas is frequently reproduced in the present day. Hundreds of people excuse themselves from one class of duties by pretended zeal for others, and compensate for neglecting Christ's cause by affecting great concern for the poor. Yet in reality they care nothing for the poor and only want to save their own money, and to be spared contributing to religious causes. Some, for instance, will never give money to benefit the souls of their fellow-countrymen and tell us we must first relieve their property and feed their bodies. Some again will give nothing to help missions abroad and tell us we must first mind the poor at

home. Even the shareholders of some great joint stock companies have been known to express great concern for the poor and working classes as an excuse for carrying on their business on Sundays. The language of St. John about Judas Iscariot shows us that this apparent zeal for the poor should always be regarded with suspicion and submitted to close analysis and cross-examination. He talked brave words about the poor, as if he cared more for them than anyone! Yet there is not the slightest proof in the Gospels that he cared more for them than others. Above all, the conclusion of the verse lets out the truth, and the unerring pen of inspiration reveals the man's true motives. These things are written for our learning. There are few greater impostors in the world than some of those who are pretending perpetually to care about the poor. The truest and best friends of the working classes and the poor, the people who give most and do most for them, will always be found among those who do most for Christ. It is the successors of Mary of Bethany, and not of Judas Iscariot, who really "care for the poor." But they do not talk about it. While others talk and profess, they act.

[*But because he was a thief.*] This is strong language and a very heavy accusation. It seems to indicate that this was the habitual character of Judas. He always had been and always was a dishonest man. So says an inspired Apostle. In the face of this expression, it appears to me impossible to prove that Judas ever had the grace of God at any time, and that he only fell away at last. He was inwardly wrong at heart all the way through. Again, I find it impossible to believe that Judas was a high-souled and noble-minded (though

greatly erring) man, and that his motive in betraying his Lord was to hasten His kingdom and to cut short the period of his humiliation. I cannot reconcile this with the word "thief." Let us note here how far a man may go in Christian profession without any inward grace. There is no evidence that Judas up to this time was unlike other Apostles. Like them he had seen all Christ's miracles, heard Christ's teaching, lived in Christ's company, and had himself preached the kingdom of God. Yet he was at bottom a graceless man. Privileges alone convert nobody.

Ferus remarks: "Let us never put confidence in man or in any sanctity of position, office, or dress. If apostleship did not make Judas a saint, neither will position, office, or dress make you a saint. In fact, unless you first have inward holiness and have sought it from God, it may be that your office may render who more wicked.

Let us note the amazing power of the love of money. No besetting sin seems so thoroughly to wither up and blight and harden the heart. No wonder it is called "the root of all evil" (1 Tim. 6:10). However many the faults and infirmities recorded of saints in the Bible, we have not a single example of one that was covetous.

Chrysostom observes: "A dreadful thing is the love of money! It disables both eyes and ears and makes man worse to deal with than a wild beast, allowing a man to consider neither conscience, nor friendship, nor fellowship, nor salvation."

Quesnel observes that "Christ allows His money to be taken from

Him, but never His sheep."

[*And had the bag*.] The Greek word rendered "bag" is a curious one. The original idea is that of a bag in which musicians kept the mouthpieces or reeds of their instruments. From that the idea evidently was attached to it of a bag carried about by any member of a company, such as that of the disciples, on behalf of his companions. Whether the common stock of provisions as well as of money was not kept in the bag perhaps admits of a question.

Theophylact says that some think that Judas was trusted with the care of the money as one of the meanest and most inferior of Christian duties. Thus in Acts the Apostles would not "serve tables" (Acts 6:2).

[*And bare what was put in it*.] The last words would be more literally rendered "the things put therein." Some, as Origen, Theophylact, Pearce, Lampe, Tittman, Bloomfield, and Clarke, have thought that the word "bare" means "took away, carried off, stole, secreted, or set apart for himself." I doubt this. I prefer the simple idea of "carrying about." It was the office of Judas to be the purse-keeper of the little company of disciples. The contributions in money and provisions of those friends who ministered to our Lord, such as Joanna, Susanna, and many others (Luke 8:3), were probably meant by the things here mentioned. It is clear that our Lord had not earthly wealth, nor His disciples. It is equally clear that His friends, scattered all over Palestine, must have thought it a privilege,

whenever He came among them, to contribute to His maintenance and support. Of these contributions in all probability Judas was treasurer. Let professing Christians note that to have money passing through their hands is a snare and a temptation. It is a snare by which many in every age have been cast down.

7.—[*Then Jesus said, Let her alone.*] This is unquestionably a rebuke to Judas, and a somewhat sharp one. It shows how jealously our Lord regards any attempt to hinder, check, or discourage the zeal of His own people. Even now, when some of His weak disciples undertake work which calls for enmity and opposition, He can make all difficulties vanish and say, "Let them alone."

[*Against the day...this.*] The first word here would be more literally rendered "for" the day. I believe we must not interpret this sentence as if our Lord meant that Mary really knew that our Lord's burial was at hand. I think it rather signifies, "The ointment which Mary has poured on my feet, though she meant it only as a mark of honor, happens to be a most suitable thing since my death and burial are approaching. She little knew in doing what she did the nearness of my death; but, as it happens, her action is most seasonable."
Some, as Chrysostom, think that our Lord intended to prick the conscience and soften the feelings of Judas by talking of His "burial," and by the language of the next verse, "Me ye have not always." It may possibly be so. But I rather think that in both instances He intended to direct the minds of all around Him, as He had evidently been doing for some weeks, to His approaching death and the

conclusion of His ministry. He brings that conclusion in at every turn now.

Some think that the word "kept" refers to the ointment having been originally got by Mary for her brother Lazarus, and that there had been a long hoarding up of it from the day when Lazarus died, and that Judas blamed Mary for having "kept" it so long and not having sold it. But this is purely conjectural.

May we not learn from our Lord's words here that Christians do not always know the full meaning of what they do? God uses them as His instruments without their being aware of it at the time. (Compare John 12:16.) Calvin says: "Those are absurd interpreters who infer from Christ's reply that costly and magnificent worship is pleasing to God. He rather excuses Mary on the ground of her having rendered an extraordinary service, which ought not to be regarded as a perpetual rule for the worship of God."

8.—[*For the poor…always*.] It is clear from these words that poverty will always exist; and we need not wonder. So long as human nature is what it is, some will always be rich and some poor—because some are diligent and some idle, some are strong and some weak, some are wise and some foolish. We need never dream that by any arrangement, either civil or ecclesiastical, poverty can ever be entirely prevented. The existence of pauperism is no proof whatever that states are ill governed, or that churches are not doing their duty.

Ecolampadius thinks that our Lord here refers to the poor as being His members, and that there is a latent reference to the language of the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew about works of mercy being regarded as works done to Christ's brethren and to Christ Himself (Matt. 25:40). It is noteworthy that in this sentence Jesus passes from a singular verb to a plural one, and seems to address not Judas only but all present. [*But me ye have not always.*] These words show, for one thing, that our Lord's bodily presence on earth was a great and miraculous event and, as such, deserved to be marked with peculiar honor; and for another thing, that His departure was at hand so that the opportunities for doing Him honor were becoming very few. Moreover, if words mean anything, the sentence completely overthrows the whole theory of Christ' body being present under the forms of bread and wine in the Lord's Supper. That favorite Romish doctrine can never be reconciled with "Me ye have not always."

We may surely learn from this verse that relieving the poor, however good a work, is not so important a work as doing honor to Christ. In times like these it is well to remember this. Not a few seem to think all religion consists in giving temporal help to the poor. Yet there are evidently occasions when the relief of the poor must not be allowed to supersede the direct work of honoring Christ. Doubtless it is well to feed, clothe, and nurse the poor; but it is never to be forgotten that to glorify Christ among them is far better. Moreover, it is much easier to give temporal than spiritual help, for we have our reward in thanks and gratitude and the praise of man. To honor Christ is far harder and gets us no praise at all. Augustine remarks: "In respect of

the presence of His Majesty, we have Christ always. In respect to the presence of the flesh, it was rightly said, 'Me ye will not have always.' The Church had Him in respect of the flesh for a few days, but now by faith and not with eyes it beholds Him." Zwingli observes that this sentence "excludes Christ's corporal presence from the Lord's Supper. According to His Divine nature, Christ is always present with His people. According to His human nature, He is in one place in heaven, at the right hand of God." Most of the other reformers make the same comment.

Rollock remarks that our Lord's defense of Mary in this passage must not be alleged as a warrant for extravagant and profuse expenditure in the public worship of Christians. Jesus Himself points out that the occasion was extraordinary and singular—on the eve almost of His burial—an occasion which could only happen once. This seems to imply that on ordinary occasions such an expenditure as that of Mary would not have been justifiable.

9—[*Now a great many…was there.*] We need not doubt that the news of our Lord's arrival at Bethany would soon spread like lightning, partly because Bethany was so near Jerusalem, partly because of the recent miracle wrought there, partly because of the order of the rulers to give information where Christ was, partly because of the approach of the Passover and the crowds assembling all around Jerusalem.

[They came not…but…see Lazarus…from the dead.] This sentence is

a genuine exhibition of human nature. Curiosity is one of the most common and powerful motives in man. The love of seeing something sensational and out of the common way is almost universal. When people could see at once both the subject of the miracle and Him that worked the miracle, we need not wonder that they resorted in crowds to Bethany. Yet within ten days a far greater miracle was to take place—our Lord's own resurrection. 10.—[*But the chief priests consulted.*] It admits of doubt whether the word rendered "consulted" would not be better rendered "purposed" or "determined," as in Acts 15:37, 27:39, and 2 Cor. 1:17. This is the view of Schleusner and Parkhurst.

[*That they might…death also.*] It is difficult to conceive a greater proof of hardened and incorrigible wickedness of heart than this sentence exhibits. The chief priests could not possibly deny the fact of Lazarus having been raised, or explain it away. He was a witness whose testimony against their unbelief was overwhelming. They must therefore stop his mouth by killing him. And these were the chief ecclesiastical leaders of Israel! Moreover, Lazarus had done them no harm. Though a disciple, there is no proof that he was a leading follower of Christ, much less a preacher of the Gospel. But he was an inconvenient standing evidence and so he must be removed!

11.—[Because…many of the Jews…believed in Jesus.] This sentence shows the immense effect that the raising of Lazarus had on the public mind, in spite of all the priests could do to prevent it. In every age people will think for themselves when God's truth comes into a

land. Prisons and threats and penalties cannot prevent men thinking. Mind and thought cannot be chained. When ecclesiastical tyrants burn martyrs and destroy Bibles and silence preachers, they forget their is one thing they cannot do: They cannot stop the inward machinery of people's thoughts. The expression "went away" will hardly bear the sense put on it by Pearce, of "withdrawing themselves from the service of the synagogue." It probably only means "went to Bethany." Bloomfield says, "it denotes their ceasing to pay that regard to the teaching of the Scribes which they formerly had done."

[*And believed in Jesus.*] I dare not think that this "believing" means more than intellectual conviction that Jesus must be the Messiah. I see no evidence that it means the faith of the heart. Yet it is probable this was exactly the state of mind in which many hundreds or thousands of Jews were before the crucifixion, the resurrection, and the day of Pentecost— convinced but not converted, persuaded that Jesus was the Christ of God but afraid to confess Him. Hence on the day of Pentecost, we cannot doubt that many hundreds of Peter's hearers were prepared to believe. The stony ground of prejudice and ignorant adhesion to Judaism had been broken to pieces, and the seed fell into soil prepared for it. Poole thinks that Lazarus, after his marvelous resurrection, "possibly spoke of it to the honor and glory of God," and that this excited the special anger of the priests.

JOHN 12:12-19

The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him. They began to shout, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the king of Israel!" Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written, "Do not be afraid, people of Zion; look, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt!" (His disciples did not understand these things when they first happened, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about him and that these things had happened to him.)

So the crowd who had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead were continuing to testify about it. Because they had heard that Jesus had performed this miraculous sign, the crowd went out to meet him. Thus the Pharisees said to one another, "You see that this is getting us nowhere. Look, the world has gone after him!"

A careful reader of the Gospels can hardly fail to observe that our Lord Jesus Christ's conduct, at this stage of His earthly ministry, is very peculiar. It is unlike anything else recorded of Him in the New Testament. Hitherto we have seen Him withdrawing as much as possible from public notice, retiring into the wilderness, and checking those who would have brought Him forward and made Him a king. As a rule He did not court popular attention. He did not "cry or strive, or cause His voice to be heard in the streets." (Matt. 12:19.) Here, on the contrary, we see Him making a public entry into

Jerusalem, attended by an immense crowd of people, and causing even the Pharisees to say, “Behold, the world has gone after Him.”

The explanation of this apparent inconsistency is not hard to find out. The time had come at last when Christ was to die for the sins of the world. The time had come when the true Passover Lamb was to be slain, when the true blood of atonement was to be shed, when Messiah was to be “cut off” according to prophecy, (Dan. 9:26,) when the way into the holiest was to be opened by the true High Priest to all mankind. Knowing all this, our Lord purposely drew attention to Himself. Knowing this, He placed Himself prominently under the notice of the whole Jewish nation. It was only fit and right that this thing should not be “done in a corner.” (Acts 26:26.) If ever there was a transaction in our Lord’s earthly ministry which was *public*, it was the Sacrifice which He offered up on the cross of Calvary. He died at the time of year when all the tribes were assembled at Jerusalem for the Passover feast. Nor was this all. He died in a week when, by His remarkable public entry into Jerusalem, He had caused the eyes of all Israel to be specially fixed upon Himself.

We learn, for one thing, in these verses, ***how entirely VOLUNTARY the sufferings of Christ were.*** It is impossible not to see in the history before us that our Lord had *a mysterious influence over the minds and wills of all around Him, whenever He thought fit to use it*. Nothing else can account for the effect which His approach to Jerusalem had on the multitudes which accompanied Him. *They seem to have been carried forward by a secret*

constraining power, which they were obliged to obey, in spite of the disapproval of the leaders of the nation. In short, just as our Lord was able to make winds, and waves, and diseases, and devils obey Him, so was He able, when it pleased Him, to turn, the minds of men according to His will.

For the case before us does not stand alone. The men of Nazareth could not hold Him when He chose to "pass through the midst of them and go His way." (Luke 4:30.) The angry Jews of Jerusalem could not detain him when they would have laid violent hands on Him in the Temple; but, "going through the midst of them, He passed by." (John 8:59.) Above all, the very soldiers who apprehended Him in the garden, at first "went backward and fell to the ground." (John 18:6.) In each of these instances there is but one explanation. A Divine influence was put forth. There was about our Lord during His whole earthly ministry a mysterious "hiding of His power." (Hab. 3:4.) But He had almighty power when He was pleased to use it.

Why, then, did He not resist His enemies at last? Why did He not scatter the band of soldiers who came to seize Him, like chaff before the wind? There is but one answer. He was a *willing Sufferer* in order to procure redemption for a lost and ruined soul. He had undertaken to give His own life as a ransom, that we might live forever, and He laid it down on the cross with all the desire of His heart. He did not bleed and suffer and die because He was vanquished by superior force, and could not help Himself, but

because He loved us, and rejoiced to give Himself for us as our Substitute. He did not die because He could not avoid death, but because He was willing with all His heart to make His soul an offering for sin.

Forever let us rest our hearts on this most comfortable thought. *We have a most willing and loving Savior*. It was His delight to do His Father's will, and to make a way for lost and guilty man to draw near to God in peace. He loved the work He had taken in hand, and the poor sinful world which He came to save. Never, then, let us give way to the unworthy thought that our Savior does not love to see sinners coming to Him, and does not rejoice to save them. He who was a most willing Sacrifice on the cross is also a most willing Savior at the right hand of God. He is just as willing to receive sinners who come to Him now for peace, as He was to die for sinners, when He held back His power and willingly suffered on Calvary.

We learn, for another thing, in these verses, ***how minutely the PROPHECIES concerning Christ's first coming were fulfilled.*** The riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, which is here recorded, might seem at first sight a simple action, and in no way remarkable. But when we turn to the Old Testament, we find that this very thing had been predicted by the Prophet Zechariah five hundred years before. (Zech. 9:9.) We find that the coming of a Redeemer some day was not the only thing which the Holy Spirit had revealed to the Fathers, but that even the least particulars of His

earthly career were predicted and written down with precise accuracy.

Such fulfillments of prophecy as this deserve the special attention of all who love the Bible and read it with reverence. They show us that every word of Holy Scripture was given by inspiration of God. They teach us to beware of the mischievous practice of spiritualizing and explaining away the language of Scripture. We must settle it in our minds that *the plain, literal meaning of the Bible is generally the true and correct meaning*. Here is a prediction of Zechariah literally and exactly fulfilled. Our Lord was not merely a very humble person as some spiritualizing interpreters would have explained Zechariah's words to mean, but He literally rode into Jerusalem on a donkey.

Above all, such fulfillments teach us what we may expect in looking forward to the second advent of Jesus Christ. They show us that we must look for a *literal* accomplishment of the prophecies concerning that second coming, and not for a figurative and a spiritual one. Forever let us hold fast this great principle. Happy is that Bible-reader who believes the words of the Bible to mean exactly what they seem to mean. Such a man has got the true key of knowledge in looking forward to things to come. To know that predictions about the second advent of Christ will be fulfilled literally, just as predictions about the first advent of Christ were fulfilled literally, is the first step towards a right understanding of unfulfilled prophecy.

Technical Notes:

12. On the next day many people who had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, 13. took branches of palm trees and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna! Blessed is the King of Israel who comes in the name of the LORD! 14. And Jesus, when he had found a young ass, sat on it; as it is written, 15. Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your King comes, sitting on an ass's colt. 16. His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written of him, and *that* they had done these things to him. 17. Therefore the people who were with him when he called Lazarus out of his grave and raised him from the dead, bore record. 18. For this reason the people also met him, because they heard that he had done this miracle. 19. The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? Behold, the world is gone after him!

12.—[*On the next day*.] This day must have been the Sunday before Easter, which is commonly known in England as "Palm Sunday," from the circumstance here related.

[*Many people…feast*.] This must include many of the Jews who had come up to the Passover from Galilee and were doubtless well acquainted with our Lord's ministry and the numerous miracles He had worked in Galilee. Some of them, in all human probability, had formed part of the multitude whom He fed with a few loaves in the

wilderness.

[*When they heard…Jerusalem.*] We must suppose that by some means our Lord's intention of coming to Jerusalem must have become known, either by Himself communicating it or by His disciples learning it and telling others. This information would be carried back to the city by those who came from thence to Bethany on Saturday. Bethany, however, was on the direct road from Jericho to Jerusalem, and the tidings of our Lord's approach may have traveled before Him for some days. Rollock thinks this multitude must have been chiefly composed of Jews not residing in Jerusalem. The Jerusalem Jews, he thinks, are an instance of the old proverb, which he quotes, "The nearer the Church the further from God."

13.—[*Took branches…to meet him.*] The precise motive of this action we are left to conjecture. Palm branches were carried by processions attending kings or victorious generals on public occasions. The triumphant host in heaven, which John saw in vision, was composed of persons having "palms in their hands" (Rev. 7:9). It may be that some of the crowd on this occasion believed that Jesus was the Messiah. Others, we may be sure, did what the rest did, without any special motive at all. At most, we can only suppose that the multitude had a vague idea that Jesus was somebody very remarkable—a prophet or someone raised up by God—and as such did Him honor.
Rollock thinks the custom of carrying branches at the feast of tabernacles, as the expression of joy, was the motive of the crowd here. [*And cried, Hosanna!*] This Hebrew word is taken from Psalm

118:25 and signifies “Save now, we beseech thee.”

Calvin thinks this phrase testified that they acknowledged Christ to be the Messiah, and considers that the 118th Psalm had special reference to Messiah’s coming.

[*Blessed is the King of Israel, etc.*] This sentence would be more literally rendered “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, the king of Israel.” It is partly taken from Psalm 118:26, but there the words are simply “Blessed be He who comes in the name of the Lord” and no mention is made of “the king.” We can only conjecture that some of the multitude had a vague idea that Jesus had come to be a temporal King and a conquering Messiah who would set Israel free from all foreign dominion. These few caught up the words of the Psalm, and their cry was taken up by the many around them, perhaps without knowing distinctly what they did or said. Nothing is so soon caught up as a popular cry. From “Hosanna” to “Crucify Him” there was only an interval of a very few days! Nothing is so worthless as popular applause. Theophylact holds decidedly that the multitude honored our Lord as God. But I cannot think it.

14.—[*And Jesus, when he had found, etc.*] That there was no chance of accident in the ass being found we know from St. Matthew’s Gospel, where we read that the disciples were sent to get the ass ready (Matt. 21:7). Every step of this triumphal progress into Jerusalem was prearranged. To ride upon an ass, we must always remember, was not so low and ignominious a mode of traveling as it

may seem to us. The Eastern ass is a very different creature to the English ass—larger, stronger, and far more valuable. Asses are specially named as part of the wealth of Abraham, Jacob, and Job (Gen. 12:16, 30:43, Job 13:12). Solomon had an officer specially over the asses (1 Chr. 27:30). Abraham, Balaam, Achsah, Abigail, and the Shunamite rich woman all rode on asses. To ride on white asses was a mark of great men in the days of the Judges (Judges 5:10). The idea therefore of anything degrading in riding on an ass must be entirely dismissed from our minds.

On the other hand, it is undeniable that the ass is not the animal that a king or ruler, in any age, has ever chosen to use on public occasions in heading a procession. The horse has always been preferred. The use of an ass, we cannot doubt, was meant to show that our Lord's kingdom was utterly unlike the kingdoms of this world. No Roman soldier in the garrison of Jerusalem who (standing at his post or sitting in his barrack window) saw our Lord riding on an ass, could report to his centurion that He looked like one who came to wrest the kingdom of Judea out of the hand of the Romans, drive out Pontius Pilate and his legions from the tower of Antonia, and achieve independence for the Jews with the sword! The Greek word rendered "young ass" here is a diminutive, and seems used intentionally to show that it was a very young or small ass.

[*As it is written*.] By riding on an ass, our Lord had fulfilled the prophecy of Zechariah in which, 500 years before, the prophet had foretold that the King of Zion would one day appear "riding upon an

ass." At the time when he prophesied this there were no kings in Jerusalem. The kingdom had ceased at the captivity. We cannot doubt that this prophecy was well known among the Scribes and Pharisees, and taken together with the fact that Daniel's 70 weeks were expiring, our Lord's entry into Jerusalem in this fashion must have raised many thoughts in their hearts. Let it be noted that many like events in our Lord's earthly ministry were foreknown and foretold long before they happened, and with increasing minuteness and particularity as the roll of prophecy drew near to an end.

15.—[*Fear not, etc.*] It will be observed, of course, that John does not quote literally and exactly all that Zechariah said; he omits several words. The explanation is simple. He did not quote from memory only and so forget part, but he purposely only quoted that part of the prediction which was now specially fulfilled— "the riding on the ass." The object of the prophecy when it was first delivered, was to comfort the Jews in their low and decayed state after their return from Babylon by a promise of Messiah. Therefore Zechariah was taught by the Holy Ghost to say things which may be paraphrased as follows: "Fear not; be not cast down or depressed, O daughter of Zion, or inhabitants of Jerusalem. Low and depressed as your condition may be now, there will be a day when you shall have a King again. There shall come One who will ride on a certain public occasion into thy gates—a King on an ass's colt, not as a warrior with a sword in hand but as a peaceful Prince, a just and holy King better even than David, Solomon, Hezekiah, or Josiah, and bring with Him salvation for souls. Therefore think not yourself forsaken because

you are poor now and have no king. Look forward to your coming King."

Let it be noted that Christ's coming, first or second, is always the great topic of comfort in prophetical writings.

16.—[*His disciples did not…at first.*] It is clear from this and other kindred passages that our Lord's own immediate followers had a very imperfect knowledge of our Lord's Person and work, and of the fulfillment of Scripture which was going on around them. Brought up amidst Jewish notions of a glorious temporal Messiah, they failed to see the full meaning of many of our Lord's doings.

Let us never forget that men may be true Christians and right hearted and yet be very ignorant on some points. "Faith," says Zwingli on this verse, "admits of degrees and increase." In estimating others, we must make great allowance for early training and associations.

[*But when Jesus was glorified.*] This must mean, as Theophylact says, our Lord's ascension. After that time and the day of Pentecost, the minds of the disciples were greatly enlightened. Compare John 7:39: "The Holy Ghost was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified."

[*Then they remembered…written of him.*] The power of memory to see things in a new light long after they happen, and then to

recollect them vividly, is very remarkable. In no case does it appear more curiously than in the rising again in our minds of texts and sermons heard long ago, which at the time apparently left no impression on us. Preachers and teachers may take comfort in this. All is not lost that they say, although their hearers and scholars may seem at the time to pay no attention. Their words in many cases shall have a resurrection. One great cause of this is that it is part of the Holy Ghost's office "to bring things to remembrance" (John 14:26).

[*And that they had done these things to him*.] The disciples found, long after the triumphant entry into Jerusalem, that they had been unconscious actors in a mighty accomplishment of Scripture. This is a thought for us all. We have not the least idea, during the greater part of our lives, how much of God's great purposes on earth are being carried on through us and by us without our being conscious of it. The full extent to which they are carried on we shall never know till we wake up in another world. We shall then discern with wonder and amazement the full meaning of many a thing in which we were unconscious agents during our lives. Calvin remarks: "Then, after the ascension, did it occur to the disciples that Christ did not do these things rashly, and that these men were not employed in idle amusement, but that the whole transaction had been regulated by the providence of God."

Poole observes that here St. John "confesses his own ignorance." He was present and saw all that was done, but did not understand it at the time.

17.—[Therefore the people… Lazarus…bore record.] I feel no doubt that this verse describes one part of the multitude which met our Lord, and the following verse describes another part. One part, and of course a small one, consisted of those who had seen the raising of Lazarus. The other, and a much larger one, consisted of those who had only heard the report. That there must have been a very large number of persons present at the miracle of Bethany is, I think, indirectly proved by the expression here used, "people that were with Him."

The words "bore record" must mean that they testified that a great miracle really had been worked, and that this same Jesus now riding on an ass before the eyes of the people was that very Person who had worked it. I do not see that we can possibly get more out of the expression, and I cannot suppose that these people testified their belief in Christ's Messiahship. The double expression, "called out of his grave" and "raised from the dead," deserves notice. It is doubtless meant to keep before our minds the mighty simplicity of the means used by our Lord. He spoke and it was done. He "called" to Lazarus to come forth, and he was "raised" at once. 18.—[*For this reason, etc.*] This verse describes the state of mind of the larger part of the multitude which surrounded our Lord at His entry into Jerusalem. It consisted of those who had heard the report of His raising Lazarus—a story magnified, no doubt, in the telling. Strong curiosity to see the Person who had done such a miracle would call forth an immense crowd in any city. But among Jews familiar with Old Testament

miracles, assembled in enormous numbers for the Passover, excited by the rumor of Messiah coming—among such we may well believe that the report of Jesus coming in from Bethany would draw together many myriads of spectators to meet Him.

The Greek words "for this reason" here seem to refer forward to the latter part of the verse and not backward to the preceding verse. Compare 10:17 where the same form of language is used.

19.—[The Pharisees…said…ye prevail nothing.] This is the language of men baffled, angry, and at their wits' end from vexation to see their plans defeated. Instead of finding people willing to lay hands on Jesus as a malefactor and deliver Him up into their power, they beheld a large multitude surrounding Him with joyful acclamations and saluting Him as a King! Of course they could do nothing but sit still and see it. The least attempt to use violence against our Lord would have raised a tumult and endangered their own lives. So they were obliged to see their most hated enemy entering Jerusalem in triumph, like Mordecai led by Haman (Esther 6:11).

"Perceive ye," I believe, should be taken as an imperative and not as an interrogative indicative. It sounds like the language of men looking on from the city walls or the temple courts as the huge procession wound slowly through the gates of the city. "Behold this sight! Behold how you do nothing effectual to stop this fellow's course! Your order to denounce Him and have Him apprehended is utterly useless and unprofitable." Chrysostom and Theophylact think

that those who said this had some faith and felt rightly, but had not courage enough to confess Christ. But I cannot agree with them. Calvin and other reformers think, on the contrary, that it was the language of Christ's enemies.

Bullinger observes that wicked men show their wickedness especially by their dislike of true religion, and their annoyance when, as in the case before us, it seems to enjoy a temporary popularity. For neglect and contempt of religion, they show no concern at all.

[*Behold, the world is gone after him!*] Some allowance of course must be made for the exaggerated language which angry and disappointed men use under the influence of passion. Nevertheless, the word "world" may not be really so extravagant as it appears at first when we consider the immense number of Jews who attended the Passover feast. According to a computation made by Josephus, there were nearly three million people assembled on such occasions at Jerusalem. At this rate we can understand that the crowd drawn together by our Lord's public entry might well be so large as to warrant the saying, "The world is gone after him." Most of the crowd, it may be remembered, were not dwellers in Jerusalem but strangers who were only visitors or sojourners—absent from home—and would materially swell a crowd.

In leaving this passage, it is impossible not to feel that there must have been an overruling, constraining influence on the minds of the Jewish people on the occasion of our Lord's triumphant entry into

Jerusalem. This, no doubt, was an influence miraculously exercised by our Lord in order to draw all men's attention to Himself, and to make His approaching Sacrifice on the cross as public an event as possible. Rollock observes: "A secret power of royal authority stirred up the minds of the multitude to receive Christ as a king." He also observes that it is the same power which Christ will put forth when He comes at the last day to judge the world.

JOHN 12:20-26

Now some Greeks were among those who had gone up to worship at the feast. So these approached Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and requested, "Sir, we would like to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew, and they both went and told Jesus. Jesus replied, "The time has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the solemn truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains by itself alone. But if it dies, it produces much grain. The one who loves his life destroys it, and the one who hates his life in this world guards it for eternal life. If anyone wants to serve me, he must follow me, and where I am, my servant will be too. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him."

There is more going on in some people's minds than we are aware of. The case of the Greeks before us is a remarkable proof of this. Who would have thought when Christ was on earth, that foreigners from a distant land would have come forward in Jerusalem, and said, "Sir, we would like to see Jesus"? Who these Greeks were, what they meant, why they desired to see Jesus, what their inward motives

were—all these are questions we cannot answer. Like Zaccheus, they may have been influenced by curiosity. Like the wise men from the East, they may have surmised that Jesus was the promised King of the Jews, whom all the eastern world was expecting. Enough for us to know that they showed more interest in Christ than Caiaphas and all his companions. Enough to know that they drew from our Lord's lips sayings which are still read in one hundred and fifty languages, from one end of the world to the other.

We learn, for one thing, from our Lord's words in this passage, that ***death is the way to spiritual life and glory.*** "Except a grain of wheat falls into the ground, it abides alone; but if it dies, it brings forth much fruit."

This sentence was primarily meant to teach the wondering Greeks the true nature of Messiah's kingdom. If they thought to see a King like the kings of this world, they were greatly mistaken. Our Lord would have them know that He came to carry a cross, and not to wear a crown. He came not to live a life of honor, ease, and magnificence, but to die a shameful and dishonored death. The kingdom He came to set up was to begin with a crucifixion, and not with a coronation. Its glory was to take its rise not from victories won by the sword, and from accumulated treasures of gold and silver, but from the death of its King.

But this sentence was also meant to teach a wider and broader lesson still. It revealed, under a striking figure, the mighty foundation truth, that *Christ's death was to be the source of spiritual*

life to the world. From His cross and sufferings was to spring up a mighty harvest of benefit to all mankind. His death, like a grain of seed, was to be the root of blessings and mercies to countless millions of immortal souls. In short, the great principle of the Gospel was once more exhibited—that Christ's vicarious *death* (not His life, or miracles, or teaching, but His *death*) was to bring forth fruit to the praise of God, and to provide redemption for a lost world.

This deep and mighty sentence was followed by a practical application, which closely concerns ourselves. "He who hates his life shall keep it." He that would be saved must be ready to give up life itself, if necessary, in order to obtain salvation. He must bury his love of the world, with its riches, honors, pleasures, and rewards, with a full belief that in so doing he will reap a better harvest, both here and hereafter. He who loves the life that now is, so much that he cannot deny himself anything for the sake of his soul, will find at length that he has lost everything. He, on the contrary, who is ready to cast away everything most dear to him in this life, *if it stands in the way of his soul*, and to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts, will find at length that he is no loser. In a word, his losses will prove nothing in comparison to his gains.

Truths such as these should sink deeply into our hearts, and stir up self-inquiry. It is as true of Christians as it is of Christ—there can be no life without death, there can be no sweet without bitter, there can be no crown without a cross. Without Christ's death there would have been no life for the world. Unless we are willing to die to sin,

and crucify all that is most dear to flesh and blood, we cannot expect any benefit from Christ's death. Let us remember these things, and take up our cross daily, like men. Let us, for the joy set before us, endure the cross and despise the shame, and in the end we shall sit down with our Master at God's right hand. The way of self-crucifixion and sanctification may seem foolishness and wasteful to the world, just as burying good seed seems wasteful to the child and the fool. But there never lived the man who did not find that, by sowing to the Spirit, he reaped life everlasting.

We learn, for another thing, from our Lord's words, that ***if we profess to serve Christ, we must follow Him.*** "If any man serves Me," is the saying, "let him follow Me."

That expression, "following," is one of wide signification, and brings before our minds many familiar ideas. As the soldier follows his general, as the servant follows his master, as the scholar follows his teacher; as the sheep follows its shepherd, just so ought the professing Christian to follow Christ. Faith and obedience are the leading marks of real followers, and will always be seen in true believing Christians. Their knowledge may be very small, and their infirmities very great; their grace very weak, and their hope very dim. But they believe what Christ says, and strive to do what Christ commands. And of such Christ declares, "They serve Me, they are Mine."

Christianity like this receives little from man. It is too thorough, too decided, too strong, too real. To serve Christ in name and form is

easy work, and satisfies most people, but to follow Him in faith and life demands more trouble than the generality of men will take about their souls. Laughter, ridicule, opposition, persecution, are often the only reward which Christ's followers get from the world. Their religion is one, "whose praise is not of men, but of God." (Rom. 2:29.)

Yet to him who follows, let us never forget, the Lord Jesus holds out abundant encouragement— "Where I am," He declares, "there also shall my servant be; if any man serves Me, him will my Father honor." Let us lay to heart these comfortable promises, and go forward in the narrow way without fear. The world may cast out our name as evil, and turn us out of its society; but when we dwell with Christ in glory, we shall have a home from which we can never be ejected. The world may pour contempt on our religion, and laugh us and our Christianity to scorn; but when the Father honors us at the last day, before the assembly of angels and men, we shall find that *His praise makes amends for all.*

Technical Notes:

20. And there were certain Greeks among those who came up to worship at the feast. 21. Then they came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and desired him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus. 22. Philip came and told Andrew, and Andrew and Philip told Jesus. 23. And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour has come that the Son of man should be glorified. 24. Verily, verily I say to

you, Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it brings forth much fruit. 25. He who loves his life shall lose it, and he who hates his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. 26. If any man serves me, let him follow me; and where I am, there my servant shall be also. If any man serves me, *him will my Father honor*.

20.—[*And there were certain Greeks, etc.*] Who these Greeks were has exercised the conjectural ingenuity of commentators. They were not downright heathens; it is clear from the expression that they were of those "that came to worship" at the feast. No heathen would be admitted to the Passover. They were not, in my judgment, Jews who had lived among Greeks until they were more Grecian than Jewish in their language. The word we have rendered "Greeks" seems to me to make that impossible. I believe they were men who were by birth heathens but had become proselytes to Judaism, and as such were regular attendants on the Jewish feasts. That there were many such proselytes wherever Jews lived is a simple matter of fact. So in Acts 17:4 we read of "devout" or "worshipping" Greeks. The leavening influence of Judaism, in every part of the heathen world where the scattered Jews dwelt before the coming of Christ, was probably very considerable. It is worth notice that as Gentiles, the wise men from the East were among the first to honor our Lord when He was born; so Gentiles were among the first to show interest in Him just before His crucifixion. Whether the circumstance recorded in the passage before us took place the same day that our Lord rode

in triumph into Jerusalem, or whether there was not a break or interval of a day or two, admits of question. Judging from the inquiry of the Greeks, "We wish to see Jesus," it seems unlikely that it happened the same day. It stands to reason that our Lord, at a time when He was riding into Jerusalem on an ass and was the object of popular enthusiasm, would easily have been distinguished and recognized by the Greeks. Moreover, one cannot suppose that the words spoken in the following verse, and the miracle of the voice from heaven, belong to a time of noise, shouting, and popular acclamation, such as there must have been during the procession. For these reasons I incline to the opinion that we must suppose an interval of a day or two between this verse and the preceding one.

21.—[*Then they came to Philip…Galilee.*] Why the Greeks came to Philip more than any other disciple we do not know. It is conjectured that Philip, being an inhabitant of a town in North Galilee, was more likely than the other disciples to be acquainted with Greeks from nearby Tyre and Sidon. But this reason applies quite as much to Andrew, Peter, James, and John—who were all Galileans—as it does to Philip. Is it not worth noticing that Philip's name is a more purely Greek name than that of any of the apostles? Does not this indicate that he probably had Greek relatives and connections?

The mention of Bethsaida accounts for Philip speaking to Andrew, in the next verse. Bethsaida was the native place of Andrew and Peter, and Philip therefore was their fellow townsman.

[*And desired him, saying, Sir*.] The Greek word rendered "desired" is more frequently translated "asked," "besought," "prayed." It implies the desire of an inquirer who expresses a wish for a thing and asks whether it is possible for him to have it.

The word we render "sir" is almost always rendered "lord." When rendered "sir," it is addressed by an inferior to a superior. Thus the servant of the householder says, "Sir, did you not sow good seed?" (Matt. 13:27.) The Pharisees said to Pilate, "Sir, we remember that deceiver said" (Matt. 27:63). The Samaritan woman says to Jesus three times, "Sir" (John 4:11,13,19). Here the use of the word marks the respect of the Greeks for our Lord and His apostles.

[*We would see Jesus*.] The English here fails to express the Greek fully. It is literally, "we wish, we desire to see." Concerning the motive of the Greeks in asking to see our Lord, we know nothing certain. It may have been nothing but curiosity, like that of Zaccheus, aroused by hearing rumors about Jesus and sharpened by seeing the procession of the palm-bearing multitude at His entry into the city. This alone was enough to excite the attention of Greeks accustomed to the demonstrations of their own countrymen on public occasions. It may possibly be that, like the Canaanitish woman, the centurion of Capernaum, and Cornelius, they had, as proselytes, got hold of the great truths which underlaid Judaism and were actually looking for a Redeemer. But we do not know.

Bengel thinks that at this moment "Jesus was engaged in the inner

part of the temple, to which an entrance was not open to the Greeks," and for this reason the Greeks could not get at Him and have a personal interview. These Greeks, we should note, sought to see Jesus at the very time when the Jews sought to kill Him.

22.—[*Philip came and told Andrew*.] This expression seems to favor the idea that this whole transaction was not on the same day that Jesus entered Jerusalem. On such a day there would hardly be an opportunity for one disciple coming quietly and telling a thing to another. Why Philip chose to tell Andrew we have seen—he was his fellow townsman. [*And Andrew and Philip told Jesus*.] This expression seems to imply that the two Apostles consulted together before they told our Lord. Perhaps, as thorough Jews, they did not feel sure that our Lord would care to give an interview to Gentiles, and at first hesitated about telling Him. They remembered that at one time Jesus had said, "Go not into the way of the Gentiles" (Matt. 10:5). On reflection, they probably remembered our Lord's kindness to the Canaanitish mother and Roman centurion, and resolved to tell Him.

Of course, it is possible that the Greeks only wanted to look at our Lord and see what He was like, and not to converse with Him. If this was all, the disciples may have doubted whether it was worth mentioning to Jesus.

23.—[*And Jesus answered them, saying*.] It is doubtful whether this was spoken to the two disciples only—or to them and the Greeks

before mentioned—or to the twelve alone. I incline to think it must mean to the twelve, and specially to Andrew and Philip.

[*The hour is come…glorified.*] The true keynote to this verse and the two which follow is probably this: Our Lord saw the state of mind in which His followers were. He saw them excited by His triumphant entry into Jerusalem, and the desire of strangers like the Greeks to see their Master. He saw they were secretly expecting a glorious kingdom to be immediately set up in which they would have chief places, power, and authority. He proceeds to rectify their conceptions and to remind them of what He had repeatedly told them—His own death.

[To paraphrase], The hour has certainly arrived for my being glorified. I am about to leave the world, ascend up to my Father, finish the work I came to do, and be highly exalted. My earthly ministry of humiliation is ending, and my time of glory is drawing nigh. But all this is to be brought about in a way very different from that which you are thinking about. I am going to a cross first, and not a throne. I am going first to be condemned, crucified, and slain.

That "glorified" means "to be crucified" I cannot admit, with such texts as John 7:39 and 12:16 before me. That the cross led to glory and that through the crucifixion came the glorification I believe firmly. But the glory came after the suffering (Luke 24:26).

Let us note that "the hour" or season for Christ to finish His ministry

was fixed and appointed. Till it came, the Jews could do nothing to stop His preaching or harm His person. Just so it is with His people in one sense; each is immortal till his work is done.

Does it not seem that the inquiry of the Greeks has much to do with our Lord's opening words? "The Gentiles are beginning to inquire after Me. Thus the hour is manifestly come that my work should be finished and my kingdom fully set up in the world by my crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension."

24.—[*Verily, verily, I say to you.*] This is one of those solemn prefaces which are so frequent in John's Gospel, and indicate some very weighty truth coming. I think "to you" must surely include not only Andrew and Philip, but all the company around our Lord.

[*Unless a grain of wheat, etc.*] Our Lord here illustrates a great Scriptural truth by a very familiar fact in nature. That fact is, that in plants and seeds life comes by death. The seed must be put into the ground, must rot, decay, and die if we want it to bear fruit and produce a crop. If we refuse to bury the seed and will keep it without sowing it, we shall never reap any harvest. We must be content to let it die if we want corn.

The wealth of spiritual truth which this beautiful figure unfolds is very great. The death of Christ was the life of the world. From it, as a most prolific seed, was to spring an enormous harvest of blessing to souls and of glory to God. His substitution on the cross, His atoning

death, were to be the beginning of untold blessings to a lost world. To wish Him not to die, to dislike the idea of His death (as the disciples evidently did), was as foolish as to keep seed-corn locked up in the granary and to refuse to sow it. “I am the corn of wheat,” Jesus seems to say. “Unless I die, whatever you in your private opinion may think, my purpose in coming into the world will not be accomplished. But if I die, multitudes of souls will be saved.”

Let us carefully mark here the immense importance which our Lord attached to His death. Nothing can explain this but the old foundation doctrine of the Bible—that Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross is the only satisfaction and atonement for the sin of the world. A passage like this can never be thoroughly explained by those who regard Christ’s death as nothing more than a martyrdom or an example of self-denial. It was something far greater and more important than this. It was the dying of a grain of wheat in order that out of its death should spring up an enormous spiritual harvest. Christ’s vicarious death is the world’s life. Let us notice here, as elsewhere, the Divine wisdom with which our Master illustrated spiritual truth by earthly figures. Illustrations, fitly chosen, strike men much more than abstract arguments. Ministers and teachers of religion should study to “use similitudes.” Theophylact thinks our Lord meant, by this beautiful figure, to encourage His disciples not to be offended and shaken in mind by His coming death. In His case, as in the natural world, they must remember life comes through death.

Zwingli thinks that as with the corn, when sown, so it is with the body of Christ. It does us good by dying for us, and not by our eating

it. Gill remarks that by "abiding alone," in this simile, Christ meant that if He did not die, He would be "alone" in heaven with the Father and the elect angels, but without any of the sons of men. Scott says the same.

25.—[*He who loves his life, etc.*] There are few of our Lord's saying more frequently recorded by the Holy Ghost than this pair of paradoxes. The repetition shows its great importance. It will be found in Matt. 10:39, 16:25, Mark 8:35, Luke 9:24, 17:33, as well as here. The meaning is plain: "He who loves his life, or thinks more of the life that now is than that which is to come, shall lose that which is the best part of his life, his soul. He who hates his life, or cares little for it compared to the life to come, shall preserve to eternal glory that which is the best part of his life, to wit, his soul."

One object of our Lord in saying these words was evidently to prevent His disciples from looking for good things in this life if they followed Him. They must give up their Jewish ideas about temporal rewards and honors in Messiah's service. They must understand that His kingdom was entirely spiritual, and that if they were His disciples, they must be content to lose much in this life in order to gain the glory of the life to come. So far from promising them temporal rewards, He would have them distinctly know that they must give up much and sacrifice much if they wanted to be saved.

The other object our Lord had in view, in saying these words, was to teach all Christians in every age that like Him they must make up

their minds to sacrifice much, and to die to the world, in the hope of a harvest of glory in a world to come. Through death we must seek life. Eternal life must be the great end a Christian looks to. To attain it he must be willing to give up everything.

The practical condemnation which this verse passes on the life lived by many should never be overlooked. How few hate their lives here! How many love them and care for nothing but how to make them comfortable and happy! The eternal loss or the eternal gain are often entirely forgotten. Augustine gives a wise caution: "Take heed unless there steal upon you a will to make away with yourself, while you take in the sense that it is a duty to hate your own life in this world. Hence certain malignant and perverse men give themselves to the flames, choke themselves in the water, dash themselves in pieces, and so perish. Christ taught not this. Not by himself, but by another must that man be put to death who would follow in Christ's footsteps."

The word "hate" here must be taken comparatively. It is a Hebraism, like "Jacob have I loved and Esau have I hated." "Your appointed feasts my soul hates." (Rom. 9:13, Isa. 1:14.)
Scott thinks this verse was meant to teach the Greeks and all the disciples to arm themselves with a mind like their Master's if they wanted to follow Him.

26.—[*If any man serves me, let him follow me.*] This verse seems spoken for the benefit and information of the Greeks who sought to

see Jesus, and of all who desired to become His disciples. If any man desires to serve Christ and be a Christian, he must be content to follow His Master, walk in His footsteps, share His lot, do as He did, and partake of His Master's inheritance in this world. He must not look for good things here—for crowns, kingdoms, riches, honors, wealth, and dignity. Like His Master, he must be content with a cross. He must, in a word, "take up his cross and follow Me" (Matt. 16:24). As St. Paul says: "We are heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ, if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together" (Rom. 8:17).

[*And where I am…be also.*] This is the first thing that Christ promises to those who follow Him. They shall be with Christ wherever He is, in paradise and in His glorious kingdom. He and His servant shall not be parted. Whatever the Master has, the servant shall have also. It is a comfortable thought that however little we know of the life to come and the state after death, we do know that we shall be "with Christ, which is far better" (Phil. 1:23).

[*If any man serves me, him will my Father honor.*] This is the second thing which Jesus promises to His disciples. The Father shall give to those who love Christ such honor as eye has not seen nor ear heard. Honor from the men of this world they may not have. Honor from the Father shall make amends for all.

It is impossible not to see throughout this verse that our Lord's intention is to discourage the carnal and earthly expectation of His

Jewish followers, and yet to encourage them by showing what they might confidently look for. They must follow in His steps if they were his true servants, and in so following they would find a cross and not a crown, whatever they might be thinking at that moment while the hosannas of an excited crowd were sounding in their ears. But though they had a cross, they should not miss a reward finally, which would make amends for all. They would be with Christ in glory. They would be honored by God the Father. The words "him will my Father honor," of course, admit of being applied to this life in a certain sense: "They who honor Me I will honor" (1 Sam. 2:30). But it is much more agreeable to the context, I think, to apply them to the honor which shall be given in another world. The clearest conception we can form of heaven is that which is here stated. It is being with Christ and receiving honor from God. Heaven is generally described by negatives. This is, however, an exceptional positive. It is being "with Christ." (Compare John 14:3, 17:24, 1 Thes. 4:17.) Let us note how wisely and mercifully our Lord always damped and checked the unscriptural expectations of His disciples. Never on any occasion do we find Him keeping back the cross, or bribing men to follow Him, as Mahomet did, by promising temporal comfort and happiness.

JOHN 12:27-33

"Now my soul is greatly distressed. And what should I say? 'Father, deliver me from this hour'? No, but for this very reason I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again."

The crowd that stood there and heard the voice said that it had thundered. Others said that an angel had spoken to him. Jesus said, "This voice has not come for my benefit but for yours. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." (Now he said this to indicate clearly what kind of death he was going to die.)

These verses show us what Peter meant, when he said, "There are some things hard to be understood" in Scripture. (2 Pet. 3:16.) There are depths here which we have no line to fathom thoroughly. This need not surprise us, or shake our faith. The Bible would not be a book "given by inspiration of God," if it did not contain many things which pass man's finite understanding. With all its difficulties, it contains thousands of passages which the most unlearned may easily comprehend. Even here, if we look steadily at these verses, we may gather from them lessons of considerable importance.

We have, first, in these verses, ***a great DOCTRINE indirectly proved.*** That doctrine is the imputation of man's sin to Christ. We see the Savior of the world, the eternal Son of God troubled and disturbed in mind— "Now is my soul troubled." We see Him who could heal diseases with a touch, cast out devils with a word, and command the waves and winds to obey Him, in great agony and conflict of spirit. Now how can this be explained?

To say, as some do, that the only cause of our Lord's trouble was the prospect of His own painful death on the cross, is a very

unsatisfactory explanation. At this rate it might justly be said that many a martyr has shown more calmness and courage than the Son of God. Such a conclusion is, to say the least, most revolting. Yet this is the conclusion to which men are driven if they adopt the modern notion, that Christ's death was only a great example of self-sacrifice.

Nothing can ever explain our Lord's trouble of soul, both here and in Gethsemane, except the old doctrine, that He felt the burden of man's sin pressing Him down. It was the mighty weight of a world's guilt imputed to Him and meeting on his head, which made Him groan and agonize, and cry, "Now is my soul troubled." Forever let us cling to that doctrine, not only as untying the knot of the passage before us, but as the only ground of solid comfort for the heart of a Christian. That our sins have been really laid on our Divine Substitute, and borne by Him, and that His righteousness is really imputed to us and accounted ours—this is the real warrant for Christian peace. And if any man asks how we know that our sins were laid on Christ, we bid him read such passages as that which is before us, and explain them on any other principle if he can. Christ has borne our sins, carried our sins, groaned under the burden of our sins, been "troubled" in soul by the weight of our sins, and really taken away our sins. This, we may rest assured, is sound doctrine this is Scriptural theology.

We have, secondly, in these verses, ***a great MYSTERY unfolded.*** That mystery is the possibility of much inward conflict of soul without sin.

We cannot fail to see in the passage before us a mighty mental struggle in our blessed Savior. Of its depth and intensity we can probably form very little conception. But the agonizing cry, “My soul is troubled,”—the solemn question, “What shall I say?”—the prayer of suffering flesh and blood, “Father, save Me from this hour,”—the meek confession, “For this cause came I unto this hour,”—the petition of a perfectly submissive will, “Father, glorify Your name,”—what does all this mean? Surely there can be only one answer. These sentences tell *of a struggle within our Savior’s breast*, a struggle arising from the natural feelings of one who was perfect man, and as man could suffer all that man is capable of suffering. Yet He in whom this struggle took place was the Holy Son of God. “In Him is no sin.” (1 John 3:5.)

There is a fountain of comfort here for all true servants of Christ, which ought never to be overlooked. Let them learn from their Lord’s example that *inward conflict of soul is not necessarily in itself a sinful thing*. Too many, we believe, from not understanding this point, go heavily all their days on their way to heaven. They fancy they have no grace, because they find a fight in their own hearts. They refuse to take comfort in the Gospel, because they feel a battle between the flesh and the Spirit. Let them mark the experience of their Lord and Master, and lay aside their desponding fears. Let them study the experience of His saints in every age, from Paul downwards, and understand that as Christ had inward conflicts, so must Christians expect to have them also. To give way to doubts and unbelief, no doubt is wrong, and robs us of our peace. There is a

faithless despondency, unquestionably, which is blameworthy, and must be resisted, repented of, and brought to the fountain for all sin, that it may be pardoned. But the mere presence of fight and strife and conflict in our hearts is in itself no sin. The believer may be known by his inward warfare as well as by his inward peace.

We have, thirdly, in these verses, ***a great MIRACLE exhibited.*** That miracle is the heavenly Voice described in this passage—a voice which was heard so plainly that people said it thundered—proclaiming, "I have glorified my name, and will glorify it again."

This wondrous Voice was heard three times during our Lord's earthly ministry. Once it was heard at His baptism, when the heavens were opened and the Holy Spirit descended on Him. Once it was heard at His transfiguration, when Moses and Elijah appeared for a season with Him, before Peter, James, and John. Once it was heard here at Jerusalem, in the midst of a mixed crowd of disciples and unbelieving Jews. On each occasion we know that it was the Voice of God the Father. But why this Voice was only heard on these occasions we are left to conjecture. The thing was a deep mystery, and we cannot now speak particularly of it.

Let it suffice us to believe that this miracle was meant to show *the intimate relations and unbroken union of God the Father and God the Son*, throughout the period of the Son's earthly ministry. At no period during His incarnation was there a time when the eternal Father was not close to Him, though unseen by man.

Let us also believe that this miracle was meant to signify to bystanders *the entire approval of the Son by the Father*, as the Messiah, the Redeemer, and the Savior of man. That approval the Father was pleased to signify by voice three times, as well as to declare by signs and mighty deeds, performed by the Son in His name. These things we may well believe. But when we have said all, we must confess that the Voice was a mystery. We may read of it with wonder and awe, but we cannot explain it.

We have, lastly, in these verses, ***a great PROPHECY delivered***. The Lord Jesus declared, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." Concerning the true meaning of these words, there can be but one opinion in any honest mind. They do not mean, as is often supposed, that if the doctrine of Christ crucified is lifted up and exalted by ministers and teachers, it will have a drawing effect on hearers. This is undeniably a truth, but it is not the truth of the text. They simply mean that the death of Christ on the cross would have a drawing effect on all mankind. His death as our Substitute, and the Sacrifice for our sins, would draw multitudes out of every nation to believe on Him and receive Him as their Savior. By being crucified for us, and not by ascending a temporal throne, He would set up a kingdom in the world, and gather subjects to Himself.

How thoroughly this prophecy has been fulfilled for eighteen centuries, the history of the Church is an abundant proof. Whenever Christ crucified has been preached, and the story of the cross fully

told, souls have been converted and drawn to Christ, in every part of the world, just as iron-filings are drawn to a magnet. No truth so exactly suits the needs of all children of Adam, of every color, climate, and language, as the truth about Christ crucified.

And the prophecy is not yet exhausted. It shall yet receive a more complete accomplishment. A day shall come when every knee shall bow before the Lamb that was slain, and every tongue confess that He is Lord to the glory of God the Father. He who was "lifted up" on the cross shall yet sit on the throne of glory, and before Him shall be gathered all nations. Friends and foes, each in their own order, shall be "drawn" from their graves, and appear before the judgment-seat of Christ. Let us take heed in that day that we are found on His right hand!

Technical Notes:

27. Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? But for this purpose I came to this hour. 28. Father, glorify thy name. Then a voice came from heaven *saying*, I have both glorified *it* and will glorify *it* again. 29. Therefore the people who stood by and heard *it* said that it had thundered. Others said, And angel has spoken to him. 30. Jesus answered and said, This voice did not come because of me, but for your sakes. 31. Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out. 32. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all *men* unto me. 33. This he said,

signifying by what death he would die.

27.—[*Now is my soul troubled, etc.*] This remarkable verse comes in somewhat abruptly. Yet the connection is not hard to trace. Our Lord had just been speaking of His own atoning death. The thought and prospect of that death appears to draw from Him the expressions of this verse, which I will now examine in order.

[*Now is my soul troubled.*] This sentence implies a sudden, strong mental agony, which came over our Lord, troubling, distressing, and harassing Him. What was it from? Not from the mere foresight of a painful death on the cross and the bodily suffering attending it. No doubt human nature, even when sinless, naturally revolts from pain and suffering. Yet mere bodily pain has been endured for weeks by many a martyr, and even by heathen fanatics in India, without a groan or a murmur. No! It was the weight of the world's imputed sin laid upon our Lord's head which pressed Him downward and made Him cry, "Now is my soul troubled." It was the sense of the whole burden of man's transgression imputed to Him, which, as He drew near to the cross, weighed Him down so tremendously. It was not His bodily sufferings, either anticipated or felt, but our sins which here, at Gethsemane and at Calvary, agonized and racked His soul. Let us notice here the reality of Christ's substitution for us. He was made "a curse" for us, and sin for us, and He felt it for a time most deeply (Gal. 3:13, 2 Cor. 5:21). Those who deny the doctrine of substitution, imputation, and atonement can never explain the expressions before us satisfactorily.

Poole remarks: “There is a vast difference between this trouble of spirit in Christ and that which is in us. Our troubles are upon reflection for our own sins and the wrath of God therefore due to us; His troubles were for the wrath of God due to us for our sins. Our troubles are because we have personally grieved God; His were because those given to Him had offended God. We are afraid of our eternal condemnation; He was only afraid by a natural fear of death, which naturally rises higher according to the kind of death we die. Our troubles have a mixture of despair, distrust, sinful horror; there was no such thing in His trouble. Our troubles, in their natural tendency, are killing and destroying (only by accident and the wise ordering of Divine providence do they prove advantageous and lead us to Him); His trouble, in the very nature of it, was pure, clean, sanative, and healing. But that He was truly troubled and that such a trouble did truly agree to His office as Mediator, and is a great foundation of peace, quiet, and satisfaction to us, is out of [beyond] question. By some of these stripes we are healed.”

We should remember and admire the prayer in the Litany of the Greek Church:

“By Thine unknown sufferings, good Lord, deliver us.” Rollock observes here: “If you ask me what the Divine nature in Christ was doing when He said, ‘My soul is troubled,’ and whether it was divided asunder from His human nature, I reply that it was not divided but contained itself, or held itself passive, while the human nature was

suffering. If it had exercised itself in its full power and glory, our Lord could not possibly have suffered."

(The whole of Rollock's remarks on this difficult verse are singularly good and deserve close study.) Hutcheson observes: "The rise and cause of this trouble was thus, the Godhead hiding itself from the humanity's sense, and the Father letting out not only an apprehension of sufferings to come but a present taste of the horror of His wrath due to man for sin. Christ was amazed, perplexed, and overwhelmed with it in His humanity. And no wonder, since He had the sins of all the elect laid upon Him, by imputation, to suffer for." Hengstenberg remarks: "The only solution of this extreme trouble is the vicarious significance of the sufferings and death of Christ. If our chastisement was upon Him in order that we might have peace, then in Him must have been concentrated all the horror of death. He bore the sin of the world, and the wages of that sin was death. Death therefore must to Him assume its most frightful form. The physical suffering was nothing compared to the immeasurable suffering of soul which impended over the Redeemer, and the full greatness and depth of which He clearly perceives. Therefore, in Heb. 5:7, 'a fear' is described as that which pressed with such awful weight upon our Lord. When God freed Him from that, He saved Him from death. Thus, when the suffering of Christ is apprehended as vicarious and voluntary, all the accompanying circumstances can be easily understood."

Let us note the exceeding guilt and sinfulness of sin. The thing which

made even God's own Son, who had power to work works that none else did beside Him, groan and cry "My soul is troubled," can be no light thing. He who would know the full measure of sin and guilt should mark attentively this verse, and the expressions used by our Lord at Gethsemane and Calvary. It is worth noticing that there are only three places in the Gospels where our Lord speaks of "My soul"—this verse, Matt. 26:38, and Mark 14:34. The word "now," I suspect, is emphatic: "Now, at this special time, my soul has begun to be specially troubled."

[*And what shall I say?*] These words are thought by some, as Theophylact, Grotius, Bloomfield, and Barnes, to be wrongly translated in our English version. They would render them, "And what? What is my duty? What does the hour require of Me? Shall I say, Save Me," etc. I much prefer our English version as it is. I believe the question is strongly significant of the agony and conflict through which our Lord's soul was passing. "What shall I say under this sense of pressing, overwhelming trouble? My human nature bids me say one thing, acting alone and urging me alone. My knowledge of the purpose for which I came into the world bids me say another thing. What, then, shall I say?" Such a question as this is a strong proof of our Lord's real, true humanity.

Rollock observes: "'What shall I say?' is the language of the highest perplexity and anxiety of mind. In the height of anguish is the height of perplexity, so that a man knows not what to say or do. The Lord found deliverance in prayer. But the perpetual cry of the lost will be,

‘What shall I say? What shall I do?’ From that perplexity and anguish they will never be delivered.”

Bengel remarks: “Jesus says, ‘What shall I say?’ not, ‘What shall I choose?’ Compare with this the different expression of St. Paul: ‘What I shall choose I know not, for I am in a strait between two, having a desire to depart.’”

Ecolampadius thinks the question means, “In what words shall I unfold my pain, or the bitterness and ingratitude of the Jews?” I prefer taking it as the language of perplexity and distress.

The presence of two natures in our Lord Jesus Christ’s person seems clearly taught when we compare the language used by our Lord in this verse with the language of the 5th and 17th chapters of this Gospel. *Here* we see unmistakably our Lord’s true humanity. *There*, on the other hand, we see no less plainly His divinity. Here He speaks as man; there as God.

[*Father, save me from this hour.*] This is undoubtedly a prayer to be saved from, or delivered from, the agony and suffering of this hour. It is the language of a human nature which, though sinless, could suffer, and instinctively shrank from suffering. It would not have been real human nature if it had not so shrunk and recoiled.

The idea of the prayer is just the same as that of the prayer in Gethsemane— “Let this cup pass from me” (Matt. 26:39). Let us

learn from our Lord's example that there is nothing sinful in praying to be delivered from suffering, so long as we do it in submission to the will of God. There is nothing wrong in a sick person's saying, "Father, make me well," so long as the prayer is offered with proper qualification.

Rollock observes: "In agony there is a certain forgetfulness of all things except present pain. This seems the case of our Lord here. Yet even here He turns to His Father, showing that He never loses the sense of the Father's love. The lost in hell will never turn to the Father." It is worth noticing that our Lord speaks of "the Father" and "My Father" at least 110 times in John's Gospel.

[*But for this purpose I came to this hour*.] This sentence is an elliptical way of declaring our Lord's entire submission to His Father's will, in the matter of the prayer He had just prayed. "But I know that for this cause I came into the world and have reached this hour, to suffer as I am now suffering, and to agonize as I am now agonizing. I do not refuse the cup. If it be Thy will, I am willing to drink it. Only I tell Thee my feelings, with entire submission to Thy will."

We may surely learn from the whole verse that Christians have no cause to despair because they feel trouble of soul (because they feel perplexed and know not what to say in the agony of inward conflict), because their nature shrinks from pain and cries to God to take it away. In all this there is nothing wicked or sinful. It was the

expression of the human nature of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and in Him was no sin. Rollock says: "This is the language of one recollecting himself, and collecting his thoughts to remember something besides his agony and pain." [*Father, glorify thy name.*] This passage seems the conclusion of the strife and agony of soul which came over our Lord at this particular period. It is as though He said, "I leave the matter in Thy hand, O My Father. Do what Thou seest best. Glorify Thy name and Thy attributes in Me. Do what is meet for setting forth Thy glory in the world. If it be for Thy glory that I should suffer, I am willing to suffer even unto the bearing of the world's sins."

I see in the whole event here described a short summary of what took place afterward more fully at Gethsemane. There is a remarkable parallelism at every step.

(a) Does our Lord say here, "My soul is troubled"? Just so He said in Gethsemane, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death" (Matt. 26:38).

(b) Does our Lord say here, "Father, save Me from this hour"? Just so he says in Gethsemane, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me" (Matt. 26:39).

(c) Does our Lord say here, "For this cause came I unto this hour"? Just so he says in Gethsemane, "If this cup may not pass away from Me except I drink it, Thy will be done" (Matt. 26:42).

(d) Does our Lord say, finally, “Father, glorify Thy name”? Just so our Lord says, lastly, “The cup which my Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?” (John 18:11).

The brief prayer which our Lord here offers, we should remember, is the highest, greatest thing that we can ask God to do. The utmost reach of the renewed will of a believer is to be able to say always, “Father, glorify Thy name in Me. Do with Me what Thou wilt, only glorify Thy name.” The glory of God after all is the end for which all things were created. Paul’s joyful hope, he told the Philippians when a prisoner at Rome, was “that in all things, by life or by death, Christ might be magnified in his body” (Philip. 1:20).
Rollock says: “This is the language of one who now forgets the agony and pain, remembers only His Father’s glory, and desires it even together with His own passion and death.” He also remarks that the experience of God’s saints in great trouble is in a sense much the same. For a time they forget everything but present pain. By and by they rise above their sufferings and remember only God’s glory.

[*Then a voice came from heaven.*] This voice was undoubtedly a great miracle. God the Father was heard speaking audibly with man’s voice to the Son. Three times in our Lord’s ministry this miracle took place: first, at His baptism; second, at His transfiguration; third, just before His crucifixion. Rarely has the voice of God been heard by large crowds of unconverted men. Here, at Mount Sinai, and perhaps at our Lord’s baptism, are the only three occasions on record.

Of course, we can no more explain this wonderful miracle than any other miracle in God's Word. We can only reverently believe and admire it. The intimate nearness of the Father to the Son all through His ministry is one of the many thoughts which may occur to our minds as we consider the miracle. Our Lord was never left alone. His Father was always with Him, though men knew it not. How could it be otherwise? So far as concerned His Divine nature, He and the Father were "one." How anyone in the face of this passage can deny that the Father and the Son are two distinct Persons, it is very hard to understand. When one person is heard speaking to another, common sense seems to point out that there are two persons, and not one.

Hammond maintains that there really was a loud clap of thunder as well as a voice from heaven. Burkitt also seems to think the same and compares it to the thunder which accompanied the giving of the law at Sinai.

[*I have both glorified it and will glorify it again*.] This solemn sentence—far more solemn in the pithy and expressive Greek language than it can possibly be made in our translation—admits, as Augustine says, of being interpreted two ways.

(a) It may be applied solely and entirely to the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. It would then be a special declaration of the Father to the Son: "I have glorified my name in Thy incarnation, Thy miracles, Thy

words, Thy works. I will yet glorify it again in Thy voluntary suffering for mankind, Thy death, Thy resurrection, and Thy ascension." Lightfoot thinks there is a special reference to our Lord's conflict with the devil. "I have glorified my name in the victory Thou formerly did obtain over Satan's temptation in the wilderness. I will glorify my name again in the victory Thou shalt have in this conflict also."

(b) It may be applied to the whole course of God's dealings with creation from the beginning. It would then be a declaration of the Father: "I have continually glorified my name in all the dispensations which have been— before the flood, in the days of the patriarchs, in the time of Moses, under the law, under the judges, under the kings. I will yet glorify it once more at the end of this dispensation by finishing up the types and figures, and accomplishing the work of man's redemption." Which of these views is the true one, I cannot pretend to decide. Either makes excellent divinity and is reasonable and consistent. But we have no means of ascertaining which is correct. If I have any opinion on the point, I lean to the second view.

29.—[*Therefore the people, etc.*] This verse apparently is meant to describe the various opinions of the crowd which stood around our Lord, about the voice which spoke to Him. Some who were standing at some little distance and not listening very attentively said it thundered. Others who were standing close by and paying great attention declared that an invisible being, an angel, must have spoken. Both parties entirely agreed on one point: something

uncommon had happened. An extraordinary noise had been heard which to some sounded like thunder and to others like words. But nobody said they heard nothing at all.

That the voice must have been very loud seems proved by the supposition that it was “thunder.” That the reality and existence of angels formed part of the popular creed of the Jews seems proved by the readiness of some to take up the idea that an angel had spoken.

Some think that the Greeks before mentioned, not knowing the Hebrew language in which probably the voice spoke, fancied the voice was thunder, and the Jews of the crowd thought it an angel’s voice. 30.—[*Jesus answered…but for your sakes.*] In this verse our Lord tells the Jews the purpose of this miraculous voice. It was not for His sake—to comfort Him and help Him, but for their sakes—to be a sign and a witness to them. The voice could tell Him nothing that He did not know. It was meant to show them what they did not know, or doubted. The sentence would be more literally rendered, “Not on account of Me was this voice, but on account of you.” It was just one more public miraculous evidence of His Divine mission, and apparently the last that was given. The first evidence was a voice at His baptism and the last a voice just before His crucifixion.

Augustine remarks: “Here Christ shows that his voice was not to make known to Him what He already knew, but to them to whom it was meet to be made known.”

31.—[*Now is the judgment of this world.*] This is undeniably a difficult saying. The difficulty lies principally in the meaning of the word "judgment."

(a) Some, as Barnes, think that it means, "This is the crisis, or most important time in the world's history." I cannot receive this. I doubt whether the Greek word used here will ever bear the signification of our word "crisis." That our Lord's atoning death was a crisis in the world's history is undoubtedly true. But that is not the question. The question is, what do the Greek words mean?

(b) Some, as Theophylact and Euthymius, think it means, "Now is the vengeance of this world." "I will cast out him by whom the world has been enslaved." I doubt this also.

(c) Some, as Zwingle, think that "judgment" means the discrimination or separation between the believing and the unbelieving in the world. (Compare John 9:39.)

(d) Some, as Calvin, Brentius, Beza, Bucer, Hutcheson, Flacius, and Gualter, think that "judgment" means the reformation, or setting in right order of the world.

(e) Some, as Grotius, Gerhard, Poole, Toletus, and à Lapide, think "judgment" means the deliverance and setting free from bondage of this world.

(f) Some, as Pearce, think it means, “Now is the Jewish world or nation about to be judged or condemned for rejecting Me.”

(g) Some, as Bengel, think it means, “Now is the judgment concerning this world, as to who is hereafter to be the rightful possessor of it.” I take it that the word we render “judgment” can only mean condemnation, and that the meaning of the sentence is this: “Now has arrived the season when a sentence of condemnation shall be passed by my death on the whole order of things which has prevailed in the world since the creation. The world shall no longer be let alone and left to the devil and the powers of darkness. I am about to spoil them of their dominion by my redeeming work, and to condemn and set aside the dark, godless order of things which has so long prevailed upon earth. It has been long winked at and tolerated by my Father. The time has come when it will be tolerated no longer. This very week, by my crucifixion, the religious systems of the world shall receive a sentence of condemnation.” This seems Bullinger and Rollock’s view, and I agree with it.

In order to realize the full meaning of this sentence, we must call to mind the extraordinary condition of all the world, with the exception of Palestine, before Christ’s death. To an extent of which now we can form no conception, it was a world without God, plunged in idolatry, worshipping devils—in open rebellion against God. (Compare 1 Cor. 10:20.) When Christ died, this order of things received its sentence of condemnation. Rollock says: “I understand, by this judgment, the condemnation of that sin of which the world was so full when Christ

came, and which had reigned from Adam to Moses." Of this undisturbed reign of idolatry Christ's advent made an end.

Augustine, on this verse, says: "The devil kept possession of mankind, holding men as criminals bound over to punishment by the handwriting of their sins, having dominion in the hearts of the unbelieving, dragging them, deceived and captive, to the worship of the creature for which they had deserted the Creator. But by the faith of Christ, confirmed by His death and resurrection, through His blood shed for the remission of sins, thousands of believing persons obtain deliverance from the dominion of the devil, are joined to the body of Christ, and quickened by His Spirit as faithful members under so great a Head. This it was that He called *judgment*."

[*Now shall the prince…be cast out*.] In this remarkable sentence there can be no doubt that Satan is meant by the "prince of this world." Up to the time of our Lord's redeeming work, the entire world was in a certain sense completely under his dominion. When Christ came and died for sinners, Satan's usurped power was broken and received a deadly blow. Heathenism, idolatry, and devil-worship no longer governed all the earth, except Palestine, as they had done for four thousand years, because undisturbed. In a wonderful and mysterious manner Christ on the cross "spoiled principalities and powers, and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them" (Col. 2:15). To this victory our Lord clearly refers. "Now in this week, by my vicarious death as man's Redeemer on the cross, Satan, the Prince of this world, shall receive a deadly blow and be dethroned

from his supremacy over man and cast out. The head of the serpent shall be bruised."

Of course, our Lord did not mean that Satan would be "cast out" of this world entirely and tempt it no more. That will be done at the second advent, we know from Rev. 20; but it was not done at the first. It only means that he should be cast out of a large portion of the dominion, and power, and undisturbed authority he had hitherto exercised over men's souls. The result of the change which took place in this respect, when Christ died, is perhaps not enough considered by Christians. We probably have a very inadequate idea of the awful extent to which Satan carried his dominion over men's souls before the "kingdom of heaven" was set up. Bodily possession, familiar spirits, wizards, heathen oracles, heathen mysteries—all these are things which before the crucifixion of Christ were much more real and powerful than we suppose. And why? Because the "prince of this world" had not yet been cast out. He had a power over men's bodies and minds far greater than he has now. When Christ came to the cross, He did battle with Satan, won a victory over him, stripped him of a large portion of his authority, and cast him out of a large portion of his dominion. Does not the whole of the vision in Rev. 12:7-17 point to this? This view is supported by Lightfoot.

This sentence shows clearly the reality and power of the devil. How anyone can say there is no devil in the face of such expressions as "the prince of this world" is strange. How anyone can scoff and think lightly of a being of such mighty power is stranger still. The true

Christian, however, may always take comfort in the thought that Satan is a vanquished enemy. He was stripped of a large part of his dominion at Christ's first advent. He is still "going to and fro" seeking whom he may devour, but he shall be completely bound at the second advent. (1 Pet. 5:8, Rom. 16:20, Rev. 20:2.)

The whole verse appears to me inexplicable unless we receive and hold the doctrine of Christ's death being an atonement and satisfaction for man's sin and a payment of man's debt to God. That thought underlies the deep statement here made of the mighty work about to be done by our Lord, in the week of His crucifixion, against the prince of this world. Once adopt the modern notion that Christ's death was only a beautiful example of self-sacrifice and martyrdom for truth, like that of Socrates, and you can make nothing of this verse. Hold, on the other hand, the old doctrine that Christ's death was the payment of man's debt and the redemption of man's soul from the power of sin and the devil, and the whole verse is lighted up and made comparatively clear.

Augustine observes: "The Lord in this verse was foretelling that which He knew—that after His passion and glorifying, throughout the whole world many a people would believe, within whose hearts the devil once was, whom when by faith they renounce, then is he cast out." He also says that what formerly took place in a few hearts, like those of the patriarchs and prophets, or very few individuals, is now foretold as about to take place in many a great people.

Euthymius remarks that as the first Adam was cast out of Paradise by eating of the tree, so the second Adam by dying on the tree cast the devil out of his usurped dominion in the world.

Bucer thinks there is a latent reference to our Lord's former words about the "strong man armed keeping his house" till a stronger comes upon him and spoils him. (Luke 11:21,22.)

32.—[*And I...draw all men unto me.*] In this remarkable verse our Lord plainly points to His own crucifixion, or being lifted up on the cross. It is the same expression that He used with Nicodemus: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up" (John 3:15).

The promise, "I will draw all men unto Me," must, I think, mean that our Lord after His crucifixion would draw men of all nations and kindreds and tongues to Himself, to believe on Him and be His disciples. Once crucified, He would become a great center of attraction and draw to Himself, and release from the devil's usurped power, vast multitudes of all peoples and countries to be His servants and followers. Up to this time all the world had blindly hastened after Satan and followed him. After Christ's crucifixion great numbers would turn away from the power of Satan and become Christians.

The promise doubtless looks even further than this. It points to a time when every knee shall bow to the crucified Son of God, and

every tongue confess that Jesus is the Lord. The whole world shall finally become the kingdom of our God and of His Christ.

Of course, the words must not be pressed too far. We must not think that they support the deadly heresy of universal salvation. We must not suppose them to mean that all men shall be actually saved by Christ's crucifixion any more than we must suppose that Christ actually "lights" everyone in the world. (See John 1:9.) The analogy of other texts shows plainly that the only reasonable sense is that Christ's crucifixion would have a "drawing" influence on men of all nations, Gentiles as well as Jews. Scripture and facts under our eyes both show us that all persons are not actually drawn to Christ. Many live and die and are lost in unbelief. The word "draw" is precisely the same that is used in John 6:44: "No man can come to Me except the Father draw him." Yet I doubt whether the meaning is precisely the same. In the one case it is the drawing of election, when the Father chooses and draws souls. In the other case it is the drawing influence which Christ exercises on laboring and heavy-laden sinners, when He draws them by His spirit to come to Him and believe. The subjects of either "drawing" are the same men and women, and the drawing in either case is irresistible. All who are drawn to believe are drawn both by the Father and the Son. Without this drawing no one would ever come to Christ.

The idea of some—that the verse may be applied to the lifting up or exalting of Christ by ministers in their *preaching*—is utterly baseless and a mere play upon words. That the preaching of Christ will always

do good, more or less, and draw souls to Christ by God's blessing, is no doubt true. But it is not the doctrine of this text and ought to be dismissed as an unfair accommodation of Scriptural language.

Euthymius observes that the mission of Christ began to draw souls at once, as in the case of the penitent thief and the centurion.

33.—[*This he said…death he would die*.] This explanatory comment of St.

John on our Lord's words is evidently intended to make His meaning plain. He spoke of "being lifted up" with a special reference to His being lifted up on the cross. Of course, it is just possible that the reference is to the drawing all men, and that it means, "He spoke of drawing all men, with a reference to His death being a sacrificial and atoning death, which would affect the position of all men." But I doubt this being so correct a view as the other.

"He should die" is literally, He was "about to die." It is curious that in the face of this verse some, as Bucer and Diodati, maintain that our Lord by "being lifted up" refers to His exaltation into heaven after His resurrection. They think that then, and not till then, could He be said to "draw" men. I cannot see anything in this. Our Lord appears to me to teach plainly that after His crucifixion, and through the virtue of His crucifixion, He would draw men. That "lifting up" means crucifixion is, in my judgment, plainly taught by John 3:15.

JOHN 12:34-43

Then the crowd responded, "We have heard from the law that the Christ will remain forever. How can you say, 'The Son of Man must be lifted up'? Who is this Son of Man?" Jesus replied, "The light is with you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become sons of light." When Jesus had said these things, he went away and hid himself from them.

Although Jesus had performed so many miraculous signs before them, they still refused to believe in him, so that the word of Isaiah the prophet would be fulfilled. He said, "Lord, who has believed our message, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" For this reason they could not believe, because again Isaiah said, "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, so that they would not see with their eyes and understand with their heart, and turn to me, and I would heal them."

Isaiah said these things because he saw Christ's glory, and spoke about him. Nevertheless, even among the rulers many believed in him, but because of the Pharisees they would not confess Jesus to be the Christ, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue. For they loved praise from men more than praise from God.

We may learn, from these verses, ***the duty of using present opportunities.*** The Lord Jesus says to us all, “Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness come upon you. While you have light believe in the light.” Let us not think that these things were only spoken for the sake of the Jews. They were written for us also, upon whom the ends of the world are come.

The lesson of the words is generally applicable to the whole professing Church of Christ. Its time for doing good in the world is short and limited. The throne of grace will not always be standing—it will be removed one day, and the throne of judgment will be set up in its place. The door of salvation by faith in Christ will not always be open—it will be shut one day forever, and the number of God’s elect will be completed. The fountain for all sin and uncleanness will not always be accessible; the way to it will one day be barred, and there will remain nothing but the lake that burns with fire and brimstone.

These are solemn thoughts; but they are true. They cry aloud to sleeping Churchmen and drowsy congregations, and ought to arouse great searching’s of heart. “Can nothing more be done to spread the Gospel at home and abroad? Has every means been tried for extending the knowledge of Christ crucified? Can we lay our hands on our hearts, and say that the Churches have left nothing undone in the matter of missions? Can we look forward to the Second Advent with no feelings of humiliation, and say that the talents of wealth, and influence, and opportunities have not been buried in the ground?” Such questions may well humble us, when we look, on one

side, at the state of professing Christendom, and, on the other, at the state of the heathen world. We must confess with shame that the Church is not walking worthy of its light.

But the lesson of the words is specially applicable to ourselves as *individuals*. Our own time for getting good is short and limited; let us take heed that we make good use of it. Let us "walk while we have the light." Have we Bibles? Let us not neglect to read them. Have we the preached Gospel? Let us not linger halting between two opinions, but believe to the saving of our souls. Have we Sabbaths? Let us not waste them in idleness, carelessness, and indifference, but throw our whole hearts into their sacred employments, and turn them to good account. Light is about us and around us and near us on every side. Let us each resolve to walk in the light while we have it, lest we find ourselves at length cast out into outer darkness forever. It is a true saying of an old divine, that *the recollection of lost and misspent opportunities will be the very essence of hell.*

We may learn, secondly, from these verses, ***the desperate hardness of the human heart.*** It is written of our Lord's hearers at Jerusalem, that, "though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on Him."

We err greatly if we suppose that seeing wonderful miraculous things will ever convert souls. Thousands live and die in this delusion. They fancy if they saw some miraculous sight, or witnessed some supernatural exercise of Divine grace, they would lay aside their doubts, and at once become decided Christians. It is a total

mistake. Nothing short of a new heart and a new nature implanted in us by the Holy Spirit, will ever make us real disciples of Christ. Without this, a miracle might raise within us a little temporary excitement; but, the novelty once gone, we would find ourselves just as cold and unbelieving as the Jews.

The prevalence of unbelief and indifference in the present day ought not to surprise us. It is just one of the evidences of that mighty foundation-doctrine, the total corruption and fall of man. How feebly we grasp and realize that doctrine is proved by our surprise at human incredulity. We only half believe the heart's deceitfulness. Let us read our Bibles more attentively, and search their contents more carefully. Even when Christ wrought miracles and preached sermons, there were numbers of His hearers who remained utterly unmoved. What right have we to wonder if the hearers of modern sermons in countless instances remain unbelieving? "The disciple is not greater than his Master." If even the hearers of Christ did not believe, how much more should we expect to find unbelief among the hearers of His ministers! Let the truth be spoken and confessed. Man's obstinate unbelief is one among many indirect proofs that the Bible is true. The clearest prophecy in Isaiah begins with the solemn question, "Who has believed?" (Isaiah. 53:1.)

We may learn, thirdly, from these verses, ***the amazing power which the love of the world has over men.*** We read that "among the chief rulers many believed on Christ; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the

synagogue. For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God."

These unhappy men were evidently convinced that Jesus was the true Messiah. Reason, and intellect, and mind, and conscience, obliged them secretly to admit that no one could do the miracles which He did, unless God was with Him, and that the preacher of Nazareth really was the Christ of God. But they had not courage to confess it. They dared not face the storm of ridicule, if not of persecution, which confession would have entailed. And so, like cowards, they held their peace, and kept their convictions to themselves.

Their case, it may be feared, is a sadly common one. There are thousands of people who know far more in religion then they act up to. They know they ought to come forward as decided Christians. They know that they are not living up to their light. But the fear of man keeps them back. They are afraid of being laughed at, jeered at, and despised by the world. They dread losing the good opinion of society, and the favorable judgment of men and women like themselves. And so they go on from to year to year, secretly ill at ease and dissatisfied with themselves—knowing too much of religion to be happy in the world, and clinging too much to the world to enjoy any religion.

Faith is the only cure for soul ailments like this. A believing view of an unseen God, an unseen Christ, an unseen heaven, and an unseen judgment-day—this is the grand secret of overcoming the

fear of man. *The expulsive power of a new principle is required to heal the disease.* "This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith." (1 John 5:4.) Let us pray for faith, if we would conquer that deadly enemy of souls, the fear of man and the love of man's praise. And if we have any faith, let us pray for more. Let our daily cry be, "Lord, increase our faith." We may easily have too much money, or too much worldly prosperity; but we can never have too much faith.

Technical Notes:

34. The people answered him, We have heard from the law that Christ abides forever; and how *can* you say, The Son of man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of man? 35. Then Jesus said to them, Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you; for he who walks in darkness does not know where he goes. 36. While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light. These things Jesus spoke, and departed, and hid himself from them. 37. But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they did not believe in him, 38. that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke: Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? 39. Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again, 40. He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, that they should not see with *their*

eyes nor understand with *their* heart, and be converted, and I should heal them. 41. These things Isaiah said when he saw his glory and spoke of him. 42. Nevertheless even among the chief rulers many believed in him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess *him*, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; 43. for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.

34.—[*The people answered, etc.*] This verse supplies a remarkable instance of the perverse and hardened blindness of the Jews in our Lord's time. They pretended to be unable to reconcile the Lord's language about being "lifted up" with the Old Testament prophecies about the eternity and never dying of Christ. That "lifted up" meant being put to death on the cross, they seem to have understood. That our Lord, or the Son of man, as He called Himself, claimed to be the Christ, they quite understood. What they stumbled at was the idea of the eternal Christ being put to death. They had got hold of the idea of a glorious, eternal Messiah. They had not got hold of the idea of a suffering, dying Messiah.

Of course they were right in holding that "Christ abides forever." It is the universal doctrine of the Old Testament. (Compare Isa. 9:7, Psalm 110:4, Ezek. 37:25, Dan. 7:14, Micah 4:7.) Our Lord had never for a moment denied this. He was the promised Savior who, as Gabriel said to Mary, was to "reign over the house of Jacob forever" (Luke 1:33). On the other hand, they were entirely wrong in not understanding that Christ had to suffer before He reigned, and to go

to the cross before He wore the crown. They were wrong in not seeing that His sacrifice as our Substitute and our Passover was the very cornerstone of revealed religion, and that the very "law" of which they made so much pointed to His sacrifice as clearly as to His eternal glory. They forgot that Isaiah says that Messiah is to be "brought as a lamb to the slaughter," and that Daniel speaks of His being "cut off." (Isa. 53:7, Dan. 9:26.) The words "we" and "you" in this verse, in the Greek are emphatic. WE Jews have always been taught to believe the eternity of Messiah. "YOU, on the other hand, say that Messiah must be put to death and lifted up on the cross. How is this? How are we to understand it?" "The law" in this verse must evidently be taken for the whole of the Old Testament Scriptures.

It is worthy of remark that the Jews charge our Lord with saying "the Son of Man must be lifted up." Yet our Lord in the last verse but one had not mentioned the Son of man but had only said, "I, if I be lifted up." It is also singular that our Lord nowhere uses the expression "lifted up" except in His conversation with Nicodemus in John 3:14. We must therefore either suppose that the Jews referred to the saying of Christ when He spoke to Nicodemus (which is very unlikely), or that the expression "The Son of man must be lifted up" was so frequently on our Lord's lips that the Jews caught it up and pressed it on Him here, or else that our Lord so frequently spoke of Himself as the Son of man that when He said "If I be lifted up" the Jews thought it equivalent to saying "If the Son of man be lifted up."

The question ,"Who is this Son of man?" can hardly imply that the Jews did not know that Christ was speaking of Himself. Does it not rather mean, "Who, and what kind of a person do You claim to be, calling Yourself the Son of man and yet talking of being lifted up on the cross? Do You really mean that one and the same person can be a dying person and yet also the eternal Christ? Do You claim to be the eternal Christ and yet talk of being lifted up on a cross? Explain this apparent contradiction, for we cannot understand it." It is just the old story over again. The Jews could not and would not understand that Messiah was to suffer as well as to reign, to die as a Sacrifice as well as to appear in glory. They could not and would not see that the two things could be reconciled and could meet in one person. Hence their perplexity exhibited in the question of the text. The title "Son of man" is first found applied to Messiah in Daniel 7:13.

We cannot doubt that the Jews understood and remembered that passage. Let us note that a half knowledge of Scripture, a suppression of some texts, and a misapplication of other texts will account for a large portion of mistakes in religion. In this way people get a heresy or a crotchet into their heads on some doctrinal point and seem blind to the truth. No heresies are so obstinately defended and so difficult to meet as those which are based on a perverted view of some portion of Scripture. In reading our Bibles, we must be careful to give every part and portion its due weight.

Let us remember, before we judge the blindness of the Jews too severely in this place, that many Christians are just as slow to see the

whole truth about the second advent of Christ and His coming glory as the Jews were to see the whole truth about the first advent and the cross. Multitudes apply texts to the first advent which only belong to the second advent and are just as much prejudiced against the second personal coming of Christ to reign as the Jews were against the first personal advent to suffer. Not a few Christians, I fear, are ready to say, "We have heard out of the Scriptures that Christ was to come in humiliation to be crucified; and how say ye, then, that Christ must come in power to reign?" The expression "this" is rather emphatic and has something contemptuous about it. "We have heard of a Son of man who is eternal. Who is THIS Son of man about to be lifted up on the cross of whom you speak?"

35.—[*Then Jesus said…light with you.*] It is noteworthy that our Lord makes no direct answer to the question of the Jews. He only warns them, in a very solemn manner, of the danger they were in of letting their day of grace slip away unimproved. He draws a figure from the light of day and acknowledged importance of walking and journeying while we have the light. By "the light" He evidently means Himself. "I, the Light of the world, am only going to be with you a very little longer. My day is drawing to a close. The sun will soon set." (Compare Jer. 13:15.) Here, as elsewhere, we see how clearly and distinctly our Lord saw His own approaching death and withdrawal from the world. Ecolampadius thinks that there is a latent connection between this verse and the question of the Jews. "You ask who is this Son of man? I reply that He is the Light of the world, as I have often told you. Like the sun, He is about to be eclipsed, or

withdrawn from your eyes very shortly. Make haste and delay not to believe on Him."

Gerhard justly remarks on this sentence how far from infallibility the best of the Fathers were. Even Augustine, from his slight acquaintance with Greek, renders the sense, "There is yet a *little light* in your *hearts*!" A German commentator remarks that Christ seems here to rebuke this quibbling and questioning about phrases. "There was no time now for sophistry and circumlocution. It was a solemn matter. How differently ought they to demean themselves in their little residue of time, and not to fritter it away with affected contradictions! How earnestly they ought to seek at once for refuge to the light, and shield themselves against coming darkness!"

[*Walk while ye have the light*.] This solemn exhortation was meant to urge the Jews to do for their souls' safety what a wise traveler would do to get safely to his journey's end. "Enter in at the strait gate; walk in the narrow way; flee from the city of destruction; set out on your journey towards eternal life, rise and be moving while I and my Gospel are close to you, shining on you, and within your reach."

Hengstenberg remarks that "walking here denotes activity and stands opposed to an idle and indifferent rest."

[*Lest darkness come upon you*.] Our Lord here warns the Jews of the things to be feared if they neglected His advice. Darkness would

overtake, catch, and come upon them. He would leave the world and return to His Father. They would be left in a state of judicial darkness and blindness as a nation and, with the exception of an election, would be given over to untold calamities, scattering, and misery. How true these words were we know from the history of the Jews, written by Josephus, after our Lord left the world. His account of the extraordinary state of the inhabitants of Jerusalem during the siege of the city by Titus is the best commentary on the text before us. The state of the Jews, as a nation, during the last days of Jerusalem can only be described as "darkness that might be felt."

[For he...does not know...goes.] This is an argument drawn from the acknowledged helplessness of one who attempts a difficult journey in a dark night. He cannot see his way. He only gets into trouble and perhaps loses his life. This was exactly the case of the Jewish nation after our Lord left the world. Up to the time of the destruction of the temple, they seemed like a nation of madmen and a people judicially blinded—conscious that they were in a wrong position, struggling furiously to get out of it, and yet only plunging deeper into the mire of hopeless misery till Titus took the city and carried the whole race into captivity. They had put out their own eyes by rejecting Christ and were like a strong man blinded, maddened by a sense of his own misery and yet impotent to get out of it.

36.—[While ye have light...children of light.] This sentence would have been more accurately rendered, "While ye have THE Light;" that is, "while ye have ME, the Light of the world, with you." It is a

final, affectionate entreaty to the Jews repeating in more plain words the exhortation of the last verse, “To walk in the light.” It is as though our Lord said, “Once more I beseech you to believe in Me as the Light of the world, while I am with you.” The end and object for which they are to believe is also added:

“That ye may become my children, have light in your hearts, light in your consciences, light in your lives, light on your present path, light in your future prospects.” There can be no doubt that the expression “children of light” is a Hebraism signifying “to be brought in close connection with or under the full influence of light.”

Let us note that here, as elsewhere, believing is the first step, the one thing needful. The exhortation is still to be offered to every sinner directly and personally— “Believe, that you may be a child of light.”

[*These things…hid himself from them*.] We know not exactly on what day in the last week of our Lord’s life the words just recorded had been spoken. The sentence before us certainly seems to mark a break and interval, and we can hardly suppose that the short address from the forty-fourth verse to the end of the chapter was spoken the same day or was continuously connected with the discourse ending in this verse. To me it seems probable that our Lord “departed” to Bethany after the miracle of the Voice from the heavens and the commotion that followed it. The words of our English version “did hide Himself,” seem to me rather stronger than the Greek warrants. It would be more literally, “was concealed from them.” Whether this

was by miracle, as on other occasions, is not clear.

Calvin seems to think that our Lord only departed from the hearers immediately round Him and went to the temple where He met with another audience of a more believing kind. Flacius, too, thinks it was only a short and temporary withdrawal. Poole, on the contrary, takes the view that I adopt and says that our Lord withdrew to Bethany.

37.—[*But though…miracles…them.*] This verse begins a long parenthetical comment, which John was inspired to make at this point, on the peculiar unbelief of the Jerusalem Jews. He remarks on the singular hardness of this section of the nation in the face of the singularly strong evidence which they enjoyed of Christ's Messiahship. The expression "so many miracles" seems to point out that the miracles recorded by St. John are by no means all the miracles that our Lord performed in and near Jerusalem. Beside the purifying of the temple, John only records three: the healing of the impotent man, the healing of the blind, and the raising of Lazarus (John 5, 9, 11). Yet John expressly speaks of *miracles* (both here and in John 2:23), and the Pharisees say, "This Man does many miracles" (John 11:47).

The Greek word rendered "before" is very strong. It is the same that is "in the sight of" in 1 Thes. 1:3 and "in the presence of" in 1 Thes. 2:19. [*Yet they did not believe in him.*] In estimating the peculiar hardness and unbelief of the Jews at Jerusalem, it is worth remembering that all experience proves that where there is the

greatest quantity of the form of religion, there is often the greatest proportion of formality and unbelief. The places where men become most familiar with the outside and ceremonial of Christianity are precisely the places where the heart seems to become most hard. Witness the state of Rome at this day. Witness too often the state of cathedral cities in our own land. We need not wonder that the city in which was the temple, the daily sacrifice, and the priesthood was the most unbelieving place in Palestine.

38.—[*That the word of Isaiah…spoke.*] We must not suppose this means that the Jews did not believe *in order that* the prophecy of Isaiah might be fulfilled. This would be teaching sheer fatalism and would destroy man's responsibility. The true meaning is, "So that by this unbelief the saying of Isaiah was fulfilled." (See John 5:20, Rom. 5:20, 2 Cor. 1:17.) Chrysostom observes: "It was not because Isaiah spoke that they believed not, but because they were not about to believe, that he spoke." Augustine says: "The Lord, by the prophet, did predict the unbelief of the Jews—predict, however, not cause. It does not follow that the Lord compels any man to sin because He knows men's future sins." Theophylact and Euthymius say much the same..

[*Lord, who has believed our report?*] This question begins the well-known 53rd chapter of Isaiah, which describes with such extraordinary accuracy our Lord's sufferings. It is certainly a most singular fact that the very chapter which the Jews in every age have been most obstinately unwilling to believe should begin with this

question. It is a Hebraism, tantamount to saying, “Nobody believes our report.” The unbelief of the Jews was a thing as clearly foretold in Scripture as the sufferings of Christ. If they had not been unbelieving, the Scriptures would have been untrue.

[*To whom…revealed?*] The expression “arm of the Lord” is thought by Augustine to mean Christ Himself. It may be so. If not, it must mean, “To whom is the Lord’s power in raising up a Redeemer and an atoning sacrifice revealed?” That is, the Lord’s power is revealed to and received by none. The question here again is a Hebraism, equivalent to an assertion. Bullinger observes that “some might perhaps wonder that the Jews did not believe Jesus to be the Messiah. To this John replies that Isaiah long ago foretold that they would prove an unreasonable and unbelieving nation.” The quotation of Isaiah in this place is strong evidence that the 53rd chapter of this prophecy applies to Christ and none else. 39.—[*Therefore they could not believe, etc.*] This is undeniably a difficult verse. It cannot of course mean that the Jews were unable to believe, although really desirous to do so, and were prevented by the prophecy of Isaiah. What, then, can it mean? The following paraphrase is offered: “This was the cause why they could not believe—they were in that state of judicial blindness and hardness which Isaiah had described. They were justly given over to this state because of their many sins, and for this cause they had no power to believe.”

“Therefore” is literally “on account of this.” It cannot, I think, look

backward, but forward. (Compare 10:17 and 12:18.) “They could not” is literally “they were not able.” It precisely describes the moral inability of a thoroughly hardened and wicked man to believe. He is thoroughly under the mastery of a hardened and seared conscience and has, as it were, lost the power of believing. They had no will to believe and so they had no power. They could have believed if they would, but they would not and so they could not. The expression is parallel to the well-known words, “No man can come to Me, except the Father who has sent Me draws him.” There the meaning is, “No man has any will to come unless he is drawn, and so no man can come.”

Even in our own English language the expression “could not” is sometimes used in the sense of “would not.” Thus the brethren of Joseph “hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him” (Gen. 37:4). The word “because” is a needlessly strong rendering of the Greek. It would be just as correctly translated “for.” Chrysostom observes: “In many places Christ is wont to term choice power. So, ‘The world *cannot* hate you, but Me it hates.’ So in common conversation a man says, ‘I cannot love this or that person, calling the force of his will power.’”

Augustine says: “If I be asked why they could not believe, I answer in a word, Because they would not.” He also says, “It is said of the Omnipotent, He *cannot* deny Himself, and this is the power of the Divine will. So ‘they could not believe’ is the fault of the human will.” Zwingli also says that “could not” means “would not.” Ecolampadius

observes: “They would not, and therefore they could not believe. God is wont to punish those who commit some sin by giving them up to other sins.” This, he remarks, is the heaviest judgment to which we can be given up—to have sins punished by sins, that is, by being let alone to commit them.

Bishop Hall says: “They could not believe, because, as Isaiah says, in a just punishment for their maliciousness and contempt, God had stricken them with a reprobate sense, so that their eyes were blinded.” Quesnel says here: “Let us bewail this inability of will with which, by means of Adam’s sin, we are all born, and which, by our own sins, we daily increase. Let us continually have recourse to Him who said, ‘without Me ye can no nothing,’ and, ‘No man can come to Me, unless the Father draw him.’”

40.—[*He has blinded their eyes, etc.*] This quotation is a free paraphrase of the general view of a verse in Isaiah 6:9,10. I think it can only have one meaning. That meaning is, that “God had given over the Jews to judicial blindness as a punishment for their long-continued and obstinate rejection of His warnings.” That God does in some cases give people over as a punishment for obstinate unbelief, and that He may be justly termed the cause of such unbelief, is, I think, quite plain in Scripture. Pharaoh is a case in point. He obstinately refused God’s warnings and so at last He was given over, and God is said to have “hardened his heart.” Compare Joshua 11:20: “It was of the Lord to harden their hearts that they should come against Israel in battle, that He might destroy them.” (So Deut. 2:30,

1 Sam. 2:25, Rom. 9:18.)

This is no doubt a very solemn and awful subject. It seems at first sight to make God the author of man's destruction. But surely a moment's reflection will show us that God is a Sovereign in punishing, and may punish in any way he pleases. Some He cuts off suddenly the moment they sin. Others He gives over to judicial blindness and ceases to strive with their consciences. "The Judge of all the earth will certainly do right." Those whom He is said to "harden and blind" will always be found to be persons whom He had previously warned, exhorted, and constantly summoned to repent. And never is He said to harden and blind, and give me up to judicial hardness and blindness, till after a long course of warnings. This was certainly the case with Pharaoh and with the Jews. The consequence of God blinding and hardening a person is that he does not "see" his danger with his eyes or "understand" his position with his heart. The result is that he holds on his way unconverted, and dies without his soul's disease being healed. "Seeing" and "understanding" are essential parts of conversion. No simpler reason can be given why myriads of churchgoers continue careless, unaffected, unmoved, and unconverted: they neither "see" nor "understand." God alone can give them seeing eyes and understanding hearts, and ministers cannot. And one solemn reason why many live and die in this state is that they have resisted God's warnings, and are justly punished already with a judicial blindness and hardness by Him whom they have resisted.

The key to the whole difficulty, after all, lies in the answer we are prepared to give to the question, “Is God just in punishing the sinner?” The true Christian and honest Bible reader will find no difficulty in answering that question in the affirmative. Once grant that God is just in punishing the ungodly, and there is an end of the problem. God may punish by giving over the obstinate sinner to a reprobate mind, as really as by sentencing him to everlasting fire at the last day. One thing only must never be forgotten. God “wills not the death of any sinner.” He is willing to soften the hardest heart and to open the blind eyes of the greatest sinner. In dealing with men about their souls, we must never forget this. We may well remind them that by hardened impenitence they may provoke God to give them up. But we must also press on them that God’s mercies in Christ are infinite, and that, if they are finally, lost, they will have none but themselves to blame. Burgon thinks that the nominative to “blinded” at the beginning of the verse is not God but “the Jewish people,” and that the meaning is, “This people has blinded their own eyes.” But I cannot see that this idea can be supported by reference to Isaiah, and though it smooths over difficulties, I dare not receive it.

Calvin thinks that the passage applies to the hardness by which God punishes the wickedness of an ungrateful people. They are given over justly to an unbelieving and judicially blinded state of mind. Poole observes: “We have this text, then which there is none more terrible, no less than six times quoted in the New Testament. In all places it is quoted and given as a reason for the Jews’ unbelief in Christ. (Matt. 13:14,15; Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10; Acts 28:26,27; Rom. 11:8). It is not

quoted alike in all places, but for substance it is the same. In the original, Isaiah is made the instrumental cause. Matthew, Luke, and Paul (in Acts) mention the people themselves as the cause. All the other texts speak of it as God's act. The thing is easily reconciled." He then says:

"The Jews first shut their own eyes and hardened their own hearts. Thus behaving themselves, God judicially gave them up to their own lusts, permitted their hearts to harden, and suffered them to close their own eyes so that they could not repent, believe, or return. God did not infuse any malice into their hearts, but withdrew His grace from them." Rollock makes the wise and deep remark that "Darkness does not blind men so much as light, unless God renews their minds by His Spirit." It is of course noteworthy that this quotation is not given literally and exactly as it stands in the Old Testament. But it is particularly mentioned by Surenhusine in his book upon the quotations in the New Testament, that it was a common thing with the Hebrew doctors to abbreviate texts in quoting them, and to be content with giving the general sense. The abbreviation, therefore, in the text quoted before us would not strike John's contemporaries as at all extraordinary.

Let us not fail to remark how "seeing, understanding, being converted, and being healed" are linked together.

41.—[*These things Isaiah said…spoke of him*.] To see the full force of this verse, we should read the sixth chapter of Isaiah in its entirety.

We should there see a magnificent description of the Lord's glory, before which even the seraphim veiled their faces. We should observe their cry, "Holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts!" We should mark how Isaiah says, "My eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts." And then let us remember that John says, "Isaiah saw Christ's glory and spoke of Christ!" How anyone in the face of this evidence can say that Jesus Christ is not very God, it seems hard to understand.

Lightfoot thinks that Isaiah in this chapter had a view of the glory which our Lord would have when He came to punish the Jewish nation. He thinks this is pointed out by "the posts of the door being shaken;" by "the temple being filled with smoke;" and by "the cities being wasted." (See Isaiah 6.)

42.—[*Nevertheless…many believed in him.*] Here St. John mentions a fact which he would have us take together with his account of the hardened unbelief of most of the Jews. There were some who were not so utterly hardened as the rest. They were in a different state of mind—not blind but convinced, not hardened against our Lord but secretly persuaded that He was the Christ. Many even of the chief people at Jerusalem believed, in their own secret minds, that Jesus was the Christ. This faith no doubt was only the faith of the head and not of the heart. But they did believe. Let us note that there is often far more going on in people's minds than preachers are aware of. There is much secret conviction. [*But because…did not confess him.*] They dared not openly confess their faith in our Lord for fear of the persecution of the Pharisees. They

were cowards, and influenced by the fear of man. No wonder that our Lord spoke so strongly in other places about the duty of confessing Him.

[*Lest…out of the synagogue.*] The thing that they feared was excommunication. We can have little idea perhaps of the extreme dread with which a Jew regarded exclusion from the visible Jewish Church. Unlike ourselves, he knew no other Church in the whole world. To be shut out of this Church was equivalent to being shut out of heaven. The dread of excommunication in the Irish Catholic Church is perhaps the nearest thing to it in our days.

43.—[*For they loved, etc.*] St. John here tells us plainly the prevailing motive in the minds of the cowardly Jews. They loved above everything to be well thought of by their fellowmen. They thought more of having the good opinion of man that the praise of God. They could not bear the idea of being laughed at, ridiculed, reviled, or persecuted by their fellowmen. To keep in with them and have their praise, they sacrificed their own convictions and acted contrary to their conscience. How much this feeling injures the soul is shown by our Lord's words in a former place: "How can ye believe which received honor one from another?" (John 5:44.) Let us remember that all over the world the same miserable motive is still ruining myriads of souls. "The fear of man brings a snare" (Prov. 29:25). Nothing seems so difficult to overcome as the desire of pleasing man, keeping in with man, and retaining man's praise. Nothing will overcome it but thorough faith. "This is the victory that overcomes

the world, even our faith" (1 John 5:4). The expulsive power of a new principle that makes us see God, Christ, heaven, hell, judgment, and eternity as realities, is the grand secret of getting the victory over the fear of man. Poole says: "They were not willing to part with their great places in the magistracy, which brought them respect honor, and applause from men. They valued this more than God's praise."

JOHN 12:44-50

But Jesus shouted out, "The one who believes in me does not believe in me, but in the one who sent me, and the one who sees me sees the one who sent me. I have come as a light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in darkness. If anyone hears my words and does not obey them, I do not judge him. For I have not come to judge the world, but to save the world. The one who rejects me and does not accept my words has a judge; the word I have spoken will judge him at the last day. For I have not spoken from my own authority, but the Father himself who sent me has commanded me what I should say and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. Thus the things I say, I say just as the Father has told me."

These verses throw light on two subjects which we can never understand too well. Our daily peace and our practice of daily watchfulness over ourselves are closely connected with a clear knowledge of these two subjects.

One thing shown in these verses is, ***the dignity of our Lord Jesus Christ.*** We find Him saying, "He that sees Me, sees Him that sent Me. I have come as a Light into the world, that whoever believes on Me should not abide in darkness." Christ's oneness with the Father, and Christ's office, are clearly exhibited in these words.

Concerning the *unity of the Father and the Son*, we must be content to believe reverently, what we cannot grasp mentally or explain distinctly. Let it suffice us to know that our Savior was not like the prophets and patriarchs, a man sent by God the Father, a friend of God, and a witness for God. He was something far higher and greater than this. He was in His Divine nature essentially *one with the Father*—and in seeing Him, men saw the Father who sent Him. This is a great mystery; but a truth of vast importance to our souls. He that casts His sins on Jesus Christ by faith is building on a rock. Believing on Christ, he believes not merely on Him, but on Him that sent Him.

Concerning the *office* of Christ, there can be little doubt that in this place He compares Himself to the sun. Like the sun, He has risen on this sin-darkened world with healing on His wings, and shines for the common benefit of all mankind. Like the sun, He is the great source and center of all spiritual life, comfort, and fertility. Like the sun, He illuminates the whole earth, and no one need miss the way to heaven, if he will only use the light offered for his acceptance.

Forever let us *make much of Christ in all our religion*. We can never trust Him too much, follow Him too closely, or commune with

Him too unreservedly. He has all power in heaven and earth. He is able to save to the uttermost all who come to God by Him. None can pluck us out of the hand of Him who is one with the Father. He can make all our way to heaven bright and plain and cheerful; like the morning sun cheering the traveler. Looking unto Him, we shall find light in our understandings, see light on the path of life we have to travel, feel light in our hearts, and find the days of darkness, which will come sometimes, stripped of half their gloom. Only let us abide in Him, and look to Him with a single eye. There is a mine of meaning in His words, "If your eye be single, your whole body shall be full of light." (Matt. 6:22.)

Another thing shown in these verses is, ***the certainty of a judgment to come.*** We find our Lord saying, "He that rejects Me, and receives not my words, has One that judges him—the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day."

There is a last day! The world shall not always go on as it does now. Buying and selling, sowing and reaping, planting and building, marrying and giving in marriage—all this shall come to an end at last. There is a time appointed by the Father when the whole machinery of creation shall stop, and the present dispensation shall be changed for another. It had a beginning, and it shall also have an end. Banks shall at length close their doors forever. Stock exchanges shall be shut. Parliaments shall be dissolved. The very sun, which since Noah's flood has done his daily work so faithfully, shall rise and set no more. Well would it be if we thought more of this day! Pay-

days, birth-days, wedding-days, are often regarded as days of absorbing interest; but they are nothing compared to the last day.

There is a judgment coming! Men have their reckoning days, and God will at last have His. The trumpet shall sound. The dead shall be raised incorruptible. The living shall be changed. All, of every name and nation, and people and tongue, shall stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. The books shall be opened, and the evidence brought forth. Our true character will come out before the world. There will be no concealment, no evasion, no false coloring. Every one shall give account of himself to God, and all shall be judged according to their works. The wicked shall go away into everlasting fire, and the righteous into life eternal.

These are dreadful truths! But they are truths, and ought to be told. No wonder that the Roman governor Felix trembled when Paul the prisoner discoursed about "righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come." (Acts 24:25.) Yet the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ has no cause to be afraid. For him, at any rate, there is no condemnation, and the last assize need have no terrors. The bias of his life shall witness for him; while the shortcomings of his life shall not condemn him. It is the man who rejects Christ, and will not hear His call to repentance—he is the man who in the judgment-day will have reason to be cast down and afraid.

Let the thought of judgment to come have a practical effect on our religion. Let us daily judge ourselves with righteous judgment, that we may not be judged and condemned of the Lord. Let us so speak

and so act as men who will be judged by the law of liberty. Let us make conscience of all our hourly conduct, and never forget that for every idle word we must give account at the last day. In a word, let us live like those who believe in the truth of judgment, heaven, and hell. So living, we shall be Christians indeed and in truth, and have boldness in the day of Christ's appearing.

Let the judgment-day be the Christian's answer and apology when men ridicule him as too strict, too precise, and too particular in his religion. Irreligion may do tolerably well for a season, so long as a man is in health and prosperous, and looks at nothing but this world. But he who believes that he must give account to the Judge of quick and dead, at His appearing and kingdom, will never be content with an ungodly life. He will say, "There is a judgment. I can never serve God too much. Christ died for me. I can never do too much for Him."

Technical Notes:

44. Jesus cried out and said, He who believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. 45. And he who sees me sees him who sent me. 46. I have come *as* a light into the world, that whoever believes in me should not abide in darkness. 47. And if any man hears my words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. 48. He who rejects me, and does not receive my words, has one who judges him; the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day. 49. For I have not spoken on my own *authority*; but

the Father who sent me gave me a commandment, what I should say and what I should speak. 50. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting. Therefore, whatever I speak, even as the Father said to me, so I speak.

44.—[*Jesus…said.*] The connection between the address which begins here and the preceding verse is not very plain or easy to understand. Some think that it is a continuation of the address which ended at the 36th verse, and that John's comment and explanation in the last seven verses must be regarded entirely as a parenthesis. This is rather an awkward supposition, when we look at the 36th verse and see at the end, "These words spoke Jesus and departed, and did hide Himself." Unless we suppose that as He was walking away "He cried [out] and said, He who believes in Me," etc., the connection seems incapable of proof. Yet it appears most unlikely that our Lord would have said such things as he was departing. Others, as Theophylact, think that the address before us is an entirely new and distinct one, and delivered on a different day from the ending at the 36th verse: viz., on the Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday in Passion Week. This certainly appears to me the least difficult view of the subject. It would then mean that the day after the miracle of the voice from heaven, Jesus appeared again publicly in Jerusalem, and "cried [out] and said." However, it is useless to deny that the abrupt manner in which the verse before us and the following verses come in is a difficulty, and one which we know not exactly how to explain. One thing only is very clear: this was probably one of the last public discourses which our Lord delivered in Jerusalem, and forms a kind

of conclusion to His ministry in that city. It is a short but solemn winding up of all His public testimony to the Jews. It deserves notice that some, as Tittman, Stier, Olshausen, Tholuck, Bloomfield, and Alford, consider the whole of the passage, from verse 44 to the end of the chapter, to be not the words of Jesus Christ but a statement of John the Baptist himself concerning the doctrine Jesus taught throughout His ministry, and specially at Jerusalem. From this view, however, I strongly dissent. The beginning, "Jesus cried [out]," etc., seems utterly inconsistent with the theory. There seems no special necessity for adopting it. A plain reader of the chapter would never dream of it. It is worth remarking that the Greek expression, "He cried," is very seldom applied to our Lord in the New Testament. It is found in Matt. 27:50, Mark 15:39, John 7:28-37, and here. In every instance it means a loud cry, such as anyone uses to call attention to what he has to say. Flacius thinks that the address beginning here is a kind of peroration and summing up of all our Lord's public teaching to the Jews. In it He repeats the proclamation of His own Divine office and dignity, the purpose for which He came, to be a "light", the danger of neglecting His testimony, the certainty of a final judgment, and the direct procession of His doctrine form the Father.

[He who believes... Him who sent Me.] This remarkable expression seems meant to proclaim, for the last time, the great truth so often insisted on by our Lord—the entire unity between Himself and the Father. Once more Jesus declares that there is such a complete and mysterious oneness between Himself and the Father that he who

believes in Him believes not only in Him but in Him who sent Him. Of course, the sentence cannot literally mean that the man who believes in Christ does *not* believe in Christ. But according to a mode of speech not uncommon in the New Testament, our Lord taught that all who in obedience to His call put their trust in Him would find that they were not trusting in the Son only but in the Father *also*. In short, to trust in the Son, the sent Savior of sinners, is to trust also in the Father who sent Him to save. The Son and the Father cannot be divided, though they are distinct Persons in the Trinity; and faith in the Son gives an interest in the Father. (Compare John 5:24: "He who hears my word, and believes on Him who sent Me." And 1 Peter 1:21: "Who by Him do believe in God.")

To draw a wide line of separation between the Father and the Son, as some do, and to represent the Father as an angry Being whom the Son appeases, is very poor theology and the high road to Tritheism. The true doctrine is that the Godhead of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost is one, and that in the unity of the Godhead there are three Persons, and yet that there is such entire unity between the Persons that He who believes in the Son believes also in the Father.

Zwingli thinks the latent idea is: "Do not think it is a small and insignificant thing to believe in Me. To believe in Me is the same thing as believing in God the Father, and to know Me is to know the Father." Bucer seems to think that the address in this verse was meant to encourage those who believed Christ to be the Messiah, but were afraid of confessing Him, to come forward boldly and

acknowledge their belief. Poole says that in like manner God says to Samuel, “They have not rejected you, but have rejected Me,” meaning not you *alone*. (1 Sam. 8:7.)

45—[*And he…sees him who sent Me*.] This deep and mysterious verse proclaims even more distinctly than the last verse the unity of the Father and the Son. It cannot mean that anyone who saw Christ with his bodily eyes did, in so seeing, behold the First Person in the Trinity. Such beholding we are distinctly told is impossible. He is one “whom no man has seen or can see” (1 Tim. 6:16). What our Lord seems to means is this: “He who sees Me sees not Me only, as an ordinary man or a Prophet, like John the Baptist. In seeing Me he beholds one who is one with the Father, the brightness of His glory and the express image of His Person” (Heb. 1:3). Of course our Lord did not literally mean, “He who sees Me does not see Me.” But He meant, “He who sees Me sees not only Me, but through Me and by Me he sees Him who sent Me, for we cannot be divided.” The divinity of Jesus Christ seems incontrovertibly proved by this verse and the preceding one. If to believe in Christ is to believe in the Father, and to see Christ is to see the Father, then Jesus Christ must be equal with the Father—very and eternal God.

The supposition of some—that the first “sees” in this verse means nothing more than “sees by faith”—appears rather incredible. At this rate the verse would be only a repetition of the one preceding it. I prefer the idea that “sees” means literally “Sees with his bodily eyes.” Yet Bengel says that “sees” refers to that vision which faith

accompanies, and compares it to John 6:40.

The object our Lord had in view in this and the preceding verse appears to have been twofold. It was partly to proclaim once more the unity of Himself and the Father. It was partly to encourage all believers in Himself, for the last time, before He was crucified. Let them know that in resting their souls on Him, they were resting not on Him alone who died on Calvary, but on one who was one with the Father, and therefore were resting on the Father.

Chrysostom observes on the expression "sees Him who sent me:" "What then? Is God a body? By no means. The seeing of which Jesus here speaks is that of the mind, thence showing the consubstantiality." Barnes observes that this language could not have been used about any mere man. To say it of Paul or Isaiah would have been blasphemy. 46.—[*I have come as a light, etc.*] In this sentence our Lord proclaims once more the great end and object of His coming into the world. He does it by using His favorite figure of light and comparing Himself to the sun. "I have come into a world full of darkness and sin, to be the source and center of life, peace, holiness, happiness to mankind, so that every one who receives and believes in Me may be delivered from darkness and walk in full light."

Let us note that the form of language used here seems to teach that our Lord existed before He entered the world. The saints "are the light of the world," but they do not "come as a light into the world."

This could only be said of Christ, who was light before His incarnation, just as the sun exists and shines before it rises above the eastern horizon. Let us note that our Lord's language seems to teach that He came to be a common Savior and Messiah for all mankind, just as the sun shines for the good of all. It is as though He said, "I have arisen on the world like the sun in the firmament of heaven, in order that every one who is willing to believe in Me should be delivered from spiritual darkness and be enabled to walk in the light of spiritual life."

Once more we may remember that none could give such a majestic description of His mission, but one who knew and felt that He was very God. We never find Moses, John the Baptist, Paul, or Peter using such language as this. The quantity of precious truth taught and implied in this verse is very noteworthy. The world is in darkness. Christ is the only light. Faith is the only way to have interest in Christ. He who believes no longer abides in darkness but has spiritual light. He who does not believe remains and continues in a state of darkness, the prelude to hell. The expression, "not abide in darkness," seems to have a latent reference to those Jews who were convinced of Christ's Messiahship but were afraid to confess Him openly. Such persons are exhorted not to remain, stick fast, and continue in darkness.

Burgon remarks on this verse: "This verse shows that (1) Christ existed before His incarnation, even as the sun exists before it appears above the eastern hills; (2) that Christ is the one Savior of

the world, even as there is only one sun; (3) that He came not for one nation but for all, as the sun shines for all the world."

47.—[*And if any man…does not believe.*] Having shown the privilege of those who believe in Him, our Lord now shows the danger and ruin of those who hear His teaching and yet believe not.

[*I do not judge him.*] These words can only mean, "I judge him not now." To put more on them would contradict the teaching of other places, where Christ is spoken of as the Judge of all at the last day. Our Lord's meaning evidently is to teach that His First Advent was not for judgment but for salvation, not to punish and smite as a conqueror but to heal and save as a physician.

[*For I did not come to judge, etc.*] These words are an expansion and explanation of the preceding sentence, "I judge him not." They are evidently meant to correct the Jewish impression that Messiah was to come only to judge, to execute vengeance, to smite down His enemies, and to punish His adversaries. This impression arose from misapplied views of the Second Advent and the judgment yet to come. Our Lord, for the last time, declares that He came for no such purpose. Wicked as unbelief was, He did not come to punish it now. He came not as a judge at His First Advent, but as a Savior.

We must take care, however, that we do not misinterpret this sentence. It affords no countenance to the dangerous doctrine of universal salvation. It does not mean that Christ came in order to

actually save from hell all the inhabitants of the whole world. Such a meaning would flatly contradict many other plain passages of Scripture. When, then, does it mean? It means that our Lord came at His First Advent not to be a judge but a Savior, not to inflict punishment but to provide mercy. He came to provide salvation for all the world, so that anyone in the world may be saved. But no one gets any benefit from this salvation except those who believe. The true key to the meaning of the sentence is the contrast between Christ's first coming and His second one. The first was to set up a throne of grace; the second will be to set up a throne of judgment. The expression in John 3:17 is precisely parallel: "God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." If it were lawful to coin a word, the true exposition of the sentence would be, "I came that the world might be *salvable*."

But while I say all this, I am unable to see how such expressions as this and John 3:16,17 can possibly be reconciled with an extreme view of particular redemption. To say, on the one hand, that Christ's death is efficacious to none but the elect and believers is strictly true. Not all men are finally saved by Christ. There is a hell, and unbelievers and impenitent people will be found there. But to say, on the other hand, that in no sense did Christ do anything at all for the whole world, but that He did everything for the elect alone, seems to me utterly irreconcilable with this text. Surely Christ came to provide a salvation *sufficient* for the whole "world."

I am aware that the advocates of an extreme view of particular redemption say that “the world” here does not mean “the world,” but the elect of all nations as compared to the Jews. But this view is not satisfactory and looks very like an evasion of the plain meaning of words. Why the same Greek word is rendered by our English translators “judge” in this verse and “condemn” in the parallel place in John 3:17, it is not easy to see.

48.—[*He who rejects…has one who judges him*.] In this verse our Lord declares positively the future judgment and condemnation of those who reject Him and refuse to believe His teaching.

The word we render “rejects” is only used here in St. John’s Gospel. The idea is that of “despising, setting at naught.” (See Luke 10:16.) The person described is one who despises and sets at naught Christ Himself, after seeing Him, and deliberately refuses to acknowledge Him as the Messiah in spite of all the evidence of His miracles. He is also one who will not receive and take into his heart the doctrines preached by Christ. In short, he despises His person, and refuses to believe His teaching. “Such a man will find at last, though I punish him not now, that there is a judgment and condemnation of him. He will not find that rejection of Me and his unbelief will go unpunished. He has a Judge prepared already. There is one already, though he knows it not, who will witness against him and condemn him.”

[*The word…judge…last day*.] Our Lord here declares that the things He publicly preached to the Jews while He was upon earth would

witness finally against those who did not believe, at the last day, and be their condemnation. They will not then be able to deny that they were words of wisdom, words of mercy, words subversive of their false views, words fully explaining Christ's kingdom, words entirely in accordance with the Scriptures. And the result will be that they will be speechless. The witness of Christ's words will be unanswerable, and in consequence of that witness they will be condemned.

We see here that the words of those who speak for God are not thrown away because they seem not believed at the time. Christ's words, though despised and rejected by the Jews, did not fall to the ground. Those whom they did not save they will condemn. There will be a resurrection of all faithful sermons at the last day. Great is the responsibility of preachers! Their words are always doing good, or adding to the condemnation of the lost. They are a savor of life to some and of death to others. Great is the responsibility of hearers! They may ridicule and despise sermons, but they will find to their cost at last that they must give account of all they hear. The very sermons they now despise may be witnesses against them to their eternal ruin.

Let us note that our Lord speaks of judgment and the last day as great realities. Let us take care that we always account them such and live accordingly. The Christian's best answer to those who ridicule his religion is to say, "I believe in a judgment and a last day." Let us note that condemnation is taken for granted, if not directly

expressed, as the portion of some at the last day. Then let us not listen to those who say that there is no future punishment, and that all persons of all characters, both good and bad, are at last going to heaven. Zwingli remarks that the expression, "My word shall judge," is parallel to such expressions as, "The law puts a man to death," though it is not actually the law but the executioner that does it. The law only shows him to be worthy of death. So the works and words of Christ will show the unbelieving to be worthy of judgment and condemnation. 49.—[*For I have not spoken of myself.*] In these words our Lord once more, as if for the last time, declares that mighty truth which we find so often in St. John—the intimate union between Himself and His Father. "I have not spoken of myself, of my own independent mind, and without concert with my Father in heaven."

The object of saying this is evident. Our Lord would have the Jews know what a serious sin it was to refuse His words and not believe them. In so doing, men did not refuse the words of a mere man or a prophet like Moses or John the Baptist. They were refusing the words of Him who never spoke alone, but always in closest union with the Father. To refuse to receive the words of Christ was to reject not merely His words, but the words of God the Father.

Here, as in many other places in St. John's Gospel, the Greek does not mean "I have not spoken *concerning* myself, but out of or from myself."

[But the Father…commandment…speak.] Here our Lord explains and enforces more fully what He said of "not speaking from Himself." He declares that when He came into the world, the Father gave Him a "commandment," or a commission, as to what He should say and speak to men. The things that He had spoken were the result of the eternal counsels of the ever-blessed Trinity. The works that He had done were works which the Father gave Him to do. The words that He spoke were words which the Father gave Him to speak. Both in His doing and speaking nothing was left to chance, unforeseen, unprovided, or unpremeditated. All was arranged by perfect wisdom, both His words and His works.

When we read of the Father "sending" Christ and giving Christ a "commandment," we must carefully dismiss from our minds all idea of any inferiority to God the Father on the part of God the Son. The expressions are used in condescension to our weak faculties, to convey the idea of perfect oneness. We are not speaking of the relation that exists between two human beings like ourselves, but between the Persons in the Divine Trinity. The "*sending"* of the Son was the result of the eternal counsel of that blessed Trinity, in which Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are co-equal and co-eternal. The eternal Son was as willing to be "sent" as the eternal Father was to "send" Him. The "*commandment*" given by the Father to the Son as to what He should teach and do, was not a commandment in which the Son had no part but to obey. It was simply the charge or commission arranged in the covenant of redemption, by all three Persons in the Trinity, which the Son was as willing to execute as the Father was

willing to give. The distinction between “say” and “speak” in the Greek is not very clear. Burgon thinks the phrase is meant to include “every class of discourse; as well the words of familiar intercourse as the grave and solemn addresses.” But I am not satisfied that this can be proved. À Lapide says that “to say is to teach and publish a thing gravely, and to speak is to utter a thing familiarly.” Bengel, however, distinguishes them in precisely the contrary way!

There certainly seems to be an intention in the verse to refer the Jews to the well-known words of Deuteronomy concerning the Prophet like unto Moses. “I will raise up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words into His mouth, and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command Him.” Our Lord’s hearers, familiar from their infancy with Scripture, would see at once that Jesus claimed to be the promised Prophet. The Father’s words were in His mouth. He spoke what was commanded Him.
(See Deut. 18:18.)

50.—[And I know…commandment is life everlasting.] The meaning of this sentence seems to be: “I know, whether you like to believe it or not, that this message, commandment, or commission which I have from my Father is life everlasting to all who receive it and believe. You, in your blindness, see no beauty or excellence in the message I bring and the doctrine I preach. But I know that in rejecting it you are rejecting life everlasting.” Thus Peter says to our Lord, “You have the words of eternal life” (John 6:68); that is, we know You have a commission to proclaim and publish eternal life.

Thus our Lord says, “The words that I speak are spirit and life” (John 6:63).

Poole and others say this sentence means, “I know that the way to life everlasting is to keep His commandments.” But I cannot think this is the meaning. Hall paraphrases the sentence, “The doctrine which by His commandment I preach unto you is that which will surely bring you to everlasting life.”

[Therefore, whatever I speak…so I speak.] This sentence seems intended to wind up our Lord’s public discourses to the unbelieving Jews at Jerusalem. “Whatever things I am teaching now, or have spoken to you all through my ministry, are things which the Father gave to Me to speak to you. I am only speaking to you what the Father said to Me. If therefore you reject or refuse my message, know once more, for the last time, that you are rejecting a message from God the Father Himself. I speak nothing but what the Father said to Me. If you despise it, you are despising the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob.” Let us remember that the holy boldness of this last verse should be a pattern to every minister and preacher of the Gospel. Such a man ought to be able to say confidently, “I know and am persuaded that the message I bring is life everlasting to all who believe it; and that, in saying what I do, I say nothing but what God has showed me in His Word.”

John – Chap. 13

JOHN 13:1-5

Washing the Disciples' Feet

Just before the Passover feast, Jesus knew that his time had come to depart from this world to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now loved them to the very end. The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, that he should betray Jesus. Because Jesus knew that the Father had handed all things over to him, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, he got up from the meal, removed his outer clothes, took a towel and tied it around himself. He poured water into the washbasin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to dry them with the towel he had wrapped around himself.

The passage we have now read begins one of the most interesting portions of John's Gospel. For five consecutive chapters we find the Evangelist recording matters which are not mentioned by Matthew, Mark, and Luke. We can never be thankful enough that the Holy Spirit has caused them to be written for our learning! In every age the contents of these chapters have been justly regarded as one of the most precious parts of the Bible. They have been the food and drink, the strength and comfort of all true-hearted Christians. Let us ever

approach them with peculiar reverence. The place whereon we stand is holy ground.

We learn, for one thing, from these verses, ***what patient and continuing love there is in Christ's heart towards His people.*** It is written that "having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end." Knowing perfectly well that they were about to forsake Him shamefully in a very few hours, in full view of their approaching display of weakness and infirmity, our blessed Master did not cease to have loving thoughts of His disciples. He was not weary of them—He loved them to the last.

The love of Christ to sinners is the very essence and marrow of the Gospel. That He should love us at all, and care for our souls—that He should love us before we love Him, or even know anything about Him, that He should love us so much as to come into the world to save us, take our nature on Him, bear our sins, and die for us on the cross—all this is wonderful indeed! It is a kind of love to which there is nothing like it, among men. The narrow selfishness of human nature cannot fully comprehend it. It is one of those things which even the angels of God "desire to look into." It is a truth which Christian preachers and teachers should proclaim incessantly, and never be weary of proclaiming.

But the love of Christ to saints is no less wonderful, in its way, than His love to sinners, though far less considered. That He should bear with all their countless infirmities from grace to glory—that He should never be tired of their endless inconsistencies and petty

provocations—that He should go on forgiving and forgetting incessantly, and never be provoked to cast them off and give them up —all this is marvelous indeed! No mother watching over the waywardness of her feeble babe, in the days of its infancy, has her patience so thoroughly tried, as the patience of Christ is tried by Christians. Yet His patience is infinite. His compassions are a well that is never exhausted. His love is "a love that passes knowledge."

Let no man be afraid of beginning with Christ, if he desires to be saved. The chief of sinners may come to Him with boldness, and trust Him for pardon with confidence. This loving Savior is One who delights to "receive sinners." (Luke 15:2.) Let no man be afraid of going on with Christ after he has once come to Him and believed. Let him not fancy that Christ will cast him off because of failures, and dismiss him into his former hopelessness on account of infirmities. Such thoughts are entirely unwarranted by anything in the Scriptures. Jesus will never reject any servant because of feeble service and weak performance. Those whom He receives He always keeps. Those whom He loves at first He loves at last. His promise shall never be broken, and it is for saints as well as sinners— "Him that comes unto Me I will in no wise cast out." (John 6:37.)

We learn, for another thing, from these verses, ***what deep corruption may sometimes be found in the heart of a great professor of religion.*** It is written that "the devil put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Christ."

This Judas, we must always remember, was one of the twelve Apostles. He had been chosen by Christ Himself, at the same time with Peter, James, John, and their companions. For three years he had walked in Christ's society, had seen His miracles, had heard His preaching, had experienced many proofs of His loving-kindness. He had even preached himself and wrought miracles in Christ's name; and when our Lord sent out His disciples two and two, Judas Iscariot no doubt must have been one of some couple that was sent. Yet here we see this very man possessed by the devil, and rushing headlong to destruction.

On all the coasts of England there is not such a beacon to warn sailors of danger as Judas Iscariot is to warn Christians. He shows us what length a man may go in religious profession, and yet turn out a rotten hypocrite at last, and prove never to have been converted. He shows us the uselessness of the highest privileges, unless we have a heart to value them and turn them to good account. Privileges alone without grace save nobody, and will only make hell deeper. He shows us the uselessness of mere head-knowledge. To know things with our brains, and be able to talk and preach and speak to others, is no proof that our own feet are in the way of peace. These are terrible lessons—but they are true.

Let us never be surprised if we see hypocrisy and false profession among Christians in modern days. There is nothing new in it, nothing peculiar, nothing that did not happen even among Christ's own immediate followers, and under Christ's own eyes. Counterfeit

money is a strong proof that there is good coin somewhere. Hypocrisy is a strong indirect evidence that there is such a thing as true religion.

Above all, let us pray daily that our own Christianity may at any rate be genuine, sincere, real and true. Our faith may be feeble, our hope dim, our knowledge small, our failures frequent, our faults many. But at all events let us be real and true. Let us be able to say with poor, weak, erring Peter, "You, Lord, who know all things, know that I love You." (John 21:17.)

Technical Notes:

1. Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come that he should depart from this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. 2. And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's *son*, to betray him, 3. Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, 4. He rose from supper and laid aside his garments, and took a towel and girded himself. 5. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe *them* with the towel with which he was girded.

There are peculiarities in St. John's narrative of the end of our Lord's life on earth, which seem to require a few introductory remarks

before entering into the substance of the 13th chapter.

A careful reader of the four Gospels can hardly fail to remark that in St. John's account of the last six days of our Lord's ministry, many things mentioned by Matthew, Mark, and Luke are entirely omitted. The parables of the two sons, of the householder who let out a vineyard, of the wedding garment, of the ten virgins, of the talents, of the sheep and goats, are left out. The second cleansing of the temple, the cursing of the barren fig tree, the public discussion with the chief priests and elders about John's baptism, the silencing of the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the lawyers, the public denunciation to the multitude of the Scribes and Pharisees—all these interesting matters are found in the first three Gospels but passed over in silence in the fourth. We cannot doubt that there were wise reasons.

But the most striking thing in St. John's narrative at this point is the entire absence of our Lord's famous prophecy upon the Mount of Olives and of the institution of the Lord's Supper. Both these deeply interesting portions of our Lord's last doings before His crucifixion, which are most fully given in the three Gospels, are completely omitted in the fourth. The reason of these two remarkable omissions we are left to conjecture. "God gives no account of His matters." If we once admit that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, we need not doubt that the Gospel writers were equally guided and directed by the Holy Ghost, both in the things they omitted and the things they recorded. Nevertheless, a few remarks on the subject may be interesting to some readers.

(a) Concerning the omission of the prophecy on the Mount of Olives, I venture the following conjecture. I think it is partly accounted for by the time when St. John's Gospel was given to the Church. That must have been very near the taking of Jerusalem, the destruction of the temple, and the complete overthrow of the Jewish ceremonial. Now if St. John had just at this crisis inserted anew this prophecy in his Gospel, it would have confirmed the erroneous notion which many have always held, that it refers only to the destruction of Jerusalem and does not extend to the second advent of Christ and the end of the world. His marked silence about it would be a testimony against the misapplication of the prophecy. The second reason of the omission, I think, is the striking fact that the writer of the fourth Gospel was inspired to write the Book of Revelation. No wonder, therefore, that he was directed to pass over our Lord's prophecy when he was about to write at a later date the most striking prophetical book in the Bible.

(b) Concerning the omission of the Lord's Supper, I venture the following conjecture. I think it was specially intended to be a witness forever against the growing tendency of Christians to make an idol of the sacraments. Even from the beginning there seems to have been a disposition in the Church to make Christianity a religion of forms and ceremonies rather than of heart, and to exalt outward ordinances to a place which God never meant them to fill. Against this teaching St. John was raised up to testify. The mere fact that in his Gospel he leaves out the Lord's Supper altogether and does not

even name it is strong proof that the Lord's Supper cannot be, as many tell us, the first, foremost, chief, and principal thing in Christianity. Its perfect silence about it can never be reconciled with this favorite theory. It is a most conspicuous silence which the modern advocates of the so-called sacramental system can never get over or explain away. If the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper really is the first and chief thing in Christianity, why does St. John tell us nothing about it? To that question I can only see one answer: it is because it is not a primary but a secondary thing in Christ's religion.

The reason assigned for the omission by many commentators, viz., that St. John thought it needless to repeat the account of the institution after it had been recorded by three evangelists and St. Paul, appears to me entirely insufficient.

1.—[*Now before… Passover*.] We should observe that the feast of the Passover is always carefully mentioned by each Gospel writer as the precise time of the year when Jesus was crucified. It was ordered of God that it should be at this particular time for two good reasons. For one thing, the Passover lamb was the most striking and remarkable type in the whole Jewish ceremonial of Christ Himself, and the history of the Passover of Christ's work of redemption. For another thing, it secured the greatest assembly of Israelites to be eyewitnesses of our Lord's crucifixion. At no time of the Jewish year were so many Jews gathered at Jerusalem. Anything that happened at the Passover would be reported by Jewish worshippers, on returning home, all over the civilized world. For these two reasons

"the Lamb of God" was slain at this feast in spite of the priests who said, "Not on the feast day."
Let us remember that one of the few dates we know for certainty of the events in our Lord's life is the time of His crucifixion. Of the time of His birth and baptism we know nothing. But that he died at Easter we may be quite sure.

[*When Jesus knew that His hour had come.*] Let us note that our Lord knew perfectly beforehand when and how He should suffer. This, whatever we may think, is a great addition to suffering. Our ignorance of things before us is a great blessing. Our Lord saw the cross clearly before Him and walked straight up to it. His death was not a surprise to Him but a voluntary, foreknown thing.

[*That…depart…to the Father.*] Let us observe how death is spoken of here. It is taking a journey, a going from one place to another. In the case of our Lord, it was a return to His Father's house and a going home after finishing the work He came to do. So a believer's death, in a lower sense, is going home.

Calvin observes: "This definition of death belongs to the whole body of the Church. It is to the saints a passage to the Father, an inlet to eternal life."

[*Having loved his own…to the end.*] The meaning of this seems to be, "Having always loved His own disciples and having given many proofs of his singular affection, He now, before leaving them alone

like orphans in the world, gave one more striking proof of His love by washing their feet, and thus on the last evening before His death showed that He loved them to the very end of His ministry and was not weary of them." He knew perfectly that He was about to suffer within twenty-four hours, but the knowledge and foresight of it did not absorb His thoughts so as to make Him forget His little flock of followers. Saints, when they are dying, often ask to be left alone and let alone. Christ, on the trial of His crucifixion, thought of others and loved His disciples to the end. The love of Christ to Christians who really believe in Him is a great depth. "It passes knowledge." It is something that our poor corrupt nature cannot fully comprehend or measure.

The expression "His own," applied to believers, is very noteworthy. They are Christ's peculiar property given to Him by the Father, and His own special care as members of His body. Tittman's idea that "His own" means all mankind is preposterous and weak, and ignores the privileges of believers.

The expression, "who were in the world," is another great depth. Believers are not in heaven yet, and find it out to their cost. They are in a cold, unkind, persecuting world. Let them take comfort in the thought that Jesus knows and remembers it. "I know your works and where you dwell" (Rev. 2:13).

Theophylact thinks that our Lord purposely deferred this act of washing the disciples' feet to the last evening of His ministry in order

to leave in their minds a pleasant impression of His love and condescension.

Melancthon shows that the three greatest marks of pity and compassion are (1) to tolerate the wicked for a season, (2) to abstain from exposing their sins as long as possible, (3) to warn them plainly and gently before leaving them forever. All this appears in our Lord's dealing with Judas in this chapter.

2.—[*And supper being ended.*] These words would have been more literally rendered, "while supper was going on," or "supper being in progress." That this is the true meaning seems clear from the 26th verse. If supper had really been ended, we should not have heard of a sop being given out of the dish, etc. It is only fair to say that Scaliger and other learned men insist that the Jews had more than one supper at the Passover—one a legal one strictly according to ritual, the other a social one. They think these two suppers are both in this chapter. Gerhard gives this opinion at length. Whitby seems to lean to this view and maintains that our Lord *twice* pointed out Judas as the traitor—once privately and once publicly. Let it be noted that our Lord's ministry ended with a supper, that the last ordinance He appointed was a supper, that one promise He has left to a believer is "I will come and sup with him" (Rev. 3:20), and that the first thing that will take place at His second advent will be the marriage supper of the Lamb. All point to the same great truth—the close union, familiarity, and comfortable intimacy between Christ and His people. It is a thing far too little known.

What supper this was we are not told and are left to conjecture. It is a point on which opinions widely differ. Some, as Lightfoot, think that the supper was the same that took place at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper two days before the Passover. Rollock also thinks it was not the Passover. Others think it was the ordinary Passover supper that our Lord was eating with His disciples the night before His crucifixion. This certainly, in my judgment, seems the more probable view.

One thing at any rate is pretty clear. It was not the institution of the Lord's Supper. It seems highly improbable that the washing of the disciples' feet would take place after the Lord's Supper. That blessed ordinance appears to come in after the 20th verse. Brentius stands alone in maintaining that it was the Lord's Supper.

[*The devil…heart*.] This does not mean that Judas now for the first time left the faith and became an apostate. Our Lord long before had spoken of him as one who "was a devil" (John 6:70). But it means that now at length the devil suggested into the heart of this unhappy man the atrocious idea of betraying his Master. It was the last and final heading up of his apostasy.

The personality of Satan and his old character as the father of all wickedness are forcibly brought out here. The word rendered "put" is literally "cast." This graphically describes the way in which Satan works. He casts into the heart of those he tempts the seeds of evil.

The heart is the seed plot which he sows. Suggestion is one of his chief weapons. The sin of man consists in opening his heart to the suggestion—giving it a place and letting it sink down. This is obvious in the first temptation of Eve in the Garden of Eden. Tittman's idea that the expression is only a "popular form of speaking" is utterly untenable and cannot be reconciled with the general teaching of the Bible about the devil.

[*Judas Iscariot, Simon's son.*] Here, as in three other places, the false apostle is called emphatically "Simon's son." Doubtless this was to mark him out as not the Judas who was brother of James and son of Alphæus. Who this Simon was we do not know. (See note on John 6:71.)

[*To betray him.*] There seems no need for regarding Judas' betrayal of his Master as anything but the wicked act of a wicked man who loved money more than his soul. The theory that he was a high-minded, impatient disciple who wished his Master no harm but desired to hasten His kingdom, and expected Him to work a miracle and save Himself at the last, is ingenious but lacks foundation. Our Lord's word applied to him— "a devil"—and the word of St. John— "a thief"—appear to me to overturn the theory altogether. Judas betrayed Jesus because he loved money better than His Master. He probably did not realize the full consequence of his act. But this is often the case with wicked men.

3.—[*Jesus knowing that the Father, etc.*] The reason why this verse

comes in here is not very plain. Why are we told that Jesus "washed His disciples' feet" knowing all these wonderful things? What is the special point and object of the sentence?

Some think that the words means that our Lord knew the end of His ministry was at hand, that all His work was accomplished, that the Father had now committed to Him all power in heaven and earth, and that having come from God He was about to return to God very shortly. Knowing this, He seized the last opportunity that remained to give His disciples a practical example of love and humility. He knew that His time was short and that He must give the lesson this night, if it was to be given at all. Others, as Chrysostom, Augustine, and Zwingli, think that the object of the words is to show the extent and depth of our Lord's infinite condescension and love to His disciples. With a full knowledge that the Father had committed all power into His hands, that He had been from eternity with God and was going back to God, knowing all the dignity and majesty of His person and office, He yet condescended to perform the most menial office and to minister like a servant to His disciples.

Either view is good sense and good divinity and admissible as a fair interpretation of the words. For myself, I prefer the latter view. Theophylact points out that to argue our Lord's inferiority to the Father from the expression "Delivered all things into His hand," is unfair. He justly remarks that you might as well infer the Father's inferiority to the Son from the expression in Corinthians, "When He shall have delivered up the kingdom to the Father."

Bernard remarks that “Jesus came from God, not leaving Him, and went to God, not leaving us.”

4.—[*He rose from supper, etc.*] The minuteness with which every action of our Lord is related here is very striking. No less than seven distinct things are named—rising, laying aside garments, taking a towel, girding Himself, pouring water into a basin, washing and wiping. This very particularity stamps the whole transaction with reality and is the natural language of an astonished and admiring eyewitness. The “laying aside garments” of course only means the laying aside the long, loose, outer garment which people in the East always wear, and which must be laid aside if any bodily exertion is used.

The “girding Himself” refers to the well-known practice of tying tightly round the person any loose garment before taking any action requiring bodily exertion. A good servant is said to have “his loins girded and his lamp burning,” ready for any errand or duty.

The likeness between our Lord’s action here and the words in Luke 12:37 are very striking: “He shall gird Himself—serve them,” etc. Jansenius remarks that the “rising” here mentioned seems like a clear proof that this supper could not be the paschal supper. That was to be eaten standing.

The use of the present tense all through this description is

noteworthy. It brings the whole transaction before us like a picture. Hengstenberg says here: “Jesus had seated himself at the table, and Peter probably enjoyed the honor of washing His feet. After this he, with the other disciples, sat down also at table, expecting that the younger would spontaneously assume the function of feet-washer for all the rest. But pride evoked pride. The younger Apostles, following a quick impulse, seated themselves also at table. Thus a situation of deep embarrassment resulted in murmuring and contest. Who would be the first to rise up again? Jesus put an end to the embarrassment by rising from supper and washing the feet of His disciples.” This is possible, but it is only conjecture.

5.—[*After that he poured water, etc.*] Wonderful as all this transaction seems, and no doubt is when we remember who our Lord was, one thing must never be forgotten. The actions here described would not seem nearly so strange to the disciples as they do to us. They were simply the courteous actions of a host who desired to show the utmost degree of hospitable attention to the guests. Thus Abraham washed the feet of the three angel messengers. (Gen. 18:4. So also 1 Sam. 25:41.) In a hot country like Palestine, where people wore no stockings and the heat was very scorching to the skin, frequent washing of the feet was an absolute necessity, and to wash the feet of guests was a common piece of hospitality. It is one mark of a deserving widow that she has “washed the saints’ feet” (1 Tim. 5:10). The real wonder was that such a Master, on such a solemn occasion, should do such a condescending act to such weak disciples. It was not so much the action as the doer of it that was remarkable.

After all, there was a touching fitness in our Lord's choice of an instructive action on this solemn occasion. He knew that He was leaving His disciples, like poor feeble travelers, in a weary, wicked world. He would therefore wash their feet before parting and strengthen and refresh them for their journey. It will be observed that the work was not left unfinished and half-done. Like a perfect servant, our Lord "wiped" the feet as well as "washed" them.

JOHN 13:6-15

Then he came to Simon Peter. Peter said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus replied, "You do not understand what I am doing now, but you will understand after these things." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet!" Jesus replied, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, wash not only my feet, but also my hands and my head!" Jesus replied, "The one who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean. And you disciples are clean, but not every one of you." (For Jesus knew the one who was going to betray him. For this reason he said, "Not every one of you is clean.")

So when Jesus had washed their feet and put his outer clothing back on, he took his place at the table again and said to them, "Do you understand what I have done for you? You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and do so correctly, for that is what I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you too ought to wash

one another's feet. For I have given you an example—you should do just as I have done for you.

The verses we have now read conclude the story of our Lord's washing the feet of His disciples, the night before He was crucified. It is a story full of touching interest, which for some wise reason no Evangelist records except John. The wonderful condescension of Christ, in doing such a menial action, can hardly fail to strike any reader. The mere fact that the Master should wash the feet of the servants might well fill us with surprise. But the circumstances and sayings which arose out of the action are just as interesting as the action itself. Let us see what they were.

We should notice, firstly, ***the hasty ignorance of the Apostle Peter.*** One moment we find him refusing to allow his Master to do such a servile work as He is about to do— "Do you wash my feet?" "You shall never wash my feet." Another moment we find him rushing with characteristic impetuosity into the other extreme— "Lord, wash not my feet only, but my hands and my head." But throughout the transaction we find him unable to take in the real meaning of what his eyes behold. He sees, but he does not understand.

Let us learn from Peter's conduct that a man may have plenty of faith and love, and yet be sadly destitute of clear knowledge. We must not set down men as graceless and godless because they are dull, and stupid, and blundering in their religion. The heart may often be quite right when the head is quite wrong. We must make

allowances for the corruption of the understanding, as well as of the will. We must not be surprised to find that the brains as well as the affections of Adam's children have been hurt by the fall. It is a humbling lesson, and one seldom fully learned except by long experience. But the longer we live the more true shall we find it, that a believer, like Peter, may make many mistakes and lack understanding, and yet, like Peter, have a heart right before God, and get to heaven at last.

Even at our best estate we shall find that many of Christ's dealings with us are hard to understand in this life. The "why" and "wherefore" of many a providence will often puzzle and perplex us quite as much as the washing puzzled Peter. The wisdom, and fitness, and necessity of many a thing will often be hidden from our eyes. But at times like these we must remember the Master's words, and fall back upon them— "What I do you know not now, but you shall know hereafter." There came days, long after Christ had left the world, when Peter saw the full meaning of all that happened on the memorable night before the crucifixion. Even so there will be a day when *every dark page in our life's history* will be explained, and when, as we stand with Christ in glory, we shall know all.

We should notice, secondly, in this passage, ***the plain practical lesson which lies upon its surface.*** That lesson is read out to us by our Lord. He says, "I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you."

HUMILITY is evidently one part of the lesson. If the only-begotten Son of God, the King of kings, did not think it beneath Him to do the humblest work of a servant, there is nothing which His disciples should think themselves too great or too good to do. No sin is so offensive to God, and so injurious to the soul as pride. No grace is so commended, both by precept and example, as humility. "Be clothed with humility." "He who humbles himself shall be exalted." "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus; who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God—but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men—and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself." (1 Pet. 5:5; Luke 18:14; Phil. 2:5-8.) Well would it be for the Church if this very simple truth was more remembered, and real humility was not so sadly rare. Perhaps there is no sight so displeasing in God's eyes as a self-conceited, self-satisfied, self-contented, stuck-up professor of religion. Alas, it is a sight only too common! Yet the words which John here records have never been repealed. They will be a swift witness against many at the last day, except they repent.

LOVE is manifestly the other part of the great practical lesson. Our Lord would have us love others so much that we should delight to do anything which can promote their happiness. We ought to rejoice in doing kindnesses, even in little things. We ought to count it a pleasure to lessen sorrow and multiply joy, even when it costs us some self-sacrifice and self-denial. We ought to love every child of Adam so well, that if in the least trifle we can do anything to make

him more happy and comfortable, we should be glad to do it. This was the mind of the Master, and this the ruling principle of His conduct upon earth. There are but few who walk in His steps, it may be feared; but these few are men and women after His own heart.

The lesson before us may seem a very simple one; but its importance can never be overrated. Humility and love are precisely the graces which the men of the world can understand, if they do not comprehend doctrines. They are graces about which there is no mystery, and they are within reach of all Christians. The poorest and most ignorant Christian can every day find occasion for practicing love and humility. Then if we would do good to the world, and make our calling and election sure, let no man forget our Lord's example in this passage. Like Him, let us be humble and loving towards all.

We should notice, lastly, in this passage, ***the deep spiritual lessons which lie beneath its surface.*** They are three in number, and lie at the very root of religion, though we can only touch them briefly.

For one thing, we learn that all need to be washed by Christ. "If I wash you not, then have no part in Me." No man or woman can be saved unless his sins are washed away in Christ's precious blood. Nothing else can make us clean or acceptable before God. We must be "washed, sanctified, and justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." (1 Cor. 6:11.) Christ must wash us, if we are ever to sit down with saints in glory. Then let us take heed that

we apply to Him by faith, wash and become clean. They only are washed who believe.

For another thing, we learn that even those who are cleansed and forgiven need a daily application to the blood of Christ for daily pardon. We cannot pass through this evil world without defilement. There is not a day in our lives but we fail and come short in many things, and need fresh supplies of mercy. Even "he that is washed needs to wash his feet," and to wash them in the same fountain where he found peace of conscience when he first believed. Then let us daily use that fountain without fear. With the blood of Christ we must begin, and with the blood of Christ we must go on.

Finally, we learn that even those who kept company with Christ, and were baptized with water as His disciples, were "not all" washed from their sin. These words are very solemn— "You are clean—but not all." Then let us take heed to ourselves, and beware of false profession. If even Christ's own disciples are not all cleansed and justified, we have reason to be on our guard. Baptism and Churchmanship are no proof that we are right in the sight of God.

Technical Notes:

6. Then he came to Simon Peter, and Peter said to him, Lord, are you washing my feet? 7. Jesus answered and said to him, What I am doing you do not understand now, but you shall understand hereafter. 8. Peter said to him, you shall never wash my feet! Jesus answered him, If I do not

wash you, you have no part with me. 9. Simon Peter said to him, Lord, not my feet only, but also *my* hands and *my* head! 10. Jesus said to him, He who is washed needs only to wash *his* feet, but is clean every whit; and ye are clean, but not all. 11. For he knew who should betray him; therefore he said, Ye are not all clean. 12. So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and sat down again, he said to them, Do ye know what I have done to you? 13. Ye call me Master and Lord, and ye say well, for *so* I am. 14. If I then, *your* Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet. 15. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.

6.—[*Then he came to Simon Peter*.] Whether our Lord began with Simon Peter is not quite clear from the words before us. The word "then," however, certainly does not mean "then" in the sense of "in order." Chrysostom and Theophylact hold that Jesus washed Judas Iscariot's feet and then came to Peter. From the subsequent action of dipping and giving a morsel to Judas, it certainly seems probable that he sat very near our Lord.

Augustine holds that Jesus began with Peter. Bellarmine eagerly grasps at this and gives it as one of twenty-eight alleged proofs that Peter always had a primacy among the Apostles!

[*And Peter said to him*.] The word "Peter" is not in the Greek text

here, but simply “he” or “that man.” Our translators seem to have inserted it to make the meaning plain.

[*Lord, do you wash my feet?*] The English language here fails to give the full emphasis of the Greek. It would be literally rendered, “Do You, of me, wash the feet?” Such a one as You are, wash the feet of such a one as I am! It is like John the Baptist’s exclamation when our Lord came to his baptism: “Come thou to me?” (Matt. 3:14.)

7.—[*Jesus answered and said, etc.*] The famous saying of this verse stretches far beyond the literal application of the words. Primarily, of course, it means, “This action of mine has a meaning which in a few minutes I will explain and you will understand, though at present it may seem to you strange and unsuitable.” But in every age true Christians have seen a higher, deeper, broader meaning in the words, and a pious mind cannot doubt that they were intended to bear that meaning. It supplies the key to many things that we cannot understand in the providential government of the world, in the history of the Church, in the events of our own lives. We must make up our minds to see many things happening which we do not know and understand now, and of which we cannot at present see the wisdom. But we must believe that “we shall know hereafter” the full purposes, the why and wherefore and needs-be of each and all. It is a golden sentence to store up in our memories. God’s eternal counsels, the wisdom of the great Head of the Church, must never be forgotten. All is going on well, even when we think all is going on ill. When we cannot see it, we must believe. In sickness, sorrow,

bereavement, disappointment, we must summon up faith and patience and hear Christ saying to us, “What I am doing you do not understand now, but you shall understand hereafter.” Musculus has some happy remarks here on the applicability of this expression to infant baptism, which are most just and true.

8.—[*Peter said…never wash my feet*.] Here, again, the English version fails to give the full strength of the Greek words. This sentence would be rendered literally, “You shall never wash my feet forever,” or unto eternity.

We may note here, in Peter’s language, that there is such a thing as “a voluntary humility” which runs into extremes. Hutcheson remarks: “Men may have much seeming humility in the matters of God which is yet but preposterous and sinful and learned from carnal reason.” Rollock compares with Peter’s conduct here the Romish worship of saints and angels under the pretense of deep humility and unworthiness to approach God.

[Jesus answered…not wash you…no part with me.] We need not doubt that this sentence was meant to bear a deep and full meaning and to reach far beyond the primary application. It would be a very cold and tame exposition to say that our Lord only meant, “Unless your feet are washed by Me tonight, you are not one of my disciples.” It means a great deal more. Our Lord seems in effect to say, “You will not be wise to object to the symbolic action which I am performing. Remember, no one can be saved or have any part in Me and my work

of redemption unless I wash away his sins. Except I wash away your many sins, even you, Simon Peter, have no part in Me. I must wash every saved soul, and every saved soul must be washed. Surely, therefore, it does not become you to object to my doing an instructive and figurative act to your feet when I must needs do a far greater work to your soul."

The sentence is one of wide, deep, and sweeping application. It is true of every Christian of every rank and position. To each one Christ says, "If I wash you not, you have no part in Me." It is not enough that we are Churchmen, professed communicants, and the like. The great question for everyone is this: "Am I washed and justified?" The common assertion that this "washing" here spoken of is baptism seems to be unwarrantable. Our Lord never baptized anyone, so far as we can learn from Scripture. Where is it said that He baptized Peter? Moreover, if baptism were meant, the past tense would have been used: "If I had not washed you, you would have no part in Me." The washing here spoken of is something far above baptism.

9.—[*Simon Peter said, etc.*] The exclamation of Peter in this verse is highly characteristic of the man. Impulsive, excitable, zealous, ardent, with more love than knowledge and more feeling than spiritual discernment, he is horrified at the very idea of "having no part in Christ." Anything rather than that! Not seeing clearly the deep meaning of His Master's words, and still sticking to a carnal, literal interpretation of the word "washing," he cries out that his Master may wash him all over, hands and head as well as feet, if an

interest in Christ depends on that. Great zeal and love are perfectly consistent with great spiritual ignorance and dullness, and great slowness to comprehend spiritual truth. Rollock remarks that Peter erred as much in one extreme now as he had erred before in another.

Stier remarks that the passionate, strong expression of Peter in this verse is just the language of a warm-hearted but dull-minded disciple just beginning to understand, as if light had suddenly flashed on him.

10.—[*Jesus said to him, He who is washed, etc.*] This sentence of our Lord's conveys a latent rebuke of Peter's spiritual dullness. It is as though Jesus said, "The washing of head and hands of which you speak is not needed. Even assuming that a literal washing is all I meant in saying, 'If I wash you not,' it is well known that he who is washed needs only to wash his feet after a journey, and is accounted clean entirely after such a partial washing. But this is far more true of the washing of pardon and justification. He who is pardoned and justified by Me is entirely washed from all his sins and only needs the daily forgiveness of the daily defilement he contracts in traveling through a sinful world. Once washed, justified, and accepted by Me, ye are clean before God—although not all of you. There is one painful exception."

The great practical truth contained in this sentence ought to be carefully noted and treasured up by all believers. Once joined to Christ and cleansed in His blood, they are completely absolved and

free from all spot of guilt and are counted without blame before God. But for all this, they need every day, as they walk through this world, to confess their daily failures and to sue for daily pardon. They require, in short, a daily washing of their feet over and above the great washing of justification, which is theirs the moment they first believe. He who neglects this daily washing is a very questionable and doubtful kind of Christian. Luther remarks pithily, "The devil allows no Christian to reach heaven with clean feet all the way."

"Every whit," in this verse, means literally "the whole man." The deep mine of meaning that often lies under the surface of our Lord's language is strikingly exemplified in this verse, as well as in the seventh and eighth. There is far more in many of His sayings, we may believe, than has ever yet been discovered.

It is striking to observe that even of His poor, weak, erring disciples, Jesus says "Ye are clean." Bullinger observes that the words of the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our trespasses," are a daily confession of the very thing here mentioned—the need of daily washing of our feet. Casaubon remarks that those who come out of a bath, as a matter of constant experience, only need to wash their feet which, stepping on the ground as they come out, must needs contract some defilement. In eastern countries where bathing was very common, all could see the force of this. Hengstenberg remarks that "the expression 'but not all' was intended to pierce the conscience of Judas, whom the Redeemer did not give up until the last good impulse died within him."

The common idea that the "washing" here spoken of refers to the baptism, seems to me quite untenable. He who is washed must mean only "washed in a spiritual sense from his sins;" as Psalm 51:4. Hengstenberg's discussion of the point is worth reading.

Burgon observes, "The traitor, Judas, though washed by the hands of Christ Himself, was filthy still."

11.—[*For he knew who should betray him, etc.*] Our Lord's perfect foreknowledge of His sufferings and the manner of them, and His thorough discernment of the real characters of all His disciples, are alike shown in this verse. He did not suffer because he did not foresee it and was taken by surprise. He walked up to death knowing every step he was about to tread.

The sentence is an example of the explanatory glosses which are so characteristic of St. John's Gospel.

The Greek words rendered "who should betray Him" are literally, "the person betraying Him," in the past participle.

12.—[*So after…feet.*] After the conversation between our Lord and Peter, the washing seems to have gone on without interruption. The disciples were accustomed to see their Master do things they did not understand, and they submitted in silence.

[*And had taken…sat down again.*] This refers to His putting on

again the long loose outer robe, which was laid aside on performing any action requiring exertion in the East. Then our Lord took His place once more at the table and commenced a discourse that seems to have ushered in the Lord's Supper. Whether the washing of the feet was meant, among other things, to teach the need of special preparation for that blessed ordinance, is an interesting thought and worth consideration. It certainly seems our Lord's last *action* before He gave the bread and wine.

[*He said, Do ye know what I have done to you?*] This question was meant to stir up in the disciples' minds inquiry as to the meaning of what they had just seen. Understanding and intelligent perception of all we do in religion should be sought after and valued by all true Christians. There is no real religion in blind devotion. "What do I mean by this service?" should be the question often impressed on our minds.

13.—[*Ye call me Master and Lord.*] These words would be more literally rendered, "Ye call Me, or speak of Me, as the Master and the Lord." The expression seems to show that this was the habitual language of the disciples while our Lord was on earth. So Martha says to Mary, "The Master is come" (John 11:28).
[*Ye say well, for so I am.*] The word "so" is not in the Greek. It is simply, "for I am." The expression is a beautiful warrant for applying to Jesus especially the appellation "the Lord." He has Himself endorsed it by the words "Ye say well."

14.—[*If I then, your Lord, etc.*] The argument of this verse is one which our Lord very frequently uses: “If I do a thing, much more ought ye to do it.” Literally rendered the meaning is, “If I, the Person whom ye speak of as ‘the Lord’ and ‘the Master,’ have washed your feet and condescended to perform the most menial act of attention to you, ye also ought to feel it a duty to do acts of the same kind for one another—acts as condescending as washing one another’s feet.” The words “Your Lord and Master” in the Greek are literally “The Lord and the Master.” “Ye ought” is a very strong expression. It is tantamount to saying, “It is your duty and debt—ye are under an obligation to do it.” Paley in Evidences, p. 2, ch. 4, has a remarkable passage showing the close affinity between our Lord’s conduct here and His conduct when taking a little child and putting him in the midst of the disciples. In both he taught humility, that rare grace, by action.

15.—[*For I have given you an example, etc.*] “I have, in my own person, given you a pattern of what your own conduct should be. The duty I want you to learn is of such vast importance that I have not left it to a general precept but have given you an example of my meaning.” Of course, the question at once rises, What did our Lord really mean? Did he mean that we all ought literally to do the very same thing that He did? Or did he only mean that we are to imitate the spirit of this action? The Church of Rome, it is well known, puts a literal sense on our Lord’s language. Once every year, about Easter, the head of the Romish Church publicly washes the feet of certain poor persons got ready for the occasion. The absurdity, to say the

least, of this view is evident on a moment's reflection.

It seems absurd to take our Lord's words literally and to suppose that the Pope's literal washing of a few feet at Easter can supersede the duty of all Christians to do the same. Yet it is only fair to remember that the Moravians to this day take a literal view of those words and have a custom called "pedilavium."

It is, in any case, absurd to suppose that our Lord would require His disciples to perform a duty which the young and the feeble would be physically unable to do. It is inconsistent with the general tenor of our Lord's teaching to suppose that He would ever attach so much importance to a mere bodily action. "Bodily exercise profits little" (1 Tim. 4:8). A formal performance of bodily acts of religion is just the easiest thing that can be imposed on people. The thing that is really hard, and yet always required, is the service of the heart.

The true interpretation of the two verses is that which places a spiritual sense on our Lord's words. It is a practical illustration of Matthew 20:26-28. He wished to teach His disciples that they ought to be willing to wait on one another, serve one another, minister to one another even in the least and lowest things. They should think nothing too low, or humble, or menial to undertake if they can show love, kindness, and condescension to another. If He, the King of kings, condescended to leave heaven to save souls and dwell 31 years in this sin-defiled world, there is nothing that we should think too lowly to undertake.

Pride, because we possess wealth, rank, position, place, education, or high-breeding, is condemned heavily in this passage. He who would shrink from doing the least kindness to the poorest Christian has read these verses to little purpose and does not copy his Master's example. One caution only we must remember. Let us not suppose that an ostentatious attention to the poor constitutes the whole of obedience to the law of this passage. It is easy work comparatively to care for the poor. We are to be ready to do the least acts of kindness to our equals quite as much as to the poor. There is nothing about temporal poverty in the passage. The disciples were told their duty to "one another." This is a very important point. It is much easier and more self-satisfying to play the part and do the work of a Christian to the poor than to our equals. How entirely the passage overthrows the claim of mere talking, head-learned professors of sound doctrine to be accounted true Christians, it is needless to show. Doctrinal orthodoxy without practical love and humility is utterly worthless before God.

Bullinger remarks how singularly full of Christian truth the passage is which ends at this verse. That we are washed clean from all sins by Christ our Savior, that although washed the remainder of infirmity sticks to us and obliges us to wash our feet daily, that the duty of a disciple is to make Christ his example in all things—these three great lessons stand forth most prominently.

Gurnall observes, "The master here does not only rule the scholar's book for him, but writes him a copy with his own hand."

JOHN 13:16-20

"I tell you the solemn truth, the slave is not greater than his master, nor is the one who is sent as a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you understand these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

"What I am saying does not refer to all of you. I know the ones I have chosen. But this is to fulfill the scripture, 'The one who eats my bread has turned against me.' I am telling you this now, before it happens, so that when it happens you may believe that I am he. I tell you the solemn truth, whoever accepts the one I send accepts me, and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me."

If we would understand the full meaning of these verses, we must mark carefully where they stand in the chapter. They follow right after the remarkable passage in which we read of Christ washing His disciples' feet. They stand in close connection with His solemn command, that the disciples should do as they had seen Him do. Then come the five verses which we have now to consider.

We are taught, for one thing, in these verses, that ***Christians must never be ashamed of doing anything that Christ has done.*** We read, "Verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his Lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him."

There seems little doubt that our Lord's all-seeing eye saw a rising unwillingness in the minds of the Apostles to do such menial

things as they had just seen Him do. Puffed up with their old Jewish expectation of thrones and kingdoms in this world, secretly self-satisfied with their own position as our Lord's friends, these poor Galileans were startled at the idea of washing people's feet! They could not bring themselves to believe that Messiah's service entailed work like this. They could not yet take in the grand truth, that true Christian greatness consisted in doing good to others. And hence they needed our Lord's word of warning. If He had humbled Himself to do humbling work, His disciples must not hesitate to do the same.

The lesson is one of which we all need to be reminded. We are all too apt to dislike any work which seems to entail trouble, self-denial, and going down to our inferiors. We are only too ready to relegate such work to others, and to excuse ourselves by saying, "It is not in our way." When feelings of this kind arise within us we shall find it good to remember our Lord's words in this passage, no less than our Lord's example. We ought never to think it beneath us to show kindness to the lowest of men. We ought never to hold our hand because the objects of our kindness are ungrateful or unworthy. Such was not the mind of Him who washed the feet of Judas Iscariot as well as Peter. He who in these matters cannot stoop to follow Christ's example, gives little evidence of possessing true love or true humility.

We are taught, for another thing, in these verses, ***the uselessness of religious knowledge if not accompanied by practice.*** We read, "If you know these things, happy are you if you do them." It sounds as if our Lord would warn His disciples that they

would never be really happy in His service if they were content with a barren head-knowledge of duty, and did not live according to their knowledge.

The lesson is one which deserves the continual remembrance of all professing Christians. Nothing is more common than to hear people saying of doctrine or duty— "We know it, we know it;" while they sit still in unbelief or disobedience. They actually seem to flatter themselves that there is something creditable and redeeming in knowledge, even when it bears no fruit in heart, character, or life. Yet the truth is precisely the other way. To know what we ought to be, believe, and do, and yet to be unaffected by our knowledge, only adds to our guilt in the sight of God. *To know that Christians should be humble and loving, while we continue proud and selfish, will only sink us deeper in the pit, unless we awake and repent*. Practice, in short, is the very life of religion. "To him that knows to do good, and does it not, to him it is sin." (James 4:17.)

Of course we must never *despise* knowledge. It is in one sense the beginning of Christianity in the soul. So long as we know nothing of sin, or God, or Christ, or grace, or repentance, or faith, or conscience, we are of course nothing better than heathens. But we must not overrate knowledge. It is altogether valueless unless it produces results in our conduct, and influences our lives, and moves our wills. In fact knowledge without practice does not raise us above the level of the devil. He could say to Jesus, "I know You who You are, the Holy One of God." The devils, says James, "believe and tremble."

(James 2:19.) Satan knows truth, but has no will to obey it, and is miserable. He that would be happy in Christ's service must not only know, but do.

We are taught, for another thing, in these verses, ***the perfect knowledge which Christ has of all His people.*** He can distinguish between false profession and true grace. The Church may be deceived, and rank men as Apostles, who are nothing better than brethren of Judas Iscariot. But Jesus is never deceived, for He can read hearts. And here He declares with peculiar emphasis, "I know whom I have chosen."

This perfect knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ is a very solemn thought, and one which cuts two ways. It ought to fill the hypocrite with alarm, and drive him to repentance. Let him remember that the eyes of the all-seeing Judge already see him through and through, and detect the absence of a wedding garment. If he would not be put to shame before assembled worlds, let him cast aside his false profession, and confess his sin before it is too late. Believers, on the other hand, may think of an all-knowing Savior with comfort. They may remember, when misunderstood and slandered by an evil world, that their Master knows all. He knows that they are true and sincere, however weak and failing. A time is coming when He will confess them before His Father, and bring forth their characters clear and bright as the summer sun at noon-day.

We are taught, finally, in these verses, ***the true dignity of Christ's disciples.*** The world may despise and ridicule the

Apostles because they care more for works of love and humility than the pursuits of the world. But the Master bids them remember their commission, and not be ashamed. They are God's ambassadors, and have no cause to be cast down. "Verily, verily," He declares, "He that receives whomsoever I send receives Me; and he that receives Me receives Him that sent Me."

The doctrine here laid down is full of encouragement. It ought to cheer and hearten all who lay themselves out to do good, and specially to do good to the fallen and the poor. Work of this kind gets little praise from men, and they who give themselves up to it are often regarded as miserable enthusiasts, and meet with much opposition. Let them however work on, and take comfort in the words of Christ which we are now considering. To spend and be spent in trying to do good, makes a man far more honorable in the eyes of Jesus than to command armies or amass a fortune. The few who work for God in Christ's way have no cause to be ashamed. Let them not be cast down if the children of the world laugh and sneer and despise them. A day comes when they will hear the words, "Come you blessed children of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you." (Matt. 25:34.)

Technical Notes:

21. When Jesus had said these things, he was troubled in spirit, and testified and said, Verily, verily, I say to you, that one of your shall betray me. 22. Then the disciples looked at one another, doubting of whom he spoke. 23.

Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved. 24. Simon Peter therefore beckoned to him to ask who it was of whom he spoke. 25. He then, lying on Jesus' breast, said to him, Lord, who is it? 26. Jesus answered, he it is to whom I shall give a sop when I have dipped *it*. And when he had dipped the sop, he gave *it* to Judas Iscariot, *the son* of Simon. 27. And after the sop, Satan entered into him. Then Jesus said to him, What you do, do quickly. 28. Now no man at the table knew for what reason he said this to him. 29. For some *of them* thought, because Judas had the bag, that Jesus had said to him, Buy *those things* we have need for the feast; or that he should give something to the poor. 30. He then having received the sop went immediately out. And it was night.

21.—[*When Jesus had thus said*.] This would be more literally rendered, "had said these things," referring to all He had just been saying. There seems to be a kind of break or pause in the narrative here. This is the point in St. John's narrative where the institution of the Lord's Supper seems to come in. At any rate, there seems no point, comparing his account of this evening with that of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, where it can be so well fitted in. This is the view of Jansenius, Lampe, and Burgon.

[*He was troubled in spirit*.] This expression, applied to our Lord, is peculiar to St. John. We find it only in his Gospel, here and at 11:33 and 12:27. Here it seems to mean principally the pain and sorrow

that our Lord experienced on seeing one of his own chosen Apostles about to betray him. In addition to this, it probably includes that peculiar agony and distress of soul that our Lord was subject to under the presence of a world's sin laid upon Him, and which we see intensified in the garden of Gethsemane. Let it be noted that of all the Gospel writers, John is the one who dwells most fully on the Divine nature of our Lord, and also is the one who describes most fully the reality of His human affections. Observe that to be troubled and disturbed in mind is not in itself sinful. Brentius remarks, after Augustine, how foolish were the Stoic philosophers who taught that a wise man is never disturbed in mind. Musculus thinks that our Lord's distress and sorrow at the sight of the wickedness of Judas had much to do with this "trouble of spirit." Nothing is so sad as the sight of a hardened, incorrigible backslider.

[*And testified and said.*] The frequency with which John used the word "testified" is very remarkable. It occurs thirty-three times in his Gospel and only three times in all the other three Gospels. Why our Lord is said to "testify" in this place is hard to see. We must suppose that it means He made an open, solemn declaration in a very impressive manner, like a witness bearing testimony to some great and unexpected fact.

[*Verily…shall betray me.*] The solemn "Amen, amen" here, as elsewhere, was calculated to arrest the attention of the disciples to the declaration our Lord was going to make. "One out of you (*i.e.*, out of your number) shall betray Me. My last and crowning trial draws

near. I am about to bear a world's sins in my own body, on the tree. And painful as it is to say, the first step in the history of my passion shall be my betrayal by one of yourselves."

Let us note our Lord's thorough foreknowledge of all the details of His sufferings as well as of the great fact that He was about to be killed.

22.—[*Then the disciples looked at one another.*] The first effect of our Lord's declaration seems to have been silence. Like men stunned and amazed, the disciples looked at one another in astonishment. The thing announced was the last thing they expected hear.

[*Doubting of whom he spoke.*] The word "doubting" hardly conveys the full force of the Greek here. It is rather, as 2 Cor. 4:8, "perplexed," "puzzled."

Let us note that neither here nor afterward does any suspicion appear to have fallen on Judas. For anything we can see, he looked as good as Peter, James, and John, and as unlikely to betray his Master. The length to which hypocrisy can go is very awful.

23.—[Now...leaning...bosom.] To understand this we must remember the customs of the East, in the time of our Lord, about the position and attitude of the guests at a meal. They did not sit but reclined. The famous picture of the Last Supper by Leonardo DaVinci gives a totally inaccurate idea of the scene.

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Bullinger points out that the possession of money is evidently not in itself sinful and wicked, and argues from the verse that the Romish mendicant friars and others who made a merit of self-imposed poverty are under a complete delusion. It is not the having but the misusing of money which is sinful.

30.—[He then…sop…immediately out.] The hasty departure of Judas as soon as our Lord had given him the morsel and spoken the remarkable words already commented on, may easily be explained. He saw at once that our Lord knew all his plot, and dreaded exposure. His conscience condemned him, and he dared no longer sit in our Lord's company. He, at any rate, understood what our Lord meant if nobody else did. He felt himself detected and discovered, and for very shame got up and went away. It is curious and

noteworthy that John, at all events, must have known Judas to be the traitor, and yet he seems to have said nothing. It seems very difficult to me to explain this part of the history of this memorable evening unless we admit that Judas Iscariot received the Lord's Supper with the other Apostles. From this point to the seizure of our Lord in the garden, the narrative flows on without break or interruption, and I cannot see any place at which the Lord's Supper can come in. I therefore hold strongly that Judas was actually a communicant. The subject is very fully discussed by Gerhard, who takes this view and confirms it by quotations from Cyprian, Jerome, Augustine, Chrysostom, Cyril of Jerusalem, Theodoret, Euthymius, Aquinas, Ferus, Toletus, Bellarmine, Jansenius, Baronius, Maldonatus, Calvin, Beza, Martyr, Bucer, and Whittaker. After all, the expression of Luke 22:21 appears to me unanswerable.

[*And it was night*.] This emphatic little sentence of course is not inserted without a meaning; but why, we are left to conjecture. Perhaps it was meant to show us that Judas purposely waited till darkness to accomplish his deed of darkness. "This is your hour, and the power of darkness" (Luke 22:53).

Perhaps it was meant to show that Judas slunk off at a time when nobody could see where he went, follow him, or observe his movements. Perhaps it was meant to show that the time was hastening on, and that our Lord had reason to say, "What you do, do quickly." Perhaps it was only meant to mark the precise time when our Lord delivered the exquisite address of the next three chapters.

St. John loves to mark time and places in his narrative.

One thing, at any rate, is very clear. The expression shows that the first Lord's Supper was not celebrated by day but by night. The objections to an evening sacrament commonly made by certain persons are really so untenable in the face of this passage that one marvels how men of common sense can make them.

JOHN 13:21-30

When he had said these things, Jesus was greatly distressed in spirit, and testified, "I tell you the solemn truth, one of you will betray me." The disciples began to look at one another, worried and perplexed to know which of them he was talking about. One of his disciples, the one Jesus loved, was at the table at Jesus' right in the place of honor. So Simon Peter gestured to this disciple to ask Jesus who it was he was referring to. Then the disciple whom Jesus loved leaned back against Jesus' chest and asked him, "Lord, who is it?" Jesus replied, "It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread after I have dipped it in the dish." Then he dipped the piece of bread in the dish and gave it to Judas Iscariot, Simon's son. And after Judas took the piece of bread, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, "What you are about to do, do quickly." (Now none of those present at the table understood why Jesus said this to Judas. Some thought that, because Judas had the money box, Jesus was telling him to buy whatever they needed for the feast, or to give something

to the poor.) Judas took the piece of bread and went out immediately. Now it was night.

The subject of the verses before us is a very painful one. They describe the last scene between our Lord Jesus Christ and the false Apostle Judas Iscariot. They contain the last words which passed between them before they parted forever in this world. They never seem to have met again on earth, excepting in the garden when our Lord was taken prisoner. Within a short time both the holy Master and the treacherous servant were dead. They will never meet again in the body until the trumpet sounds, and the dead are raised, and the judgment is set, and the books are opened. What a dreadful meeting will that be!

Let us mark, firstly, in this passage, ***what trouble our Lord Jesus went through for the sake of our souls.*** We are told that shortly after washing the disciples' feet, He "was troubled in spirit, and said, One of you shall betray Me."

The whole length and breadth and depth of our Master's troubles during His earthly ministry are far beyond the conception of most people. His death and suffering on the cross were only the heading up and completion of His sorrows. But all throughout His life—partly from the general unbelief of the Jews—partly from the special hatred of the Pharisees and Sadducees—partly from the weakness and infirmity of His few followers—He must have been in a peculiar degree "a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." (Isa. 53:3.)

But the trouble before us was a singular and exceptional one. It was the bitter sorrow of seeing a chosen Apostle deliberately becoming an apostate, a backslider, and an ungrateful traitor. That it was a foreseen sorrow from the beginning we need not doubt; but sorrow is not less acute because long foreseen. That it was a peculiarly cutting sorrow is very evident. Nothing is found so hard for flesh and blood to bear as ingratitude. Even a poet of our own has said that it is "sharper than a serpent's tooth to have a thankless child." Absalom's rebellion seems to have been David's heaviest trouble, and Judas Iscariot's treachery seems to have been one of the heaviest trials of the Son of David. When He saw it drawing near He was "troubled in spirit."

Passages like these should make us see the amazing love of Christ to sinners. How many cups of sorrow He drained to the dregs in working out our salvation, beside the mighty cup of bearing our sins. They show us how little reason we have for complaining when friends fail us, and men disappoint us. If we share our Master's lot we have no cause to be surprised. Above all, they show us the perfect suitableness of Christ to be our Savior. He can sympathize with us. He has suffered Himself, and can feel for those who are ill-used and forsaken.

Let us mark, secondly, in these verses, ***the power and malignity of our great enemy the devil.*** We are told in the beginning of the chapter that he "put it into the heart" of Judas to betray our Lord. We are told here that he "entered into" him. First he

suggests—then he commands. First he knocks at the door and asks permission to come in—then, once admitted, he takes complete possession, and rules the whole inward man like a tyrant.

Let us take heed that we are not "ignorant of Satan's devices." He is still going to and fro in the earth, seeking whom he may devour. He is about our path, and about our bed, and spies out all our ways. Our only safety lies in resisting him at the first, and not listening to his first advances. For this we are all responsible. Strong as he is, he has no power to do us harm, if we cry to the stronger One in heaven, and use the means which He has appointed. It is a standing principle of Christianity, and will ever be found true. "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." (James 4:7.)

Once let a man begin tampering with the devil, and he never knows how far he may fall. Trifling with the first thoughts of sin—making light of evil ideas when first offered to our hearts—allowing Satan to talk to us, and flatter us, and put bad notions into our hearts—all this may seem a small matter to many. It is precisely at this point that *the road to ruin* often begins. He that allows Satan to sow wicked *thoughts* will soon find within his heart a crop of wicked *habits*. Happy is he who really believes that there is a devil, and believing, watches and prays daily that he may be kept from his temptations.

Let us mark, lastly, in these verses, ***the extreme hardness which comes over the heart of a backsliding professor of religion.*** This is a thing which is most painfully brought out in the

case of Judas Iscariot. One might have thought that the sight of our Lord's trouble, and the solemn warning, "One of you shall betray Me," would have stirred the conscience of this unhappy man. But it did not do so. One might have thought that the solemn words, "what you do, do quickly," would have arrested him, and made him ashamed of his intended sin. But nothing seems to have moved him. Like one whose conscience was dead, buried, and gone, he rises and goes out to do his wicked work, and parts with his Lord forever.

The extent to which we may harden ourselves by resisting light and knowledge is one of the most fearful facts in our nature. We may become past feeling, like those whose limbs are mortified before they die. We may lose entirely all sense of fear, or shame, or remorse, and have a heart as hard as the nether millstone, blind to every warning, and deaf to every appeal. It is a painful disease, but one which unhappily is not uncommon among professing Christians. None seem so liable to it as those who, having great light and privilege, deliberately turn their backs on Christ, and return to the world. Nothing seems likely to touch such people, but the voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God. Let us watch jealously over our hearts, and beware of giving way to the beginnings of sin. Happy is he who fears always, and walks humbly with his God. The strongest Christian is the one who feels his *weakness* most, and cries most frequently, "Hold me up, and I shall be safe." (Psalm 119:117; Prov. 28:14.)

Technical Notes:

21. When Jesus had said these things, he was troubled in spirit, and testified and said, Verily, verily, I say to you, that one of your shall betray me. 22. Then the disciples looked at one another, doubting of whom he spoke. 23. Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved. 24. Simon Peter therefore beckoned to him to ask who it was of whom he spoke. 25. He then, lying on Jesus' breast, said to him, Lord, who is it? 26. Jesus answered, he it is to whom I shall give a sop when I have dipped *it*. And when he had dipped the sop, he gave *it* to Judas Iscariot, *the son* of Simon. 27. And after the sop, Satan entered into him. Then Jesus said to him, What you do, do quickly. 28. Now no man at the table knew for what reason he said this to him. 29. For some *of them* thought, because Judas had the bag, that Jesus had said to him, Buy *those things* we have need for the feast; or that he should give something to the poor. 30. He then having received the sop went immediately out. And it was night.

21.—[*When Jesus had thus said.*] This would be more literally rendered, "had said these things," referring to all He had just been saying. There seems to be a kind of break or pause in the narrative here. This is the point in St. John's narrative where the institution of the Lord's Supper seems to come in. At any rate, there seems no point, comparing his account of this evening with that of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, where it can be so well fitted in. This is the view of Jansenius, Lampe, and Burgon.

[*He was troubled in spirit*.] This expression, applied to our Lord, is peculiar to St. John. We find it only in his Gospel, here and at 11:33 and 12:27. Here it seems to mean principally the pain and sorrow that our Lord experienced on seeing one of his own chosen Apostles about to betray him. In addition to this, it probably includes that peculiar agony and distress of soul that our Lord was subject to under the presence of a world's sin laid upon Him, and which we see intensified in the garden of Gethsemane. Let it be noted that of all the Gospel writers, John is the one who dwells most fully on the Divine nature of our Lord, and also is the one who describes most fully the reality of His human affections. Observe that to be troubled and disturbed in mind is not in itself sinful. Brentius remarks, after Augustine, how foolish were the Stoic philosophers who taught that a wise man is never disturbed in mind. Musculus thinks that our Lord's distress and sorrow at the sight of the wickedness of Judas had much to do with this "trouble of spirit." Nothing is so sad as the sight of a hardened, incorrigible backslider.

[*And testified and said*.] The frequency with which John used the word "testified" is very remarkable. It occurs thirty-three times in his Gospel and only three times in all the other three Gospels. Why our Lord is said to "testify" in this place is hard to see. We must suppose that it means He made an open, solemn declaration in a very impressive manner, like a witness bearing testimony to some great and unexpected fact.

[*Verily…shall betray me.*] The solemn "Amen, amen" here, as elsewhere, was calculated to arrest the attention of the disciples to the declaration our Lord was going to make. "One out of you (*i.e.*, out of your number) shall betray Me. My last and crowning trial draws near. I am about to bear a world's sins in my own body, on the tree. And painful as it is to say, the first step in the history of my passion shall be my betrayal by one of yourselves."

Let us note our Lord's thorough foreknowledge of all the details of His sufferings as well as of the great fact that He was about to be killed. 22.—[*Then the disciples looked at one another.*] The first effect of our Lord's declaration seems to have been silence. Like men stunned and amazed, the disciples looked at one another in astonishment. The thing announced was the last thing they expected hear.

[*Doubting of whom he spoke.*] The word "doubting" hardly conveys the full force of the Greek here. It is rather, as 2 Cor. 4:8, "perplexed," "puzzled."

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29.—[*For some of them thought, etc.*] This whole verse is interesting and throws light on some curious points. The statement that "Judas had the bag" shows the position he occupied among the Apostles. He was so far from being suspected that he had the charge of the common store of money. Bullinger even thinks that he must have been a man remarkable for wisdom, prudence, economy, and faithfulness. The supposition of some, that Jesus told Judas to "buy the things needed against the feast," shows clearly that our Lord did not work miracles in order to procure the necessaries required by Himself and His disciples. Christians must buy and sell like other

people and must manage their money affairs with prudence and economy. It shows how little the disciples realized that their Master's death was close at hand. The supposition of others, that Jesus told Judas to "give something to the poor," shows plainly what was our Lord's custom in the matter of almsgiving. He sanctified and adorned the practice of caring for the poor by His own example. This passage and Galatians 2:10 deserve careful consideration. It may be doubted whether the English Poor Law has not tended to shut up English almsgiving far more than is right before God. Let us mark the snares that attend the possession, fingering, and handling of money. The man who has care of the money in our Lord's little company of followers is the very man who makes shipwreck of his soul forever though the love of money. "Give me neither poverty nor riches" should be a Christian's frequent prayer. (Prov. 30:8.)

Bullinger points out that the possession of money is evidently not in itself sinful and wicked, and argues from the verse that the Romish mendicant friars and others who made a merit of self-imposed poverty are under a complete delusion. It is not the having but the misusing of money which is sinful.

30.—[He then…sop…immediately out.] The hasty departure of Judas as soon as our Lord had given him the morsel and spoken the remarkable words already commented on, may easily be explained. He saw at once that our Lord knew all his plot, and dreaded exposure. His conscience condemned him, and he dared no longer sit in our Lord's company. He, at any rate, understood what our Lord

meant if nobody else did. He felt himself detected and discovered, and for very shame got up and went away. It is curious and noteworthy that John, at all events, must have known Judas to be the traitor, and yet he seems to have said nothing. It seems very difficult to me to explain this part of the history of this memorable evening unless we admit that Judas Iscariot received the Lord's Supper with the other Apostles. From this point to the seizure of our Lord in the garden, the narrative flows on without break or interruption, and I cannot see any place at which the Lord's Supper can come in. I therefore hold strongly that Judas was actually a communicant. The subject is very fully discussed by Gerhard, who takes this view and confirms it by quotations from Cyprian, Jerome, Augustine, Chrysostom, Cyril of Jerusalem, Theodoret, Euthymius, Aquinas, Ferus, Toletus, Bellarmine, Jansenius, Baronius, Maldonatus, Calvin, Beza, Martyr, Bucer, and Whittaker. After all, the expression of Luke 22:21 appears to me unanswerable.

[*And it was night*.] This emphatic little sentence of course is not inserted without a meaning; but why, we are left to conjecture. Perhaps it was meant to show us that Judas purposely waited till darkness to accomplish his deed of darkness. "This is your hour, and the power of darkness" (Luke 22:53).

Perhaps it was meant to show that Judas slunk off at a time when nobody could see where he went, follow him, or observe his movements. Perhaps it was meant to show that the time was hastening on, and that our Lord had reason to say, "What you do, do

quickly." Perhaps it was only meant to mark the precise time when our Lord delivered the exquisite address of the next three chapters. St. John loves to mark time and places in his narrative.

One thing, at any rate, is very clear. The expression shows that the first Lord's Supper was not celebrated by day but by night. The objections to an evening sacrament commonly made by certain persons are really so untenable in the face of this passage that one marvels how men of common sense can make them.

JOHN 13:31-38

When Judas had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and he will glorify him right away. Children, I am still with you for a little while. You will look for me, and just as I said to the Jewish authorities, 'Where I am going you cannot come,' now I tell you the same."

"I give you a new commandment—to love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. Everyone will know by this that you are my disciples—if you have love for one another."

Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus replied, "Where I am going, you cannot follow me now, but you will follow later." Peter said to him, "Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you!" Jesus answered, "Will you lay down

your life for me? I tell you the solemn truth, the rooster will not crow until you have denied me three times!

In this passage we find the Lord Jesus at last alone with His eleven faithful disciples. The traitor, Judas Iscariot, had left the room, and gone out to do his wicked deed of darkness. Freed from his painful company, our Lord opens His heart to His little flock more fully than He had ever done before. Speaking to them for the last time before His passion, He begins a discourse which for touching interest surpasses any portion of Scripture.

These verses show us ***what glory the crucifixion brought both to God the Father and to God the Son.*** It seems impossible to avoid the conclusion that this was what our Lord had in His mind when He said, "Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in Him." It is as though He said, "The time of my crucifixion is at hand. My work on earth is finished. An event is about to take place tomorrow, which, however painful to you who love Me, is in reality most glorifying both to Me and My Father."

This was a dark and mysterious saying, and we may well believe that the eleven did not understand it. And no wonder! In all the agony of the death on the cross, in all the ignominy and humiliation which they saw afar off, or heard of next day, in hanging naked for six hours between two thieves—in all this there was no appearance of glory!—On the contrary, it was an event calculated to fill the minds of the Apostles with shame, disappointment, and dismay. And yet our Lord's saying was true.

The crucifixion brought glory to the FATHER. It glorified His wisdom, faithfulness, holiness, and love. It showed Him wise, in providing a plan whereby He could be just, and yet the Justifier of the ungodly. It showed Him faithful, in keeping His promise, that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. It showed Him holy, in requiring His law's demands to be satisfied by our great Substitute. It showed Him loving, in providing such a Mediator, such a Redeemer, and such a Friend for sinful man as His co-eternal Son.

The crucifixion brought glory to the SON. It glorified His compassion, His patience, and His power. It showed Him most compassionate, in dying for us, suffering in our stead, allowing Himself to be counted sin and a curse for us, and buying our redemption with the price of His own blood. It showed Him most patient, in not dying the common death of most men, but in willingly submitting to such horrors and unknown agonies as no mind can conceive, when with a word he could have summoned His Father's angels, and been set free. It showed Him most powerful, in bearing the weight of all a world's transgressions, and vanquishing Satan and despoiling him of his prey.

Forever let us cling to these thoughts about the crucifixion. Let us remember that painting and sculpture can never tell a tenth part of what took place on the cross. Crucifixes and pictures at best can only show us a human being agonizing in a painful death. But of the length and breadth and depth and height of the work transacted on the cross—of God's law honored, man's sins borne, sin punished in a

Substitute, free salvation bought for man—of all this they can tell nothing. Yet all this lies hid under the crucifixion. No wonder Paul cries, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Gal. 6:14.)

These verses show us, secondly, ***what great importance our Lord Jesus attaches to the grace of brotherly love.*** Almost as soon as the false Apostle had left the faithful eleven, comes the injunction, “Love one another.” Immediately after the sad announcement that He would leave them soon, the commandment is given, “Love one another.” It is called a “new” commandment, not because it had never been given before, but because it was to be more honored, to occupy a higher position, to be backed by a higher example than it ever had been before. Above all, it was to be the test of Christianity before the world. “By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another.”

Let us take heed that this well-known Christian grace is not merely a notion in our heads, but a practice in our lives. Of all the commands of our Master there is none which is so much talked about and so little obeyed as this. Yet, if we mean anything when we profess to have charity and love toward all men, it ought to be seen in our tempers and our words, our bearing and our doing, our behavior at home and abroad, our conduct in every relation of life. Specially it ought to show itself forth in all our dealing with other Christians. We should regard them as brethren and sisters, and delight to do anything to promote their happiness. We should abhor the idea of

envy, malice, and jealousy towards a member of Christ, and regard it as a downright sin. This is what our Lord meant when He told us to love one another.

Christ's cause in the earth would prosper far more than it does if this simple law was more honored. There is nothing that the world understands and values more than true charity. The very men who cannot comprehend doctrine, and know nothing of theology, can appreciate charity. It arrests their attention, and makes them think. For the world's sake, if for no other cause, let us follow after charity more and more.

These verses show us, lastly, ***how much self-ignorance there may be in the heart of a true believer.*** We see Simon Peter declaring that he was ready to lay down his life for his Master. We see his Master telling him that in that very night he would "deny Him three times." And we all know how the matter ended. The Master was right, and Peter was wrong.

Let it be a settled principle in our religion, that *there is an amount of weakness in all our hearts, of which we have no adequate conception, and that we never know how far we might fall if we were tempted.* We fancy sometimes, like Peter, that there are some things we could not possibly do. We look pitifully upon others who fall, and please ourselves in the thought that at any rate we would not have done so. We know nothing at all. The seeds of every sin are latent in our hearts, even when renewed, and they only need occasion, or carelessness and the withdrawal of God's grace for a

season, to put forth an abundant crop. Like Peter, we may think we can do wonders for Christ, and like Peter, we may learn by bitter experience that we have no power and might at all.

The servant of Christ will do wisely to remember these things. "Let him that thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall." (1 Cor. 10:12.) A humble sense of our own innate weakness, a constant dependence on the Strong for strength, a daily prayer to be held up, because we cannot hold up ourselves—these are the true secrets of safety. The great Apostle of the Gentiles said, "When I am weak, then I am strong." (2 Cor. 12:10.)

Technical Notes:

31. Therefore, when he had gone out, Jesus said, Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. 32. If God is glorified in him, God shall also glorify him in himself, and shall immediately glorify him. 33. Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek me; and as I said to the Jews, Where I am going, ye cannot come, so now I say to you. 34. A new commandment I give to you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. 35. By this shall all *men* know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love for one another. 36. Simon Peter said to him, Lord, where are you going? Jesus answered him, Where I am going, you cannot follow me now, but you shall follow me afterward. 37. Peter said to him, Lord, why cannot I follow you now? I will lay down my

life for your sake. 38. Jesus answered him, Will you lay down your life for my sake? Verily, verily, I say to you, the cock shall not crow till you have denied me thrice.

31.—[*Therefore…gone out, Jesus said.*] The withdrawal of Judas from the company of the disciples, at that point, forms a distinct break in the narrative. At once, from this time, our Lord seems to speak as one relieved by the absence of an uncongenial mind. There is a manifest alteration in the tone of all He says. It seems pitched in a higher key. Bengel, at this point, interposes an entire interval of a night and thinks that a new discourse begins here. It seems a needless view and is very unnatural.

[*Now is the Son of Man glorified, etc.*] This is a deep saying, and not least so because both the verbs are in the past tense. Literally rendered in each case, the verb should be "has been glorified." This is not an uncommon mode of speech. The glorification is so near, so certain, so complete that it is spoken of as a thing accomplished and even past. It was accomplished in purpose and in a few hours would be accomplished in reality. (So John 17:4.) The meaning of our Lord may probably be paraphrased thus: "Now has the time come that I, the Son of Man, should be glorified by actually dying as man's substitute and shedding my blood for the sins of the world. Now has the time come that God the Father should receive the highest glory by my sacrifice on the cross." Let it be noted that the Lord regards His own atoning death on the cross as the most glorious part of His work on earth; and that nothing so tends to glorify the Father's

attributes of justice, holiness, mercy, and faithfulness to His promises as the death of the Son. Let it be noted that the Lord does not speak of His death as a punishment, disgrace, or humiliation, but as an event most glorious—glorifying both to Himself and to the Father. So Christians should learn to "glory in the cross."

If we do not take this view and adhere to a strictly literal rendering of the verb glorified, as past, as Hengstenberg does, we must suppose it to mean, "Now at last, by my perfect righteousness in life and willingness to suffer in death, I, the Son of man, have received glory, and my Father at the same time has received glory through Me." But the other interpretation, taking the past tense for the present or future, is better. "The sacrifice has begun. The last act of my redeeming work—specially glorifying myself and my Father—has actually commenced or is commencing." Augustine and Ecolampadius hold that the expression, "Now is the Son of Man glorified," has a special reference to the glory that surrounds our Lord when the wicked are all put away from Him and He is attended only by saints. This peculiar glory was on Him when Judas Iscariot went out and left Him and His faithful disciples alone.

32.—[*If God be glorified in him, etc.*] This verse may be paraphrased as follows: "If God the Father be specially glorified in all His attributes by my death, He shall proceed at once to place special glory on Me for my personal work, and shall do it without delay by raising Me from the dead and placing Me at His right hand." It is like the famous passage in Philippians: "Wherefore God also has highly exalted Him." It is the same idea that we have in the 17th chapter

more fully: “I have glorified Thee on the earth; now, O Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine own self.” (Phil. 2:9, John 17:5.)

If the Son, on the one hand, specially glorifies the Father’s attributes of holiness, justice, and mercy by satisfying all His demands with His own precious blood on the cross, so, on the other hand, the Father specially glorifies the Son by exalting Him above all kings, raising Him from the dead, and giving Him a name above every name. “In Himself” must refer to that special and peculiar glory which, in the counsels of the blessed Trinity, is conferred on the Second Person on account of His incarnation, cross, and passion.

It is hardly needful to remind Christians that “if” does not imply any doubtfulness, but is rather equivalent to “since,” as in Col. 3:1: “If ye then be risen with Christ.” If anyone wishes to adhere rigidly to the past tense in the first “glorified” of this verse, it undoubtedly makes excellent meaning. “If God the Father has been glorified on the earth by my life and perfect obedience to His law, He will also glorify Me in my own person by raising Me from the dead and placing Me at His own right hand, and that very soon.” But I doubt this being the full meaning for the reasons given in the preceding verse.

The perfect harmony and cooperation of the Persons in the blessed Trinity shine out here. The Son glorifies the Father, and the Father glorifies the Son. The Son shows the world by His death how holy and just is the Father, and how He hates sin. The Father shows the world, by raising and exalting the Son to glory, how He delights in

the redemption for sinners which the Son has accomplished.

Chrysostom thinks that "immediately glorify Him" must refer to the special signs and wonders which appeared from the very time that our Lord was on the cross. "So the sun was darkened, the rocks rent, the veil of the temple parted, many bodies of the saints arose, the tomb had its seal, the guards sat by, and while a stone lay on the grave the body rose." Musculus remarks that here you have the great principle asserted which is always true: "Those who glorify God shall be glorified by God." 33.—[*Little children*.] This is the only time our Lord ever calls His disciples by this name. It was evidently a term of affection and compassion, like the language of a father speaking to children whom he is about to leave alone as orphans in the world. "My believing followers, whom I love and regard as my children."

Observe that the expression is not used till Judas has gone away.

Unbelievers are not to be addressed as Christ's children.

[*Yet a little while I am with you*.] This seems to mean: "I am only staying a very little longer with you. The time is short. The hour approaches when we must part. Give me your best attention while I talk to you for the last time before I go."

[*Ye shall seek Me*.] It is not quite clear what this means. Of course it cannot refer to the time after the resurrection, when the disciples were fully convinced that "the Lord had risen." Much less can it refer

to the time after the ascension. I can only suppose it means: "After my death ye shall be perplexed, amazed, and confounded for a little season, wanting Me, seeking Me, wishing for Me, and wondering where I am gone. The very moment the little child is left alone by mother or nurse, it begins to cry after her and want her. So will it be with you."

[*And as I said to the Jews, etc.*] This sentence can only mean: "The words that I said to the Jews will soon apply to you also, though in a very different sense. Where I am going you cannot follow Me. You will follow Me hereafter, but at present there is a gulf between us, and you will not see Me."

Of course, the words applied to the Jews meant that Jesus was going to a place where spiritually and morally the Jews were unfit to go, and in their impenitent state could not go. The words applied to the disciples only meant that Jesus was going into a world where they could not follow Him till they died. They were remaining on earth and He was going to heaven. Hengstenberg observes that this is the only place in which Jesus ever spoke to His disciples concerning "the Jews." Elsewhere He uses the expression in speaking to the Samaritan woman (John 4:22) and before Caiaphas and Pilate.

34.—[*A new commandment, etc.*] The immense importance of Christian love or charity cannot possibly be shown more strikingly than by the way it is urged on the disciples in this place. Here is our Lord leaving the world, speaking for the last time, and giving His last

charge to His disciples. The very first subject He takes up and presses on them is the great duty of loving one another; and that with no common love, but after the same patient, tender, unwearied manner that He has loved them. Love must needs be a very rare and important grace to be so spoken of! The lack of it must needs be a plain proof that a man is no true disciple of Christ. How vast the extent of Christian love ought to be! The measure and standard of it is the love wherewith Christ loved us. His was a love even to death. Melancthon points out our Lord's great desire to promote unity and concord among professing Christians by His dwelling so much on love before He left the world.

Why did our Lord call love a "new" commandment? This is a rather difficult question and has called forth great variety of opinions. One thing only is very clear: Jesus did not mean to say that "love" was a grace peculiar to the Gospel and was nowhere taught in the law of Moses. To say this is a mark of great ignorance. The point is set at rest by the words in Lev. 19:18: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." What then does this word "new" mean?

Some think, as Chrysostom, that our Lord refers to the degree with which Christians should love—even as He had loved them. This was a new and higher standard than had been yet known. Hitherto, as Cyril says, men were to love others as themselves. Now they were to love them more than themselves. Some think that our Lord refers to the great duty of Christians to love one another and cling to one another with a special and peculiar love, over and above the love they had

generally to all mankind. This was in a sense a novelty. Some think that our Lord only meant that He renewed and recreated the great law of love and raised it to so much higher a position than it had ever held among the Jews, that it might be truly called a "new commandment." The parable of the good Samaritan shows how little the Jews realized the duty of loving their neighbors. He had in view the utter neglect into which the law of love had fallen among Jewish teachers like the Pharisees, and, like Isaac digging the earth out of the old well, would give the law a second beginning, as if it were new. Some, as Maldonatus and Suicer, think that the expression is only a Hebraism and that "new," "rare," and "excellent" are synonymous. Thus a new name, a new song, a new wine. (Rev. 2:17, Ps. 96:1, Matt. 26:29.) Perhaps there is something in each and all of these views. One thing is very certain: nothing could exalt the value of love so highly as to call it a "new commandment."

Scott observes that the law of love to others "was now to be explained with new clearness, enforced by new motives and obligations, illustrated by a new example, and obeyed in a new manner."

35.—[*By this shall all men know, etc.*] There can be no mistake about these words. Love was to be the grand characteristic, the distinguishing mark of Christ's disciples.

Let us note that our Lord does not name gifts, miracles, or intellectual attainments as the evidence of discipleship, but love—the simple grace of love—a grace within reach of the poorest, lowliest believer. No love, no grace, no regeneration, no true Christianity!

Musculus observes, with withering scorn, how little likeness there is between our Lord's mark of discipleship and the dresses, beads, fasting's, and self-imposed austerities of the Church of Rome. Let us note what a heavy condemnation this verse pronounces on sectarianism, bigotry, narrow-mindedness, party-spirit, strife, bitterness, needless controversy between Christian and Christian. Let us note how far from satisfactory is the state of those who are content with sound doctrinal opinions and orthodox correct views of the Gospel while in their daily life they give way to ill temper, ill nature, malice, envy, quarreling, squabbling, bickering, surliness, passion, snappish language, and crossness of word and manner. Such persons, whether they know it or not, are daily proclaiming that they are not Christ's disciples. It is nonsense to talk about justification, regeneration, election, conversion, and the uselessness of works unless people can see in us practical Christian love.

Whitby remarks that in the primitive ages the mutual love of Christians was notorious among heathens. "See how these Christians love one another" was a common saying, according to Tertullian. Even Julian the apostate proposed them to the heathen as a pattern in this respect.

36.—[*Simon Peter…where are you going?*] Here, as elsewhere, the forward, impulsive spirit of Peter prompts him to ask anxiously what our Lord meant by talking of going. "Where are you going?" Can we doubt, however, that in this question he was the spokesman

of all?

How very little the disciples had ever comprehended our Lord's repeated saying that He must be taken prisoner, crucified, and die, we see in this place. Often as He had told them He must die, they had never realized it and are startled when He talks of going away. It is amazing how much religious teaching men may have and yet not take it in, receive or believe it, especially when it contradicts preconceived notions.

[*Jesus answered him, etc.*] Our Lord graciously explains here a part of His meaning. He does not explicitly tell Peter where He is going; but He tells him He is going to a place where Peter cannot follow Him now during his lifetime, but will follow Him after his death, at a future date. It is not unlikely, as Cyril observes, that these words, "You shall follow Me," pointed to the manner of Peter's death by crucifixion. He was to walk in his Master's steps and enter heaven by the same road.

37.—[Peter said…follow you now, etc.] This question shows how little Peter realized what our Lord fully meant, and the nearness of His death on the cross. "Why cannot I follow You now? Where is the place You are going to on earth where I am not willing and ready to follow You? I love You so much and am so determined to cling to You, that I am ready to lay down my life rather than be separate from You." These words were well meant, and Peter never doubted, perhaps, that he could stand to them. But he did not know his own

heart. There was more feeling than principle in his declaration. He did not see all that was in himself.

Let us note the mischief of self-ignorance. Let us pray for humility. Let us beware of over-confidence in our own courage and steadfastness. Pride goes before a fall.

38.—[*Jesus answered him, Will you lay, etc.*] Our Lord's meaning appears to be: "Will you really and truly lay down your life for Me? You little know your own weakness and feebleness. I tell you in the most solemn answer that this very night, before the cock crows, before sunrise, you, even you, will deny three times that you know Me. So far from laying down your life, you will try to save your life by cowardly denying that you have anything to do with Me."

Let us note the wonderful foreknowledge of our Lord. What an unlikely thing it seemed that such a professor should fall so far and so soon. Yet our Lord foresaw it all!

Let us note the wonderful kindness and condescension of Jesus. He knew perfectly well the weakness and feebleness of His chief disciple and yet never rejected him, and even raised him again after his fall. Christians should be men of pity and tender feelings toward weak brethren. Their inconsistencies may be very great and provoking, but we must never forget our Lord's dealing with Simon Peter.

John – Chap. 14

JOHN 14:1-3

Jesus' Parting Words to His Disciples

"Do not let your hearts be distressed. You believe in God; believe also in me. There are many dwelling places in my Father's house. Otherwise, I would have told you. I am going away to make ready a place for you. And if I go and make ready a place for you, I will come again and take you to be with me, so that where I am you may be too.

The three verses we have now read are rich in precious truth. For eighteen centuries they have been peculiarly dear to Christ's believing servants in every part of the world. Many are the sick rooms which they have lightened! Many are the dying hearts which they have cheered! Let us see what they contain.

We have, first, in this passage ***a precious remedy against an old disease.*** That disease is trouble of heart. That remedy is faith.

Heart-trouble is the commonest thing in the world. No rank, or class, or condition is exempt from it. No bars, or bolts, or locks can keep it out. Partly from inward causes and partly from outward causes—partly from the body and partly from the mind—partly from what we love and partly from what we fear, the journey of life is full of trouble. Even the best of Christians have many bitter cups to drink

between grace and glory. Even the holiest saints find the world a valley of tears.

Faith in the Lord Jesus is the only sure medicine for troubled hearts. To believe more thoroughly, trust more entirely, rest more unreservedly, lay hold more firmly, lean back more completely—this is the prescription which our Master urges on the attention of all His disciples. No doubt the members of that little band which sat round the table at the last supper, had believed already. They had proved the reality of their faith by giving up everything for Christ's sake. Yet what does their Lord say to them here? Once more He presses on them the old lesson, the lesson with which they first began—"Believe! Believe more! Believe on Me!" (Isaiah. 26:3.)

Never let us forget that there are degrees in faith, and that there is a wide difference between weak and strong believers. The weakest faith is enough to give a man a saving interest in Christ, and ought not to be despised, but it will not give a man such inward comfort as a strong faith. Vagueness and dimness of perception are the defect of weak believers. They do not see clearly what they believe and why they believe. In such cases more faith is the one thing needed. Like Peter on the water, they need to look more steadily at Jesus, and less at the waves and wind. Is it not written, "You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You"? (Isaiah. 26:3.)

We have, secondly, in this passage ***a very comfortable account of heaven, or the future abode of saints.*** It is but little that we understand about heaven while we are here in the body,

and that little is generally taught us in the Bible by negatives much more than positives. But here, at any rate, there are some plain things.

Heaven is “a Father’s house,”—the house of that God of whom Jesus says, “I go to my Father, and your Father.” It is, in a word, HOME—the home of Christ and Christians. This is a sweet and touching expression. Home, as we all know, is the place where we are generally loved for our own sakes, and not for our gifts or possessions; the place where we are loved to the end, never forgotten, and always welcome. This is one idea of heaven. Believers are in a strange land, and at school, in this life. In the life to come they will be at home.

Heaven is a place of “MANSIONS”—of lasting, permanent, and eternal dwellings. Here in the body we are in temporary lodgings, tents, and tabernacles, and must submit to many changes. In heaven we shall be settled at last, and go out no more. “Here we have no continuing city.” (Heb. 13:14.) Our house not made with hands shall never be taken down.

Heaven is a place of “MANY mansions.” There will be room for all believers and room for all sorts, for little saints as well as great ones, for the weakest believer as well as for the strongest. The feeblest child of God need not fear there will be no place for him. None will be shut out but impenitent sinners and obstinate unbelievers.

Heaven is a place where CHRIST HIMSELF SHALL BE PRESENT. He will not be content to dwell without His people—"Where I am, there you shall be also." We need not think that we shall be alone and neglected. Our Savior—our elder Brother—our Redeemer, who loved us and gave Himself for us, shall be in the midst of us forever. *What* we shall see, and *whom* we shall see in heaven, we cannot fully conceive yet, while we are in the body. But one thing is certain—we shall see Christ.

Let these things sink down into our minds. To the worldly and careless they may seem nothing at all. To all who feel in themselves the working of the Spirit of God they are full of unspeakable comfort. If we hope to be in heaven it is pleasant to know what heaven is like.

We have, lastly, in this passage ***a solid ground for expecting good things to come.*** The evil heart of unbelief within us is apt to rob us of our comfort about heaven. "We wish we could think it was all true." "We fear we shall never be admitted into heaven." Let us hear what Jesus says to encourage us.

One cheering word is this— "I go to PREPARE a place for you." Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people—a place which we shall find Christ Himself has made ready for true Christians. He has prepared it by procuring a right for every sinner who believes to enter in. None can stop us, and say we have no business there. He has prepared it by going before us as our Head and Representative, and taking possession of it for all the members of His mystical body. As our Forerunner He has marched in, leading captivity captive, and

has planted His banner in the land of glory. He has prepared it by carrying our names with Him as our High Priest into the holy of holies, and making angels ready to receive us. Those who enter heaven will find they are neither unknown nor unexpected.

Another cheering word is this— "I will come again and receive you unto myself." Christ will not wait for believers to come up to Him, but will come down to them, to raise them from their graves and escort them to their heavenly home. As Joseph came to meet Jacob, so will Jesus come to call His people together and guide them to their inheritance. The second advent ought never to be forgotten. Great is the blessedness of looking back to Christ coming the first time to suffer for us, but no less great is the comfort of looking forward to Christ coming the second time, to raise and reward His saints.

Let us leave the whole passage with solemnized feelings and serious self-examination. How much they miss who live in a dying world and yet know nothing of God as their Father and Christ as their Savior! How much they possess who live the life of faith in the Son of God, and believe in Jesus! With all their weaknesses and crosses they have that which the world can neither give nor take away. They have a true Friend while they live, and a true home when they die.

Technical Notes:

1. Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me. 2. In my father's house are many mansions; if *it were* not *so*, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. 3. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to myself; that where I am, *there* ye may be also.

1.—[*Let not…troubled.*] We must carefully remember that there is no break between the end of the 13th and beginning of the 14th chapters. Our Lord is continuing the discourse He began after the Lord's Supper and the departure of Judas, in the presence of the eleven faithful disciples. A slight pause there certainly seems to be, since He turns from Peter (to whom He had been speaking individually) to the whole body of the Apostles and addresses them collectively. But the place, the time, and the audience are all one.

Our Lord's great object throughout this and the two following chapters seems clear and plain. He desired to comfort, establish, and build up His downcast disciples. He saw their "hearts were troubled" from a variety of causes—partly by seeing their Master "troubled in Spirit" (13:21), partly by hearing that one of them should betray Him, partly by the mysterious departure of Judas, partly by their Master's announcement that He should only be a little time longer with them and that at last they could not come with Him, and partly by the warning addressed to Peter that he would deny His Master three times. For all these reasons this little company of weak believers was disquieted and cast down and anxious. Their gracious Master saw it

and proceeded to give them encouragement: “Let not your heart be troubled.” It will be noted that He uses the singular number “your heart,” not “your hearts.” He means “the heart of any one of you.” Hengstenberg gives the following list of the grounds of comfort which the chapter contains, in systematic order, which well deserves attention.

(a) The first encouragement is: to the disciples of Christ heaven is sure (v.2,3).

(b) The second encouragement is: disciples in Christ have a certain way to heaven (v.4-11).

(c) The third encouragement is: disciples need not fear that with the departure of Christ His work will cease (v.12-14).

(d) The fourth encouragement is: in the absence of Christ disciples will have the help of the Spirit (v.15-17).

(e) The fifth encouragement is: Christ will not leave His people forever, but will come back again (v.18-24).

(f) The sixth encouragement is: the Spirit will teach the disciples and supply their lack of understanding when left alone (v.25,26).

(g) Finally, the seventh encouragement is: the legacy of peace will be left to cheer them in their Master’s absence (v.27). These seven points are well worthy the attention of all believers in every age and are as useful now as when first pressed on the eleven.

Lightfoot thinks one principal cause of the disciples' trouble was their disappointment at seeing their Jewish expectations of a temporal kingdom under a temporal Messiah failing and coming to an end.

[*Ye believe in God, believe also in me.*] The Gospel words rendered "Ye believe" and "believe" in this place admit of being differently translated, and it is impossible to say certainly whether our English version is right. Some, as Luther, think both words should be indicative: "ye believe and ye believe." Some think both should be imperative: "believe and believe." My own opinion is decided that the English version is right. It seems to me to express exactly the state of mind in which the disciples were. They did, as pious Jews, believe in God already. They needed, as young Christians, to be taught to believe more thoroughly in Christ. Among those who think that both verbs are imperative are Cyril, Augustine, Lampe, Stier, Hengstenberg, and Alford. Among those who adhere to our English version and make the first "believe" indicative and the second imperative, are Erasmus, Beza, Grotius, and Olshausen. Let us note that faith, and specially more strong and distinct faith in Christ, is the truest remedy for trouble of heart. But we must never forget that true faith admits of growth and degrees. There is a wide gulf between little and great faith.

Ferus remarks that our Lord does not say "Believe my divinity," but "Believe personally in Me." Toletus observes that our Lord here

teaches that Jewish faith was somewhat distinct from Christian faith. The Jew, not seeing clearly the Trinity, dwelt chiefly on the unity of God. The Christian was intended to see three Persons in the Godhead.

Wordsworth remarks that the verb "to believe" followed by a preposition and an accusative, is never applied to any but God in the New Testament.

2.—[*In my Father's house.*] This phrase can bear only one meaning. It is my Father's house in Heaven—an expression accommodated to our weakness. God needs no literal house with walls and roof, as we do. But where He dwells is called His house. (See Deut. 26:15, Ps. 33:14, 2 Chr. 38:27, 2 Cor. 5:1.) There is something very touching and comforting in the thought that the heaven we go to is "our Father's house." It is home.

[*Are many mansions.*] The word rendered "mansions" means literally "abiding-places." It is only used here, and in the 23rd verse of this chapter, "abode." We need not doubt that there is an intentional contrast between the unchanging, unvarying house in heaven and the changing, uncertain dwellings of this world. Here we are ever moving; there we shall no more go out. (See also Heb. 13:14.)

Our Lord's intention seems to be to comfort His disciples by the thought that nothing could cast them out of the heavenly house. They

might be left alone by Him on earth; they might be even cast out of the Jewish Church and find no resting place or refuge on earth. But there would be always room enough for them in heaven and a house from which they would never be expelled. “Fear not. There is room enough in heaven.” Chrysostom, Augustine, and several other ancient writers think the “many mansions” mean the degrees of glory. But the argument in favor of the idea does not appear to me satisfactory. Bishop Bull, Wordsworth, and some few modern writers take the same view. That there are degrees of glory in heaven is undoubtedly true, but I do not think it is the truth of this text.

The modern idea that our Lord meant that heaven was a place for all sorts of creeds and religions seems utterly unwarranted by the text. From the whole context He is evidently speaking for the special comfort of Christians.

Lightfoot’s idea, that our Lord meant to teach the passing away of the Jewish economy and the admission of all nations into heaven by faith in Christ, seems fanciful.

[*If it were not so…you.*] This is a gracious way of assuring the disciples that they might have confidence that what their Lord said was true. It is the tender manner of a parent speaking to a child. “Do not be afraid because I am leaving you. There is plenty of room for you in heaven. You will get there safe at last. If there was the least uncertainty about it, I would tell you.” We may remember that our Lord called the Apostles “little children” only a few minutes before

(John 13:33).

[*I go to prepare a place for you.*] This sentence is meant to be another ground of comfort. One of the reasons why our Lord went away, He says, was to get ready a dwelling place for His disciples. It is like the expression in Hebrews, "the forerunner." (Heb. 6:20; see also Num. 10:33.) The manner in which Christ prepares a place for His people is mysterious and yet not inexplicable. He enters heaven as their High Priest, presenting the merit of his sacrifice for their sins. He removes all barriers that sin made between them and God. He appears as their proxy and representative and claims a right of entry for all His believing members. He intercedes continually for them at God's right hand and makes them always acceptable in Himself, though unworthy in themselves. He bears their names mystically, as the High Priest, on His breast and introduces them to the court of heaven before they get there. That heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people is a very cheering and animating thought. When we arrive there we shall not be in a strange land. We shall find we have been known and thought of before we got there.

3.—[And if I go...receive you to myself.] These words contain another strong consolation. Our Lord tells the disciples that if He does go away, they must not think it is forever. He means to come again and take them all home and gather them round Him in one united family, to part no more. Poole remarks: "The particle 'if' in this place denotes no uncertainty of the thing but has the force of 'although' or 'after that.'" (See also Col. 3:1.)

Many think, as Stier, that the "coming again" here spoken of means Christ's coming to His disciples after His resurrection, or Christ's coming spiritually to His people in comfort and help even now, or Christ's coming to remove them at last by death. I cannot think so. I believe that, as a rule, when Christ speaks of *coming again* both here and elsewhere, He means His own personal second advent at the end of the dispensation. The Greek word rendered "I will come" is in the present tense and the same that is used in Rev. 22:20: "I come quickly." The first and second advents are the two great events to which the minds of all Christians should be directed. This is Cyril's view of the passage and Bishop Hall's. [*That where I am, there ye may be also.*] Here is one more comfort. The final end of Christ's going away and coming again is that at last His disciples may be once more with Him and enjoy His company forever. "We part; but we shall meet again and part no more." Let us note that one of the simplest, plainest ideas of heaven is here. It is being "ever with the Lord." Whatever else we see or do not see in heaven, we shall see Christ. Whatever kind of a place, it is a place where Christ is. (Phil. 1:23, 1 Thess. 4:17.)

JOHN 14:4-11

"And you know the way where I am going." Thomas said, "Lord, we don't know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus replied, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you have known me, you

will know my Father too. And from now on you do know him and have seen him."

Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be content." Jesus replied, "Have I been with you for so long, and you have not known me, Philip? The person who has seen me has seen the Father! How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you, I do not speak on my own initiative, but the Father residing in me performs his miraculous deeds. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father is in me, but if you do not believe me, believe because of the miraculous deeds themselves."

We should mark in these verses ***how much better Jesus speaks of believers than they speak of themselves.*** He says to His disciples, "You know where I go, and you know the way." And yet Thomas at once breaks in with the remark, "We know neither the where nor the way." The apparent contradiction demands explanation. It is more seeming than real.

Certainly, in one point of view, the knowledge of the disciples was very small. They knew little before the crucifixion and resurrection compared to what they might have known, and little compared to what they afterwards knew after the day of Pentecost. About our Lord's purpose in coming into the world, about His sacrificial death and substitution for us on the cross, their ignorance was glaring and great. It might well be said, that they "knew in part" only, and were children in understanding.

And yet, in another point of view, the knowledge of the disciples was very great. They knew far more than the great majority of the Jewish nation, and received truths which the Scribes and Pharisees entirely rejected. Compared to the world around them, they were in the highest sense enlightened. They knew and believed that their Master was the promised Messiah, the Son of the living God; and to know Him was the first step towards heaven. All things go by comparison. Before we lightly esteem the disciples because of their ignorance, let us take care that we do not underrate their knowledge. They knew more precious truth than they were aware of themselves. Their hearts were better than their heads.

The plain truth is, that all believers are apt to undervalue the work of the Spirit in their own souls, and to fancy they know nothing because they do not know everything. Many true Christians are thought more of in heaven while they live, than they think of themselves, and will find it out to their surprise at the last day. There is One above who takes far more account of heart knowledge than head-knowledge. Many go mourning all the way to heaven because they know so little, and fancy they will miss the way altogether, and yet have hearts with which God is well pleased.

We should mark, secondly, in these verses, ***what glorious names the Lord Jesus gives Himself.*** He says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." The fullness of these precious words can probably never be taken in by man. He that attempts to unfold them does little more than scratch the surface of a rich soil.

Christ is “the WAY,”—the way to heaven and peace with God. He is not only the guide, and teacher, and lawgiver, like Moses; He is Himself the door, the ladder, and the road, through whom we must draw near to God. He has opened the way to the tree of life, which was closed when Adam and Eve fell, by the satisfaction He made for us on the cross. Through His blood we may draw near with boldness, and have access with confidence into God’s presence.

Christ is “the TRUTH,”—the whole substance of true religion which the mind of man requires. Without Him the wisest heathen groped in gross darkness and knew nothing about God. Before He came even the Jews saw “through a glass darkly,” and discerned nothing distinctly under the types, figures, and ceremonies of the Mosaic law. Christ is the whole truth, and meets and satisfies every desire of the human mind.

Christ is “the LIFE,”—the sinner’s title to eternal life and pardon, the believer’s root of spiritual life and holiness, the surety of the Christian’s resurrection life. He that believes on Christ has everlasting life. He that abides in Him, as the branch abides in the vine, shall bring forth much fruit. He that believes on Him, though he were dead, yet shall he live. The root of all life, for soul and for body, is Christ.

Forever let us grasp and hold fast these truths. To use Christ daily as the way, to believe Christ daily as the truth—to live on Christ daily as the life, this is to be a well-informed, a thoroughly furnished and an established Christian.

We should mark, thirdly, in these verses, ***how expressly the Lord Jesus shuts out all ways of salvation but Himself.*** "No man," He declares, "No man comes unto the Father but by Me."

It avails nothing that a man is clever, learned, highly gifted, amiable, charitable, kind-hearted, and zealous about some sort of religion. All this will not save his soul if he does not draw near to God by Christ's atonement, and make use of God's own Son as his Mediator and Savior. *God is so holy* that all men are guilty and debtors in His sight. *Sin is so sinful* that no mortal man can make satisfaction for it. There must be a mediator, a ransom-payer, a redeemer, between ourselves and God, or else we can never be saved. There is only one door, one bridge, one ladder, between earth and heaven—the crucified Son of God. Whoever will enter in by that door may be saved; but to him who refuses to use that door the Bible holds out, no hope at all. Without shedding of blood there is no remission.

Let us beware, if we love life, of supposing that mere earnestness will take a man to heaven, though he knows nothing of Christ. The idea is a deadly and ruinous error. Sincerity will never wipe away our sins. It is not true that every man will be saved by his own religion, no matter what he believes, so long as he is diligent and sincere. We must not pretend to be wiser than God. Christ has said, and Christ will stand to it, "No man comes unto the Father but by Me."

We should mark, lastly, in these verses, ***how close and mysterious is the union of God the Father and God the Son.*** Four times over this mighty truth is put before us in words that

cannot be mistaken. “If you had known Me, you would have known my Father.” “He that has seen Me has seen the Father.” “I am in the Father, and the Father in Me.” “The Father that dwells in Me, He does the works.”

Sayings like these are full of deep mystery. We have no *eyes* to see their meaning fully—no *line* to fathom it—no *language* to express it—no mind to take it in. We must be content to believe when we cannot explain, and to admire and revere when we cannot interpret. Let it suffice us to know and hold that the Father is God and the Son is God, and yet that they are one in essence though two distinct Persons—ineffably one, and yet ineffably distinct. These are high things, and we cannot attain to a full comprehension of them.

Let us however take comfort in the simple truth, that Christ is very God of very God; equal with the Father in all things, and One with Him. He who loved us, and shed His blood for us on the cross, and bids us trust Him for pardon, is no mere man like ourselves. He is “God over all, blessed forever,” and able to save to the uttermost the chief of sinners. Though our sins be as scarlet, He can make them white as snow. He that casts his soul on Christ has an Almighty Friend—a Friend who is One with the Father, and very God.

Technical Notes:

4. And where I go ye know, and the way ye know. 5. Thomas said to him, Lord, we do not know where you are going, and how can we know the way? 6. Jesus said to him,

I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father but by me. 7. If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also; and from now on ye know him and have seen him. 8. Philip said to him, Lord, show us the Father, and it suffices us. 9. Jesus said to him, Have I been with you so long, and yet have you not known me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father; so how can you say, Show us the Father? 10. Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I speak to you I speak not of myself; but the Father who dwells in me, he does the works. 11. Believe me that I *am* in the Father and the Father in me, or else believe me for the sake of the works themselves.

4.—[*And where I go…ye know*.] This remarkable sentence was evidently meant to stir and cheer the disciples by reminding them of what their Master had repeatedly told them. It is as though our Lord said, "Do not be cast down by my going away, as if you had never heard Me say anything about heaven and the way to heaven. Awake from your despondency, stir up your memories. Surely you know, if you reflect a little, that I have often told you all about it." Is it not, again, like a tender parent saying to a frightened child, who says he knows not what to do and is ready to sit down in despair, "Come, you know well enough, if you will only consider"? Poole observes on this verse: "It is pleasant to notice how Christ continues His discourse to the disciples like a mother speaking to a little child crying after her when she prepares to go abroad. The child cries; the mother bids it

be still for she is only going to a friend's house. It still cries; she tells it she is only going to prepare a place for it there, where it will be much happier than at home. It is not yet satisfied; she tells it again that though she goes, she will come again and then it shall go with her and she will part from it no more. The child is yet impatient; she endeavors to still it, telling it that it knows where she is going and it knows the way by which, if need be, it may come to her."

Let us note that disciples often know more than they suppose or admit, but do not use their knowledge or keep it ready for use. Ferus compares them to infants lying in their cradles who have fathers and fortunes but do not know it.

Let us note that Christ looks graciously on the little knowledge His people possess, and make the most of it. He can make allowance for their minds being clouded by grief or trouble and their consequent forgetfulness of truth for a season.

5.—[*Thomas said to Him, etc.*] This verse shows how foolishly a disciple may talk under the influence of despondency. Here is one of the eleven faithful Apostles declaring flatly that they neither knew where their Master was going nor the way! The saying is characteristic of the man. Thomas always appears a doubting, slow-minded believer. But we must not judge disciples too sharply for words spoken under deep distress. When the passions and affections are much stirred, the tongue often runs away with a man and he speaks unadvisedly. Nor must we forget that disciples have very

different gifts. All have not equally strong faith, clear understanding, and good memory.

Trapp quaintly remarks that believers in the frame of Thomas are like people who hunt for their keys and purses when they have them in their pockets.

6.—[*Jesus said…and the life.*] This wonderful saying is a brilliant example of a foolish remark calling out a great truth from our Lord's lips. To the ill-natured remark of the Pharisees we owe the parable of the Prodigal Son (see Luke chapter 15); to the fretful complaint of Thomas we owe one of the grandest texts in Scripture. It is one of those deep utterances, which no exposition can thoroughly unfold and exhaust. When our Lord says "I am the way," He means, "the Father's house is to be reached through my mediation and atonement. Faith in Me is the key to heaven. He who believes in Me is on the right road." When our Lord says "I am the truth," He means, "The root of all knowledge is to know Me. I am the true Messiah to whom all revelation points, the truth of which the Old Testament ceremonies and sacrifices were a figure and shadow. He who really knows Me knows enough to take him safely to heaven, though he may not know many things and may be troubled at his own ignorance."

When our Lord says "I am the life," He means, "I am the Root and Fountain of all life in religion, the Redeemer from death and the Giver of everlasting life. He who knows and believes in Me, however weak and ignorant he may feel, has spiritual life now and will have a

glorious life in my Father's house hereafter."

Some think that the three great words in this sentence should be taken together and that our Lord meant, "I am the true and living way." Yet the general opinion of the best commentators is decidedly unfavorable to this view of the sentence. To my own mind, it cuts down and impoverishes a great and deep saying.
Musculus remarks that no prophet, teacher, or apostle ever used such words as these. They are the language of one who knew that He was God.

[*No man comes to the Father but by Me*.] Here our Lord teaches that He is not merely the way to our Father's home in heaven, but that there is no other way, and that men must either go to heaven by His atonement or not go there at all. It is a clear distinct limitation of heaven to those who believe on Christ. None else will enter in there. Rejecting Christ, they lose all.

We should mark carefully what an unanswerable argument this sentence supplies against the modern notion that it does not matter what a man believes—that all religions will lead men to heaven if they are sincere, that creeds and doctrines are of no importance, that heaven is a place for all mankind (whether heathen, Mahometan, or Christian), and that the Fatherhood of God is enough to save all at last of all sects, kinds, and characters! Our Lord's words should never be forgotten: "There is no way to the Father but by Me." God is a Father to none but those who believe in Christ. In short, there are

not many ways to heaven. There is only one way.

“Coming to the Father” in this place, we must remark, includes not only coming to Him in glory at the last, but coming to Him in a friendly relation for peace and comfort now in this life.

“By Me” is literally “through” Me—as a door, gate, road, path, entrance. It is an expression which would be peculiarly expressive to the Jews who were taught from their childhood to draw near to God only through the priests.

7.—[*If…known my Father also.*] This is a deep saying, like every saying which handles the mysterious union of the Father and the Son in St. John’s Gospel. The meaning seems to be: “If you had rightly, properly, and perfectly known Me as the Divine Messiah in all the fulness of my nature, you would then have known more of that Father to whom I am inseparably united. No one can rightly know Me without knowing the Father, because I and the Father are One.”

[*And from now on…seen him.*] The meaning of these words seems to be: “Understand from this time forward that in knowing Me you know the Father, and in seeing Me see the Father, so far as the Father can be seen and known by man.” Although the Son and the Father are two distinct persons in the Trinity, yet there is so close and mysterious a union between them that he who sees and knows the Son, in a certain sense, sees and knows the Father. Is it not written of the Son that “He is the express image of the Father”?

(Heb. 1:2.)

The whole difficulty of the verse arises from the extreme mysteriousness of its subject. The relation between the eternal Father and the eternal Son and the eternal Spirit, who, while three Persons are one God, is precisely one of those things that we have no minds to take in and no language to express. We must often be content to believe and reverence it without attempting to explain it. This only we may lay down with certainty as a great canon and maxim: the more we know of Christ, "the more we know of the Father."

8.—[Philip said…show us…suffices us.] We are not told Philip's motive in making this request. Perhaps, like Moses, he and the other disciples had a pious desire to see a more full vision and revelation of God's glory as an authenticatı0on of their Master's Divine mission. "Show me Thy glory" (Ex. 33:18). Perhaps Philip's petition is recorded to show how little clear knowledge the Apostles yet had of their Master's nature, and how little they realized that He and the Father were one. "If we could only see once for all the Divine Being whom You call the Father, it would be sufficient. We should be satisfied and our doubts would be removed." At any rate, we have no right to think that Philip spoke like the unbelieving Jews, who always pretended to want signs and wonders. Whatever sense we put on the words, we must carefully remember not to judge Philip too harshly. Living as we do in the nineteenth century, amidst light and creeds and knowledge, we can have faint ideas of the extreme difficulty that

must have been felt by the disciples in fully realizing their Master's nature in the days where He was "in the form of a Servant" and under a veil of poverty, weakness, and humiliation.

Melancthon remarks that Philip's petition represents the natural wish of man in every age. Men everywhere feel an inward craving to see God.

9.—[Jesus said...not known me, Philip?] This verse is undoubtedly a gentle rebuke. The expression "so long time" is noteworthy when we remember that Philip was one of the very first disciples whom Jesus called. (See John 1:43.) The meaning seems to be, "After three long years, Philip, do you not yet thoroughly know and understand who I am?" [*He who has seen me has seen the Father.*] This deep sentence can only mean, "He who has thoroughly seen me with the eye of faith and realized that I am the eternal Son, the Divine Messiah, has seen as much of my Father, whose express image I am, as mortal man can comprehend." There is so close and intimate a union between persons in the Trinity that he who sees the Son sees the Father. And yet we must carefully beware that we do not, like some heretics, "confound the Persons." The Father is not the Son, and the Son is not the Father.

Musculus observes that to see with bodily eyes is one thing, and to see with the eyes of faith quite another.

[*So how…show us the Father?*] This question is a further gentle rebuke of Philip's ignorance. "What do you mean by saying, Show us the Father? What clear knowledge of Me can you have if you can ask such a question?" Let us note how Jesus calls Philip by name. It was doubtless meant to prick his conscience. "You, Philip, an old disciple, so ignorant! Ought not you, after following and hearing Me for three years, to have known better than this?"

10.—[*Do you not believe, etc.*] This question continues the rebuke to Philip. It means: "Do you not yet believe and realize what I have taught— that there is a mystical union between Me and the Father, and that He is in Me and I in Him?"

This question surely seems to indicate that our Lord had often taught His disciples about the union between Himself and the Father. But, like many of the things He taught, the mighty truth passed over their heads at first and was not remembered till afterward. How little reason have ministers to complain if their teaching is little regarded when this was Christ's experience!

[The words that I speak… Father…he does the works.] There can be little doubt that this is a very elliptical sentence. The full meaning must be supplied in this way: "The words that I speak to you, I speak not independently of the Father; and the works that I do, I do not do them independently of the Father. The Father who dwells in Me speaks in Me and works in Me. My words are words given Me to speak, and my works are works given Me to do, in the eternal counsel

between the Father and the Son. Both in speaking and working I and my Father are one. What I speak He speaks, and what I work He works."

The whole difficulty of the verse arises from forgetting the close and mysterious and insoluble union between the Persons of the Trinity. How little we realize the fulness of the expression, "The Father dwells in Me."

11.—[Believe Me... Father in Me.] Direct instruction follows the rebuke of the preceding verse. Our Lord repeats for the benefit not of Philip only but of all the eleven, the great doctrine He had so often taught them. "Once more I say, Believe, all of you, my words when I say that I and the Father are so closely united that I am in Him and He in Me." The word rendered "believe" in this verse is in the plural number. Our Lord does not address Philip only but the whole company of the Apostles. What an example we have here of the necessity of repeating instruction over and over again. Our Lord had evidently taught these things before to the eleven, and yet they had either not understood or not remembered.

[*Or else believe me, etc.*] Here our Lord condescends to the weakness of the disciples. "If you will not believe the close union of Myself and the Father because of my word, believe it because of the works I work. They are such works as no one could work of himself, and without the Father." Let us carefully observe how our Lord here, as elsewhere, specially names His works, or miracles, as testimonies

of His nature and Divine mission. To leave out miracles in the list of the evidences of Christianity is a great mistake.

JOHN 14:12-17

I tell you the solemn truth, the person who believes in me will perform the miraculous deeds that I am doing, and will perform greater deeds than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.

"If you love me, you will obey my commandments. Then I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot accept, because it does not see him or know him. But you know him, because he resides with you and will be in you."

These verses are an example of our Lord's tender consideration for the weakness of His disciples. He saw them troubled and faint-hearted at the prospect of being left alone in the world. He cheers them by THREE PROMISES, peculiarly suited to their circumstances. "A word spoken in season, how good is it!"

We have first in this passage, a striking promise about ***the works that Christians may do.*** Our Lord says, "He that believes on Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father."

The full meaning of this promise is not to be sought in the miracles which the Apostles wrought after Christ left the world. Such a notion seems hardly borne out by facts. We read of no Apostle walking on the water, or raising a person four days dead, like Lazarus. What our Lord has in view seems to be the far greater number of conversions, the far wider spread of the Gospel, which would take place under the ministry of the Apostles, than under his own teaching. This was the case, we know from the Acts of the Apostles. We read of no sermon preached by Christ, under which three thousand were converted in one day, as they were on the day of Pentecost. In short, "greater works" mean more conversions. There is no greater work possible than the conversion of a soul.

Let us admire the condescension of our Master in allowing to the ministry of His weak servants more success than to His own. Let us learn that His visible presence is not absolutely necessary to the progress of His kingdom. He can help forward His cause on earth quite as much by sitting at the right hand of the Father, and sending forth the Holy Spirit, as by walking to and fro in the world. Let us believe that there is nothing too hard or too great for believers to do, so long as their Lord intercedes for them in heaven. Let us work on in faith, and expect great things, though we feel weak and lonely, like the disciples. Our Lord is working with us and for us, though we cannot see Him. It was not so much the sword of Joshua that defeated Amalek, as the intercession of Moses on the hill. (Ex. 17:11.)

We have, secondly, in this passage, a striking promise ***about things that Christians may get by prayer.*** Our Lord says, "Whatever you shall ask in my name, that will I do . . . If you shall ask anything in my name, I will do it."

These words are a direct encouragement to the simple, yet great duty of praying. Everyone who kneels daily before God, and from his heart "says his prayers," has a right to take comfort in these words. Weak and imperfect as his supplications may be, so long as they are put in Christ's hands, and offered in Christ's name, they shall not be in vain. We have a Friend at Court, an Advocate with the Father; and if we honor Him by sending all our petitions through Him, He pledges His word that they shall succeed. Of course it is taken for granted that the things we ask are for our souls' good, and not mere temporal benefits. "Anything" and "whatever" do not include wealth, and money, and worldly prosperity. These things are not always good for us, and our Lord loves us too well to let us have them. But whatever is really good for our souls, we need not doubt we shall have, if we ask in Christ's name.

How is it that many true Christians have so little? How is it that they go halting and mourning on the way to heaven, and enjoy so little peace, and show so little strength in Christ's service? The answer is simple and plain. "They have not, because they ask not." They have little because they ask little. They are no better than they are, because they do not ask their Lord to make them better. Our languid desires are the reason of our languid performances. We are

not straitened in our Lord, but in ourselves. Happy are they who never forget the words, “Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it.” (Ps. 81:10.) He that does much for Christ, and leaves his mark in the world, will always prove to be one who prays much.

We have, lastly, in this passage, a striking promise ***about the Holy Spirit.*** Our Lord says, “I will ask the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, even the Spirit of truth.”

This is the first time that the Holy Spirit is mentioned as Christ’s special gift to His people. Of course we are not to suppose that He did not dwell in the hearts of all the Old Testament saints. But He was given with peculiar influence and power to believers when the New Testament dispensation came in, and this is the special promise of the passage before us. We shall find it useful, therefore, to observe closely the things that are here said about Him.

The Holy Spirit is spoken of as “a Person.” To apply the language before us to a mere influence or inward feeling, is an unreasonable strain of words.

The Holy Spirit is called “the Spirit of truth.” It is His special office to apply truth to the hearts of Christians, to guide them into all truth, and to sanctify them by the truth.

The Holy Spirit is said to be one whom “the world cannot receive and does not know.” His operations are in the strongest sense foolishness to the natural man. The inward feelings of conviction,

repentance, faith, hope, fear, and love, which He always produces, are precisely that part of religion which the world cannot understand.

The Holy Spirit is said to “dwell in” believers, and to be known by them. They know the feelings that He creates, and the fruits that He produces, though they may not be able to explain them, or see at first whence they come. But they all are what they are—new men, new creatures, light and salt in the earth, compared to the worldly, by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is given to the Church of the elect, “to abide with them” until Christ comes the second time. He is meant to supply all the needs of believers, and to fill up all that is lacking while Christ’s visible presence is removed. He is sent to abide with and help them until Christ returns.

These are truths of vast importance. Let us take care that we grasp them firmly, and never let them go. Next to the whole truth about Christ, it concerns our safety and peace to see the whole truth about the Holy Spirit. Any doctrine about the Church, the ministry, or the Sacraments, which obscures the Spirit’s inward work, or turns it into mere form, is to be avoided as deadly error. Let us never rest until we feel and know that He dwells in us. “If any man has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.” (Rom. 8:9.)

Technical Notes:

12. Verily, verily, I say to you, he who believes in me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater *works* than these shall he do, because I go to my Father. 13. And whatever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14. If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do *it*. 15. If ye love me, keep my commandments. 16. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever; 17. *even* the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; but ye know him, for he dwells with you and shall be in you.

12.—[Verily, verily...the works...do also.] Here we have another comforting word addressed to the disciples. They must not suppose there would be an end of miraculous works when their Master went away and that they would be left weak and helpless and unable to do anything to arrest the attention of an unbelieving world. On the contrary, our Lord assures them, with two emphatic "verily's," that miracles would not cease with His departure. He would take care that believers should have power to do works like His own, and to confirm their word by signs following. I cannot doubt that this promise refers to the miraculous gifts which the first generation of Christians had power to exercise, as we read everywhere in the Acts of the Apostles. That the sick were healed, the dead raised, and devils cast out by disciples after the Lord ascended, is quite plain, and this fulfilled the words now before us.

I can see no reason to suppose that our Lord meant the promise to be

fulfilled after the generation He left on earth was dead. If miracles were continually in the Church, they would cease to be miracles. We never see them in the Bible except at some great crisis in the Church's history. The Irvingite theory—that the Church would always have miraculous gifts if men only had faith—seems to me a violent straining of this text.

[*And greater works…do.*] The meaning of these words must be sought in the moral and spiritual miracles which followed the preaching of the Apostles after the day of Pentecost. It could not be truly said that the physical miracles worked by the Apostles in the Acts were greater than those worked by Christ. But it is equally certain that after the day of Pentecost they did far more wonderful works in converting souls than our Lord did. On no occasion did Jesus convert 3,000 at one time and a "great company of priests."

[*Because I go to my Father.*] These words must point to the great outpouring of the Holy Ghost that took place after our Lord's ascension into heaven, whereby the miracles of conversion were wrought. There was an immediate and mysterious connection, we must remember, between our Lord ascending up on high and "receiving gifts for men." If He had not gone to the Father, the Spirit would not have been sent forth. (Eph. 4:8.) Melancthon thinks the promise of this text is clearly bound up with the following verse, "He shall do greater works because I go to the Father, and because then whatever ye shall ask I will do."

13.—[*And whatever…will I do.*] Here comes another great piece of comfort for the troubled disciples: viz., a promise that Christ will do everything for them which they pray for in His name and for His sake. Whatever help, strength, support, or guidance they need, if they ask God for it in Christ's name, Christ will give it.

This is one of those texts that authorizes all prayers being made through Christ's mediation, as in Prayer-book collects. The "whatever" must, of course, be taken with the qualifying condition, "whatever really good thing ye ask." The connection with the end of the preceding verse should not be overlooked: "When I go to the Father, I will do whatever ye ask."

[*That the Father may be glorified in the Son.*] This is a difficult sentence. The meaning probably is: "I will do whatever ye ask, that my Father may be glorified by my mediation, by sending into the world a Son through whom sinners can obtain such blessings." Christ's power to do anything that He is asked brings glory to Him who sent Him.

14.—[*If ye shall ask… I will do it.*] This verse is a repetition of the preceding to give emphasis and assurance to the promise. It is as if our Lord saw how slow the disciples would be to believe the efficacy of prayer in His name. "Once more I tell you most emphatically, that if you ask anything in my name, I will do it."

We should notice both in this verse and the preceding one that it is

not said, “If ye ask in my name the Father will do it,” but “I will do it.” 15.—[*If ye love…commandments.*] Here we have a direct practical exhortation. “If ye really love Me, prove your love not by weeping and lamenting at my departure, but by striving to do my will when I am gone. Doing, and not crying, is the best proof of love.” The commandments here mentioned must include all the Lord’s moral teaching while on earth, and specially such rules and laws as He had laid down in the “Sermon on the Mount.”

I cannot but think that in this verse our Lord had in view the disposition of His disciples to give way to grief and distress at His leaving them, and to forget that the true test of love was not useless and barren lamentation, but practical obedience to their Master’s commands. Let us notice how our Lord speaks of “my commandments.” We never read of Moses or any other servant of God using such an expression. It is the language of one who was one with God the Father and had power to lay down laws and make statutes for His Church.

16.—[*And I will pray the Father, etc.*] This verse holds up to the eleven another grand consolation, viz., the gift of another abiding Comforter in place of Christ, even the Holy Ghost. “When I go to heaven I will ask the Father to give you another friend and helper to be with you and support you in my stead, and never leave you as I do.” In this remarkable verse, several points demand special notice.

One principal point is the mention of all the three persons in the

blessed Trinity—the Son praying, the Father giving, the Spirit comforting. When our Lord says, “I will pray the Father and He shall give,” we must needs suppose that He accommodates language to our minds. The gift of the Holy Ghost was appointed in the eternal counsels of the Trinity; and we cannot literally say that the gift depended on Christ asking. Moreover, in another place our Lord says, “I will send Him.”

Burkitt remarks that the future tense here points to Christ’s continual intercession. As long as Christ is in heaven, Christians shall not lack a supply of comfort.

When we read of the Holy Ghost being “given,” we must not think that He was in no sense in the Church before the day of Pentecost. He was ever in the hearts of Old Testament believers. No one ever served God acceptably, from Abel downward, without the grace of the Holy Ghost. John the Baptist was “filled” with Him. In can only mean that He shall come with more fulness, influence, grace, and manifestation than He did before. When we read of the “Spirit abiding forever” with disciples, it means that He will not, like Christ after His resurrection, return to the Father, but will always be with God’s people until Christ comes again. The word “Comforter” is the same that is translated “advocate” and applied to Christ Himself in 1 John 2:2. This has caused much difference of opinion. The word is only used five times in the New Testament and is four times applied to the Holy Spirit.

Some, as Lightfoot, Bishop Hall, and Doddridge, maintain that our

translation here is right, and that it is the office of the Spirit to comfort and strengthen Christ's people.

Others, as Beza, Lampe, DeDieus, Gomarus, Poole, Pearce, Stier, and Alford, maintain that the word here should have been rendered "Advocate," as in John's Epistle; and that this word aptly expresses the office of the Spirit as pleading our cause and making intercession for the saints, and helping them in prayer and preaching. (See Rom. 8:26, Matt. 10:19,20.) I decidedly prefer this latter view. Those who wish to see an able argument in its favor should study Canon Lightfoot's volume on New Testament Revision (p. 55).

Lampe sensibly remarks that the word "another" points to the phrase meaning "Advocate" rather than "Comforter." That Jesus is our "Advocate" all allow. "Well," our Lord seems to say, "you shall have another 'Advocate' beside myself." Why use the word "another" at all if "Comforter" is the meaning? It is only fair to say that "the consolation of Israel" was a Jewish name of Messiah (Luke 2:25), and that some think that Christ was one Comforter and the Holy Ghost another. But I do not see much in this. 17.—[*Even the Spirit of truth.*] The Holy Ghost is most probably so called because He brings truth specially home to men's hearts—because truth is His great instrument in all His operations—and because He bears witness to Christ the truth. Elsewhere we read, "It is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth" (1 John 5:6).

[Whom the world…neither sees him nor knows him.] Here our Lord

teaches that it is one great mark of the unbelieving and worldly that they neither receive, nor know, nor see anything of the Holy Ghost. This is strikingly true. Many false professors and unconverted people receive Christ's name and talk of Him while they know nothing experimentally of the operations of the Holy Spirit. It is written, "The natural man receives not the things of the spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; neither can he know them" (1 Cor. 2:14).

[But ye know…dwells…shall be in you.] Our Lord's meaning here must be that the eleven knew something experimentally of the Spirit's work. They might not be fully acquainted with Him, but He was actually in them, making them what they were; and He would remain in them and carry on the work He had begun to a glorious end. "Whether you know it thoroughly and rightly or not, He is actually in you now, and shall always be in you and never leave you."

Let us mark in this and in the preceding verse how our Lord speaks of the Holy Spirit as "a Person." We should never speak of Him as a mere "influence" or dishonor Him by calling Him "it." Let us never forget that "having the Spirit or not having the Spirit" makes the great distinction between the children of God and the children of the world. Believers have Him. Worldly and wicked people have Him not. (Jude 19.)

JOHN 14:18-20

"I will not abandon you as orphans, I will come to you. In a little while the world will not see me any longer, but you will see me; because I live, you will live too. You will know at that time that I am in my Father and you are in me and I am in you.

The short passage before us is singularly rich in "precious promises." Twice our Lord Jesus Christ says, "I will." Twice He says to believers, "You shall."

We learn from this passage, that ***Christ's second coming is meant to be the special comfort of believers.*** He says to His disciples, "I will not leave you comfortless—I will come to you."

Now what is the "coming" here spoken of? It is only fair to say that this is a disputed point among Christians. Many refer it to our Lord's coming to His disciples after His resurrection. Many refer it to His invisible coming into the hearts of His people by the grace of the Holy Spirit. Many refer it to His coming by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. It may well be doubted, however, whether any one of these three views conveys the full meaning of our Lord's words, "I will come."

The true sense of the expression appears to be the second personal coming of Christ at the end of the world. It is a wide, broad, sweeping promise, intended for all believers, in every age, and not for the Apostles alone— "I will not stay always in heaven—I will one day come back to you." It is like the message which the angels brought to the disciples after the ascension— "This same Jesus shall

come in like manner as you have seen Him go." (Acts. 1:11.) It is like the last promise which winds up the Book of Revelation— "Surely I come quickly." (Rev. 22:20.) Just in the same way the parting consolation held out to believers, the night before the crucifixion, is a personal return— "I will come."

Let us settle it in our minds that all believers are comparatively "orphans," and children in their minority, until the second advent. Our best things are yet to come. Faith has yet to be exchanged for sight, and hope for certainty. Our peace and joy are at present very imperfect. They are as nothing to what we shall have when Christ returns. For the return let us look and long and pray. Let us place it in the forefront of all our doctrinal system, next to the atoning death and the interceding life of our Lord. The highest style of Christians are the men who look for and love the Lord's appearing. (2 Tim. 4:8.)

We learn for another thing, **that *Christ's life secures the life of His believing people.*** He says, "Because I live you shall live also."

There is a mysterious and indissoluble union between Christ and every true Christian. The man that is once joined to Him by faith, is as closely united as a member of the body is united to the head. So long as Christ, his Head, lives, so long he will live. He cannot die unless Christ can be plucked from heaven, and Christ's life destroyed. But this, since Christ is very God, is totally impossible! "Christ being raised from the dead, dies no more—death has no more

dominion over Him." (Rom. 6:9.) That which is divine, in the very nature of things, cannot die.

Christ's life secures the continuance of *spiritual life* to His people. They shall not fall away. They shall persevere unto the end. The divine nature of which they are partakers, shall not perish. The incorruptible seed within them shall not be destroyed by the devil and the world. Weak as they are in themselves, they are closely knit to an immortal Head, and not one member of His mystical body shall ever perish.

Christ's life secures the *resurrection life* of His people. Just as He rose again from the grave, because death could not hold Him one moment beyond the appointed time, so shall all His believing members rise again in the day when He calls them from the tomb. The victory that Jesus won when He rolled the stone away, and came forth from the tomb, was a victory not only for Himself, but for His people. If the Head rose, much more shall the members.

Truths like these ought to be often pondered by true Christians. The careless world knows little of a believer's privileges. It sees little but the outside of him. It does not understand the secret of his present strength, and of his strong hope of good things to come. And what is that secret? Invisible union with an invisible Savior in heaven! Each child of God is invisibly linked to the throne of the Rock of Ages. When that throne can be shaken, and not until then, we may despair. But Christ lives, and we shall live also.

We learn, finally, from this passage, that ***full and perfect knowledge of divine things will never be attained by believers until the second advent.*** Our Lord says, “At that day,” the day of my coming, “you shall know that I am in my Father, and you in Me, and I in you.”

The best of saints knows but little so long as he is in the body. The fall of our father Adam has corrupted our understandings, as well as our consciences, hearts, and wills. Even after conversion we see through a glass darkly, and on no point do we see so dimly as on the nature of our own union with Christ, and of the union of Christ and the Father. These are matters in which we must be content to believe humbly, and, like little children, to receive on trust the things which we cannot explain.

But it is a blessed and cheering thought that when Christ comes again, the remains of ignorance shall be rolled away. Raised from the dead, freed from the darkness of this world, no longer tempted by the devil and tried by the flesh, believers shall see as they have been seen, and know as they have been known. We shall have light enough one day. What we know not now, we shall know hereafter.

Let us rest our souls on this comfortable thought, when we see the *mournful divisions* which rend the Church of Christ. Let us remember that a large portion of them arise from ignorance. We know in part, and therefore misunderstand one another. A day comes when Lutherans shall no longer wrangle with Zwinglians, nor Calvinist with Arminian, nor Churchman with Dissenter. That day is

the day of Christ's second coming. Then and then only will the promise receive its complete fulfillment— "At that day you shall know."

Technical Notes:

18. I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you. 19. Yet a little while and the world sees me no more, but ye see me. Because I live, ye shall live also. 20. At that day ye shall know that I *am* in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.

18.—[*I will not leave you comfortless.*] The word we render "comfortless" means literally "orphans," and is so translated in the marginal reading of the English version. It beautifully describes the helpless, solitary, friendless state, by comparison, in which the disciples of Christ were left when He died and was withdrawn from their bodily eyes. "In that condition," says Jesus, "I will not leave you. You shall not always be orphans." It adds to the beauty of the expression to remember that He had already called them "little children." Hence, there was a special fitness in the word "orphans."

[*I will come to you.*] The verb here is in the present tense: "I do come." About the meaning of the sentence there is much difference of opinion. Even the Fathers, as Burgon says, "explain the words diversely." There is no more unanimity, we must remember, among the Fathers than among modern divines. The "consent of Catholic

antiquity," about which many make so much ado, is more imaginary than real.

Some think, as Chrysostom, that the "coming" means only the reappearing of Christ after His resurrection from the grave on the third day. Others think, as Hutcheson, that our Lord only means His coming by His Spirit, as a pledge of his presence.

Others think, as Augustine and Bede, that our Lord looks far forward to His second coming at the end of the world and speaks the words to the whole company of believers in every age: "I am coming again. I come quickly." I decidedly prefer this last view. The first and second seem to me to cramp, narrow, and confine our Lord's promise. The last is in harmony with all His teaching. The second advent is the great hope of the Church. In the last chapter of the Bible, the Greek for "I come quickly" is precisely the same verb that is used here. (Rev. 22:20.)

In saying this I would not be mistaken. I admit fully that Jesus came to His Church after His ascension, invisibly, does come to His Church continually, is with His Church even to the end of the world. But I do not think this is the meaning of the text.

19.—[*Yet a little while…ye see me.*] Again the meaning of our Lord is somewhat obscure. I think He must mean, "Very shortly the wicked unbelieving world will no longer behold and gaze on Me, as I shall be withdrawn from it and ascend into heaven. But even then ye see Me

and will continue seeing Me with the eyes of faith." I cannot think that the present tense here, "Ye behold Me," can apply to the second advent. It must surely refer to the spiritual vision of Christ which believers would enjoy. The world could not prevent them seeing Him. The Greek word for "ye see" implies a fixed, steady, habitual gaze.

Bishop Hall says, "Ye by the eye of faith shall see and acknowledge Me."

[*Because I live, ye shall live also.*] This great deep saying of Christ seems to admit of a very wide and full signification: "Your spiritual life now and your eternal life hereafter are both secured by my life. The life of the Head guarantees the life of the members. I live, have life in myself, can never die, can never have my life destroyed by my enemies, and live on to all eternity. Therefore ye shall live also. Your life is secured for you and can never be destroyed. You have everlasting life now and shall have everlasting glory hereafter."

That word "I live" is a great full saying, and we cannot fathom it all. It does not merely mean "I shall rise from the dead." It is certainly far more than the future tense. It implies that Christ is "the Living One," the source and fountain of life. It is like "In Him was life," and "as the Father has life in Himself, even so has He given to the Son to have life in Himself" (John 1:4, 5:26).

20.—[*On that day ye shall know, etc.*] Here again I believe (with Cyril and Augustine) that our Lord specially refers to the day of His own second advent. Then, and not till then, His disciples will have perfect knowledge. Now they see and know in part and through a glass darkly. Then they shall fully understand the mystical union between the Father and Son and between the Son and all His believing members. To confine the "day," as Chrysostom does, to the resurrection of Christ from the dead seems to me to fall short of its full meaning.

JOHN 14:21-26

"The person who has my commandments and obeys them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and will reveal myself to him."

"Lord," Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, "what has happened that you are going to reveal yourself to us and not to the world?" Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and take up residence with him. The person who does not love me does not obey my words. And the word you hear is not mine, but the Father's who sent me."

"I have spoken these things while staying with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and will cause you to remember everything I said to you."

We learn from these verses that ***keeping Christ's commandments is the best test of love to Christ.*** This is a lesson of vast importance and one that needs continually pressing on the attention of Christians. It is not talking about religion, and talking fluently and well too, but steadily doing Christ's will and walking in Christ's ways, that is the proof of our being true believers. Good feelings and desires are useless if they are not accompanied by action. They may even become mischievous to the soul, induce hardness of conscience, and do certain harm. Passive impressions which do not lead to action, gradually deaden and paralyze the heart. Living and doing are the only real evidence of grace. Where the Holy Spirit is, there will always be a holy life. A jealous watchfulness over tempers, words, and deeds, a constant endeavor to live by the rule of the Sermon on the Mount, this is the best proof that we love Christ.

Of course such maxims as these must not be wrested and misunderstood. We are not to suppose for a moment that "keeping Christ's commandments" can save us. Our best works are full of imperfection. When we have done all we can, we are feeble and unprofitable servants. "By grace are you saved through faith—not of works." (Ep. 2:8.) But while we hold one class of truths, we must not forget another. Faith in the blood of Christ must always be attended by loving obedience to the will of Christ. What the Master has joined together, the disciple must not put asunder. Do we profess to love Christ? Then let us show it by our lives. The Apostle who said, "You know that I love You!" received the charge, "Feed my lambs." That meant, "Do something. Be useful—follow my example." (John 21:17.)

We learn, secondly, from these verses, that ***there are special comforts laid up for those who love Christ, and prove it by keeping His words.*** This, at any rate, seems the general sense of our Lord's language— "My Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."

The full meaning of this promise, no doubt, is a deep thing. We have no line to fathom it. It is a thing which no man can understand except he that receives and experiences it. But we need not shrink from believing that eminent holiness brings eminent comfort with it, and that no man has such sensible enjoyment of his religion as the man who, like Enoch and Abraham, walks closely with God. There is more of heaven on earth to be obtained than most Christians are aware of. "The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him, and He will show them His covenant." "If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and dine with him, and he with Me." (Ps. 25:14; Rev. 3:20.) Promises like these, we may be sure, mean something, and were not written in vain.

How is it, people often ask, that so many professing believers have so little happiness in their religion? How is it that so many know little of "joy and peace in believing," and go mourning and heavy-hearted towards heaven? The answer to these questions is a sorrowful one, but it must be given. Few believers attend as strictly as they should to Christ's practical sayings and words. There is far too much loose and careless obedience to Christ's commandments. There is far too much forgetfulness, that while good works cannot

justify us they are not to be despised. Let these things sink down into our hearts. If we want to be eminently happy, we must strive to be eminently holy.

We learn, lastly, from these verses, that ***one part of the Holy Spirit's work is to teach, and to bring things to remembrance.*** It is written, "The Comforter shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance."

To confine this promise to the eleven Apostles, as some do, seems a narrow and unsatisfactory mode of interpreting Scripture. It appears to reach far beyond the day of Pentecost, and the gift of writing inspired books of God's Holy Word. It is safer, wiser, and more consistent with the whole tone of our Lord's last discourse, to regard the promise as the common property of all believers, in every age of the world. Our Lord knows the ignorance and forgetfulness of our nature in spiritual things. He graciously declares that when He leaves the world, His people shall have a teacher and remembrancer.

Are we sensible of spiritual ignorance? Do we feel that at best we know in part and see in part? Do we desire to understand more clearly the doctrines of the Gospel? Let us pray daily for the help of the "teaching" Spirit. It is His office to illuminate the soul, to open the eyes of the understanding, and to guide us into all truth. He can make dark places light, and rough places smooth.

Do we find our memory of spiritual things defective? Do we complain that though we read and hear, we seem to lose as fast as we

gain? Let us pray daily for the help of the Holy Spirit. He can bring things to our remembrance. He can make us remember "old things and new." He can keep in our minds the whole system of truth and duty, and make us ready for every good word and work.

Technical Notes:

21. He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him and will manifest myself to him. 22. Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world? 23. Jesus answered and said to him, If a man loves me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our abode with him. 24. He who does not love me does not keep my sayings; and the word which ye hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me. 25. These things have I spoken to you while being present with you. 26. But the Comforter, *which is* the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I have said to you.

21.—[He who has...keeps...loves me.] Our Lord seems to return to the lesson of the 15th verse and to repeat it because of its importance. There, however, He spoke specially to His disciples; here He lays it down as a general principle applicable to all Christians in all time:

"He who not only possesses and knows my commandments but also does and practices them, he is the man who really loves Me." Obedience is the true test of real love to Christ, and not knowledge and talk only. Many HAVE, but do not KEEP Christ's will.
Burgon observes: "This amounts to a declaration that the sad hearts and weeping eyes of the Apostles would not be accepted by their Lord as any proof of their love. Obedience was the test He chose."

[*He who loves... Father*.] Here follows an encouragement to practical obedience: "He who really loves Me and proves his love by his life, shall be specially loved by my Father. My Father loves those who love Me." Let us carefully note that there is a special love of God the Father which is peculiarly set on believers, over and above the general love of pity and compassion with which He regards all mankind. In the highest sense God is a "Father" to none but those who love Christ. The modern doctrine of a "Fatherhood" of God which is soul-saving to those who neglect Christ is a mere delusion of man.

[And I...love...manifest...him.] Here follows another encouragement to the man who strives to keep Christ's commandments. Christ will specially love that man and will give him special manifestations of His grace and favor, invisibly and spiritually. He shall feel and know in his own heart comforts and joys that wicked men and inconsistent professors know nothing of. That the "manifesting" of Himself here spoken of is a purely unseen and spiritual thing is self-evident. It is one of those things which can only be known by experience, and is

only known by holy and consistent Christians.

We should carefully observe here that Christ does more for the comfort of some of His people than He does for others. Those who follow Christ most closely and obediently will always follow Him most comfortably and feel most of His inward presence. It is one thing, as St. John says, to know Christ; it is another to know that we know Him. (1 John 2:3.) 22.—[*Judas (not Iscariot)*...] Jude, the writer of the Epistle and brother of James, was the Apostle who speaks here. He is called elsewhere Lebbeus and Thaddeus. Remembering that James is called in Galatians "the Lord's brother," there must have been some relationship between him and our Lord. Probably he was a cousin. Whether a recollection of this may have been in His mind when asking the question admits of conjecture. This is the only word recorded to have been spoken by Jude in the Gospels. We should mark the careful manner in which St. John reminds us that it was not the false Apostle who asked.

Let us note that out of each saying of the three Apostles who spoke to our Lord, interrupting Him in His last discourse, a great truth was elicited for the benefit of the Church. Thomas, Philip, and Jude, ignorant and slow as they were, drew out of our Lord's mouth rich and precious sayings.

[*How is it that you will manifest, etc.*] This question is the simple inquiry of one guessing after the truth, and not able to see clearly what our Lord's words meant—whether a visible or an invisible

manifestation of Himself. “What is the precise distinction of privilege between ourselves and the world to which you point?” The Greek for “how is it” would be literally “what has happened.” The Greek for “You will” is literally “You are about.”

Whitby thinks that Jude, like most Jews of his time, expected Messiah’s kingdom to be a visible temporal kingdom over all the earth. He could not therefore understand a manifestation of Christ confined to the disciples.

23.—[*Jesus answered…will love him.*] This sentence is simply a repetition of the truth contained in the 15th and 21st verses: “I tell you again emphatically that the man who really loves Me will keep my words and obey my commandments. And I repeat that such a man will be specially loved and cared for by my heavenly Father.” Let us note that in this verse our Lord does not say, “Keep my commandments,” but my “word” generally, in the singular number, including all His whole teaching.

[*And we will come…abode with him.*] These words can only admit of one sense—a spiritual and invisible coming and abiding. The Father and the Son will come spiritually into the heart and soul of a true saint, and will make their continual dwelling with him. This, again, is a purely experimental truth, and one that none can know but he who has felt it. Let us note the condescension of the Father and the Son, and the high privileges of a believer. No matter how poor and lowly a man may be, if he has faith and grace he has the best of company and

friends. Christ and the Father dwell in his heart, and he is never alone and cannot be poor. He is the temple of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. The use of the plural number "we" is very noteworthy in this place.

24.—[*He who does not…sayings.*] Once more the same great principle already taught is laid down again from the negative side. Where there is no obedience to Christ, there is no love. Nothing can be more plain than our Lord's repeated warnings that practical obedience, keeping His commandments and sayings, doing His will, is the only sure test of love to Him. Without this obedience, [however], profession, talk, knowledge, churchmanship, yes even feeling, conviction, weeping and crying, are all worthless things.

[And the word…not mine…sent me.] The purpose of this sentence is to remind the disciples of the authority and dignity of our Lord's sayings and commandments. They are not His words only, but His Father's. He who despises them despises the Father, and He who honors them by obedience honors the Father.

25.—[These things…spoken…present with you.] Our Lord seems here to begin to wind up the first part of His discourse to a conclusion. Whether "these things" mean only the things He spoke this evening, or all the things He had taught them during His ministry, admits of doubt. I rather incline to the view that the expression must be taken in the widest sense:
"These and many other things I have spoken to you while abiding

and dwelling among you. Your hearts are troubled, perhaps, by the thought that you cannot remember them and do not understand them. Here there are some grounds of comfort."

26.—[*But the Comforter…send in my name.*] Here comes one more grand consolation: "When I am gone, the Holy Ghost, the promised Advocate whom the Father will send on my account, through my intercession, and to glorify Me, shall supply all your need and provide for all your wants." Let us note how distinctly the Holy Spirit is spoken of here as a Person and not an influence.

Let us note how the Father sends the Spirit, but also sends Him in Christ's name and with a special reference to Christ's work.

[*He shall teach you all things.*] The first word here rendered "He" is unmistakably applicable to none but a person, being a masculine pronoun. The "teaching" here promised must mean, firstly, that fuller and more complete instruction which the Holy Ghost evidently gave to believers after our Lord's ascension. No one can read the book of Acts without seeing that the eleven were different men after the day of Pentecost, and saw and knew and understood things of which they were very ignorant before. But, secondly, the "teaching" most probably includes all that teaching and enlightening which the Spirit imparts to all true believers in every age. Light is the first thing we need, and He gives it. It is His special office to "open the eyes of our understandings."

The expression “all things” must plainly be limited to all things needful to be known by the soul, and does not include all knowledge of every kind.

[*And bring to your remembrance, etc.*] This is a special consolation for the weak memories of the troubled disciples. Our Lord promises that the Spirit would bring back to their memories the many lessons, both doctrinal and practical, which they had heard from Him but forgotten. This was a very needful promise. How often we find it recorded that the disciples did not understand our Lord’s sayings and doings at the time they heard and saw them, it is almost needless to point out. (John 2:22, 12:16.) Some apply these words especially to the gift of inspiration by which the New Testament Scriptures were written. I cannot see this. The promise was to the whole eleven, of whom only five were allowed to write! This is strongly dwelt on by Alford.

Some apply these words exclusively to the eleven. I cannot see this either. To my eyes they seem a general promise, primarily no doubt applying especially to the eleven, but after them belonging also to all believers in every age. As a matter of experience, I believe that the awakening of the memories of true Christians is one of the peculiar works of the Holy Ghost on their souls. Once converted, they understand things and remember things in a way they did not before. Does anyone complain of his own ignorance and bad memory? Let him not forget that there is One whose office it is to “teach and to bring to remembrance.” Let him pray for the Holy Spirit’s help.

JOHN 14:27-31

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; I do not give it to you as the world does. Do not let your hearts be distressed or lacking in courage. You heard me say to you, 'I am going away and I am coming back to you.' If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I am. I have told you now before it happens, so that when it happens you may believe. I will not speak with you much longer, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me, but I am doing just what the Father commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Get up, let us go from here."

We ought not to leave the closing portion of this wonderful chapter without noticing one striking feature in it. That feature is the singular frequency with which our Lord uses the expression, "My Father," and "the Father." In the last five verses we find it four times. In the whole chapter it occurs no less than twenty-two times. In this respect the chapter stands alone in the Bible.

The reason of this frequent use of the expression, is a deep subject. Perhaps the less we speculate and dogmatize about it the better. Our Lord was one who never spoke a word without a meaning, and we need not doubt there was a meaning here. Yet may we not reverently suppose that He desired to leave on the minds of His disciples a strong impression of his entire unity with the Father? Seldom does our Lord lay claim to such high dignity, and such power of giving and supplying comfort to His Church, as in this discourse.

Was there not, then, a fitness in His continually reminding His disciples that in all His giving He was one with the Father, and did nothing without the Father? This, at any rate, seems a fair conjecture. Let it be taken for what it is worth.

We should observe, for one thing, in this passage, ***Christ's last legacy to His people.*** We find Him saying, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world gives, give I unto you."

Peace is Christ's distinctive gift—not money, not worldly ease, not temporal prosperity. These are at best very questionable possessions. They often do more harm than good to the soul. They act as clogs and weights to our spiritual life. Inward peace of conscience, arising from a sense of pardoned sin and reconciliation with God, is a far greater blessing. This peace is the property of all believers, whether high or low, rich or poor.

The peace which Christ gives He calls "my peace." It is specially His own to give, because He bought it by His own blood, purchased it by His own substitution, and is appointed by the Father to dispense it to a perishing world. Just as Joseph was sealed and commissioned to give grain to the starving Egyptians, so is Christ specially commissioned, in the counsels of the Eternal Trinity, to give peace to mankind.

The peace that Christ gives is not given as the world gives. What He gives the world cannot give at all, and what He gives is given

neither unwillingly, nor sparingly, nor for a little time. Christ is far more willing to give than the world is to receive. What He gives He gives to all eternity, and never takes away. He is ready to give abundantly above all that we can ask or think. “Open your mouth wide,” He says, “and I will fill it.” (Psalm 81:10.)

Who can wonder that a legacy like this should be backed by the renewed emphatic charge, “Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid?” There is nothing lacking on Christ’s part for our comfort, if we will only come to Him, believe, and receive. The chief of sinners has no cause to be afraid. If we will only look to the one true Savior, there is medicine for every trouble of heart. Half our doubts and fears arise from dim perceptions of the real nature of Christ’s Gospel.

We should observe, for another thing, in this passage, ***Christ’s perfect holiness.*** We find Him saying, “The prince of this world comes, and has no power over Me.”

The meaning of these remarkable words admits of only one interpretation. Our Lord would have his disciples know that Satan, “the prince of this world,” was about to make his last and most violent attack on Him. He was mustering all his strength for one more tremendous onset. He was coming up with his utmost malice to try the second Adam in the garden of Gethsemane, and on the cross of Calvary. But our blessed Master declares, “He has no power over Me.” “There is nothing he can lay hold on. There is no weak and defective point in Me. I have kept my Father’s commandment, and

finished the work He gave me to do. Satan, therefore, cannot overthrow Me. He can lay nothing to my charge. He cannot condemn Me. I shall come forth from the trial more than conqueror."

Let us mark the difference between Christ and all others who have been born of woman. He is the only one in whom Satan has no power over. He came to Adam and Eve, and found weakness. He came to Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and all the saints, and found imperfection. He came to Christ, and found "nothing" at all. He was a Lamb "without blemish and without spot," a suitable Sacrifice for a world of sinners, a suitable Head for a redeemed race.

Let us thank God that we have such a perfect, sinless Savior; that His righteousness is a perfect righteousness, and His life a blameless life. In ourselves and our doings we shall find everything imperfect; and if we had no other hope than our own goodness, we might well despair. But in Christ we have a perfect, sinless, Representative and Substitute. Well may we say, with the triumphant Apostle, "Who shall lay anything to our charge?" (Rom. 8:33.) Christ has died for us, and suffered in our stead. In Him Satan can find nothing. We are hidden in Him. The Father sees us in Him, unworthy as we are, and for His sake is well pleased.

Technical Notes:

27. Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. 28. Ye have heard how I

said to you, I go away and come *again* to you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice because I said, I go to the Father, for my Father is greater than I. 29. And now I have told you before it comes to pass, that when it does come to pass, ye might believe. 30. Hereafter I will not talk much with you, for the prince of this world comes and has nothing in me. 31. But that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence.

27.—[*Peace I leave with you.*] In this verse our Lord gives His disciples one more consolation. He bequeaths them as a legacy "peace;" not riches or worldly honor, but peace—peace of heart, conscience, and inward man, peace from a sense of pardoned sin, a living Savior, and a home in heaven. Matthew Henry remarks here: "When Christ left the world, He made His will. His soul He bequeathed to His Father, and His body to Joseph. His clothes fell to the soldiers. His mother He left to the care of John. But what should He leave to His poor disciples who had left all for Him? Silver and gold He had none; but He left them what was far better—His peace."

[*My peace I give to you.*] The expression "my peace" seems to indicate something peculiar in the gift here promised. Does it not mean "a sense of that peace with God which I am purchasing with my blood, that inward calm and rest of soul which faith in Me procures for believers, that peace which it is my special prerogative to give to my people"?

[*Not as the world gives, etc.*] The first and fullest meaning of this sentence seems to lie in the kind of things which Christ gives: "I give you possessions which the world cannot give, because it has not got them to give." The world can give temporary carnal satisfaction and excitement, and can gratify the passions and affections and pride of the natural man. But the world cannot give inward peace and rest of conscience. Some, however, think that the point of the sentence lies in the manner of the world's giving—temporarily, defectively, imperfectly, grudgingly, and the like. But, however true this may be, I prefer the view that the chief point is in the nature of the world's gifts compared to Christ's.

[*Let not your heart be troubled.*] This is a repetition of the words which began the long list of consolations in this chapter. "Once more I say to you, in view of the many grounds of comfort which I have just named, do not give way to trouble of heart."

[*Neither let it be afraid.*] These words are added to the opening charge, not to be "troubled." They point to a frame of mind which our Lord saw creeping over the disciples: "Let not your heart give way to cowardice. Let it not be fearful." It is the only place in the New Testament where this word is used.

We need not doubt that the whole of this consoling verse is meant to be the property of all believers in every age.

28.—[*Ye have heard... I go away.*] This sentence must refer to 13:33-

36 and 14:2,3,12. The disciples seem to have understood clearly that our Lord was leaving them, and that seems to have been one chief reason of their trouble and distress.

[*And come again to you.*] I must retain the opinion that this coming refers to the second advent and not to the resurrection of Christ. "My leaving the world until my second advent, you have heard me plainly teach and declare."

[If ye loved…rejoice…go to the Father.] These words mean: "If you really loved Me with an intelligent love, and thoroughly understood my person, nature, and work, you would rejoice to hear of my leaving the world and going to the Father, because you would see in it the finishing and completion of the work which the Father sent Me to do." Our Lord cannot, of course, mean that the disciples did not "love" Him at all, but that they did not rightly and intelligently love Him; otherwise they would have rejoiced at His completion of His work.

[*For my Father is greater than I.*] This famous sentence has always been an occasion of controversy and dispute. It presents two difficulties.

(a) What did our Lord mean by saying, "My Father is greater than I"? I answer that the words of the Athanasian Creed contain the best reply. Christ is no doubt "equal to the Father as touching His Godhead, and inferior to the Father as touching His manhood." This

we may freely and fully admit and yet not give up a hair's breadth to Arians and Socinians, who always throw this text in our teeth. The enemies of the doctrine of Christ's divinity forget that Trinitarians maintain the humanity of Christ as strongly as His divinity, and never shrink from admitting that while Christ as God is equal to the Father, as man He is inferior to the Father. And it is in this sense that He here says truly, "My Father is greater than I." It was especially spoken of the time of His incarnation and humiliation. When the Word was "made flesh," He took on Him "the form of a servant." This was temporary inferiority. (Phil. 2:7.)

(b) But what did our Lord mean by saying that the disciples ought to rejoice at His going to the Father BECAUSE "the Father is greater than I"? This is a hard knot to untie and has received different solutions. My own impression is that the meaning must be something of this kind: "Ye ought to rejoice at my going to the Father because in so going, I shall resume that glory which I had with Him before the world was and which I laid aside on becoming incarnate. Here on earth, during the thirty-three years of my incarnation, I have been in the form of a servant, and dwelling in a body as one inferior to my Father. In leaving this world I go to take up again the equal glory and honor which I had with the Father before my incarnation, and to lay aside the position of inferiority in which I have tabernacled here below. I go to be once more Almighty with the Almighty, and to share once more my Father's throne, as a Person in that Trinity in which 'none is afore or after other, none is greater or less than another.' I go to receive the kingdom and honor which in

eternal counsels the Father has prepared for the Son. And on this account, if you really knew and understood all, you would rejoice at my going. If I had not voluntarily placed myself in a position of inferiority to the Father by becoming man for man's sake, you would have no hope for your souls. But now the work is finished. I return to the Father and leave my position of inferiority and humiliation; and you ought to rejoice and be glad."

29.—[*And now I have told you, etc.*] This seems to refer to our Lord's going away. "I have told you plainly that I am leaving you and about to die on the cross, in order that when I do die and go, you may continue believing and not have your faith shaken."

30.—[*Hereafter…not talk…you.*] This must mean that our Lord would not talk much more before His crucifixion. The time was short and the betrayal and suffering drew nigh. It does not refer to the time after our Lord's resurrection and the forty days before His ascension.

[*For the prince of this world, etc.*] This means that Satan was drawing nigh for his last final assault on our Lord, and that he would find nothing to lay hold on and no weak point.
It is very striking to observe that our Lord does not say "Judas, the Romans, the Pharisees are coming." It is only the devil. He, as at the fall, is at the bottom of all. Others are only his tools. We should note how the devil is called "the prince of this world." He rules and reigns in the hearts of the vast majority of mankind. The whole world "lies in the wicked one." Of the extent and intensity of Satan's influence on earth, even now we have probably very little idea. When it says

that he "comes," we must not suppose that it means "comes for the first time." All through our Lord's earthly ministry He was tempted and assailed and opposed by Satan. It must mean, "He is coming with special violence and bitter wrath to make his last attack on Me both in Gethsemane and on Calvary." There are evidently degrees at different seasons in the intensity and virulence of Satan's attacks. When it says "has nothing in Me," it must mean that our Lord's heart and life were equally without spot of sin. He knew and felt that He the second Adam had nothing about Him that Satan could lay hold on. No one but Christ our Head could say that. The holiest saint could never say it! Sanderson observes: "A cunning searcher had pried narrowly into every corner of His life; and if there had been anything amiss, would have been sure to have spied it and proclaimed it. But he could find nothing."

31.—[*But that the world…so I do.*] This is a somewhat dark and obscure passage. The meaning is probably something of this kind: "I do all I am doing now, and go to the cross voluntarily, though innocent, that the world may have full proof that I love the Father who sent Me to die, and am willing to go through everything which He has commanded Me to go through. Innocent as I am, and without one spot of sin that Satan can lay to my charge, I willingly go forward to the cross to show how I love the Father's will and am determined to do it by dying for sinners."

[*Arise, let us go hence.*] These words seem to indicate a change of position, and probably mean that our Lord at this point rose from the

table where He had been speaking and walked out toward the garden of Gethsemane. The rest of His discourse He seems to have delivered in the act of walking, without a single interruption from any of the disciples, until the end of the 16th chapter. Then, at some point unknown to us, He probably paused and offered up the prayer of the 17th chapter.

This is the view of Cyril, Augustine, and most commentators. Yet Jansenius, Maldonatus, Alford, and some others, think that our Lord never left the house and only rose from table at this point and went on with His discourse standing!

Lightfoot, almost alone, maintains the strange and improbable notion that the place where this discourse was delivered was Bethany, that the interval of a week comes into the narrative here, that at the end of this week the paschal supper and the institution of the Lord's Supper took place, and then came the discourse of the 15th chapter.

No commentator, perhaps, can leave this chapter without deeply feeling how little he knows and understands of the full meaning of much of its contents. May we not, however, fairly reflect that one great cause of the chapter's difficulty is man's entire inability to grasp the great mystery of the union of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit in the Trinity? We are continually handling matters which we cannot fully comprehend, and cannot therefore fully explain, and must be content humbly to believe.

John – Chap. 15

JOHN 15:1-6

The Vine and the Branches

"I am the true vine and my Father is the gardener. He takes away every branch that does not bear fruit in me. He prunes every branch that bears fruit so that it will bear more fruit. You are clean already because of the word that I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it remains in the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me."

"I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me—and I in him—bears much fruit, because apart from me you can accomplish nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is thrown out like a branch, and dries up; and such branches are gathered up and thrown into the fire, and are burned up."

These verses, we must carefully remember, contain a parable. In interpreting it we must not forget the great rule which applies to all Christ's parables. The general lesson of each parable is the main thing to be noticed. The minor details must not be tortured and pressed to an excess, in order to extract a meaning from them. The

mistakes into which Christians have fallen by neglecting this rule, are neither few nor small.

We are meant to learn first, from these verses, that ***the union between Christ and believers is very close.*** He is "the Vine," and they are "the branches."

The union between the branch of a vine and the main stem, is the closest that can be conceived. It is the whole secret of the branch's life, strength, vigor, beauty, and fertility. Separate from the parent stem, it has no life of its own. The sap and juice that flow from the stem are the origin and maintaining power of all its leaves, buds, blossoms, and fruit. Cut off from the stem, it must soon wither and die.

The union between Christ and believers is just as close, and just as real. In themselves believers have no life, or strength, or spiritual power. All that they have of vital religion comes from Christ. They are what they are, and feel what they feel, and do what they do, because they draw out of Jesus a continual supply of grace, help, and ability. Joined to the Lord by faith, and united in mysterious union with Him by the Spirit, they stand, and walk, and continue, and run the Christian race. But every jot of good about them is drawn from their spiritual Head, Jesus Christ.

The thought before us is both comfortable and instructive. Believers have no cause to despair of their own salvation, and to think they will never reach heaven. Let them consider that they are

not left to themselves and their own strength. Their root is Christ, and all that there is in the root is for the benefit of the branches. Because He lives, they shall live also. Worldly people have no cause to wonder at the continuance and perseverance of believers. Weak as they are in themselves, their Root is in heaven, and never dies. "When I am weak," said Paul, "then am I strong." (2 Cor. 12:10.)

We are meant to learn, secondly, from these verses, that ***there are false Christians as well as true ones.*** There are "branches in the vine" which appear to be joined to the parent stem, and yet bear no fruit. There are men and women who appear to be members of Christ, and yet will prove finally to have had no vital union with Him.

There are myriads of professing Christians in every Church whose union with Christ is only outward and formal. Some of them are joined to Christ by baptism and Church-membership. Some of them go even further than this, and are regular communicants and loud talkers about religion. But they all lack the one thing needful. Notwithstanding services, and sermons, and sacrament, they have no grace in their hearts, no faith, no inward work of the Holy Spirit. They are not one with Christ, and Christ in them. Their union with Him is only nominal, and not real. They have "a name to live," but in the sight of God they are dead.

Christians of this stamp are aptly represented by branches in a vine which bear no fruit. Useless and unsightly, such branches are only fit to be cut off and burned. They draw nothing out of the parent

stem, and make no return for the place they occupy. Just so will it be at the last day with false professors and nominal Christians. Their end, except they repent, will be destruction. They will be separated from the company of true believers, and cast out, as withered, useless branches, into everlasting fire. They will find at last, whatever they thought in this world, that there is a worm that never dies, and a fire that is not quenched.

We are meant to learn, thirdly, from these verses, that ***the fruits of the Spirit are the only satisfactory evidence of a man being a true Christian.*** The disciple that "abides in Christ," like a branch abiding in the vine, will always bear fruit.

He that would know what the word "fruit" means, need not wait long for an answer. Repentance toward God, faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, holiness of life and conduct, these are what the New Testament calls "fruit." These are the distinguishing marks of the man who is a living branch of the true Vine. Where these things are lacking, it is vain to talk of possessing *dormant* grace and spiritual life. Where there is no fruit there is no life. He that lacks these things is "dead while he lives."

True grace, we must not forget, is never idle. It never slumbers and never sleeps. It is a vain notion to suppose that we are living members of Christ, if the example of Christ is the only satisfactory evidence of saving union between Christ and our souls. Where there is no fruit of the Spirit to be seen, there is no vital religion in the heart. The Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus will always make Himself

known in the daily conduct of those in whom He dwells. The Master Himself declares, “Every tree is known by his own fruit.” (Luke 6:44.)

We are meant, lastly, to learn from these verses, that ***God will often increase the holiness of true Christians by His providential dealings with them.*** “Every branch,” it is written, “that bears fruit, He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.”

The meaning of this language is clear and plain. Just as the gardener prunes and cuts back the branches of a fruitful vine, in order to make them more fruitful, so does God purify and sanctify believers by the circumstances of life in which He places them.

Trial, to speak plainly, is the instrument by which our Father in heaven makes Christians more holy. By trial He calls out their passive graces, and proves whether they can suffer His will as well as do it. By trial He weans them from the world, draws them to Christ, drives them to the Bible and prayer, shows them their own hearts, and makes them humble. This is the process by which He “prunes” them, and makes them more fruitful. The lives of the saints in every age, are the best and truest comment on the text. Never, hardly, do we find an eminent saint, either in the Old Testament or the New, who was not purified by suffering, and, like His Master, a “man of sorrows.”

Let us learn to be patient in the days of darkness, if we know anything of vital union with Christ. Let us remember the doctrine of the passage before us, and not murmur and complain because of

trials. Our trials are not meant to do us harm, but good. God chastens us "for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness." (Heb. 12:10.) Fruit is the thing that our Master desires to see in us, and He will not spare the pruning knife if He sees we need it. In the last day we shall see that all was well done.

Technical Notes:

1. I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. 2. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit he prunes it, that it may bring forth more fruit. 3. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken to you. 4. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can ye, unless ye abide in me. 5. I am the vine, ye *are* the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing. 6. If a man does not abide in me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and men gather them and cast *them* into the fire, and they are burned.

1.—[I am...vine... Father...husbandman.] In this and the following chapter, our Lord proceeds to give instruction rather than consolation. Having cheered and comforted the timid disciples (in the 14th chapter), He now presses on their attention certain great truths which He would have them specially remember when He was gone. And He begins by urging the absolute necessity of close union

and communion with Himself by means of the illustration of a vine and its branches.

We must always remember that the passage before us is a parable, and as a parable must be interpreted. We must be careful not to press each sentence in it too far; and, in all parables, we must look at the great lesson that it contains rather than at each clause. The old saying is most true that no parable stands on four legs, and in all parables there are parts which are only drapery of the figure and not the figure itself. Neglect of this caution does much harm to the souls of Christians and is the cause of much crude and unsound doctrine. In the passage before us, we must remember that our Lord Jesus Christ is not literally a vine, nor are believers literal branches, nor is the Father literally a husbandman. We are dealing with figures and pictures, mercifully used in order to meet our weak capacities. And we must take care that we do not draw doctrinal conclusions from them which contradict other plain passages of Scripture. Evan Maldonatus, the Romish commentator, here remarks: "All the several parts of a parable are not always meant to be fitted to the thing signified by the parable. Many things in parables are said to fill up or adorn the narrative." Toletus says just the same.

Burgon remarks: "Instead of perplexing ourselves with minor details, let us bear in mind that in interpreting each of our Lord's parables the great *purpose* for which it was delivered is ever to be borne in mind, if we would understand it rightly."

Our Lord's reason for choosing the illustration of "a vine" has caused much speculation. Some think that He drew the figure from a vine trained over the walls and windows of the upper chamber which He and His disciples were leaving. Some think that He drew it from the famous golden vine which ornamented the principal gate of the temple. Some think that He drew it from the vines which He saw by the wayside as He walked to the garden of Gethsemane. Some refer it to the "fruit of the vine" at the Lord's Supper. After all, these are only guesses and conjectures. It was night when our Lord spoke, and of course nothing could be seen very distinctly. Nor is it necessary to suppose that our Lord drew His illustration from anything but His own mind.

The expression "the true" applied to the vine is an argument much used by those who think our Lord founded His parable on a vine under His eyes. But is it not more likely that our Lord had in view those places in the Old Testament where the Jewish Church is compared to a vine? (See Ps. 80:8, Jer. 2:21, Ezek. 15:2, Hosea 10:1.) It would then mean: "I, and not the decaying Jewish Church, am the true source of spiritual life." This, to Jewish minds, would be a very useful lesson.

For the use of the word "true" in a precisely similar way, see John 6:32, "the true bread." It means the true, original type vine of which all other vines are only types and shadows.
Lightfoot says: "Hitherto Israel had been the vine, into which everyone who would worship the true God must be grafted. But from

henceforward, they were to be planted into the profession of Christ." The meaning of the verse seems to be this: "The relation between you and Me is that of a vine and its branches. I am the true source of all your life and spiritual vigor, and you are as entirely dependent on Me as the branches of the vine are on the parent stem. There is as close a union between you and Me as between a vine and its branches. My Father takes the same tender interest in you that the vine-dresser does in the branch of the vine and is continually watching over your health, fruitfulness, and fertility. Think not for a moment that my Father is not as deeply interested in your spiritual prosperity as I am myself." The interpretation adopted by Alford and many others—that the vine means "the visible Church" of which Christ is the *inclusive Head*—appears to me thoroughly unsatisfactory. Our Lord is speaking specially to eleven believers and treating of their relation to himself. To apply all the language of this parable to so mixed and defective a body as the "visible Church" seems to me to lower and degrade the whole passage.

2.—[Every branch…does not…takes away.] Perhaps no sentence in the parable is more perverted and wrested and misapplied than this. Many assert that it teaches that a man may be a real true branch of the vine, a member of Christ, and yet lose all His grace and be finally cast away. In short, the sentence is the favorite weapon of all Arminians, of all who maintain an inseparable connection between grace and baptism, and of all who deny the perseverance in faith of believers. I will not urge in reply that this view of the sentence cannot be reconciled with other plainer texts of Scripture, which are not

parts of a parable like this, and that we should always shrink from interpreting Scripture so as to make one part contradict another. I prefer saying that the sentence before us will not bear the sense commonly put on it. The plain truth is that this text is precisely that part of the parable which will not admit of a literal interpretation. As a matter of fact, it is not true that the Father "takes away" all unfruitful branches. When does He do it? When does He remove from the Church all graceless Christians? On the contrary, for 1800 years He has allowed them to exist in the Church and has not taken them away. Nor will He take them away until the day of judgment. If the expression "takes away" cannot be interpreted literally, we must beware of interpreting literally the expression "branch in Me." As the one phrase is figurative, so also is the other. In short, it cannot be shown that a "branch in Me" must mean a believer in Me. It means nothing more than "a professing member of my Church, a man joined to the company of my people but not joined to me." The true meaning of the verse, I believe, to be this: "My Father deals with my mystical body just as the vine-dresser deals with the vine and its branches. He will no more allow any of my members to be fruitless and graceless than a vine-dresser will allow barren branches to grow on the vine. My Father will take care that all who are in Me give proof of their union by their fruitful lives and conversation. He will not tolerate for a moment such an inconsistent being as an unfruitful believer, if such a being could be found. In a word, fruitfulness is the great test of being one of my disciples, and he that is not fruitful is not a branch of the true vine."

Calvin remarks: “Many are supposed to be in the vine, according to man’s opinion, who actually have no root in the vine.” Hengstenberg thinks that the Jewish Church is primarily meant here as a fruitless branch, compared to the Christian Church.

[And every branch…prunes…more fruit.] The meaning of this part of the verse is happily more easy than the other. “Just as a vine-dresser prunes and cuts all healthy branches of a vine in order to prevent it running to wood, and have it bear more fruit, so does my Father deal with all my believing members. He prunes and purifies them by affliction and trouble, in order to make them more fruitful in holiness.”

Let us remember that this sentence throws light on many of the afflictions and trials of God’s people. They are all part of that mysterious process by which God the Father purifies and sanctifies Christ’s people. They are the “pruning” of the vine-branches, for good and not for harm, to increase their fruitfulness. All the most eminent saints in every age have been men of sorrows, and often pruned.

Clement of Alexandria, and many writers in all ages, remark on this verse that the vine-branch which is not sharply pruned is peculiarly liable to run to wood and bear no fruit.
After all, in leaving this difficult verse, we must not forget that a man may *appear* to us to be a “branch in Christ” and a true believer, and yet not be one in the sight of God. The end of that man will be death.

He will be “taken away” at last to punishment. “Everyone who seems and appears to be a branch of the true vine, and yet is not really one, will be lost.” Two principles, in any case, we must never let go. One principle is that no one can be a branch in Christ and a living member of His body who does not bear fruit. Vital union with Christ not evidenced by life is an impossibility and a blasphemous idea. The other principle is that no living branch of the true vine, no believer in Christ, will ever finally perish. They that perish may have looked like believers, but they were not believers in reality.

3.—[*Now ye are clean, etc.*] Having described the relation between Himself and His people generally, our Lord now turns to His disciples and shows them their present position and immediate duty. “Now you are comparatively cleansed and purified by the doctrine which I have taught and you have received and believed. But do not be content with past attainments. Attend to the counsel that I am about to give you.” When our Lord calls His disciples “clean” or “pure” in this place, we cannot doubt that He uses the phrase in a comparative sense. Compared to the unbelieving Scribes and Pharisees, compared indeed with themselves before their Lord called and taught them, the disciples were a cleansed and purified people—imperfectly and very partially cleansed no doubt, but cleansed.

We should carefully note how our Lord speaks of His “Word” as the great instrument of cleansing His disciples. It is the same mighty principle that is found in Eph. 5:26 and 1 Peter 1:22. God’s Word is God’s grand means of converting and sanctifying souls.

Henry remarks here: “Those who are justified by the blood and sanctified by the Spirit of Christ are in Christ’s account clean already, notwithstanding many spots and manifold imperfections.”

4.—[*Abide in Me, and I in you.*] Now comes the direct instruction that our Lord desired the disciples to receive: “Abide in Me. Cling to Me. Stick fast to Me. Live the life of close and intimate communion with Me. Get nearer and nearer to Me. Roll every burden on Me. Cast your whole weight on Me. Never let go your hold on Me for a moment. Be as it were rooted and planted in Me. Do this and I will never fail you. I will ever abide in you.”

This word “abide,” or “remain,” is used no less than ten times in the first eleven verses of this chapter. It implies a constant remaining or continuing in one spot or place. A true Christian must be always “in Christ” as a man dwelling always inside the walls of a fortified city.

[*As the branch…abide in Me.*] Here our Lord returns once more to the figure of the parable. “Just as the branch of the vine cannot bear fruit separately and of itself, and must keep up living union with the parent stem and out of it draw life and strength, just so you cannot bear Christian fruit and walk in Christian ways and live a Christian life unless you keep up constant union and communion with Me.”

5.—[*I am the Vine, ye are the branches.*] Once more our Lord repeats the leading idea of the parable, in order to impress the lesson He is teaching on the disciples' minds. "I repeat the assertion I made. The relation between you and Me must be as close and intimate as that between a vine and its branches."

[*He who abides…much fruit.*] Here our Lord gives encouragement to the disciples to keep up the habit of closest union with Him. This is the secret of bearing "much fruit" and being an eminently holy and useful Christian. The experience of every age of the Church proves the truth of this saying. The greatest saints have always lived nearest to Christ. Do we not see here that there is a difference in the degrees of fruitfulness to which Christians attain? Is there not a tacit distinction here between "fruit" and "much fruit"?

[*For without Me ye can do nothing*.] The marginal reading gives our Lord's meaning more completely: "Severed from Me, separate from Me, you have no strength and can do nothing. You are as lifeless as a branch cut off from the parent stem."

We must always take care that we do not misapply and misinterpret this text. Nothing is more common than to hear some ignorant Christians quoting it partially as an excuse of indolence and neglect of means of grace. "You know we can do nothing" is the cry of such people. This is dragging out of the text a lesson it was never meant to teach. He who spoke these words to His eleven chosen Apostles is the same Lord who said to all men who would be saved, "Strive to enter

in," "Labor for the meat that endures to everlasting life," "Repent and believe."

6.—[*If a man does not abide…burned.*] The consequence of not abiding in Christ, of refusing to live the life of faith in Christ, are here described under a terrible figure. The end of such false professors will be like the end of fruitless and dead branches of a vine. Sooner or later they are cast out of the vineyard as withered, useless things and gathered as firewood to be burned. Such will be the last end of professing Christians who turn their backs on Jesus and bear no fruit to God's glory. They will finally come to the fire that is never quenched in hell. These are awful words. They seem, however, to apply specially to backsliders and apostates, like Judas Iscariot. There must be about a man some *appearance* of professed faith in Christ before he can come to the state described here. Doubtless there are those who seem to depart from grace and to go back from union with Christ; but we need not doubt that in such cases the grace was not real but seeming, and union was not true but fictitious. Once more we must remember that we are reading a parable. That there is a hell and that God can punish seems plainly taught in this verse.

It is noteworthy that the Greek would be more literally rendered in the past tense: "He has been cast out" and "has been withered." Alford thinks that this is because the whole is spoken as if the great day of judgment were come. Also the word "men" is supplied in our translation. Literally it would be, "they gather," "they cast," without referring to any person in particular. This is a Hebraism which will

be found in Matt. 5:15, Luke 16:9, and Acts 7:6.

After all, the final, miserable ruin and punishment of false professors is the great lesson, which the verse teaches. Abiding in Christ leads to fruitfulness in this life and everlasting happiness in the life to come. Departure from Christ leads to the everlasting fire of hell.

JOHN 15:7-11

"If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you want, and it will be done for you. My Father is honored by this, that you bear much fruit and show that you are my disciples."

"Just as the Father has loved me, I have also loved you; remain in my love. If you obey my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commandments and remain in his love. I have told you these things so that my joy may be in you, and your joy may be complete."

There is a wide difference between believers and believers. In some things they are all alike. All feel their sins; all trust in Christ; all repent and strive to be holy. All have grace, and faith, and new hearts. But they differ widely in the degree of their attainments. Some are far happier and holier Christians than others, and have far more influence on the world.

Now what are the inducements which the Lord Jesus holds out to His people, to make them aim at eminent holiness? This is a question which ought to be deeply interesting to every pious mind. Who would not like to be a singularly useful and happy servant of Christ? The passage before us throws light on the subject in three ways.

In the first place, our Lord declares, "If you abide in Me, and my words abide in you, you shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you." This is ***a distinct promise of power and success in prayer. A***nd what does it turn upon? We must "abide in Christ," and Christ's "words must abide in us."

To abide in Christ means to keep up a habit of constant close communion with Him—to be always leaning on Him, resting on Him, pouring out our hearts to Him, and using Him as our Fountain of life and strength, as our chief Companion and best Friend. To have His words abiding in us, is to keep His sayings and precepts continually before our memories and minds, and to make them the guide of our actions and the rule of our daily conduct and behavior.

Christians of this stamp, we are told, shall not pray in vain. Whatever they ask they shall obtain, so long as they ask things according to God's mind. No work shall be found too hard, and no difficulty insurmountable. Asking they shall receive, and seeking they shall find. Such men were Martin Luther, the German Reformer, and our own martyr, Bishop Latimer. Such a man was John Knox, of whom Queen Mary said, that she feared his prayers more than an army of twenty thousand men. It is written in a certain place, "The

effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." (James 5:16.)

Now, why is there so little power of prayer like this in our own time? Simply because there is so little close communion with Christ, and so little strict conformity to His will. Men do not "abide in Christ," and therefore pray in vain. Christ's words do not abide in them, as their standard of practice, and therefore their prayers seem not to be heard. They ask and receive not, because they ask amiss. Let this lesson sink down into our hearts. He that would have answers to his prayers, must carefully remember Christ's directions. We must keep up intimate friendship with the great Advocate in heaven, if our petitions are to prosper.

In the second place, our Lord declares, "Herein is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit; showing yourselves to be my disciples." The meaning of this promise seems to be, that ***fruitfulness in Christian practice will not only bring glory to God, but will supply the best evidence to our own hearts that we are real disciples of Christ.***

Assurance of our own interest in Christ, and our consequent eternal safety, is one of the highest privileges in religion. To be always doubting and fearing is miserable work. Nothing is worse than suspense in any matter of importance, and above all in the matter of our souls. He that would know one of the best receipts for obtaining assurance, should diligently study Christ's words now before us. Let him strive to bear much fruit in his life, his habits, his

temper, his words, and his works. So doing he shall feel the "witness of the Spirit" in his heart, and give abundant proof that he is a living branch of the true Vine. He shall find inward evidence in his own soul that he is a child of God, and shall supply the world with outward evidence that cannot be disputed. He shall leave no room for doubt that he is a disciple.

Would we know why so many professing Christians have little comfort in their religion, and go fearing and doubting along the road to heaven? The question receives a solution in the saying of our Lord we are now considering. Men are content with a little Christianity, and a little fruit of the Spirit, and do not labor to be holy in all of life. They must not wonder if they enjoy little peace, feel little hope, and leave behind them little evidence. The fault lies with themselves. God has linked together holiness and happiness; and what God has joined together we must not think to put asunder.

In the third place, our Lord declares, "If you keep my commandments, you shall abide in my love." The meaning of this promise is near akin to that of the preceding one. ***The man who makes conscience of diligently observing Christ's precepts, is the man who shall continually enjoy a sense of Christ's love in his soul.***

Of course we must not misunderstand our Lord's words when He speaks of "keeping His commandments." There is a sense in which no one can keep them. Our best works are imperfect and defective, and when we have done our best we may well cry, "God be merciful

to me a sinner." Yet we must not run into the other extreme, and give way to the lazy idea that we can do nothing at all. By the grace of God we may make Christ's laws our rule of life, and show daily that we desire to please Him. So doing, our gracious Master will give us a constant sense of His favor, and make us feel His face smiling on us, like the sun shining on a fine day. "The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him, and He will show them His covenant." (Ps. 25:14.)

Lessons like these may be *legal* to some, and bring down much blame on those who advocate them. Such is the narrow-mindedness of human nature, that few can look on more than one side of truth! Let the servant of Christ call no man his master. Let him hold on his way, and never be ashamed of diligence, fruitfulness, and jealous watchfulness, in his obedience to Christ's commands. These things are perfectly consistent with salvation by grace and justification by faith, whatever any one may say to the contrary.

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter. The Christian who is careful over his words and tempers and works, will generally be the most happy Christian. "Joy and peace in believing" will never accompany an inconsistent life. It is not for nothing that our Lord concludes the passage— "These things have l spoken unto you, that your joy might be full."

Technical Notes:

7. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done for you. 8. By this my Father is glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. 9. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; continue ye in my love. 10. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love, even as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. 11. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy might remain in you, and *that* your joy might be full.

7.—[*If ye abide…done for you.*] In this verse our Lord continues to encourage the disciples to "abide in Him" by holding up to them a gracious promise. Abiding in Christ, their prayers will obtain signal and special replies. They shall ask what they will, and it shall be done for them. The doctrine here laid down and implied is a very remarkable one. There are some Christians whose prayers are more powerful and effectual than those of others. The nearer a man lives to Christ and the closer his communion with Him, the more effectual will his prayers be. The truth of the doctrine is so self-evident and reasonable that no one on reflection can deny it. He who lives nearest to Christ will always be the man who feels most and prays most earnestly, fervently and heartily. Common sense shows that such prayers are most likely to get answers. Many believers get little from God because they ask little, or ask amiss. The holiest saints are the most earnest in prayer, and they consequently get the most. We should note that our Lord says not only "if ye abide in Me," but adds "and my words abide in you." This means, "If my doctrine and

teaching abide fresh in your memories and is continually influencing your lives." Our Lord guards against us supposing that a mere indolent abiding in Him, with a dreamy, mystical kind of religion, is what He means. His words must be burning like fire within us and constantly actuating our characters and lives.

When He says "ye shall ask what ye will," we must of course understand that His promise only includes things according to God's mind and for God's glory. Paul asked for the "thorn in the flesh" to depart, but his prayer was not granted. We need not, however, hesitate to believe that there is a special and peculiar power in the prayers of eminent saints: "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (James 5:16). The prayers of Luther, Latimer, Knox, Welsh, Baxter, Herbert, Romaine, and other great saints are specially noted by their contemporaries as possessing power. The Greek word rendered "it shall be done" means literally "it shall come to pass."

8.—[By this…glorified…be my disciples.] In this verse our Lord supplies two more reasons why His disciples should abide in Him and strive to bring forth much fruit of holiness. One reason is that it will glorify His Father in heaven. Their good works will recommend their religion and make the world honor the God who has such servants. The other reason is that it will give evidence of their being real, true, genuine disciples. Their lives will prove plainly that they are followers of Christ. The expression "so shall ye be" is literally "all ye shall be." It must mean, "Ye shall be known and recognized by all men as my disciples, and shall feel in your own hearts the witness of

the Spirit that ye are such." Poole remarks, "In Scripture, being often signifies appearing," as in John 8:31 and Romans 3:4.

9.—[As the Father... I loved you.] This remarkable statement seems intended to show the depth and magnitude of our Lord's love to His people. We can form no adequate idea of the love of the Father towards the Son. The feeling of one eternal Person in the Trinity to another Person is a high thing into which we cannot enter. Yet even such is the love of Christ towards those who believe in Him—a vast, wide, deep, unmeasurable love that passes knowledge and can never be fully comprehended by man. [*Continue ye in my love.*] This must mean, "Continue resting your souls on this love of mine towards you, and live under a constant sense of it. Remain clinging to it, as within a fortress and place of refuge." Christ's free, continued, and mighty love should be the home and abiding place of a believer's soul.

The word rendered "continue" is the same that is rendered "abide" in verse 4, and ought to have been the same here.

10. [*If ye keep...abide in my love.*] Once more our Lord returns to the subject of practical obedience to His laws as the grand secret of a happy and comfortable religion. "If you keep my commandments, you will live in the enjoyment of a continued sense of my love to your souls and feel inwardly that you are my saved people." The doctrine here laid down is one of the great principles of experimental Christianity. Holy living and assurance of an interest in Christ are closely connected. Our own happiness and enjoyment of religion are

inseparably bound up with our daily practical living. He who expects assurance, while he neglects Christ's commandments and gives way to daily inconsistencies of temper and conduct, is expecting what he will never get. "Hereby we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments" (1 John 2:3). Let those who will call such doctrine "legal." As a matter of fact, it will always be found true.

[*Even as I…abide in his love.*] The statement of this sentence is one of those that man can never fully grasp. That Christ kept the Father's commandments perfectly while we can only keep His imperfectly, and that He abides in the Father's love continually and without defect while our abiding in His love is at least fitful and uncertain, are truths which no intelligent Christian can dispute. In this, as in everything else, our Lord's example and pattern are propounded to us as things which we must strive to follow, though at a long distance and not always with sensible comfort. But we may remember that even when Jesus said on the cross, "My God, why have you forsaken Me," He was still abiding in the Father's love. 11.—

[*These things…joy might be full.*] In this verse our Lord gives two reasons why all the things in His discourses were addressed to the disciples. One was that "his joy might abide," or remain, "in them"—that they might have a comfortable share of their Master's joy in their salvation and redemption. The other was that their own individual joy might be filled up and perfected. Two joys are named, we must observe. One is that special joy mentioned in Hebrews 12:2, which our Lord feels in the redemption of His people. The other is

that joy which His people feel from a sense of Christ's love to their souls.

Here, as elsewhere, we should note that the joy of believers is a thing that admits of degrees and increase. Cyril, on this verse, remarks that it is the mark of prosperous Christians to rejoice in those things in which Christ rejoices, and that this is the special object of the phrase "my joy"— "that ye may continually rejoice in those things in which I rejoice, and so your own inward happiness may be increased."

JOHN 15:12-16

My commandment is this—to love one another just as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this—that one lays down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I no longer call you slaves, because the slave does not understand what his master is doing. But I have called you friends, because I have revealed to you everything I heard from my Father. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that remains, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name he will give you.

Three weighty points demand our attention in this passage. On each of these the language of our Lord Jesus Christ is full of striking instruction.

We should observe first, ***how our Lord speaks of the grace of brotherly love.***

He returns to it a second time, though He has already spoken of it in the former part of His discourse. He would have us know that we can never think too highly of love, attach too much weight to it, labor too much to practice it. Truths which our Master thinks it needful to enforce on us by repetition, must needs be of first-class importance.

He commands us to love one another. "This is my commandment." It is a positive duty laid on our consciences to practice this grace. We have no more right to neglect it than any of the ten precepts given on Mount Sinai.

He supplies the *highest standard* of love— "Love one another as I have loved you." No lower measure must content us. The weakest, the lowest, the most ignorant, the most defective disciple, is not to be despised. All are to be loved with an active, self-denying, self-sacrificing love. He that cannot do this, or will not try to do it, is disobeying the command of his Master.

A precept like this should stir up in us great searching's of heart. It condemns the selfish, ill-natured, jealous, ill-tempered spirit of many professing Christians, with a sweeping condemnation. Sound views of doctrine, and knowledge of controversy, will avail us nothing at last, if we have known nothing of love. Without charity we may pass muster very well as Churchmen. But without charity we are no better, says Paul, than "sounding brass and tinkling cymbal." (1 Cor. 13:1.) Where there is no Christlike love, there is no grace, no work of the Spirit, and no reality in our religion. Blessed are those who do not forget Christ's commandment! They are those who shall

have right to the tree of life, and enter the celestial city. The unloving professor is unfit for heaven.

We should observe, secondly, ***how our Lord speaks of the relation between Himself and true believers.*** He says, "Henceforth I call you not servants . . . but I have called you friends."

This is indeed a glorious privilege. To know Christ, serve Christ, follow Christ, obey Christ, work in Christ's vineyard, fight Christ's battles, all this is no small matter. But for sinful men and women like ourselves to be called "friends of Christ," is something that our weak minds can hardly grasp and take in. The King of kings and Lord of lords not only pities and saves all those who believe in Him, but actually calls them His "friends." We need not wonder, in the face of such language as this, that Paul should say, the "love of Christ passes knowledge." (Ephes. 3:19.)

Let the expression before us encourage Christians to deal familiarly with Christ in prayer. Why should we be afraid to pour out all our hearts, and unbosom all our secrets, in speaking to one who calls us His "friends"? Let it cheer us in all the troubles and sorrows of life, and increase our confidence in our Lord. "He that has friends," says Solomon, "will show himself friendly." (Prov. 18:24.) Certainly our great Master in heaven will never forsake His "friends." Poor and unworthy as we are, He will not cast us off, but will stand by us and keep us to the end. David never forgot Jonathan, and the Son of David will never forget His people. None so rich, so strong, so

well off, so thoroughly provided for, as the man of whom Christ says, “This is my friend!”

We should observe, lastly, ***how our Lord speaks of the doctrine of election.*** He says, “You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, that you should go and bring forth fruit.” The choosing here mentioned is evidently twofold. It includes not only the election to the Apostolic office, which was peculiar to the eleven, but the election to eternal life, which is the privilege of all believers. To this last “choosing,” as it specially concerns ourselves, we may profitably direct our attention.

Election to eternal life, is a truth of Scripture which we must receive humbly, and believe implicitly. Why the Lord Jesus calls some and does not call others, quickens whom He will, and leaves others alone in their sins, these are deep things which we cannot explain. Let it suffice us to know that it is a fact. God must begin the work of grace in a man’s heart, or else a man will never be saved. Christ must first choose us and call us by His Spirit, or else we shall never choose Christ. Beyond doubt, if not saved, we shall have none to blame but ourselves. But if saved, we shall certainly trace up the beginning of our salvation, to the choosing grace of Christ. Our song to all eternity will be that which fell from the lips of Jonah—“Salvation is of the Lord.” (Jonah 2:9.)

Election is always to sanctification. Those whom Christ chooses out of mankind, He chooses not only that they may be saved, but that they may bear fruit, and fruit that can be seen. All other election

beside this is a mere vain delusion, and a miserable invention of man. It was the faith and hope and love of the Thessalonians, which made Paul say, “I know your election of God.” (1 Thess. 1:4.) Where there is no visible fruit of sanctification, we may be sure there is no election.

Armed with such principles as these, we have no cause to be afraid of the doctrine of election. Like any other truth of the Gospel, it is liable to be abused and perverted. But to a pious mind, as the seventeenth Article of the Church of England truly says, it is a doctrine “full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort.”

Technical Notes:

12. This is my commandment, that ye love one another as I have loved you. 13. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. 14. Ye are my friends if ye do whatever I command you. 15. Henceforth I call you not servants, for the servant does not know what his Lord is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. 16. Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you and ordained you that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain, that whatever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give you.

12.—[*This is my commandment, etc.*] In this verse our Lord returns to the old lesson that He has taught before—the great duty of love

towards other Christians. He backs the command by His own example. Nothing less than His matchless love towards sinners should be the measure and standard of love to one another.

The frequent repetition of this command teaches the vast importance of Christian charity and the great rarity of it. How anyone can pretend to Christian hope who is ignorant of Christian love, it is hard to understand. He who supposes he is right in the sight of God because his doctrinal views are correct, while he is unloving in his temper, and is sharp, cross, snappish and ill-natured in the use of his tongue, exhibits wretched ignorance of the first principles of Christ's Gospel. The crossness, spitefulness, jealousy, maliciousness, and general disagreeableness of many high professors of "sound doctrine" are a positive scandal to Christianity. Where there is little love there can be little grace. 13.—[*Greater love…for his friends*.] In this verse our Lord teaches what should be the measure and degree of the love that Christians should have to one another. It should be a self-sacrificing love, even to death, as His was. He proved the greatness of His love by dying for His friends, and even for His enemies. (Rom. 5:6-8.) It would be impossible for love to go further. There is no greater love than willingness to lay down life for those we love. Christ did this, and Christians should be willing to do the same.

Let us note here that our Lord clearly speaks of His own death as a sacrificial and propitiatory death. Even His friends need a substitute to die for them.

14.—[*Ye are my friends…command you.*] This verse seems closely connected with the preceding one. “You are the friends for whom I lay down my life, if you do whatever things I command you.” We are not to dream that we are Christ’s friends if we do not habitually practice His commands. Very striking is it to observe how frequently our Lord returns to this great principle, that obedience is the great test of vital Christianity and doing the real mark of saving faith. Men who talk of being “the Lord’s people” while they live in sin and neglect Christ’s plain commands, are in the broad way that leads to destruction.

15.—[*Henceforth I call you not servants, etc.*] Having used the word “friends,” our Lord tells His disciples that He has used that word purposely to cheer and encourage them. “Observe that I call you friends. I do so intentionally. I no longer call you servants, because the servant from his position knows not all his master’s mind and is not in his confidence. But to you I have revealed all the truths that my Father sent me to teach the world, and have kept nothing back. I may therefore justly call you friends.”

When our Lord speaks of “having made known all things” to the disciples, we must reasonably suppose that He means all things needful to their spiritual good and all things that they were able to bear.

The high privilege of a believer is strikingly taught here. He is a friend of Christ, as well as a child of God. No one need ever say he

has no “friend” to turn to so long as Christ is in heaven. Once only before this place does Christ call the disciples “friends” (Luke 12:4). It is noteworthy that Abraham is the only person in the Old Testament who is called “the friend of God” (Isa. 41:8), and of him the Lord says, “Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?” (Gen. 18:17).

16.—[*Ye have not chosen Me, etc.*] The connecting link between this verse and the passage preceding it is not very clear.

Hengstenberg thinks that it refers to the commandment just laid down, to love one another. “I may fairly lay down laws and rules for your conduct, because I first chose and called you to be members of my church.” I much prefer thinking that our Lord’s object is to exalt the privilege of discipleship in the eyes of the eleven. “Remember, when I call you friends, that I called you into the number of my people and chose you before you chose Me. See then how great and free and deep is my love to you.”

When our Lord speaks of “choosing” in this verse, I think that He means two things: viz., His choice of the eleven to be His apostles and their eternal election to salvation. There seems to be a peculiar fulness in the phrase. The choice of the believer to eternal life is not the whole idea that our Lord means to convey. True as that glorious doctrine is, it is not the whole doctrine of this verse. The “choosing” includes a choosing for an office, like John 6:70, and seems to have a special reference to the choice of the eleven faithful apostles to be the

first children of Christ's Church.

Calvin certainly says: "The subject now in hand is not the ordinary election of believers, by which they are adopted to be God's children, but that special election by which Christ sets apart His disciples to the office of preaching the gospel." (See John 6:70.) This also is the view of Chrysostom and Cyril. But most of the Latin fathers apply the "choice" to eternal election. So also does Lampe. My own impression is that, for once, the expression includes both official and eternal election. The Greek word rendered "ordained" means simply, "I have placed you" in a certain position as my apostles.

When our Lord says, "I have chosen and ordained you that ye should go and bring forth fruit," I think He refers to the work of conversion and building a Church in the world. "I chose and set you apart for this great purpose, that ye should go into all the world preaching the Gospel and gathering in the harvest and fruit of saved souls, and that this work begun by you might remain and continue long after your deaths." And then to encourage the eleven He adds, "It was part of my plan that so bringing forth fruit, ye should obtain by prayer everything that ye need for your work."

It is vain to deny that the verse is a very difficult one both as to its connection and contents. As a general rule, I hold strongly that the things spoken by our Lord in this last discourse decidedly belong to all believers in every age and not to the eleven only. Yet there are perhaps exceptions, and this verse may be one. The expression "Go

and bring forth fruit" certainly seems to apply peculiarly to the eleven, who were to "GO" into all the world and preach the Gospel. It is as though our Lord said, "Take comfort in the thought that I chose you as my friends for this great purpose—to go and preach, to reap an abundant harvest of souls, to do lasting work, and to obtain a constant supply of grace and help, by prayer." I cannot see how the word "go" can apply to any but the eleven to whom the Lord was speaking, and this weighs heavily with me in interpreting it. "That your fruit should remain," again, is a phrase that I cannot apply to anything but the lasting and abiding work which the Apostles did when they went through the world preaching the Gospel. But I freely admit that I find in the verse "things hard to be understood."

JOHN 15:17-21

"This I command you—to love one another."

"If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. However, because you do not belong to the world, but I chose you out of the world, for this reason the world hates you. Remember what I told you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they obeyed my word, they will obey yours too. But they will do all these things to you on account of my name, because they do not know the one who sent me."

The passage before us opens with a renewed exhortation to brotherly love. For the third time in this discourse our Lord thinks it needful to press this precious grace on the attention of His disciples. Rare, indeed, must genuine charity be, when such repeated mention of it is made! In the present instance the connection in which it stands should be carefully observed. *Christian love is placed in contrast to the hatred of the world.*

We are shown first, in this passage, ***what true Christians must expect to meet in this world—hatred and persecution.*** If the disciples looked for kindness and gratitude from man they would be painfully disappointed. They must lay their account to be ill-treated like their Master. "The world hates you. Be not moved or surprised. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my word, they will keep yours also."

Facts, painful facts in every age, supply abundant proof that our Lord's warning was not without cause. Persecution was the lot of the Apostles and their companions wherever they went. Not more than one or two of them died quietly in his bed. Persecution has been the lot of true believers throughout the eighteen Christian centuries of history. The doings of Roman Emperors and Roman Popes, the Spanish inquisition, the martyrdoms of Queen Mary's reign, all tell the same story. Persecution is the lot of all really godly people at this very day. Ridicule, mockery, slander, misrepresentations still show the feeling of unconverted people against the true Christian. As it was in Paul's day, so it is now. In public and in private, at school and

at college, at home and abroad, “all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” (2 Tim. 3:12.) Mere churchmanship and outward profession are a cheap religion, of course, and cost a man nothing. But real vital Christianity will always bring with it a cross.

To know and understand these things is of the utmost importance to our comfort. Nothing is so mischievous as the habit of indulging false expectations. Let us realize that human nature never changes, that “the carnal mind is enmity against God,” and against God’s image in His people. Let us settle it in our minds that no holiness of life or consistency of conduct will ever prevent wicked people hating the servants of Christ, just as they hated their blameless Master. Let us remember these things, and then we shall not be disappointed.

We are shown secondly, in this passage, ***two reasons for patience under the persecution of this world.*** Each is weighty, and supplies matter for much thought.

For one thing, persecution is the cup of which Christ Himself drank. Faultless as He was in everything, in temper, word, and deed —unwearied as He was in works of kindness, always going about doing good—never was any one so hated as Jesus was to the last day of His earthly ministry. Scribes and High Priests, Pharisees and Sadducees, Jews and Gentiles, united in pouring contempt on Him, and opposing Him, and never rested until He was put to death.

Surely this simple fact alone should sustain our spirits and prevent our being cast down by the hatred of man. Let us consider

that we are only walking in our Master's footsteps, and sharing our Master's portion. Do we deserve to be better treated? Are we better than He? Let us fight against these murmuring thoughts. Let us drink quietly the cup which our Father gives us. Above all, let us often call to mind the saying, "Remember the word that I spoke unto you, The servant is not greater than his Master."

For another thing, persecution helps to prove that we are children of God, and have treasure in heaven. It supplies evidence that we are really born again, that we have grace in our hearts, and are heirs of glory— "If you were of the world, the world would love his own—but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." Persecution, in short, is like the goldsmith's stamp on real silver and gold—it is one of the marks of a converted man.

Let us nerve our minds with this cheering thought, when we feel ready to faint and give way under the world's hatred. No doubt it is hard to bear, and the more hard when our conscience tells us we are innocent. But after all let us never forget that it is a token for good. It is a symptom of a work begun within us by the Holy Spirit, which can never be overthrown. We may fall back on that wonderful promise, "Blessed are you when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad—for great is your reward in heaven." (Matt. 5:11, 12.) When the world has said and done its worst, it cannot rob believers of that promise.

Let us leave the whole subject with a feeling of deep pity for those who persecute others on account of their religion. Often, very often, as our Lord says, they do it because they know no better. “They know not Him that sent Me.” Like our Divine Master and His servant Stephen, let us pray for those who despitefully use us and persecute us. Their persecution rarely does us harm, and often drives us nearer to Christ, the Bible, and the throne of grace. Our intercession, if heard on high, may bring down blessings on their souls.

Technical Notes:

17. These things I command you, that ye love one another. 18. If the world hates you, ye know that it hated me before *it hated* you. 19. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own. But because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. 20. Remember the word that I said to you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they have kept my word, they will keep yours also. 21. But all these things they will do to you for my name’s sake, because they do not know him who sent me.

17.—[*These things…love one another*.] The expression “these things” must either refer backwards to what has just been said or forwards to what is going to be said. I prefer the latter view. “I press on you these repeated charges to love one another, because you must expect the

hatred of the world. The more the world hates you, the more you ought to love one another and stick together."

18.—[*If the world hates you, etc.*] The object of this verse is to encourage and comfort the disciples under the hatred and enmity of the unbelieving Jews. "Do not be surprised and discouraged if you find yourselves hated and persecuted by an unbelieving world. Do not think the fault is yours. You know, and have seen, and must remember that this same world has always hated and persecuted Me before you, although it could lay no fault to my charge."

The principle of the verse will be found true in every age. It is not the weaknesses and inconsistencies of Christians that the world hates, but their grace. Christians should carefully remember that their spotless and blameless Master was bitterly hated by the world when He was on earth, and they must count it no strange thing if they are treated in the same way. Hengstenberg thinks that the words "ye know" should be taken as an imperative and not an indicative, like "remember" in verse 20. I doubt this; but the construction of the Greek language makes it an open question. The Greek word rendered "before" is literally "first." It is the same that is translated "before" in John 1:15 and 30.

19.—[*If ye were of the world, etc.*] In this verse our Lord shows the disciples that the hatred of the world, however painful to bear, is a satisfactory evidence of their state before God. It is like, "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you," and, "Woe unto

you when all men shall speak well of you." This comes out more clearly if we invert the order of the verse. "The world hates you because you are not like itself but have a different faith and live a different life, and because I have drawn you out of it to be my disciples and apostles. The world always loves what is like itself, and would love you if your standard of faith and life was like its own. The very hatred of the world, therefore, is a satisfactory evidence that you are my disciples." Luther remarks: "Towards each other, apart from Christ, the men of the world are as little friends as dogs and cats. In all that concerns Christ, they are unanimous in hatred."

The expression "his own" means literally "its own thing," its own spirit, tone, character, faith, and life. The whole verse contains rich experimental comfort for true Christians. There are few things that we are so slow to realize as the enmity of natural man against God and all who have anything of God's image. Forgetfulness of it often brings believers into much trouble and perplexity of mind. They do not expect the world's hatred and are surprised when they meet with it. This verse teaches plainly that they ought not to be surprised.
Burgon quotes a saying of Bishop Sanderson: "The godly are in the world as strangers, and in a foreign, yea in an enemy's country; and they look upon the world, and are looked upon by it, as strangers, and used by it accordingly."

20.—[*Remember the word, etc.*] Our Lord continues in this verse the same subject: viz., what the disciples must expect from the world. He reminds the eleven of the things He had said before, when He first

sent them out to preach (Matt. 10:24, Luke 6:40). He had always told them that they must not expect to be better treated than He had been Himself. He quotes the proverbial saying that "a servant must not expect to fare better than his master." "Did they persecute Me? Then they will persecute you. Did they keep, mind, and attend to my teaching? As a rule, the great part did not; and you must expect the same."

We ought to observe carefully how strongly this lesson about the world is laid down by our Lord. It was doubtless spoken for all time and with a special reference to believers' slowness to realize it. If there is anything that true Christians seem incessantly forgetting, and seem to need incessantly reminding of, it is the real feeling of unconverted people towards them and the treatment they must expect to meet with. Wrong expectations are one great cause of Christians feeling troubled and perplexed. That word "remember," "do you remember," has a mine of meaning in it.

Gataker, Bengel, and some others think that the Greek word here rendered "keep" means "to observe with a malicious intention to carp at it; but this seems improbable. Whether, however, there is not a latent irony in the sentence is doubtful."

21.—[But all these things...name' sake.] Our Lord here tells His disciples that He Himself was the cause of all the enmity and hatred they would meet with. They would be hated on account of their Master, more than on account of themselves. "These things" must

refer apparently to the expression, “hate, persecute, and keep your word.”

It may be some comfort to a persecuted Christian to think that it is for his Master’s sake that he is ill used. He is “filling up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ” (Col. 1:24). He is “bearing the reproach of Christ” (Heb. 11:26).

[*Because they do not know Him who sent Me.*] This sentence is elliptical. It means that dark ignorance was the great cause of the conduct of the unbelieving Jews. They did not rightly know God the Father who had sent Christ into the world. They did not know that Christ was the Messiah whom the Father had promised to send. In this state of ignorance, they blindly persecuted Christ and His disciples.

This judicial blindness and hardness of the Jewish nation in the time of our Lord and His Apostles is a thing that ought to be carefully observed by all Bible-readers. (See Acts 3:17, 13:27, 28:25-27, 1 Cor. 2:8, 2 Cor. 3:14.) It was a peculiar judicial blindness, we must remember, to which the whole nation was given over, like Pharaoh, as a final punishment for many centuries of idolatry, wickedness and unbelief. Nothing but this seems thoroughly to account for the extraordinary unbelief of many of our Lord’s hearers.

In leaving this passage we should not fail to notice the singular frequency with which our Lord speaks of “the world.” Six times he mentions it. We should also notice the singular resemblance between

the line of argument adopted in the passage and the line of St. John in the third chapter of his first Epistle. The Apostle writes his Epistle in that part as if he had this chapter before him.

JOHN 15:22-27

"If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. But they no longer have any excuse for their sin. The one who hates me hates my Father too. If I had not performed among them the miraculous deeds that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. But now they have seen the deeds and have hated both me and my Father. Now this happened to fulfill the word that is written in their law, 'They hated me without reason.' When the Advocate comes, whom I will send you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me, and you also will testify, because you have been with me from the beginning."

In these verses our Lord Jesus Christ handles three subjects of great importance. They are difficult subjects, no doubt, subjects on which we may easily fall into error. But the words before us throw much light upon them.

We should observe, for one thing, how our Lord speaks of ***the misuse of religious privileges.*** It intensifies man's guilt, and will increase his condemnation. He tells His disciples that if He had not "spoken" and "done" among the Jews things which none ever spoke or did before, "they would not be guilty of sin." By this, we must

remember, He means, “they had not been so sinful and so guilty as they are now. But now they were utterly without excuse.” They had seen Christ’s works, and heard Christ’s teaching, and yet remained unbelieving. What more could be done for them? Nothing. absolutely nothing! They willfully sinned against the clearest possible light, and were of all men most guilty.

Let us settle it down as a first principle in our religion, that religious privileges are in a certain sense very dangerous things. If they do not help us toward heaven, they will only sink us deeper into hell. They add to our responsibility. “To whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required.” (Luke 12:48.) He that dwells in a land of open Bibles and preached Gospel, and yet dreams that he will stand in the judgment day on the same level with an untaught Chinese, is fearfully deceived. He will find to his own cost, except he repents, that his judgment will be according to his light. The mere fact that he had knowledge and did not improve it, will of itself prove one of his greatest sins. “He that knew His Master’s will and did it not, shall be beaten with many stripes.” (Luke 12:47.)

Well would it be for all professing Christians in England, if this point was more thoroughly considered! Nothing is more common than to hear men taking comfort in the thought that they “know what” is right, while at the same time they are evidently unconverted, and unfit to die. They rest in that unhappy phrase, “We know it, we know it,” as if knowledge could wash away all their sins—forgetting that the devil has more knowledge than any of us, and yet is no better

for it. Let the burning words of our Lord in the passage now before us, sink down into our hearts, and never be forgotten— "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they would not be guilty of sin—but now they have no cloak for their sin." To see light and not use it, to possess knowledge and yet not turn it to account, to he able to say "I know," and yet not to say "I believe," will place us at the lowest place on Christ's left hand, in the great day of judgment.

We should observe, for another thing, in these verses, ***how our Lord speaks of the Holy Spirit.*** He speaks of Him as a Person. He is "the Comforter" who is to come; He is One sent and "proceeding;" He is One whose office it is to "testify." These are not words that can be used of a mere influence or inward feeling. So to interpret them is to contradict common sense, and to strain the meaning of plain language. Reason and fairness require us to understand that it is a personal Being who is here mentioned, even He whom we are justly taught to adore as the third Person in the blessed Trinity.

Again, our Lord speaks of the Holy Spirit as One whom He "will send from the Father," and One "who proceeds from the Father." These are deep sayings, no doubt, so deep that we have no line to fathom them. The mere fact that for centuries the Eastern and Western Churches of Christendom have been divided about their meaning, should teach us to handle them with modesty and reverence. One thing, at all events, is very clear and plain. There is a close and intimate connection between the Spirit, the Father, and the

Son. Why the Holy Spirit should be said to be sent by the Son, and to proceed from the Father, in this verse, we cannot tell. But we may quietly repose our minds in the thought expressed in an ancient creed, that "In this Trinity none is afore or after other—none is greater or less than another." "Such as the Father is such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit." Above all, we may rest in the comfortable truth that in the salvation of our souls all three Persons in the Trinity equally co-operate. It was God in Trinity who said, "Let us create," and it is God in Trinity who says, "Let us save."

Forever let us take heed to our doctrine about the Holy Spirit. Let us make sure that we hold sound and Scriptural views of His nature, His Person, and His operations. A religion which entirely leaves Him out, and gives Him no place, is far from uncommon. Let us beware that such a religion is not ours. "Where is the Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ?" should be the first testing question about our Christianity. "Where is the Holy Spirit?" should be the second question. Let us take good heed that the work of the Spirit is not so buried under extravagant views of the Church, the ministry, and the Sacraments, that the real Holy Spirit of Scripture is completely put out of sight. "If any man has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." (Rom. 8:9.) No religion deserves to be called Scriptural and apostolic, in which the work of the Spirit does not stand forth prominently, and occupy a principal place.

We should observe lastly, in these verses, ***how our Lord speaks of the special office of the Apostles.*** They were to be

His witnesses in the world. “You also shall bear witness.”

The expression is singularly instructive and full of meaning. It taught the eleven what they must expect their portion to be, so long as they lived. They would have to bear testimony to facts which many would not believe, and to truths which the natural heart would dislike. They would often have to stand alone, a few against many, a little flock against a great multitude. None of these things must move them. They must count it no strange thing to be persecuted, hated, opposed, and discredited. They must not mind it. To witness of Christ was their grand duty, whether men believed them or not. So witnessing, their record would be on high, in God’s book of remembrance; and so witnessing, sooner or later, the Judge of all would give them a crown of glory that fades not away.

Let us never forget, as we leave this passage, that the position of the Apostles is that which, in a certain sense, every true Christian must fill, as long as the world stands. We must all be witnesses for Christ. We must not be ashamed to stand up for Christ’s cause, to speak out for Christ, and to persist in maintaining the truth of Christ’s Gospel. Wherever we live, in town or in country, in public or in private, abroad or at home, we must boldly confess our Master on every opportunity. So doing, we shall walk in the steps of the Apostles, though at a long interval. So doing, we shall please our Master, and may hope at last that we shall receive the Apostles’ reward.

Technical Notes:

22. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. 23. He who hates me hates my Father also. 24. If I had not done among them the works which no other man did, they would have no sin; but now they have seen and also hated both me and my Father. 25. But *this happened* that the word might be fulfilled which is written in their law, They hated me without a cause. 26. But when the Comforter comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, *even* the Spirit of truth which proceeds from the Father, he shall testify of me. 27. And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning.

22.—[*If I had not come, etc.*] In this and the three following verses, our Lord shows the peculiar guilt and wickedness of the Jews in not believing him. "If I had not come among them and spoken such words as no one ever spoke before, and taught such truths as no one ever taught before, they would not have been so guilty as they are. But now they have no excuse for their unbelief. They cannot say that they were not taught in the plainest way who I am and who sent Me."

Does not our Lord in this verse point to the famous prophecy (Deut. 18:18,19 of a Prophet to be raised up like Moses, to whom the Jews were to hearken? Does He not seem to say: "I have come as that Prophet and have spoken my Father's words, and they ought to have received and hearkened to them. The refusal of the promised Prophet is of itself their condemnation, and leaves them without

excuse."

When our Lord says "that would have no sin," He does not of course mean they would not have been sinners at all. It is only another way of putting the degree of their guilt. "They would have been less guilty than they are now. To have heard Me and not believed will increase their condemnation." (Compare John 9:41.)

Let us note that there are degrees of sin, and that nothing seems to increase man's guiltiness so much as to have privileges and not use them aright.

23.—[*He who hates Me hates my Father also.*] The object of this verse is to supply a reason why the guilt of hearing Christ without believing was so great. It was because Christ's words were not only His words but the Father's also. "He who hears Me and hates and refuses my teachings, is hating not Me only but my Father, because I and my Father are one." Once more we are reminded of the close union between the first and second Persons of the Trinity. The idea that we can worship and serve God while we neglect Christ is a baseless dream. Neglecting Christ, we neglect the Father. (See Psalm 69:9.)

Poole remarks: "It is a common error of the world, that many pretend to love God while yet they are manifest haters of Christ and His Gospel. Our Savior says this is impossible. Whoever hates him who is sent, hates also him who sent him."

Hengstenberg observes: “The Jews professed that they loved God, and that on the ground of that love they hated Christ. However, the God whom they loved was not the true God but a phantom, which they named God. The fact that they rejected Christ, in spite of all His words of spirit and truth, showed them to be enemies of the Father.”

24.—[*If I had not done, etc.*] In this verse our Lord gives another proof of the exceeding wickedness of the Jews. They had seen works and miracles done under their eyes, in confirmation of Christ’s Divine mission, more numerous and mighty than anyone had ever worked before, and yet they continued unbelieving. The more they saw of Him, the more they hated Him; and in so hating Him they hated not Him only, but the Father who sent Him. “The Jews would not be so guilty as they now are if they had not seen my miracles as well as heard my words. But now they have both seen and heard overwhelming proofs of my Divine mission and yet remain unbelieving. They have had the clearest evidence that could be given —the evidence of works and words. And yet they have persisted in hating both Me and the Father who sent Me.”

Burgon here remarks: “It is not meant that every single miracle that our Lord performed surpassed in wonder any single miracle recorded of Moses, Elijah, or Elisha; for that would not be true. But Christ’s works were made so great by the way He worked them. Without effort, by a mere word, He showed that all creation was obedient to His will.” Let us carefully observe how our Lord appeals

to His miracles as a proof of His Messiahship, which ought to have convinced the Jews. They are a part of the evidences of Christianity, which ought never to be kept back or omitted.

25.—[*But this happened, etc.*] The manner in which our Lord quotes Scripture here is so common in the Gospels that it needs little remark. The things He mentions did not happen in order that Scripture might be fulfilled, but by their happening Scripture was fulfilled. "Their law" here is a general expression denoting the Old Testament Scripture.

"Without a cause" means literally "gratuitously, as a free gift." The word occurs only nine times in the New Testament. Six times it is rendered "freely," once "in vain," once "for nought," and once "without a cause." What precise text our Lord has in view is not quite clear, and some have thought that He only referred generally to Scripture testimony, like Matt. 2:23. Others, however, point to Psalm 31:19 and 69:4. Let us note that gratuitous, ceaseless hatred was our Lord's portion on earth, and His true disciples in every age must never wonder if they share His lot.

26.—[*But when the Comforter, etc.*] The object of this verse appears to be the encouragement of the disciples. They were not to despond or feel hopeless because of the unbelief and hardness of the Jews. A witness would be raised up by and by, whose evidence the Jews would not be able to resist. There would come One who would give such testimony to the Divine mission of Christ that even the wicked Jews would be silenced and crushed, although unconverted. Who

was this promised witness? It was the Holy Ghost, who was to come forth with peculiar power in the day of Pentecost, and to abide in the early Church. The second chapter of Acts was the first fulfillment of the verse. The irresistible influence which the Gospel obtained in Jerusalem, in spite of all the efforts of scribe and priest, and Pharisee and Sadducee, was another fulfillment. The "proceeding" here spoken of, we must remember, does not merely mean that the Spirit is sent by the Father and comes from the Father. All the best interpreters agree in thinking that it means the eternal procession of the Holy Spirit.

We should carefully note in this verse the language that our Lord uses concerning the Holy Ghost. He is the "Comforter," or rather the Advocate, as we have seen before. He is the "Spirit of truth," also, as we have seen before. But we should specially mark that Christ says "I will send Him," and also says He "proceeds from the Father." The singular number is used:

"He proceeds," not "will proceed." This then is one of those texts that appears to supply evidence of the Holy Ghost proceeding both from the Father and from the Son, though not direct evidence. The whole Greek Church, however, denies the procession from the Son, and it must be honestly conceded that the Scripture does not so distinctly and directly assert it as the procession from the Father. Yet, on the other hand, it is hard to understand how the Son can *send* the Spirit and the Spirit in no sense *proceed* from the Son. The subject is a deep and mysterious one, and we have not eyes to see everything

about it. The difference between the Eastern and Western Churches may, after all, be more apparent than real; and we must beware of denouncing men as heretics whom perhaps God has received. But in any case, the text before us is one that ought to be carefully noted as one on which much of the controversy hinges. Let us take care that we ourselves have the Holy Spirit in our hearts, and when we die we shall know all about the point in dispute.

One thing at any rate comes out very plainly here, and that is the personality of the Holy Ghost. In the Greek it stands out very prominently in the gender of the pronouns, which our English language cannot reach. The word we render "whom" in the Greek text is masculine, "which" is neuter, and "he" is masculine again.

27.—[*And ye also shall bear witness, etc.*] In this verse our Lord continues the line of encouragement that he began in the preceding verse. Notwithstanding all the hardness and unbelief of the Jews, even the disciples would be enabled to bear a testimony to their Lord's Divine mission, which none of their enemies would be able to gainsay or resist. How remarkably this was fulfilled we know from the first seven chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. For instance, Acts 4:32— "with great power gave the Apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus"—is an exact accomplishment of the promise of the text.

It is noteworthy that both the verbs in this verse are in the present tense. They would be naturally rendered "Ye do bear witness" and

“Ye are with Me.” Does this point to the certainty of the testimony being borne? “Ye do bear witness”—you are sure to be enabled to do it. In leaving this chapter let us not fail to note how systematically our blessed Master gave His disciples instruction on three most important points. The *first* was their relation to Himself. They were to abide in close union with Him, like branches in a vine. The *second* was their relation to one another. They were to love one another with a deep, self-sacrificing love, like their Master’s. The *third* was their relation to the world. They were to expect its hatred and not be surprised at it, to bear it patiently, and not be afraid of it.

John – Chap. 16

JOHN 16:1-7

"I have told you all these things so that you will not fall away. They will put you out of the synagogue, yet a time is coming when the one who kills you will think he is offering service to God. They will do these things because they have not known the Father or me. But I have told you these things so that when their time comes you will remember that I told you about them."

"I did not tell you these things from the beginning because I was with you. But now I am going to the one who sent me, and not one of you is asking me, 'Where are you going?' Instead your hearts are filled with sadness because I have said these things to you. But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I am going away. For if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you, but if I go, I will send him to you."

The opening verses of this chapter contain three important utterances of Christ, which deserve our special attention.

For one thing, we find ***our Lord delivering a remarkable prophecy.*** He tells His disciples that they will be cast out of the Jewish Church, and persecuted even to the death— "They shall put

you out of the synagogues—yes, the time comes, that whoever kills you will think that he does God service."

How strange that seems at first sight! Excommunication, suffering, and death, are the portion that the Prince of Peace predicts to His disciples. So far from receiving them and their message with gratitude, the world would hate them, despitefully use them, and put them to death. And, worst of all, their persecutors would actually persuade themselves that it was right to persecute, and would inflict the cruelest injuries in the sacred name of religion.

How true the prediction has turned out! Like every other prophecy of Scripture, it has been fulfilled to the very letter. The Acts of the Apostles show us how the unbelieving Jews persecuted the early Christians. The pages of history tell us what horrible crimes have been committed by the Popish Inquisition. The annals of our own country inform us how our holy Reformers were burned at the stake for their religion, by men who professed to do all they did from zeal for pure Christianity. Unlikely and incredible as it might seem at the time, the great Prophet of the Church has been found in this, as in everything else, to have predicted nothing but literal truth.

Let it never surprise us to hear of true Christians being persecuted, in one way or another, even in our own day. Human nature never changes. Grace is never really popular. The quantity of persecution which God's children have to suffer in every rank of life, even now, if they confess their Master, is far greater than the thoughtless world supposes. They only know it who go through it, at

school, at college, in the counting-house, in the barracks-room, on board the ship. Those words shall always be found true— "All who will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution." (2 Tim. 3:12.)

Let us never forget that religious earnestness alone is no proof that a man is a sound Christian. Not all zeal is right—it may be a zeal without knowledge. No one is so mischievous as a blundering, ignorant zealot. Not all earnestness is trustworthy—without the leading of God's Spirit, it may lead a man so far astray, that, like Saul, he will persecute Christ himself. Some bigots imagine they are doing God service, when they are actually fighting against His truth, and trampling on His people. Let us pray that we may have *light* as well as *zeal*.

For another thing, we find ***our Lord explaining His special reason for delivering the prophecy just referred to***, as well as all His discourse. "These things," He says, "I have spoken unto you, that you should not be offended."

Well did our Lord know that nothing is so dangerous to our comfort as to indulge false expectations. He therefore prepared His disciples for what they must expect to meet with in His service. Forewarned, forearmed! They must not look for a smooth course and a peaceful journey. They must make up their minds to battles, conflicts, wounds, opposition, persecution, and perhaps even death. Like a wise general, He did not conceal from His soldiers the nature of the campaign they were beginning. He told them all that was before them, in faithfulness and love, that when the time of trial

came, they might remember His words, and not be disappointed and offended. He wisely forewarned them that the cross was the way to the crown.

To count the cost is one of the first duties that ought to be pressed on Christians in every age. It is no kindness to young beginners to paint the service of Christ in false colors, and to keep back from them the old truth, "Through much tribulation we must enter the kingdom of God." By prophesying smooth things, and crying "Peace," we may easily fill the ranks of Christ's army with professing soldiers. But they are just the soldiers, who, like the stony-ground hearers, in time of tribulation will fall away, and turn back in the day of battle.

No Christian is in a healthy state of mind who is not prepared for trouble and persecution. He that expects to cross the troubled waters of this world, and to reach heaven with wind and tide always in his favor, knows nothing yet as he ought to know. We never can tell what is before us in life. But of one thing we may be very sure—we must carry the cross if we would wear the crown. Let us grasp this principle firmly, and never forget it. Then, when the hour of trial comes, we shall "not be offended."

In the last place, we find ***our Lord giving a special reason why it was expedient for Him to go away from His disciples.*** "If I do not go away," He says, "the Comforter will not come unto you."

We can well suppose that our gracious Lord saw the minds of His disciples crushed at the idea of His leaving them. Little as they realized His full meaning, on this, as well as on other occasions, they evidently had a vague notion that they were about to be left, like orphans, in a cold and unkind world, by their Almighty Friend. Their hearts quailed and shrunk back at the thought. Most graciously does our Lord cheer them by words of deep and mysterious meaning. He tells those who His departure, however painful it might seem, was not an evil, but a good. They would actually find it was not a loss, but a gain. His bodily absence would be more useful than His presence.

It is vain to deny that this is a somewhat mysterious saying. It seems at first sight hard to understand how in any sense it could be good that Christ should go away from His disciples. Yet a little reflection may show us that, like our Lord's sayings, this remarkable utterance was wise, and right, and true. The following points, at any rate, deserve attentive consideration.

If Christ had not died, risen again, and ascended up into heaven, it is plain that the Holy Spirit could not have come down with special power on the day of Pentecost, and bestowed His manifold gifts on the Church. Mysterious as it may be, there was a connection in the eternal counsels of God, between the ascension of Christ and the outpouring of the Spirit.

If Christ had remained bodily with the disciples, He could not have been in more places than one at the same time. The presence of

the Spirit whom He sent down, would fill every place where believers were assembled in His name, in every part of the world.

If Christ had remained upon earth, and not gone up into heaven, He could not have become a High Priest for His people in the same full and perfect manner that He became after His ascension. He went away to sit down at the right hand of God, and to appear for us, in our human nature glorified, as our Advocate with the Father.

Finally, if Christ had always remained bodily with His disciples, there would have been far less room for the exercise of their faith and hope and trust, than there was when He went away. Their graces would not have been called into such active exercise, and they would have had less opportunity of glorifying God, and exhibiting His power in the world.

After all, there remains the broad fact that after the Lord Jesus went away, and the Comforter came down on the day of Pentecost, the religion of the disciples became a new thing altogether. The growth of their knowledge, and faith, and hope, and zeal, and courage, was so remarkable, that they were twice the men they were before. They did far more for Christ when He was absent, than they had ever done when He was present. What stronger proof can we require that it was expedient for those who their Master should go away!

Let us leave the whole subject with a deep conviction that it is not the bodily presence of Christ in the midst of us, so much as the

presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, that is essential to a high standard of Christianity. What we should all desire and long for is not Christ's body literally touched with our hands and received into our mouths, but Christ dwelling spiritually in our hearts by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Technical Notes:

1. These things I have spoken to you, that ye should not be offended. **2. They shall put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he does God service. 3. And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor me. 4. But these things I have told you, that when the time comes, ye may remember that I told you of them. And these things I did not say to you at the beginning, because I was with you. 5. But now I go away to him who sent me, and none of you ask me, "Where are you going?" 6. But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. 7. Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Comforter will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send him to you.**

1.—[*These things…not be offended*.] The chapter we now begin is a direct continuation of the last chapter, without break or pause. Our Lord's object in this first verse is to cheer and revive the minds of the Apostles and to prevent them being discouraged by the persecution

of the unbelieving Jews. “I have spoken the things which I have just been speaking in order to obviate the depressing effect of the treatment you will receive. Lest you should stumble and be offended by the conduct of your enemies, I have told you the things you have just heard.”

Stier remarks that “these things” include both the warning of the world’s hatred and the promise of the witnessing Spirit. Foreknowledge of the world’s hatred would prevent the disciples being surprised and disappointed. The promise of the Spirit would cheer and encourage. The word “offended” is literally “scandalized.” It is a remarkable instance of a word that has greatly changed its meaning since the last translation of the Bible, to the great perplexity and injury of many Bible readers.

It is needless to point out how great a stumbling block it often is to young and unestablished Christians to find themselves persecuted and ill used for their religion. Our Lord knew this and took care to arm the eleven apostles with warnings. He never kept back the cross or concealed the difficulties in the way to heaven.

2.—[*They shall put…synagogues*.] In this verse our Lord tells the disciples most plainly what they must expect. “They will excommunicate you, and cast you out of the Jewish Church, and expel you from their assemblies.” The Greek words are curious: “They will make you out-of synagogue men.” How great a grief and loss this was to a Jew we have little idea, unless we have studied the

work of Christianity among the Jews in modern times. Nothing affects a Jew so much as expulsion from the synagogue, or excommunication.
There is no nominative here to which we can refer "they." It is a Hebraism equivalent to "You will be put out."

Hengstenberg observes: "The disciples were not to depart voluntarily out of the synagogue but to await what would happen to them on a full proclamation of the Gospel. This gives a very intelligible hint to the faithful in times of the Church's decline: viz., that they should keep far from their thoughts the idea of arbitrary secession. The new formation is right only when the casting out has gone before."

Calvin remarks: "We have no reason to be alarmed at the Pope's excommunications, with which he thunders against us on account of the Gospel. They will do us no more injury than those ancient excommunications that were made against the apostles." The curse causeless shall not come.

[Yes…kills you…does God service.] In this clause our Lord warns the eleven that they must not be surprised if even death was the final result of discipleship. There would be no length of persecution to which their enemies would not go. "The hour comes when he who has killed you will think that in so doing he offers God an acceptable service." How true this has proved, the history of all religious persecution has abundantly showed. Who can doubt that Saul before his conversion was sincere? "I verily thought that I ought to do many

things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth" (Acts 26:9). The persecutions carried on in Spain, Portugal, France, and England by Romanists against Protestants are painful examples of the same thing. Men have actually thought that killing people was doing a holy and a good action.

The extent to which conscience may be blinded—until a man actually thinks that he is doing a godly deed when in reality he is committing a huge sin— is one of the most painful phenomena in human nature. Many of those who burned our Reformers in the days of Queen Mary were sincere and in earnest. Earnestness is not the slightest proof that a man is right in his religion. It is one of the most monstrous idols of modern times. The folly of those who are content with earnestness and say that all earnest men go to heaven, is abundantly shown by this text.

Ferus remarks that "good intentions and meanings are no better than impiety, if they do not spring from God's Word."

3.—[*And these things they will do, etc.*] Here, as in a former verse, our Lord points to blind ignorance as the true cause of the enmity of the Jews against Himself and His disciples. "They do not rightly know my Father, in spite of their professions of religious knowledge, nor Me whom the Father has sent. Hence they hate and persecute." (See my notes on ch. 15 verse 21.)

4.—[*But these things I have told you, etc.*] Here once more our Lord

repeats His reasons for telling the disciples what they must expect. “I have told you what treatment you will receive, in order that you may not be surprised when the time of trial comes but remember that I foretold you all, and [that you may] not be cast down. Nothing unforeseen, nothing unpredicted, you will feel, happens to us. Our Master told us it would be so.”

The word “I” in the sentence— “that ye may remember that I told you”—is emphatic in the Greek. It seems to mean, “Remember that I myself, your Master, told you.”
Our Lord adds the reason why He had not dwelt on these trials before. “I did not tell you much of these things at the beginning of your discipleship because I was with you, and would not disturb your minds with painful tidings while you were learning the first principles of the Gospel. But now that I am about to leave you, it is needful to forewarn you of things you are likely to meet with.”

Of course it cannot be said that our Lord had never and in no sense before this time foretold persecution and the cross to His disciples. But it must mean that He did not think it needful to dwell much on the subject so long as He was with them and taking care of them.

5.—[But now I go… “Where are you going?”] These words seem to convey a reproof to the disciples for not inquiring more earnestly about the heavenly home to which their Master was going. Peter, no doubt, had said with vague curiosity, “Where are You going?” (John 13:36); but his question had not originated in a desire to know the

place, so much as in surprise that His Lord was going at all. Our Lord seems here to say, “If your hearts were in a right frame, you would seek to understand the nature of my going and the place to which I go.”

Let us observe that our Lord spoke of His departure as a “going back to Him who sent Him,” His mission being finished and His work done. 6.—[*But because I have said, etc.*] Here our Lord continues the reproof of the last verse. The minds of the eleven were absorbed and overwhelmed with sorrow at the thought of their Master going, and they could think of nothing else. Instead of seizing the little time that was left in order to learn more from His lips about His place and work in heaven, they were completely taken up with sorrow and could think of nothing else but their Master’s departure.

We should do well to mark how mischievous overmuch sorrow is, and to seek grace to keep it in proper control. No affection, if uncontrolled, so disarranges the order of men’s minds and makes them unfit for the duties of their calling.

7.—[*Nevertheless, I tell you the truth, etc.*] In this verse we see our Lord mercifully condescending to show His disciples the necessity for His leaving them. It was expedient. It was for their good. It was for the real ultimate benefit of themselves and the whole Church that He should go away. If He did not go away, the great outpouring of the Holy Ghost, so often promised, could not come down on them and the world. If He went away, He would send the Comforter. If he

did not go away, the Comforter would not come.

There is undeniably much that is deep and mysterious about the contents of this verse. We can only speak with reverence of the matter it unfolds. It seems clearly laid down that the Holy Ghost's coming down into the world with influence and grace was a thing dependent on our Lord's dying, rising again, and ascending into heaven. It seems to be part of the eternal covenant of man's salvation that the Son should be incarnate, die, and rise again; and that then, as a consequence, the Holy Spirit should be poured out with mighty influence on mankind, the Gentile Churches be brought into the fold, and Christianity spread over a vast portion of the world. This seems plainly taught, and this we must simply believe. If anyone asks why the Holy Ghost could not be poured down without Christ's going away, it is safest to reply that we do not know.

One thing is very clear. The universal invisible presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church is better than the visible bodily presence of Christ with the Church. Christ's body could only be in one place. The Holy Ghost can be everywhere at one and the same time. Whatever the disciples might think, it was far better for Christ to go up to heaven and sit at God's right hand as their Priest and send down the Holy Ghost to be with the Church till He came again than for Christ to tarry with them as He had done. Flesh and blood might have liked better to keep Christ on earth, eating and drinking and walking and talking in Palestine. But it was far better for the souls of men that Christ should finish His work, go up to heaven, take up His office

there in the holy of holies, and send down the Holy Spirit on the Church and the world.

Calvin remarks: “Far more advantageous and far more desirable is that presence of Christ, by which He communicates Himself to us through the grace and power of His Spirit, than if He were present before our eyes.” Alford remarks: “The dispensation of the Spirit is a more blessed manifestation of God than was ever the bodily presence of the risen Savior.” Bishop Andrews remarks: “We shall never see the absolute necessity of the Holy Ghost’s coming until we see the inconvenience of His not coming.” The expression “I tell you the truth” is a very solemn, emphatic one. It is like, “Verily, verily I say, whether you believe me or not, it is true.” The expression “I will send” seems again to point to the equal procession of the Holy Ghost from the Son and the Father. In another place it is, “The Father will send.” Here, “I will send.”

After all, no text throws more light on this deep verse than Psalm 68:18: “Thou hast ascended up on high, and received gifts for men; that the Lord God might dwell among them.” These words surely point out that the Holy Ghost’s dwelling among men was a gift purchased by the Son. Does not the verse teach us that those who make much of the so-called “corporal presence” of Christ in the Lord’s Supper as a thing we should hold and believe, are in great error? There is something of far more importance to the Church, between the first and second advents, than any corporal presence of Christ, and that is the presence of the Holy Ghost. This is the *real*

presence we should make much of and desire to feel more. Our question should not be, “Is Christ’s body here?” but “is the Spirit, the Comforter, here?” Excessive craving after Christ’s bodily presence before the second advent is in reality a dishonoring of the Holy Ghost. We should make much of the Spirit.

Ecolampadius remarks: “Those who try to defend an eating of Christ, or a presence of Christ, in the Sacramental bread, as if His body was at the same time with us and in heaven, are manifestly at variance with this text.”

Henry remarks here: “The presence of the Holy Spirit is a greater comfort and advantage to us than the presence of Christ in the flesh. Christ’s bodily presence was comfortable, but the Spirit is more intimately a Comforter than Christ in His fleshly presence because the Spirit can comfort all believers at once in all places, while Christ’s bodily presence can comfort but few and that only in one place at once. The benefit of Christ’s presence was great, but the advantage of the Spirit’s renovation and holy inspiration is much greater.”

JOHN 16:8-15

“And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong concerning sin and righteousness and judgment—concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.”

"I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. For he will not speak on his own authority, but will speak whatever he hears, and will tell you what is to come. He will glorify me, because he will receive from me what is mine and will tell it to you. Everything that the Father has is mine; that is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what is mine and will tell it to you."

When our Lord in this passage speaks of the Holy Spirit "coming," we must take care that we do not misunderstand His meaning. On the one hand, we must remember that the Holy Spirit was in all believers in the Old Testament days, from the very beginning. No man was ever saved from the power of sin, and made a saint, except by the renewing of the Holy Spirit. Abraham, and Isaac, and Samuel, and David, and the Prophets, were made what they were by the operation of the Holy Spirit.

On the other hand, we must never forget that after Christ's ascension the Holy Spirit was poured down on men with *far greater energy* as individuals, and with *far wider influence* on the nations of the world at large, than He has ever poured out before. It is this increased energy and influence that our Lord has in view in the verses before us. He meant that after His own ascension the Holy Spirit would "come" down into the world with such *a vastly increased power*, that it would seem as if He had "come" for the first time, and had never been in the world before.

The difficulty of rightly explaining the wondrous sayings of our Lord in this place is undeniably very great. It may well be doubted whether the full meaning of His words has ever been entirely grasped by man, and whether there is not something at the bottom which has not been completely unfolded. The common, superficial explanation, that our Lord only meant that the work of the Spirit in saving individual believers is to convince them of their own sins, of Christ's righteousness, and of the certainty of judgment at last, will hardly satisfy thinking minds. It is a short-cut and superficial way of getting over Scripture difficulties. It contains excellent and sound doctrine, no doubt, but it does not meet the full meaning of our Lord's words. It is truth, but not the truth of the text. It is not individuals here and there whom He says the Spirit is to convince, but the world. Let us see whether we cannot find a fuller and more satisfactory interpretation.

For one thing, our Lord probably meant to ***show us what the Holy Spirit would do to the world of unbelieving JEWS.*** He would convince them "of sin, and righteousness, and judgment."

He would convince the Jews "of sin." He would compel them to feel and acknowledge in their own minds, that in rejecting Jesus of Nazareth they had committed a great sin, and were guilty of gross unbelief.

He would convince the Jews of "righteousness." He would press home on their consciences that Jesus of Nazareth was not an impostor and a deceiver, as they had said, but a holy, just, and

blameless Person, whom God had owned by receiving up into heaven.

He would convince the Jews of "judgment." He would oblige them to see that Jesus of Nazareth had conquered, overcome, and judged the devil and all his host, and was exalted to be a Prince and a Savior at the right hand of God.

That the Holy Spirit did actually so convince the Jewish nation after the day of Pentecost, is clearly shown by the Acts of the Apostles. It was He who gave the humble fishermen of Galilee such grace and might in testifying of Christ, that their adversaries were put to silence. It was His reproving and convincing power which enabled them to "fill Jerusalem with their doctrine." Not a few of the nation, we know, were savingly convinced, like Paul, and "a great company of priests" became obedient to the faith. Myriads more, we have every reason to believe, were mentally convinced, if they had not courage to come out and take up the cross. The whole tone of the Jewish people towards the end of the Acts of the Apostles is unlike what it is at the beginning. A vast reproving and convincing influence even where not saving, seems to have gone over their minds. Surely this was partly what our Lord had in view in these verses when He said, "The Holy Spirit shall reprove and convince."

For another thing, our Lord probably meant to ***foretell what the Holy Spirit would do for the whole of MANKIND, both Gentiles as well as Jews.***

He would reprove in every part of the earth the current ideas of men about sin, righteousness, judgment, and convince people of some far higher ideas on these points than they had before acknowledged. He would make men see more clearly *the nature of sin, the need of righteousness, the certainty of judgment*. In a word, He would insensibly be an Advocate and convincing Pleader for God throughout the whole world, and raise up a standard of morality, purity and knowledge, of which formerly men had no conception.

That the Holy Spirit actually did so in every part of the earth, after the day of Pentecost, is a simple matter of fact. The unlearned and lowly Jews, whom He sent forth and strengthened to preach the Gospel after our Lord's ascension, "turned the world upside down," and in two or three centuries altered the habits, tastes, and practices of the whole civilized world. The power of the devil received a decided check. Even infidels dare not deny that the doctrines of Christianity had an enormous effect on men's ways, lives, and opinions, when they were first preached, and that there were no special graces or eloquence in the preachers that can account for it. In truth, the world was "reproved and convinced," in spite of itself; and even those who did not become believers became better men. Surely this also was partly what our Lord had in view when He said to His disciples, "When the Holy Spirit comes, He shall convince the world of sin, and righteousness, and judgment."

Let us leave the whole passage, deep and difficult as it is, with a thankful remembrance of one comfortable promise which it contains.

“The Spirit of truth,” says our Lord to His weak and half-informed followers, “shall guide you into all truth.” That promise was for our sakes, no doubt, as well as for theirs. Whatever we need to know for our present peace and sanctification, the Holy Spirit is ready to teach us. All truth in science, nature, and philosophy of course is not included in this promise. But into all *spiritual* truth that is really profitable, and that our minds can comprehend and bear, the Holy Spirit is ready and willing to guide us. Then let us never forget, in reading the Bible, to pray for the teaching of the Holy Spirit. We must not wonder if we find the Bible a dark and difficult book, if we do not regularly seek light from Him by whom it was first inspired. In this, as in many other things, “we have not because we ask not.”

Technical Notes:

8. And when he has come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: 9. of sin, because they do not believe in me; 10. of righteousness, because I go to my Father and ye see me no more; 11. of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged. 12. I still have many things to say to you, but ye cannot bear them now. 13. However, when he, the Spirit of truth, has come, he will guide you into all truth; for he shall not speak of himself, but whatever he hears he will speak; and he will tell you things to come. 14. He shall glorify me, for he shall receive of mine and shall show *it* to you. 15. All things that the Father has are mine.

Therefore I said that he shall take of mine and shall show *it* to you.

8.—[*And when he has come.*] These words would be rendered more literally, “And He having come.” Here, as in other places, we must remember that the “coming” of the Holy Ghost does not mean His coming for the first time into the world. He was in all the Old Testament saints, and no one ever believed or served God without His grace. Wherever there has been a true servant of God, there has been the Holy Ghost. The “coming” here mentioned means His coming down with larger power and influence on all mankind after the ascension of Christ, and specially on the day of Pentecost. From that day began an enormous extension of His influence and operation on human nature—an influence so much wider than it ever was before, that He is said to have “come.”

Lightfoot remarks that “the Holy Spirit had absented Himself from the Jewish nation for four hundred years!” Hence the phrase “come” had a special significance.

[*He will reprove…of judgment.*] This sentence is perhaps one of the most difficult in the whole of St. John’s Gospel. Men will probably never agree about it entirely till the Lord comes. There is something in it which seems to baffle all interpreters.

The most common explanation is that which regards the passage as describing the ordinary operations of the Holy Ghost in saving God’s

people. It is He who convinces people that they are sinners, convinces them that they must be saved by Christ's righteousness and not their own, and convinces them that there is a judgment to come. This interpretation is the one adopted by Alford and many others. No doubt it contains truth, but it is not at all clear to me that it is the truth of the passage. It is open, in short, to grave objections, and, in common with some commentators, I cannot feel satisfied with it. For popular addresses, this view may do pretty well. But, I venture to think, no man who sits down and calmly weighs the meaning of words can fail to see that it is open to very serious objections. Inward conviction is certainly not the meaning of the word rendered "reprove." It is rather refutation by proofs, convicting by unanswerable argument as an advocate, that is meant.

Believers and God's people are not said to be the subjects of the Spirit's reproving work. It is the "world" that is to be reproved; and this very world, in this last sermon, is continually put in contrast with Christ's people.

Add to all this, that the latter part of the 9th, 10th, and 11th verses can hardly be said to suit and square in with the verse we are considering. If our Lord had simply said, "The Spirit shall convince your hearers of their own sins, of my imputed righteousness, and of a day of judgment," it would have been plain enough. But unfortunately there are several things added that really do not chime in with this mode of interpretation. I repeat that no intelligent Christian, of course, will think of denying that the conviction of sin is

a special and saving work of the Holy Ghost on the hearts of believers. But it does not therefore follow that it is the thing taught in this passage. It is truth, but not the truth of the text. I believe the meaning to be something of this kind. “After the day of Pentecost, the Holy Ghost—the great Advocate of Me and my people—shall come into this world with such mighty power that He shall silence, convince, and stop the mouths of your enemies and oblige them, however unwillingly, to think of Me and my cause very differently from what they think now. In particular, He shall convince them of their own sins, of my righteousness, and of the victory that I have won over Satan. He shall, in short, be a crushing Advocate whom the world shall not be able to resist or gainsay.”

That this was one effect of the Holy Ghost coming down on the day of Pentecost appears so frequently in the Acts of the Apostles that it is needless to quote texts. It is clear from the whole narrative of the earlier portion of Acts that after the day of Pentecost there was a peculiar, restraining, irresistible power accompanying the work of the Apostles, which the unbelieving Jews, in spite of all their numbers and influence, were unable to withstand. Nor was this work of the Holy Ghost confined to the Jews. Wherever the Apostles and their fellow laborers went, the same convincing power accompanied them and obliged even the heathen to acknowledge Christianity as a great fact, even when they did not believe. Pliny’s famous letter to Trajan about the Christians is a remarkable illustration of this.

I prefer this interpretation to the one above mentioned, as held by

Alford and most commentators, for two simple reasons. One is that it suits the language of the passage and the other view does not. The other reason is that it harmonizes with the context. Our Lord is encouraging the disciples against the world by the presence of the Comforter. And one special part of the encouragement is that the Comforter shall do for them the work of an advocate by silencing, crushing, refuting, and convincing their enemies. After all, the enormous change that took place in the state of "the world" within a few centuries after Pentecost is a strong proof, to my own mind, of the correctness of the view I advocate. About sin, Christ, and judgment, the opinions of men were completely transformed even though men were unconverted. And who did this? The Holy Ghost. Nothing can account for the change but the miraculous interposition of the Holy Ghost. I frankly confess that this view of the passage before us is not that of the vast majority of commentators. But in these matters I dare not call any man master and must say what I think. Those who wish to see the view I maintain more fully argued out and supported are advised to consult "Poole's Annotations" and Suicer's "Thesaurus" on the Greek work that we translate "reprove." Schleusner also seems to support the view. Scott remarks here: "It is worthy of notice that from the time of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit after our Lord's ascension, an immense proportion of the human race have been led to form such sentiments about sin, righteousness, and a future judgment (of which the world up to that time had not the most remote conception), that a far higher standard of morals has been fixed throughout numerous nations than was at all thought of before."

9.—[*Of sin, etc.*] I think this verse means: “The Holy Ghost shall first and foremost convince the world concerning sin by obliging my enemies to see, though too late, that in not believing Me they made an enormous mistake and committed a great sin. He shall make them feel at last that in rejecting Me they rejected One whom they ought to have believed.”

10.—[*Of righteousness, etc.*] I think this verse means: “The Holy Ghost, secondly, shall convince the world concerning my righteousness—that I was a righteous Man and not a deceiver. And this He will do after I have left the world, when the Jews can no longer see Me and form any opinion of Me. I go to the Father, as you know, and you will soon see me no more. But after I am gone, the Holy Ghost will oblige my enemies to feel that I was a just and righteous Person and was unjustly slain.” Even the centurion who saw our Lord crucified declared, “Certainly this was a righteous man” (Luke 23:46).

11.—[*Of judgment, etc.*] I think this verse means: “The Holy Ghost, in the last place, shall convince the world concerning the judgment and overthrow of Satan’s usurped power by setting up a new kingdom everywhere, even my Church, by emptying the heathen temples of their worshippers, and by drying up the power of idolatry and delivering vast portions of the world from its dominion.”

The “Prince of this world,” of course, means the devil. How great His

power was over mankind before Christ came into the world, and how great a change Christ's death and resurrection produced in the general condition of mankind, are things that at this period of time we can hardly realize. The coming of the "kingdom of God," or "kingdom of heaven," was a reality 1800 years ago, of which we can now form little idea. The Holy Ghost produced a general conviction that a new order of things had begun, and that the old king and tyrant of the world was dethroned and stripped of much of his power.

Such is the view that I take of this passage. I do not pretend to deny that there are difficulties about it. I only maintain that these difficulties are fewer than those that surround the common idea attached to the passage. Poole's "Annotations" perhaps throw more light on the passage than any commentary I have met with. But even he says things that appear to me not warranted by the words of the evangelist.

12.—[*I still have…say to you.*] This clause seems to refer to the higher, fuller, deeper views of Christian truth that our Lord doubtless revealed to His disciples during the forty days between His resurrection and ascension, when He was continually "speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." The absurdity and unreasonableness of concluding from this text that there are many other truths that Christ revealed to the Apostles after His resurrection, but which are not recorded in Scripture, is well exposed by Ecolampadius and other Protestant commentators.

[*Ye cannot bear them now.*] This word "bear" means literally "carry." It does not therefore signify things that the disciples could not "apprehend," but things that their minds were not yet strong enough to endure and digest. Do we not see here that there are steps and degrees in Christian attainment? A man may be a good man and yet not able to endure the whole truth. We must teach people as they are able to bear, and be patient.

13.—[*However...guide you into all truth.*] Here our Lord gives another promise concerning the Holy Ghost. He shall guide disciples into all truth. He will lead and direct them into the full knowledge of all the doctrines of the Gospel and all the truth they need to know. It is needless to say that "all truth" here does not mean all scientific truth. It applies specially to spiritual truth.

This great promise does not appear to me to signify "inspiration," or the imparting of that power to write and teach infallibly, which the Apostles possessed. I much prefer the view that it is a wide promise belonging to the whole Church in every age. It means that special office of "teaching" by which the Spirit illuminates, guides, and informs the understandings of all believers. That the minds of true Christians are taught and enlightened in a manner wonderful to themselves as well as others is a simple matter of Christian experience. That enlightenment is the gift of the Holy Spirit and the first step in saving religion. At the same time we must never forget that the disciples received an immense increase of spiritual

knowledge after the day of Pentecost, and saw everything in religion far more clearly than they did before. Alford observes: “No promise of universal knowledge, nor of infallibility, is hereby conveyed; but it is a promise to them and us that the Holy Spirit shall teach and lead us, not as children under the tutors and governors of legal and imperfect knowledge, but as sons, making known to us all the truth of God” (Gal. 4:6).

It is worth notice that in the Greek it is literally “guide into all THE truth,” as if it specially meant “the truth concerning Me.” Poole remarks that the Greek word rendered “guide” is one of great emphasis, signifying not only a guide who will discover truth as the object of the understanding, but one who will bow the will to the doctrines of truth.

[For…not speak of Himself…will speak.] Here begins a list of things said about the Holy Ghost that our weak capacities can hardly take in. The clause before us seems meant to show the close and intimate union existing between the Spirit and the two other Persons in the blessed Trinity. “He shall not speak from Himself, independently of Me and my Father. He shall only speak such things as He shall hear from us.” The words “speak” and “hear” are both accommodations to man’s weakness. The Spirit does not literally “speak” or literally “hear.” It must mean, “His teachings and guiding’s shall be those of One who is in the closest union with the Father and the Son.”

“Of Himself” does not mean “about Himself,” but “from Himself.” [*He will tell you things to come.*] The second thing said about the

Spirit is that He will tell “things to come.” I can only suppose that this points to the prophetical revelation of the future of the Church, which the Spirit was to impart to the disciples. He did so when He inspired St. Paul, St. Peter, St. Jude, and St. John to prophecy. The expression probably includes the destruction of Jerusalem, the removal of the Mosaic dispensation, the scattering of the Jews, the calling in of the Gentile churches, and the whole history of their rise, progress, and final decay.

14.—[*He shall glorify Me.*] The third thing said of the Spirit is that he shall “glorify Christ.” He shall continually teach, lead, and guide disciples to make much of Christ. Any religious teaching that does not tend to exalt Christ has a fatal defect about it. It cannot be from the Spirit.

[*He shall receive…show it to you.*] This is the fourth thing said of the Spirit in this place. He will take of the truth about Christ and show it, or reveal it, to disciples. I can attach no other meaning to the phrase “mine.” It is in the singular number— “that thing which is mine”— and I cannot see what it can mean but “truth concerning Me.” Alford remarks: “This verse is decisive against all additions and pretended revelations subsequent to and beside Christ, it being the work of the Spirit to testify to the things of Christ and not to anything new or beyond Him.”

15.—[*All things that the Father has, etc.*] The object of this deep verse seems to be to show the entire unity between Father, Son, and

Holy Spirit in the revelation of truth made to man. “The Holy Spirit shall show you things concerning Me, and yet things at the same time concerning the Father, because all things that the Father has are mine.” Both this verse and the preceding one are strikingly calculated to humble a Bible reader and make him feel how little he knows, at his very best, of the full meaning of some Scriptures. There are things in them that we must feel we do not comprehend. Beyond the great principle—that it is the special office of the Holy Spirit to glory Christ and to show disciples the whole truth concerning Christ—it is very hard to get. May not the clause “All things that the Father has are mine” be specially put in to prevent our supposing that there can be any real separation between the things of Christ and the things of the Father? It is like, “I and my Father are One,” “All mine are Thine, and Thine are mine.” “Think not,” our Lord seems to say, “when I speak of the Spirit showing you ‘my things,’ that He will not show you the things of my Father. That would be impossible. There is so close a union between the Father and the Son that the Spirit cannot show or teach the things of the one without the things of the other. In a word, He proceeds from the Father as well as from the Son.”

JOHN 16:16-24

“In a little while you will see me no longer; again after a little while, you will see me.” Then some of his disciples said to one another, “What is the meaning of what he is saying, ‘In a little while you will not see me; again after a little while, you will see me,’ and, ‘because I am going to the Father’?” So they kept on repeating,

“What is the meaning of what he says, ‘In a little while’? We do not understand what he is talking about.”

Jesus could see that they wanted to ask him about these things, so he said to them, “Are you asking each other about this—that I said, ‘In a little while you will not see me; again after a little while, you will see me’? I tell you the solemn truth, you will weep and wail, but the world will rejoice; you will be sad, but your sadness will turn into joy. When a woman gives birth, she has distress because her time has come, but when her child is born, she no longer remembers the suffering because of her joy that a human being has been born into the world. So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you. At that time you will ask me nothing. I tell you the solemn truth, whatever you ask the Father in my name he will give you. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive it, so that your joy may be complete.”

Not all Christ’s sayings were understood by His disciples. We are told this distinctly in the passage we have now read. “What is this that he says? We cannot tell what he says.” None ever spoke so plainly as Jesus. None were so thoroughly accustomed to His style of teaching as the Apostles. Yet even the Apostles did not always take in their Master’s meaning. Surely we have no right to be surprised if we cannot interpret Christ’s words. There are many depths in those who we have no line to fathom. But let us thank God that there are many

sayings of our Lord recorded which no honest mind can fail to understand. Let us use diligently the light that we have, and not doubt that "to him that has, more shall be given."

We learn, for one thing, in these verses, that ***Christ's absence from the earth will be a time of sorrow to believers, but of joy to the world.*** It is written, "You shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice." To confine these words to the single point of Christ's approaching death and burial, appears a narrow view of their meaning. Like many of our Lord's sayings on the last evening of His earthly ministry, they seem to extend over the whole period of time between His first and second advents.

Christ's personal absence must needs be a sorrow to all true-hearted believers. "The children of the bride-chamber cannot but fast when the bridegroom is taken from them." Faith is not sight. Hope is not certainty. Reading and hearing are not the same as beholding. Praying is not the same as speaking face to face. There is something, even in the hearts of the most eminent saints, that will never be fully satisfied as long as they are on earth and Christ is in heaven. So long as they dwell in a body of corruption, and see through a glass darkly —so long as they behold creation groaning under the power of sin, and all things not put under Christ—so long their happiness and peace must needs be incomplete. This is what Paul meant when he said, "We ourselves, which have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body." (Rom. 8:23.)

Yet this same personal absence of Christ is no cause of sorrow to the children of this world. It was not sorrow to the unbelieving Jews, we may be sure. When Christ was condemned and crucified, they rejoiced and were glad. They thought that the hated reprover of their sins and false teaching was silenced forever. It is not sorrow to the careless and the wicked of our day, we may be sure. The longer Christ keeps away from this earth, and lets them alone, the better will they be pleased. "We do not want this Christ to reign over us," is the feeling of the world. His absence causes them no pain. Their so-called happiness is complete without Him. All this may sound very painful and startling. But where is the thinking reader of the Bible who can deny that it is true? The world does not want Christ back again, and thinks that it does very well without Him. What a fearful waking up there will be by-and-by!

We learn, for another thing in this verse, that ***Christ's personal return shall be a source of boundless joy to His believing people.*** It is written, "I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man takes from you." Once more we must take care that we do not narrow the meaning of these words by tying them down to our Lord's resurrection. They surely reach much further than this. The joy of the disciples when they saw Christ risen from the dead, was a joy soon obscured by His ascension and withdrawal into heaven. The true joy, the perfect joy, the joy that can never be taken away, will be the joy which Christ's people will feel when Christ returns the second time, at the end of this world.

The second personal advent of Christ, to speak plainly, is the one grand object on which our Lord, both here and elsewhere, teaches all believers to fix their eyes. We ought to be always looking for and "loving His appearing," as the perfection of our happiness, and the consummation of all our hopes. (2 Peter 3:12; 2 Tim. 4:8.) That same Jesus who was taken up visibly into heaven, shall also come again visibly, even as He went. Let the eyes of our faith be always fixed on this coming. It is not enough that we look *backward* to the cross, and rejoice in Christ dying for our sins; and *upwards* to the right hand of God, and rejoice in Christ's interceding for every believer. We must do more than this. We must look *forward* to Christ's return from heaven to bless His people, and to wind up the work of redemption. Then, and then only, will the prayer of eighteen centuries receive its complete answer— "Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Well may our Lord say that in that day of resurrection and reunion our "hearts shall rejoice." "When we awake up after His likeness we shall be satisfied." (Psalm 17:15.)

We learn, lastly, in these verses, that ***while Christ is absent believers must ask much in prayer.*** It is written, "Hitherto have you asked nothing in My name—ask and you shall receive, that your joy may be full."

We may well believe that up to this time the disciples had never realized their Master's full dignity. They had certainly never understood that He was the one Mediator between God and man, in whose name and for whose sake they were to put up their prayers.

Here they are distinctly told that henceforward they are to “ask in His name.” Nor can we doubt that our Lord would have all His people, in every age, understand that the secret of comfort during His absence is to be instant in prayer. He would have us know that if we cannot *see* Him with our bodily eyes any longer, we can *talk* with Him, and through Him have special access to God. “Ask and you shall receive,” He proclaims to all His people in every age; “and your joy shall be full.”

Let the lesson sink down deeply into our hearts. Of all the list of Christian duties there is none to which there is such abounding encouragement, as prayer. It is a duty which concerns all. High and low, rich and poor, learned and unlearned—all must pray. It is a duty for which all are accountable. All cannot read, or hear, or sing; but all who have the spirit of adoption can pray. Above all, it is a duty in which everything depends on the heart and motive within. Our words may be feeble and ill-chosen, and our language broken and ungrammatical, and unworthy to be written down. But if the heart be right, it matters not. He that sits in heaven can spell out the meaning of every petition sent up in the name of Jesus, and can make the asker know and feel that he receives.

“If we know these things, happy are we if we do them.” Let prayer in the name of Jesus be a daily habit with us every morning and evening of our lives. Keeping up that habit, we shall find strength for duty, comfort in trouble, guidance in perplexity, hope in sickness,

and support in death. Faithful is He that promised, “Your joy shall be full;” and He will keep His word, if we ask in prayer.

Technical Notes:

16. A little while, and ye shall not see me; and again a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father. 17. Then *some* of his disciples said among themselves, What is this that he says to us. A little while, and ye shall not see me, and again a little while, and ye shall see me; and, Because I go to the Father? 18. They therefore said, What is this that he says, A little while? We cannot tell what he is saying. 19. Now Jesus knew that they desired to ask him, and said to them, Do ye inquire among yourselves about what I said, A little while, and ye shall not see me; and again a little while, and ye shall see me? 20. Verily, verily I say to you, that ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice; and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy. 21. A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. 22. And ye now therefore have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man will take from you. 23. And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily I say to you, whatever ye shall ask the Father in my name he will give you. 24. Until now ye

have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.

16.—[*A little while, etc.*] There is a difficulty in this verse which requires consideration. To what time does our Lord refer when He says, "a little while and ye shall not see Me," and "ye shall see Me?" There are two answers.

(a) Some think, as Chrysostom, Cyril, and Hengstenberg, that our Lord only meant, "In a few hours I shall be removed by death, and buried, and then you will not see Me; and again after three days I shall rise again, and then you will see Me."

(b) Others think, as Augustine, Maldonatus, and Wordsworth, that our Lord meant, "In a short time I shall leave the world, ascend up to heaven, and go to my Father, and you will see Me no more; and again, in comparatively short time, I shall return to the world at my second advent, and you will see Me again."

I decidedly prefer the second of these interpretations. To explain the phrases "Ye shall not see Me" and "Ye shall see Me" by our Lord's death and resurrection, seems to me a forced and unnatural interpretation. Moreover, it completely fails to explain the words "I go to the Father." Both here and all through the passage, I believe our Lord is speaking for the benefit of the whole Church until His coming again, and not merely for the benefit of the eleven apostles. The true sense is best seen by inverting the order of the words. "The

time has arrived when I must leave the world and go back again to my Father. The consequence is that in a little time you will no longer see Me with your bodily eyes, for I shall be in heaven and you on earth. But take comfort! In a little time I shall return again with power and great glory, and then you and all my believing people will see Me again."

It is worth notice, in support of the view I maintain, that the expression in Greek, "a little while," is almost the same as in Heb. 10:37, when the second advent is clearly spoken of. Moreover, the expression "I go" is distinctly applied in several places to our Lord's final departure from the world and seldom, if ever, to our Lord's death on the cross. Alford thinks His meaning is manifold, and says: "'Ye shall see Me' began to be fulfilled at the resurrection, then received its main fulfillment at Pentecost, and shall have its final fulfillment at the return of our Lord." This strikes me as a very untenable view.

It is curious that the first "Ye shall see" is in the present tense, and is an entirely different word to the second, which is a future. The first would be rendered literally, "Ye behold, or gaze upon Me!" 17.—[*Then some of his disciples said, etc.*] This whole verse shows how little the disciples realized or understood our Lord's meaning at present, when He spoke of His second advent. Yet when we consider how widely different are the meanings put on our Lord's words by Christians in *this* day, we can hardly feel surprised that eleven weak believers, like the apostles, could not take in the full sense of the

words when they first heard them the night before the crucifixion.

18.-[*They therefore said…a little while.*] This sentence shows that it was the "time" mentioned— "a little while"—which perplexed the disciples. We may conjecture that they could not make out whether it literally meant a few days or hours or figuratively meant a comparatively short time. And is not this precisely the point on which all students of unfulfilled prophecy disagree? The verse before us is curiously applicable to many a prophetical controversy.
[*We cannot tell, etc.*] The words would be more literally rendered, "We do not know what he is speaking of."

19.—[*Now Jesus knew…ask Him.*] Here, as in other places, our Lord's perfect knowledge of the hearts and thoughts of all around Him is pointed out. The word "ask," we should carefully note, is literally "to ask questions about a thing." It is the same word that is used in verse 23, "at that day ye shall ask Me nothing."

[*And said, etc.*] The phrase rendered, "Do ye inquire among yourselves of that?" would be more literally, "Concerning this, do ye seek with each other?"

20.—[*Verily…say to you.*] It should be observed in this verse that our Lord gives no reply to the inquiry of the disciples. He does not tell them what He meant by saying "a little while." Questions about times and dates are rarely answered in Scripture. Our attention is rather turned to practical things.

[*Ye shall weep and lament, etc.*] I believe, with Augustine and Bede, that the whole verse is meant to be a general description of the state of things between the first and second advents of Christ. "During my absence from the world after my ascension, you, my beloved disciples, and believers after you, shall have many reasons to lament and mourn (like a bride separated from her husband), while the wicked world around you shall rejoice in my absence and not wish to see Me return. During this long weary interval, you and all believers after you shall often have sorrow and tribulation. But at last, when I come again, your sorrow shall be turned into joy." In support of this view I advise the reader to study Matt. 9:15. The idea in each place seems the same. (Compare also Is. 65:14.) Poole remarks: "The time of this life is the worldling's hour, while it is for the most part the power of darkness to all who love and fear God. But as the worldling's joy shall at last be turned into sorrow, so the godly man's sorrow shall be turned into joy." (Is. 50:11, Matt. 25:23.) The interpretation of Chrysostom, Cyril, and others, which makes the whole verse fulfilled by the crucifixion and resurrection of our Lord, appears to me very unsatisfactory. It hardly affords time for the weeping and rejoicing which is here described. Nor is it quite clear that the day during which our Lord lay in the grave was a day of rejoicing to His enemies, if we may judge their anxiety to prevent, if possible, His resurrection from the dead.

21.—[*A woman, etc.*] This verse is an illustration of the whole state of the Church between the first and second advents of Christ. It was to

be a time of pain, anxiety, and desire for deliverance, from which the only cessation would be at the personal return of Christ. We are distinctly told in Romans 8:22 that "the whole creation groans and travails in pain until now." It is the normal state of things while Christ is absent. The second coming of the second Adam can alone restore joy to the world. The Church in Rev. 7:2 is compared to a woman "laboring in birth, and pained to be delivered." The wars and disturbances of the world are called in Matt. 24:8 the beginning of "sorrows;" and the word "sorrows" there means literally "the pains of a woman in labor." The whole idea of the verse seems to be that the interval between Christ's first and second advent will be, to the Church, a period of pain, sorrow, and anxiety, like the state of a woman expecting her delivery; that the end of this period will be the appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ the second time; and that when our Lord does come the second time, the joy of the true Church will be so great that the former sorrow and tribulation will be comparatively forgotten. The joy of seeing Christ will swallow up the afflictions of His absence. (Compare Rom. 8:18-22 and 2 Cor. 4:17.)

22.—[*And ye now therefore, etc.*] I apply to this verse the same principle of interpretation that I have applied to the preceding ones. I think our Lord is speaking of the sorrow and pain that believers would feel during the interval between His first and second advent. "You are now entering on a period of pain, sorrow, and tribulation. But fear not. It shall not be forever. I will return and see you again. In that day your heart shall be filled and satisfied with joy—a joy that no one can ever take from you, a joy that shall be forever."

I cannot bring myself to believe that this "see you again" can possibly refer to the short period of forty days between the resurrection and the ascension! Above all, I feel strongly that the words, "Your joy no man takes from you," could certainly not be applied to the times of trouble and tribulation and persecution even unto death, which the primitive Church passed through in the beginning of its existence. The sensible joy of the primitive Church, beyond doubt, was often taken away, as when Stephen was martyred, James slain with the sword, and Peter put in prison. The second coming of Christ is the only time of universal and unbroken joy to which believers can look forward. Now we are in the wilderness and our sorrowless home is yet to be reached. Then, and then only, will tears be wiped from all eyes.

23.—[*And in that day…ask me nothing*.] In the first part of this verse I believe, with Augustine, that the "day" spoken of is the day of our Lord's second advent. The "asking" is asking questions, or making inquiries, such as the disciples had wanted to make in verse 19. "They were desirous to ask Him." The Greek word is the same, and quite different from the word rendered "ask" in the latter part of this verse. The meaning of the sentence is: "In the day of my second advent, you will not need to ask Me any questions. You will then fully understand the meaning of many things that you do not understand now." The far superior light, which believers will enjoy in the day of Christ's second coming, is the chief point of the promise, as in 1 Cor. 13:12.

Cyril and Chrysostom, however, apply "that day" to our Lord's resurrection and the forty days following it.

[Verily…whatever…ask…give you.] In this portion of the verse our Lord renews and repeats His former promise about prayer. "Until that day when I come again, I solemnly declare that whatever things you shall ask in prayer from the Father in my name, He will give them to you." The word "ask" in the Greek, in the latter part of this verse, is entirely different from the word rendered "ask" in the former part. Here it signifies seeking or petitioning in prayer. There it meant asking questions.

It is worth noticing here how very frequent and full are the encouragements to prayer which our Lord holds out in the Gospels. The "whatever" of the text must, of course, be limited to whatever things are really for God's glory, the disciples' good, and the interests of Christ's cause in the world.

24.—[*Until now…nothing in my name*.] This sentence means that up to this time the disciples had not prayed for anything through the name and mediation of Christ. They had followed Him as a teacher, looked up to Him as a Master, loved Him as a friend, believed Him as the Messiah predicted by the prophets. But they had not fully realized that He was the one Mediator between God and man, through whom alone God's mercy could come down to sinners, and sinful creatures could draw near to God. They were now to learn that their Master was one far higher than any prophet, yes, even than

Moses himself.

Daniel's prayer, "Shine on Thy sanctuary for the Lord's sake," is almost the only instance of a prayer in Messiah's name in the Old Testament. (Dan. 9:17.)

[Ask...receive...joy may be full.] This sentence means: "From henceforth, begin the practice of asking everything in my name and through my mediation. Ask fully and confidently, and you shall receive fully and abundantly. So asking, you shall find the joy and comfort of your own souls enlarged and filled up." John Gerhard here remarks: "The benefit of prayer is so great that it cannot be expressed! Prayer is the dove, which when sent out returns again, bringing with it the olive leaf, namely peace of heart. Prayer is the golden chain, which God holds fast and lets not go until He blesses. Prayer is Moses' rod, which brings forth the water of consolation out of the rock of salvation. Prayer is Samson's jawbone, which smites down our enemies. Prayer is David's harp, before which the evil spirit flies. Prayer is the key to Heaven's treasures."
The Greek word rendered "full" means literally "filled up," being the perfect participle of the verb "to fill or fulfill."

The sentence teaches us that the joy and happiness of believers admit of degrees, and may be fuller at one time than at another. It also teaches that the joy of a believer depends much on his fervency and earnestness in prayer. He who prays little and coldly must not expect to know much of "joy and peace in believing." We should not fail to

observe how prayer is here set before believers as a plain duty, in the imperative mood, and also how desirous our Lord is that His people should be rejoicing Christians even now in the midst of a bad world. That religion which makes people melancholy and miserable and wretched looking, is a very low type of Christianity, and far below the standard of Him who wished "joy to be full." (Compare 1 John 1:4.)

JOHN 16:25-33

"I have told you these things in obscure figures of speech; a time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in obscure figures, but will tell you plainly about the Father. At that time you will ask in my name, and I do not say that I will ask the Father on your behalf. For the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. I came from the Father and entered into the world, but in turn, I am leaving the world and going back to the Father."

His disciples said, "Look, now you are speaking plainly and not in obscure figures of speech! Now we know that you know everything and do not need anyone to ask you anything. Because of this we believe that you have come from God."

Jesus replied, "Do you now believe? Look, a time is coming—and has come—when you will be scattered, each one to his own home, and I will be left alone. Yet I am not alone, because my Father is with me. I have told you these things so that in me you may have

peace. In the world you have trouble and suffering, but have courage—I have conquered the world."

The passage we have now read is a very remarkable portion of Scripture, for two reasons. On the one hand, it forms a suitable conclusion to our Lord's long parting address to His disciples. It was fit and right that such a solemn sermon should have a solemn ending. On the other hand it contains the most general and unanimous profession of belief that we ever find the Apostles making — "Now are we sure that You know all things . . . by this we believe that you came forth from God."

That there are things hard to be understood in the passage it would be useless to deny. But there lie on its surface three plain and profitable lessons, to which we may usefully confine our attention.

We learn, for one thing, that ***clear knowledge of God the Father is one of the foundations of the Christian religion.*** Our Lord says to His disciples, "The time comes when I shall show you plainly of the Father." He does not say, we should mark, "I will show you plainly about myself." It is the Father whom He promises to show.

The wisdom of this remarkable saying is very deep. There are few subjects of which men know so little in reality as the character and attributes of God the Father. It is not for nothing that it is written, "No man knows the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son shall reveal Him." (Matt. 11:27.) "The only begotten Son, who is

in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him." (John 1:18.) Thousands imagine that they know the Father because they think of Him as great, and almighty, and all-hearing, and wise, and eternal, but they think no further. To think of Him as just and yet the justifier of the sinner who believes in Jesus—as the God who sent His Son to suffer and die—as God in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself—as God specially well-pleased with the atoning sacrifice of His Son, whereby His law is honored; to think of God the Father in this way is not given to most men. No wonder that our Master says, "I will show you plainly of the Father."

Let it be part of our daily prayers, that we may know more of "the only true God," as well as of Jesus Christ whom He has sent. Let us beware alike of the mistakes which some make, who speak of God as if there was no Christ; and of the mistakes which others make, who speak of Christ as if there was no God. Let us seek to know all three Persons in the blessed Trinity, and give to each One the honor due to him. Let us lay hold firmly of the great truth, that the Gospel of our salvation is the result of the eternal counsels of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and that we are as thoroughly debtors to the love of the Father, as to the love of the Spirit, or the love of the Son. No one has learned of Christ so deeply as the man who is ever drawing nearer to the Father through the Son—ever feeling more childlike confidence in Him—and ever understanding more thoroughly that in Christ, God is not an angry judge, but a loving Father and Friend.

We learn, for another thing, in this passage, that ***our Lord Jesus Christ makes much of a little grace, and speaks kindly of those who have it.*** We see Him saying to the disciples — "The Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came out from God."

How weak was the faith and love of the Apostles! How soon, in a very few hours, they were buried under a cloud of unbelief and cowardice! These very men whom Jesus commends for loving and believing, before the morning sun arose, forsook Him and fled. Yet, *weak* as their graces were, they were *real* and *true* and *genuine*. They were graces which hundreds of learned priests and scribes and Pharisees never attained, and, not attaining, died miserably in their sins.

Let us take great comfort in this blessed truth. The Savior of sinners will not cast off those who believe in Him, because they are babes in faith and knowledge. He will not break the bruised reed or quench the smoking flax. He can see reality under much infirmity, and where He sees it, He is graciously pleased. The followers of such a Savior may well be bold and confident. They have a Friend who despises not the least member of His flock, and casts out none who come to Him, however weak and feeble, if they are only true.

We learn, for another thing, in this passage, that ***the best Christians know but little of their own hearts.*** We see the disciples professing loudly, "Now You speak plainly—now we are sure—now we believe." Brave words these! And yet the very men that

spoke them, in a very short time were scattered like timid sheep, and left their Master alone.

We need not doubt that the profession of the eleven was real and sincere. They honestly meant what they said. But they did not know themselves. They did not know what they were capable of doing under the pressure of the fear of men and of strong temptation. They had not rightly estimated the weakness of the flesh, the power of the devil, the feebleness of their own resolutions, the shallowness of their own faith. All this they had yet to learn by painful experience. Like young recruits, they had yet to learn that it is one thing to know the soldier's drill and wear the uniform, and quite another thing to be steadfast in the day of battle.

Let us mark these things, and learn wisdom. The true secret of spiritual strength is self-distrust and deep humility. "When I am weak," said a great Christian, "then am I strong." (2 Cor. 12:10.) None of us, perhaps, have the least idea how much we might fall if placed suddenly under the influence of strong temptation. Happy is he who never forgets the words, "Let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall;" and, remembering our Lord's disciples, prays daily "Hold me up and then I shall be safe."

We learn, lastly, from this passage, that ***Christ is the true source of peace.*** We read that our Lord winds up all His discourse with these soothing words— "These things have I spoken unto you, that you might have peace." The end and scope of His parting address, He would have us know, is to draw us nearer to Himself as

the only fountain of comfort. He does not tell us that we shall have no trouble in the world. He holds out no promise of freedom from tribulation, while we are in the body. But He bids us rest in the thought that He has fought our battle and won a victory for us. Though tried, and troubled, and vexed with things here below, we shall not be destroyed. “Be of good cheer,” is His parting charge— “Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”

Let us lean back our souls on these comfortable words, and take courage. The storms of trial and persecution may sometimes beat heavily on us; but let them only drive us closer to Christ. The sorrows, and losses, and crosses, and disappointments of our life may often make us feel sorely cast down; but let them only make us tighten our hold on Christ. Armed with this very promise let us, under every cross, come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. Let us often say to our souls, “Why are you cast down, and why are you disturbed?” And let us often say to our gracious Master— “Lord, did not You say, Be of good cheer? Lord, do as You have said, and cheer us to the end.”

Technical Notes:

25. These things I have spoken to you in proverbs; but the time is coming when I shall no more speak to you in proverbs, but I shall tell you plainly about the Father. 26. At that day ye shall ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I will pray the Father for you; 27. for the Father

himself loves you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came forth from God. 28. I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father. 29. His disciples said to him, See, now you speak plainly, and speak no proverb. 30. Now we are sure that you know all things, and have no need that any man should question you. By this we believe that you came forth from God. 31. Jesus answered them, Do ye now believe? 32. Behold, the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me. 33. These things I have spoken to you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.

25.—[*These things…proverbs.*] Our Lord seems here to begin winding up and concluding His discourse. The expression "these things" seems to me to apply to all that He had been saying since Judas went out and He was alone with the eleven. "All these things I have been saying to you in language that you have not been able fully to understand, insomuch that I seem to have been speaking to you in parables or proverbs." The Greek word rendered "proverb" is only used five times in the New Testament, and in John 10:6 is translated parable.

Besser observes here: "From the very first words of our Lord's farewell discourse—'In my Father's house are many mansions'—to

the words concerning the travailing woman, the heavenly purport of the discourse is wrapped in various similes and parables."

Do we not learn here that ministers must not refrain from telling their hearers many truths, which at the time they do not fully comprehend, in the hope that they will seek more knowledge and comprehend afterward the meaning of the things taught?

[*But the time comes... Father*.] I believe the "time" here mentioned must be the time between our Lord's resurrection and ascension, the great forty days when He taught the eleven disciples more fully than He had taught them before, and spoke more openly of the things of His Father. I say this with diffidence. But I can see no other time to which our Lord could refer excepting this. It is evidently some personal instruction that He means and not instruction by the invisible agency of the Holy Ghost. "The time is very close at hand, when my sacrifice on the cross having been accomplished and my resurrection having taken place, I will show you openly and plainly the things concerning my Father, who I am, and my relation to Him, and will no longer use parables and figures to convey my meaning." The promise MAY possibly include the continual teaching of the Holy Spirit, which our Lord would give His disciples after His ascension. But the language seems rather to point to direct teaching from our Lord's own mouth. Moreover, it is an "hour" that comes, in the Greek, and not a continuous period of time. So in verse 32 "the hour" means a time close at hand.

26.—[*At that day…my name.*] I believe this sentence must mean, "In the day following my resurrection, when the full nature of my mission and office is at last understood, you will begin to pray and ask in my name. Hitherto you have not done it. When I have risen from the dead and opened your understandings, you will begin to do it."

I see insuperable objection to any other view. The "day" spoken of cannot be the day of Christ's second advent, because prayer will not be needed then. Nor yet can it be the whole period of time between Christ's first and second advent, because the passage with which it is here bound up belongs specially to the Apostles. (See verse 27.) There remains, in my judgment, no reasonable explanation except the one already given.

[*And I do not say… Father for you.*] The meaning of this sentence seems to be: "It is not necessary to say that I will pray the Father to hear you and grant your requests. Not only shall I of course do this, but my Father also will willingly hear your prayer." This is the most natural meaning of the passage, in my judgment.

It is singular that the Greek word rendered "pray" at the end of the verse is the same that is used to signify "ask questions" or "make inquiry" in verse 23. But it is worth notice that the word seems specially used when our Lord is described as "praying" to the Father. (See John 17:9, 25:20.) 27.—[*For the Father Himself, etc.*] This verse is a continuation of the encouragement contained in the verse before.

“You need not doubt the Father doing for you all that you ask in my name, because he loves you for having loved Me and for believing my divine mission. He loves all who love Me and believe on Me.” (See John 14:23.)

Anton paraphrases the verse: “Ye need not so think of my intercession as if the Father were not Himself well disposed, but must first be coerced into kindness. No! He Himself loves you, and Himself ordained my intercession.” We should notice here how graciously our Lord acknowledges the grace there was in the disciples, with all their weakness. When myriads of Jews regarded Jesus as an impostor, the eleven loved Him and believed in Him. Jesus never forgets to honor true grace, however much it may be mingled with infirmity.

28.—[*I came forth, etc.*] This verse seems a farewell summary of the true nature of our Lord’s office and mission. It grows out of the last clause of the preceding verse. “You have believed that I came forth from God. In so believing you have done well, for so it is. For the last time I repeat that my mission is divine. I came forth from the Father, and came into the world to be man’s Redeemer; and now, my work being finished, I am about to leave the world and go back again to my Father.” This deep sentence contains more than at first sight appears. It points backward to our Lord’s persecution; it points forward to His resurrection and ascension into glory.

Augustine, quoted by Burgon, remarks: “When Christ came forth

from the Father, He so came into the world as never to leave the Father; and He so left the world and went to the Father as never to leave the world."

29.—[*His disciples said, etc.*] The words of the disciples seem to be a reference to our Lord's statement in the 25th verse, that "the time was coming when He would no more speak in proverbs, but show them plainly concerning the Father." The eleven appear to catch at that promise. "Even now You are speaking to us more plainly than we have ever heard You speaking before, and not in figurative language."

30.—[*Now we are sure, etc.*] This is a peculiar verse. It is hard to see what there was in our Lord's statement in verse 28 to carry such conviction to the minds of the eleven, and to make them see things about their Master so much more clearly than they had seen them before. But the precise reason why words affect men's minds and lay hold on their attention at one time and not at another is a deep mystery and hard to explain. The very same truths that a man hears from one mouth, and is utterly unimpressed, come home to him with such power from another mouth that he will declare he never heard them before! Even more, the very same speaker who is heard without attention one day is heard another day teaching the very same things, with the deepest interest by the same hearers, and they will tell you they never heard them before!

The words "We are sure" are literally "We know." They mean, "We

know now that You know all things concerning Yourself, Your mission, and the Father." The words, "You need not that any man should ask You," mean: "You have told us so plainly who and what You are, that there is no need for anyone to ask You questions or seek further explanation."
The words, "By this we believe" must mean, "We are convinced and persuaded by the statement You have just made," in verse 28.

31.—[*Jesus answered them, Do ye now believe?*] In this verse our Lord warns the eleven of their self-ignorance. They thought they believed. They did not doubt their own faith. Let them not be too confident. They would soon find they had an evil root of unbelief within. Never do we find our Lord flattering His disciples. Warnings against self-confidence need to be continually pressed on believers. Nothing is so deceptive as feeling and excitement in religion. We know not the weakness of our hearts. Alford thinks that "do ye now believe" should not be rendered as a question, but as an affirmation. "You now believe, I know." The Greek admits of either view. I prefer the question.

32.—[Behold, the hour…shall leave Me alone.] In this sentence our Lord reveals to his confident hearers the amazing fact that they, even they, would in a very short time forsake Him, desert Him, run away, and fail in faith altogether. "Behold!" He begins (to denote how wonderful it was), "the hour comes, yes, is now come. This very night, before the sun rises, the thing is immediately going to take place. Ye shall be scattered, like sheep fleeing from a wolf, one

running one way and one another, every man going off to his own things, his own friends, or his own house, or his own place of refuge. Ye shall leave Me alone. You will actually allow Me to be taken off by myself as a prisoner to the high priests and to Pontius Pilate, and not so much as one of you will stand by Me." How little the best of believers know their own hearts, or understand how they may behave in times of trial! If any men were ever fully and fairly warned of their coming failure, the disciples were. We can only suppose that they did not understand our Lord, or did not realize the magnitude of the trial coming on them, or fancied that He would work some miracle at the last moment for His deliverance.

The Greek phrase rendered "His own" means literally "His own things." It may either be "His own business" or, as the margin renders it, "His own home."

[*And yet… Father is with Me.*] In this teaching and touching sentence, our Lord reminds His disciples that their desertion would not deprive Him of all comfort. "And yet, when you are scattered and have left Me, I am not entirely alone, because the Father is always with Me." We need not doubt that one great need of the sentence was to teach the disciples where they must look themselves in their own future trials. They must never forget that God the Father would always be near them and with them, even in the darkest times. A sense of God's presence is one great source of the comfort of believers. The last promise in Matthew, before the ascension, was, "I am with you always, even to the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20).

John Huss, the famous martyr who was burned at Constance, is said to have drawn special comfort from this passage during the lonely imprisonment that preceded his death.

33.—[*These things…peace.*] In this concluding verse our Lord sums up the reasons why He has spoken the things contained in this whole discourse. "All these things I have spoken for this one great end—that you may have inward peace by resting your souls on Me and keeping up close communion with Me." It is one great secret in our religion to draw all our consolation from Christ, and live in Him. "He is our peace" (Eph. 2:14).

[*In the world…tribulation.*] Here our Lord tells the eleven, plainly and honestly, that they must expect trouble and persecution from the world. He does not conceal that the way to heaven is not smooth and strewn with flowers. On the contrary, "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12). To keep back from young beginners in religion the cross and the battle is not teaching as Christ taught.

[*But be of good cheer…world.*] Here our Lord winds up all by bidding the disciples to take courage, cheer up, be confident, and go forward without fear. The world in which they lived was a vanquished enemy. He, their Master, had "overcome the world." This means, I believe, not merely that He had given them an example of successful fighting by overcoming the fear of the world and the

flattery of the world, but something far more important. He had overcome the Prince of this world, and was just about to win His final victory over him on the cross. Hence His disciples must remember that they were contending with an enemy already sorely beaten. “Ye need not fear the world, because I am just leading captive its king, and about to triumph over him on the cross.”

Luther, quoted by Besser, here remarks: “Thus is the ‘goodnight’ said, and the hand shaken. But very forcibly does He conclude with that very thing around which His whole discourse has turned. Let not your heart be troubled. Be of good cheer.”

No devout commentator, I think, can leave this wonderful chapter without deeply feeling how little we understand the depths of Scripture. There are many words and sentences in it about which we can only give conjectures, and must admit our inability to speak positively. Nowhere in Scripture, I must honestly confess, do commentators appear to me to contribute so little light to the text as in their interpretation of this chapter.

John – Chap. 17

JOHN 17:1-8

When Jesus had finished saying these things, he looked upward to heaven and said, “Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, so

that your Son may glorify you—just as you have given him authority over all humanity, so that he may give eternal life to everyone you have given him. Now this is eternal life—that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you sent. I glorified you on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me at your side with the glory I had with you before the world was created.

"I have revealed your name to the men you gave me out of the world. They belonged to you, and you gave them to me, and they have obeyed your word. Now they understand that everything you have given me comes from you, because I have given them the words you have given me. They accepted them and really understand that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me.

These verses begin one of the most wonderful chapters in the Bible. It is a chapter in which we see our Lord Jesus Christ addressing a long prayer to God the Father. It is wonderful as a specimen of the communion that was ever kept up between the Father and the Son, during the period of the Son's ministry on earth. It is wonderful as a pattern of the intercession which the Son, as a High Priest, is ever carrying on for us in heaven. Not least it is wonderful as an example of the sort of things that believers should mention in prayer. What Christ asks for His people, His people should ask for themselves. It has been well and truly said by an old

divine, that “the best and fullest sermon ever preached was followed by the best of prayers.”

It is needless to say that the chapter before us contains many deep things. It could hardly be otherwise. He that reads the words spoken by one Person of the blessed Trinity to another Person, by the Son to the Father, must surely be prepared to find much that he cannot fully understand, much that he has no line to fathom. There are sentences, words, and expressions, in the twenty-six verses of this chapter, which no one probably has ever unfolded completely. We have not minds to do it, or to understand the matters it contains, if we could. But there are great truths in the chapter which stand out clearly and plainly on its face, and to these truths we shall do well to direct our best attention.

We should notice, firstly, in these verses, ***what a glorious account they contain of our Lord Jesus Christ’s office and dignity.*** We read that the Father has “given Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life.” The keys of heaven are in Christ’s hands. The salvation of every soul of mankind is at His disposal. We read, furthermore, that “it is life eternal to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom He has sent.” The mere knowledge of God is not sufficient, and saves none. We must know the Son as well as the Father. God known without Christ, is a Being whom we can only fear, and dare not approach. It is “God in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself,” who alone can give to the soul life and peace. We read, furthermore, that Christ “has finished the

work which the Father gave Him to do." He has finished the work of redemption, and wrought out a perfect righteousness for His people. Unlike the first Adam, who failed to do God's will and brought sin into the world, the second Adam has done all, and left nothing undone that He came to do. Finally, we read that Christ "had glory with the Father before the world was." Unlike Moses and David, He existed from all eternity, long before He came into the world; and He shared glory with the Father, before He was made flesh and born of the Virgin Mary.

Each of these marvelous sayings contains matter which our weak minds have not power fully to comprehend. We must be content to admire and reverence what we cannot thoroughly grasp and explain. But one thing is abundantly clear—sayings like these can only be used of one who is very God. To no patriarch, or prophet, or king, or apostle, is any such language ever applied in the Bible. It belongs to none but God.

Forever let us thank God that the hope of a Christian rests on such a solid foundation as a Divine Savior. He to whom we are commanded to flee for pardon, and in whom we are bid to rest for peace, is God as well as man. To all who really think about their souls, and are not careless and worldly, the thought is full of comfort. Such people know and feel that great sinners need a great Savior, and that no mere human redeemer would meet their needs. Then let them rejoice in Christ, and lean back confidently on Him. Christ has all power, and is able to save to the uttermost, because Christ is

divine. Office, power, and pre-existence, all combine to prove that He is God.

We should notice, secondly, in these verses, ***what a gracious account they contain of our Lord Jesus Christ's disciples.*** We find our Lord Himself saying of them, "They have kept Your Word—they have known that all things You have given Me are of You—they have received Your words—they have known surely that I came out from You—they have believed that You did send Me."

These are wonderful words when we consider the character of the eleven men to whom they were applied. How weak was their faith! How slender their knowledge! How shallow their spiritual attainments! How faint their hearts in the hour of danger! Yet a very little time after Jesus spoke these words they all forsook Him and fled, and one of them denied Him three times with an oath. No one, in short, can read the four Gospels with attention, and fail to see that never had a great master such *weak servants* as Jesus had in the eleven apostles. Yet these very weak servants were the men of whom the gracious Head of the Church speaks here in high and honorable terms.

The lesson before us is full of comfort and instruction. It is evident that Jesus sees far more in His believing people than they see in themselves, or than others see in them. The least degree of faith is very precious in His sight. Though it be no bigger than a grain of mustard seed, it is a plant of heavenly growth, and makes a boundless difference between the possessor of it and the man of the

world. Wherever the gracious Savior of sinners sees true faith in Himself, however feeble, He looks with compassion on many infirmities, and passes by many defects. It was even so with the eleven apostles. They were weak and unstable as water; but they believed and loved their Master when millions refused to own Him. And the language of Him who declared that a cup of cold water given in the name of a disciple should not lose its reward, shows clearly that their loyalty was not forgotten.

The true servant of God should mark well the feature in Christ's character which is here brought out, and rest his soul upon it. The best among us must often see in himself a vast amount of defects and infirmities, and must feel ashamed of his poor attainments in religion. But do we simply believe in Jesus? Do we cling to Him, and roll all our burdens on Him? Can we say with sincerity and truth, as Peter said afterwards, "Lord, You know all things—You know that I love You"? Then let us take comfort in the words of Christ before us, and not give way to despondency. The Lord Jesus did not despise the eleven because of their feebleness, but bore with them and saved them to the end, because they believed. And He never changes. What He did for them, He will do for us.

Technical Notes:

1. Jesus spoke these words, lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son also may glorify you, 2. as you have given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as

many as you have given him. 3. And this is life eternal, that they might know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. 4. I have glorified you on the earth. I have finished the work which you gave me to do. 5. And now, O Father, glorify me together with yourself, with the glory which I had with you before the world was. 6. I have manifested your name to the men whom you gave me out of the world; they were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. 7. Now they have known that all things which you have given me are from you. 8. For I have given to them the words which you gave me; and they have received *them*, and have known surely that I came forth from you; and they have believed that you sent me.

1.—[*Jesus spoke these words*.] The chapter we have now begun is the most remarkable in the Bible. It stands alone, and there is nothing like it. A few introductory remarks will not be out of place. Henry remarks that this was a prayer after sermon, a prayer after sacrament, a family prayer, a parting prayer, a prayer before a sacrifice, a prayer that was a specimen of Christ's intercession. We have here the only long prayer of the Lord Jesus, which the Holy Ghost has thought good to record for our learning. That He often prayed we know well; but this is the only prayer reported. We have many of His sermons, parables, and conversation, but only this prayer. We have here the prayer of one who spoke as never man spoke, and prayed as never man prayed—the prayer of the second Person in the Trinity to the Father; the prayer of one whose office it

is, as our High Priest, to make intercession for His people.

We have a prayer offered up by the Lord Jesus on an especially interesting occasion: just after the Lord's Supper, just after a most striking discourse, just before His betrayal and crucifixion, just before the disciples forsook Him and fled, and just at the end of His earthly ministry.

We have here a prayer that is singularly full of deep and profound expressions; so deep, indeed, that we have no line to [fathom] them. The wisest Christian will always confess that there are things here that he cannot fully explain.

The Bible reader who attaches no weight to such considerations as these must be in a very strange state of mind.

Augustine remarks: "The prayer that Christ made for us, He has also made known to us. Being so great a Master, not only what He says in discoursing to the disciples but also what He says to the Father in prayer for them is their edification."

Calvin remarks: "Doctrine has no power unless efficacy is imparted to it from above. Christ holds out an example to teachers not to employ themselves only in sowing the Word, but by mingling prayers with it, to implore the assistance of God, that His blessing may render their labor fruitful."

Bullinger remarks that it was the duty of the Jewish priest to pray for the people as well as to offer sacrifice for them. About the place where this prayer was offered, we know nothing certain. Some, as Alford, have conjectured that it was in the upper room where the Lord's Supper was held. This, however, seems inconsistent with "Arise, let us go hence" (14:31). It seems more likely that it was prayed in some quiet place outside the walls, before our Lord "crossed the brook Cedron" (John 18:1). One thing at least is almost certain: it is a totally different prayer from that which our Lord prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane (although Rupertus asserts it was the same). About the hearers of this prayer, there seems no reason to doubt that all the eleven apostles were present and all heard it. All heard the discourses of the last three chapters, and I cannot see why all should not have heard the concluding prayer.

About the general plan, order, and arrangement of the prayer, I decline to express any opinion, thinking it more reverent not to define too closely such a matter. We can all see at a glance that our Lord prays about himself, prays about the disciples, and prays about those who were to be disciples afterward. But it is best to pause here and not to dissent and analyze and systematize too minutely such a prayer. One thing only may be remarked, and that is, the singular frequency with which "the world" is mentioned. The phrase occurs no less than nineteen times. I conclude these introductory observations by advising all who wish to study thoroughly this wonderful chapter of Scripture, to consult, if they can, the following works specially devoted to the elucidation of it:

"Manton's Sermons on Seventeenth John," (400 folio pages); "George Newton's Exposition of Seventeenth John," (560 pages); and "Burgess's Expository Sermons on Seventeenth John," (700 pages). These three books, having been written by Puritans 200 years ago, are ignored by some and despised by others. I simply venture the remark that he who cares to examine them will find that they richly repay perusal. Manton's work especially will bear a comparison with anything written on this chapter since his days. It is curious that the other prayer, commonly called the "Lord's Prayer," has been frequently made the subject of books and expositions, while this much larger "prayer" has been comparatively little handled. Melancthon says: "There is no voice that has ever been heard, either in heaven or earth, more exalted, more holy, more fruitful, more sublime than this prayer."

Luther says: "In proportion as this prayer sounds plain and simple, it is in reality deep, rich, and wide—that which none can fathom."

[*Lifted up his eyes to heaven.*] This sentence shows that bodily gestures in prayer and worship of God are not altogether to be overlooked as unmeaning. There is a decent and reverent manner and gesture that suits the action of addressing God. It also seems clearly to show that the prayer was prayed before witnesses. John writes as one describing what he saw and heard. It is perhaps too much to say that the expression proves the prayer to have been in the open air. A person may look upward and heavenward even in a room. Yet it certainly rather increases the probability that our Lord was in

the open air.

Calvin says: “If we desire to imitate Christ, we must take care that our outward gestures do not express more than is in our mind, but that inward feeling shall direct the eyes, the hands, the tongue, and everything about us.”

Newton observes that gesture and demeanor in God’s worship, though not everything, are something.

[*And said, Father, the hour has come.*] The “hour” here named is the hour appointed in God’s eternal counsels for the sacrifice of the death of Christ and the final accomplishment of His atonement. That time, which had been promised by God and expected by saints for 4000 years, ever since Adam’s fall, had at length arrived; and the seed of the woman was actually about to bruise the serpent’s head by dying as man’s Substitute and Redeemer. Up to this night, “the hour was not yet come” (John 7:30, 8:20), and until it had come, our Lord’s enemies could not hurt Him. Now, at last, the hour had come, and the Sacrifice was ready. Augustine says here: “Time did not force Christ to die, but Christ chose a time to die. So also the time at which He was born of the Virgin He settled with the Father, of whom He was begotten without time.” Let us remember, though in a far lower sense, that believers are all immortal till their hour is come; and till then, they are safe and cannot be harmed by death.

Let us note how our Lord addresses God as “Father.” In a lower sense

we may do the same, if we have the Spirit of adoption and are His children in Christ. The Lord's prayer teaches us to do so.

It is worth notice that our Lord uses the phrase "Father" six times in this one prayer.

[*Glorify your Son…glorify you*.] I think the meaning of this sentence must be this: "Give glory to Your Son, by carrying Him through the cross and the grave, to a triumphant completion of the work He came to do, and by placing Him at Your right hand, and highly exalting Him above every name that is named. Do this, in order that He may glorify You and Your attributes. Do this, that He may bring fresh glory to Your holiness, and justice, and mercy, and faithfulness, and prove to the world that You are a just God, a holy God, a merciful God, and a God who keeps His word. My vicarious death and my resurrection will prove this and bring glory to You. Finish the mighty work. Glorify Me, and in so doing glorify Yourself. Finish Your work, not least, that Your Son may glorify You by bringing many redeemed souls to heaven, to the glory of Your grace." Stier remarks: "These words prove the Son is equal to the Father, as touching His Godhead. What creature could stand before his Creator and say, 'Glorify Me, that I may glorify You?'"

The glory of God and His attributes is the grand end of all creation and of all God's arrangements and providences. Nothing brings such glory to God as the completion of the redeeming work of Christ by His death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven. Our Lord seems

to me to ask that His death may at once take place, that He through death may be taken up to glory, and that there the justice, holiness, mercy, and faithfulness of the Father may be glorified and exhibited to all creation, and many souls be at once saved and glorify the Divine wisdom and power. Augustine remarks: "Some take the Father's glorifying the Son to consist in this—that He spared Him not, but delivered Him up for us all. But if He be said to be glorified by passion, how much more by resurrection? For in the passion it is more His humility than His glory that is shown forth, as the Apostle says in Phil. 2:7-11."

2.—[*As you have given him power, etc.*] The Greek of part of this verse is peculiar as it contains a nominative absolute, and a literal translation seems impossible. It would be, "That with regard to all that body or thing which You have given Him, He should give eternal life to them." There seems a distinction between the whole body and the particular individual members. The body is given to Christ, in the mass, from all eternity. The members of that body are called in time, separately and one-by-one, and eternal life given to them.

There certainly seems a connection between this verse and the concluding clause of the preceding verse. "Let Your Son glorify You by saving souls, even as You have appointed He should do, seeing that You have given Him power and authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all the members of that mystical body which You have given Him." When we read here of "the Father giving power to the Son," we must carefully remember that it is not the giving by a superior to an inferior. It signifies that arrangement in the counsels

of the eternal Trinity by which the Father gives to the Son especially the carrying out of the work of redemption. Newton thinks the "power" includes the dignity of judgment at the last day, as in John 5:22.

The expression "all flesh" seems to me, as it does to Augustine, Bullinger, Newton, and others, to denote all mankind. All are not saved, but Christ has power and authority over all. Some confine it to the "elect," but I cannot see the force of their argument. To my eyes it is like John 3:16, where "world" and "believers" are in contradistinction. So it seems here— "all flesh" and "given ones."

Chrysostom thinks that the phrase "all flesh" had special reference to the calling of the Gentiles into the Church, and that our Lord meant that henceforward He was to be "Savior of Gentiles as well as Jews." The phrase "eternal life" includes everything that is necessary to the complete salvation of a soul—the life of justification, sanctification, and final glory.

The Son gives "eternal life" to none but those who are "given to Him" in the everlasting counsels of the Trinity, from all eternity. Who these are man cannot say. "Many of the *given* ones," says Traill, "do not for a long time know it. All are invited to repent and believe, without distinction." No one is warranted in saying, "I was not given to Christ and cannot be saved." But that the last day will prove that none are saved except those given to Christ by the Father, is clear and plain.

Poole remarks: "We need not ascend up to heaven to search the rolls

of the eternal counsels. All whom the Father has given to Christ shall come to Christ, and not only receive Him as Priest, but give themselves up to be ruled and quickened by Him. By such a *receiving* of Christ, we shall know whether we are of the number of those that are *given* to Christ." Traill remarks: "This giving of men to the Son to be redeemed and saved is the same thing with election and predestination." "There is a twofold giving of men to the Son by the Father. One is eternal, in the purpose of His grace; and this is mainly meant here. The other is in time, when the Father by His Spirit draws men to Christ. (John 6:44.) All the elect are given from eternity to the Son, to be redeemed by His blood; and all the redeemed are in due time drawn by the Father to the Son, to be kept to eternal life."

3.—[*And this is life eternal, etc.*] This verse is mercifully given to us by our Lord as a description of saved souls. "The secret of possessing eternal life—of being justified and sanctified now and glorified hereafter—consists simply in this: in having a right saving knowledge of the one true God and of that Jesus Christ whom He has sent to save sinners." In short, our Lord declares that he who rightly knows God and Christ is the man who possesses eternal life.

Of course, we must distinctly understand that mere head-knowledge, like that of the devil, is not meant by our Lord in this verse. The knowledge He means is a knowledge that dwells in the heart and influences the life. A true saint is one who "knows the Lord." To know God on the one hand—His holiness, His purity, His hatred of

sin—and to know Christ on the other hand—His redemption, His mediatorial office, His love to sinners—are the two grand foundations of saving religion.

Right knowledge, after all, lies at the root of all vital Christianity, as light was the beginning of creation. We need to be "renewed in knowledge" (Col. 3:10). We must know what we believe, and we cannot properly worship an unknown God. The two great questions to be considered are, Do we know God and do we know Christ aright? God known out of Christ is a consuming fire and will fill us with fear only. Christ known without God will not be truly valued; we shall see no meaning in His Cross and passion. To see clearly at the same time a holy, pure, sin-hating God and a living, merciful, sin-atoning Christ is the very ABC of comfortable religion. In short, it is life eternal to know rightly God and Christ. "To know God without Christ," says Newton, "is not to know Him savingly." Traill remarks: "The secret moth and poison in many people's religion is that it is not Christianity at all. God out of Christ is a consuming fire. God not worshipped in Christ is an idol. All hopes of acceptance out of Christ are vain dreams. A heaven out of Christ is little better than the Turk's paradise."

The Greek of the phrase "that they might know," would have been better rendered "to know." It is the same phrase that is so rendered in John 4:34: "My meat is to do the will." Literally this is, "My meat is that I may do the will."

Let us learn that knowledge is the chief thing in religion, though we

must not make it an idol. Most wicked men are what they are because they are ignorant. Godly people are often described in Scripture by one single phrase: “They know God.”

The argument that Arians and Socinians have always loved to found on this verse appears to me extremely weak. Their idea, that our Lord did not lay claim to divinity because He speaks of the Father as the “only true God,” is foolish and unreasonable. Chrysostom, Cyril, Toletus, and others remark very sensibly that the word “only” was not meant to exclude the Son and the Holy Ghost, but only those idols and false gods with which the heathen religions had filled the earth when Christ appeared. The very fact that eternal life consists in knowing not only God, but Christ, goes far to prove Christ’s divinity.

Manton remarks that the expression in this verse had a two-fold object: firstly, to exclude the idols and false gods, and secondly, to show the order and economy of salvation.
Let us note that this is the only place in the New Testament where our Lord calls Himself “Jesus Christ.”

4.—[*I have glorified You on the earth*.] The meaning of these words I take to be this: “I have now glorified You during my life on earth by keeping Your law perfectly (so that Satan can find no defect or blemish in Me), by witnessing faithfully to Your truth in opposition to the sins and false teaching of the Jews, and by showing You and Your mind towards man in a way that was never known before.”

[*I have finished the work…to do*.] The meaning of these words I take to be this: “I have completed the work of redemption, which You sent me into the world to accomplish, my death and resurrection being so near that to all intents and purposes it is finished.”

On the use of the past tense here instead of the future, Augustine remarks: “Christ says He *has* finished that which He most surely knows He *will* finish. Thus long before in prophecy, he used verbs of past tense, when that which He said was to come to pass after many years. ‘They pierced,’ says He, ‘my hands and my feet;’ not they will pierce.” (Psalm 22:16.) It has been truly remarked that Christ alone, of all born of woman, could say literally, “I have finished the work You gave Me to do.” He did what the first Adam failed to do, and what all the saints in every age fail to do. He kept the law perfectly, and by so keeping it brought in everlasting righteousness for all them that believe. Yet here is the model we ought to keep before our eyes continually. We must aim to finish the work our Father appoints for us, whether great or small.

Musculus remarks that true godly obedience is to be seen not merely in doing such work as we arbitrarily take up, but in doing such work as God appoints us to do.
It admits of doubt whether there is not a latent reference in the end of this verse to Daniel’s prophecy, that Messiah would “finish transgression, make an end of sins, make reconciliation for iniquity, and bring in everlasting righteousness” (Dan. 9:24).

Let it be carefully noted that Christ's redeeming work on earth was "work that the Father gave Him to do." He was the Person commissioned in the counsels of the everlasting Trinity to do this work. "On the earth" must include the whole period of Christ's incarnation, from His birth until His ascension. During all that period He glorified the Father by perfect unvarying holiness.

5.—[*And now, O Father, etc.*] Having briefly recited His work on earth, or, as it were, rendered an account of His ministry, our Lord now repeats the one prayer with which He began: "Glorify Me." The meaning of this verse I take to be as follows: "Father, my earthly work being now finished, I ask to be restored to that heavenly glory which in an unspeakable manner I had with You, as one of the co-equal and undivided Trinity, long before this world existed. The period of my humiliation and self-imposed weakness being accomplished, let Me once more share Your glory, and sit with You on Your throne as I did before my incarnation."

It is needless to say that the things asked in this prayer both here and elsewhere are very deep and reach far beyond man's understanding. The glory which the Son had with the Father, in the time before the creation of the world, is a matter passing our comprehension. But the pre-existence of Christ, the doctrine that Father and Son are two distinct persons, and the equal glory of the Father and the Son are, at any rate, taught here very plainly. It seems perfectly impossible to reconcile the verse with the Socinian theory that Christ was a mere man, like David or Paul, and did not exist before He was born at

Bethlehem.

Let us also learn the practical lesson, that a prayer for glory comes best from those who have done work upon earth for God. A lazy wish to go to glory without working is not according to Christ's example.

6.—[*I have manifested Your name.*] In this part of the prayer our Lord begins to speak of His believing people—directly of the eleven apostles but indirectly and partially of all believers in every age. And the rest of the prayer from this point is entirely taken up with the case of the disciples.

The sentence before us means, "I have made known Yourself, Your character, and Your attributes to my disciples." The word "name" is continually used in this sense in the Bible. Thus: Psalm 22:22, 52:9, 119:55, Isa. 26:8, Acts 9:14, Prov. 18:10. A right knowledge of God the Father was the first thing that Christ revealed and taught to His disciples. Burgon remarks: "The word *name* is here used in that large signification, so well known to readers of Scripture, whereby it is made to stand for God himself. (Psalm 20:1.) The evangelist says, 'They shall call His name Emmanuel,' meaning that our Savior would be what the name Emmanuel means: viz., God with us. As often thus as our Lord made known to men the mind and will of the eternal Father, so often did He manifest His name." Traill remarks: "What is the Father's name? Many think they know it, to whom Christ never revealed it. If you ask them whether they know Christ's Father's name, they have a ready answer. He is the first Person in the Trinity.

He is the Almighty, the maker and ruler of heaven and earth. Yes, but this is the name of God only, and that in general! The name of Christ's Father is that name and discovery of God wherein He stands related to the Son."

[*To the men…you gave them to Me.*] In this sentence our Lord describes His disciples. He calls them "men whom the Father gave Him out of the world—men who were the elect children of the Father, and whom the Father committed and entrusted to His care as to a good Shepherd." Lampe thinks that "men" are emphatically mentioned here to the seclusion of angels. Believers are "given" to Christ by the Father, according to an everlasting covenant made and sealed long before they were born, and taken out from the world by the calling of the Spirit in due time. They are the Father's peculiar property as well as the property of the Son. They were of the world and nowise better than others. Their calling and election out of the world to be Christ's people, and not any foreseen merit of their own, is the real foundation of their character.

These are deep things. They are to be read with peculiar reverence because they are the words of the Son addressed to the Father, and handling matter about believers that the Eternal Trinity alone can handle with positiveness and certainty. Who those are who are given to Christ by the Father, we can only certainly know by outward evidences. But that all believers are so given by the Father, predestined, elect, chosen, called by an everlasting covenant, and their names and exact number known from all eternity, is truth that

we must reverently believe and never hesitate to receive. So long as we are on earth we have to do with invitations, promises, commands, evidences, and faith; and God's election never destroys our responsibility. But all true believers, who really repent and believe and have the Spirit, may fairly take comfort in the thought that they were known and cared for and given to Christ by an eternal covenant, long before they knew Christ or cared *for* Him. It is an unspeakable comfort to remember that Christ cares for those whom the Father has given Him.

[*And they have kept Your word.*] Here our Lord continues the description of His disciples and names things about them which may be seen by men as well as God. He says, "They have kept (or observed, or attended to) the Word of the Gospel which You did send them by Me. While others would not attend to or keep that Word, these eleven men had hearing ears and attentive hearts and diligently obeyed Your message." Practical obedience is the first great test of genuine discipleship.

7.—[*Now they have known, etc.*] In this verse our Lord proceeds to give an account of His disciples. The meaning seems to be: "They have now attained such a degree of knowledge that they know the words they have heard and the works they have seen from Me are words and works given Me to speak and do by You."

The idea is that they know my mission to be divine. "They know that You have sent Me to be the Messiah, and have commissioned Me to speak and act as I have done."

Here, as elsewhere, it is striking to observe how Jesus dwells on a

right knowledge of the Father as the great truth which He came into the world to reveal.

8.—[*For I have given…which you gave Me.*] In this sentence our Lord declares what He had done in teaching His disciples. He had given them the words (doctrines or truth) that the Father had given Him to proclaim to the world. The words that our Lord spoke and the works that He did were both alike given Him by the Father to speak and to do, in the eternal counsels of the Trinity, about man's salvation.

For the peculiar use of the phrase "words" to denote the truths or doctrines taught by our Lord, see John 3:34, 6:68, 12:48, and 14:10. Specially we should remark Peter's saying, "You have the words of eternal life."

[*They have received, etc.*] Our Lord here declares three remarkable things about His disciples. They had willingly received and embraced the truths He brought them from the Father. They had known and acknowledged that their Master came from God the Father. They believed and were persuaded that the Father sent Him to be the Messiah. And all this had taken place when the vast majority of their countrymen neither acknowledged nor believed anything of the kind.

We should carefully note the high character given to the disciples by our Lord. It seems wonderful, at first sight (when we remember their many defects in faith and knowledge), that our Lord should commend them for "knowing" and "believing." Yet when we think of

their immensely difficult position and the opposition they had to meet, we shall see it was no light matter to believe at all. It is, after all, a very comfortable reflection that our Lord does not despise weak grace, and that He honors reality and sincerity of faith although it may be very small. Believers make a better appearance in heaven than they do upon earth. The word rendered “surely” is literally “truly.” It is translated “surely” in Matt. 26:73 and Mark 14:70. The idea is, “They have known for a sure and undoubted truth.”

Manton observes: “The faith of the Apostles was weak. They had but a confused view of Christ’s Godhead and eternal generation. They knew little of His death, were filled with the thought of a terrene kingdom and a pompous Messiah, and understood not His prediction of His death and passion. Though they knew Him to be the Redeemer and Savior of the world, yet the manner of His death and passion they knew not. ‘We trusted that it had been He who should have redeemed Israel.’ Yet observe how Christ commends their weak faith! Certainly He loves to encourage poor sinners when He praises their mean and weak beginnings.” Traill observes: “Christ tells all the good He can of His disciples, and covers their failings. How poorly had they received Christ’s Word. How weak and staggering was their faith. How oft had Christ reproved them sharply for their unbelief and other faults. Yet not a word of all this in Christ’s representing them to His Father! This is the constant, gracious way of our High Priest. He makes no mention of His Israel’s faults in heaven, but for their expiation.”

JOHN 17:9-16

"I am praying on behalf of them. I am not praying on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those you have given me, because they belong to you. Everything I have belongs to you, and everything you have belongs to me, and I have been glorified by them. I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them safe in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one just as we are one. When I was with them I kept them safe and watched over them in your name that you have given me. Not one of them was lost except the one destined for destruction, so that the scripture could be fulfilled. But now I am coming to you, and I am saying these things in the world, so they may experience my joy completed in themselves. I have given them your word, and the world has hated them, because they do not belong to the world just as I do not belong to the world. I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but that you keep them safe from the evil one. They do not belong to the world just as I do not belong to the world."

These verses, like every part of this wonderful chapter, contain some deep things which are "hard to be understood." But there are two plain points standing out on the face of the passage which deserve the special attention of all true Christians. Passing by all other points, let us fix our attention on these two.

We learn, for one thing, that ***the Lord Jesus does things for His believing people which He does not do for the wicked***

and unbelieving. He helps their souls by special intercession. He says, "I pray for them—I pray not for the world, but for those who You have given Me."

The doctrine before us is one which is specially hated by the world. Nothing gives such offence, and stirs up such bitter feeling among the wicked, as the idea of God making any distinction between man and man, and loving one person more than another. Yet the world's objections to the doctrine are, as usual, weak and unreasonable. Surely a little reflection might show us that a God who regarded good and bad, holy and unholy, righteous and unrighteous, with equal complacency and favor, would be a very strange kind of God! The special intercession of Christ for His saints is agreeable to reason and to common sense.

Of course, like every other Gospel truth, the doctrine before us needs careful statement and Scriptural guarding. On the one hand, we must not narrow the love of Christ to sinners; and on the other we must not make it too broad. It is true that Christ loves all sinners, and invites all to be saved; but it is also true that He *specially* loves the "blessed company of all faithful people," whom He sanctifies and glorifies. It is true that He has wrought out a redemption sufficient for all mankind, and offers it freely to all; but it is also true that His redemption is effectual only to those who believe. Just so it is true that He is the Mediator between God and man; but it is also true that He intercedes actively for none but those who come unto God by Him. Hence it is written, "I pray for them—I pray not for the world."

This special intercession of the Lord Jesus is one grand secret of the believer's safety. He is daily watched, and thought for, and provided for with unfailing care, by One whose eye never slumbers and never sleeps. Jesus is "able to save them to the uttermost who come unto God by Him, because He ever lives to make intercession for them." (Heb. 7:25.) They never perish, because He never ceases to pray for them, and His prayer must prevail. They stand and persevere to the end, not because of their own strength and goodness, but because Jesus intercedes for them. Judas fell never to rise again; while Peter fell, but repented, and was restored. The reason of the difference lay under those words of Christ to Peter, "I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not." (Luke 22:32.)

The true servant of Christ ought to lean back his soul on the truth before us, and take comfort in it. It is one of the peculiar privileges and treasures of a believer, and ought to be well known. However much it may be wrested and abused by false professors and hypocrites, it is one which those who really feel in themselves the workings of the Spirit should hold firmly and never let go. Well says the judicious Hooker— "No man's condition so safe as ours—the prayer of Christ is more than sufficient both to strengthen us, be we ever so weak; and to overthrow all adversary power, be it ever so strong and potent."

We learn, for another thing, in these verses, that ***Christ does not wish His believing people to be taken out of the world, but to be kept from the evil of it.***

We need not doubt that our Lord's all-seeing eye detected in the hearts of His disciples an impatient desire to get away from this troubled world. Few in number and weak in strength, surrounded on every side by enemies and persecutors, they might well long to be released from the scene of conflict, and to go home. Even David had said in a certain place, "Oh, that I had wings like a dove, then would I flee away and be at rest!" (Psalm 55:6.) Seeing all this, our Lord has wisely placed on record this part of His prayer for the perpetual benefit of His Church. He has taught us the great lesson that He thinks it better for His people to remain in the world and be kept from its evil, than to be taken out of the world and removed from the presence of evil altogether.

Nor is it difficult on reflection to see the wisdom of our Lord's mind about His people, in this as in everything else. Pleasant as it might be to flesh and blood to be snatched away from conflict and temptation, we may easily see that it would not be profitable. How could Christ's people do any good in the world, if taken away from it immediately after conversion? How could they exhibit the power of grace, and make proof of faith, and courage, and patience, as good soldiers of a crucified Lord? How could they be duly trained for heaven, and taught to value the blood and intercession and patience of their Redeemer, unless they purchased their experience by suffering? Questions like these admit of only one kind of answer. To abide here in this valley of tears, tried, tempted, assaulted, and yet kept from falling into sin, is the surest plan to promote the sanctification of Christians, and to glorify Christ. To go to heaven at

once, in the day of conversion, would doubtless be an easy course, and would save us much trouble. But the easiest course is not always the path of duty. He that would win the crown must carry the cross, and show himself light in the midst of darkness, and salt in the midst of corruption. “If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him.” (2 Tim. 2:12.)

If we have any hope that we are Christ’s true disciples, let us be satisfied that Christ knows better than we do what is for our good. Let us leave “our times in His hand,” and be content to abide here patiently as long as He pleases, however hard our position, so long as He keeps us from evil. That He will so keep us we need not doubt, if we ask Him, because He prays that we may be “kept.” Nothing, we may be sure, glorifies grace so much as to live like Daniel in Babylon, and the saints in Nero’s household—in the world and yet not of the world—tempted on every side and yet conquerors of temptation, not taken out of the reach of evil and yet kept and preserved from its power.

Technical Notes:

9. I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. 10. And all mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I am glorified in them. 11. And now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to you. Holy Father, keep through your own name those whom you have given me, that they may be one, as we *are*. 12. While I was with them

in the world, I kept them in your name. Those whom you gave me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. 13. And now I come to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves. 14. I have given them your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 15. I do not pray that you should take them out of the world, but that you should keep them from the evil. 16. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

9.—[*I pray for them…not…the world.*] In this verse our Lord begins that part of His prayer which is specially intercessory and proceeds, from this point down to the end of the chapter, to name things which He asks for His disciples. It may be convenient to remember that the things He asks may be divided under four heads. He prays that His disciples may be (a) kept, (b) sanctified, (c) united, (d) and be with Him in glory. Four more important things cannot be desired for believers.

To say, as some have said, that our Lord's intercessory prayer is an exact specimen of what He does in heaven as our High Priest, is straining a point and going too far. To suppose that the Son literally *asks* things of the Father by prayer in heaven is in my judgment unreasonable, and a very limited, narrow view of Christ's intercession. We are reading a prayer made by our Lord during the time of His earthly ministry, before His ascension and session at

God's right hand; and we are not reading an account of what He does for us, as our Priest, within the veil. Let it suffice us to believe that the intercession of this chapter exhibits accurately Christ's mind toward believers, His desires for believers, the active interest He takes in believers, and the graces He would fain see in believers. Above all, let us believe that if we seek for ourselves the same four things that Jesus here names, we have a Friend in heaven who will take care that we do not seek in vain and will make our prayer effectual. There are two interpretations of our Lord's meaning when He speaks of praying for the disciples and "not praying for the world." Some, as Bengel and Alford, think that our Lord meant, "At this present moment I pray specially for my disciples and not for the world."

They will not admit that our Lord does not pray and intercede in any way for the wicked and unbelieving; and they quote with some show of reason His prayer at the crucifixion for His murderers— "Father, forgive them" (Luke 23:34). Others, as Hutcheson and Lampe, think that our Lord meant, "I pray specially for my disciples, because now and always it is their special privilege to be prayed for and interceded for by Me." The advocates of this view maintain that it is derogatory to our Lord's honor to suppose that He can ask anything in vain; and that His intercession specially belongs to "those who come unto God by Him" (Heb. 7:25). The point in dispute is a nice and delicate one, and will probably never be settled. On the one hand, we must take care that we do not forget that our Lord Jesus Christ does take a special interest in His believing people and does do special things for

them, which He does not do for the wicked and unbelieving. On the other hand, we must not forget that our Lord pities all, cares for all, and has provided salvation *sufficient* for all mankind. There is no escaping the text that says of the wicked, they "deny the Lord who bought them" (2 Peter 2:1). The most fair and honest interpretation of the text "God so loved the world" (John 3:16), is to regard "the world" as meaning all mankind.

The whole dispute turns, as is often the case in such disputes, on the meaning we put on a word. If by "intercession" we mean vaguely and generally the whole mediatorial work of Christ on behalf of mankind, it is then true that Christ intercedes for all, both good and bad, and this text before us must mean, "I pray at this moment specially for my people and am only thinking of them." If, on the other hand, we mean by "intercession" that special work which Christ does for His people in order to carry them to heaven (after calling, pardoning, justifying, renewing, and sanctifying them), it is then plain that Christ intercedes for none but believers and that the words before us mean, "I pray now, as always, specially for my disciples, and not for the world."

If I must give an opinion, I must own that I decidedly hold the second (or last view) of which I have spoken. I believe that Christ never, in the fullest sense of the word, "makes intercession" for the wicked. I believe that such intercession is a peculiar privilege of the saints and one grand reason of their continuance in grace. They stand because there is One in heaven who actively and effectually

intercedes.

I will give place to no one in maintaining that Jesus loves all mankind, came into the world for all, died for all, provided redemption sufficient for all, calls on all, invites all, commands all to repent and believe; and ought to be offered to all—freely, fully, unreservedly, directly, unconditionally—without money and without price. If I did not hold this, I dare not get into a pulpit, and I should not understand how to preach the Gospel.

But while I hold all this, I maintain firmly that Jesus does special work for those who believe, which He does not do for others. He quickens them by His Spirit, calls them by His grace, washes them in His blood—justifies them, sanctifies them, keeps them, leads them, and continually intercedes for them—that they may not fall. If I did not believe all this, I should be a very miserable, unhappy Christian.

Holding this opinion, I regard the text before us as one that describes our Lord's special intercession for His people, and I take the meaning to be simply: "I pray for them, as my peculiar people, that they may be kept, sanctified, united, and glorified; but I do not pray for the world." The famous text, "Father, forgive them" (Luke 23:34), is at best a doubtful one. Will anyone undertake to say that those for whom our Lord prayed were never forgiven and saved? Have we forgotten that within fifty days after that prayer 3,000 souls were converted at Pentecost, of whom Peter said, "By wicked hands ye crucified and slew Jesus of Nazareth"? (Acts 22:23.) Who can prove

that the very men who crucified our Lord were not among the number converted and were thus the answer to our Lord's prayer? These, however, are conjectures at the very best. The matter is one which is not necessary to salvation, and one about which Christians must agree to differ, and must not excommunicate one another. "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind" (Rom. 14:5).

Hengstenberg remarks: "The world may be viewed under two aspects. First, there is the susceptibility of grace, which, despite the depths of the sinful depravation of Adam's race, still remains in it. Of the world in this sense Jesus says, 'I came not into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world.' (John 1:29, 3:17.) Viewed under this aspect, the world is the subject of Christ's intercession. The disciples themselves were won from the world. But the world may also be viewed as ruled by predominantly ungodly principles. Of the world in this sense we read that it cannot receive the 'Spirit of truth.' (John 15:27.) To pray for the world, thus viewed, would be as vain as to pray for the prince of this world." Manton suggests that we must draw some distinction between the intercession of Christ as a Divine Mediator and the prayers of Christ as a man, wherein He is an example to His people. Yet, however just this remark, it hardly seems to apply to this peculiarly solemn prayer.

[*For those…given… Yours.*] Our Lord here repeats the description of His disciples that He had given before. They were men whom "the Father had given Him" to teach and feed, and save. They were His Father's sheep, entrusted to His charge. Therefore, He seems to

argue, “I am specially bound to pray for them and ask for them everything that their souls need. Like a good Shepherd, I must give an account of them one day.”

10.—[*And all mine… Yours are mine.*] This sentence seems to come in parenthetically, and to be a reassertion of the great truth of the perfect unity of the Father and the Son. The words in the Greek mean literally “things” and not “persons.” “All my things are Your things, and all Your things are my things. As with everything else, these eleven disciples are not mine more than Yours, or Yours more than mine.” This continual assertion of the doctrine of the perfect unity of the Godhead and the distinction of the Persons in the Trinity is very remarkable and instructive.

[*I am glorified in them.*] In this sentence our Lord seems to return to the disciples. “I have been and am glorified in them by their faith, obedience, and love, when the vast majority of their countrymen have hated and rejected Me. They have honored Me and brought glory to Me by continuing with Me in my tribulation. Therefore I now make special prayer and intercession for them.”

Let us mark here that the weakest faith and love to Christ brings Him some glory, and is not overlooked by Him.

11.—[*And now I am…come to You.*] In the beginning of this verse, our Lord describes the position of the disciples and shows the special reason why they required prayer and intercession to be made for

them. They were about, for the first time, to be left alone like orphans and thrown on their own resources, in a certain sense. Hitherto they had always had their Master at their side and could turn to Him in every case of need. Now they were about to enter on a totally different condition of things. “The time of my departure from the world is at hand. I am very soon about to ascend into heaven and come to You. But these few sheep, these weak disciples, are not coming to heaven with Me. They are going to be left alone in a wicked, cold, persecuting world.”

Poole observes: “Christ here speaks of Himself as one who had already died and was already risen and ascended, though none of all these things were past, because they were so soon and suddenly to come.” Let us not fail to note how our Lord remembers the position of His people here on earth: He cares tenderly for them, and will make all needful provision for their safety and comfort. “I know your works, and where you dwell” (Rev. 2:13).

[*Holy Father*.] This is the only place in the Gospel where we find our Lord addressing the Father by this epithet. There is doubtless some good reason for it. It may be that there is a fitness in asking the “Holy” Father to keep the disciples holy and free from the dominion of evil. “As You are holy, so keep these my disciples holy.”

[*Keep…whom you have given me*.] Here is the first petition that our Lord puts up for His disciples. He asks that they may be kept and preserved from evil, from falling away, from false doctrine, from

being overcome by temptation, from being crushed by persecution, from every device and assault of the devil. Danger was around them on every side. Weakness was their present characteristic. Preservation was what He asked. The expression, “Keep through Your own name,” is remarkable. I take it to mean, “through Your own attributes of power, love, and wisdom.” The “name” of God, as before remarked, is frequently used in Scripture to signify His character and attributes.

[*That they may be one, as we are.*] Here our Lord mentions one special object for which He desires that His people may be kept, viz., their unity: that they may be one. “Keep them, that they may be of one heart and one mind, striving together against common foes and for common ends, and not broken up, weakened, and paralyzed by internal quarrels and divisions.” He adds the highest model and pattern of unity, “one as we are”—the unity of the Father and the Son. Of course there cannot be literally such union between Christian and Christian as there is between two Persons in the Trinity. But the unity that Jesus prays the disciples may aim at should be a close, intimate, unbroken unity of mind, will, opinion, and feeling. Burgon remarks here: “The word rendered ‘as’ both here and in verse 21 does not denote strict correspondence but only general resemblance, as in the Athanasian Creed where the union of two natures in the one Person of Christ is popularly illustrated by the union of the ‘reasonable soul and flesh’ in man.” (Comp. Matt. 5:48 and Luke 6:36.)

The importance attached by our Lord to "unity" among Christians is very strikingly illustrated by the prominent place assigned to it in this verse. The very first object for which He desires the preservation of the disciples is that they may be kept from division. Nor can we wonder at this when we consider the interminable divisions of Christians in every age, the immense harm they have done in the world, and the astounding indifference with which many regard them, as if they were perfectly innocent things, and as if the formation of new sects was a laudable work!

12.—[*While…kept them in Your name.*] Our Lord here recites what He had done for the disciples during His ministry. "Throughout the three years in which I have been with these eleven disciples in the world, I used to keep them from all harm, through Your power and name." I can see no reason why the same Greek words should not be rendered "*through* Your name" in this verse, as well as in the preceding one. In both cases the idea seems the same—a preservation through the grace, power, and attributes of God the Father.

[*Those whom You gave…none of them is lost.*] The word rendered "kept" in this clause is quite different from the word so rendered in the first part of the verse. There it means simply "I have preserved." Here it means "I have guarded," like a shepherd guarding a flock or a soldier guarding a treasure. "I have so carefully guarded those disciples whom You have given Me that not one of them has perished, or is lost."

[*Except the son of perdition*.] This remarkable expression of course refers to Judas Iscariot, the traitor, the only one of the Apostles who was lost and cast away in hell. The name given to Judas is a strong Hebraism and means "a person worthy of perdition, or only fit to be lost and cast away by reason of his wickedness." David says to Saul's servants, "Ye are worthy to die," or as the margin says, "sons of death" (1 Sam. 26:16). Again, he says to Nathan, "The man who has done this thing shall surely die," or, "is a son of death." (2 Sam. 26:5; see also Ps. 79:11, Matt. 13:38, Luke 16:8.) It is a tremendously strong expression to come from the lips of our merciful and loving Savior. It shows the desperate helplessness of anyone who, living in great light and privileges like Judas, misuses his opportunities and deliberately follows the bent of his own sinful inclinations. He becomes the "child of hell" (Matt. 23:15). A question of very grave importance arises out of the words before us. Did our Lord mean that Judas was originally one of those whom the Father "gave to him" and was primarily a true believer? Did he therefore fall away from grace? Many maintain, as Hammond, Alford, Burgon, and Wordsworth, that Judas was at one time a true believer like Peter, James, and John, and that the text is an unanswerable proof that grace may be *lost*, and that a man may be converted and have the Holy Ghost and yet finally fall away and perish forever in hell. This is not only a very uncomfortable doctrine, but one which it is hard to reconcile with many plain texts of Scripture, to say nothing of the seventeenth Article of our own Church. But does the text before us clearly prove that Judas was one of those who were "given" to Christ by the

Father? I believe firmly that it does not. I maintain that the "but" in the text is not an "exceptive" word but an "adversative" one. I hold the right meaning to be: "Those whom You gave Me I have kept, and out of them not one is lost. But there is one man who is lost, even Judas, the son of perdition; not one who was ever given to Me, but one whom I declared long ago to be a 'devil,' a man whose hardened heart fitted him for destruction."

It is easy, of course, to say that this view is a far-fetched and nonnatural one. I ask those who say this to observe that the same Greek words here rendered "but" are used in other places in the New Testament where it is impossible to put an "exceptive" sense on them, and where the "adversative" meaning is the only one they can possibly bear. I challenge anyone to deny that "but" in such texts as Matt. 12:4— "but only for the priests," Mark 13:32— "but the Father," Rev. 9:4— "but only those men," Rev. 21:27— "but they which are written," must be interpreted as an "adversative" and cannot possibly be an "exceptive" word. (See also Acts 27:22 and 2 Kings 5:17.) And so it is here. Our Lord does not mean, "No one of those given to Me is lost EXCEPT the son of perdition." What He does mean is, "Not one of those given to Me is lost. On the other hand and in contrast, Judas —a man not given to Me, a graceless man—is lost." Let me add, in confirmation of the view I maintain, that in the very next chapter the expression here used is referred to by St. John in his account of our Lord's capture. He says: "The saying was fulfilled which He spoke: 'Of them who You gave me have I lost none" (John 18:9); and not one hint does he give of any exception having been made by our

Lord, when he heard Him use the expression before. The view I advocate is maintained by DeDieu, Gomarus, Lampe, Hutcheson, and Manton. It is a curious fact that even in our own English language, Milton, writing in the seventeenth century (when the last revision of our Bible took place) has used the word "except" in the same way. He says of Satan, in *Paradise* Lost, "God and His Son *except*, created thing Nought valued He or shunned."

"Except" there must clearly be adversative. God and His Son are not *created* things! Both Brown (on John 17) and Doddridge quote this sentence of Milton.

Bishop Beveridge, quoted by Ford, remarks: "Judas, here called the son of perdition, though he seemed to be given to Christ and to come to Him yet really did not. Therefore, though he was lost, as the Scripture had foretold, yet Christ's word is still true that He never casts out nor loses any who really come to Him."
[*That the Scripture might be fulfilled.*] Here, as in many places, it does not mean that Judas was lost in order to fulfill Scripture, but that the Scripture was fulfilled by the loss of Judas. The place referred to is Psalm 109:8.

Let us not fail to note the high honor put on Scripture in this place. Even in a prayer of the utmost solemnity addressed by the Son to the Father, we find reverent allusion to the written word of the Old Testament and to that oft-quoted book, the Psalms.

13.—[*And now I come to You, etc.*] This is a somewhat elliptical verse. I take the meaning to be something of this kind: "I am now soon leaving the world and coming to You. Before leaving the world, I speak these things openly in prayer in the hearing of these my disciples, in order that they may be cheered and comforted, and feel the joy that I give to them filled up and abounding in their hearts."

I can hardly think that our Lord is referring to the discourse that preceded this prayer. It seems more natural to apply "these things I speak" to His prayer.

The expression "my joy" occurs before in 15:11. It must mean that peculiar, inward sense of comfort that Christ imparts to believers, and which no one knows excepting him who receives it.

14.—[*I have given them Your word, etc.*] In this verse our Lord appears to describe more fully the position of the disciples as an introduction to a more full repeated prayer for their preservation. It is as though He said:

"I do not pray that my disciples may be kept without good reason. I have given them the Word of the Gospel, and they have received it and have been at once persecuted and ill-treated for receiving it. In short, the world has hated them ever since they became my disciples because, like myself, they are not of the world, neither holding the world's principles nor walking in the world's ways."

Let us not fail to remark that true believers must expect the hatred and enmity of the wicked in every age. They must not be surprised at it. Christ and His disciples had to endure it, and all real Christians must endure it too. The reason of this enmity is the continual testimony which believers bear against the world's opinions and practices. The world feels itself condemned and hates those whose faith and lives condemn it. If believers were more bold, decided, and consistent, they would soon find these things out more than they do now. The good opinion of the world is about the last thing a true Christian should expect or desire. If all men speak well of his opinions and ways in religion, he may well doubt whether there is not something very wrong and defective about them. We are not to court the world's enmity. A narrow, morose, discourteous, and exclusive spirit is downright wrong. But we are never to be the least surprised by the world's enmity if we meet with it; and the more holy we are, the more we shall meet with it. Christ was perfect in holiness; but the world hated Him.

15.—[*I do not pray that You, etc.*] In this verse our Lord repeats and develops more fully His prayer that His disciples may be kept. His meaning appears to be this: "Wicked and persecuting as the world is, I pray not that You would take my disciples immediately out of it. Such removal would be bad for themselves and bad for the world. What I do pray is, that remaining in the world, You would keep them from the evil of the world. Though in it, let them not be spoiled or corrupted by it." The deep wisdom of this prayer is very instructive. There are few Christians who would not like to go to heaven without

trouble, conflict, and persecution. Yet it would not be for their own sanctification, and it would deprive the world of the benefit of their teaching and example. Believers would never value Christ and heaven as much as they will do one day if they were not kept here on earth a good deal, taught to know their own hearts, and, like their Master, "perfected by suffering" (Heb. 2:10). Hutcheson remarks: "However much we ought to have our eye upon our rest, and make ready for it, yet we are not anxiously to long for it till God's time come, nor to be weary of life because of any trouble, persecution, or inconvenience we meet with in His service."

There is a strong indirect argument here, as Bullinger and Gaulter remark, against the favorite theory of many—that retreat from the world by going into monasteries and convents is the secret of eminent holiness. Eminent holiness is most seen by publicly winning a victory over evil, and not by a cowardly desertion of our post in society.

Three of the only prayers not granted to saints, recorded in Scripture, are the prayers of Moses, Elijah, and Jonah, to be "taken out of the world." Gerhard remarks that the Apostles were to be the first preachers of the Gospel and the light of the world. If they had been taken away immediately after their Lord, the world would have been left in darkness. Moreover, the cross is the school of faith and patience, and without remaining in the world they could not have become eminent saints. George Newton remarks: "The world is the place where we bring glory to the Lord; in the world to come we are glorified by Him. Oh, let us be so ingenuous as to desire to be awhile

where we may glorify God, rather than where we may have glory from Him. Let us not be so eager for our wages and our rest till we have finished our work and served our generation. When we have done so, God will glorify us with Himself forever." The meaning of the phrase "the evil" is a point on which there is much difference of opinion.

Some think that it means simply, as our translation of the Bible has it, evil in the abstract, all evil of every kind, like "deliver us from evil" in the Lord's prayer; and they think that it includes all evil that may assail us from the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Others think that the words would have been better rendered "the evil one" and apply the expression to the devil, as the first great cause and beginner of evil. The word is so rendered in Matt. 13:19-38, 1 John 2:13,14, 3:12, and 5:18.

The question is one that will probably never be settled, and the Greek phrase may be translated either way. Nevertheless, I decidedly incline to think that our translation is right. It is "evil" in the abstract, and not the devil, that our Lord means. I think so partly because the devil is not anywhere brought forward in this prayer, and partly because it is more consistent to reason to suppose our Lord would have His disciples kept from all kind of "evil" than from the devil only. This is the more clear to my mind from the fact that it is "the world" and its hatred and enmity of which our Lord has just been speaking, and not the devil. However, I freely admit that it is an

open question.

16.—[*They are not of the world, etc.*] These words are a literal repetition of the end of the 14th verse and need no further comment. Our Lord seems to repeat them in order to add emphasis to the request He has just made; and the repetition strengthens my opinion that it is "the evil in the world" that He specially desires His people to be kept from. "They need to be specially kept and preserved because, I repeat, there is an entire lack of harmony, a gulf of separation between them and this wicked world, in which I leave them. They are much hated and need to be much kept."

Repetitions in real, earnest prayer, we may observe, are not wrong; Christ's example warrants them. It is "vain repetitions" such as were common among the heathen—repeating the same words over and over again without thought or feeling—against which we are warned in the Sermon on the Mount. (Matt. 6:7.)

JOHN 17:17-26

"Set them apart in the truth; your word is truth. Just as you sent me into the world, so I sent them into the world. And I set myself apart on their behalf, so that they too may be truly set apart."

"I am not praying only on their behalf, but also on behalf of those who believe in me through their testimony, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me and I am in you. I pray that they may be in us, so that the world may believe that you sent me.

The glory you gave to me I have given to them, that they may be one just as we are one—I in them and you in me—that they may be completely one, so that the world may know that you sent me, and you have loved them just as you have loved me."

"Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, so that they may see my glory that you gave me because you loved me before the creation of the world. Righteous Father, even if the world does not know you, I know you, and these men know that you sent me. I made known your name to them, and I will continue to make it known, so that the love you have loved me with may be in them, and I may be in them."

These wonderful verses form a fitting conclusion of *the most wonderful prayer that was ever prayed on earth*—the last Lord's prayer after the first Lord's Supper. They contain three most important petitions which our Lord offered up in behalf of His disciples. On these three petitions let us fix our attention. Passing by all other things in the passage, let us look steadily at these three points.

We should mark, first, ***how Jesus prays that His people may be sanctified.*** "Sanctify them," He says, "through your truth —Your word is truth."

We need not doubt that, in this place at any rate, the word "sanctify" means "make holy." It is a prayer that the Father would make His people more holy, more spiritual, more pure, more saintly

in thought and word and deed, in life and character. Grace had done something for the disciples already—called, converted, renewed, and changed them. The great Head of the Church prays that the work of grace may be carried higher and further, and that His people may be more thoroughly sanctified and made holy in body, soul, and spirit—in fact more like Himself.

Surely we need not say much to show the matchless wisdom of this prayer. More holiness is the very thing to be desired for all servants of Christ. *Holy living is the great proof of the reality of Christianity*. Men may refuse to see the truth of our arguments, but they cannot evade the evidence of a godly life. Such a life adorns religion and makes it beautiful, and sometimes wins those who are not "won by the Word." Holy living trains Christians for heaven. The nearer we live to God while we live, the more ready shall we be to dwell forever in His presence when we die. Our entrance into heaven will be entirely by grace, and not of works; but heaven itself would be no heaven to us if we entered it with an unsanctified character. Our hearts must be in tune for heaven if we are to enjoy it. There must be a moral "*fitness* for the inheritance of the saints in light," as well as a *title*. Christ's blood alone can give us a title to enter the inheritance. Sanctification must give us a capacity to enjoy it.

Who, in the face of such facts as these, need wonder that increased sanctification should be the first thing that Jesus asks for His people? Who that is really taught of God can fail to know that holiness is happiness, and that those who walk with God most

closely, are always those who walk with Him most comfortably? Let no man deceive us with vain words in this matter. He who despises holiness and neglects good works, under the vain pretense of giving honor to justification by faith, shows plainly that he has not the mind of Christ.

We should mark, secondly, in these verses, ***how Jesus prays for the unity and oneness of His people.*** "That they all may be one—that they may be one in Us—that they may be one even as We are one"—and "that so the world may believe and know that You have sent Me,"—this is a leading petition in our Lord's prayer to His Father.

We can ask no stronger proof of the value of unity among Christians, and the sinfulness of division, than the great prominence which our Master assigns to the subject in this passage. How painfully true it is that in every age divisions have been the scandal of religion, and the weakness of the Church of Christ! How often Christians have wasted their strength in contending against their brethren, instead of contending against sin and the devil! How repeatedly they have given occasion to the world to say, "When you have settled your own internal differences we will believe!" All this, we need not doubt, the Lord Jesus foresaw with prophetic eye. It was the foresight of it which made Him pray so earnestly that believers might be "one."

Let the recollection of this part of Christ's prayer abide in our minds, and exercise a constant influence on our behavior as

Christians. Let no man think lightly, as some men seem to do, of schism, or count it a small thing to multiply sects, parties, and denominations. These very things, we may depend, only help the devil and damage the cause of Christ. “If it be possible, as much as lies in us, let us live peaceably with all men.” (Rom. 12:18.) Let us *bear* much, *concede* much, and *put up with* much, before we plunge into secessions and separations. They are movements in which there is often much false fire. Let rabid zealots who delight in sect-making and party-forming, rail at us and denounce us if they please. We need not mind them. So long as we have Christ and a good conscience, let us patiently hold on our way, follow the things that make for peace, and strive to promote unity. It was not for nothing that our Lord prayed so fervently that His people might be “one.”

We should mark, finally, in these verses, ***how Jesus prays that His people may at last be with Him and behold His glory.*** “I will,” He says, “that those whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am—that they may behold my glory.”

This is a singularly beautiful and touching conclusion to our Lord’s remarkable prayer. We may well believe that it was meant to cheer and comfort those who heard it, and to strengthen them for the parting scene which was fast drawing near. But for all who read it even now, this part of his prayer is full of sweet and unspeakable comfort.

We do not see Christ now. We read of Him, hear of Him, believe in Him, and rest our souls in His finished work. But even the best of

us, at our best, walk by faith and not by sight, and our poor halting faith often makes us walk very feebly in the way to heaven. There shall be an end of all this state of things one day. We shall at length see Christ as He is, and know as we have been known. We shall behold Him face to face, and not through a glass darkly. We shall actually be in His presence and company, and go out no more. If *faith* has been pleasant, much more will *sight* be; and if *hope* has been sweet, much more will *certainty* be. No wonder that when Paul has written, "We shall ever be with the Lord," he adds, "Comfort one another with these words." (1 Thess. 4:17, 18.)

We know little of heaven now. Our thoughts are all confounded, when we try to form an idea of a future state in which pardoned sinners shall be perfectly happy. "It does not yet appear what we shall be." (I John 3:2.) But we may rest ourselves on the blessed thought, that after death we shall be "with Christ." Whether before the resurrection in paradise, or after the resurrection in final glory, the prospect is still the same. True Christians shall be "with Christ." We need no more information. Where that blessed Person is who was born for us, died for us, and rose again, there can be no lack of anything. David might well say, "In Your presence is fullness of joy, and at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore." (Psalm 16:11.)

Let us leave this wonderful prayer with a solemn recollection of the three great petitions which it contains. Let holiness and unity by the way, and Christ's company in the end, be subjects never long out of our thoughts or distant from our minds. Happy is that Christian

who cares for nothing so much as to be holy and loving like his Master, while he lives, and a companion of his Master when he dies.

Technical Notes:

7. Sanctify them through your truth; your word is truth. 18. As you sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. 19. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. 20. Neither do I pray for these alone, but for them also who shall believe on me through their word; 21. that they all may be one, as you, Father, *are* in me, and I in you; that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that you sent me. 22. And the glory which you gave me I have given them, that they may be one even as we are one; 23. I in them, and you in me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that you have sent me, and have loved them as you have loved me. 24. Father, I will that they also whom you gave me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which you have given me; for you loved me before the foundation of the world. 25. O righteous Father, the world has not known you, but I have known you; and these have known that you sent me. 26. And I have declared to them your name, and will declare *it,* that the love with which you loved me may be in them, and I in them.

17.—[*Sanctify them, etc.*] In this verse our Lord proceeds to name the second thing He asks for His disciples in prayer. Preservation was the first thing, and sanctification the second. He asks His Father to make the disciples more holy, to lead them on to higher degrees of holiness and purity. He asks Him to do it "through the truth"—by bringing truth to bear more effectually and powerfully on their hearts and consciences and inner man. And to prevent mistake as to what He meant by truth, he adds, "Your Word, Your revealed Word, is the truth that I mean." Some, as Maldonatus, maintain that the sentence only means "sanctify them truly," in opposition to that legal sanctification of priests of which we read in Exodus and Leviticus. This, however, seems a very cold, thin, shallow sense to put on the words.

Some, again, as Mede, Pearce, and Burgon, maintain that our Lord is only praying that His Apostles may be consecrated, fitted, and set apart for the great work of the ministry, and that this is all the meaning of "sanctify." This appears to me an imperfect and defective view of the sentence. No doubt the word "sanctify" originally and primarily means "set apart, separate for religious uses;" and it might be used of a vessel, a house, or an animal. But inasmuch as in human beings this separation is principally evidenced by holiness and godliness of life and character, the secondary sense of "sanctify" is "to make holy," and holy and godly people are "sanctified." This I hold to be the meaning here most decidedly. It is a prayer for the increased holiness and practical godliness of Christ's people. In short, the petition comes to this: "Separate them more and more

from sin and sinners by making them more pure, more spiritually minded, and more like Yourself." This is the view of Chrysostom and all the leading commentators.

Four great principles may be gathered from this text.

(a) The importance of sanctification and practical godliness. Our Lord specially asks it for His people. Those who despise Christian life and character, and think it of no importance so long as they are sound in *doctrine*, know very little of the mind of Christ. Our Christianity is worth nothing if it does not make us value and seek practical sanctification.

(b) The wide difference between justification and sanctification. Justification is a perfect and complete work obtained for us by Christ, imputed to us, and external to us, as perfect and complete the moment we believe as it can ever be, and admitting of no degrees. Sanctification is an inward work wrought in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, and never quite perfect so long as we live in this body of sin. The disciples needed no prayer for justification; they were completely justified already. They did need prayer for their sanctification; for they were not completely sanctified.

(c) Sanctification is a thing that admits of growth; else why should our Lord pray, "Sanctify them"? The doctrine of imputed sanctification is one that I can find nowhere in the Word of God. Christ's imputed righteousness I see clearly, but not an imputed

holiness. Holiness is a thing imparted and in-wrought, but not imputed.

(d) The Word is the great instrument by which the Holy Ghost carries forward the work of inward sanctification. By bringing that Word to bear more forcibly on mind, will, conscience, and affection, we make the character grow more holy. Sanctification from without by bodily austerities and asceticism, and a round of forms, ceremonies, and outward means, is a delusion. True sanctification begins from within. Here lies the immense importance of regularly reading the written Word and hearing the preached Word. It surely, though insensibly, promotes our sanctification. Believers who neglect the Word will not grow in holiness and victory over sin.

Calvin remarks: “As the apostles were not destitute of grace, we ought to infer from Christ’s words that sanctification is not instantly completed in us on the first day, but that we make progress in it through the whole course of our life.”

Hutcheson remarks: “It is not enough that men have a begun work of sanctification in them, unless they grow up in it daily more and more. Christ prays for those who were already converted and sanctified.” Augustine thinks that “Your Word” in this place means the Personal Word, Christ Himself. But in this opinion I can find no one holding with him, except Rupertus.

18.—[*As you sent Me, etc.*] The connection between this verse and the preceding one seems to me to be this: "I ask for the increased sanctification of my disciples, because of the position they have to occupy on earth. Just as You did send Me to be Your Messenger to this sinful world, so have I now sent them to be my messengers to the world. It is therefore of the utmost importance that they should be holy—the holy messengers of a holy Master—and so stop the mouths of their accusers." Believers are Christ's witnesses, and the character of a witness should be spotless and blameless. For this reason our Lord specially prays that His disciples may be "sanctified."

19.—[*And for their sakes I sanctify myself.*] This is a rather hard passage. In one sense, of course, our Lord needed no sanctification. He was always perfectly holy and without sin. I believe, with Chrysostom, the meaning must be: "I consecrate myself, and offer myself up as a sacrifice and a priest, for one special reason, to say nothing of others—in order that these my disciples may be sanctified by the truth, and made a holy people." Is it not as good as saying, "The sanctification no less than the justification of my people is the end of my sacrifice. I have to have a people who are sanctified as well as justified. So much importance do I attach to this that this is one principal reason why I now offer myself to die as a sacrifice"? The same idea seems to lie in the text, "He gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people." And again, "Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify it." (Titus 2:14, Eph. 4:26, 1 Pet. 2:24.)

Melancthon remarks: “The word ‘I sanctify myself’ in this place, without doubt, is taken from priests and victims.”

20.—[*Neither do I pray for these alone, etc.*] In this and the three following verses our Lord proceeds to name another thing that He prays for His people. He asks that they may be “one.” He had already named this on behalf of the eleven Apostles. But He takes occasion now to enlarge the prayer and to include others beside the eleven—the whole company of future believers. “I now pray also for all who shall believe on Me through the preaching of my disciples in all future time, and not for my eleven apostles only.” All believers needed preservation and sanctification in every age; but none so much as the eleven, because they were the first to attack the world and bear the brunt of the battle. In some respects it was more easy to be “one” at the first beginnings of the Church and harder to be kept and “sanctified.” As the Church grew, it would be more difficult to keep unity.

Let us mark how wide was the scope of our Lord’s intercessory prayer. He prayed not only for present, but for future believers. So should it be with our prayers. We may look forward and pray for believers yet to be born, though we may not look back and pray for believers who are dead. George Newton observes what an encouragement it should be to us in praying for others, for a child or a friend, to remember that perhaps Christ is asking him or her of God too. He here prays for those who did not yet believe but were to believe one day.

Let us mark how the “word” preached is mentioned as the means of making men believe. Faith comes by hearing. The Church that places Sacraments above the preaching of the Word will have no blessing of God, because it rejects God’s order.

Hengstenberg thinks that the “word” here must include the writings of the Apostles as well as their sermons.

21.—[*That they all…one in us.*] The meaning of this sentence I take to be: “I pray that both these my disciples and those who hereafter shall become my disciples may all be of one mind, one doctrine, one opinion, one heart, and one practice, closely united and joined together even as You, Father, and I are of one mind and one will, in consequence of that ineffable union whereby You are in Me and I in You.” Here, as in verse 11, we must carefully remember that the unity between the Father and the Son is one which the unity of believers cannot literally attain to. They must, however, imitate it.

The true secret of the unity of believers lies in the expression “one in us.” They can only be thoroughly “one” by being joined at the same time to one Father and to one Savior. Then they will be one with one another. Ferus thinks that one thing in our Lord’s mind in this sentence was the union of Jew and Gentile into one Church, and the removal of the “wall of partition.”

[*That the world may believe that you sent Me.*] Here our Lord

brings in one important reason why He prays for His people to be "one." It will help to make the world believe His Divine mission. "When the world sees my people not quarreling, not divided, but one in judgment, heart, and life, then the world will begin to believe that the Savior, who has such a people, must really be a Savior sent from God."

Let us carefully note how well our Lord foresaw the effect which the lives, ways, and opinions of professing Christians have on the world around them. The lack of unity, and consequent strife, among English Christians in the last 300 years has been a miserable example of the enormous damage that believers may do their Master's cause by neglecting this subject. "How much," says George Newton, "our blessed Savior and His Gospel suffer by the hot contentions of those who call themselves saints." 22.—[*And the glory, etc.*] In this verse our Lord repeats His deep desire for the unity of His people. He declares that in order that they may be one, He has given them the glory which the Father gave Him. This is a very difficult expression, and one that seems to puzzle all commentators. The whole question is, what did our Lord mean by "the glory" which He gave?

(a) Some, as Calvin, think that "glory" means the image and likeness of God, by which the disciples were renewed. (2 Cor. 3:18.)

(b) Some, as Bengel, think that "glory" means that insensible power, influence, and authority which accompanied all our Lord did and

said during His earthly ministry. Thus Moses had “glory” in his countenance when coming down from the mount. (2 Cor. 3:7.) This same power and influence Christ gave to the Apostles. (See Acts 4:33.)

(c) Some, as Zwingli, Brentius, Gualter, and Pearce, think that “glory” means the power of working miracles, which was the special and peculiar glory of our Lord while He was on earth. Thus we read, “Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father” (Rom. 6:4).

(d) Some, as Augustine, Ecolampadius, Bullinger, and Manton, think that “glory” means the heavenly glory and immortality which our Lord promised to His disciples—a glory which they should have after faithfully serving Him on earth. (Rom. 8:18.)

(e) Toletus makes the strange suggestion that the “glory” means that which is communicated to us in the Lord’s Supper! Burgon seems to take the same view.

(f) Stier and Hengstenberg hold that the “glory” means unity of mind and heart.

(g) Some, as Gregory Nyssen, Ammonius, Theophylact, and Bucer, think that “glory” means the Holy Ghost, who is elsewhere called “the Spirit of glory” (1 Pet. 4:14).

The question will probably never be settled. If I must give an

opinion, I prefer the last view to any other. It suits the end of the verse better than any other. Nothing was so likely to make the disciples "one" as the gift of the Holy Ghost.

23.—[*I in them and You in Me, etc.*] In this verse our Lord simplifies His declarations about unity and expands them more fully in order to show emphatically how great importance He attached to unity. I take the meaning to be something of this kind: "I pray that my disciples may be so closely united, I dwelling in them and You dwelling in Me, that they may be compacted and perfected into one body—having one mind, one will, one heart, and one judgment, though having many members—and that they the world, seeing this unity, may be obliged to confess that You did send Me to be the Messiah, and that You love my people even as You love Me." In leaving this deep and difficult passage about unity, it is well to remember that the Church whose unity the Lord desires and prays for is not any particular or visible Church, but the Church which is His Body, the Church of the elect, the Church which is made up of true believers and saints alone.

Moreover, the unity that our Lord prays for is not unity of forms, discipline, government and the like, but unity of heart, will, doctrine and practice. Those who make uniformity the chief subject of this part of Christ's prayer entirely miss the mark. There may be uniformity without unity, as in many visible churches on earth now. There may be unity without uniformity, as between godly Episcopalians and godly Presbyterians. Uniformity no doubt may be a great help to unity, but it is not unity itself.

The unity that our Lord prays about here is that true, substantial, spiritual, internal, heart unity which undoubtedly exists among all members of Christ of every church and denomination. It is the unity which results from one Holy Ghost having made the members of Christ what they are. It is unity which makes them feel more of one mind with one another than with mere professors of their own party. It is unity which is the truest freemasonry on earth. It is unity which shakes the world and obliges it to confess the truth of Christianity. For the continued maintenance of this unity and an increase of it, our Lord seems to me in this prayer specially to pray. And we need not wonder. The divisions of mere worldly professors are of little moment. The divisions of real true believers are the greatest possible injury to the cause of the Gospel. If all believers at this moment were of one mind and would work together, they might soon turn the world upside down. No wonder the Lord prayed for unity.

24.—[Father, I will…behold…given Me.] In this verse our Lord names the fourth and last thing that He desires for His disciples in His prayer. After preservation, sanctification, and unity comes participation of His glory. He asks that they may be "with Him" in the glory yet to be revealed, and "behold," share, and take part in it. "I will" is a remarkable phrase, though it must not be pressed and strained too far. (See Mark 6:25, 10:35.) The daughter of Herodias, asking the head of John the Baptist, said, "I will that you give me." It may be nothing more than the expression of a strong "wish." Yet it is the wish of Him who is one with the Father, and only wills what the

Father wills. It is probably used to assure the mind of the disciples. “I will,” and it will be done.

Hutcheson says: “‘I will’ does not import any imperious commanding way, repugnant to His former way of humble supplication, but it only imports that in this His supplication, He was making His last will and Testament and leaving His legacies, which He was sure would be effectual, being purchased by His merits and prosecuted by His affectionate and earnest requests and intercessions.”

Traill remarks: “Christians, behold the amazing difference between Christ’s way of praying against His own hell (if I may so call it) and His praying for our heaven! When praying for Himself, it is ‘Father, if it be Thy will, let this cup pass from Me.’ But when Christ is praying for His people’s heaven, it is ‘Father, *I will* that they may be with Me.’” Stier maintains that “I will” “is no other than a testamentary word of the Son, who in the unity of the Father, is appointing what He *wills*, at the second limit of the prayer where petition ceases.” Alford says: “This is an expression of will founded on acknowledged right.” The expression “Be with Me where I am” is one of those deeply interesting phrases that show the nature of the future dwelling-place of believers. Wherever it may be, whether before or after the resurrection, it will be in the company of Christ. It is like “with Me in Paradise,” “depart and be with Christ,” and “forever with the Lord.” (Luke 23:43, Phil. 1:23, 1 Thess. 4:17.) The full nature of the future state is wisely hidden from us. It is enough for believers to know that they will be “with Christ.” It is company,

and not place, that makes up happiness. Traill remarks: “Heaven consists in the perfect immediate presence of Christ. Perfect presence is when all on both sides is present—all of Christ and all of the Christians. But now all of Christ is not with us, and all of us is not with Him. On His part we have Christ’s Spirit, word, and grace. On our part there is present with Him our hearts and the workings of our faith and love and desire toward Him. But the presence is imperfect and mixed with much distance and absence.” The expression “Behold my glory,” of course, must not be confined to the idea of looking on as spectators. It includes participation, sharing, and common enjoyment. (Compare John 3:3-36, 8:51, and Rev. 28:7.) The expression “which You have given Me” seems to point to that special glory which the Father, in everlasting covenant, has appointed for Christ as the reward of the work of redemption. (Phil. 2:9).

[*For You loved Me before the foundation of the world.*] This sentence seems specially inserted in order to show that the glory of Christ in the next world is a glory that had been prepared from all eternity—before time began and before the creation of man—and that it was not only something which, like Moses or John the Baptist, He had obtained by His faithfulness on earth, but something which He had as the eternal Son of the eternal Father, from everlasting. “You loved Me, and did assign Me this glory long before this world was made,” that is, from all eternity. This is a very deep saying and contains things far above our full comprehension. 25.—[*O righteous Father, etc.*] In this verse our Lord begins the final winding up of His

wonderful prayer. He does it by declaring the position of things in which He was about to leave the world and His disciples. I take the meaning to be this: “I come to You from a world that knows You not, and has refused to know You throughout my ministry. But in the midst of this world, I have known You and steadily adhered to You. And these my disciples have acknowledged and confessed that You did send Me to be the Messiah.”

It is not clear why our Lord uses the expression “righteous Father.” It is one that stands alone. It may possibly be intended to bring out in strong contrast the wickedness of a world that “knew not the Word” when the Word was in it (see John 1:10), and the justice of God in punishing this world, which refused to know Christ while the disciples received Him. The expression “I have known You” seems to point to the veil of humiliation that covered our Lord during the whole period of His incarnation. “Even then,” He seems to say, “I never ceased to know and honor You.” The high testimony borne to the disciples once more deserves notice. With all their infirmity, “they have KNOWN my Divine mission.”

26.—[*And I have declared…declare it*.] In this sentence our Lord briefly sums up what He had done and was still doing for the disciples: “I have made known to them Your name and character and attributes, as the sender of salvation to a lost world, and will continue to declare it after my ascension, by the Holy Spirit.”

Here, as elsewhere, our Lord again declares that to make known the

Father was one great object of His ministry. The expression "I will declare it," says George Newton, is a proof that "Jesus Christ will be continually making further declarations of His Father's name to other nations and other persons, to the end of the world. He will be ever teaching new scholars to spell it and understand it, in every generation, while the world endures."

[That the love…may be in them, and I in them.] Our Lord ends His prayer by expressing His wish that the Father's love may dwell in the hearts of His disciples, and that He Himself may dwell in their hearts. "My great desire is that they may know and feel the love wherewith You love Me, and that I may ever dwell in their hearts by faith."

Let us not forget that one great wish of St. Paul in his Epistles to the Ephesians was that "Christ might dwell in their hearts by faith" (Eph. 3:15). He also tells the Romans, "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts" (Rom. 5:5).

The expression "I will declare my love" is a difficult one. It can only mean, "I will declare it personally during the interval between my resurrection and my ascension," or, "I will continue to declare it by my Spirit's continual teaching after I leave the world." The latter seems the more probable meaning.

The expression "Your love may be in them" is another grave difficulty. It must either be "that Your love, the same love with which

You love Me, may be directed on and toward them," or else, "that they may feel in their own hearts a sense of that same love toward them with which You love Me." I prefer the latter sense.

George Newton remarks on this verse: "If Christ is in you, let me give you this caution: Let Him live quietly in your hearts. Do not molest Him and disturb Him; do not make Him vex and fret. Let it not be a penance to Him to continue in you. But labor every way to please Him, and give Him satisfaction and contentment so that the house He has chosen may not be dark and doleful, but delightful to Him."

Manton remarks: "If an earthly king lie but one night in a house, what care there is taken that nothing be offensive to him and that all be neat and sweet and clean. How much more careful ought you to be to keep your hearts clean, to perform service acceptable to Him, to be in the exercise of faith, love, and other graces so that you may entertain, as you ought, your heavenly King, who comes to take up His continual abode in your hearts." We may well feel humbled, as we leave this chapter, when we think of our ignorance of the true meaning of many of its phrases. How much of our exposition is nothing better than feeble conjecture! We seem only to scratch the surface of the field. Let us only remember that the four things prayed for by our Lord are things that every Christian should daily desire—preservation, sanctification, unity, and final glory in Christ's company.

George Newton closes his exposition of the whole chapter with these

touching words: “How earnest and importunate is Christ with God the Father, that we may be one here, and that we may be in one place hereafter! Oh, let us search into the heart of Jesus Christ, laid open to us in this abridgment of His intercession for us, that we may know it and the workings of it more and more, until at length the precious prayer comes to its full effect and we be taken up to be forever with the Lord, and where He is there we may be also!”

John – Chap. 18

JOHN 18:1-11

Betrayal and Arrest

When he had said these things, Jesus went out with his disciples across the Kidron Valley. There was an orchard there, and he and his disciples went into it. (Now Judas, the one who betrayed him, knew the place too, because Jesus had met there many times with his disciples.) So Judas obtained a squad of soldiers and some officers of the chief priests and Pharisees. They came to the orchard with lanterns and torches and weapons.

Then Jesus, because he knew everything that was going to happen to him, came and asked them, "Who are you looking for?" They replied, "Jesus the Nazarene." He told them, "I am he." (Now Judas, the one who betrayed him, was standing there with them.) So when Jesus said to them, "I am he," they retreated and fell to the ground. Then Jesus asked them again, "Who are you looking for?" And they said, "Jesus the Nazarene." Jesus replied, "I told you that I am he. If you are looking for me, let these men go." He said this to fulfill the word he had spoken, "I have not lost a single one of those whom you gave me."

Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, pulled it out and struck the high priest's slave, cutting off his right ear. (Now the slave's name was Malchus.) But Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword back into its sheath! Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?"

These verses begin John's account of Christ's sufferings and crucifixion. We now enter on the closing scene of our Lord's ministry, and pass at once from His intercession to His sacrifice. We shall find that, like the other Gospel-writers, the beloved disciple enters fully into the story of the cross. But we shall also find, if we read carefully, that he mentions several interesting points in the story, which Matthew, Mark, and Luke, for some wise reasons, have passed over.

We should notice, first, in these verses, *the* ***exceeding hardness of heart to which a backsliding professor may attain.*** We are told that Judas, one of the twelve Apostles, became guide to those who captured Jesus. We are told that he used his knowledge of the place of our Lord's retirement, in order to bring His deadly enemies upon Him; and we are told that when the band of men and officers approached his Master, in order to take Him prisoner, Judas "stood with them." Yet this was a man who for three years had been a constant companion of Christ, had seen His miracles, had heard His sermons, had enjoyed the benefit of His private instruction, had professed himself a believer, had even worked and preached in Christ's name! "Lord," we may well say, "what is man?" From the highest degree of privilege down to the

lowest depth of sin, there is but a succession of steps. Privileges misused seem to paralyze the conscience. The same fire that melts wax, will harden clay.

Let us beware of resting our hopes of salvation on religious knowledge, however great; or religious advantages, however many. We may know all doctrinal truth and be able to teach others, and yet prove rotten at heart, and go down to the pit with Judas. We may bask in the full sunshine of spiritual privileges, and hear the best of Christian teaching, and yet bear no fruit to God's glory, and be found withered branches of the vine, only fit to be burned. "Let him that thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall." (1 Cor. 10:12.) Above all, let us beware of cherishing within our hearts any secret besetting sin, such as love of money or love of the world. One faulty link in a chain-cable may cause a shipwreck. One little leak may sink a ship. One allowed and unmortified sin may ruin a professing Christian. Let him that is tempted to be a careless man in his religious life, consider these things, and take care. Let him remember Judas Iscariot. His history is meant to be a lesson.

We should notice, secondly, in these verses, ***the entire voluntariness of Christ's sufferings.*** We are told that the first time that our Lord said to the soldiers, "I am He, they went backward, and fell to the ground." *A secret invisible power*, no doubt, accompanied the words. In no other way can we account for a band of hardy Roman soldiers falling prostrate before a single unarmed man. The same miraculous influence which tied the priests

and Pharisees powerless at the triumphant entry into Jerusalem—which stopped all opposition when the temple was purged of buyers and sellers—that same mysterious influence was present now. A real miracle was wrought, though few had eyes to see it. At the moment when our Lord seemed weak, He showed that He was strong.

Let us carefully remember that our blessed Lord suffered and died of His own free will. He did not die because He could not help it; He did not suffer because He could not escape. All the soldiers of Pilate's army could not have taken Him, if He had not been willing to be taken. They could not have hurt a hair of His head, if He had not given them permission. But here, as in all His earthly ministry, Jesus was a willing sufferer. He had set His heart on accomplishing our redemption. He loved us, and gave Himself for us, cheerfully, willingly, gladly, in order to make atonement for our sins. It was "the joy set before Him" which made Him endure the cross, and despise the shame, and yield Himself up without reluctance into the bands of His enemies. Let this thought abide in our hearts, and refresh our souls. We have a Savior who was far more willing to save us than we are willing to be saved. If we are not saved, the fault is all our own. Christ is just as willing to receive and pardon, as He was willing to be taken prisoner, to bleed, and to die.

We should notice, thirdly, in these verses, ***our Lord's tender care for His disciples' safety. E***ven at this critical moment, when His own unspeakable sufferings were about to begin, He did not forget the little band of believers who stood around Him. He

remembered their weakness. He knew how little fit they were to go into the fiery furnace of the High Priest's Palace, and Pilate's judgment-hall. He mercifully makes for them a way of escape. "If you seek Me, let these go their way." It seems most probable that here also a miraculous influence accompanied his words. At any rate, not a hair of the disciples' heads was touched. While the Shepherd was taken, the sheep were allowed to flee away unharmed.

We need not hesitate to see in this incident an instructive type of all our Savior's dealings with His people even at this day. He will not allow them "to be tempted above that which they are able to bear." He will hold the winds and storms in His hands, and not allow believers, however sifted and buffeted, to be utterly destroyed. He watches tenderly over every one of His children, and, like a wise physician, measures out the right quantity of their trials with unerring skill. "They shall never perish, neither shall any one pluck them out of His hand." (John 10:28.) Forever let us lean our souls on this precious truth. In the darkest hour the eye of the Lord Jesus is upon us, and our final safety is sure.

We should notice, lastly, in these verses, ***our Lord's perfect submission to his Father's will.*** Once, in another place, we find Him saying, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me—nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will." Again, in another place, we find Him saying, "If this cup may not pass away from Me except I drink it, Your will be done." Here, however, we find even a higher

pitch of cheerful acquiescence— “The cup that my Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?” (Matt. 26:39-42; John 18:11.)

Let us see in this blessed frame of mind, a pattern for all who profess and call themselves Christians. Far as we may come short of the Master’s standard, let this be the mark at which we continually aim. Determination to have our own way, and do only what we like, is one great source of unhappiness in the world. The habit of laying all our matters before God in prayer, and asking Him to choose our portion, is one chief secret of peace. He is the truly wise man who has learned to say at every stage of his journey, “Give me what you will, place me where You will, do with me as You will; but not my will, but Yours be done.” This is the man who has the mind of Christ. By self-will Adam and Eve fell, and brought sin and misery into the world. Entire submission of will to the will of God is the best preparation for that heaven where God will be all.

Technnical Notes:

1. When Jesus had spoken these words, he went forth with his disciples over the brook Cedron, where there was a garden, into which he and his disciples entered. 2. And Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place; for Jesus often resorted there with his disciples.3. Then Judas, having received a band *of men,* and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, came there with lanterns, torches, and weapons. 4. Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon him, went forward and said to them,

Whom are you seeking? 5. They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus said to them, I am *he*. And Judas, who betrayed him, also stood with them. 6. As soon then as he had said to them, I am *he*, they drew back and fell to the ground. 7. Then he asked them again, Whom are ye seeking? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth. 8. Jesus answered, I have told you that I am *he*. Therefore, if ye seek me, let these go their way, 9. that the saying might be fulfilled which he spoke, Of those whom you gave me I have lost none. 10. Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus. 11. Then Jesus said to Peter, Put your sword into the sheath. Shall I not drink the cup which my Father has given me?

1.—[*When Jesus…words*.] This would have been more literally rendered, "Jesus having said these things." The "things" referred to seem to me to include the discourse of the 15th and 16th chapters, as well as the prayer of the 17th.

Henry observes: "The office of the priest was to teach and pray and offer sacrifice. Christ, after teaching and praying, applies Himself to make atonement. He had said all He had to say as a prophet. He now addresses Himself to His work as priest."

[*He went forth…disciples*.] The question arises, "From what place did He go forth?" It receives very different answers.

Many, as Cyril, Ecolampadius, Maldonatus, Doddridge, and Ellicott, think that it only means He went forth from the room where He had held the Lord's Supper and delivered His parting address and prayer. The advocates of this view hold that our Lord did not actually go out of the room when He said, at the end of the 14th chapter, "Arise, let us go hence," and that He probably continued His discourse and prayed standing. This, to say the least, seems a very unnatural view.

Some, as Burgon, think that our Lord spoke the latter part of His address and prayer within the precincts of the temple, and that the words before us mean that He moved away from the temple. This, however, seems hardly probable. It was night, we know. There is no evidence that gatherings of people by night were held within the temple precincts. The most probable view, in my opinion, seems to be that Jesus went forth out of the city after concluding His discourse and prayer, and that after leaving the room where our Lord's Supper was held (at the end of the 14th chapter), He spoke and prayed near the gates or within the city walls. He left the room when He said "Arise, let us go hence." Then having reached some quiet spot near the walls, He continued His discourse and prayed. Then after that he went out of the city. This seems to me the more natural account.

[*Over the brook Cedron.*] The Cedron here mentioned is the same as the Kidron named more than once in the Old Testament. The word "brook" means, literally, a "winter torrent," and this, according to all travelers, is precisely what the Kidron is. Excepting in winter or after

rains, it is merely the dry bed of a watercourse. It lies on the east side of Jerusalem, between the city and the Mount of Olives. It is the same Kidron that David passed over weeping when obliged to flee from Jerusalem by the rebellion of Absalom (2 Sam. 15:23). It is the same Kidron by the side of which Asa burned the idol of his mother Maachah (2 Chron. 15:16), and into which Josiah cast the dust of the idolatrous altars which he destroyed (2 Kings 23:12).

Lampe says that the way by which our Lord left the city was the way by which the scapegoat, Azazel, was annually sent out into the wilderness on the great day of atonement.

Bishop Andrews says that "the first breach made by the Romans, when Titus took Jerusalem, was at the brook Cedron, where they took Christ." [*Where…garden…entered.*] There can be little doubt that this garden is the same as the "place called Gethsemane." What kind of a garden it was we know not, unless a garden of olive trees. Probably it was neither a garden of flowers nor of herbs, but simply a place enclosed where trees were sheltered and encouraged to grow in order to provide a quiet shady retirement away from the bustle of the city. Whether it was a public garden or private property, we know not. Hengstenberg conjectures that "the owner of the place must have stood in some special relation to Jesus," and that this accounts for His frequent and free resort to the place. He also conjectures that the young man named in Mark 14:51,52 must have belonged to the family of the owner. This, however, is pure conjecture. Almost all commentators notice the curious fact that the fall of Adam and Eve took place in a garden, and Christ's passion also began in a garden,

and the sepulcher where Christ was laid was in a garden, and the place where He was crucified was in a garden. (John 19:41.) Augustine remarks: “It was fitting that the blood of the Physician should there be poured out, where the disease of the sick man first commenced.” Gualter remarks that the first Adam had everything that was pleasant in the Garden of Eden, and yet fell. The second Adam had everything that was painful and trying in the Garden of Gethsemane, but was a glorious conqueror.

The agony in Gethsemane, we may observe, is entirely passed over by John in his Gospel, and for wise reasons we need not doubt. But it is evident that it took place at this point of the narrative. The order of things is: first, the Lord’s Supper; then the long discourse recorded by John alone; then the marvelous prayer; then the going over Cedron into the garden; then the agony; and then the arrival of Judas and the capture of our Lord. It is plain, therefore, that there is a pause in the narrative of John’s Gospel at this point, and that we must allow a little space of time for the agony after our Lord “went out” of the city and crossed the Cedron. This would make the arrival of Judas and the soldiers far on into the night. Lightfoot mentions a curious fact, which he draws from a Jewish writer, that the blood from the sacrifices in the temple ran down a drain into the brook Kidron and was then sold to the gardeners for the purpose of dressing their gardens. The blood, having been consecrated, could not be put to common uses without sin, and therefore the gardeners paid for it as much as would buy a trespass offering. This is curious, if true. 2.—[*And Judas, etc.*] This verse is one of John’s peculiar

explanatory comments. He tells us that this garden was a place where our Lord and His disciples were in the habit of assembling together when they went up to Jerusalem at the great Jewish feasts. At such seasons the crowd of worshippers was very great, and many had to content themselves with such shelter as they could find under trees or rocks in the open air. This is what Luke means when he says, "At night He went out and abode in the mount that is called the Mount of Olives" (Luke 21:37). Excepting at the celebration of the first Lord's Supper, we have no mention of our Lord ever being in any *house* in Jerusalem.

Chrysostom remarks: "It is evident from this that Jesus generally passed the night out of doors."

Bucer thinks that Judas specially knew the place where our Lord used to pray. Our Lord's habits of prayer were as well known as those of Daniel. The fact that the traitor Judas "knew the place," while our Lord deliberately went there, shows three things. One is that our Lord went to His death willingly and voluntarily. He went to the garden knowing well that Judas was acquainted with the place. Another thing is that our Lord was in the habit of going to this garden so often that Judas felt sure He would be found there. Another thing is that the heart of Judas must have been desperately hard when, after so many seasons of spiritual refreshment as he must have seen in this garden, he could use his knowledge for the purpose of betraying his Master. He "knew the place" because he had often heard his Master teaching and praying there. He knew it from

spiritual associations, and yet turned his knowledge to wicked ends! May we not learn from this verse that there is nothing to be ashamed of, nothing wrong, in loving one place more than another and choosing one place more than another for communion with God? Even our blessed Lord had one special place, near Jerusalem, more than other places, to which He often resorted. The common idea of some, that it matters not where or in what place we worship, and that it is unspiritual and wrong to care for one seat in church more than another, can hardly be reconciled with this verse. The Greek words rendered "resorted there" are literally "were gathered together there."

3.—[*Then Judas, having received, etc.*] This verse begins John's circumstantial account of the taking and subsequent passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. A careful reader will not fail to observe that John entirely passes over several points in this history which are mentioned by the three other Gospel writers, and not least, the bargaining of Judas with the priests to betray our Lord for money. But it is evident that John assumes his readers were acquainted with the other three Gospels and purposely dwells on points which they had not mentioned. The expression "a band of men" can only mean the detachment of Roman soldiers which had been lent by Pilate to the priests for the occasion. Some think that it means literally "a cohort," which was the tenth part of a legion and consisted of four or five hundred men. This, however, seems doubtful. Yet Matthew speaks of Judas coming and "a great multitude with him" (Matt. 26:47).

The “officers” mean the Jewish servants of the priests and Pharisees, who accompanied the Roman soldiers. The party, therefore, which Judas led consisted of two distinct elements—Romish soldiers detached from the garrison of Jerusalem and Jewish servants got together by the leaders of the Jews. Gentiles and Jews were, therefore, equally concerned in the arrest. The number of the party was probably large, from fear of an attempt at a rescue by the Galilean Jews who were supposed to favor our Lord. They would be at Jerusalem in large numbers at the Passover; and after our Lord’s recent triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the priests might well feel doubts whether they would allow Him to be made a prisoner without a struggle.

Chrysostom remarks that “these men had often, at other times, been sent to seize Him, but had not been able. Hence it is plain that at this time He voluntarily surrendered Himself.”

The “lanterns and torches” at first sight may seem to have been needless, as the moon at Passover time was full. But they were doubtless intended to assist the party in searching for our Lord if he endeavored to hide Himself among the rocks and trees. And in a deep valley there would be many dark and shady places.

The “weapons” most probably apply to the Jewish servants of the priests. It is unreasonable to suppose that Roman soldiers would ever move without their arms. For fear of resistance, the Jewish portion of the party took arms also.

Burkitt remarks on the activity and energy of wicked men: “At the very time when Peter, James, and John were sleeping in the garden, Judas and his bloody followers were gathering, marching, and planning a murder.” The confidence of Judas that our Lord would be in the garden shows plainly how familiar he was with our Lord’s habits on the occasion of his visits to Jerusalem.

4.—[Jesus…knowing…come upon him.] This sentence shows our Lord’s perfect foreknowledge of everything that was about to happen to Him. Never was there a more willing, deliberate, and voluntary sufferer than our Lord. The words “things that should come” would be more literally rendered “the things coming,” in the present tense.

The best of martyrs, like Ridley and Latimer, did not know for certain, up to the moment of their deaths, that something might not occur to alter the mind of their persecutors and save their lives. Our Lord knew perfectly well that His death was sure, by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.

Ford quotes a saying of Pinart, that “what rendered Christ’s sufferings most terrible was the perfect foreknowledge He had of the torments He should endure. From the first moment of His life, He had present to His mind the scourge, the thorns, the cross, and the agonizing death which awaited Him. Saw He a lamb in the meadow or a victim in the temple, the sight reminded Him that He was the lamb of God, and that He was to be offered up a sacrifice.”

[*Went forward*.] This must mean that our Lord came forward from that part of the garden where He was and did not wait for the party of Judas to find Him. On the contrary, he suddenly showed Himself and met them face-toface. The effect of this action alone must have been startling to the soldiers. They would feel at once that they had to do with no common person.

Henry remarks: "When the people would have forced Him to take a crown and wished to make Him a king, he withdrew and hid Himself (John 6:15). But when they came to force Him to His cross, He offered Himself. He came to this world to suffer, and went to the other world to reign." Lampe remarks that the first Adam hid himself in the garden. The second Adam went forth to meet His enemies. The first felt guilty, the second innocent.

[*And said... Whom are ye seeking?*] Jesus Himself was the first to speak and did not wait to be challenged or commanded to surrender. This sudden question, no doubt, would take the party of Judas by surprise and prepare the way for the mighty miracle that followed. The soldiers must needs have felt, "this is not the language or manner of a malefactor or a guilty man."

5.—[*They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth*.] This would be more literally rendered "Jesus the Nazarene." It is certainly hard to suppose that those who said this could have known that Jesus Himself was speaking to them. It looks as if they did not know our Lord by sight, or could not believe that the bold speaker before them

could be the prisoner they came to apprehend. That many of the party did not know our Lord by sight is clear from the fact mentioned by Matthew and Mark, that Judas had given them a sign:
"Whomsoever I kiss, that same is He; hold Him fast." This sign, therefore, had not yet been given. Probably there was no time for it. The coming forward and question of our Lord had taken place so suddenly that they took the whole party by surprise.

Chrysostom, Cyril, Theophylact, Gualter, Brentius, Gerhard, and Ferus think that our Lord miraculously blinded the eyes of the party so that they did not recognize him, as Elisha blinded the Syrians (2 Kings 6:18). They had lights, and they must have known his voice. But they seem to have been unable to know him. Musculus thinks they did not recognize Him and thought Him a disciple.

[*Jesus said to them, I am He.*] Our Lord here makes a plain, bold, full avowal that He is the very person whom they seek. It must have been a most startling announcement.
The words in the Greek are literally "I am." Some have thought that there was an intentional reference to the famous passage in Exodus, where the Lord says "I AM has sent you" (Exodus 3:14), to which also our Lord certainly did refer in John 8:58. But it seems very doubtful whether such a reference would have been used in speaking to such a party as those who came to seize our Lord.

[*And Judas…stood with them.*] It is not quite clear why this little sentence is put in here. It may be meant to show the desperate

wickedness of Judas. He stood side-by-side with the enemies of Jesus. It may be meant to show that even Judas himself was staggered and confounded by our Lord's boldness and did not give his companions the promised sign, not recognizing him any more than the others. The false apostle stood there like one struck dumb. It may be meant to show that Judas himself was a witness and a subject of one of the last great miracles our Lord wrought. He himself was once more to feel, and experience proof, that the Master he betrayed had divine power. There seems to me much probability in this last idea.

6.—[*As soon then…fell to the ground.*] I cannot doubt that the thing here related was a great miracle. I have not the slightest sympathy with Alford and others who try to explain it away partially, by reminding us of the awe and reverence that a great and good man sometimes inspires in inferior minds. Such an explanation will never account for the fact here recorded that the band of Roman soldiers and the servants of the priests— in fact, the whole body of armed men who came to seize our Lord— "went backward and fell to the earth" on hearing our Lord say "I am He." The Roman soldiers especially knew nothing about our Lord and had not cause to fear Him. The only reasonable account of the event is that it was a miracle. It was an exercise for the last time of that same Divine power by which our Lord calmed the waves, stilled the winds, cast out devils, healed the sick, and raised the dead. And it was a miracle purposely wrought at this juncture in order to show the disciples and their enemies that our Lord was not taken because He could not help

it, or crucified because He could not prevent it, but because He was willing to suffer and die for sinners. He came to be a willing sufferer for our sins, that the Scriptures might be fulfilled. (Comp. Matt. 26:53.) The effect of the miraculous influence put forth by our Lord seems to have been that the party who came to seize Him was for a little time struck down to the ground, like men struck down but not killed by lightning, and rendered so helpless that our Lord and His disciples might easily have escaped. How long they lay on the ground we are not told, but there certainly seems to be some pause at the end of the verse. It seems clear to me that the miracle saved the disciples from being taken prisoners, and so far awed the party of Judas that they were satisfied to seize our Lord only, and either intentionally let the eleven go, or in their fear of some further display or miraculous power neglected them and gave them time to escape. That it also made the whole party of Judas without excuse is equally clear. They could never say they had no evidence of our Lord's divine power. They had felt it in their own persons.

Burgon sees in this incident something that recalls to mind the prophetic words of the Psalmist: "When the wicked, even my enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell" (Psa. 27:2). Augustine remarks: "What shall He do when He comes to judge, who did this when about to be judged? What shall be His might when He comes to reign, who had this might when He was at the point to die?" The effort of some to lessen the miraculous character of this circumstance, by quoting such a case as the classical story of the soldier being daunted by the appearance of

the Roman General Caius Marius, is weak and evasive. A whole cohort of Roman soldiers would not fall down without miraculous interference. If not a miracle, the event is utterly inexplicable and contrary to experience.

7.—[*Then he asked them again, etc.*] Our Lord repeats His question, as if to test the effect of the miraculous exhibition of power which He had just given to His enemies. But they were hardened, like Pharaoh and the Egyptians under the miraculous plagues of Egypt. As soon as they rose from the ground, they proved, that though frightened, they were not turned from their purpose. They still seek to take Jesus of Nazareth.

8.—[*Jesus answered... I am He.*] The dignity and calmness of our Lord at this point are very striking. Knowing full well all the insults and barbarous usage about to begin in a few minutes, He repeats His declaration. “I am He whom you seek. Behold Me; here I am, ready to surrender myself into your hands.”

[*Therefore, if...go their way.*] The tender thoughtfulness of our Lord for His weak disciples is strikingly shown in this sentence. Even at this trying moment He thought more of others than of Himself. “If I alone am the person you seek to make prisoner, if your commission is to seize Me only, then let these my followers go away and do not harm them.” Once more, we need not doubt that the miraculous power accompanied these words, and that insensibly a restraint was laid upon our Lord’s enemies so that they felt obliged to let the

disciples escape.

The tender sympathy and consideration of our great High Priest for His people come out very beautifully in this place, and would doubtless be remembered by the eleven long afterward. They would remember that the very last thought of their Master, before He was made a prisoner, was for them and their safety.

Christ's protecting power over all His believing people is plainly taught in this passage.

Jansenius remarks, that to this saying we may attribute the safety of Peter, though he smote with the sword and got inside the high priest's palace, and of John, though he stood by the cross. Besser quotes a saying of Luther, that this was as great a miracle as that of casting the party to the ground. To tie the hands of the party of Judas and prevent them touching His disciples was a mighty exercise of Divine power.

9.—[*That the saying might be fulfilled, etc.*] In this verse we have one of those parenthetical comments or explanations which are so often found in John's Gospel. He reminds us that our Lord's interference to secure the safety of His disciples at this crisis was a fulfillment in fact of His expression in prayer, "none of them is lost."

Some persons see a difficulty here, and object that in the prayer our Lord speaks of eternal salvation, while here He is only speaking of

temporal safety. Yet there seems no solid ground for the objection. Our Lord's preservation of His disciples included the means as well as the end. One means of preserving them from making shipwreck of the faith altogether was to keep them from being tempted above what they could bear. Our Lord knew that they would be so tempted, and that their souls were not strong enough to bear the trial. If they had been taken prisoners and brought before Caiaphas and Pilate, with Himself, their faith would have failed entirely. He therefore provides for their escape and overrules the plans of His enemies, so that the eleven were "let go." And thus He literally carried out what he had mentioned in prayer. He prevented any of them being lost. They would have been lost so far as man's eye can judge, if He had not provided a way of escape and prevented them being tempted beyond their strength. The care of Jesus over His people provides the means of perseverance and continuance in the faith, as well as the great end of eternal salvation.

Chrysostom remarks: "By loss He does not here mean temporal death, but eternal." Calvin remarks: "The Evangelist does not speak merely of their bodily life, but means that Christ, sparing them for a time, provided for their eternal salvation. Consider how great their weakness was. What do we think they would have done alone, if brought to the test? Christ did not choose they should be tried beyond the strength He had given, and rescued them from eternal destruction."

It seems to me most probable that at this point of the history the kiss

of Judas and His “Hail Master” come in. At any rate, it is difficult to suppose that Judas could have kissed our Lord when he first “went forth” and surprised the band by meeting them. There does not seem time for the salutation, nor does it seem probable that Judas would first kiss our Lord and then fall to the ground. Nor does the repeated answer of the band to the question “Whom seek ye?” give the idea that they had as yet recognized our Lord, or had any sign from Judas. I give this as my own conjecture and admit that the matter is doubtful. But I must think that as soon as the band of soldiers recovered their presence of mind, Judas came forward and kissed our Lord, and then the capture took place. This is the order of events maintained by Chrysostom, Cyril, Theophylact, Gerhard, Jansenius, Lightfoot, Stier, and Alford.

10.—[*Then Simon Peter, having a sword, etc.*] The event here mentioned is recorded by all the four Gospel writers, but John alone gives the name of Peter as the striker and of Malchus as the person struck. The reason commonly assigned for this is probably correct. John’s Gospel was written long after the other three, when Peter and Malchus were both dead and their names could, therefore, be safely mentioned.

Peter’s impetuous temperament comes out in the action before us. Impulsive, earnest, zealous, and inconsiderate of consequences, he acted hastily, and his zeal soon cooled down and was changed into fear. It is not those who are for a time most demonstrative and fervent whose religion is deepest. John never smote with the sword;

but John never denied his Lord, and was at the foot of the cross when Christ died. The use of the article "the" before "servant" would seem to indicate that Malchus was some person well known as an attendant of Caiaphas. Whether the ear was cut off entirely or only so cut as to hang down by the skin, may be left to conjecture. In any case, we know that it gave occasion for the last miracle of bodily cure which our Lord ever wrought. Luke tells us that He "touched" the ear, and it was instantaneously healed. To the very end of His ministry, our Lord did good to His enemies and gave proof of His divine power; but His hardened enemies gave no heed. Miracles alone convert no one. As in the case of Pharaoh, they only seem to make some men harder and more wicked.

We cannot doubt that Peter meant to kill Malchus with this blow, which was probably aimed at his head. His own agitation probably, and the special interposition of God, alone prevented him taking away the life of another, and endangering his own life and that of his fellow-disciples. What might have happened if Malchus had been killed, no one can tell. Musculus remarks how entirely Peter seems to have forgotten all His Master's frequent predictions—that He would be delivered to the Gentiles and be condemned to death—and acts as if he could prevent what was coming. It was clearly an impulsive act, done without reflection. Zeal not according to knowledge often drives a man into foolish actions and makes work for repentance.

11.—[*Then Jesus said…sword into the sheath.*] This was the language of firm and decided rebuke. It was meant to teach Peter, and all

Christians in every age, that the Gospel is not to be propagated or maintained by carnal weapons or by smiting and violence. Matthew adds the solemn words, “All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.” How needful the rebuke and how true the comment have often been proved by the history of the Church of Christ. The appeal to the sword can rarely be justified, and has often recoiled on the head of its promoters. The wars of the Protestants on the Continent after the Reformation, and the American war between North and South, furnished melancholy proofs of this. Some of the best Christians have died on battlefields. Taking the sword, they perished by the sword.

St. John, for wise reasons, does not mention the miraculous healing of Malchus. Burgon takes occasion to remark that even in the hour of our Lord’s apparent weakness, He gave His enemies a miracle of power and a miracle of mercy—power in striking them to the ground, mercy in healing.

[*Shall I not drink…given me?*] This beautiful saying is peculiar to St. John’s Gospel. It was meant to show our Lord’s perfect willingness and readiness to drink the bitter cup of suffering that was before Him. It should always be read in connection with the two other expressions about the cup which our Lord had very shortly before used in the garden of Gethsemane. First came the prayer, “If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me.” Then came the resigned declaration, “If this cup may not pass from Me except I drink it, Thy will be done.” And last of all comes the firm and composed assertion

of perfect readiness for anything: “Shall I not drink the cup given to Me by my Father?” The three expressions taken together are deeply instructive. They show that our Lord in His agony prayed for relief. They show that His prayer was first answered by His being able to submit entirely to His Father’s will. They show that His prayer was finally answered by His being able to show complete willingness to suffer. What an example this is for all believers in the time of trouble! Like our Master, we may pray about it and hope that like Him we shall obtain help by prayer. What a proof this is of our Lord’s power to sympathize with suffering believers. He knows their conflicts by experience.

The absolute voluntariness of Jesus Christ’s suffering for us is nowhere perhaps more remarkably brought out than in this passage. He resents and rebukes the effort of a zealous disciple to repel force by force. He speaks of His sufferings as “a cup” given to Him by His Father, and appointed in the everlasting counsels of the Trinity, and as one which He cheerfully and willingly drinks. “Shall I not drink it? Would you have me refuse it? Would you prevent my dying for sinners?” It is the more marvelous when we reflect that He who thus willingly suffered was God Almighty as well as man. Nothing can account for the whole scene but the doctrine of atonement and substitution.

To the eye of some, our Lord’s sufferings were forced on Him by the Jews. Yet when He speaks of them here, He looks far above second causes. He says that His sufferings were “the cup given to Him by the

Father." Are not all the sufferings of God's children to be regarded in the same light? Calvin warns us here that while we ought to be ready to drink any cup appointed by our Father, "we must not listen to those fanatics who tell us that we may not seek remedies for diseases and any other kind of distresses, lest we reject the cup presented to us by our heavenly Father." Henry observes on the word "cup" as applied to affliction: "It is but a cup, a small matter comparatively, be it what it will. It is not a sea, a Red sea or a Dead sea, for it is not hell; it is light, and but for a moment. It is a cup that is *given* us; sufferings are gifts. It is given us by a Father, by one who has a Father's authority, and does us no wrong; a Father's affection, and means us no hurt."

Bengel remarks that John here evidently presupposes the particulars detailed by Matthew about "the cup," named by our Lord in prayer, to be things known by his readers. Paley also notices the expression as one of the undesigned coincidences of Scripture.

JOHN 18:12-27

Then the squad of soldiers with their commanding officer and the officers of the Jewish religious leaders arrested Jesus and tied him up. They brought him first to Annas, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. (Now it was Caiaphas who had advised the Jewish leaders that it was to their advantage that one man die for the people.)

Simon Peter and another disciple followed them as they brought Jesus to Annas. (Now the other disciple was acquainted with the high priest, and he went with Jesus into the high priest's courtyard.) But Simon Peter was left standing outside by the door. So the other disciple who was acquainted with the high priest came out and spoke to the slave girl who watched the door, and brought Peter inside. The girl who was the doorkeeper said to Peter, "You're not one of this man's disciples too, are you?" He replied, "I am not." (Now the slaves and the guards were standing around a charcoal fire they had made, warming themselves because it was cold. Peter also was standing with them, warming himself.)

While this was happening, the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching. Jesus replied, "I have spoken publicly to the world. I always taught in the synagogues and in the temple courts, where all the Jewish people assemble together. I have said nothing in secret. Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said. They know what I said." When Jesus had said this, one of the high priest's officers who stood nearby struck him on the face and said, "Is that the way you answer the high priest?" Jesus replied, "If I have said something wrong, confirm what is wrong. But if I spoke correctly, why strike me?" Then Annas sent him, still tied up, to Caiaphas the high priest.

Meanwhile Simon Peter was standing in the courtyard warming himself. They said to him, "You aren't one of his disciples too, are you?" Peter denied it "I am not!" One of the high priest's slaves, a

relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, said, "Did I not see you in the orchard with him?" Then Peter denied it again, and immediately a rooster crowed.

In this part of John's history of Christ's sufferings, three wonderful things stand out upon the surface of the narrative. To these three let us confine our attention.

We should mark, for one thing, ***the amazing hardness of unconverted men.*** We see this in the conduct of the men by whom our Lord was taken prisoner. Some of them most probably were Roman soldiers, and some of them were Jewish servants of the priests and Pharisees. But in one respect they were all alike. Both parties saw our Lord's divine power exhibited, when they "went backward, and fell to the ground." Both saw a miracle, according to Luke's Gospel, when Jesus touched the ear of Malchus and healed him. Yet both remained unmoved, cold, indifferent and insensible, as if they had seen nothing out of the common way. They went on coolly with their odious business; "They took Jesus, bound Him, and led Him away."

The degree of hardness and insensibility of conscience to which men may attain, when they live twenty or thirty years without the slightest contact with religion, is something dreadful and appalling. God and the things of God seem to sink out of sight and disappear from the mind's eye. The world and the things of the world seem to absorb the whole attention. In such cases we may well believe miracles would produce little or no effect, as in the case before us.

The eye would gaze on them, like the eye of a beast looking at a romantic landscape, without any impression being made on the heart. He who thinks that seeing a miracle would convert him into a thorough Christian has got much to learn.

Let us not wonder if we see cases of hardness and unbelief in our own day and generation. Such cases will continually be found among those classes of mankind, who from their profession or position are completely cut off from means of grace. Twenty or thirty years of total irreligion, without the influence of Sunday, Bible, or Christian teaching, will make a man's heart hard as the nether mill-stone. His conscience at last will seem dead, buried, and gone. He will appear past feeling. Painful as these cases are, we must not think them peculiar to our own times. They existed under Christ's own eyes, and they will exist until Christ returns. The Church which allows any portion of a population to grow up in practical heathenism, must never be surprised to see a rank crop of practical infidelity.

We should mark, for another thing, ***the amazing condescension of our Lord Jesus Christ.*** We see the Son of God taken prisoner and led away bound like a malefactor—arraigned before wicked and unjust judges—insulted and treated with contempt. And yet this unresisting prisoner had only to will His deliverance, and He would at once have been free. He had only to command the confusion of His enemies, and they would at once have been confounded. Above all He was One who knew full well that Annas and Caiaphas, and all their companions, would one day stand

before His judgment seat and receive an eternal sentence. He knew all these things, and yet condescended to be treated as a malefactor without resisting.

One thing at any rate is very clear. The love of Christ to sinners is "a love that passes knowledge." To suffer for those whom we love, and who are in some sense worthy of our affections, is suffering that we can understand. To submit to ill-treatment quietly, when we have no power to resist, is submission that is both graceful and wise. But *to suffer voluntarily, when we a have the power to prevent it, and to suffer for a world of unbelieving and ungodly sinners, unasked and unthanked*—this is a line of conduct which passes man's understanding. Never let us forget that this is the peculiar beauty of Christ's sufferings, when we read the wondrous story of His cross and passion.

He was led away captive, and dragged before the High Priest's bar, not because He could not help Himself, but because He had set His whole heart on saving sinners, by bearing their sins, by being treated as a sinner, and by being punished in their stead. He was a willing prisoner, that we might be set free. He was willingly arraigned and condemned, that we might be absolved and declared innocent. "He suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us unto God." "Though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor, that we through His poverty might be rich." "He was made sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." (1 Peter 3:18; 2 Cor. 8:9; 5:21.) Surely

if there is any doctrine of the Gospel which needs to be clearly known, it is the doctrine of Christ's voluntary substitution. He suffered and died willingly and unresistingly, because He knew that He had come to be our substitute, and by substitution to purchase our salvation.

We should mark, lastly, ***the amazing degree of weakness that may be found in a real Christian.*** We see this exemplified in a most striking manner, in the conduct of the Apostle Peter. We see that famous disciple forsaking his Master, and acting like a coward—running away when he ought to have stood by His side—ashamed to own Him when he ought to have confessed Him—and finally denying three times that He knew Him. And this takes place immediately after receiving the Lord's' Supper—after hearing the most touching address and prayer that mortal ear ever heard. after the plainest possible warnings—under the pressure of no very serious temptation. "Lord," we may well say, "what is man that You are mindful of him?" "Let him that thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall." (1 Cor. 10:12.)

This fall of Peter is doubtless intended to be a lesson to the whole Church of Christ. It is recorded for our learning, that we be kept from like sorrowful overthrow. It is a beacon mercifully set up in Scripture, to prevent others making shipwreck. It shows us the danger of pride and self-confidence. If Peter had not been so sure that although all denied Christ, he never would, he would probably never have fallen. It shows us the danger of laziness. If Peter had

watched and prayed, when our Lord advised him to do so, he would have found grace to help him in the time of need. It shows us, not least, the painful influence of the fear of man. Few are aware, perhaps, how much more they fear the face of man whom they can see, than the eye of God whom they cannot see. These things are written for our admonition. Let us remember Peter and be wise.

After all let us leave the passage with the comfortable reflection that we have a merciful and pitiful High Priest, who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and will not break the bruised reed. Peter no doubt fell shamefully, and only rose again after heartfelt repentance and bitter tears. But he did rise again. He was not left to reap the consequence of his sin, and cast off for evermore. The same pitying hand that saved him from drowning, when his faith failed him on the waters, was once more stretched out to raise him when he fell in the High Priest's hall. Can we doubt that he rose a wiser and better man? If Peter's fall has made Christians see more clearly *their own great weakness and Christ's great compassion*, then Peter's fall has not been recorded in vain.

Technical Notes:

12. Then the band and the captain and officers of the Jews took Jesus and bound him. 13. And they led him away to Annas first, for he was father-in-law to Caiaphas, who was the high priest that same year. 14. Now it was Caiaphas who gave counsel to the Jews that it was expedient that one man should die for the people. 15. And Simon Peter

followed Jesus, and *so did* another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest, and went in with Jesus into the palace of the high priest. 16. But Peter stood at the door outside. Then the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to her who kept the door, and brought Peter in. 17. Then the damsel who kept the door said to Peter, Are not you *also one* of this man's disciples? He said, I am not. 18. And the servants and officers stood there, who had made a fire of coals; for it was cold, and they warmed themselves. And Peter stood with them and warmed himself. 19. The high priest then asked Jesus about his disciples and his doctrine. 20. Jesus answered him, I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in the synagogue and in the temple, where the Jews always meet, and in secret I have said nothing. 21. Why do you ask Me? Ask those who heard me what I said to them. Behold, they know what I said. 22. And when he had thus spoken, one of the officers who stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, Do You answer the high priest like that? 23. Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike me? 24. Now Annas had sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest. 25. And Simon Peter stood and warmed himself. Therefore they said to him, Are you not also *one* of his disciples? He denied *it* and said, I am not. 26. One of the servants of the high priest, a kinsman *of him* whose ear Peter cut off, said, Did not I see you in the

garden with him? 27. Peter then denied again; and immediately the cock crowed.

12.—[*Then the band and the captain, etc.*] This verse begins the story of our Lord when He was actually in the hands of His deadly enemies. For the first time in His earthly ministry, we see Him not a free agent but submitting to be a passive sufferer and allowing His foes to work their will. The last miracle had been wrought in vain. Like a malefactor, He is seized and put in chains.

The captain must mean the Roman officer who commanded the band, cohort, or detachment, which was sent to apprehend our Lord. The officers must mean the civil servants of the priests who accompanied them. The binding must mean the putting of chains or handcuffs on our Lord's arms and wrists.

13.—[*And led Him away to Annas, etc.*] This is a fact that is mentioned by no Gospel writer except John. The explanation of it is probably something of this kind. In the time when our Lord Jesus was on earth, the office of the high priest among the Jews was filled up with the utmost disorder and irregularity. Instead of the high priest being high priest for life, he was often elected for a year or two and then deposed and his office given to another. There were often living at one time several priests who had served the office of high priest and then ceased to hold it, like sheriffs or mayors among ourselves. In the case before us Annas appears, after ceasing to be high priest himself, to have lived in the same palace with his son-in-

law Caiaphas and to have assisted him as an assessor and adviser in the discharge of his duties, which from his age and official experience he would be well qualified to do. Remembering this, we may understand our Lord "being led away to Annas first" and then passed on by him to Caiaphas. So intimate were the relations between the two that in Luke 3:2 we are told that "Annas and Caiaphas were high priests." In Acts 4:6 Annas is called "the high priest." Yet it is very certain that Caiaphas was the acting high priest the year that our Lord was crucified. John distinctly asserts it.

The gross inconsistency of the Jews in making such ado about the law of Moses, while they permitted and tolerated such entire departures from its regulations about the high priest's office, is a curious example of what blindness unconverted men may exhibit. As to there being two high priests at the same time, we must in fairness remember that even in holy David's time "Zadok and Abiathar were the priests" (2 Sam. 2:25). The gross irregularity in our Lord's time consisted in making the high priest's office an annual one.

The object of the Jews in bringing our Lord before the high priest and in the Sanhedrim first is very plain. They wished to convict him of heresy and blasphemy, and then after that to denounce him to the Romans. Augustine thinks that Caiaphas arranged that our Lord should be taken to Annas first because he was his father-in-law. He also thinks that these two held the office of high priest, each in his turn, year by year. Calvin thinks that our Lord was only taken to Annas first because his house happened to be convenient, till the

high priest and council assembled. Cyril and Musculus think that Annas was the contriver and designer of all done against Christ.

Cyril here interposes the verse which in most Bibles comes in as the 24th:

"Annas at once sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest." Luther, Flacius, and Beza incline to approve of this. But it is fair to say that there is great lack of authority for this change.
Most commentators think that Jesus was taken to Annas first, by way of exhibiting to that old "enemy of all righteousness" the triumphant success of the attempt to capture the prisoner, whom the Sanhedrim had agreed to slay. They think that he was just shown to Annas and then passed on to Caiaphas. But I cannot think this probable. I hold, with Alford and Ellicott, that our Lord was examined by Annas.

Cornelius á Lapide suggests that Annas was very likely the person with whom Judas bargained to betray our Lord for money; and that when the capture was effected, Judas brought the prisoner to the house of Annas and remained there to claim his price, after Annas had seen Him. He observes with some acuteness that Judas does not appear after this in the history of the examination of our Lord.

Lightfoot quotes a Jewish writer who says that "in the second temple, which only stood four hundred and twenty years, there were in that time more than three hundred high priests!"
Henry remarks: "It was the ruin of Caiaphas that he was high priest

that year, and so became a ringleader in putting Christ to death. Many a man's advancement has lost him his reputation; and he would not have been dishonored if he had not been preferred and promoted."

14.—[*Now it was Caiaphas, etc.*] This verse contains one of John's peculiar explanatory comments and as such comes in parenthetically. It is as though he said, "Let us not forget that this was the very Caiaphas who, after the raising of Lazarus, had said publicly that it was expedient that one man should die for the people. Behold how he is made the unconscious instrument of bringing that saying to pass, though in a widely different sense from that which he intended!" Calvin compares him to Balaam. Let us note how the great wicked men of this world—the Sennacheribs, Neros, bloody Marys, and Napoleons—are used by God as His saws and axes and hammers to do His work and carry out the building of His Church, though they are not themselves in the least aware of it. Indeed Caiaphas helps forward the one great sacrifice for the sins of the world!

15.—[*And Simon Peter followed Jesus.*] The first flight and running away of the disciples is passed over entirely by John. He simply mentions that Peter followed his Master, though at a distance, lovingly anxious to see what was done to Him, yet not bold enough to keep near Him like a disciple. Any one can see that the unhappy disciple was under the influence of very mixed feelings. Love made him ashamed to run away and hide himself. Cowardice made him

afraid to show his colors and stick by his Lord's side. Hence he chose a middle course—the worst, as it happened, that he could have followed. After being self-confident when he should have been humble, and sleeping when he ought to have been praying, he could not have done a more foolish thing than to flutter round the fire and place himself within reach of temptation. It teaches the foolishness of man when his grace is weak. No prayer is more useful than the familiar one, "Lead us not into temptation." Peter forgot it here.

[*And so did another disciple.*] This would be more literally rendered "the other disciple." The opinion of many commentators is that this disciple was John. Precisely the same expression is used in four successive verses (John 20:2,3,4, and 8), where John is clearly referred to. This is the view of Chrysostom, Cyril, Alford, Wordsworth, and Burgon. Chrysostom and Cyril observe that it was John's humility that made him conceal his name both here and elsewhere. Here he would not proclaim that he stood while Peter fell. Ferus suggests that the presence of a disciple is mentioned in order to show that John saw with his own eyes all that went on at our Lord's examination.

[*That disciple was known…priest.*] How and in what manner this acquaintance originated we are not told, nor is there any clue to a knowledge of it. On the face of things, it certainly seems strange that a humble Galilean fisherman, like John, should be personally known to Caiaphas! On the other hand, we must not forget that every devout Jew went up to Jerusalem at the three great feasts and on these

occasions might easily have become acquainted with the high priest, and the more likely to get acquainted if a conscientious and godly man. Moreover, we must remember that John was once a disciple of John the Baptist, and that there was a time when “Jerusalem and all Judea” attended on John’s ministry. Acquaintance might have been formed then. Some have thought that John’s calling as a fisherman might easily bring him into communication with the family of Caiaphas, when he visited Jerusalem on business. All these, it must be confessed, are only conjectures, and it is perhaps the safest to admit our ignorance. Enough for us to read that the high priest knew John; but why and how we cannot tell.

Hengstenberg suggests an explanation so singular that I think it best to give it in his own words: “The character of John leads to the obvious supposition that his acquaintance with the high priest rested on religious grounds. Searching for goodly pearls, John had earlier sought from the high priest what, after the intervening ministry of the Baptist, he found in Christ. With what eyes he had formerly regarded the position of high priest is shown by the fact that, though a disciple of Christ, he nevertheless assigned to the word of the high priest a prophetic significance (John 11:51). John, by his internally devout nature, had so attracted the good will of the high priest that he did not wholly cast him off even after he had gone over to the true High Priest. Nor had John entirely abandoned Caiaphas. Real love cannot be so easily rooted from the heart, and it is characteristic of John to retain a pious regard to earlier relations. In the love which hopes all things, he might hope yet to win the high priest to Christ.” I

make no comment on this extraordinary suggestion. I cannot see the slightest warrant for it, but others perhaps, who, like the Athenians, love new things, may see more in it than I can. After all, it is only fair to remember that Augustine, Gerhard, Calovius, Lightfoot, Lampe, and many others, think it quite uncertain who this disciple "known to the high priest" was. Grotius and Poole think it may have been the master of the house where Jesus had the Lord's Supper. Toletus thinks it was one of those to whom the garden belonged. Bengel thinks it was Nicodemus. One German commentator suggests that it was Judas Iscariot. Calvin thinks it most improbable that a proud high priest would have known so mean a person as a fisherman. Yet, singularly enough, Gualter and others lean strongly to the theory that John's business as a fisherman may have made him acquainted with the high priest. It certainly is rather remarkable that when John was brought before Annas and Caiaphas shortly after, they do not appear to have known much of him, except that he was unlearned and ignorant and had been with Jesus (Acts 3:13). The question, "who it was," is one that will probably never be settled.

[And went in…palace…priest.] This sentence would seem to indicate that John went together with our Lord, either by His side or in the crowd around Him, from the garden where He was taken to the house of Annas and Caiaphas. We can hardly doubt that at first he fled (when we read "All forsook Him and fled"), but we must suppose that he soon turned back and mixed with the multitude escorting our Lord, which he might easily do by night, and amidst the confusion of the whole event.

It is noteworthy that some think the houses of Caiaphas and Annas were adjacent, and that "the hall" was common to both of them. I am strongly disposed to think that this is a correct view, and a remembrance of it may help us over several difficulties in the narrative of the four evangelists when compared.

16.—[*But Peter stood…outside.*] This seems to indicate that at first Peter stood outside the door of the palace, not daring to go in. It is a little detail in the story of his fall that the three other Gospel writers omit to mention. Again we see in him the mixture of good and bad feelings, cowardice and love contending for the mastery. Happy would it have been for him if he had stayed outside the door!

Rollock remarks that when Peter found the door shut, he ought not to have stood there, but gone away. "It was by God's providence the door was shut. He got a warning then to leave off, but would not. These impediments, cast in our way when we purpose to do a thing, should not be idly looked at, but should make us carefully try the deed, whether it be lawful."

[Then the other disciple…brought *Peter in.*] Here we see how Peter got inside the palace. It was through the mistaken, though well-meant, kindness of John. He must have seen through the door, when it occasionally opened, the well-known figure of his brother disciple, and with the best intentions got him admission. It is plain that John must have been well known to the household of the high priest, or else we should not be told that he had only to speak to the

doorkeeper to get admission for Peter.

Let us mark what mistakes even the best believers make in dealing with their brethren. John thought it would be a kind and useful thing to bring Peter into the high priest's house. He was perfectly mistaken, and was unintentionally one link in the chain of causes that led to his fall. People may harm each other with the best intentions. Quesnel remarks: "Men sometimes imagine they do a considerable piece of service to their friends who are clergymen by introducing them to the great; and thereby they undesignedly expose them to sin and eternal damnation."

17.—[*Then…said to Peter*.] Those who are best acquainted with Jewish customs say that it was a common practice to employ women as doorkeepers. Thus a damsel named Rhoda went to the gate when Peter knocked at the door of Mary's house in Jerusalem, after his miraculous escape from prison (Acts 12:13). It is the same in large houses in Paris to this very day.

[*Are not you… I am not*.] This was the first trial of Peter's faith and courage. A woman asks him a simple question. There is nothing to show that she does it in a threatening manner, as if she desires to harm him. But at once the Apostle's courage breaks down. He answers with a direct lie: "I am not." How little we know our own hearts! Twelve hours before Peter would have told us this lie was impossible. "Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?" Why this doorkeeper should have asked the question, we know not.

Perhaps Peter's dress and appearance, like a Galilean fisherman of the very same stamp and style as John, made her guess that, like John, he was a disciple. Perhaps Peter's manner and demeanor made her guess it. There may have been agitation, anxiety, fear in the apostle's countenance. Perhaps the woman may have seen him in Jerusalem in company with Jesus. Perhaps the mere fact that John knew him and asked her to admit him made her assume that he was a friend of John, and like John a disciple of Christ. Perhaps the Galileans were marked men, not often seen in high priests' houses, and known to be specially favorable to the cause of Jesus of Nazareth. Any one of these solutions, or all, may be correct. In any case, the woman only asked a simple question, and perhaps from no other motive than curiosity, and at once the great apostle falls into sin. How weak we are when left to reap the consequence of self-confidence, and laziness, and neglect of prayer. Even an apostle, we see, could tell a cowardly lie.

Chrysostom observes: "What do you say, Peter? Did you not declare but now, 'I will lay down my life for You'? What has happened then that you cannot endure the questioning of a doorkeeper? Is it a soldier who questions you? Is it one of those who seized Him? No, it is a mean and abject doorkeeper. Nor is the questioning of a rough kind. She does not say, 'Are you a disciple of that cheat and corrupter,' but '*of that man*,' which was the expression rather of pitying and relenting. But Peter could not bear any of these words. The expression, 'Are you not *also*' is used because John was already within."

Augustine remarks: “Behold that most firm pillar of the Church, touched but by one breath of danger, trembles all over. Where is now that boldness of promising, that confident vaunting of himself?”

Brentius remarks how the impulsive, unstable character of the apostle Peter comes out here. One hour he draws his sword against a whole multitude of armed men. Another hour he is frightened out of his Christian profession and driven into lying by one woman.

18.—[*And the servants and officers stood there.*] This seems to indicate that when Peter entered the hall he found the common servants and the higher attendants of the high priest standing round a fire. It is the pluperfect tense, “they had stood,” or “had been standing there” some little time.

[*Who had made…warmed themselves.*] It is remarked by all travelers in Palestine that the nights in that country about Easter time are often so extremely cold that a fire is very acceptable. The servants and officers were in the act of warming themselves when Peter entered. It is worth notice that the Greek word rendered “a fire of coals” is only used here and at John 21:9, in the marvelous account of Jesus appearing to the disciples at the sea of Galilee. Some have thought that the “fire of coals” on that latter occasion was purposely intended by our Lord to remind Peter of his fall.

[*And Peter…warmed himself.*] The Greek words here would be more

literally rendered “and there was among them Peter, standing and warming himself.” The tense is imperfect, and conveys the idea of continuous action for a little time. The apostle stood among the crowd of his Master’s enemies and warmed himself like one of them —as if he had nothing to think of but his bodily comfort—while his beloved Master stood in a distant part of the hall, cold and a prisoner. Who can doubt that Peter, in his miserable cowardice, wished to appear one of the party who hated his Master and thought to conceal his real character by doing as they did? And who can doubt that while he warmed his hands he felt cold, wretched, and comfortless in his own soul? “The backslider in heart is filled with his own ways.”

How many do as others do and go with the crowd, while they know inwardly they are wrong!

Cyril suggests that Peter wished to conceal his discipleship by warming himself and trying to look comfortable among the high priest’s servants.

19.—[The high priest then asked…doctrine.] This verse describes the first judicial examination that our Lord underwent. He was questioned concerning “His disciples;” that is, who they were, how many, what position they occupied, and what were their names. And concerning “His doctrine;” that is, what were the principal points or truths of His creed, what were the peculiar things He called on man to believe. The object of this preliminary inquiry seems manifest. It

was meant to elicit some admission from our Lord's mouth on which some formal charge of heresy and blasphemy before the Sanhedrim might be founded. There are two grave difficulties growing out of this verse, both of which require consideration.

(a) Who was the "High Priest" in this verse? Most commentators think it was Caiaphas. He alone is called by John "the high priest" that same year in which Jesus was crucified. Some few think it was Annas, because John says Jesus was brought to him (ver. 13). This at first sight seems the plain meaning of the narrative and is confirmed by verse 24. Yet this theory is open to the serious objection that it makes John call Annas the high priest and that it makes John omit altogether our Lord's examination before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrim. Yet notwithstanding all these difficulties, I own to the opinion that this is the true view of the history. Augustine, Chrysostom, Casaubon, Ferus, Besser, Stier, Alford, and Ellicott maintain this view, but most of the commentators do not. We must remember that Annas is distinctly called "the High Priest" in Acts 4:6, and this probably before the year of the crucifixion had completely run out. Even in David's time Zadok and Ahimelech are called "the priests" (2 Sam. 8:17), as if both were high priests.

(b) What was the examination recorded in this verse? It seems to be one entirely passed over by Matthew, Mark, and Luke. They only record what took place before Caiaphas, which, on the other hand, is a part of the history passed over by John. It seems a kind of preliminary inquiry intended to prepare the case for the Sanhedrim. In spite, therefore, of the common opinion, I decidedly hold the

theory that the examination here related is only described by John. It seems, moreover, to have been an examination conducted by Annas only, and quite of a separate character from that which took place at "day-break" before the whole Sanhedrim. This, at any rate, seems to my mind by far the most reasonable account of the passage, and the difficulties in the way of any other interpretation appear to me insuperable.

Ellicott remarks: "It only requires the simple and reasonable supposition, that Annas and Caiaphas occupied one common official residence, to unite their testimony and to remove many of the difficulties with which this portion of the sacred narrative is specially marked. Be this as it may, we can scarcely doubt, from the clear statement in St. John's Gospel, that a preliminary examination, perhaps conversationally, about His followers and His teaching, and which the brutal conduct of one attendant present seems to show was private and informal, took place in the palace of Annas. There too, it would seem, we must place the three denials of St. Peter." 20. —[*Jesus answered him, etc.*] This verse contains a calm, dignified statement from our Lord of the general course of His ministry. He had done nothing in a clandestine or underhand way. He had always spoken openly "to the world," and not confined His teaching to any one class. He had always taught publicly in synagogues, and in the temple where the Jews resorted. He had said nothing privately and secretly, as if He had any cause to be ashamed of it.

The verse is mainly remarkable for the strong light it throws on our

Lord's habit of teaching throughout the three years of His ministry. It shows that He was eminently a public teacher—kept back no part of His message from any class of the population—and proclaimed it with equal boldness in every place. There was nothing whatever of reserve about His Gospel. This is His own account, and we therefore know that it is correct. "I have spoken in the most public manner, and taught in the most public places, and done nothing in a corner."

Calvin remarks: "When Jesus says that He spoke nothing in secret, this refers to the substance of His doctrine, which was always the same, though the form of teaching it was various."
We should observe that our Lord did not refuse to use the synagogue and the temple on account of the corruption of the Jewish Church! Four times we read in St. John of our Lord being at Jerusalem at the feasts (John 2:13, 5:1, 7:14, 10:22), and each time speaking in the temple.

21.—[*Why do you ask Me, etc.*] This verse is a remonstrance against the gross injustice of Annas' line of examination. Our Lord appeals to him whether it is reasonable, and just, and fair to call upon a prisoner to incriminate himself, and to supply evidence that may be used against himself. "Why do you, the judge, ask information of Me, the prisoner, about my disciples and my doctrine? Ask rather of those who have heard Me teach and preach, what I have said to them. These know well, and can tell you what things I have said."
Cyril thinks there may be a reference here to those servants of the

priest who were sent on a former occasion to take Jesus, and returned saying, “Never man spoke like this Man” (John 7:46).

The boldness and dignity of our Lord’s reply to Annas in this verse are very noteworthy. They are an example to all Christians of the courageous and unflinching tone that an innocent defendant may justly adopt before the bar of an unrighteous judge. “The righteous is bold as a lion.” The wide difference between the language of our Lord here and that which He uses before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrim, as recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, is very remarkable. It affords strong additional evidence that we are reading an account of an examination of a more private kind before Annas, quite distinct from that which took place before Caiaphas. The careful reader of the other three Gospels cannot fail to observe that not a word of all this is recorded in them.

Bengel and Stier think that the word “these” points to the people there in the court, hearing and standing by.

22.—[*And when He had thus spoken, etc.*] This verse mentions an event that John alone has recorded. One of the attendants standing by rudely interrupts our Lord by striking Him and coarsely taxing Him with impertinence and disrespect in so speaking, as He had spoken to the high priest.

The Greek words literally rendered mean, “gave a blow on the face;” but whether with the palm of the hand or with a stick cannot be

determined. The marginal reading renders it quite uncertain. Some see in the action a fulfillment of the prophecy, “They shall smite the judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek” (Micah 5:1).

Stier remarks that this was the first blow that the holy body of Jesus received from the hands of sinners.

We may learn from this circumstance what a low, degraded, and disorderly condition the Jewish courts of Ecclesiastical law must have been in at this period when such a thing as publicly striking a prisoner could take place, and when violence could be shown to a prisoner in a full court of justice for answering boldly for himself. It supplies strong evidence of the miserably fallen state of the whole Jewish nation when such an act could be done under the very eyes of a judge. Nothing is a surer index of the real condition of a nation than the conduct of its courts of justice and its just or unjust treatment of prisoners. The scepter had clearly fallen from Judah and rottenness was at the core of the nation when the thing mentioned in this verse could happen. Our Lord’s assailant evidently held that a prisoner must never reply to his judge, however unjust or corrupt the judge might be.

Theophylact suggests that the man who struck our Lord was one who had heard our Lord preach and was now anxious to free himself from the suspicion of being one of His friends.
There is a striking resemblance between the treatment our Lord received here and the treatment that Latimer, Ridley, Rogers, and

other English martyrs received at their examination before the Popish bishops. Hutcheson remarks, “Corrupt masters have generally corrupt servants.”

23.—[*Jesus answered him, etc.*] Our Lord’s reply to him who smote is a calm and dignified reproof. “If I have spoken wickedly, bear witness in a just and orderly way becoming a court of law, but do not strike Me. If on the contrary I have spoken well, what reasonable cause can you allege for striking Me either here or out of court?”

Let us note that our Lord’s conduct at this point teaches that His maxim, “If any one slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also” (Matt. 5:39), is a maxim that must be taken with reserve and is not of unlimited application. There may be times when in defense of truth and for the honor of justice a Christian must firmly protest against violence, and publicly refuse to countenance it by tame submission. Augustine observes: “Our Lord here showed that His great precepts of patience are to be put into practice, not by outward show of the body, but by preparedness of heart. Visibly to present the other cheek is no more than an angry man can do. How much better, then, that with mild answer he speak the truth, and with tranquil mind endure worse outrages.”

24.—[Now Annas had sent Him… Caiaphas…priest.] This verse undoubtedly contains a difficulty. Most commentators seem to think that it states a fact that ought to come in after the 13th verse; and

that the questioning and smiting of the last four verses took place before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrim, and not before Annas. Some think that up to this point John only describes what took place before Annas; and that he entirely passes over all that took place before Caiaphas, as being well known to his readers. The question is undoubtedly rather a puzzling one, and there is much to be said on both sides.

On the one hand, it seems curious that the examination of our Lord before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrim should be so completely omitted by John in his Gospel, as it must be, if we take the high priest of the 19th verse to be Annas.

On the other hand, we cannot see why John should so carefully mention our Lord being "led to Annas first" if, after all, Annas did not examine Him at all and sent Him at once to Caiaphas.

If I must give an opinion, I must say that I agree with Stier, Ellicott, and Alford, and consider that this 24th verse describes our Lord's first appearance before Caiaphas; that for some wise reason John entirely omits and silently passes over our Lord's examination before the Sanhedrim; and that the examination of the 19th and four following verses was a kind of private, preliminary examination before Annas that Matthew, Mark, and Luke entirely omit. My grounds for this conclusion are as follows:

(a) The whole tone of John's narrative would make any ordinary

reader suppose that Annas, and not Caiaphas, was the examiner and high priest of the 19th verse. They story reads straight on upon this theory, while upon the other it is most awkward and seemingly contradictory, and the 24th verse seems to come in at the wrong place.

(b) The tone of the high priest's examination in John is entirely different from that of the other three Gospels, and so also are our Lord's answers.

(c) There is nothing uncommon in John omitting something that is fully recorded in the other three Gospels. The institution of the Lord's Supper is an example. His Gospel was eminently supplementary. Writing later than the others, he was specially inspired to dwell at great length on the examination of Jesus before Pilate the Gentile ruler, and to say comparatively little about the proceedings in the Jewish courts.

(d) Last, but not least, the Greek of the 24th verse cannot fairly and honestly bear the same sense that our translators have put upon it. They have really strained the words to make the sense square with their evident interpretation. The word "sent" is not a pluperfect at all in the Greek! The verse literally translated is, "Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest." It is rather "did then send Him," than "now had sent Him." The natural sense that any ordinary reader would put on it is, that "Annas having asked our Lord about His disciples and His doctrine, and having found by His reply that he

could make nothing of Him, did then send Him bound to Caiaphas." As to what THEN took place before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrim, John tells us NOTHING, and leaves us to learn it from Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

Such are my reasons for the view which I adopt. If the reader does not think them valid, he must regard the 24th verse as one of John's parenthetical explanations or comments, and carry the true place of the fact mentioned backwards to verse thirteen; and he must suppose that the examination of our Lord in the 19th and four following verses is the examination before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrim, and only another part of what Mathew, Mark, and Luke describe! Not least, he must suppose that "did send" in the 24th verse means "had sent" some time before! Chrysostom says: "Annas questioned Jesus about His doctrine; and having heard Him, sent Him to Caiaphas; and he, having in his turn questioned Him and discovered nothing, sent Him to Pilate."

25.—[*And Simon Peter stood and warmed himself*.] This would be more literally rendered, "was standing and warming himself." The expression seems to indicate that all the time during which Annas was questioning and examining our Lord, Peter was standing by the fire in another part of the hall and warming himself comfortably among the enemies of our Lord, like one of them. May not the light of the fire, as it burned up, have made Peter's face and appearance more easily recognizable?

[*They said…one of His disciples?*] Here comes Peter's second trial. After a time, when the fire had burned up and men could see better and felt more warm, they looked at Peter standing among them, and recognizing either by his dress and talk that he was a Galilean, or suspecting by his anxious manner that he was a friend of our Lord, they asked him plainly, "Are you not one of this prisoner's disciples?" We see what trials people bring upon themselves by going where they ought not. [*He denied it… I am not.*] A second time we find the unhappy Apostle telling a lie, and this time it is added emphatically, "he denied it." The further a backslider goes, the worse he becomes. The first time he seems to have said quietly, "I am not." The second time he flatly "denies." Even an apostle can fall into being a liar!

Bloomfield suggests that Peter heard our Lord's examination and was terrified at hearing inquiry made about His disciples. This, he supposes, hastened his fall.

26.—[*One of the servants, etc.*] Here comes Peter's last trial. Attention seems to have been roused by his strong denial, and eyes were fixed on him. And the one who had seen him in the garden and marked him as a forward man among the disciples by his using the sword, presses home the painful question, "Did not I see you?"

[*Peter then denied again.*] From the other Gospels we know that this denial was more loud and emphatic than any, and was made with cursing and swearing! The further a man falls, the heavier his fall.

Calvin remarks on the course of a backslider: “At first the fault will not be very great. Next it becomes habitual. And at last, after the conscience has been laid asleep, he who has accustomed himself to despise God will think nothing unlawful, but will dare to commit the greatest wickedness.”

Henry remarks: “The sin of lying is a fruitful sin, and therefore exceedingly sinful. One sin needs another to support it, and that needs another.”

[*And immediately the cock crowed*.] There was nothing uncommon in this, of course. Everyone knows that cocks crow at night. But the bird’s familiar crow no doubt sounded in Peter’s ear like a clap of thunder, because it awoke him to a sense of his sin and his fall.

It will be noted that for wise reasons John says nothing about Peter’s weeping, or about our Lord turning and looking at him, or about Peter going out. He seems to have left the hall when the cock crowed, without any attempt being made to detain him. This too MAY have been the overruling work of his gracious Master.

As long as the world stands, Peter’s fall will be an instructive example of what even a great saint may come to if he neglects to work and pray, of the mercy of Christ in restoring such a backslider, and of the honesty of the Gospel writers in recording such a history.

Let it never be forgotten that Peter's fall is one of those few facts that all four Gospel writers carefully record for our learning.

JOHN 18:28-40

Then they brought Jesus from Caiaphas to the Roman governor's residence. (Now it was very early morning.) They did not go into the governor's residence so they would not be ceremonially defiled, but could eat the Passover meal. So Pilate came outside to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" They replied, "If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you."

Pilate told them, "Take him yourselves and pass judgment on him according to your own law!" The Jewish religious leaders replied, "We cannot legally put anyone to death." (This happened to fulfill the word Jesus had spoken when he indicated what kind of death he was going to die.)

So Pilate went back into the governor's residence, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" Jesus replied, "Are you saying this on your own initiative, or have others told you about me?" Pilate answered, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own people and your chief priests handed you over to me. What have you done?"

Jesus replied, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my servants would be fighting to

keep me from being handed over to the Jewish authorities. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." Then Pilate said, "So you are a king!" Jesus replied, "You say that I am a king. For this reason I was born, and for this reason I came into the world—to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." Pilate asked, "What is truth?"

When he had said this he went back outside to the Jewish religious leaders and announced, "I find no basis for an accusation against him. But it is your custom that I release one prisoner for you at the Passover. So do you want me to release for you the king of the Jews?" Then they shouted back, "Not this man, but Barabbas!" (Now Barabbas was a revolutionary.)

The verses we have now read contain four striking points, which are only found in John's narrative of Christ's passion. We need not doubt that there were good reasons why Matthew, Mark, and Luke were not inspired to record them. But they are points of such deep interest, that we should feel thankful that they have been brought forward by John.

The first point that we should notice is ***the false conscientiousness of our Lord's wicked enemies.*** We are told that the Jews who brought Christ before Pilate would not go into "the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the Passover." That was scrupulosity indeed! These hardened men were actually engaged in doing the wickedest act that mortal man ever did. They wanted to kill their own Messiah. And yet at this very time they

talked of being “defiled,” and were very fastidious about the Passover!

The conscience of unconverted men is a very curious part of their moral nature. While in some cases it becomes hardened, seared, and dead, until it feels nothing; in others it becomes morbidly scrupulous about the lesser matters of religion. It is no uncommon thing to find people excessively meticulous about the observance of trifling forms and outward ceremonies, while they are the slaves of degrading sins and detestable immoralities. Robbers and murderers in some countries are extremely strict about confession, and absolution, and prayers to saints. Fasting’s and self-imposed austerities in Lent, are often followed by excess of worldliness when Lent is over. There is but a step from Lent to Carnival. The attendants at daily services in the morning are not infrequently the patrons of balls and theaters at night. All these are symptoms of spiritual disease, and a heart secretly dissatisfied. Men who know they are wrong in one direction, often struggle to make things right by excess of zeal in another direction. That very zeal is their condemnation.

Let us pray that our consciences may always be enlightened by the Holy Spirit, and that we may be kept from a one-sided and deformed Christianity. A religion that makes a man neglect the weightier matters of daily holiness and separation from the world, and concentrate his whole attention on forms, sacraments, ceremonies, and public services, is to say the least, very suspicious. It may be accompanied by immense zeal and show of earnestness, but

it is not sound in the sight of God. The Pharisees paid tithe of mint, anise, and cummin, and compassed sea and land to make proselytes, while they neglected "judgment, mercy, and faith." (Matt. 23:23.) The very Jews who thirsted for Christ's blood were the Jews who feared the defilement of a Roman judgment hall, and made much ado about keeping the Passover! Let their conduct be a beacon to Christians, as long as the world stands. That religion is worth little which does not make us say, "I esteem all Your commandments concerning all things to be right, and I hate every false way." (Ps. 119:128.) That Christianity is worthless which makes us make up for the neglect of heart religion and practical holiness, by an extravagant zeal for man-made ceremonies or outward forms.

The second point that we should notice in these verses, is ***the account that our Lord Jesus Christ gives of His kingdom.*** He says, "My kingdom is not of this world." These famous words have been so often perverted and wrested out of their real sense, that their true meaning has been almost buried under a heap of false interpretations. Let us make sure that we know what they mean.

Our Lord's main object in saying "My kingdom is not of this world," was to inform Pilate's mind concerning the true nature of His kingdom, and to correct any false impression he might have received from the Jews. He tells him that He did not come to set up a kingdom which would interfere with the Roman Government. He did not aim at establishing a temporal power, to be supported by armies and maintained by taxes. *The only dominion He exercised was over*

men's hearts, and the only weapons that His subjects employed were spiritual weapons. A kingdom which required neither money nor servants for its support, was one of which the Roman Emperors need not be afraid. In the highest sense it was a kingdom "not of this world."

But our Lord did not intend to teach that the kings of this world have nothing to do with religion, and ought to ignore God altogether in the government of their subjects. No such idea, we may be sure, was in His mind. He knew perfectly well that it was written, "By Me kings reign" (Prov. 8:15), and that kings are as much required to use their influence for God, as the lowest of their subjects. He knew that the prosperity of kingdoms is wholly dependent on the blessing of God, and that kings are as much bound to encourage righteousness and godliness, as to punish unrighteousness and immorality. To suppose that He meant to teach Pilate that, in His judgment, an infidel might be as good a king as a Christian, and a man like Gallio as good a ruler as David or Solomon, is simply absurd.

Let us carefully hold fast the true meaning of our Lord's words in these latter days. Let us never be ashamed to maintain that no Government can expect to prosper which refuses to recognize religion, which deals with its subjects as if they had no souls, and cares not whether they serve God, or Baal, or no God at all. Such a Government will find, sooner or later, that its line of policy is suicidal, and damaging to its best interests. No doubt the kings of this world cannot make men Christians by laws and statutes. But

they can encourage and support Christianity, and they will do so if they are wise. The kingdom where there is the most industry, temperance, truthfulness, and honesty, will always be the most prosperous of kingdoms. The king who wants to see these things abound among his subjects, should do all that lies in his power to help Christianity and to discourage irreligion.

The third point that we should notice in these verses is ***the account that our Lord gives of His own mission.*** He says, "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth."

Of course we are not to suppose our Lord meant that this was the *only* end of His mission. No doubt He spoke with special reference to what He knew was passing through Pilate's mind. He did not come to win a kingdom with the sword, and to gather adherents and followers by force. He came armed with no other weapon but "truth." To testify to fallen man the truth about God, about sin, about the need of a Redeemer, about the nature of holiness—to declare and lift up before man's eyes this long lost and buried "truth,"—was one great purpose of His ministry. He came to be God's witness to a lost and corrupt world. That the world needed such a testimony, He does not shrink from telling the proud Roman Governor. And this is what Paul had in view, when he tells Timothy, that "before Pontius Pilate Christ witnessed a good confession." (1 Tim. 6:13.)

The servants of Christ in every age must remember that our Lord's conduct in this place is meant to be their example. Like Him

we are to be witnesses to God's truth, salt in the midst of corruption, light in the midst of darkness, men and women not afraid to stand alone, and to testify for God against the ways of sin and the world. To do so may entail on us much trouble, and even persecution. But the duty is clear and plain. If we love life, if we would keep a good conscience, and be owned by Christ at the last day, we must be "witnesses." It is written, "Whoever shall be ashamed of Me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels." (Mark 8:38.)

The last point that we should notice in these verses is ***the question that Pontius Pilate addressed to our Lord.*** We are told that when our Lord spoke of the truth, the Roman Governor replied, "What is truth?" We are not told with what motive this question was asked, nor does it appear on the face of the narrative that he who asked it waited for an answer. It seems far more likely that the saying was the sarcastic, sneering exclamation of one who did not believe that there was any such thing as "truth." It sounds like the language of one who had heard, from his earliest youth, so many barren speculations about "truth" among Roman and Greek philosophers, that he doubted its very existence. "Truth indeed! What is truth?"

Melancholy as it may appear, there are multitudes in every Christian land whose state of mind is just like that of Pilate. Hundreds, it may be feared among the upper classes, are continually

excusing their own irreligion by the specious plea that, like the Roman Governor, they cannot find out “what is truth.” They point to the endless controversies of Romanists and Protestants, of High Churchmen and Low Churchmen, of Churchmen and Dissenters, and pretend to say that they do not understand who is right and who is wrong. Sheltered under this favorite excuse, they pass through life without any decided religion, and in this wretched, comfortless state, too often die.

But is it really true that truth cannot be discovered? Nothing of the kind! God never left any honest, diligent inquirer without light and guidance. *Pride* is one reason why many cannot discover truth. They do not humbly go down on their knees and earnestly ask God to teach them. *Laziness* is another reason. They do not honestly take pains, and search the Scriptures. The followers of unhappy Pilate, as a rule, do not deal fairly and honestly with their consciences. Their favorite question—What is truth? is nothing better than a pretense and an excuse. The words of Solomon will be found true as long as the world stands— “If you cry after knowledge, and lift up your voice for understanding; if you do you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hid treasures; then shall you understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God.” (Prov. 2:4, 5.) No man ever followed that advice and missed the way to heaven.

Technical Notes:

28. Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas to the hall of judgment, and it was early. And they themselves did not go

into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the Passover. 29. Pilate then went out to them and said, What accusation do ye bring against this man? 30. They answered and said to him, If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up to you. 31. Then Pilate said to them, Ye take him and judge him according to your law. The Jews therefore said to him, It is not lawful for us to put any man to death, 32. that the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled which he spoke, signifying what death he should die. 33. Then Pilate entered into the judgment hall again, and called Jesus and said to him, Are you the King of the Jews? 34. Jesus answered him, Are you speaking for yourself, or did others tell you this concerning me? 35. Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you to me. What have you done? 36. Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now my kingdom is not from here. 37. Pilate therefore said to him, Are you a king then? Jesus answered, You say that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause I came into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice. 38. Pilate said to him, What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, I find in him no fault *at all*. 39. But ye have a custom, that I should release to you one at the Passover. Do

you therefore want me to release to you the King of the Jews? 40. Then cried they all again, saying, Not this man, but Barabbas. Now Barabbas was a robber.

28.—[*Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas*.] A careful reader of the Gospels will not fail to observe here that John entirely passes over the examination of Caiaphas and the Sanhedrim of the Jews, which is so fully described by Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Specially he omits our Lord's confession, when adjured, that He was the Christ. He takes it all for granted as a thing well known, and passes on to dwell on his far more important examination before Pilate, the Roman Governor. In this he brings out many striking particulars, which, for wise reasons, Matthew, Mark, and Luke did not record. Writing, as John did, long after the other three, and writing more especially for Gentile readers, we can well understand that he would give far more prominence to the proceedings before the Gentile Governor than to those before the Jewish Ecclesiastical Court. Yet it cannot be denied that there is a remarkable curtness and brevity in his statement of facts at this point. The Greek is literally they "lead"—in the present tense.

[*To the hall of judgment*.] This is a Latin word and admits of two views. The marginal reading, according to Schleusner and Parkhurst, is the correct translation. It is the "Governor's palace" rather than the hall of judgment. According to Josephus, the prætors, or governors of Judea, who ordinarily lived at Caesarea when they were at Jerusalem, used Herod's palace in the upper part of the city as their

residence. Some say it was the famous tower of Antonia.

[*And it was early*.] The precise time here meant we cannot exactly tell. It cannot have been so early as daybreak, because we are especially told by Luke that the elders and chief priests and the Sanhedrim assembled to examine our Lord "as soon as it was day" (Luke 22:66). Considering that the day begins at the equinox about six, we may assume that "early" cannot mean sooner than seven or eight o'clock.

[And they…did not go…be defiled.] The meaning of this sentence is that the Jews would not go within the walls of Pilate's palace, lest by so doing they should contract ceremonial uncleanness. Pilate was a Gentile. Peter says in the Acts, "It is unlawful for a man who is a Jew to keep company or come unto one of another nation" (Acts 10:28). If the Jews had gone inside Pilate's house, they would have been made ceremonially unclean, and would have considered themselves defiled.

The sentence is an extraordinary example of the false scrupulosity of conscience that a wicked man may keep up about forms and ceremonies and trifling externals in religion, at the very time when he is deliberately committing some gross and enormous sin. The notorious fact that Italian bandits and murderers will make much of fasting, keeping Lent, confession, absolution, Virgin Mary worship, saint worship, and image worship, at the very time when they are arranging robberies and assassinations, is an accurate illustration of

the same principle. The extent to which formality and wickedness can go side-by-side is frightful, and little known. The Jews were afraid of being defiled by going into a Gentile's house at the very moment when they were doing the devil's work and murdering the Prince of life! Just so, many people in England will attach immense importance to fasting and keeping Lent and attending saints' day services, while they see no harm in going to races, operas, and balls at other times! Persons who have very low notions about the Seventh Commandment will actually tell you that it is wrong to be married in Lent! The very same persons who totally disregard Sunday abroad will make much ado about saints' day at home! Absurd strictness about Lent and excess of riot and licentiousness in carnival will often go together.

Chrysostom remarks: "Though they had taken up a deed that was unlawful, and were shedding blood, they are scrupulous about the place, and bring forth Pilate unto them."
Augustine remarks: "O impious blindness! They would be defiled, indeed, by a dwelling which was another's, and not be defiled by a crime which was their own. They feared to be defiled by the prætorium of an alien judge, and feared not to be defiled by the blood of an innocent brother." Bishop Hall remarks: "Woe unto you priests, scribes, elders, hypocrites! Can there be any roof so unclean as that of your own breasts? Not Pilate's walls, but your own hearts are impure. Is murder your errand, and do you stick at a local infection? God shall smite you, ye whited walls! Do you long to be stained with blood—with the blood of God? And do ye fear to be

defiled with the touch of Pilate's pavement? Does so small a gnat stick in your throats while ye swallow such a camel of flagitious wickedness? Go out of Jerusalem, ye false disbelievers, if ye would not be unclean! Pilate has more cause to fear, lest his walls should be defiled with the presence of such prodigious monsters of iniquity." Poole remarks: "Nothing is more common than for persons overzealous about rituals to be remiss about morals."

[*That they might eat the Passover*.] This sentence contains an undeniable difficulty. How could the Jews eat the Passover now when our Lord and His disciples had eaten it the evening before? That our Lord would eat the Passover at the right time we may assume as a matter of course, and that time was Thursday evening. What then can be meant by the chief priests and elders and leaders of the Jews eating the Passover on Friday? This is a question that has received various answers.

(a) Some think that in our Lord's time the whole Jewish Church had fallen into such disorder, and had so fallen away from original purity, that the Passover was not kept strictly according to the primary institution and might be eaten on almost any day within the Passover feast.

(b) Some think that it was considered allowable to eat the Passover at any time between sunset one day and sunset the next day, so long as it was eaten within the 24 hours.

(c) Some think that the Passover eating here mentioned was not the eating of the Passover lamb, but the eating of the Passover feast called "chagigah," which took place every day during the Passover week. This is Lightfoot's view.

(d) Some think that as there is no law without an exception, and even the law of the Passover admitted of alteration in case of necessity (see Num. 9:11), so the chief priests persuaded themselves that as they had been occupied by duty—the duty (indeed!) of apprehending our blessed Lord throughout the night (when they ought to have kept the Passover)—they were justified in deferring it till the next day.

All these, it must be confessed, are only conjectures. There is probably some explanation which, at this distance of time, we are unable to supply. For the present, the third and fourth suggestions seem to me the most reasonable.

Chrysostom observes: "Either John calls the whole feast the Passover, or means that they were then keeping the Passover; while Jesus delivered it to His followers one day sooner, reserving His own sacrifice for His preparation day, when also of old His passion was celebrated." One thing, at any rate, is very plain and noteworthy. The chief priests and their party made much ado about eating the Passover lamb and keeping the feast, at the very time when they were about to slay the true Lamb of God of whom this Passover was a type! No wonder that Samuel says, "To obey is better than sacrifice" (1 Sam. 15:22).

Bullinger calls attention here to the wide difference between inward sanctification of the heart and outward sanctimoniousness about forms, ordinances, and ceremonies.
Calvin remarks that it is one mark of hypocrisy "that while it is careful in performing ceremonies, it makes no scruple of neglecting matters of the highest importance."

29.—[Pilate then went out...and said, etc.] This "going out" means that Pilate, hearing that the chief priests had brought a prisoner to the courtyard (or open space before his palace) and knowing from experience as a governor of Judea that they would not come into his palace for fear of defilement (but waited for him to come out to them), went out and spoke to them. His first question is one that became his office as a magistrate and judge. He inquires what is the charge or accusation brought against the prisoner before him. "Of what crime do you accuse this man?" The well-known Valerian law among the Romans made it unlawful to judge or condemn anyone without hearing the charge against him stated.

30.—[*They answered and said, etc.*] The reply of the chief priests to Pilate's inquiry, as given by John, is peculiar and elliptical. They began by saying that the prisoner was a convicted evildoer according to their law, or else they would not have brought Him there. They had found Him, by examination before the Sanhedrim, to be a breaker of the law, and they only came there to have sentence pronounced on Him by Pilate. "If He were not a person guilty and

worthy of death, we would not have delivered Him up to you. We have discovered Him to be such a person, and we now ask you to sentence Him to death. We have convicted Him, and we ask you, as our chief ruler, to slay Him." There is a proud, haughty, supercilious tone, we may remark, about this answer, which was not likely to please a Roman Governor. It is plain, by a comparison with St. Luke's Gospel, that at this point the Jews added a statement which St. John has omitted. "If you would know the precise nature of this prisoner's evil doing, we tell you that we found Him perverting the nation and forbidding to give tribute to Cæser, and saying that He is a King" (Luke 23:2). Why St. John omitted this we cannot tell, but he evidently takes it for granted that his readers knew this accusation was made, by telling us in verse 33 that Pilate asked Him if He was "the King of the Jews."

Tholuck remarks that "if the authorities had not regarded the prisoner as worthy of death, they would not have brought him to the procurator, as none but criminal cases needed confirmation by him."

31.—[Then Pilate said…judge him…law.] This sentence indicates a desire on Pilate' part to have nothing to do with the case. From the very first he evidently wished to put it away from him and, if he could, to avoid condemning our Lord. How this feeling originated, we cannot tell. Matthew and Mark say that he knew Jesus was delivered to him from "envy." Matthew says that his wife warned him to have nothing to do with that "just person." (Matt. 27:18, 27:19, Mark 15:10.) It is quite possible that the fame and character of Jesus

had reached Pilate's ears long before He was brought before him. It is hard to suppose that such miracles as our Lord worked would never be talked of within the palace of the chief ruler of Judea. The raising of Lazarus must surely have been reported among his servants. Our Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, attended by myriads of people shouting "Blessed is the King," must surely have been noted by the soldiers and officers of Pilate's guard. Can we wonder that all this made him regard our Lord with something like awe? Wicked men are often very superstitious. His language now before us is that of one who would gladly evade the whole case and leave the responsibility entirely with the Jews. "If He is, as you say, a malefactor, take Him into your own hands and condemn Him to death according to your own Law. Do as you like with Him, but do not trouble me with the case." The word we render "judge" is literally much stronger in sense. It is, rather, "condemn to death". The only punishment the Jews might inflict, if any (which is more than doubtful), was death by stoning.

The pitiable and miserable character of Pilate, the Roman Governor, begins to come into clear light from this point. We see him a man utterly destitute of moral courage—knowing what was right and just in the case before him, yet afraid to act on his knowledge; knowing that our Lord was innocent, yet not daring to displease the Jews by acquitting Him; knowing that he was doing wrong, and yet afraid to do right. "The fear of man brings a snare" (Prov. 29:25). Wretched and contemptible are those rulers and statesmen whose first principle is to please the people, even at the expense of their own

consciences, and who are ready to do what they know to be wrong rather than offend the mob! Wretched are those nations that for their sins are given over to be governed by such statesmen! True godly rulers should lead the people and not be led by them, should do what is right and leave consequences to God. A base determination to keep in with the world at any price and a slavish fear of man's opinion were leading principles in Pilate's character. There are many like him. Nothing is more common than to see statesmen evading the plain line of duty and trying to shuffle responsibility on others rather than give offense to the mob. This is precisely what Pilate did here. The spirit of his reply to the Jews is, "I had rather not be troubled with the case. Cannot you settle it yourselves without asking me to interfere?"

Ellicott remarks: "It seems clear that from the first the sharp-sighted Roman perceived that this was no case for his tribunal, that it was wholly a matter of religious difference and religious hate, and that the meek prisoner who stood before him was at least innocent of the political crime laid to his charge with such an unwonted and suspicious zeal." He also quotes the just and pertinent remark of a German writer: "Pilate knew too much of Jewish expectations to suppose that the Sanhedrim would hate and persecute one who would free them from Roman authority." Calvin thinks that Pilate said this ironically, as he would not have allowed them to inflict capital punishment. Gerhard also regards the saying as sarcastic and sneering. "If this prisoner has done anything against your Jewish superstitions, settle it yourselves." Yet a comparison with Luke

makes this rather improbable in my opinion. The Jews there tell him plainly that Christ made Himself a King (Luke 23:1). This, even a Roman must allow, was a serious charge.

Henry suggests that perhaps Pilate thought they did not really want to kill Jesus, but only to chastise Him.

[The Jews…not lawful…to death.] This answer of the Jews completely defeated the wretched Pilate's attempt to put away the case before him and avoid the necessity of judging our Lord. They reminded the Roman Governor that the power of taking away life was no longer in their hands, and that it was impossible for them to do as he suggested and settle our Lord's case in their own way.

Let us mark here what a striking confession the Jews here made, whether they were aware of it or not. They actually admitted that they were no longer rulers and governors of their own nation, and that they were under the dominion of a foreign power. They were no longer independent, but subjects of Rome. He who has power of condemning to death and taking away the life of a prisoner, he is the governor of a country. "It is not lawful for us," said the Jews, "to take away life. You, the Roman Governor, alone can do it, and therefore we come to you about this Jesus." By their own mouth and their own act they publicly declared that Jacob's prophecy was fulfilled, "that the scepter had departed from Judah," that they had no longer a lawgiver of their own stock, and that consequently the time of Shiloh, the promised Messiah, must have come (Gen. 49:10). How

unconscious wicked men are that they fulfill prophecy!

The idea of Chrysostom and Augustine, that the sentence only means that the Jews could not put anyone to death during the Passover feast, looks to me utterly improbable.

32.—[*That the saying…fulfilled, etc.*] This verse is one of John's peculiar parenthetical comments, which are so frequent in his Gospel. Here, as in many other instances, the meaning is, "By this the saying of Jesus was fulfilled," and not, "The thing took place in order that the saying might be fulfilled." What precise saying is referred to is a point on which commentators have not quite agreed.

(a) Some think, as Theophylact, Bullinger, Musculus, and Gerhard, that St.
John refers to the saying recorded in this very Gospel (John 12:33), and that the expression "what death" only refers to the particular manner of His death by crucifixion.

(b) Others think, as Augustine, Calvin, and Beza, that St. John refers to the fuller saying in Matt. 20:19, where our Lord foretells His own delivery to the Gentiles as well as His crucifixion.

Of the two views, the second seems to me the preferable one. The previous verse distinctly points to the inability of the Jews to put Jesus to death, and the necessity of the Gentiles doing the murderous work. And John remarks that this was just what Jesus had predicted

—that He would die by the hand of the Gentiles. I think, at the same time, that the crucifixion was probably included, being the death which the Gentiles inflicted in contradistinction to the Jewish custom of stoning. 33.—[*Then Pilate entered…again.*] The meaning of this must be that Pilate, disappointed in his attempt to put away the case from him, retired into his palace again, where he knew the Jews would not follow him from fear of contracting ceremonial defilement, and resolved to have a private interview with our Lord and examine Him alone. It is quite clear that the conversation that follows, from this point down to the middle of the 38th verse, took place within the Roman Governor's walls, and most probably without the presence of any Jewish witnesses. If that was so, the substance of it could only be revealed to John by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. Pilate's soldiers and a few guards of the prisoner may have been present. But it is highly improbable that John, or any friend of our Lord's, could have got inside the Governor's palace. If the beloved Apostle did manage to get in and hear the conversation, it is a striking example of his attachment to his Master. "Love is strong as death" (Cant. 8:6).

[*And called Jesus.*] This expression literally means that he called Jesus with a loud voice to follow him inside the palace; and came out of the outer court, or area, where he had first met the party that had brought the Prisoner to him. It is as though he said, "Come in here, Prisoner, that I may speak with you privately!"

[*And said… King of the Jews?*] The first question that Pilate asked of

our Lord was whether he really admitted that He was what the Jews had just accused Him of being. “Tell me, is it true that You are the King of the Jews? Do you really profess to be the King of this ancient people over whom I and my soldiers are now rulers?” It is far from improbable that Pilate, living so long in Jerusalem, may have often heard of the old Jewish kings and of the dominion they received. It is far from unlikely, moreover, that he thought it possible he had before him one of those mock Messiahs who, like Theudas, rose up at this period and kept the minds of the Jews in agitation. “They accuse You of setting up Yourself as a King? Are You really a King? Do You lay claim to any royal authority?” The humble attire and lowly appearance of our Lord can hardly fail to have struck Pilate. “Can it be true that You, a poor man with no signs of a kingdom about You, are the King of the Jews?”

In order to estimate aright this question which Pilate put, we must remember that Suetonius, the Roman historian, distinctly says that a rumor was very prevalent throughout the East at this period that a King was about to arise among the Jews, who would obtain dominion over the world. This singular rumor, originating no doubt from Jewish prophecies, had of course reached Pilate’s ears and goes far to account for his question. It is noteworthy that each of the four Gospel writers distinctly records that this was the first question that Pilate put to our Lord. It seems to show that the chief thing impressed on the mind of Pilate about Jesus was that He was *a King*. As a King he examined Him, as a King he sentenced Him, and as a King he crucified Him. And one main object that he seems to have had in

view in questioning our Lord was to ascertain what kind of a kingdom He ruled over, and whether it was one that would interfere with the Roman authority. One the whole, the question seems a mixture of curiosity and contempt.

34.—[*Jesus answered him, etc.*] Our Lord's motive in this answer to Pilate was probably to awaken Pilate's conscience: "Do you say this of your own independent self, in consequence of any complaints you have heard against Me as a seditious person? Or do you only ask it because the Jews have just accused Me of being a King? Have you, during all the years you have been a Governor, ever heard of Me as a leader of insurrection or a rebel against the Romans? If you have never heard anything of this kind against Me and have no personal knowledge of my being a rebel, ought you not to pay very little attention to the complaint of my enemies? Their bare assertion ought not to weigh with you."

Grotius paraphrases the verse thus: "You have been long a ruler and a careful defender of the Roman majesty. Have you ever heard anything that would impeach Me of a desire to usurp authority against Rome? If you have never known anything of yourself, but others have suggested it, beware lest you be deceived by an ambiguous word."

There is undoubtedly some little obscurity around the verse, and it becomes us to handle it reverently. It certainly looks like an appeal to the Roman Governor's conscience. "Before I answer your question,

let Me ask you one. For what reason and from what motive are you making this inquiry about my being a King? Can you say, from your own personal knowledge, that you have ever heard Me complained of as setting up a kingdom? You know you cannot say that. Are you only asking Me because you have heard the Jews accuse Me of being a King today? If this is so, judge for yourself whether such a King as I appear to be is likely to interfere with your authority." Poole says: "Our Savior desired to be satisfied from Pilate whether he asked Him as a private person for his own satisfaction, or as a judge having received any such accusation against Him. If he asked Him as a judge, he was bound to call others to prove what they had charged Him with."

Burgon remarks that Jesus did not need information in asking this question. He asked, as the Lord asked Adam "Where are you? (Gen. 3:9), in order to arouse Pilate to a sense of the shameful injustice of the charge."

35.—[*Pilate answered, etc.*] The answer of Pilate exhibits the haughty, high-minded, supercilious, fierce spirit of a Roman man of the world. So far from responding to our Lord's appeal to his conscience, he fires up at the very idea of knowing anything of the current opinions about Christ. "Am I a Jew? Do you think that a noble Roman like me knows anything about the superstitions of Your people. I only know that Your own countrymen and the very leaders of Your nation have brought You unto me as a prisoner worthy of death. What they mean I do not pretend to understand. But I

suppose there is some ground for their accusation. Tell me plainly what You have done."

Pilate's answer seems tantamount to an acknowledgment that he knew nothing against our Lord. But as He had been brought before him as a prisoner, and he was pressed to condemn Him, he asks Him what He has done to bring this hatred of the Jews upon Him.

He that would know the depth of scorn contained in that sentence, "Am I a Jew?" should mark the contemptuous way in which Horace, Juvenal, Tacitus, and Pliny "speak of the Jews."
Stier remarks: "The Romans were only concerned with what was DONE; not with dreams like the Jews, nor with wisdom like the Greeks." Pilate's question was characteristic of his nation.

36.—[*Jesus answered...not of this world.*] In this famous sentence our Lord begins His answer to Pilate's question "Are You the King of the Jews?" "You asked whether I am a King. I reply that I certainly have a kingdom, but it is a kingdom entirely unlike the kingdoms of this world. It is a kingdom that is neither begun nor propagated nor defended by the power of this world, by the world's arms or the world's money. It is a kingdom that took its origin from heaven and not from earth; a spiritual kingdom, a kingdom over hearts and wills and consciences; a kingdom that needs no armies or revenues; a kingdom that in no way interferes with the kingdoms of this world."

The literal rendering of the Greek would be, “out of this world.” But it evidently means “belonging to, dependent on, spring from, connected with.” It is the same preposition that we find in John 8:23: “Ye are from beneath; I am from above. Ye are of this world; I am not of this world.” That the above was our Lord’s plain meaning, when He spoke the words before us, is to my mind as evident as the sun at noonday. The favorite theory of certain Christians—that this text forbids Governments to have anything to do with religion, condemns the union of Church and State, and renders all Established Churches unlawful—is, in my judgment, baseless, preposterous, and utterly devoid of common sense. Whether the union of Church and State be right or wrong, it appears to me absurd to say that it is forbidden by this text. The text declares that Christ’s kingdom did not spring from the powers of this world and is not dependent on them, but the text does not declare that the powers of this world ought to have nothing to do with Christ’s kingdom. Christ’s kingdom can get on very well without them, but they cannot get on very well without Christ’s kingdom. The following leading principles are worth remembering, in looking at this vexed question:

(a) Every Government is responsible to God, and no Government can expect to prosper without God’s blessing. Every Government therefore is bound to do all that lies in its power to obtain God’s favor and blessing. The Government that does not strive to promote true religion has no right to expect God’s blessing.

(b) Every good Government should endeavor to promote truth,

charity, temperance, honesty, diligence, industry, and chastity among its subjects. True religion is the only root from which these things can grow. The Government that does not labor to promote true religion cannot be called either wise or good.

(c) To tell us that a Government must leave religion alone because it cannot promote it without favoring one church more than another is simply absurd. It is equivalent to saying that as we cannot do good to everybody, we are to sit still and do no good at all.

(d) To tell us that no Government can find out what true religion is, and that consequently a Government should regard all religions with equal indifference, is an argument only fit for an infidel. In England, at any rate, a belief that the Bible is true is a part of the Constitution; an insult to the Bible is a punishable offense, and the testimony of an avowed atheist goes for nothing in a court of law.

(e) It is undoubtedly true that Christ's kingdom is a kingdom independent of the rulers of this world, and one which they can neither begin, increase, nor overthrow. But it is utterly false that the rulers of this world have nothing to do with Christ's kingdom, may safely leave religion entirely alone, and may govern their subjects as if they were beasts and had no souls at all.

Chrysostom says that our Lord's reply meant, "I am indeed a King; but not such a King as you suspect, but one far more glorious."

[If my kingdom…servants fight… Jews.] Our Lord proceeds to give proof that His kingdom was not of this world and therefore not likely to interfere with the Roman authority. "If the kingdom of which I am head were like the kingdoms of this world, and supported and maintained by worldly means, then my disciples would take up arms and fight to prevent my being delivered to the Jews. This, as you may know by inquiry, is the very thing that I forbade last night. Your own soldiers can tell you that they saw Me reprove a disciple for fighting and heard Me tell him to put up his sword."

Let us mark that a religion propagated by the sword, or by violence, is a most unsatisfactory kind of Christianity. The weapons of Christ's warfare are not carnal. Even true Christians who have appealed to the sword to support their opinions have often found themselves losers by it. Taking the sword, they have perished by the sword. Zwingli dying in battle and the Scotch Covenanters are examples.

Stier thinks that by "my servants" in this verse our Lord meant the angels! This, however, seems very improbable. Bullinger makes some good remarks on this sentence, in reply to the Anabaptists of his time. He says, among other things: "Just as it does not follow that the Church is worldly because we (who are flesh and blood and are the world) are members of the Church, so no one—unless he lacks common sense—will say that the Church is worldly because in it kings and princes serve God by defending the good and punishing the bad." Calvin observes that this sentence "does not hinder princes from defending the kingdom of Christ; partly by appointing external

discipline, and partly by lending their protection to the Church against wicked men." Beza says much the same.

Hutcheson observes: "This text is not to be understood as if Christ disallowed that they to whom He has given the sword should defend His kingdom therewith; for if magistrates were as magistrates should be, nursing parents to the Church, and ought to kiss the Son, then certainly they may and should employ their power as magistrates for removing idolatry, and setting up the true worship of God, and defending it against violence."

[*But now…not from here.*] The true meaning of this little sentence is not very clear. May it not mean, "Now, in this dispensation, my kingdom is not an earthly one, and is not of this world. A day will come by and by, after my second advent, when my kingdom will be a visible one over the whole earth, and my saints shall rule over the renewed world." This may seem fanciful to some, but I have a strong impression that it is the true meaning. The adverb "now" is very decided and emphatical.

37.—[Pilate…said… Are you a King then?] Here Pilate returns to his question, though he puts it in a different way: "Are You in some sense a King, if not such a King as the Kings of this world? You speak of Your kingdom and Your servants. Am I to understand that You are a King?" We should observe the distinction in the language here, compared with that of verse 33. There it was, "Are You the King of the Jews?" Here it is simply, "Are You a King?"

[*Jesus answered, You say that I am a King*.] This sentence is a direct acknowledgment from our Lord's lips that He is a King; a King only over hearts, consciences, and wills, but still a real true King. "You say" is equivalent to an affirmation. "You say truly; I am what you ask about. I admit that I am a King."

There can be no doubt that this "is the good confession before Pontius Pilate" that St. Paul specially impresses on the attention of the timid disciple Timothy, in his pastoral epistle (1 Tim. 6:13).

[To this end was I born…bear witness to the truth.] Here our Lord informs Pilate what was the great end and purpose of His incarnation. "It is true that I am a King, but not a King after the manner of the world. I am only a King over hearts and minds. The principal work for which I came into the world is to be a witness of the truth concerning God, concerning man, and concerning the way of salvation. This truth has been long hidden and lost sight of. I came to bring it to light once more, and to be the King of all who receive it."

I think the "truth" in this sentence must be taken in the widest and fullest sense. The true doctrine about man, and God, and salvation, and sin, and holiness was almost buried, lost, and gone when Christ came into the world. To revive the dying light and erect a new standard of godliness in a corrupt world, which neither Egypt, Assyria, Greece, nor Rome could prevent rotting and decaying, was one grand end of Christ's mission. He did not come to gather armies,

build cities, amass treasure, and found a dynasty, as Pilate perhaps fancied. He came to be God's witness and to lift up God's truth in the midst of a dark world. He who would know how miserably small is the amount of truth which even the most civilized nations know without Christianity, should examine the religion and morality of the Chinese and Hindus in the present day.

Some think that "I was born" points to Christ's humanity and "came into the world" to His divinity.

[*Everyone…truth…voice.*] I think that in this sentence our Lord tells Pilate who are His subjects, disciples, and followers. "Would you know who are the members of my kingdom? I tell you that it consists of all who really love the truth and desire to know more of God's truth. All such hear my voice, are pleased with my principles, and are subjects of my kingdom." It is like our Lord's words to Nicodemus: "He who does truth comes to the light" (John 3:21).

Thus our Lord shows Pilate that His kingdom was not an earthly kingdom, that His business was not to wear a crown and found an earthly monarchy, but to proclaim truth; and that His followers were not soldiers and warriors, but all earnest seekers after truth. Pilate therefore might dismiss from his mind all idea of His kingdom interfering with the authority of Rome.

Let us note that the position of Christ in the world must be the position of all Christians. Like our Master, we must be witnesses for

God and truth against sin and ignorance. We must not be afraid to stand alone. We must testify.

The expression “everyone who is of the truth” is remarkable. It must mean “everyone who really and honestly desires to know the truth, receives my teaching, and follows Me as a Master.” Does it not show that our Lord, when He appeared, gathered around Him all who were true-hearted lovers of God’s revealed will and were seeking, however feebly, to know more of it? (Compare John 3:20 and 8:47.) That there were many such, like Nathanael, among the Jews, anxiously looking for a Redeemer, we cannot doubt. “These,” says our Lord, “are my subjects and make up my kingdom.” Just as when He speaks of Himself as a shepherd, He says “My sheep hear my voice;” so when He speaks of Himself as God’s great witness to truth, He says “All friends of truth hear my voice.”

The wise condescension with which our Lord adapts His language to Pilate’s habits of thought as a Roman is very noteworthy. If He had used Jewish figures of speech, drawn from Old Testament language, Pilate might well have failed to understand Him. But every Roman in high position must have heard the arguments of philosophers about “the truth.” Therefore our Lord says, “I am a witness to truth.” In speaking to unconverted people, it is wise to use terms that they can understand.

Theophylact suggests that here is an appeal to Pilate’s conscience: “If you are a real seeker after truth, you will listen to Me.”

38.—[*Pilate said to Him, What is truth?*] This famous question, in my judgment, can only admit of one interpretation. It is the cold, sneering, skeptical interjection of a mere man of the world, who has persuaded himself that there is no such thing as truth, that all religions are equally false, that this life is all we have to care for, and that creeds and modes of faith are only words and names and superstitions, which no sensible person need attend to. It is precisely the state of mind in which thousands of great and rich men in every age live and die. Expanded and paraphrased, Pilate's question comes to this: "Truth indeed! What is truth? I have heard all my life of various philosophical systems, each asserting that it has found the truth, and each differing widely from the others. Who is to decide what is truth and what is not?" The best proof that this is the right view of the sentence is Pilate's behavior when he has asked the question. He does not, as Lord Bacon remarked two centuries ago, wait for an answer, but breaks off the conversation and goes away. The supposition that he asked a question as an honest inquirer, with a real desire to get an answer, is too improbable and unreasonable to require any comment. The right way to understand Pilate's meaning is to put ourselves in his place, and to consider how many sects and schools of philosophers there were in the world at the time when our Lord appeared—some Roman, some Grecian, and some Egyptian—all alleging that they had got the truth, and all equally unsatisfactory. In short, Gallio, who thought Christianity a mere "question of words and names—Festus, who thought the dislike of the Jews to Paul arose from "questions of their own superstition,"—and Pontius Pilate, were all much alike. The worldly-minded Roman noble speaks like a man

sick and weary of philosophical speculations. “What is truth indeed? Who can tell?” Nevertheless, truth was very near him. If he had waited he might have learned!

Lightfoot alone thinks that Pilate only meant, “What is the true state of affairs? How can one so poor as You be a King? How can You be a King and yet not of this world!”

[*And…went out… Jews.*] The meaning of this sentence is that Pilate “went out” of the palace, where he had been conversing with our Lord apart from the Jews, and returned to the courtyard, or open space at the gate, where he had left the Jews at the 33rd verse. He broke off the conversation at this point. Very likely the mention of “truth” touched his conscience, and he found it convenient to go out hurriedly and cover his retreat with a sneer. A bad conscience generally dislikes a close conversation with a good man.
Augustine says: “I suppose that when Pilate said ‘What is truth?’ the Jews’ custom—that one should be released at the Passover—came into his mind at that instant, and for this reason he did not wait for Jesus to tell him what truth was, that no time might be lost!” This, however, seems rather improbable.

[And said… I find…no fault at all.] In this sentence comes out the true impression of Pilate about our Lord. “After examining this man, I can discern in Him no guilt, and nothing certainly to warrant me in condemning Him to death. He says, no doubt, and does not hesitate to avow it, that He is a King. But I find that His kingdom is not one

that interferes with the authority of Cæser. Such Kings as this, we Romans do not care for or regard as criminals. In short, your charge against Him entirely breaks down, and I am disposed to dismiss Him as not guilty." Our Lord, we may remember, came to be a sacrifice for our sins. It was only fitting that he who was one of the chief agents in killing Him should publicly declare that, like a lamb without blemish, there was "no fault in Him."

39.—[*But ye have a custom, etc.*] In this verse we see the cowardly, weak, double-minded character of Pilate coming out. He knows in his own conscience that our Lord is innocent, and that if he acts justly he ought to let Him go free. But he fears offending the Jews and wants to contrive matters so as to please them. He therefore prepares a plan by which he hoped that Jesus might be found guilty and the Jews satisfied, and yet Jesus might depart unhurt and his own secret desire to acquit Him be gratified. The plan was this. The Jews had a custom that at Passover time they might obtain from the Roman Governor the release of some notable prisoner. Pilate craftily suggests that the prisoner released this Passover should be our Lord Jesus Christ. "Let us suppose that Jesus is guilty," he seems to say. "I am willing to condemn Him and declare Him a criminal worthy of death, and a malefactor, in order to please you. But having pronounced Him a guilty criminal, what do you say to my letting Him go free according to the Passover custom?" This cowardly and unjust judge hoped in this way to please the Jews by declaring an innocent person guilty, and yet at the same time to please himself by getting His life spared. Such are the ways of worldly and

unprincipled rulers. Between the base fear of men, the desire to please the mob, and the secret dictates of their own conscience, they are continually doing wicked things and pleasing nobody at all, and least of all themselves.

About this "custom" and when it began, we know nothing. St. Mark's account would lead us to suppose that as soon as Pilate came out of his palace, the multitude cried out for the usual Passover favor to be granted to them. (See Mark 15:8.) Pilate would seem to have caught at the idea at once and to have suggested that Jesus should be the person released. There seems a latent meaning in Pilate's use of the expression "the King of the Jews." Some think that it is a sneer—"This miserable, poor, lowly King. Will you not have Him let go?" Others think that Pilate had in view our Lord's claim to be the Messiah. "Would it not be better to release this man who asserts that He is your own Messiah? Would it not be a scandal to your nation to kill Him?" A desire to release our Lord, side-by-side with a cowardly fear of offending the Jews by doing what was just and right, runs through all Pilate's dealings. He evidently knows what he ought to do, but does not do it.

Henry thinks Pilate must have heard how popular Jesus was with some of the Jews, and must have known of His triumphal entry into Jerusalem a few days before. "He looked on Him as the darling of the multitude and the envy of the rulers. Therefore he had no doubt they would demand the release of Jesus, and this would stop the prosecution and all would be well." But he had not reckoned on the

influence of the priests over the fickle multitude. 40.—[*Then cried they all, etc.*] This verse describes the complete failure of Pilate's notable plan, by which he hoped to satisfy the Jews and yet release Jesus. The fierce and bigoted party of Caiaphas would not listen to his proposal for a moment. They declared they would rather have Barabbas, a notorious prisoner in the hands of the Romans, released than Jesus. Nothing would content them but our Lord's death. Barabbas, we know from St. Luke 23:19, was a murderer as well as a robber. The Jews were asked to decide whether the holy Jesus or the vile criminal should be let go free and released from prison. Such was their utter hardness, bitterness, cruelty, and hatred of our Lord that they actually declare they would rather have Barabbas set free than Jesus! Nothing in short would satisfy them but Christ's blood. Thus they committed the great sin, which Peter charges home on them not long after: "Ye denied Jesus in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go. Ye denied the Holy One and the Just and desired a murderer to be granted unto you" (Acts 3:13,14). They publicly declared that they liked a robber and a murderer better than Christ!

The Greek word rendered "cried" signifies a very loud cry or shout. It is the same word that occurs at the raising of Lazarus. "He cried, Lazarus, come forth!" (John 11:43.)

The expression "again" must either refer to the loud cries the Jews had raised when they first brought Jesus to Pilate and demanded His condemnation, or else it must refer to a former cry for Barabbas to be released. According to Matthew, they TWICE demanded this, with an

interval of time between. (Compare Matt. 27:15-26.)

The singularly typical character of all this transaction should be carefully noticed. Even here at this juncture we have a lively illustration of the great Christian doctrine of *substitution*. Barabbas, the real criminal, is acquitted and let go free. Jesus, innocent and guiltless, is condemned and sentenced to death. So is it in the salvation of our souls. We are all by nature like Barabbas and deserve God's wrath and condemnation; yet he was accounted righteous and set free. The Lord Jesus Christ is perfectly innocent, and yet He is counted a sinner, punished as a sinner, and put to death that we may live. Christ suffers, though guiltless, that we may be pardoned. We are pardoned, though guilty, because of what Christ does for us. We are sinners and yet counted righteous. Christ is righteous and yet counted a sinner. Happy is that man who understand this doctrine and has laid hold on it by faith for the salvation of his own soul.

In leaving this chapter, it is vain to deny that there are occasional difficulties in harmonizing the four different accounts of our Lord's examination and crucifixion. This, of course, arises from one Gospel writer dwelling more fully on one set of facts, and another on a different set of facts. But we need not doubt that all is perfectly harmonious, and that if we do not see it, the reason lies in our present lack of perception. If each Evangelist had told the story in precisely the same words, the whole result would have been far less satisfactory. It would have savored of imposture, concert, and collusion. The varieties in the four accounts are just what might have

been expected from four honest independent witnesses, and fairly treated, admit of explanation. Augustine remarks: “How all the Evangelists agree together and nothing in any one Evangelist is at variance with the truth put forth by another. This whosoever desires to know, let him seek it in laborious writings and not in popular discourses, and not by standing and hearing but by sitting and reading, or by lending a most attentive ear and mind to him who reads. Yet let him believe, before he knows it, that there is nothing written by any one Evangelist that can possibly be contrary either to his own or another’s narration.”

Melancthon suggests that the whole history of the passion, in this chapter, is a vivid typical picture of the history of Christ’s Church in every age. He bids us observe what a multitude of portraits it contains! There are saints both weak and strong, and enemies of many kinds—traitors, hypocrites, tyrants, priests, rulers, mobs, violence, treachery, the flight of friends, the bitter language of foes. What is it but a kind of prophetic history of Christ’s Church?

The character of Pontius Pilate is so ably drawn out by Ellicott that it may be well to quote it in concluding this chapter. “Pilate was a thorough and complete type of the later-Roman man of the world. Stern but not relentless, shrewd and world-worn, prompt and practical, haughtily just and yet (as the early writers correctly observed) self-seeking and cowardly, able to perceive what was right but without moral strength to follow it out, this Procurator of Judea stands forth a sad and terrible instance of a man whom the fear of

endangered self-interest drove not only to act against the deliberate convictions of his heart and conscience, but further to commit an act of cruelty and injustice, even after those convictions had been deepened by warnings and strengthened by presentiment."

John – Chap. 19

JOHN 19:1-16

Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged severely. The soldiers braided a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they clothed him in a purple robe. They came up to him again and again and said, "Hail, king of the Jews!" And they struck him repeatedly in the face.

Again Pilate went out and said to the Jewish religious leaders, "Look, I am bringing him out to you, so that you may know that I find no reason for an accusation against him." So Jesus came outside, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Look, here is the man!" When the chief priests and their officers saw him, they shouted out, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Pilate said, "You take him and crucify him! For I find no reason for an accusation against him!" The Jewish religious leaders replied, "We have a law, and according to our law he ought to die, because he claimed to be the Son of God!"

When Pilate heard what they said, he was more afraid than ever, and he went back into the governor's residence and said to Jesus, "Where do you come from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. So Pilate said, "Do you refuse to speak to me? Don't you know I have the authority to release you, and to crucify you?" Jesus

replied, "You would have no authority over me at all, unless it was given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of greater sin."

From this point on Pilate tried to release him. But the Jewish religious leaders shouted out, "If you release this man, you are no friend of Caesar! Everyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar!" When Pilate heard these words he brought Jesus outside and sat down on the judgment seat in the place called "The Stone Pavement" (Gabbatha in Aramaic). (Now it was the day of preparation for the Passover, about noon.) Pilate said to the Jewish religious leaders, "Look, here is your king!"

Then they shouted out, "Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!" Pilate asked, "Shall I crucify your king?" The high priests replied, "We have no king except Caesar!" Then Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified.

These verses exhibit to our eyes a wonderful picture, a picture which ought to be deeply interesting to all who profess and call themselves Christians. Like every great historical picture, it contains special points on which we should fix our special attention. Above all, it contains three life-like portraits, which we shall find it useful to examine in order.

The first portrait in the picture is that of our Lord JESUS CHRIST himself. We see the Savior of mankind scourged, crowned with thorns, mocked, smitten, rejected by His own people,

unjustly condemned by a judge who saw no fault in Him, and finally delivered up to a most painful death. Yet this was He who was the eternal Son of God, whom the Father's countless angels delighted to honor. This was He who came into the world to save sinners, and after living a blameless life for thirty years, spent the last three years of His time on earth in going about doing good, and preaching the Gospel. Surely the sun never shone on a more wondrous sight since the day of its creation!

Let us admire that love of Christ which Paul declares, "passes knowledge," and let us see an endless depth of meaning in the expression. There is no earthly love with which it can be compared, and no standard by which to measure it. It is a love that stands alone. Never let us forget when we ponder this tale of suffering, that Jesus suffered for our sins, the Just for the unjust, that He was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities, and that with His stripes we are healed.

Let us diligently follow the example of His patience in all the trials and afflictions of life, and specially in those which may be brought upon us by religion. When He was reviled, He reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not, but committed Himself to Him that judges righteously. Let us arm ourselves with the same mind. Let us consider Him who endured such contradiction of sinners without a murmur, and strive to glorify Him by suffering well, no less than by doing well.

The second portrait in the picture before us, is that of the UNBELIEVING JEWS who favored our Lord's death. We see them for three or four long hours obstinately rejecting Pilate's offer to release our Lord—fiercely demanding His crucifixion, savagely claiming His condemnation to death as a right—persistently refusing to acknowledge Him as their King—declaring that they had no King but Caesar—and finally accumulating on their own heads the greater part of the guilt of His murder. Yet, these were the children of Israel and the seed of Abraham, to whom pertained the promises and the Mosaic ceremonial, the temple sacrifices and the temple priesthood. These were men who professed to look for a Prophet like unto Moses, and a son of David who was to set up a kingdom as Messiah. *Never, surely, was there such an exhibition of the depth of human wickedness since the day when Adam fell.*

Let us mark with fear and trembling the enormous danger of long-continued rejection of light and knowledge. There is such a thing as judicial blindness; and it is the last and sorest judgment which God can send upon men. He who, like Pharaoh and Ahab, is often reproved but refuses to receive reproof, will finally have a heart harder than the nether mill-stone, and a conscience past feeling, and seared as with a hot iron. This was the state of the Jewish nation during the time of our Lord's ministry; and the heading up of their sin was their deliberate rejection of Him, when Pilate desired to let Him go. From such judicial blindness may we all pray to be delivered! *There is no worse judgment from God than to be left to ourselves, and given over to our own wicked hearts and the devil.*

There is no surer way to bring that judgment upon us than to persist in refusing warnings and sinning against light. These words of Solomon are very dreadful— "But since you rejected me when I called and no one gave heed when I stretched out my hand, since you ignored all my advice and would not accept my rebuke, I in turn will laugh at your disaster; I will mock when calamity overtakes you." (Prov. 1:24-26.) Never let it be forgotten, that, like the Jews, we may at length be given up to strong delusion, so that we believe lies, and think that we are doing God service while we are committing sin. (2 Thess. 2:11.)

The third, and last portrait in the picture before us, is that of PONTIUS PILATE. We see a Roman Governor—a man of rank and high position—an imperial representative of the most powerful nation on earth—a man who ought to have been the fountain of justice and equity—halting between two opinions in a case as clear as the sun at noonday. We see him knowing what was right, and yet afraid to act up to his knowledge—convinced in his own conscience that he ought to acquit the prisoner before him, and yet afraid to do it lest he should displease His accusers—sacrificing the claims of justice to the base fear of man—sanctioning from sheer cowardice, an enormous crime—and finally countenancing, from love of man's good opinion, the murder of an innocent person. Never perhaps did human nature make such a contemptible exhibition. Never was there a name so justly handed down to a world's scorn as the name which is embalmed in all our creeds—the name of Pontius Pilate.

Let us learn what miserable creatures great men are, when they have no high principles within them, and no faith in the reality of a God above them. The lowest laborer who has grace and fears God, is a nobler being in the eyes of his Creator than the King, ruler, or statesman, whose first aim it is to please the people. To have one conscience in private and another in public—one rule of duty for our own souls, and another for our public actions—to see clearly what is right before God, and yet for the sake of popularity to do wrong—this may seem to some both right, and politic, and statesmanlike, and wise. But it is a character which no Christian man can ever regard with respect.

Let us pray that our own country may never be without men in high places who have grace to think right, and courage to act up to their knowledge, without truckling to the opinion of men. Those who fear God more than man, and care for pleasing God more than man, are the best rulers of a nation, and in the long run of years are always most respected. Men like Pontius Pilate, who are always trimming and compromising, led by popular opinion instead of leading popular opinion, afraid of doing right if it gives offence, ready to do wrong if it makes them personally popular, such men are the worst governors that a country can have. They are often God's heavy judgment on a nation because of a nation's sins.

Technical Notes:

1. So then Pilate took Jesus and scourged *him*. 2. And the soldiers twisted a crown of thorns and put *it* on his

head, and they put on him a purple robe, 3. and said, Hail, King of the Jews! And they struck him with their hands. 4. Pilate then went out again and said to them, Behold I bring him out to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in him. 5. Then Jesus came forth, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. And *Pilate* said to them, Behold the man! 6. Therefore, when the chief priests and officers saw him, they cried out saying, Crucify *him*, crucify *him*. Pilate said to them, You take him and crucify *him*, for I find no fault in him. 7. The Jews answered him, We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God. 8. Therefore, when Pilate heard that saying, he was the more afraid, 9. and went again into the judgment hall, and said to Jesus, Whence are You? But Jesus gave him no answer. 10. Then Pilate said to him, Are you not speaking to me? Do you not know that I have power to crucify you, and have power to release you? 11. Jesus answered, You could have no power *at all* against me, except it were given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me to you has the greater sin. 12. From then on Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, saying, If you let this man go, you are not Cæsar's friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Cæsar. 13. When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha. 14. And it was the preparation of the Passover, and about the sixth hour. And he said to the

Jews, Behold your King! 15. But they cried out, Away with *him*, away with *him*, crucify him! Pilate said to them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Cæsar. 16. Then he delivered him to them to be crucified. And they took Jesus and led *him* away.

1.—[*So then Pilate...scourged Him.*] The cruel injury inflicted on our Lord's body, in this verse, was probably far more severe than an English reader might suppose. It was a punishment which among the Romans generally preceded crucifixion, and was sometimes so painful and violent that the sufferer died under it. It was often a scourging with rods, and not always with cords, as painters and sculptors represent. Josephus, the Jewish historian, in his "Antiquities" particularly mentions that malefactors were scourged and tormented in every way before they were put to death. Smith's Dictionary of the Bible says that under the Roman mode of scourging, "the culprit was stripped, stretched with cords or thongs on a frame, and beaten with rods."

As to Pilate's reason for inflicting this punishment on our Lord, there seems little doubt. He secretly hoped that this tremendous scourging, in the Roman fashion, would satisfy the Jews; and that after seeing Jesus beaten, bleeding, and torn with rods, they would be content to let Him go free. As usual, he was double-minded, cruel and deceitful. He tried to please the Jews by ill treating our Lord as much as possible, and at the same time he hoped to please his own conscience a little by not putting Him to death. He told the Jews,

indeed, according to Luke's account, what he wanted: "I will chastise Him and release Him" (Luke 23:16). How entirely this weak design failed we shall see by-and-by.

Chrysostom says: "Pilate scourged Jesus, desiring to exhaust and soothe the fury of the Jews. Being anxious to stay the evil at this point, he scourged Him and permitted to be done what was done, and the robe and crown to be put on Him, in order to relax their anger." Augustine and Cyril say much the same.

The importance of this particular portion of our Lord's sufferings is strongly shown by the fact that Isaiah specially says, "by His stripes we are healed;" and that St. Peter specially quotes that text in his first epistle. (Isaiah 53:5, 1 Peter 2:24.) Our Lord Himself particularly foretold that He would be scourged (Luke 18:33). It may seem needless to say that Pilate did not scourge Jesus with his own hands. Any plain reader will at once conclude that the scourging was inflicted by his soldiers or attendants. Yet the venerable Bede thinks that Pilate himself scourged Jesus. And it is worth remembering that a modern skeptical writer has actually argued that the book of Leviticus must be uninspired, because in that book the priest is commanded to lift, and move, and offer up the bodies of slain sacrifices, which alone he could not do! Surely he might have recollected that a man is said to do things when he does them by the hands of servants and attendants! It was thus, no doubt, that Pilate scourged Jesus. The word "took" probably means "commanded Him to be seized."

Hengstenberg thinks that the remarkable incident of Pilate's washing his hands (Matt. 27:24) and declaring his innocence of Christ's blood comes in between this verse and the preceding chapter. I would rather place it after the 15th verse of this 19th chapter.

The place where this horrible indignity was inflicted on our Lord's holy person (according to St. Matthew 27:27) was the prætorium, or common hall, which was probably a kind of guardroom where the Roman soldiers used to spend their time and keep themselves in readiness to do anything the Governor wished. What kind of a place the guardroom of a body of rough Roman soldiers can have been we can hardly conceive, even if we visit the worst regimental guardrooms of modern days.

Some think that our Lord was scourged twice—once at the beginning of Pilate's examination and once after His final condemnation. This, however, seems to me very doubtful. The idea probably arises from not carefully observing that the proceedings before Pilate, after the scourging recorded here, are peculiar to St. John's Gospel, and omitted by Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

Besser remarks: "Before the message 'Christ our righteousness' was revived and the Lutheran 'Christ for us' was again the refreshment of weary souls, men could not draw much refreshment from Christ's scourging. Before the Reformation, whole hosts of self-bewailing penitents came forth from Italy and spread over Germany. They were

called ‘Flagellants;’ and naked to the waist they roamed through towns and villages singing penitential hymns like Dies Iræ, and flogging one another.”

2.—[And…crown of thorns…on His head.] About the object of the soldiers in this act, there can be no doubt. It was done in mockery and ridicule of our blessed Lord, and to pour contempt on the idea of His being a King. These rude men would show how they defied such a King. We can well believe that rough heathen soldiers, like Roman legionaries, were expert and trained by practice in the best way of torturing a prisoner. Thorns, according to Tristram, are so common in Palestine that the soldiers would have no difficulty in finding materials for weaving this crown. Hasselquist, quoted in Smith’s Dictionary, says: “The plant called ‘nebk’ (*zizyphus spina Christi*) was very suitable for the purpose as it has many sharp thorns, and its flexible, pliant, and round branches might easily be plaited in the form of a crown; and what, in my opinion, seems the greatest proof, is that the leaves most resemble those of ivy, as they are of a very deep green. Perhaps the enemies of Christ would choose a plant like that with which Emperors and Generals used to be crowned, that there might be calumny even in the punishment.” How painful and irritating such a crown of thorns would be, sticking into the forehead or head of one whose hands were bound, we can easily imagine.

Here, as in every step of Christ’s passion, we see His complete and perfect substitution for sinners. He, the innocent sin-bearer, wore the crown of thorns so that we, the guilty, might wear a crown of

glory. Vast is the contrast which there will be between the crown of glory that Christ will wear at His second advent and the crown of thorns that He wore at His first coming.

Lightfoot remarks that "it was a most unquestionable token that Christ's kingdom was not of this world when He was crowned only with thorns and briars, which are the curse of the earth." It was, moreover, a striking symbol of the consequences of the fall being laid on the head of our divine Substitute. In Leviticus it is written that Aaron shall lay his hands "upon the *head* of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the Children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat" (Lev. 16.21). History says that in the Crusades, when Godfrey of Bouillon, the Christian General, was made King of Jerusalem, he refused to be crowned with a golden crown, saying that "it did not become him to wear a crown of gold in the city where his Savior had worn a crown of thorns." Rollock observes: "You shall find these soldiers even worse inclined than Pilate was. This falls out: if the master command them to do one evil deed, often the servants will do two."

When John Huss, the martyr, was brought forth to be burned, they put a paper over his head on which were pictured three devils, and the title "heresiarch." When he saw it he said, "My Lord Jesus Christ, for my sake, did wear a crown of thorns. Why should not I, therefore, for His sake, wear this ignominious crown?"

[*And…a purple robe.*] This again was done as a mark of contempt and derision. A mock royal robe was thrown over our Lord's shoulders in order to show how ridiculous and contemptible was the idea of His kingdom. The color purpose was doubtless meant to be a derisive imitation of the well-known imperial purple, the color worn by Emperors and Kings. Some have thought that this robe was only an old soldier's cape, such as a guard house would easily furnish. Some, with more show of probability, have thought that this robe must be the gorgeous robe that Herod put on our Lord (mentioned by St. Luke) when he sent Him back to Pilate (Luke 23.11), a circumstance which John has not recorded. In any case, we need not doubt that the robe was some shabby, cast-off garment. It is worth remembering that this brilliant color, scarlet or purple, would make our blessed Lord a most conspicuous object to every eye when He was led through the streets from Herod, or brought forth from Pilate's house to the assembled multitude of Jews. Once more we should call to mind the symbolical nature of this transaction also. Our Lord was clothed with a robe of shame and contempt, so that we might be clothed with a spotless garment of righteousness and stand in white robes before the throne of God.

3.—[*And said, Hail, King of the Jews!*] This again was evidently done to pour contempt upon our Lord. The words of the soldiers were spoken in contemptuous imitation of the words addressed to a Roman Emperor on his assuming Imperial power: "Hail, Emperor! *ave Imperator!*" It was as much as saying, "Thou a King indeed! Thou and thy kingdom are alike base and contemptible."

Hengstenberg observes: “It was the kingdom of the Jews itself that the soldiers laughed at. They regarded Jesus as the representative of the Messianic hope of the Jews. They would turn to ridicule these royal hopes, which were known far in the heathen world, more especially as they aspired to the dominion of the whole earth.”

Let us not fail to remark at this point that ridicule, scorn, and contempt were one prominent portion of our blessed Master’s sufferings. Anyone who knows human nature must know that few things are more difficult to bear than ridicule, especially when we know that it is undeserved and when it is for religion’s sake. Those who have to endure such ridicule may take comfort in the thought that Christ can sympathize with them; for it is a cup which He Himself drank to the very dregs. Here again He was our Substitute. He bore contempt that we might receive praise and glory at the last day.

Henry remarks: “If at any time we are ridiculed for well-doing, let us not be ashamed, but glorify God; for thus we are partakers of Christ’s sufferings.”

[*And they struck…hands.*] The words so rendered would be equally translated “they gave Him blows with a rod or stick.” The same Greek word in the singular is so translated in the marginal reading of John 18:22. When we compare Matt. 27:27,30, where it says the soldiers took a reed and struck Him with it on the head, it seems highly

probable that this was the action here recorded. According to Matthew, the soldiers put the reed in our Lord's hand as a mock scepter; and when, as Lampe observes, "He refused to retain it in His right hand, because He came to suffer indignities but not to perform them," they snatched it out of His hand and brutally struck Him with it on the head. This appears to me a reasonable and satisfactory supposition, and makes it most likely that the blow here was not "with the hand."

If the blows were inflicted on the head, whether with hand or reed, we can readily conceive what acute bodily pain they might occasion to a head crowned with thorns. The thorns would be driven into the skin till the blood ran down the face and forehead and neck of our Lord. Truly "He was bruised for our iniquities" (Isa. 53:5).

4.—[*Pilate then went out, etc.*] This verse opens a new scene of the painful story of the passion. The scourging being over and the mockery of the soldiers having gone on as long as Pilate thought it worthwhile, the Roman Governor went forth outside the palace where he lived to the Jews, who were waiting to hear the result of his private interview with our Lord. We must remember that under the influence of hypocritical scrupulosity, they would not go inside the Gentile Governor's house lest indeed they should be "defiled," and were therefore waiting in the court outside. Now Pilate comes out of his palace and speaks to them. The words of the verse seem to show that Pilate came out first and that our Lord was led out behind him. "Behold I am bringing Him outside again, that you may know that I

can find no fault or cause of condemnation in Him, and no ground for your charge that He is a stirrer-up of sedition and a rebel King. He is only a weak, harmless fanatic who lays claim to no kingdom of this world, and I bring Him forth to you as a poor, contemptible person worthy of scorn, but not one that I can pronounce worthy of death. I have examined Him myself, and I inform you that I can see no harm in Him." It seems to me quite plain that Pilate's private interview with our Lord had completely satisfied the Governor that He was a harmless, innocent person, and made him feel a strong desire to dismiss Him unhurt; and he secretly hoped that the Jews would be satisfied when they saw the prisoner whom they had accused brought out beaten and bruised, and treated with scorn and contempt, and that they would not press the charge any further. How thoroughly this cowardly double-dealing man was disappointed, and what violence he had to do to his own conscience, we shall soon see. It is very noteworthy that the expression "I find no fault in Him" is used three times by Pilate, in the same Greek words, in St. John's account of the passion. (John 18:38, 19:4-6.) It was meet and right that he who had the chief hand in slaying the Lamb of God, the Sacrifice for our sins, should three times publicly declare that he found no spot or blemish in Him. He was proclaimed a Lamb without spot or fault, after a searching examination by him who slew Him.

5.—[*Then Jesus came forth...robe.*] The language of this sentence appears to me to show that Pilate went outside the palace first and announced that he was going to bring out the prisoner, and that then

our Lord followed him. The word “forth” both in this and the preceding verse means literally “outside” or “without.” It is the same that is used in the texts “His brethren stood without” (Matt. 12:46) and “Without are dogs” (Rev. 22:15). That our blessed Lord, the eternal Word, should have meekly submitted to be led out after this fashion—as a gazing-stock and an object of scorn, with an old purple robe on His shoulders and a crown of thorns on His head, His back bleeding from scourging and His head from thorns, to feast the eyes of a taunting, howling, blood-thirty crowd—is indeed a wondrous thought! Truly, “though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor” (2 Cor. 8:9). Since the world began, the sun never shone on a more surprising spectacle both for angels and men.

[*And Pilate… Behold the Man.*] This famous sentence, so well known as “Ecce Homo” in Latin, admits of two views being taken of it. Pilate may have spoken it in *contempt*: “Behold the Man you accuse of setting Himself up as a King! See what a weak, helpless, contemptible creature He is.” Or else Pilate may have spoken it in *pity*: “Behold the poor feeble Man whom you want me to sentence to death. Surely your demands may be satisfied by what I have done to Him. Is He not punished enough?” Perhaps both views are correct. In any case, there can be little doubt that the latent feeling of Pilate was the hope that the Jews, on seeing our Lord’s miserable condition, would be content and would allow Him to be let go. In this hope, again, we shall find he was completely deceived. Pilate probably threw a strong emphasis on the expression “Man,” indicative of contempt. This may have led to the Jews saying so

strongly, in the seventh verse, that the prisoner "made Himself the *Son of God*," and claimed to be Divine and not a mere "man" as Pilate had said. He probably also meant the Jews to mark that he said "Behold the man," not "your King", but a mere common man.

6.—[*When the chief priests…crucify Him.*] We see in this verse the complete failure of Pilate's secret scheme for avoiding the condemnation of our Lord. The pitiful sight of the bleeding and despised prisoner had not the effect of softening down the feelings of His cruel enemies. They would not be content with anything but His death, and the moment He appeared they raised the fierce cry, "Crucify Him, crucify Him."

Let it be noted that the chief priests were the foremost in raising the cry for crucifixion. It is a painful fact that in every age none have been such hard, cruel, unfeeling, and bloody-minded persecutors of God's saints as the ministers of religion. The conduct of Bishop Bonner, in the reign of bloody Mary, toward some of our martyred Reformers is a melancholy proof of this.

The officers here mentioned were the attendants, servants, and immediate followers of the priests, who would naturally take up any cry raised by their masters.

The word rendered "cried out" means a loud shot or clamorous cry, and is peculiar to John's account of this part of the passion. It is the same word that is used of our Lord at the grave of Lazarus: "He cried,

Lazarus, come forth" (John 11:43). It is the same that is used of the multitude at Jerusalem, when they would no longer listen to Paul speaking to them on the stairs: "They cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air" (Acts 22:23).

The cry "Crucify" was equivalent to a demand that our Lord might be put to death after the Roman manner.

Cyril remarks: "When the multitude would perhaps have blushed with shame at the sight of what had been done, remembering Christ's miracles, the priests are the first to cry out, and so inflame and stir up the mob." He who would know to what an extraordinary degree of blood-thirstiness a mob may be stirred up to, when once excited, should study the history of the Reign of Terror at Paris during the first French revolution.

[Pilate said...take Him...no fault in Him.] This, as Cyril justly argues, is the language of one vexed and irritated, and made impatient by the pertinacity with which the priests stuck to their point. "Do your bloody work yourselves, if you must needs have it done. Take your prisoner away and do not trouble me with the case. I find no fault in Him, and I dislike being made your tool in this matter." It seems impossible to put any other construction on Pilate's words. He could not have meant gravely and seriously that he would allow the Jews to put the prisoner to death and thus admit the precedent of letting them inflict capital punishment. Temper, vexation, and irony seem to lie at the bottom of his words; and the

chief priests seem to have taken his words in this sense. We cannot doubt that they would gladly have taken away our Lord and crucified Him at once if they had thought Pilate really meant they should do so. For the third time we should notice Pilate's emphatic declaration, "I find no fault in Him." Three times he vainly tried to evade condemning our Lord, or to make the Jews desist from their bloody design: once by asking the Jews to choose between Christ and Barabbas; once by sending Him to Herod; once by scourging Him and exhibiting Him in a contemptible light before the people. Three times he failed utterly. Burkitt remarks: "Hypocrites within the pale of the visible Church may be guilty of such monstrous acts of wickedness, as even the consciences of heathens without the Church may boggle at and protest against."

7.—[*The Jews answered him, etc.*] In this verse we find the priests taking up a new ground of accusation against our Lord. They saw that their political accusation had failed. Pilate would not condemn Him as a King, and refused to see any fault in Him on that score. They, therefore, charge our Lord with blasphemy and committing an offense against their law. As to Pilate's ironical words, "Take ye Him and crucify Him," they made no remark on them, as though they knew they were not meant to be taken seriously. The whole sense must be filled up in some such way as this: "It is no use telling us to crucify this prisoner ourselves, because you well know that it is not lawful for us to put any man to death. But seeing that you will not condemn Him as a political offender, we now charge Him with an offense against our religion, which, as our Governor,

you are bound to defend and protect. We call upon you to condemn Him to death for claiming to be the Son of God, which, according to our law, is blasphemy, and a capital crime." This is a lengthy paraphrase, undoubtedly, but one that is necessary if we would fill up the sense of the verse and understand what the Jews meant.

The "law" referred to by the Jews is probably Lev. 24:16. But it is curious that "stoning" is the punishment there mentioned, and not a word is said of crucifixion. This they do not tell Pilate. There is, perhaps, more fullness in the expression "a law" than appears at first. It may mean, "We Jews have a law given us by man from God, which is our rule of faith in religion. It is a law, we know, not binding on Gentiles, but it is a law that we feel bound to obey. One of the articles of that law is that 'He who blasphemes the name of the Lord shall be stoned.' We ask that this article may be enforced in the case of this man. He has blasphemed by calling Himself the Son of God, and He ought to be put to death. We, therefore, demand His life." There certainly seems an emphasis in the Greek on the word "we," as if it meant "we Jews," in contradistinction to Gentiles.

The expression "He ought" is literally "he owes it," he is a debtor, he is under an obligation or penalty of death, according to the terms of our code of law.

The expression "made Himself" must mean appointed, constituted, or declared Himself the Son of God. Compare Mark 3:14, John 6:15-8:53, Acts 2:36, Heb. 3:2, and Rev. 1:6.

The expression “Son of God” meant far more to a Jewish mind than it does to us. We see in John 5:18 that the Jews considered that when our Lord said that God was His Father, He made Himself “equal with God.” See also John 10:33. One thing, at any rate, is very clear: whatever Socinians may say, our Lord distinctly laid claim to divinity, and the Jews distinctly understood Him to mean that He was God as well as man. Cyril well remarks that if the Jews had dealt justly, they would have told the Gentile ruler that the person before him had not only claimed to be the Son of God, but had also done many miracles in proof of His divinity. Rollock observes: “Look what blinds them! The Word of God, which should make them see, blinds them so that they use it to their ruin. The best things in the world, yea, the Word of God itself, serve to wicked men for nothing else but their induration. The more they read, the blinder they are. And why? Because they abuse the word and make it not a guide to direct their affections and actions.”

8.—[*When Pilate heard…more afraid.*] In this verse we see Pilate in a different frame of mind. This new charge of blasphemy against our Lord threw a new light over his feelings. He began to be really frightened and uncomfortable. The thought that the meek and gentle Prisoner before him might after all be some superior Being, and not a mere common man, filled his weak and ignorant conscience with alarm. What if he had before him some God in human form? What if it should turn out that he was actually inflicting bodily injuries on one of the Gods? As a Roman he had doubtless heard and read many stories, drawn from the heathen mythology of Greece and Rome,

about Gods coming down to earth and appearing in human form. Perhaps the prisoner before him was one! The idea raised new fears in his mind. Already he had been made very uncomfortable about Him. Our Lord's calm, dignified, and majestic demeanor had doubtless made an impression. His evident innocence of all guilt, and the extraordinary malice of His enemies, whose characters Pilate most likely knew well, had produced an effect. His own wife's dream had its influence. Even before the last charge of the Jews, the Roman judge had been awe-struck, and secretly convinced of our Lord's innocence, and anxious to have Him set free, and actually "afraid" of his prisoner. But when he heard of His being the "Son of God," he was made more afraid.

Burgon remarks: "Like Gamaliel in the Acts, Pilate was seized with a salutary apprehension, lest haply he be found even to fight against God." The "saying" referred to must mean the expression "Son of God." The word "more" deserves attention. It shows clearly that from the first Pilate had been afraid and uneasy in conscience. He had never liked the case being brought before him at all. To have such an extraordinary preacher, and a worker of such miracles as our Lord, brought to his bar frightened him. But now when he heard that He laid claim to divinity, he was "*more* afraid." We must never forget that Pilate, as Roman Governor of Judea (charged with the management of a most turbulent and troublesome province), was doubtless informed by spies, as well as the officers of his army, of everything that went on in Judea. Can we doubt for a moment that he must have heard many accounts of our Lord's ministry, and

specially of His miracles and astonishing power over the sick and the dead? Can we doubt that he heard of the raising of Lazarus at Bethany, within a walk of Jerusalem? Remembering all this, we may well suppose that he regarded the whole case brought before him by the Jews with much anxiety from the very first, and we can well understand that when he heard that Jesus was "the Son of God," he was more than ever alarmed. Unprincipled rulers have an uneasy position.

Bishop Hall thinks that the cause of Pilate's fear was only the increased rage and excitement of the people. He was afraid of a riot and tumult!

9.—[*And went again into the judgment hall.*] This means that on hearing this fresh charge of blasphemy, Pilate retired again from the outside of the palace into the inner part, where he had before conversed with our Lord, once more leaving the Jews outside. This new charge was so serious that he did not care to enter into it publicly, and preferred examining our Lord about it privately.

[*And said... Whence are You?*] This question, I think, can admit of only one meaning. It meant: "Who are You? What are You? Are You from heaven? Are You one of the gods come down to earth, of whom I have heard the priests talk? What is Your real nature and history? If You are some superior being, more than a common man, tell me plainly, that I may know how to deal with Your case. Tell me privately, while these Jews are not present, that I may know what

line to take up with Your enemies." We may well believe that Pilate caught at the secret hope that Jesus might tell him something about Himself which would enable him to make a firm stand and deliver Jesus from the Jews. In this hope, again, the Roman Governor was destined to be disappointed.

[*But Jesus gave him no answer*.] Our Lord's silence, when this appeal was made to Him by Pilate, is very striking. Up till now He had spoken freely and replied to questions; now He refused to speak any more. The reason for our Lord's silence must be sought in the state of Pilate's soul—he deserved no answer and therefore got none. He had forfeited his title to any further revelation about his Prisoner. He had been told plainly the nature of our Lord's kingdom and the purpose of our Lord's coming into the world, and been obliged to confess publicly his innocence. And yet, with all this light and knowledge, he had treated our Lord with flagrant injustice, scourged Him, allowed Him to be treated with the vilest indignities by his soldiers, and held Him up to scorn, knowing in his own mind all the time that He was a guiltless person. Pilate had, in short, sinned away his opportunities, forsaken his own mercies, and turned a deaf ear to the cries of his own conscience. Hence our Lord would have nothing more to do with him, and would tell him nothing more. "He gave him no answer."

Here, as in many other cases, we learn that God will not force conviction on men, and will not compel obstinate unbelievers to believe, and will not always strive with men's consciences. Most men,

like Pilate, have a day of grace and an open door put before them. If they refuse to enter in and choose their own sinful way, the door is often shut and never opened again. There is such a thing as a "day of visitation" when Christ speaks to men. If they will not hear His voice and open the door of their hearts, they are often let alone, given over to a reprobate mind, and left to reap the fruit of their own sins. It was so with Pharaoh, Saul, and Ahab; and Pilate's case was like theirs. He had his opportunity and did not choose to use it, but preferred to please the Jews at the expense of his conscience, and to do what he knew was wrong. We see the consequence. Our Lord will tell him nothing more.

In saying all this, I think we must not forget that Pilate's wicked refusal to listen to his own conscience, and our Lord's consequent refusal to speak to him any more, were all ruled by the eternal counsels of God to the carrying out of His purpose of redemption. In handling such a point, we must speak with reverence. But it is plain that if our Lord had revealed to Pilate who He was, and forced Pilate to see it, the crucifixion might perhaps never have taken place, and the great sacrifice for a world's sins might never have been offered up on the cross. Our Lord's silence was just and well merited. But it was also part of God's counsels about man's salvation.

Let us note that there is "a time to be silent" as well as "a time to speak." This is a matter in the social intercourse of daily life, about which we all need to pray for wisdom. To be always saying to everybody everything we know, is not the line of a wise follower of Christ. Let us note that if we do not make a good use of light and

opportunities, and if we resist Christ speaking to our conscience, a time may come when, like Pilate, we may speak to Christ and ask things of Him, and He may give us no answer. It is written in a certain place: “They would none of my counsel, they despised all my reproof; therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way.” “Then shall they call upon Me, but I will not answer.” (Prov. 1:24-32.)

Chrysostom observes: “Christ answered nothing, because He knew that Pilate asked all the questions idly.”

Besser remarks: “A petition to Christ for enlightenment, even when offered up in a man’s last moments from a deathbed, never fails of being answered if offered in sincerity and from the heart, and obtains for the suppliant as much grace as is needful for salvation. But to a Pilate, Jesus is silent.”

10.—[*Then Pilate said, etc.*] In this verse we see the imperious, fierce, haughty, arrogant temper of the Roman Governor breaking out. Accustomed to seeing prisoners cringing before him and willing to do anything to obtain his favor, he could not understand our Lord’s silence. He addresses him in a tone of anger and surprise combined: “Why do You not answer my question? Do You know what You are doing in offending me? Do You not know that You are at my mercy, and that I have power to crucify You or release You according as I think right?” I can see no other reasonable construction that can be put on Pilate’s words. The idea that he was only persuading our Lord and gently reminding Him of his own power seems utterly

unreasonable and inconsistent with the following verse. This high-minded claim to absolute power is one that ungodly great men are fond of making. It is written of Nebuchadnezzar: “Whom he would he slew, and whom he would he kept alive; and whom he would he set up, and whom he would he put down” (Dan. 5:19). Yet even when such men boast of power, they are often, like Pilate, mere slaves and afraid of resisting popular opinion. Pilate talked of “power to release,” but he knew in his own mind that he was afraid, and so was unable to exercise it. It is only fair to remember that the Greek word rendered “power” might be rendered “authority” or “commission;” and in this sense Pilate might only mean, “I have commission from the Roman Government to sentence prisoners to death or let them go free. Would it not be for Your interest to speak to me?”

11.—[*Jesus answered, etc.*] Our Lord’s reply to Pilate in this verse is remarkably calm and dignified, though not without some difficulties because of its elliptical construction. It may be paraphrased thus: “You speak of power. You do not know that both you and the Jews are only tools in the hand of a higher Being, and that you could have no power whatever against Me if it were not given you by God. This, however, you do not understand and are, therefore, less guilty than the Jews. The Jews who delivered Me into your hand do know that all power is from God. Thus their knowledge makes them more guilty than you. Both you and they are committing a great sin, but their sin is a sin against knowledge, and yours is comparatively a sin of ignorance. You are both unconsciously mere instruments in the hand of God, and you could do nothing against Me if God did not permit

and overrule it." The logical connection of the former and latter parts of the verse is by no means clear. The precise object of "therefore" and the reason why God's overruling providence made the Jews more guilty that the Gentiles are things that it is not easy to explain. But I must think that the latent idea of our Lord was to remind Pilate how ignorantly he was acting, and how little he knew what he was about, compared to the Jews. That the possession of superior knowledge increases the sinfulness of a sinner's sin, seems taught by implication in this verse. It was more sinful in the Jews, with all their knowledge of the law and the prophets, to deliver up Christ to be crucified than it was in Pilate, an ignorant heathen, to condemn Him and put Him to death. The word "he" is differently interpreted. Some think that it must refer to Caiaphas, as the high priest and chief actor in the whole affair of our Lord's murder. Some even think it refers to Judas Iscariot. The more probable idea is that it refers to the whole Jewish people, personified by "he" and represented by their high priest.

One thing, at any rate, is very certain. This was the last word that Jesus spoke during His trial. Henceforth He was "lake a lamb before his shearers—silent."

Hengstenberg remarks that in apportioning the comparative guilt of Pilate and of the Jews, our Lord shows Himself even at this crisis the true Judge of mankind.

Lampe remarks: "The sin of the Jews was heavier than that of Pilate.

Pilate was a Gentile, ignorant alike of the Messiah and His distinguishing marks; the Jews had read the prophecies about Him. Pilate could only have heard something about our Lord's great miracles by rumor and report; they were all done under the very eyes of the Jews. Pilate injured Jesus unwillingly and from cowardice; they injured Him from hatred and envy. Finally, Pilate was only the instrument; the Jews were the impelling cause. Thus our Lord pronounces His opinion concerning His judges, an opinion according to which He will one day judge them." The expression "therefore," or literally "on account of this," is rather a difficult one. Markland says it means "*Because* he has not this power from above, which you have, the Jew has the greater sin." Pearce takes much the same view.

Rollock observes, speaking of the inquisition in Spain: "The Papists, when they have caught a Christian who confesses Jesus Christ, after trying him, put him in the hands of the Emperor or King of Spain. Then they wash their hands, as clean of His blood; and who took his life but the King of Spain? But the wrath of God persecutes them, and the blood of the innocent lies on them because they *delivered* them into their hands to be tormented." Hutcheson observes that "the greatest height of impiety is found within the visible Church," where there is most knowledge. When all has been said, we must admit that there is probably something in the verse more deep than we have line to fathom. The two propositions of the verse are both quite intelligible; but the connecting link "therefore" is a hard knot, which has not yet been fairly untied. Augustine paraphrases this sentence thus: "He sins worse who of ill will delivers up the innocent to the

power to be put to death, than does the power itself, if for the fear of another greater power it puts to death the innocent. The Jews delivered Me unto the power, as having ill will against Me; but you are about to exercise your power against Me as being afraid for yourself. Not that a man has a right to put to death an innocent person from fear, but to put to death out of hatred is much more evil than to put to death out of fear." Cyril says much the same. One thing, at any rate, is very clear. There are degrees in sin. All are not equally sinful. The servant who knew his master's will and did it not was more guilty than he who knew it not.

12.—[*From then on…release Him.*] This is a remarkable sentence. It evidently means that from this point of the case Pilate sought more diligently than ever to have our Lord acquitted and set free. Before he wished it; now he really took pains to effect it. Whether this was occasioned by our Lord's manner and demeanor in speaking the words of the preceding verse, or by some meaning which He attached to the words, we cannot tell. But so it was.

How and in what manner Pilate sought to release Jesus we are not told by John. But it is evident that he left our Lord in the hall (where he had been asking Him "Whence are You?") and went out alone to the Jews to tell them he could make nothing of their charge of blasphemy, and wished to let the prisoner go. This must have taken place *outside* the doors, because the Jews scrupulously refused to go *inside*. Moreover, the Jews could not have known of this fresh desire to release Jesus if Pilate had not come forth and communicated it to

them. In this verse, therefore, be it remembered, we have Pilate and the Jews alone outside the palace and our Lord left inside. Pilate proposes to release Him, and the Jews protest against it. Then we shall find Pilate goes in again and brings Jesus out for the last time.

[*But the Jews cried out…speaks against Cæsar*.] In these words we see the Jews stopping Pilate short, in his weak efforts to get our Lord released, by an argument which they well knew would weigh heavily on a Roman mind. They tell him plainly that they will accuse him to Cæsar, the Roman Emperor, as a governor unfriendly to the Imperial interests. "You are no friend to Cæsar if you let off this prisoner. Everyone who sets himself up as a king, be his kingdom what it may, is usurping part of Cæsar's authority, and is a rebel. If you pass over this man's claim to be a king and set Him at liberty, we shall complain of you to Cæsar." This was a settling and clinching argument. Pilate knew well that his own government of Judea would not bear any investigation. He also knew well the cold, suspicious, cruel character of Tiberius Cæsar, the Emperor of Rome, which is specially mentioned by Tacitus and Suetonius, the Roman historians, and he might well dread the result of any appeal to him from the Jews. From this moment, all his hopes of getting rid of this anxious case and letting our Lord go away unharmed were dashed to the ground. He would rather connive at a murder to please the Jews than allow himself to be charged with neglect of Imperial interests and unfriendliness to Cæsar. It is hard to say which was the more wretched and contemptible sight at this point of the history—Pilate trampling on his own conscience to avoid the possible displeasure of

an earthly monarch, or the Jews pretending to care for Cæsar's interests and warning Pilate not to do anything unfriendly to him! It was a melancholy exhibition of cowardice on the one side and duplicity on the other; and the whole result was a foul murder!

13.—[*When Pilate heard that saying, etc.*] The "saying" here refers to the Jews' saying about Cæsar in the preceding verse. When Pilate heard the dreaded name of Cæsar brought up, and found himself threatened with a possible complaint to Rome as a neglecter of Imperial interests, he saw plainly that nothing more could be done and that he must give way to the demands of the Jews and sacrifice an innocent prisoner. He therefore returned to the palace, brought forth Jesus again, and for the first time took his seat on the throne of judgment outside the palace in the courtyard, or paved area adjacent to it. The case was now over. Pilate's weak efforts to deliver an innocent prisoner from unjust accusation were useless. He dared no longer oppose the bloody demands of the Jews. There remained nothing to be done but to take his seat publicly on the throne of judgment and pronounce the sentence.

The word "forth" here, as in the fourth and fifth verses, means literally "outside." Pearce remarks that "this is the fifth time that Pilate came forth and tried to prevail with the Jews that Jesus might not be crucified."

On the "judgment seat," Parkhurst remarks: "In the Roman provinces, justice was administered in the open air, the presiding judge sitting on a tribunal on a raised ground covered with marble."

The “pavement” means the marble, or Mosaic leveled space on which the judge’s chair was placed. Parkhurst says that Roman Governors used sometimes to carry with them the materials to form such a pavement.

The word Gabbatha, according to Hammond, is more Syriac than Hebrew:

“According to the custom of the New Testament, which calls Syriac, at that time the vulgar language of the Jews, Hebrew.” Parkhurst says that the word means literally a raised place, and remarks that John does not mean in this verse that Gabbatha means pavement, but that the same place which in Greek was called “pavement” was called in Hebrew “the raised place.”

14.—[*And it was…Passover.*] This remarkable expression cannot mean that “this was the hour for preparing the Passover meal,” for it was not. It means, “this was the day before the great sabbath of the Passover week, a day well known among the Jews as the preparation, or day of preparing for the Passover sabbath, which was peculiarly a high day.” St. Mark expressly says this in his account of the passion (Mark 15:42). That all the Jewish feasts had their “eves,” or preparation days, is quite clear from Rabbinical writers.
We should observe how accurately and precisely John marks the day of the crucifixion.

[*And about the sixth hour*.] This expression raises a grave difficulty, and one which in every age has perplexed the minds of Bible readers. The difficulty lies in the fact that Mark in his Gospel expressly says "it was the third hour, and they crucified Him" (Mark 15:25), while John in this place says our Lord was only condemned at the sixth hour! Yet both Evangelists wrote by inspiration, and both were incapable of making a mistake. How then are we to reconcile and harmonize these two conflicting statements. The solutions of the difficulty suggested are many and various.

(a) Some say, as the rationalistic writers, that one of the two Evangelists made a blunder, and that one of the accounts therefore is false. This is a solution that will satisfy no reverent-minded Christian. If Bible writers could make blunders like this, there is no such thing as inspiration, and there is an end of all confidence in Scripture as an infallible guide.

(b) Some say, as Theophylact, Beza, Nonnus (in his poetical paraphrase), Tittman, Leigh, Usher (vol. vii. 176), Kuinoel, Bengel, Pearce, Alford, Scott, and Bloomfield, that the discrepancy has probably been caused by an error of the manuscript writers, and that the true reading in St. John should be "third" and not "sixth hour." This, however, is a very shortcut road out of the difficulty, and the immense proportion of old manuscripts are flatly against it.

(c) Some say, as Augustine does in one place, and Bullinger, "that at the third hour the Lord was crucified by the tongues of the Jews, and

at the sixth by the hands of the soldiers." This however, to say the least, is a weak and childish explanation. Moreover, it is open to the grave objection that it would make out our Lord to have been only three hours on the cross, and all that time in the dark and not seen consequently by anyone! At this rate the inscription over His head on the cross would certainly not have been ready by many! "There was darkness over all the land from the sixth to the ninth hour."

(d) Some say that Mark reckoned time on the Jewish plan, by which the hours began to count from the morning, and their seven o'clock answered to our one; while John reckoned time on our English plan, which is the same as the Roman one, and John's sixth hour meant literally about six in the morning. According to this theory Jesus was condemned, in John's account of the passion, at six o'clock in the morning, and crucified, in Mark's account, at nine o'clock.

This explanation is very commonly adopted and is supported by Wordsworth, Lee, and Burgon. But it is open to very serious objections. I see no proof whatever that John reckons time on the Roman and English plan and not on the Jewish plan. The passage in the story of the Samaritan woman, which is commonly quoted as a proof, is no proof at all, and on reflection will cut directly the other say. If the "sixth hour," when Jesus sat on the well (see John 4:6) meant really our English six o'clock in the evening, it makes it impossible to understand how the conversation with the woman, her return to her native village, the telling of the men to come and see Jesus, the coming of the men, the return of the disciples with meat,

could all be brought into the short space of one evening! The thing would have been impossible. Moreover, it is an additional objection that if Jesus was condemned at six o'clock in the morning, there are left three long hours between the condemnation and the crucifixion unaccounted for and unexplained. I am obliged to say that in my judgment this way of explaining the difficulty completely fails.

(e) Some think, as Calvin, Bucer, Gaulter, Brentius, Musculus, Gerhard, Lampe, Hammond, Poole, Jansenius, Burkitt, Hengstenberg, and Ellicott, that John's sixth hour means any time after our nine o'clock in the morning; any time, in fact, within the space begun by the Jewish third hour. They say that the Jews divided the twelve hours of their day into four great portions: from six to nine, from nine to twelve, from twelve to three, and from three to six. They also say that any part of the time after our six in the morning would be called the third hour, and any time after our nine in the morning would be called the sixth hour. And they conclude that both the condemnation and the crucifixion took place soon after nine o'clock—
Mark calling it the third hour because it was near our nine o'clock, and John calling it the sixth hour because it was some time between our nine and twelve.

Grotius says, in Parkhurst, that the third, sixth, and ninth hours, which were most esteemed for prayer and other services, were marked by the sounding of a trumpet, and that after the trumpet sounding at the third hour, the sixth hour was considered to be at

hand. Glass and Lampe support this opinion; and Lampe shows from Maimonides, a famous Jewish writer, that the Jews really divided the day into four quarters. Hengstenberg also remarks that the fourth and fifth hours are never mentioned in the New Testament.
This theory undoubtedly brings the two Evangelists near to one another, if it does not quite reconcile them.

(f) Some think, as Augustine in a second place suggests, and Harmer (quoted in Parkhurst) following him, that the "sixth hour here does not refer to the time of day, but to the preparation of the Passover;" and that the meaning is, "It was the preparation of the Passover, and about the sixth hour after that preparation began." But as that preparation often began very early indeed in the morning, or about our three o'clock, six hours counted from that time would bring us down to Mark's third hour, or our nine o'clock. Lightfoot supports this view, which is certainly very ingenious and would clear away all difficulty. But it may fairly be objected that plain readers would hardly attach such a meaning as Harmer suggests to "the sixth hour."

The difficulty is one of those that will probably never be solved. God has been pleased to leave it in Scripture for the trial of our faith and patience, and we must wait for its solution. Questions of time and date, like this, are often the most puzzling, from our inability to place ourselves in the position of the writer, and from the widely different manner in which measures and points of time are expressed in the language of different nations and in different ages. This very difficulty before us, perhaps, presented no difficulty whatever to the

Apostolic Fathers, such as Polycarp and Clement. Perhaps they possessed some simple clue to its solution of which we know nothing. It is our wisdom to be patient and to believe that it admits of explanation, though we have not eyes to see it.

If I must venture an opinion, I think there is more to be said for the fifth of the six solutions I have given than for any other. But I allow that it is incomplete. In any case, we must in fairness remember that St. John does not say, distinctly and expressly, "it was the sixth hour," but "*about* the sixth hour." This shows that some latitude may be allowed in interpretation, and that the acknowledged discrepancy between John and Mark must not be too far pressed, or made of too much importance. One thing, at all events, appears to me quite inadmissible. We cannot allow ourselves to suppose that Jesus was not crucified till twelve o'clock in the day, when the miraculous darkness began, and that He only hung on the cross three hours.

[*And he said… Behold your King!*] These words must have been spoken in bitter irony, anger, and contempt. "Behold the Man whom you accuse of setting Himself up as a King and being an enemy to Cæsar! Behold this bleeding, weak, humble, meek, helpless prisoner, this wretched, harmless Person you pretend to be afraid of and want me to crucify! You wish your own King to be put to death? This, I am to understand, is what you desire. Look at Him, and say!"

15.—[*But they cried…crucify Him!*] As on former occasions, Pilate's public appeal had not the slightest effect on the Jews. Once more

they raised their fierce, relentless, obstinate cry and demanded the Prisoner's death by crucifixion. Nothing but His blood would satisfy them. The horrible excesses of the Parisian mob, during the infamous Reign of Terror in the first French revolution, give us some faint idea of the savage spirit that can run through a crowd, by a kind of infection, when their hatred is stirred up against an individual.
The Greek word rendered "away with him" is literally "take him away," and often means "take him away to execution or destruction." Henry remarks that this public rejection of Christ fulfilled two prophecies of Isaiah: "Him whom the nation abhors" (Isa. 49:7) and "We hid as it were our faces from Him" (Isa. 53:3).

[*Pilate said…crucify your King?*] For the last time Pilate put the question to the Jews and gave them a last chance of relenting. In bitter irony he asked, "Shall I then really crucify your own King? Shall I, a Roman, order a King of the Jews to be put to an ignominious death? Is this your wish and desire?"

[The chief priests…no king but Cæsar.] These memorable words inflicted indelible disgrace on the leaders of the Jews, and stamped the Jews forever as a fallen, blinded, God-forsaking, God-forsaken, and apostate nation. They, who at one time used to say "The Lord God is our King," renounced the faith of their forefathers and publicly declared that Cæsar was their king, and not God. They stultified themselves and gave the lie to their own boasted declaration of independence of foreign powers. Had they not said themselves, "We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to

any man"? (John 8:33.) Had they not tried to entrap our Lord into saying something in favor of Cæsar, that they might damage His reputation? "Is it lawful to give tribute to Cæsar?" (Matt. 20:17.) And now, indeed, they shout out, "We have no king but Cæsar!" Above all they madly proclaimed to the world, though they knew it not, that "the scepter had departed from Judah" and that Messiah must have come. (Gen. 49:10.) Truly the scepter had departed when chief priests could say "We have no king but Cæsar." Cyril remarks that "while other nations all over the world cling tenaciously to their own religion and honor those whom they call gods and will not forsake them, Israel revolted from God and cast off His authority and claimed Cæsar as their king. Justly therefore they were delivered over into Cæsar's hands and endured the heaviest calamities." Henry remarks: "They would have no king but Cæsar, and never have they had any other to this day 'but have been many days without a king and without a prince' (Hos. 3:4), that is, without any of their own; and the kings of the nations have ruled over them. Since they will have no king but Cæsar, so shall their doom be; they themselves have decided it." Lampe compares the conduct of the priests in this place to that of the trees in Jotham's parable, who said to the bramble, "Come and reign over us" (Jud. 9:14). The very men who ought to have taught the people to hope for the Messiah here publicly renounce the Messiah's kingdom, and declare themselves contented with Cæsar!

I cannot but think that Pilate's public washing of his hands before the people, and saying "I am innocent of the blood of this just

person" (Matt. 27:24), must come in at this part of St. John's narrative.

16.—[Then he delivered, etc.] This verse describes the conclusion of the most unjust trial of our blessed Lord, when "in His humiliation, His judgment was taken away" (Acts 8:33). All was now over. The last appeal had been made to the Jews, and for the last time they had rejected it. What happened is described by Luke but passed over by John. "Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required" (Luke 23:24). He then formally delivered over our Lord into the hands of the chief priests, and formally gave them permission to put Him to death by crucifixion. These hardened and wicked men at once "took Jesus and led Him away." Of course, we must not suppose that the chief priests *themselves* laid hands on our Lord, and with their own hands led Him away. No doubt the Roman soldiers of Pilate were the executioners, and a centurion had charge of all the bloody transaction of the execution. But inasmuch as the soldiers only carried out the wishes of the priests, the priests were the responsible persons and prime agents in this judicial murder. Luke says, "He delivered Jesus to their *will*" (Luke 23.25). Let us remember, when we read that word "delivered," that it is expressly written, He was "delivered for our offenses," and that God "spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all" (Rom. 4:25, 8:30). Christ was delivered to death that we might be delivered from death and set free. Here is substitution.

Let us remember, as we read the word "led," that Isaiah expressly

foretold that Messiah should be brought, or led, as a Lamb to the slaughter" (Isa. 53:7, Acts 8:32).

Alford thinks it possible that at this point the scourging of our Lord was repeated. But I see no satisfactory proof of this. Considering what a Roman scourging was, it is not probable that anybody could have endured it twice in one day.

Let us note that according to the narrative of John there seems no delay between the condemnation of our Lord and His crucifixion. He went at once from Gabbatha to Golgotha, and from the judgment to execution. At this rate, the theory supported by Burgon and others—that there was a delay of three hours, between six o'clock and nine, after condemnation—is completely overthrown. If we looked at Matthew and Mark alone, we might fancy that Pilate saw nothing more of our Lord after He had been scourged and mocked by the soldiers. But it appears plain to me, if we carefully compare John's account with that of Matthew and Mark, that they have not recorded our Lord's last appearance before Pilate, which John relates. Nor can I feel surprised at this, when I remember that throughout John's Gospel he supplies what the other evangelists have omitted. In particular, he supplies our Lord's examination before Annas and His private conversation with Pilate, when the Jews would not enter Pilate's palace, and entirely omits the examination before Caiaphas. So likewise, I think he supplies the last scene in our Lord's trial, which Matthew and Mark entirely omit, for some wise reason. Holding this theory, which to me seems the most natural account of

the order of things, I cannot see any room for an interval of time between the final condemnation and the crucifixion. Henry remarks with much shrewdness: “Judgment was not sooner pronounced than with all possible expedition the prosecutors, having gained their point, resolved to lose no time, lest Pilate should change his mind and order a reprieve, and also lest there should be an uproar among the people.”

How St. John became acquainted with all the details of our Lord’s trial and the private conversations between Him and Pilate, is a question which none can answer satisfactorily who do not hold the doctrine of plenary inspiration. That John was in and about the palace of the high priest and not far from our Lord all the time, from the seizure in Gethsemane up to His death, we may well believe; but that he could have overheard the private conversations between Jesus and Pilate seems simply impossible. How then could he know anything about them and write them down? There is but one answer. He wrote them by inspiration of the Holy Ghost. Why the common people, who always “heard Jesus gladly,” permitted our Lord’s crucifixion so easily and made no resistance, is at first sight rather hard to understand. The Galileans, who would have made Jesus King at one time, were of course at Jerusalem in great numbers on account of the Passover feast. The triumphal entry into Jerusalem, when an immense multitude cried “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the King who comes!” had happened only a few days before. The priests themselves were afraid of an uproar among the “people.” Yet there is not a symptom of any opposition to the judicial

murder that was arranged and carried into execution. How as this?

In reply, we must probably take into account the following considerations. (1) There was a superstitious reverence for the priests among all Jews. The mere fact that the high priests accused Jesus would have immense weight. (2) The fear of the Roman garrison kept the people back. (3) The followers and friends of Jesus were almost entirely the poor and lower orders. (4) All multitudes are fickle and capricious.

JOHN 19:17-27

So they took Jesus, and carrying his own cross he went out to the place called "The Place of the Skull" (called in Aramaic Golgotha). There they crucified him along with two other men, one on each side, with Jesus in the middle. Pilate also had a notice written and fastened to the cross, which read "Jesus the Nazarene, the king of the Jews." Thus many of the Jewish residents of Jerusalem read this notice, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the notice was written in Aramaic, Latin, and Greek. Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The king of the Jews,' but rather, 'This man said, I am king of the Jews.'" Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written."

Now when the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and made four shares, one for each soldier, and the tunic remained. (Now the tunic was seamless, woven from top to bottom as a single

piece.) So the soldiers said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but throw dice to see who will get it." This took place to fulfill the scripture that says, "They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they threw dice." So the soldiers did these things.

Now standing beside Jesus' cross were his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. So when Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing there, he said to his mother, "Woman, look, here is your son!" He then said to his disciple, "Look, here is your mother!" From that very time the disciple took her into his own home.

He that can read a passage like this without a deep sense of man's debt to Christ, must have a very cold, or a very thoughtless heart. Great must be the love of the Lord Jesus to sinners, when He could voluntarily endure such sufferings for their salvation. Great must be the sinfulness of sin, when such an amount of vicarious suffering was needed in order to provide redemption.

We should observe, first, in this passage, ***how our Lord had to bear His CROSS when He went forth from the city to Golgotha.***

We need not doubt that there was a deep meaning in all this circumstance. For one thing, it was part of that depth of humiliation to which our Lord submitted as our substitute. One portion of the punishment imposed on the vilest criminals, was that they should carry their own cross when they went to execution; and this portion

was laid upon our Lord. In the fullest sense He was reckoned a sinner, and counted a curse for our sakes. For another thing, it was a fulfillment of the great type of the sin-offering of the Mosaic law. It is written, that "The bull and goat given as *sin offerings*, whose blood Aaron brought into the Most Holy Place to make atonement for Israel, will be carried *outside the camp* to be burned." (Lev. 16:27.) Little did the blinded Jews imagine, when they madly hounded on the Romans to crucify Jesus outside the gates, that they were unconsciously perfecting the mightiest sin-offering that was ever seen. It is written, "So also Jesus suffered and died *outside* the city gates in order to make his people holy by shedding his own blood." (Heb. 13:12.)

The practical lesson which all true Christians should gather from the fact before us, is one that should be kept in continual remembrance. Like our Master, we must be content to go forth "outside the camp," bearing His reproach. We must come out from the world and be separate, and be willing, if need be, to stand alone. Like our Master, we must be willing to take up our cross daily, and to be persecuted both for our doctrine and our practice. Well would it be for the Church if there was more of the true cross to be seen among Christians! To wear material crosses as an ornament, to place material crosses on churches and tombs, all this is cheap and easy work, and entails no trouble. But to have Christ's cross in our hearts, to carry Christ's cross in our daily walk, to know the fellowship of His sufferings, to be made conformable to His death, to have crucified affections, and live crucified lives—all this needs self-denial; and

Christians of this stamp are few and far between. Yet, this, we may be sure, is the only cross-bearing and cross-carrying that does good in the world. The times require less of the cross outwardly and more of the cross within.

We should observe, secondly, in this passage, ***how our Lord was crucified as a KING.*** The title placed over our Lord's head made this plain and unmistakable. The reader of Greek, or Latin, or Hebrew, could not fail to see that He who hung on the central cross of the three on Golgotha, had a royal title over His head. The overruling hand of God so ordered matters, that the strong will of Pilate overrode for once the wishes of the malicious Jews. In spite of the chief priests, our Lord was crucified as "the King of the Jews."

It was fit and right that so it should be. Even before our Lord was born, the angel Gabriel declared to the Virgin Mary, "The Lord God shall give unto Him the *throne* of His father David—and He shall *reign* over the house of Jacob forever; and of His *kingdom* there shall be no end." (Luke 1:32, 33.) Almost as soon as He was born, there came wise men from the East, saying, "Where is He that is born *King* of the Jews?" (Matt. 2:2.) The very week before the crucifixion, the multitude who accompanied our Lord at His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, had cried, "Blessed is the *King* of Israel who comes in the name of the Lord." (John 12:13.) The current belief of all godly Jews was, that when Messiah, the Son of David came, He would come as a King. A kingdom of heaven and a kingdom of God was continually proclaimed by our Lord throughout His ministry. A King indeed He

was, as He told Pilate, of a kingdom utterly unlike the kingdoms of this world, but for all that a true King of a true kingdom, and a Ruler of true subjects. As such He was born. As such He lived. As such He was crucified. And as such He will come again, and reign over the whole earth, King of kings and Lord of lords.

Let us take care that we ourselves know Christ as our King, and that His kingdom is set up within our hearts. *They only will find Him their Savior at the last day, who have obeyed Him as King in this world.* Let us cheerfully pay Him that tribute of faith, and love, and obedience, which He prizes far above gold. Above all, let us never be afraid to own ourselves His faithful subjects, soldiers, servants and followers, however much He may be despised by the world. A day will soon come when the despised Nazarene who hung on the cross, shall take to Himself His great power and reign, and put down every enemy under His feet. The kingdoms of this world, as Daniel foretold, shall be swept aside, and become the kingdom of our God and of His Christ. And at last every knee shall bow to Him, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

We should observe, lastly, in these verses, ***how tenderly our Lord took thought for Mary, His mother.*** We are told that even in the dreadful agonies of body and mind which our Lord endured, He did not forget her of whom He was born. He mercifully remembered her desolate condition, and the crushing effect of the sorrowful sight before her. He knew that, holy as she was, she was only a woman, and that, as a woman, she must deeply feel the death

of such a Son. He therefore commended her to the protection of His best-loved and best-loving disciple, in brief and touching words—"Woman," He said, "behold your son! Then He said to the disciple, Behold your mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home."

We surely need no stronger proof than we have here, that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was never meant to be honored as divine, or to be prayed to, worshiped, and trusted in, as the friend and patroness of sinners. Common sense points out that she who needed the care and protection of another, was never likely to help men and women to heaven, or to be in any sense a mediator between God and man! It is not too much to say, however painful the assertion, that of all the inventions of the Church of Rome, there never was one more utterly devoid of foundation, both in Scripture and reason, than the doctrine of Mary-worship.

Let us turn from points of controversy to a subject of far more practical importance. Let us take comfort in the thought that we have in Jesus a Savior of matchless tenderness, matchless sympathy, matchless concern for the condition of His believing people. Let us never forget His words, "Whoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother." (Mark 3:35.) The heart that even on the cross felt for Mary, is a heart that never changes. Jesus never forgets any who love Him, and even in their worst estate remembers their need. No wonder that Peter says, "Casting all your care upon Him; for He cares for you." (1 Pet. 5:7.)

Technical Notes:

17. And he, bearing his cross, went forth into a place called *the place* of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha, 18. where they crucified him, and two others with him, one on either side, and Jesus in the center. 19. And Pilate wrote a title and put *it* on the cross. And the writing was, JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS.20. Then many of the Jews read this title, for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city; and it was written in Hebrew, *and* Greek, *and* Latin. 21. Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, Do not write, The King of the Jews, but that he said, I am King of the Jews. 22. Pilate answered, What I have written I have written. 23. Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments and made four parts, to each soldier a part, and also *his* coat. Now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout. 24. They said therefore among themselves, Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be, that the scripture might be fulfilled which says, They divided my raiment among them, and for my clothing they cast lots. Therefore the soldiers did these things. 25. Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the *wife* of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 26. When Jesus therefore saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing by, he said to his mother, Woman, behold your son! 27. Then he said to the

disciple, Behold your mother! And from that hour that disciple took her to his own *home*.

17.—[*And He, bearing His cross.*] It was the Roman custom to compel criminals, sentenced to crucifixion, to carry their own cross. Our Lord was thus treated like the vilest felon. "Furcifer," was the Latin name of ignominy and contempt given to the worst criminals. It means, literally, "cross-bearer."

Besser observes that our Lord, when a workman in the carpenter's shop at Nazareth, had willingly carried pieces of timber in the service of His foster-father. Here, with no less cheerfulness, He bears to Golgotha the timber of the cross, in order to raise the altar on which He is to be sacrificed and to do the will of His Father in heaven. Whether the "cross" that our Lord bore was a straight piece of timber with another transverse piece fixed across it for the hands of the criminal to be nailed to, or whether it was a tree with two forked arms, admits perhaps of some little doubt. The almost universal tradition of the Churches is that it was the former, a cross made of two pieces. Yet it is worth remembering that it was very common to crucify on a tree such as I have described, that the Latin word for "cross-bearer" means literally "forked-tree-bearer," and that our Bible translators have four times spoken of the wood on which our Lord was crucified as "the tree." (Acts 5:30; 10:39;

13:29; 1 Peter 2:24.) The matter therefore is not quite so clear as some may think, though of course it is one of no consequence. The

cross of two pieces at right angles is certainly more picturesque than a common tree shaped like the letter Y, and the habitual use of the cross in Christian art and the general tradition of ecclesiastical history have combined to make most people regard the question as a settled one. Yet the undeniable use of forked trees in crucifying criminals, and the equally undeniable difficulty of carrying a cross of two transverse pieces compared with a forked tree, are points that really ought not to be overlooked. The matter, after all, is one of pure conjecture. But, to say the least, it is quite a disputable point whether the cross with which Christendom is so familiar (on the gable ends of churches, on tombs, in painted windows, in crucifixes, or in the simple ornamental form which ladies are so fond of wearing), the cross of two transverse pieces at right angles, is really and truly the kind of cross on which Christ was crucified! There is no proof positive that the whole of Christendom is not mistaken. Of course, if the cross itself had been preserved and found, it would settle the dispute. But there is not the slightest reason to suppose that it was preserved or treated with any respect either by Jews, Romans, or disciples. The famous story of the "discovery or invention of the cross" by the Empress Helena in 326 A. D. is a mere apocryphal legend invented by man, and deserves no more attention than the many pretended pieces of the true cross which are exhibited in Romish churches as sacred relics.

Ambrose says, quaintly enough, that the form of the cross is that of a sword with the point downward—above is the hilt toward heaven, as if in the hand of God, and below is the point toward earth, as if thrust through the head of the old serpent the devil.

One thing only is very certain. Whatever was the shape of the cross on which Jesus was crucified, it could not have been the huge, tall, heavy thing which painters and sculptors have continually represented it to be. To suppose, for instance, that any man could carry such an enormous weight of timber, as the cross is made to be in Rubens' famous picture of the "Descent from the Cross," is preposterous and absurd. A cross was manifestly not a larger thing than could be lifted and borne on the shoulders of one person. Some get over the difficulty by maintaining the theory that the transverse piece was the only part of the cross which the criminal carried. But there is no sufficient evidence that this was the case.

It is noteworthy that John is the only Evangelist who says that our Lord bore His own cross. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all say that Simon the Cyrenian was compelled to bear it. The explanation is probably this. Our Lord bore the cross for a short part of the way, from the judgment-seat to Golgotha. Weakness and physical exhaustion, after all the mental and bodily suffering of the last night, rendered it impossible for Him to carry it all the way. Just at the moment when His strength failed, perhaps at the city gate, the soldiers saw Simon coming into the city and pressed him into the service. As on other occasions, John records a fact which the other Evangelists for wise reasons passed over. It is interesting to remember that the circumstance is one which John must have seen in all probability with his own eyes.

That our blessed Lord, who had a body like our own and not a body

of superhuman vigor, should have been unable to carry the cross more than a little way need not surprise us at all, if we consider all that He had gone through to try His physical strength and tax His nervous system to the uttermost in the eighteen hours preceding His crucifixion. It is hardly necessary to remark that the type of Isaac—bearing the wood for the sacrifice on Moriah in which he himself was to be the victim—was here fulfilled by our Lord. It is, moreover, a curious circumstance, mentioned by Bishop Pearson, that one Jewish commentator of Gen. 22:6 speaks of Isaac carrying the wood for the burnt offering "as a man carries his cross upon his shoulders."

[*Went forth.*] This expression shows clearly that our Lord went out of the city to be crucified. He was condemned in the open air; and "went forth" cannot mean out of Pilate's house, but went outside of Jerusalem, without the gates. Trifling as this incident may seem to a careless reader, it was a striking fulfillment of one of the great types of the Mosaic law. The sin offering on the great day of atonement was to be carried forth "without the camp" (Lev. 16:27). Our Lord came to be the true sin offering, to give His soul an offering for our sins. Therefore it was divinely overruled of God that, in order to fulfill the type perfectly, He should suffer outside the city. (See also Lev. 6:12-21.) St. Paul specially refers to this when he tells the Hebrew Christians, who were familiar with the law of Moses, that "Jesus suffered without the gate" (Heb. 13:12). The minutest details of our Lord's passion have a deep meaning.

[Into a place…skull…Golgotha.] The precise position of this place is

not known certainly and can only be conjectured. We only know (from verse twenty) that it was “nigh to the city,” that it was “outside” the walls of Jerusalem at the time of our Lord’s crucifixion, and that it was near some public road, as there is mention in one Gospel of them “that passed by” (Matt. 27:39). So many changes have taken place during the long period of 1800 years in the boundary walls and the soil of Jerusalem, that no wise man will speak positively as to the exact whereabouts of Golgotha at this day. Though outside the walls 1800 years ago, it is far from unlikely that it is within the walls at this time.

(*a*) Some maintain, as most probable, that Golgotha was a place between the then existing wall of Jerusalem and the descent into the valley of the Kidron on the east side of the city, near the road leading to Bethany. In this case the cross must have been in full view of anyone standing on the tower of Antonia, in the temple courts, on the Mount of Olives, or upon the eastern wall of the city. If this is correct, the crucifixion might have been seen by hundreds of thousands of people at once with perfect ease; and from the sufferer being lifted up, as it were, in the air, must have been an event of extraordinary publicity. According to the advocates of this theory, the traditional site now assigned to the Holy Sepulcher is the true one.

(*b*) Others, however, who have carefully examined the topography of Jerusalem and are extremely likely to be wise and impartial judges, are decidedly of the opinion that Golgotha was on the north side of

Jerusalem near the Damascus gate, and they repudiate altogether the site commonly assigned to the holy sepulcher at the present time. An old and valued friend, who has walked repeatedly over this "debatable land," says, "I think the crucifixion took place on the north side of the city, near the present Damascus gate, on a platform of rock just above a valley which runs on in endless tombs nearly two miles. Beneath this platform is a garden of olives still, full of excavations. In one of these, I think, was the sepulcher."

(*c*) Others, and among them another friend who has traveled much in Palestine and published the results of his travels, incline to think that Golgotha was on the west side of Jerusalem near the Jaffa gate. The friend I now refer to says, in a letter to me on this subject, "When I was first in Jerusalem in 1857, I visited some extraordinary fissures and cracks in the rocks west of the city, reminding me of the expression, *the rocks rent*. (Matt. 27:51.) These fissures are now all filled up." Much, he adds, depends on the question whether Pilate resided in the tower of Antonia and had his judgment hall there, or in the tower of Hippicus. This, however, we have no means of ascertaining.

In the face of such conflicting opinions, I dare not speak positively, and I must leave my readers to judge for themselves. The question is one about which no one, it is clear, has any right to be heard unless he has actually seen Jerusalem.

Why the place was called "the place of a skull" we are not told and are left entirely to conjecture.

(*a*) Some think, as Gualter, Bullinger, Musculus, Gerhard, Burgon, Alford, Besser, and others, that the verse points to the bones, skeletons, and skulls of executed criminals that were lying about on Golgotha as the common place of execution. This theory, however, is open to the grave objection that it is most unlikely that dead men's bones would be left lying above ground so near the city when, according to the Mosaic law, they made any Jew unclean who touched them. The Pharisees, with their excessive scrupulosity about externals, were not likely to tolerate such a source of defilement close to the holy city! Moreover, John expressly says that in the place where Jesus was crucified "there was a garden" (John 19:41). This does not look like a place where dead men's bones and the skulls of criminals would be left lying about! The very mention of this garden would suggest the idea that the place was not ordinarily used for execution, and that the Pharisees chose it only for its singular publicity. If it was on the east side, we can well believe that they felt a diabolical pleasure in tormenting our Lord to the last by making Him die with the temple, the Mount of Olives, and His favorite Gethsemane before His eyes.

(*b*) Some think, as Lampe, Ellicott, and others, that the name "place of a skull" arose from the shape of the small rising ground, like a skull, on which the cross was fixed. That such small elevations of limestone rock are to be found in that vicinity is asserted by some travelers. To me there seems more probability in this theory than in the other. The name "Calvary," we should remember, is never used in

the Greek; and the marginal reading in Luke 23:33, “the place of a scull,” ought certainly to be in the text.

One thing alone is very certain. There is not the slightest authority for the common idea that the place where our Lord was crucified was a hill or mountain. The common expression in hymns and religious poetry, “Mount Calvary,” is utterly incorrect and unwarrantable; and the favorite antithesis, or comparison between Mount Sinai and Mount Calvary, is so completely destitute of any Scriptural basis that it is almost profane! Anything more unlike, as a matter of fact, than Sinai and Golgotha cannot be conceived.

Origen, Cyprian, Epiphanius, Augustine, Jerome, and Theophylact all mention an old tradition, that Golgotha was the place where the first Adam, our forefather, was buried, and that the second Adam was buried near the first! This of course is a ridiculous, lying fable, as Noah’s flood must have swept away all certainty about Adam’s grave.

18.—[*Where they crucified Him.*] This famous mode of execution is so well known to every one that little need be said of it. The common mode of inflicting it, in all probability, was to strip the criminal, lay him on the cross on his back, nail his hands to the two extremities of the crosspiece (or fork of the cross), nail his feet to the upright piece (or principal stem of the cross), raise the cross on end and drop it into a hole prepared for it, then to leave the sufferer to a lingering and painful death. It was a death that combined the maximum of pain with the least immediate destruction of life. The agony of having nails driven through parts so full of nerves and sinews as the hands and feet must have been intense. Yet wounds of the hands and feet

are not mortal and do not injure any great leading blood-vessel. Hence a crucified person, even in an eastern climate exposed to the sun, might live two or three days enduing extreme pain without being relieved by death, if he was naturally a very strong man and in vigorous health. This is what we must remember our blessed Lord went through when we read “they crucified Him.” To a sensitive, delicate-minded person, it is hard to imagine any capital punishment more distressing. This is what Jesus endured willingly for us sinners. Hanging, as it were, between earth and heaven, He exactly fulfilled the type of the brazen serpent, which Moses lifted up in the wilderness. (John 3:14.)

Whether the person crucified was bound to the cross with ropes (to prevent the possibility of his breaking off from the nails in convulsive struggling), was stripped completely naked or had a cloth round His loins, had a separate nail in each foot or one nail driven through both feet, are disputed points which we have no means of settling. Some think, following Irenæus, Tertullian, and Justin Martyr, that there was a kind of seat or projection in the middle of the stem of the cross, to bear up the weight of the body, and also a place for the feet to rest on. Jeremy Taylor thinks, in support of this view, that the body of a crucified person could not rest only on the four wounds of hands and feet. Bishop Pearson also quotes a passage from Seneca, which seems to favor the idea. As to the nails, Nonnus, and Gregory Nazianzen say there were only three, and that one was driven through both feet at once. Cyprian says there were four. But these are matters about which we really know nothing, and it is useless to guess and

speculate about them. Of one thing, however, we may be very sure. The feet of a crucified person were much nearer the ground than is commonly supposed, and very likely not more than a foot or two from the earth. In this, as in other points, most pictures of the crucifixion are grossly incorrect, and the cross is made out to be a piece of timber so long and so thick that no one mortal man could ever have carried it. Concerning the precise amount of physical suffering and the precise effect on the human body in a crucifixion, the following medical account by a German physician named Richter, quoted in Smith's Dictionary of the Bible, can hardly fail to interest a Bible reader. He says, (1) "The unnatural position and violent tension of the body caused a painful sensation from the least motion. (2) The nails being driven through parts of the hands and feet that are full of nerves and tendons, and yet at a distance from the heart, created the most exquisite anguish. (3) The exposure of so many wounds and lacerations brought on inflammation, which tended to become gangrene, and every moment increased the poignancy of suffering. (4) In the distended parts of the body more blood flowed through the arteries than could be carried back into the veins, and hence too much blood found its way from aorta into the head and stomach, and the blood vessels of the heart became pressed and swollen. The general obstruction of circulation caused an internal excitement, exertion, and anxiety more intolerable than death itself. (5) There was the inexpressible misery of gradually increasing and lingering anguish. (6) To all this we may add burning and raging thirst." (Smith's Dictionary of the Bible: article, Crucifixion.) On the whole subject of the cross and the sufferings

connected with crucifixion, “Lipsius de Cruce” (published in 1595) is a most exhaustive book.

When we remember, beside all this, that our Lord’s head was crowned with thorns, His back torn with savage scourging, and His whole system weighed down by the mental and bodily agony of the sleepless night following the Lord’s Supper, we may have some faint idea of the intensity of His sufferings.

When we read “they” crucified, we are left to conjecture who it can refer to. It cannot be the Jews, because they could only stand by and superintend at the most, as the Roman soldiers would certainly not let the punishment be inflicted by any other hands than their own. It must either be the four soldiers who were the executioners, or else it must be interpreted generally after the manner of other places, for “He was crucified.” Thus, in John 16:2, “*They* shall put you out of the synagogues.” In that sentence “they” cannot refer to any person in particular. The simplest plan is to refer it generally to the whole party —Jews and Gentiles together.

[*And two others with Him, etc.*] We know from the other Gospels that these other two were malefactors and thieves. The object of crucifying our Lord between them is plain. It was intended as a last indignity and injury. It was a public declaration that He was counted no better than the vilest criminals.

Little as our Lord’s enemies meant it, this very crucifixion between

two thieves did two great things. One was that it precisely fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy about Messiah: "He was numbered with the transgressors" (Isa. 53:12). The other was that it gave our Lord the opportunity of working one more mighty miracle, even in His last hours—the miracle of converting the penitent thief, forgiving his sins, and opening paradise to him. If His enemies had been content to crucify Him alone, this last trophy could not have been won and our Lord's power over sin and the devil would not have been exhibited. So easy is it for God to bring good out of evil and to make the malice of His enemies work round to His praise. Augustine remarks that three very different persons hung together on the three crosses on Golgotha. One was the Savior of sinners. One was a sinner about to be saved. One was a sinner about to be damned. (On Psa. 34.)

Cyril sees in the two malefactors a type of the Jewish and Gentile Churches: the one rejected, impenitent, and lost; the other believing at the eleventh hour, and saved.

Many pious commentators remark that even on the cross our Lord gave an emblem of His kingly power. On His right hand was a saved soul whom He admits into His kingdom; on His left hand, a lost soul whom He leaves to reap the fruit of his own ways. There was right and left on the cross, even as there will be right and left, saved and unsaved, when He sits on the judgment-seat wearing the crown at the last day. It only remains to add that the cruel punishment of crucifixion was formally abolished by the Emperor Constantine towards the end of his reign. It is an awful historical fact that when

Jerusalem was taken by Titus, he crucified so many Jews around the city that Josephus says that space and room failed for crosses, and crosses could not be found in sufficient number for bodies! Reland well remarks, "They who had nothing but 'crucify' in their mouths were therewith paid home in their bodies."

19.—[*And Pilate wrote a title…cross.*] To fix a board with an inscription over the head of the person crucified, appears to have been a well-known custom, and is mentioned as such by classical writers. Some say it was a board covered with white gypsum with letters of black, and others say that the letters were red. Pilate therefore did nothing unusual. In our Lord's case it served two ends, whether Pilate meant them or not. For one thing, it proclaimed to all passers-by and all who saw the crucifixion, that Jesus did really suffer, that He was not at the last moment released and another punished in His stead, and that He was not taken away by miraculous interference from His enemies' hands. For another thing, it drew attention of all witnesses and passers-by to our Lord, and made it quite certain on which of the three crosses He hung. Without this, a person looking at three naked figures hanging on their crosses, from a little distance off, might well have doubted which of the three was Jesus. The title made it plain. That our Lord was regarded as no common everyday criminal, and that it was thought right to call special attention to Him, is evident from this title being put on His cross.

[Jesus… Nazareth… King… Jews.] Pilate's reasons for choosing to

place this description of our Lord over His cross, we are left to conjecture. My own decided opinion is that he worded the title as he did in anger and vexation, and with an intention to annoy and insult the Jews. He publicly held up to scorn their King, as a poor criminal from a mean village in Galilee, a fitting *king* for such a people! Whatever his motive may have been, it was curiously overruled by God, that even on the cross our Lord should be styled a "king." He came to be a King, and as a King He lived and suffered and died, though not acknowledged and honored by His subjects. "Nazarene" identified our Lord as the well-known Teacher from Galilee, who for three years had stirred the Jewish mind. "King" identified Him as the Person accused by the chief priests for claiming a kingdom, and formally rejected by them on the plea that they had no king but Cæsar. It was a very full and significant title.

A careful reader of the Gospels will not fail to observe that each Gospel writer gives this title in a slightly different form, and that there are in fact four versions of it. The question naturally arises, Which is correct? The versions do not at all contradict one another, but that of Mark, "the King of the Jews," is much shorter than that of John. No two, in a word, are exactly alike. In reply, it is fair to remind the reader that the inscription was written in three languages, and that it is far from unlikely that it was in one form in one language and in another form in a different language. The one common point in all the four versions is "the King of the Jews," and this was probably the only point that Mark, in his brief and condensed history, was taught to record. John gives the whole

inscription, because he alone narrates the dispute between the priests and Pilate about it. If I may venture a conjecture, I should guess that Mark gives the Latin inscription, Luke the Greek, and Matthew and John the Hebrew one. But why it seemed good to the Holy Ghost that Matthew should omit the expression "of Nazareth," which John mentions, I do not pretend to say. It is precisely one of those things in which it is wisest to confess our ignorance and to be willing to wait for more light. St. John alone records that Pilate "wrote" and "put" on the cross this title. We are not obliged to suppose that he did both with his own hands. The writing was almost certainly his own act. Putting the title on the cross he probably left to the soldiers.

The common pictures of the crucifixion, showing a kind of scroll or parchment over our Lord's head on the cross, are most probably in this, as in other details, most incorrect representations of the real facts. Moreover, most painters seem to forget that it was written three times over, being in three languages!

20.—[*Then many of the Jews read, etc.*] This seems to be one of John's parenthetical comments. It also reads like the report of an eye-witness, and this we know John was. He stood by and saw all that happened. It is as though he said, "I can testify that many of the Jews saw and read this title; some as they passed along the road which ran by, and some from the walls of the city, for the place was near the walls. It was an inscription, moreover, so contrived that hardly anyone in Jerusalem could fail to understand it, for it was

written in the three languages most likely to be known—in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin."

It is almost needless to say that the title was in Hebrew, because every Jew would know it, Hebrew being the oldest language in the world and the language of the Old Testament; in Greek, because this was the language most known in all eastern countries and the language of all literary and educated people; in Latin, because this was the language of the Romans, the ruling nation in the world. The Roman soldiers would all understand the Latin, the Greek proselytes and Hellenistic Jews would all understand the Greek, and the pure Jews from Galilee and Judea, and every part of the earth, assembled for the Passover, would all understand the Hebrew. All would go away to spread the tidings that one Jesus, the King of the Jews, had been put to death by crucifixion at the Passover feast. Henry remarks: "In the Hebrew the oracles of God were recorded, in Greek the learning of the philosophers, and in Latin the laws of the Empire. In each of these languages Christ is proclaimed King, in whom are hid all the treasures of revelation, wisdom, and power."

To this very day it is certain that no three languages can be more useful for a Christian minister to know, if he would be familiar with his Bible, than Hebrew, Greek, and Latin.

The last day alone, perhaps, will disclose the effect this title had on those who read it. When the priests and their companions saw it, they mocked and scoffed. "King indeed! Let Christ the King of Israel descend from the cross, and we will believe." (Mark 15:32.) But there

was one man who saw the title probably with very different eyes. The penitent thief perhaps grasped at the word "King," and believed. Who can tell that this was not the root of his cry, "Lord remember me, when You come into *Your kingdom*" (Luke 23:42). Perhaps Pilate's title helped to save a soul! Brentius remarks that when we think of the cross of Christ and the title on it, which so many read, we should remember there was another handwriting nailed to that cross spiritually, which no mortal could read. Jesus Christ, by His vicarious death for us, "Blotted out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross" (Col. 2:14).

21.—[*Then the chief priests said, etc.*] This verse brings out the feeling which the sight of Pilate's title excited in the minds of the chief priests. They were annoyed and angry. They did not like the idea of this crucified criminal being publicly declared "the King of the Jews." They probably detected the latent scorn and irony which guided Pilate's hands and lay at the bottom of his mind. They did not like so public an announcement that they had crucified their own King, and wanted "no King but Cæsar." They were vexed at the implied reflection on themselves. Besides this, they were probably uncomfortable in conscience. Hardened and wicked as they were, they had, many of them we may be sure, a secret conviction they vainly tried to keep down—that they were doing a wrong thing, and a thing which by-and-by they would find it hard to defend either to themselves or others. Hence they tried to get Pilate to alter the title and to make it appear that our Lord was only a pretended King—an

impostor who “said that He was King.” This, they doubtless thought, would shift some of the guilt off their shoulders and make it appear that our Lord was crucified for usurping a title to which He was legally proved to have no claim.

When and where the chief priests said this to Pilate does not appear. It must either have been when the whole party was leaving the judgment-seat for Golgotha, or after our Lord was nailed to the tree, or while the soldiers were nailing Him. Looking at St. John’s account, one might fancy that the centurion sent word to Pilate that the prisoner was being nailed to the cross, and asked for a title to put over His head before the cross was reared. If we do not suppose this, we must believe that Pilate actually accompanied the party outside the walls and was only at a little distance off during the last horrible preparations. In that case he might easily write a title, and the priests might easily be standing by. The difficulty is to understand where the parties could be when the priests said “Do not write;” and it is one which must be left unsettled. It seems, however, certain that once put over our Lord’s head, the title was not expected to be taken down; and the request was not to alter it, after being put up, but to write a different title before it was put up. Bengel observes that this is the only place in St. John’s Gospel where the chief priests are called “the chief priests *of the Jews*.” He thinks it is intended to mark emphatically the bitter hatred with which the *priests* of the Jews regarded the *King* of the Jews.

We may well believe that even the wickedest men at their worst are

often more sore and uncomfortable inwardly than they appear outwardly. It was this that probably lay at the bottom of the chief priests' remonstrance about the title. Herod's cry, "It is John the Baptist," after John was dead, is another case in point.

22.—[Pilate answered... I have written.] The hard, haughty, imperious character of the wicked Roman Governor comes out forcibly in these words. They show his contempt for the Jews: "Trouble me not about the title: I have written it, and I shall not alter it to please you." They suggest the idea that he was willing enough to be revenged on them for their obstinate refusal to meet his wishes and consent to our Lord's release. He was glad to hold them up to scorn and contempt as a people who crucified their own king. It is likely enough that between his wife and his own conscience and the chief priests, the Roman Governor was vexed, worried, and irritated, and savagely resolved not to gratify the Jews any further in any matter. He had gone as far as he chose in allowing them to murder an innocent and just person. He would not go an inch further. He now made a stand and showed that he could be firm and unyielding and unbending when he liked. It is no uncommon thing to see a wicked man, when he has given way to the devil and trampled on his conscience in one direction, trying to make up for it by being firm in another.

Calvin observes that Pilate, by publishing in three languages Christ's title, was "by a secret guidance made a herald of the Gospel." He contrasts his conduct with that of the Papists who prohibit the

reading of the Gospel and the Scriptures by the common people. Gualter says much the same.

Bullinger remarks that Pilate acted like Caiaphas when he said, “It is expedient that one die for the people, not knowing what he said.” Just so, Pilate little knew what testimony he was bearing to Christ’s kingly office. Leigh quotes a saying of Augustine: “If a man like Pilate can say, ‘What I have written I have written, and will not alter,’ can we think that God writes any in His book and blots him out again?”

23.—[*Then the soldiers, etc.*] The soldiers having now finished their bloody work—having nailed our Lord to the cross, put the title over His head, and reared the cross on end—proceeded to do what they probably always did, to divide the clothes of the crucified criminal among themselves. In most countries the clothes of a person put to death by the law are the perquisite of the executioner. So it was with our Lord’s clothes. They had most likely first stripped our Lord naked before nailing His hands and feet to the cross, and had laid His clothes on one side till they had finished their work. They now turned to the clothes and, as they had probably done many a time on such occasions, proceeded to divide them. All four Evangelists particularly mention this, and evidently call our special attention to it.

The division into four portions shows clearly that there were four soldiers employed, beside the centurion, in the work of crucifixion. Many commentators see in them emblems of the four quarters of the

Gentile world. This, however, seems to me fanciful. A quaternion, a small party of four, was a common division of soldiers in those days, just as “a file” of men is among ourselves. (See Acts 12:4.)

What the four portions of garments were we are left to conjecture. Hengstenberg thinks that they consisted of the covering of the head, the girdle, the shoes, and the undergarment fitting to the body. Matthew’s report of the Sermon on the Mount contains a clear distinction between a coat and a cloak (Matt. 5:40). For these four portions the soldiers probably cast lots in order that each one might have his part decided, and to prevent wrangling about the unequal value of the portions. Others think that the language of St. John about the coat which was “not torn,” is strong evidence that all the rest of our Lord’s clothes were torn into four pieces, and that Hengstenberg’s division of them will not stand. It must be admitted that there is much probability in this. It seems very unlikely that so much should be said about this seamless garment being not torn if the other garments had not been torn in dividing them. Concerning the “coat” here mentioned, it is not easy to say positively what part of our Lord’s dress it was.

(*a*) Most commentators say that it was the long inner tunic, girt about the waist and reaching almost to the feet, which was the principal garment of an inhabitant of the East; a kind of loose smock-frock with sleeves, such as any one may see a pattern of in Leonardo da Vinci’s famous picture of the Lord’s Supper. The objection to this view, to my mind, is the grave difficulty of

explaining how such a garment could be seamless and woven throughout, though I doubt not our Lord wore it and it was the hem of such a garment the woman touched.
(*b*) Some few commentators think it was the outer garment; a loose mantle or cape thrown over the shoulders, which many wore above the tunic. Such a garment, having no sleeves, might easily be made in one piece without any seam, and perhaps was only drawn together or clasped about the shoulders. It is fair, nevertheless, to say that the Greek word here rendered "coat" ordinarily means the inward garment or tunic. (See Suicer and Parkhurst.) Becker's Charicles, however, on this Greek word, shows some reason for thinking it *sometimes* means the outward coat.

The reader must judge for himself. The question is one which cannot be settled positively either way, and happily is not of any moment. To my own mind, the objection to the first and common view is very serious indeed, if not insuperable; but it may not appear so to others. The only thing we know for certain is that one portion of our Lord's dress was not torn but made the subject of casting lots as to who should have it. As to the ancient fable that our Lord's coat was woven by His mother Mary when He was a child, grew with His growth, and never waxed old or wore out—it is a foolish apocryphal legend.

Bengel observes that we never read of our Lord "tearing" His own garments in desperate sorrow, like Job, Jacob, Joshua, Caleb, Jephthah, Hezekiah, Mordecai, Ezra, Paul, and Barnabas. (See Gen. 37:29; Numb. 14:6; Judges 11:35; 2 Kings 19:1; Esther 4:1; Ezra 9:3;

Job 1:20; Acts 14:14.) On the incident recorded in this verse, Luther remarks: “This distribution of garments served for a sign that everything was done with Christ, just as with one who was abandoned, lost, and to be forgotten forever.” Even among ourselves the division, sale, or giving away of a man’s clothes is a plain indication of his being dead or given up for lost, just as among soldiers and sailors, when dead or missing, the effects are sold or distributed. Henry thinks that “the soldiers hoped to make something more than ordinary out of our Lord’s clothes, having heard of cures wrought by the touch of the hem of His garment, or expecting that His admirers would give any money for them.” But this seems unlikely and fanciful.

Our Lord was treated, we should observe, just like all common criminals— stripped naked and His clothes sold under His eyes, as one dead already and cast off by man.
It is noteworthy that in this, as in many other things, our Lord was in a striking manner our substitute. He was stripped naked, reckoned, and dealt with as a guilty sinner in order that we might be clothed with the garment of His perfect righteousness and reckoned innocent.

24.—[*Therefore they said among themselves, etc.*] In this verse we are told that the conduct of the soldiers was a precise fulfillment of a prophecy delivered a thousand years before (Psalm 22:18). That prophecy foretold not only that Messiah’s garments should be parted and distributed, but that men should “cast lots for His vesture.” Little

did the four rough Roman soldiers think that they were actually supplying evidence of the truth of the Scriptures! They only saw that our Lord's coat was a good and serviceable garment that it was a pity to tear, and therefore they agreed to cast lots as to who should have it. And yet, in so doing, they added to the great cloud of witnesses who prove the divine authority of the Bible. Men little consider that they are all instruments in God's hand for accomplishing His purposes.

The importance of interpreting prophecy literally and not figuratively is strongly shown in this verse. The system of interpretation which unhappily prevails among many Christians—I mean the system of spiritualizing away all the plain statements of the prophets and accommodating them to the Church of Christ—can never be reconciled with such a verse as this. The plain, literal meaning of words should evidently be the meaning placed on all the statements of Old Testament prophecy. This remark, of course, does not apply to symbolical prophecies such as those of the seals, trumpets, and vials in Revelation.

The typical meaning of this seamless and untorn coat of our Lord is a point on which fanciful theological writers have loved to dwell in every age of the Church of Christ. It represented, we are told by Augustine and many others, the unity of the Church, and it was an allusion to the priesthood of the Divine wearer! I frankly confess that I am unable to believe such notions, and I doubt extremely whether they were intended by the Holy Ghost. But it is a fact mentioned by

Henry that “those who opposed Luther’s separation from the Church of Rome urged much this seamless coat as an argument, and laid so much stress on it that they were called Inconsutilistæ—the seamless ones!”

As to the lying legend that this seamless coat was preserved and handed down to the Church as a precious relic, it is scarcely worthwhile to mention it, except as a melancholy illustration of the corruption of man and the apostasy of the Church of Rome. The holy coat of Trèves and its exhibition are a scandal and disgrace to Christianity. Nor is Trèves the only place where the Romish Church professes to have the Lord’s coat. Which of them all is the original and true one no Pope has ever yet attempted to decide! Suffice it to say that anyone who can seriously believe that our Lord’s seamless coat, after falling into the hands of a heathen Roman soldier, was finally treasured up as a relic, or that the cross itself was kept safe and escaped destruction, must be so credulous a person that argument is thrown away on him.

It is worth remembering that when the first Adam fell by sin and was cast out of Eden, God mercifully clothed him and covered his nakedness. When the second Adam died as our substitute and was counted “a curse” for us on the cross, He was stripped naked and His clothes sold. The reason why John concludes the verse with the words “These things therefore the soldiers did,” is not very apparent. Burgon suggests it may mean, “Such was the part which the soldiers played in this terrible tragedy. Uninfluenced by the Jews, without

any direction from Pilate, these things the soldiers did." This, however, seems hardly satisfactory, because this was not all that the soldiers did. I prefer thinking that St. John means to say that he was actually an eye-witness of the soldiers unconsciously fulfilling an ancient prophecy: "I myself saw, with mine own eyes, the four soldiers casting lots on my Lord's coat; and I can testify that I saw the words of the Psalmist literally fulfilled." Lampe thinks that St. John makes this remark in order to show how literally Scripture was fulfilled by men who were totally ignorant of Scripture. The Roman soldiers, of course, knew nothing of the Psalms yet did the very things predicted in the Psalms.

25.—[*Now there stood by the cross, etc.*] A wonderfully striking incident is recorded in this and the two following verses, which is not found in the other three Gospels. St. John tells us that at this awful moment Mary the mother of Jesus and other women (two if not three) stood by the cross on which our Lord hung. "Love is strong as death;" and even amid the crowd of taunting Jews and rough Roman soldiers these holy women were determined to stand by our Lord to the last and to show their unceasing affection to Him. When we remember that our Lord was a condemned criminal, peculiarly hated by the chief priests and executed by Roman soldiers, the faithfulness and courage of these holy women can never be sufficiently admired. As long as the world stands, they supply a glorious proof of what grace can do for the weak, and of the strength that love to Christ can supply. When all men but one forsook our Lord, more than one woman boldly confessed Him. Women, in short, were the last at the

cross and the first at the tomb. It is interesting to consider who and what they were that stood by our Lord's cross as He hung upon it. We know that John, the beloved disciple, was there, though with characteristic modesty he does not directly name himself. Yet the twenty-sixth verse shows clearly that he was one of the party. He might well be the one that "Jesus loved." No Apostle seems to have had such deep feeling toward our Lord as John. Mary, the mother of our Lord (*never called the Virgin Mary in Scripture*), was there. We must suppose that she had come up from Galilee to the feast of the Passover in company with the other women who ministered to our Lord. She must now have been comparatively old, at least forty-eight years old! Our Lord was born thirty-three years before his crucifixion. To represent her in pictures as a beautiful young woman at the time of the crucifixion is absurd. Who can doubt that when she saw her son hanging on the cross, she must have realized the truth of old Simeon's prophecy: "A sword shall pierce through your own soul also" (Luke 2:35). Very striking and instructive is it to observe how very rarely she is named in the Gospel history. Mary, the wife of Clopas, or Alpheus, was there. The Greek leaves it uncertain whether it means daughter or wife, but nearly all think it must be wife. She seems to have been the mother of James and Jude the Apostles and to have been related in some way to the Virgin Mary, either as sister or sister-in-law. Hence James is called the "Lord's brother." She too must have been nearly as old as the Virgin Mary, if we may judge by her having two sons who were Apostles. Mary of Magdala, in Galilee, commonly called Mary Magdalene, was also there. Of her we only know that Jesus had cast out of her seven devils, and that none of all

the women who ministered to our Lord seem to have felt such deep gratitude to our Savior and to have demonstrated such deep affection. The common doctrine that she had once been a notorious breaker of the seventh commandment has no foundation in Scripture. She probably was the youngest of all the party, and as such had to risk more and sacrifice her own feelings more than any in pressing through a crowd of enemies to the foot of the cross.

But were there only three women at the cross? This is a disputed question and one which will probably never be settled, since the Greek wording of the verse before us leaves the point open either way.

(1) Most commentators think that the words "His mother's sister" belong to "Mary the wife of Clopas," and are meant to define the relationship between that Mary and Mary the mother of our Lord.

(2) Others, as Pearce, Bengel, and Alford, think that "His mother's sister" means a fourth woman, and that this woman was Salome the mother of James and John. The strongest argument in favor of this view is the distinct statement in Matthew's account of the crucifixion that many women beheld the sight, "among which was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's children"—that is, Salome (Matt. 27:56.) If she stood with Mary Magdalene looking on, why should we doubt that she stood with her at the cross? The suppression of her name is quite characteristic of John. She was his own mother, and he modestly

keeps back her name as he keeps back his own. In what way she was the "sister" to the mother of our Lord we do not know. But there is no reason against it that I know of. According to this view the women at the foot of the cross were four: (1) Mary, the mother of Jesus; (2) the sister of our Lord's mother, *i.e.*, Salome, the mother of John who wrote this Gospel; (3) Mary, the wife of Alpheus and mother of two Apostles; and (4) Mary Magdalene. The reader must decide for himself. The question happily is not one affecting our salvation. For myself, I must frankly declare my belief that the second view is the right one, and that there were four women, and not three only, at the foot of the cross. The objection that the word "and" is omitted before "Mary the wife of Clopas" is worthless. In almost every catalog of the Apostles the same omission may be noticed. (See Acts 1:13; Matt. 10:2; Luke 6:14.)

Whether all Christian women should always come forward and put themselves in such public and prominent positions as these holy women took up, is a grave question about which each Christian woman must judge for herself. Considerations of *physical* strength and nervous self-command must not be overlooked. The four women who stood by the cross neither fainted nor went into hysterics, but were self-controlled and calm. Let everyone be persuaded in their own minds. Some women can do what others cannot. Why the fierce enemies of our Lord among the Jews and the rough Roman soldiers permitted these holy women to stand undisturbed by the cross, is a question we have no means of deciding. Possibly the Romans may have thought it only fair and reasonable to let a criminal's relatives

and friends stand by him, when he could do the State no more harm, and they could not rescue him from death. Possibly the centurion who superintended the execution may have felt some pity for the little weeping company of weak women. Who can tell but his kindness was a cup of cold water which was repaid him a hundred-fold? He said before the day ended, "Truly this was the Son of God" (Matt. 27:54). Possibly John's acquaintance with the high priest, already mentioned, may have procured him and his companions some favor. All these, however, are only conjectures, and we cannot settle the point.

The Greek word rendered "stood" is literally "had stood." Does not this mean from the beginning of the crucifixion?

26,27.—[*When Jesus therefore saw His mother, etc.*] The incident recorded in these two verses is wonderfully touching and affecting. Even in this trying season of bodily and mental agony, our blessed Lord did not forget others. He had not forgotten His brutal murderers, but had prayed for them— "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." He had not forgotten his fellow-sufferers by His side. When one of the crucified malefactors cried to Him, "Lord, remember me," He had at once answered him and promised him a speedy entrance into Paradise. And now He did not forget His mother. He saw her standing by the cross and knew well her distress, and felt tenderly for her desolate condition—left alone in a wicked world, after having lost such a Son. He therefore commended her to the care of John, His most loving and tenderhearted and faithful

disciple. He told John to look on her as his own mother, and told His mother to look on John as her own son. No better and wiser arrangement could have been made in every way. None would care so much for the mother of Jesus as the disciple whom Jesus loved, and who lay in His bosom at the last supper. No home could be so suitable to Mary as the home of one who was, according to the view maintained above, son to her own sister Salome. The lessons of the whole transaction are deeply instructive.

(*a*) We should mark the depth and width of our Lord's sympathies and affections. The Savior on whom we are bid to repose the weight of our sinful souls is one whose love passes knowledge. The shallow, skin-deep feelings of others, we all know, continually chill and disappoint us on every side in this world. But there is one whose mighty heart-affection knows no bottom. That one is Christ.

(*b*) We should mark the high honor our Lord puts on the fifth commandment. Even in His last hour He magnifies it and makes it honorable by providing for His mother according to the flesh. The Christian who does not lay himself out to honor father and mother is a very ignorant religionist.

(*c*) We should mark that when Jesus died Joseph was probably dead, and that Mary had no other children beside our Lord. It is absurd to suppose that our Lord would have commended Mary to John if she had had a husband or son to support her. The theory of some few writers, that Mary had other children by Joseph after Jesus was

born, is very untenable and grossly improbable.

(*d*) We should mark what a strong condemnation the passage supplies to the whole system of Mary-worship, as held by the Roman Catholic Church. There is not here a trace of the doctrine that Mary is patroness of the saints, protectress of the Church, and one who can help others. On the contrary, we see her requiring protection herself and commended to the care and protection of a disciple! Hengstenberg remarks: "Our Lord's design was not to provide for John but to provide for His mother." Alford observes: "The Romanist idea that the Lord commended all His disciples, as represented by the beloved one, to the patronage of His mother is simply absurd."

(*e*) Finally, we should mark how Jesus honors those who honor and boldly confess Him. To John, who alone of all the eleven stood by the cross, He gives the high privilege of taking charge of His mother. As Henry pleasantly remarks, it is a sign of great confidence and a mark of great honor to be made a trustee and a guardian by a great person, for those he leaves behind at his death. To the women Jesus gives the honor of being specially named and recorded for their faithfulness and love in a Gospel which is read all over the world in 200 languages. The Greek words rendered "his own home" mean literally "his own things." It is a thoroughly indefinite expression. We can only suppose it means that in the future—from that day—wherever John abode the mother of our Lord abode also. His home, in a word, became her home. There is no evidence whatever that John had any home in Jerusalem. If he had any home at all, it must have been in

Galilee near the lake of Gennesaret. Bengel, Besser, Ellicott, and Alford, from the phrase "hour," suggest that John took Mary home *immediately*, "so that she did not see our Lord die, and then returned to the cross." This, however, seems to me very improbable. The mother of our Lord would surely stay by the cross to the last, if any woman did. John would not leave the cross, in my opinion, for a minute. His narrative of the crucifixion reads like that of an eye-witness from first to last.
Hengstenberg takes the same view that I do.

The word "woman" in the twenty-sixth verse is noteworthy. It must not be pressed too far as implying the slightest disrespect or lack of affection. The whole transaction here narrated overthrows such an idea. But I think it is remarkable that our Lord does not say "Mother." And I cannot help thinking that, even at this awful moment, He would remind her that she must never suffer herself or others to presume on the relationship between herself and Him, or claim any supernatural honor on the ground of being His mother. Henceforth she must daily remember that her first aim must be to live the life of faith as a believing woman, like all other Christian women. Her blessedness did not consist in being related to Christ according to the flesh, but in believing and keeping Christ's Word. I firmly believe that, even on the cross, Jesus foresaw the future heresy of "Mary-worship." Therefore He said "Woman" and did not say "Mother." Besser remarks: "Some old writers, as Bonaventura, say that Christ perhaps avoided the sweet name of *mother* so that He might not lacerate Mary's heart with such a tender word of farewell.

Others see in Christ's manner of speaking a reference to the seed of the *woman* who was to bruise the serpent's head. The most obvious view is that the Lord, through this name *woman*, would direct His mother into that love which knows Christ no more after the flesh (2 Cor. 5:16), and would also declare to us that in the midst of His work of atonement He felt Himself equally bound close to all sinners, and that He was not nearer to His mother than He was to you and me."

JOHN 19:28-37

After this Jesus, realizing that by this time everything was completed, said (in order to fulfill the scripture), "I am thirsty!" A jar full of sour wine was there, so they put a sponge soaked in sour wine on a branch of hyssop and lifted it to his mouth. So when he had received the sour wine, Jesus said, "It is completed!" Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Then, because it was the day of preparation, so that the bodies should not stay on the crosses on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was an especially important one), the Jewish religious authorities asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies taken down. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the two men who had been crucified with Jesus, first the one and then the other. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and blood and water flowed out immediately. And the person who saw it has testified (and his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth), so that you also may believe. For

these things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled, "Not a bone of his will be broken." And again another scripture says, "They will look on the one whom they have pierced."

This part of John's narrative of Christ's passion, contains points of deep interest, which are silently passed over by Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The reason of this silence we are not told. Suffice it for us to remember that, both in what they recorded and in what they did not record, all four Evangelists wrote by inspiration of God.

Let us mark, for one thing, in these verses, ***the frequent fulfillments of prophetic Scripture throughout every part of Christ's crucifixion.*** Three different predictions are specially mentioned, in Exodus, Psalms, and Zechariah, which received their accomplishment at the cross. Others, as every well-informed Bible-reader knows, might easily be added. All combine to prove one and the same thing. They prove that the death of our Lord Jesus Christ at Golgotha was a thing foreseen and predetermined by God. Hundreds of years before the crucifixion, every part of the solemn transaction was arranged in the Divine counsels, and the minutest particulars were revealed to the Prophets. From first to last it was a thing foreknown, and every portion of it was in accordance with a settled plan and design. In the highest, fullest sense, when Christ died, He "died according to the Scriptures." (1 Cor. 15:3.)

We need not hesitate to regard such fulfillments of prophecy as strong evidence of the Divine authority of God's Word. The Prophets foretell not only Christ's death, but the *particulars* of His death. It is

impossible to explain so many accomplishments of predicted circumstances upon any other theory. To talk of luck, chance, and accidental coincidence, as sufficient explanation, is preposterous and absurd. The only rational account is the inspiration of God. The Prophets who foretold the particulars of the crucifixion, were inspired by Him who foresees the end from the beginning; and the books they wrote under His inspiration ought not to be read as human compositions, but Divine. Great indeed are the difficulties of all who pretend to deny the inspiration of the Bible. It really requires more unreasoning faith to be an infidel than to be a Christian. The man who regards the repeated fulfillments of minute prophecies about Christ's death, such as the prophecies about His dress, His thirst, His pierced side, and His bones, as the result of chance, and not of design, must indeed be a credulous man.

We should mark, secondly, in these verses, ***the peculiarly solemn saying which came from our Lord's lips just before He died.*** John relates that "when He had received the vinegar, He said, it is finished; and He bowed His head and gave up the spirit." It is surely not too much to say, that of all the seven famous sayings of Christ on the cross, none is more remarkable than this, which John alone has recorded.

The precise meaning of this wondrous expression, "It is finished," is a point which the Holy Spirit has not thought good to reveal to us. There is a depth about it, we must all instinctively feel, which man has probably no line to fathom. Yet there is perhaps no irreverence in

conjecturing the thoughts that were in our Lord's mind, when the word was spoken. The finishing of all the known and unknown sufferings which He came to endure, as our Substitute—the finishing of the ceremonial law, which He came to wind up and fulfill, as the true Sacrifice for sin—the finishing of the many prophecies, which He came to accomplish—the finishing of the great work of man's redemption, which was now close at hand—all this, we need not doubt, our Lord had in view when He said, "It is finished." There may have been more behind, for anything we know. But in handling the language of such a Being as our Savior, on such an occasion, and at so mysterious a crisis of His history, it is well to be cautious. "The place whereon we stand is holy ground."

One comfortable thought, at all events, stands out most clearly on the face of this famous expression. We rest our souls on a "finished work," if we rest them on the work of Jesus Christ the Lord. We need not fear that either sin, or Satan, or law shall condemn us at the last day. We may lean back on the thought, that we have a Savior who has done all, paid all, accomplished all, performed all that is necessary for our salvation. We may take up the challenge of the Apostle, "Who is he that condemns? It is Christ who died—yes, rather that is risen again; who is even at the right hand of God; who also makes intercession for us." (Rom. 8:34.) When we look at our own works, we may well be ashamed of their imperfections. But when we look at the finished work of Christ, we may feel peace. We "are complete in Him," if we believe. (Colos. 2:10.)

We should mark, lastly, in these verses, ***the reality and truth of Christ's death.*** We are told that "one of the soldiers with a spear pierced His side, and blood and water flowed out." This incident, small as it may seem at first sight, supplies probable proof that the heart of our blessed Lord was pierced, and that life was consequently extinct. He did not merely faint, or swoon away, or become insensible, as some have dared to insinuate. His heart actually ceased to beat, and He actually died. Great, indeed, was the importance of this fact. We must all see, on a moment's reflection, that without a real death there could be no real sacrifice; that without a real death there could be no real resurrection; and that without a real death and real resurrection, the whole of Christianity is a house built on sand, and has no foundation at all. Little indeed did that reckless Roman soldier dream that he was a mighty helper of our holy religion, when he thrust his spear into our Lord's side.

That the "blood and water" mentioned in this place had a deep spiritual meaning, we can hardly doubt. John himself seems to refer to them in his first Epistle, as highly significant. "This is He that came by water and blood." (1 John 5:6.) The Church in every age has been of one mind in holding that they are *emblems of spiritual things*. Yet the precise meaning of the blood and water is a subject about which Christians have never agreed, and perhaps will never agree until the Lord returns.

The favorite theory that the blood and water mean the two Sacraments, however plausible and popular, may be reasonably

regarded as somewhat destitute of solid foundation. Baptism and the Lord's Supper were ordinances already in existence when our Lord died, and they needed no reappointing. It is surely not necessary to drag in these two blessed Sacraments on every occasion, and to insist on thrusting them forward, as the hidden sense of every disputed text where the number "two" is mentioned. Such pertinacious application of hard places in Scripture to Baptism and the Lord's Supper does no real good, and brings no real honor to the Sacraments. It is questionable whether it does not tend to vulgarize them, and bring them into contempt.

The true meaning of the blood and water is probably to be sought in the famous prophecy of Zechariah, where he says, "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and uncleanness." (Zech. 13:1.) When was that fountain so truly and really opened as in the hour when Christ died? What emblem of atonement and purification was so well known to the Jews as blood and water? Why then should we hesitate to believe that the flow of "blood and water" from our Lord's side was a significant declaration to the Jewish nation, that the true fountain for sin was at length thrown open, and that henceforth sinners might come boldly to Christ for pardon, and wash and be clean? This interpretation, at any rate, deserves serious thought and consideration.

Whatever view we take of the blood and water, let us make sure that we ourselves are "washed and made white in the blood of the

Lamb." (Rev. 7:14.) It will matter nothing at the last day, that we held during life the most exalted view of the sacraments, if we never came to Christ by faith, and never had personal dealings with Him. Faith in Christ is the one thing needful. "He that has the Son has life, and he that has not the Son of God has not life." (1 John 5:12.)

Technical Notes:

28. After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, I thirst. 29. Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar; and they filled a sponge with vinegar and put *it* upon hyssop, and put *it* to his mouth. 30. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished! And he bowed his head and gave up the ghost. 31. The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day (for that sabbath day was a high day), besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and *that* they might be taken away. 32. Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who was crucified with him. 33. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was dead already, they did not break his legs. 34. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. 35. And he who saw *it* testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe. 36. For these things were done that the Scripture

should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken. 37. And again another Scripture says, They shall look on him whom they pierced.

28.—[*After this.*] When our Lord had commended His mother, Mary, to John, I believe that the miraculous darkness for three hours came on. During those three hours I believe our Lord said nothing except "My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?" As the darkness was passing away, He said, "I thirst." This, and the two last sayings, "It is finished" and "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit," were all that He said during the last three hours. Thus three of His seven sayings on the cross were before the darkness and four after it, or during it.
The order of the famous seven sayings was as follows:

1. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."
2. "Today shall you be with Me in paradise."
3. "Woman, behold your son. Behold your mother."
4. "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me."
5. "I thirst."
6. "It is finished."
7. "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."

[*Jesus knowing…accomplished, etc.*] In order to understand this verse aright, there is one point concerning our Lord's death that must be carefully remembered—His death was entirely a voluntary act on His part. In this one respect His death was unlike that of a

common man, and we need not wonder at it when we consider that He was God and man in one Person. The final separation between body and soul, in His case, could not take place until He willed it; and all the power of Jews and Romans together could not have effected it against His will. We die because we cannot help it; Christ died because He willed to die, and not until the moment arrived when He saw it best. He said Himself, "No man takes life from Me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again" (John 10:18). As a matter of fact, we know that our Lord was crucified about nine o'clock in the morning, and that He died about three o'clock in the afternoon of the same day. Mere physical suffering would not account for this. A person crucified in full health was known sometimes to linger on alive for three days! It is evident, therefore, that our Lord willed to give up the ghost in the same day that He was crucified, for some wise reason. This reason, we can easily suppose, was to secure the fullest publicity for His atoning death. He died in broad daylight in the sight of myriads of spectators, and thus the reality of His death could never be denied. This voluntariness and free choice of His death and of the hour of His death, in my judgment, lie at the bottom of the verse before us.

Remembering all this, I believe that the sense of the verse before us must be paraphrased in the following way: "After this Jesus, knowing in His own mind that all things were now practically accomplished that he came into the world to do and that it was expedient that His death should be a most public event, in the face of the crowds

assembled to view His crucifixion, proceeded to say the last words that He intended to say before giving up the ghost at three o'clock, and by saying them fulfilled a prophecy of Scripture." Nothing in the details of our Lord's death, we must always remember, was accidental or by chance. Every part of the great sacrifice for sin was foreordained and arranged in the eternal counsels of the Trinity, even to the words that He was to speak on the cross. The expression "I thirst" was chiefly used, I believe, in order to afford a public testimony of the reality and intensity of His bodily sufferings and to prevent anyone supposing, because of His marvelous calmness and patience, that He was miraculously free from suffering. On the contrary, He would have all around Him know that He felt what all severely wounded persons, and especially what all crucified persons, felt—a burning and consuming thirst. So that when we read that "He suffered for sins," we are to understand that He really and truly suffered.

Henry observes: "The torments of hell are represented by a violent thirst in the complaint of the rich man who begged for a drop of water to cool his tongue. To that everlasting thirst we had all been condemned, if Christ had not suffered on the cross and said 'I thirst.'" Scott observes that Christ suffered thirst in order that we might drink the water of life forever and thirst no more.

Quesnel remarks: "The tongue of Jesus Christ underwent its own particular torment, in order to atone for the ill-use that men make of their tongues by blasphemy, evil speaking, vanity, lying, gluttony,

and drunkenness." The theory that Christ only said "I thirst" in order to fulfill Scripture is, to my mind, unsatisfactory and unreasonable. His saying "I thirst" was a fulfillment of Scripture, but He did not merely say it in order to fulfill Scripture. St. John, according to his style of writing, only meant that by His saying "I thirst" and having His thirst relieved by vinegar, the words of Psalm 69:21 were fulfilled.

The Greek word that is rendered "accomplished" is the same that is rendered "finished" in the thirtieth verse. This difference, within two verses, in translating the same word is one of those blemishes in our authorized version which must be regretted.

The connection of the sentence, "that the Scripture might be fulfilled," is not very clear to my mind. Is it to be taken with the words that follow in the verse or with those that immediately precede it? The common view taken, undoubtedly, is to connect the sentence with "I thirst." The sense will then be: "Jesus said 'I thirst,' so that by this the Scripture was fulfilled." But is it necessary to make this connection? Might not the sentence be connected with the one that precedes? The sense will then be:

"Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, so that the Scripture was fulfilled concerning Himself said 'I thirst.'" In three other places in St. John where the sentence occurs, "that the Scripture might be fulfilled," the connection is with what goes before and not with what follows. (John 17:12, 19:24-36.) Semler and Tholuck incline to take this view. But I admit that the matter is

doubtful, and it certainly is not one of vital importance. One thing only we must remember. Our Lord did not say "I thirst" for no other purpose than to fulfill the Scriptures. He spoke with far deeper and stronger reasons, and yet by His speaking and afterward drinking vinegar, a passage in the prophetical Psalms was fulfilled.

29.—[*Now there was set…of vinegar*.] This would be more literally rendered "there was lying" a vessel. In all probability this was a vessel full of the sour wine in common use among the Roman soldiers.

[*And they filled a sponge, etc.*] The persons here spoken of seem to be the Roman soldiers who carried out the details of the crucifixion. The vinegar was theirs, and it is not likely that anyone would have dared to interfere with the criminal hanging on the cross except the soldiers. The act here recorded must be carefully distinguished from that recorded in Matt. 27:34, and is the same as that recorded in Matt. 27:48. The first drink of vinegar and gall, commonly given to criminals to deaden their pains, our Lord refused. The second here mentioned was given, I believe (notwithstanding what some writers say), in kindness and compassion, and our Lord did not refuse to accept it. A sponge filled with vinegar and put on the end of a stick was far the easiest and most convenient way of giving drink to one whose head was at least seven or eight feet from the ground, and whose hands, being nailed to the cross, were of course unable to take any cup and put it to his mouth. From a sponge full of liquid pressed against the lips, a

crucified person might suck some moisture and receive some benefit. What this “hyssop” here mentioned was is a point by no means clearly ascertained. Casaubon speaks of the question as a proverbial difficulty. Some think that it was a branch of the plant hyssop, fastened to the end of a reed. This seems very improbable because of the “sponge.” Dr. Forbes Royle maintains that it was the caper plant, which bears a stick about three or four feet long. Hengstenberg gives evidence from Talmudic writers that the hyssop was among the branches used at the feast of tabernacles, and that its stalk was an ell long. Like many other questions of Bible natural history, the point must probably be left obscure. Some see deep meaning in the mention of hyssop as the plant used in the ceremonial sprinkling of the law of Moses (see Heb. 9:19). Hyssop, moreover, was used at the passover in sprinkling the door posts with blood (Exod. 12:22). Yet the allusion, to say the least, seems doubtful; nor is it quite clear how any typical meaning can be got out of the mention of the plant in this place.

It is very noteworthy that even in the roughest, hardest kind of men, like these heathen soldiers, there is sometimes a tender and compassionate spot in the breast. According to Matthew’s account, the cry “I thirst” must have followed soon after the cry “My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me.” This exhibition of great mental and bodily agony together, in my opinion, touched the feelings of the soldiers; and one of them at least ran to give our Lord vinegar. We should remember this in dealing with men. Even the worst have often a soft place, if we can find it out, in their inward nature.

Cyril maintains strongly, I must admit, that the act of the soldiers in giving our Lord the sponge full of vinegar was not an act of kindness but of mockery and insult. I cannot, however, agree with him. He does not appear to distinguish between the first drink, which our Lord refused at the beginning of His crucifixion, and the last, which He accepted, but speaks of them as one and the same. Theophylact agrees with Cyril.

30.—[*When Jesus therefore…finished.*] Our Lord having now given plain proof that He had endured intense bodily suffering, and that like any other human sufferer He could appreciate a slight relief of thirst such as the vinegar afforded, proceeded to utter one of His last and most solemn sayings: "It is finished."

This remarkable expression in the Greek is one single word in a perfect tense: "It has been completed." It stands here in majestic simplicity without note or comment from St. John, and we are left entirely to conjecture what the full meaning of it is. For 1800 years Christians have explained it as best they can, and some portion of its meaning in all likelihood has been discovered. Yet it is far from unlikely that such a word spoken on such an occasion by such a person at such a moment just before death, contains depths that no one has ever completely fathomed. Some meanings there are (which no one perhaps will dispute) belonging to this grand expression, which I will briefly mention. No one single meaning, we may be sure, exhausts the whole phrase. It is rich, full, and replete with deep

truths.

(a) Our Lord meant that His great work of redemption was finished. He had, as Daniel foretold, “finished transgression, made an end of sin, made reconciliation for iniquity, and brought in everlasting righteousness” (Dan. 9:24). After 33 years, since the day when He was born in Bethlehem, He had done all, paid all, performed all, suffered all that was needful to save sinners and satisfy the justice of God. He had fought the battle and won it, and in two days would give proof of it by rising again.

(b) Our Lord meant that God’s determinate counsel and fore-will concerning His death was now accomplished and finished. All that had been appointed from all eternity that He should suffer, He had now suffered.

(c) Our Lord meant that He had finished the work of keeping God’s holy law.
He had kept it to the uttermost as our head and representative, and Satan had found nothing in Him. He had magnified the law and made it honorable by doing perfectly all its requirements. “Woe unto us,” says Burkitt, “if Christ had left but one farthing of our debt unpaid. We must have lain in hell insolvent to all eternity.”

(d) Our Lord meant that He had finished the types and figures of the ceremonial law. He had at length offered up the perfect sacrifice, of which every Mosaic sacrifice was a type and symbol, and there

remained no more need of offerings for sin. The old covenant was finished.

(e) Our Lord meant that He had finished and fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament. At length, as the Seed of the woman, he had bruised the serpent's head and accomplished the work which Messiah was engaged by covenant to come and perform.

(f) Finally, our Lord meant that His sufferings were finished. Like His Apostle, He had "finished His course." His long life of pain and contradiction from sinners, and above all His intense sufferings as bearer of our sins on Gethsemane and Calvary, were at last at an end. The storm was over, and the worst was passed. The cup of suffering was at last drained to the very dregs.

Thoughts such as these come to my own mind when I read the solemn phrase "It is finished." But I am far from saying that the phrase does not contain a great deal more. In interpreting such a saying, I am deeply conscious that there is an inexhaustible fullness in our Lord's words. I am sure we are more likely to make too little of them than to make too much.

Luther remarks: "In this word, 'It is finished,' will I comfort myself. I am forced to confess that all *my* finishing of the will of God is imperfect, piecemeal work, while yet the law urges on me that not so much as one tittle of it must remain unaccomplished. Christ is the end of the law. What it requires, Christ has performed."

To the objection of some persons, that all things were not completely finished and accomplished until Jesus rose again and ascended into heaven, Calvin replies that Jesus knew that all things were now *practically* accomplished, and that nothing now remained to hinder His finishing the work He came to do.

[*And He bowed His head.*] This is the action of one dying. When the will ceases to exercise power over muscles and nerves, at once those parts of the body that are not rigid, like the bones, collapse and fall in any direction to which their center of gravity inclines them. The head of a crucified person would naturally in death droop forward on the breast, the neck being no longer kept stiff by the will. This is what seems to have happened in the case of our Lord.

May we not gather from this expression that our Lord, up to this moment, held up His head erect, firm, steady, and unmoved even under extreme pain? Alford remarks how this little incident was evidently recorded by an eyewitness. The miraculous darkness must have now passed away in order to let this movement of the head be seen.

[*And gave up the ghost.*] These words literally mean "delivered up the spirit." It is an expression never used of any dying person in the Bible except our Lord. It is an expression denoting voluntary action. He delivered up His spirit of His own free will, because the hour was come when He chose to do it. He had just said, after using the phrase

“It is finished,” “Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit,” and then He proceeded to deliver up His spirit into the hands of God the Father. It is the Father and none else to whom the words “He delivered up” must apply. Augustine observes: “Not against His will did the Savior’s spirit leave His flesh, but because He would, and when He would, and how He would. Who is there that can even go to sleep when He will as Jesus died when He would? Who thus puts off his clothes when he will as Jesus unclothed Himself of His flesh when He would? Who goes thus out of his door when he will as Jesus, when He would, went out of this world?”

In death as well as in life, our Lord has left us an example. Of course we cannot, like Him, choose the moment of our death; and in this, as in everything else, we must be content to follow Him at an enormous distance. The best of saints is a miserable copy of his Master. Nevertheless, we too, as Cyril observes, must endeavor to put our souls into God’s hands, if God is really our Father, when the last hour of our lives comes; and like Jesus, to place them by faith in our Father’s keeping and trust our Father to take care of them.

Above all, let us never forget, as we read of Christ’s death, that He died for our sins as our Substitute. His death is our life. He died that we might live. We who believe in Christ shall live forevermore, sinners as we are, because Christ died for us, the innocent for the guilty. Satan cannot drag us away to everlasting death in hell. The second death cannot harm us. We may safely say, “Who can condemn me, or slay my soul? I know well that I deserve death and

that I ought to die because of my sins. But then my blessed Head and Substitute died for me, and when He died, I, His poor weak member, was reckoned to die also. Get behind me Satan, for Christ was crucified and died. My debt is paid, and you cannot demand it twice over." Forever let us bless God that Christ "gave up the ghost" and really died upon the cross before myriads of witnesses. That giving up the ghost was the hinge on which all our salvation turned. In vain Christ's life and miracles and preaching would have been, if Christ had not at last died for us! We needed not merely a teacher, but an atonement and the death of a Substitute. The mightiest transaction that ever took place on earth since the fall of man was accomplished when Jesus gave up the ghost. The careless crowd around the cross saw nothing but the common death of a common criminal. But in the eyes of God the Father, the promised payment for a world's sin was at last effected and the kingdom of heaven was thrown wide open to all believers. The finest pictures of the crucifixion that artists have ever painted give a miserably insufficient idea of what took place when Jesus gave up the ghost. They can show a suffering man on a cross, but they cannot convey the least notion of what was really going on—the satisfaction of God's broken law, the payment of sinners' debt to God, and the complete atonement for a world's sin. The precise physical cause of the death of Christ is a very interesting subject, which must be reverently approached, but deserves attention. Dr. Stroud, in his book on the subject, takes a view which is supported by the opinions of three eminent Edinburgh physicians —the late Sir James Simpson, Dr. Begbie, and Dr. Struthers. This view is that the immediate cause of our Lord's decease was rupture of

the heart. Dr. Simpson argues that all the circumstances of our Lord's death—His crying with a loud voice just before death, not like an exhausted person, and His sudden giving up the ghost—confirm this view very strongly. He also says that "strong mental emotions produce sometimes laceration or rupture of the walls of the heart;" and he adds, "If ever a human heart was riven and ruptured by the mere amount of mental agony endured, it would surely be that of our Redeemer." Above all, he argues that the rupture of the heart would go far to account for the flow of blood and water from our Lord's die when pierced with a spear. Dr. Simpson's very interesting letter on the subject will be found in the appendix to "Hanna's Last Days of our Lord's Passion." Concerning the deep question as to what became of our Lord's soul when He gave up the ghost, it must suffice to believe that His soul went to paradise, the place of the departed spirits of believers. He said to the penitent thief, "Today you shall be *with Me* in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). This is the true meaning of the article "descended into hell" in the Belief. "Hell" in that clause certainly does not mean the place of punishment, but the separate state or place of departed spirits. Some theologians hold that between His death and resurrection, "He went and preached to the spirits in prison" (1 Pet. 3:19) and proclaimed the accomplishment of His work of atonement. This, to say the least, is doubtful. But Athanasius, Ambrose, Zwingli, Calvin, Erasmus, Calovius, and Alford hold this view.

Concerning the miraculous signs that accompanied our Lord's death —the darkness from twelve o'clock to three, the earthquake, the

tearing of the temple veil—St. John is silent, and doubtless for some wise reasons. But we may well believe that they struck myriads with awe and astonishment, and perhaps smoothed the way for our Lord's burial in Joseph's tomb without opposition or objection.

31.—[*The Jews therefore, because it was, etc.*] The "Jews" in this verse, as in many other places in St. John's Gospel, can only mean the chief priests and leaders of the nation at Jerusalem; the same men who had pressed on Pilate our Lord's crucifixion—Annas, Caiaphas, and their companions.

The "preparation" means the day preceding the Passover sabbath. That sabbath being pre-eminently a "high day," or, to render the Greek literally, a "great" day in the year, the Friday or day preceding it, was devoted to special preparations. Hence the day went by the name of "the preparation of the sabbath." The expression makes it certain that Jesus was crucified on a Friday. The Jews saw clearly that unless they took active measures to prevent it, the body of our Lord would remain all night hanging on the tree of the cross, the law would be broken (Deut. 21:23), and a dead body would hang throughout the sabbath in full view of the temple and close by the city walls. Therefore they made haste to have Him taken down from the cross and buried.

The breaking of the legs of crucified criminals, in order to dispatch them, seems to have been a common accompaniment of this barbarous mode of execution when it was necessary to make an end

of them and get them out of the way. In asking Pilate to allow this breaking of the legs, they did nothing but what was usual. But for anything we can see, the thing would not have been done if the Jews had not asked. The verse supplies a wonderful example of the way in which God can make the wickedest men unconsciously carry out His purposes and promote His glory. If the Jews had not interfered this Friday afternoon, for anything we can see, Pilate would have allowed our Lord's body to hang upon the cross till Sunday or Monday, and perhaps to see corruption. The Jews procured our Lord's burial the very day that He died and thus secured the fulfillment of His famous prophecy, "Destroy this temple of my body, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). If He had not been buried till Sunday or Monday, He could not have risen again the third day after His death. As it was, the Jews managed things so that our Lord was laid in the grave before the evening of Friday and was thus enabled to fulfill the famous type of Jonah, and give the sign He had promised to give of His Messiahship by lying three days in the earth and then rising again the third day after He died. All this could not have happened if the Jews had not interfered and got Him taken from the cross and buried on Friday afternoon! How true it is that the wickedest enemies of God are only axes and saws and hammers in His hands, and are ignorantly His instruments for doing His work in the world. The restless, busy, meddling of Caiaphas and his companions was actually one of the causes that Christ rose the third day after death, and His Messiahship was proved. Pilate was their tool, but they were God's tools! The Romans, in all probability, would have left our Lord's body hanging on the cross till sun and rain had putrefied and

consumed it, had such a thing been possible. Bishop Pearson says it was a common rule of Roman law not to permit sepulture to the body of a crucified person. The burial, therefore, was entirely owing to the request of the Jews. The providence of God ordered things so that they who interceded for His crucifixion interceded for His burial. And by so doing they actually paved the way for the crowning miracle of His resurrection!

Let us mark the miserable scrupulosity that is sometimes compatible with the utmost deadness of conscience. Thus we see men making ado about a dead body remaining on the cross on the Sabbath at the very time when they had just murdered an innocent living person with the most flagrant injustice and monstrous cruelty. It is a specimen of "straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel."

32.—[*Then the soldiers came, etc.*] Pilate having given his consent to the request of the Jews, the Roman soldiers proceeded to break the legs of the criminals and began with the two thieves. Why they began with them is by no means clear. If the three crosses were all in a row, it is hard to see why the two outer criminals of the three should have their legs broken first and the one in the center be left to the last. We must suppose one of three things in order to explain this.

(a) Possibly two of the soldiers broke the legs of one malefactor, and the other two soldiers the legs of the other. Reason and common sense point out that it does not require four men to do this horrid work on a helpless, unresisting, crucified person. Thus having

finished their work at the two outward crosses, they would come last to the center one.

(b) Possibly the two outward crosses may have been rather forwarder in position than the central one so that the sufferers might see each others' faces. In that case the soldiers would naturally begin with the crosses they came to first. This, perhaps, would account for the penitent thief having read the word "King" over our Lord's head on the cross.

(c) Possibly the soldiers saw that our Lord was dead even before they came up to Him. At any rate, they probably saw that He was still and motionless, and thus suspecting that He was dead they did not trouble themselves with His body but began with the two who evidently were yet alive.

It is noteworthy that the penitent thief, even after his conversion, had more suffering to go through before he entered paradise. The grace of God and the pardon of sin did not deliver him from the agony of having his legs broken. When Christ undertakes to save our souls, He does not undertake to deliver us from bodily pains and a conflict with the last enemy. Penitents as well as impenitents must taste death and all its accompaniments. Conversion is not heaven, though it leads to it.

Scott remarks that those who broke the legs of the penitent thief and hastened his end were unconscious instruments of fulfilling our

Lord's promise, "*Today* you shall be with me in Paradise." How the legs of crucified criminals were broken we do not know; but it was probably done in the roughest manner. With such tools at hand as the hammers used for driving in the nails and the mattocks and spades used for putting the cross in the ground, the soldiers could hardly lack instruments. It must be remembered that a simple fracture would not cause death. The Greek word which we render "break" literally means "shiver to pieces." May it not be feared that this is the true meaning here?

33.—[*But when they came to Jesus, etc.*] This verse contains the first proof of the mighty fact that our Lord really died. We are told that the soldiers did not break His legs, because they "saw that He was dead already." Accustomed as Roman soldiers necessarily were to see death in every form, wounds of every kind, and dead bodies of every description, and trained to take away human life by their profession, they were of all men least likely to make a mistake about such a matter. Thus we have it most expressly recorded that the soldiers "saw that He was dead already" and therefore did not break His legs. Our salvation hinges so entirely on Jesus Christ's vicarious death that a moment's reflection will show us the divine wisdom of the fact being thoroughly proved. His unbelieving enemies could never say that He did not really die but was only in a swoon or fainting-fit or state of insensibility. The Roman soldiers are witnesses that on the center cross of the tree they saw a dead man.

34.—[*But one…pierced…spear*.] Here we have the second proof that our Lord did really die. One of the soldiers, determined to make sure work and leave nothing uncertain, thrust his spear into our Lord's side, in all *probability* directing his thrust at the heart as the seat of vitality. That thrust made it certain, if there had been any doubt before, that the body on the central cross was actually dead. They believed it from appearance, and perhaps from touch, when they first came up to the cross. They made it quite certain by the thrust of the spear. The body of a person in a swoon would have given some sign of life when pierced with a spear.

The gross inaccuracy of those pictures that represent this soldier as a horseman is worth noticing. Our Lord's body was easily within reach of the thrust of a spear in the hand of a foot soldier. There is no evidence whatever that any Roman cavalry were near the cross! The theory of Bishop Pearson that this soldier pierced our Lord's side in anger and impatience, as if provoked to find Him dead, does not appear to me well-founded. It is not likely that the soldiers would be angry at finding a state of things which saved them trouble. To me it seems far more likely that the thrust was the hasty, careless act of a rough soldier accustomed to prove in this way whether a body was alive or dead. I have heard it said by an eyewitness that some of the Cossacks who followed our retreating cavalry after the famous Balaclava charge in the Crimean war, were seen to prick the bodies of fallen soldiers with their spears in order to see whether they were dead or alive.

Theophylact suggests that this soldier thrust the spear into our Lord's side in order to gratify the wicked Jews who stood by. Besser remarks most sensibly: "Even the soldier's spear was guided by the Father's hand."

[*And...blood and water came out*.] The remarkable fact here recorded has given rise to considerable difference of opinion.

(a) Some, as Grotius, Calvin, Beza, and others, hold that this issue of blood and water was a proof that the heart or pericardium was pierced, and death in consequence quite certain. They say that the same result would follow from a thrust into the side of any person lately dead, and that blood and water, or something closely resembling it, would immediately flow out. They maintain, therefore, that there was nothing supernatural in the circumstance recorded.

(b) Others, as most of the Fathers, Brentius, Musculus, Calovius, Lampe, Lightfoot, Rollock, Jansenius, Bengel, Horsley, and Hengstenberg, hold that this issue of blood and water was supernatural, extraordinary, unusual, and contrary to all experience; and they maintain that it was a special miracle.

The question is one of those that will probably never be settled. We are not in possession of sufficiently precise information to justify a very positive opinion. We do not know for a certainty that the left side of our Lord was pierced and not the right. We do not know exactly how much blood and water flowed out, whether a large quantity or a very little. That a miracle might take place at such a

death, on such an occasion, and in the body of such a Person, we have no right to deny. The mere facts that when our Lord hung on the cross the sun was darkened, and when He gave up the ghost the veil of the temple was rent in two and the rocks rent and the earth quaked, might well prepare our minds to see nothing extraordinary in a miracle taking place, and almost to expect it. Perhaps the safest line to adopt is to combine both views. The thrust of the spear into the side caused blood to flow and proved that the seat of vitality in the body was pierced. The extraordinary and unusual flow of blood and water was a supernatural event and meant to teach spiritual lessons. I may be allowed to say that three eminent medical men in large practice, whom I have ventured to consult on this verse, are all of one mind—that any large flow of blood and water from a dead body is contrary to all ordinary experience. Each of them, singularly enough, has expressed this opinion independently and without any communication with the other two. Concerning the symbolical meaning of this flow of blood and water from our Lord's side, much has been written in every age of the Church. That it had a deep spiritual sense appears almost certain from St. John's words in his first Epistle (1 John 5:6-8). But what the real symbolical meaning was is a very disputable question.

(a) The common opinion is that the blood and water symbolized the two sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, both given by Christ and emanating from Him, and both symbols of atonement, cleansing, and forgiveness. This is the view of Chrysostom, Augustine, Andrews, and a large body of divines both ancient and

modern. I cannot myself receive this opinion. In matters like this I dare not call any man master, or endorse an interpretation of Scripture when I do not feel convinced that it is true. I cannot see the necessity of dragging in the sacraments at every point in the exposition of God's Word, as some do.

(b) My own opinion is most decided that the flow of blood and water, whether supernatural or not, was meant to be a symbolical fulfillment of the famous prophecy in Zechariah: "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness" (Zech. 13:1). It was a practical declaration, by fact and deed, to all Jews that by Christ's death that famous prophecy was fulfilled, and that now at last there was a fountain opened by Christ's death. The moment He was dead this fountain was opened and began to flow. Over the bleeding side of our Lord there might have been written, "Behold the fountain for all sin." It is no small evidence to my mind, in favor of this view, that this famous prophecy occurs only five verses after the text immediately quoted by St. John in this very chapter, "they shall look on Him whom they pierced" (Zech. 12:10.)

Augustine sees a type of this wound in our Lord's side, from which flowed blood and water, in the door in the side of Noah's ark, by which the living creatures entered in and were preserved from drowning! He also sees another type of the transaction in the first Adam sleeping and Eve being formed out of his side.

The opinion held by some, that this “blood and water” warrant the mixture of water and wine in the Lord’s Supper, seems to be utterly untenable. As Musculus sensibly observes, it was not “wine and water” but “blood and water” that flowed from our Lord’s side. There is not the slightest evidence that our Lord used water at the institution of the Lord’s Supper. That blood was the symbol of atonement and water of cleansing, every careful reader of the Old Testament must know. The two things are brought together by St. Paul in Heb. 9:19. The smiting of the rock by Moses, and water flowing forth, was also typical of the event before us. Lightfoot mentions a Jewish tradition that blood and water flowed from the rock at first.

Henry says: “The blood and water signified the two great benefits that all believers partake of through Christ—justification and sanctification. Blood stands for remission, water for regeneration; blood for atonement, water for purification. The two must always go together. Christ has joined them together, and we must not think to put them apart. They both flowed from the pierced side of our Redeemer.”

35.—[*And he who saw it testified, etc.*] This singular verse, by common consent, can only refer to St. John. It is as though he said, “The fact to which I now testify I saw with my own eyes, and my testimony is true, accurate, and trustworthy; and I know that I say true things in recording the fact so that you to whom I write need not hesitate to believe me. I stood by. I saw it. I was an eyewitness, and I

do not write by hearsay." The Greek word rendered "true" in the second place in this verse means literally "true things."

The question arises naturally, 'To what does John refer in this peculiar verse?'

(a) Does he refer only to the issue of blood and water from our Lord's side as a singularly miraculous event?

(b) Or does he refer to the thrust of the spear into our Lord's side as a convincing proof that our Lord really died?

(c) Or does he refer to the fact that our Lord's legs were not broken, and that he thus saw the great type of the Passover lamb fulfilled?

I decidedly lean to the opinion that the verse refers to all three things I have mentioned together and not to any one of them only. All three things were so remarkable and so calculated to strike the mind of a pious and intelligent Jew, and all happened in such close and rapid succession, that John emphatically records that he saw all three with his own eyes. He seems to say, "I myself saw that not a bone of the Lamb of God was broken, so that He fulfilled the type of the Passover. I myself saw a spear thrust into His heart, so that He was a true Sacrifice and really died. And I myself saw that blood and water came out of His side, and I beheld a fulfillment of the old prophecy of a fountain for sin being opened." When we consider the immense importance and significance of all these three things, we do not

wonder that John should have been inspired to write this verse in which he emphatically tells his readers that he is writing down nothing but the plain naked truth, and that he actually saw these three things—the unbroken legs, the pierced side, the flow of blood and water— with his own eyes.

Pearce and Alford think that the expression "that ye might believe" signifies "that ye might believe that Jesus did really die on the cross." Others decidedly prefer thinking that it means "that ye may believe that blood and water did really flow from the side of Jesus after His death." Others take the phrase in a general sense, "that ye may believe more firmly than ever on Christ as the true sacrifice for sin."

36,37.—[*For these things were done, etc.*] In these two verses John explains distinctly to his readers why two of the facts he has just mentioned, however trifling they might seem to an ignorant person, were in reality of great importance. By one of these facts—the not breaking a bone of our Lord's body—the text was fulfilled which said that not a bone of the Passover lamb should be broken (Ex. 12:46). By the other fact—the piercing of our Lord's side—the prophecy of Zechariah was fulfilled, that the inhabitants of Jerusalem "should look on him whom they pierced" (Zech. 12:12).

Alford observes that the expression "they shall look" does not refer to the Roman soldiers but to the repentant in the world, who at the time this Gospel was written had begun to fulfill this prophecy; and that it also contains a prophetic reference to the future conversion of Israel, who were here the real piercers, though the act was done by

"the hands of others." It is almost needless to say that the passage, like many others, does not mean that these things were done in order that Scripture might be fulfilled, but that by these things being done the Scripture was fulfilled, and God's perfect foreknowledge about the least details of Christ's death was proved. Nothing in the great sacrifice happened by chance, luck, or accident. All was arranged as appointed, from first to last, many centuries before by the determinate counsel of God. Caiaphas, Pilate, and the Roman soldiers were all unconscious instruments in carrying into effect what God had long predicted and foretold to the least jot and tittle. Let us carefully note here what strong evidence these verses supply in favor of a literal, and not a merely spiritual, fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies.

Rollock observes: "If God has ordained and said anything, it lies not in the hands of any man to disannul it. If God shall say, "There shall not be one bone of my anointed broken," great Cæsar and all the kings of the earth, the King of Spain and the Pope, and all their adherents shall not be able to do the contrary. So, in the midst of all fear and danger, let us depend on the providence of God.

JOHN 19:38-42

After this Joseph of Arimathea, a disciple of Jesus (but secretly, because he feared the Jewish authorities), asked Pilate if he could remove the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission, so he went and took the body away. Nicodemus, the man who had previously

come to Jesus at night, accompanied Joseph, carrying a mixture of myrrh and aloes weighing about seventy-five pounds. Then they took Jesus' body and wrapped it, with the aromatic spices, in strips of linen cloth according to Jewish burial customs. Now at the place where Jesus was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden was a new tomb where no one had yet been buried. So because it was the Jewish day of preparation and the tomb was nearby, they placed Jesus' body there.

There is a peculiar interest attached to these five verses of Scripture. They introduce us to a stranger, of whom we never heard before. They bring in an old friend, whose name is known wherever the Bible is read. They describe the most important funeral that ever took place in this world. From each of these three points of interest we may learn a very profitable lesson.

We learn, for one thing, from these verses, that ***there are some true Christians in the world of whom very little is known.*** The case of Joseph of Arimathea teaches this very plainly. Here is a man named among the friends of Christ, whose very name we never find elsewhere in the New Testament, and whose history, both before and after this crisis, is completely withheld from the Church. He comes forward to do honor to Christ, when the Apostles had forsaken Him and fled. He cares for Him and delights to do Him service, even when dead—not because of any miracle which he saw Him do, but out of free and gratuitous love. He does not hesitate to confess himself one of Christ's friends, at a time when Jews and Romans

alike had condemned Him as a malefactor, and put Him to death. Surely the man who could do such things must have had strong faith! Can we wonder that, wherever the Gospel is preached, throughout the whole world, this pious action of Joseph is told of as a memorial of him?

Let us hope and believe that there are many Christians in every age, who, like Joseph, are the Lord's hidden servants, unknown to the Church and the world, but well known to God. Even in Elijah's time there were seven thousand in Israel who had never bowed the knee to Baal, although the desponding prophet knew nothing of it. Perhaps, at this very day, there are saints in the back streets of some of our great towns, or in the lanes of some of our country parishes, who make no noise in the world, and yet love Christ and are loved by Him. Ill-health, or poverty, or the daily cares of some laborious calling, render it impossible for them to come forward in public; and so they live and die comparatively unknown. Yet the last day may show an astonished world that some of these very people, like Joseph, honored Christ as much as any on earth, and that their names were written in heaven. After all, it is special circumstances that bring to the surface special Christians. It is not those who make the greatest show in the Church, who are always found the closest friends of Christ.

We learn, for another thing, from these verses, that ***there are some servants of Christ whose latter end is better than their beginning.*** The case of Nicodemus teaches that lesson very

plainly. The only man who dared to help Joseph in his holy work of burying our Lord, was one who at first "came to Jesus by night," and was nothing better than an ignorant inquirer after truth. At a later period in our Lord's ministry we find this same Nicodemus coming forward with somewhat more boldness, and raising in the Council of the Pharisees the question, "Does our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he does?" (John 7:51.) Finally, we see him in the passage before us, ministering to our Lord's dead body, and not ashamed to take an active part in giving to the despised Nazarene an honorable burial. How great the contrast between the man who timidly crept into the Lord's lodging to ask a question, and the man who brought a hundred pounds weight of myrrh and aloes to anoint His dead body! Yet it was the same Nicodemus. *How great may be a man's growth in grace, and faith, and knowledge, and courage, in the short space of three years.*

We shall do well to store up these things in our minds, and to remember the case of Nicodemus, in forming our estimate of other people's religion. We must not condemn others as graceless and godless, because they do not see the whole truth at once, and only reach decided Christianity by slow degrees. The Holy Spirit always leads believers to the same foundation truths, and into the same highway to heaven. In these there is invariable uniformity. But the Holy Spirit does not always lead believers through the same experience, or at the same rate of speed. In this there is much diversity in His operations.

He that says conversion is a needless thing, and that an unconverted man may be saved, is undoubtedly under a strange delusion. But he that says that no one is converted except he becomes a full-blown and established Christian in a single day, is no less under a delusion. Let us not judge others rashly and hastily. Let us believe that a man's beginnings in religion may be very small, and yet his latter end may greatly increase. Has a man real grace? Has he within him the genuine work of the Spirit? This is the grand question. If he has, we may safely hope that his grace will grow, and we should deal with him gently, and bear with him charitably, though at present he may be a mere babe in spiritual attainments. The life in a helpless infant is as real and true a thing as the life in a full-grown man—the difference is only one of degree. "Who has despised the day of small things?" (Zech. 4:10.) The very Christian who begins his religion with a timid night-visit, and an ignorant inquiry, may stand forward alone one day, and confess Christ boldly in the full light of the sun.

We learn, lastly, from these verses, that ***the burial of the dead is an act which God sanctions and approves.*** We need not doubt that this is part of the lesson which the passage before us was meant to convey to our minds. Of course, it supplies unanswerable evidence that our Lord really died, and afterwards really rose again; but it also teaches that, when the body of a Christian is dead, there is fitness in burying it with decent honor. It is not for nothing that the burials of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and Joseph, and Moses are carefully recorded in holy writ. It is not for nothing that we are

told that John the Baptist was laid in a tomb; and that “devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.” (Acts 8:2.) It is not for nothing that we are told so particularly about the burial of Christ.

The true Christian need never be ashamed of regarding a funeral with peculiar reverence and solemnity. It is the body, which may be the instrument of committing the greatest sins, or of bringing the greatest glory to God. It is the body, which the eternal Son of God honored by dwelling in it for thirty and three years, and finally dying in our stead. It is the body, with which He rose again and ascended up into heaven. It is the body, in which He sits at the right hand of God, and represents us before the Father, as our Advocate and Priest. It is the body, which is now the temple of the Holy Spirit, while the believer lives. It is the body, which will rise again, when the last trumpet sounds, and, reunited to the soul, will live in heaven to all eternity. Surely, in the face of such facts as these, we never need suppose that reverence bestowed on the burial of the body is reverence thrown away.

Let us leave the subject with one word of caution. Let us take care that we do not regard a sumptuous funeral as an atonement for a life wasted in carelessness and sin. We may bury a man in the most expensive style, and spend thousands of dollars in mourning. We may place over his grave a costly marble stone, and inscribe on it a flattering epitaph. But all this will not save our souls or his. The turning point at the last day will not be how we are buried, but

whether we were "buried with Christ," and repented and believed. (Rom. 6:4.) Better a thousand times to die the death of the righteous, have a lowly grave and a pauper's funeral, than to die graceless, and lie under a marble tomb!

Technical Notes:

38. And after this Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate gave *him* permission. He came therefore and took the body of Jesus. 39. And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds. 40. Then they took the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury. 41. Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no man had yet been laid. 42. So there they laid Jesus, because of the Jews' Preparation *Day*, for the tomb was nearby.

38.—[*And... Joseph of Arimathea*.] This verse begins St. John's account of our Lord's burial. The manner of that burial was one of the things predicted by Isaiah (ch. 53:9), in a verse which is not correctly translated. It should be, "His grave was appointed with the wicked; but with the rich man was His tomb." The details of His burial are carefully recorded by all the four Evangelists. Each of them

names Joseph as the prime agent in the transaction, and, singularly enough, each mentions something that the other three Gospel writers do not mention. St. Matthew alone says that he was “a rich man” (Matt. 27:51). St. Mark alone says that he was “an honorable counselor, who also waited for the kingdom of God” (Mark 15:43). St. Luke alone says that he was “a good man and a just” who had “not consented to the counsel and deed of them…who himself waited for the kingdom of God” (Luke 23:50,51). St. John alone says here that he was “a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews.” It is another singular fact about Joseph that we never hear a word about him in Scripture except on this occasion of our Lord’s burial. Both before and after this interesting event, the Bible, for some wise reason, is entirely silent about him. Nor can we explain how an inhabitant of Arimathea happened to have a new tomb at Jerusalem. We must either suppose that as a rich man he had two residences, or else that though born at Arimathea he had lately removed to Jerusalem. The utmost we know is that the article in the Greek before “Joseph” and before “of Arimathea” seems to indicate that he was a person well known by history to the readers of St. John’s Gospel. About the place Arimathea, from where Joseph came, nothing is known. Some think that it is Ramah, where Samuel dwelt (1 Sam. 7:17). The Septuagint Greek translator certainly calls Ramah “Armathaim,” which looks like it. St. Luke calls it a “city of Judea.” Nothing certain seems to be known about it.

[*Being a disciple… Jews.*] The Greek word rendered “secretly” is literally “a concealed” disciple—a past participle. The expression

teaches the interesting fact that there were Jews who secretly believed that Jesus was the Messiah, and yet had not courage to confess Him before His crucifixion. We are distinctly told in John 12:42 that "many of the chief rulers believed, but did not confess Christ because of the Pharisees." But the character given of them, that "they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God," is so condemnatory that we may well doubt whether Joseph was one of these. Lack of physical or moral courage was probably the flaw in his character. It is only fair to remember that as "a rich man and a counselor," he had far more to sacrifice and far more opposition to encounter than poor fishermen or publicans would have. His backwardness to confess Christ cannot, of course, be defended. But his case teaches us that there is sometimes more spiritual work going on in men's minds than appears. We must not set down everyone as utterly graceless and godless who is not bold and outspoken at present. We must charitably hope that there are some secret disciples, who at present hold their tongues and say nothing, and yet, like Joseph, will one day come forward and be courageous witnesses for Christ. All is not gold that glitters, and all is not dross that now looks dirty and makes no show. We must be charitable and hope on. His case should also teach us the great power of that mischievous principle, the fear of man. Open sin kills its thousands, but the fear of man its tens of thousands. Let us watch and pray against it. Faith is the grand secret of victory over it. Like Moses, we must ever live as those who "see Him who is invisible" (Heb. 11:27). And to faith must be added the expulsive power of a new principle—the fear of God. "I

fear God," said holy Col. Gardiner, "and there is none else that I need fear."

[*Asked Pilate…body of Jesus.*] The conduct of Joseph deserves our praise and admiration, and his name will be held in honor by the Church of Christ in consequence of it as long as the world stands. Whatever Joseph was at first, he shone brightly at last. "The last are first" sometimes. Let us see what he did.

(a) Joseph honored Christ when our Lord's own apostles had forsaken Him. He showed more faith and courage than His nearest and dearest friends.

(b) Joseph honored Christ when it was a dangerous thing to do Him honor. To come forward and avow respect for one condemned as a malefactor, for one cast out by the High Priests and leaders of the Jews, and to say practically "I am Christ's friend," was bold indeed. St. mark particularly says, "He went in boldly unto Pilate" (Mark 15:43), showing plainly that it was an act of uncommon courage.

(c) Joseph honored Christ when He was a lifeless corpse and, to all appearance, could do nothing for him. It was not when Jesus was doing miracles and preaching wonderful sermons, but when there remained nothing of Him but a dead body that Joseph came forward and asked permission to bury Him.

Why Joseph's fear departed and he acted with such marvelous

boldness now is a question that we have no means of settling. But reason points out that in all probability he had been an eyewitness of much that had happened this eventful day. He had possibly stood within a short distance of the cross, seen all that took place, and heard every one of our Lord's seven sayings. The miraculous darkness for three hours and the earthquake must have arrested his attention. Surely it is not presumptuous to conjecture that all this must have had a mighty effect on Joseph's soul, and made him resolve at once to cast fear away and avow himself openly to be one of Christ's friends. It is almost certain that he must have been near the cross at three o'clock, when our Lord gave up the ghost, or else how could he have known of His death and had time to think of burying Him? After all it is a deep truth, that circumstances bring out character in an extraordinary way. Just as the developing liquid brings out of the dull grey glass in the photographer's hands a latent image, which you never suspected before, so do circumstances bring out in some men a decision and power of character which before you would have thought impossible. Rollock remarks: "When Christ was working wonders and speaking as never man spoke, all this did not move Joseph to come forth and show himself. But now with Christ being dead and in shame, he comes out. To what do I ascribe this? I ascribe it to the force that comes from the death of Christ. There was never a living man in the world who had such power as that dead body had. More mighty was His death than His life."

[*And Pilate gave him permission.*] The entire absence of difficulties in Joseph's way is, at first sight, rather remarkable. We

may easily believe that Pilate was willing enough to grant Joseph's request. He did not grant it until the centurion certified that Jesus was actually dead and the ends of justice (so called) attained. Then at once he gave permission. It is fair to remember that he had regarded our Lord as guiltless all along, that if left to his own free will he would have released Him. It is probable, moreover, that he was vexed and annoyed at the obstinate pertinacity with which the Jews pressed for our Lord's death against his wish, and that he would be glad enough to pay them off and spite them by gratifying any friends of our Lord. But we must also remember, that to the burial of our Lord's body the Jews themselves had no objection, and had even asked that the death of the criminals might be hastened and the dead bodies out of the way. What they would have done with the body of our Lord if Joseph had not come forward, we cannot certainly tell. Lightfoot says there was a common grave for the bodies of malefactors. In any case, Joseph's request was not likely to meet with objection either from Gentile or Jew. But for all that, we must not forget that it made him a marked man (as a friend of Christ) and utterly ruined his character with Caiaphas and the high priests.

[*He came…body of Jesus.*] The word rendered "took" here is the same that is rendered "took away" just above. Some think, as Tholuck and Ellicott, that the Roman soldiers took the body down from the cross. But I see no certain proof of this, and I think it unlikely they would take the trouble to do it if others were willing to undertake the task. The meaning, in my opinion, is that Joseph came up to the cross, raised and lifted from it the lifeless corpse of our

Lord, and took it away for burial. Whether this was done by rearing a ladder against the cross, as Rubens' famous picture represents, and so letting down the body after drawing out the nails, or whether by taking up the cross out of the hole in which it was fixed, laying it on the ground, and then taking out the nails, is a question that we have no means of deciding. To me it seems far more probable that the latter plan would be adopted than the former, and that as the cross was most likely reared up with the body on it, so it was taken down again with the body on it. But every reader must judge for himself. In whatever way the body was taken down, or taken off the cross, everything seems to me to indicate that Joseph was the person who did it with his own hands. This is the more remarkable when we consider that to touch a dead body made a Jew ceremonially unclean, and that this was the afternoon preceding the Passover Sabbath. There seems, however, no reason why we should suppose that no one helped Joseph. He could hardly lift the cross, or reverently lift off the body of a full-grown person in the prime of life, without some aid. Why should we hesitate to believe that John and Nicodemus helped him?

It is a curious coincidence, though perhaps only a coincidence, that it was a "Joseph" who probably first touched and received our Lord's body when He was born into the world at Bethlehem, and again a "Joseph" who was the last to hold, lift, and handle the dead body of the same Lord when He was buried.

39.—[*And Nicodemus…also came.*] The fact here recorded is quite peculiar to St. John's Gospel. For wise reasons, neither Matthew,

Mark, nor Luke ever mention the name of Nicodemus. John mentions him three times—first, as a secret inquirer (John 3:1), secondly, as a timid advocate of justice toward our Lord in the Jewish Council (John 7:10), and lastly, in this place. Both here and on the second occasion he emphatically inserts the explanatory comment that it was the same Nicodemus who "at first came to Jesus by night."

The verse before us seems to show that Nicodemus came forward as a volunteer and helped to bury our Lord, and did not shrink to take part with Joseph in his good work. I can hardly think that he went with Joseph to Pilate. There is not a word to show this in any of the four Gospels. Some think that by agreement Nicodemus went to fetch the hundred pounds' weight of spice (no slight burden to carry), while Joseph went to Pilate. I should rather conjecture that when Nicodemus saw Joseph (whom doubtless as a Pharisee and counselor he knew well) coming boldly forward and showing anxiety to honor our Lord's body, Nicodemus' own heart was stirred within him, his own timidity fell to the ground, and he came forward and offered to aid. In so doing he deserves praise and honor, though in a lower degree, like Joseph. Nicodemus showed more reverence and love to our Lord when He was dead than he had ever done when He was alive. Once more we see that circumstances bring out character in very unexpected ways. The man who began seeking Jesus by night at last confesses Jesus openly before the world in the full light of day.

The case of Nicodemus is deeply instructive. It shows us how small

and weak the beginning of true religion may be in the soul of man. It shows us that we must not despair of anyone because he begins with a little timid, secret inquiry after Christ. It shows us that there are wide differences and varieties in the characters of believers. Some are brought into full light at once and take up the cross without delay. Others attain light very slowly and halt long between two opinions. It shows us that those who make the least display at first sometimes shine brightest and come out best at last. Nicodemus confessed his love to Christ when Peter, James, and Andrew had all run away. What need we have for patience and charity in forming an estimate of other people's religion! There are more successors of Nicodemus in the Church of Christ than we are aware of. We may see some marvelous changes in some persons if we live with them a few years. The strongest, hardiest trees are often the slowest in growth. He who sets down men and women as graceless and godless, if they do not profess full assurance of hope the first day they take up religion and hear the Gospel, forgets the case of Nicodemus, and exhibits his own ignorance of the ways of the Spirit. All God's elect are led to Christ, undoubtedly, but not all at the same speed or through the same experience. On the conduct of Joseph and Nicodemus, Calvin remarks: "Here we have a striking proof that Christ's death was more quickening than His life. So great was the efficacy of that sweet savor which the death of Christ conveyed to the minds of these two men that it quickly extinguished all the passions of the flesh."

Quesnel observes: “Wonderful is the power of Christ’s death, which gives courage to confess Him in His deepest humiliation, to those who, when He was doing miracles, came to Him only in secret.” Henry observes that Joseph and Nicodemus showed weak faith but strong love. “A firm faith in Christ’s resurrection would have saved them this cost and expense. But they showed their deep love to our Lord’s person and teaching.”

[*Bringing a mixture…hundred pounds*.] The mixture here mentioned was probably in the shape of powder. The two ingredients were strongly aromatic and antiseptic. The large quantity brought shows the wealth and the liberal mind of Nicodemus. It also shows his wise forethought. A dead body so torn and lacerated as that of our blessed Lord would need an unusually large quantity of antiseptics or preservatives to check the tendency to corruption, which such a climate would cause even at Easter. Considering also that everything must have been done with some haste, the large quantity of spices used was probably meant to compensate for the lack of time to do the work slowly and carefully.

40.—[Then they took…wound it…spices.] Here we are told the precise manner of the preparation of our Lord’s body for burial. As always in that time and country, He was not put into a coffin. He was simply wrapped up in linen cloths on which the preparation of myrrh and aloes had been laid. Thus the powder would be next to our Lord’s body and interpose between the linen and His skin. How the linen cloths were provided we are told by St. Mark: Joseph “bought

fine linen" (Mark 15:46). Joseph, being a rich man, had no difficulty in supplying funds for this purpose. The word "wound" means literally "bound."

The sentence before us supplies one more strong evidence of the reality of Christ's death. Joseph and Nicodemus could not possibly be deceived. When they touched and handled the body, and wrapped it in linen cloths, they must have felt convinced that the heart had ceased to beat and that life was extinct. There is no mistaking the feel of a dead body.

[*As the custom…bury*.] This is one of those occasional comments or explanatory remarks, which St. John sometimes makes in his Gospel, supplying strong internal evidence that he wrote for all the Church of Christ in every land, Gentiles as well as Jews, and that he thought it wise to explain Jewish customs. The reference appears to be to the wrapping of the body in linen, rather than to the use of the spices. Lazarus at Bethany came out of the grave wrapped around with cloths. The wise foresight of the Spirit of God appears strongly in the details here given of our Lord's burial. The quantity of spices used was so great that it anticipates the objection that our Lord's body might possibly "see corruption" in some degree before His resurrection. At the same time, the special mention of Joseph being a rich and Nicodemus a ruler helping him, completely stops the mouths of those who would have said that the followers of our Lord could never have found means to prevent the wounds of His body corrupting. By God's superintending providence, inclining rich men

to come forward, the difficulty was obviated and the means provided. Besser says: “Twice was Jesus Christ rich in the days of His poverty. Once, immediately after His birth, when the wise men from the East offered Him gold and frankincense and myrrh; and now, after His ignominious death, when a rich man buries him and a distinguished man provides spices to anoint Him. Yes, a rich Joseph has taken the place of that poor Joseph who stood by the manger.”

41.—[*Now in the place…was a garden.*] This verse tells us the place where our Lord was buried. It was in a garden close to the spot called Golgotha, where He was crucified. This fact alone seems to dispose of the theory that the “place of a skull” meant a place where the skeletons and bones of executed criminals were lying about! Reason and common sense point out that even if there were no argument against the theory from the Jewish customs about bones, it is very unlikely that a garden would have been near such a loathsome place. Golgotha could hardly be a place of execution or a place where criminals were frequently crucified if there was a garden near! The pictures that commonly represent the scene of the crucifixion as a bleak, desolate-looking rocky hill are manifestly quite incorrect. It was a place near to which, or where, “there was a garden.” The curious coincidence that the fall of the first Adam and the agony, the cross, and the sepulcher of the second Adam were all alike connected with a garden, can hardly fail to strike a reflecting mind.

[*And in the garden…laid.*] Here we have the very receptacle described in which our Lord’s sacred body was laid. Matthew, Mark,

and Luke all tell us it was "hewn out of a rock," the limestone rock, which is the rock of the place. John tells us that it was new, and like St. Luke, adds that "no man had yet been laid" in it. It is curious that Matthew alone tells us that this tomb was Joseph's own, "which he had hewn out of a rock" (Matt. 27:60). Theophylact remarks that it is a striking proof of our Lord's poverty, that while He lived He had no house of His own, and when He died He was buried in another's tomb. It is almost needless to say that both conditions of the sepulcher above mentioned are of great importance and deserve careful notice. (a) Our Lord's tomb was hewn out of a hard limestone rock. This made it clearly impossible for anyone to say that the disciples made a subterraneous entrance into the tomb by night and stole the body away. By the entrance that it was carried into the sepulcher, by the same it must be carried out. (b) Our Lord's tomb was a new one in which no one had ever been laid. This made it impossible for anyone to say, after the resurrection, that there was no proof that Jesus rose from the dead and that it might possibly be someone else. This could not be, when His body was the first and only body that was ever laid in this grave. Wonderful is it to see how at every turn the overruling wisdom of God has stopped, obviated, and frustrated by wise provisions the objections of infidels.

42.—[*So there they laid Jesus, etc.*] In order to see the full meaning of this verse, we should slightly invert the order of the words and paraphrase them in some such way as this: "In this new rock-hewn tomb, therefore, Joseph and Nicodemus laid the body of Jesus, because it was conveniently nigh at hand and because the Jews'

preparation day, or day preceding the Passover sabbath, left them little time and made it necessary to hasten their proceedings." We may well believe that these two holy men had but little time when we consider that our Lord did not give up the ghost till three o'clock; that the day ended at six and only three hours were left for (1) Joseph to go to Pilate and get permission to remove the body from the cross, (2) for Joseph and Nicodemus to take the nails out and lift the body from the tree, (3) for wrapping the body in linen with a hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes, and (4) for finally carrying it to the tomb and rolling a huge stone to the mouth of the tomb. When we remember, besides this, that the body of a full grown man wrapped in linen with a hundred pounds of additional weight in myrrh and aloes would be a most awkward and difficult burden for two men to carry, we may well believe that nothing but severe exertion could have enabled Joseph and Nicodemus to finish their labor of love before six o'clock. The wonder is that they managed to do it at all. It certainly could not have been done if they had not got a sepulcher nigh at hand. Again the Holy Ghost appears to me to foresee the objection that there was not time to bury our Lord, and mercifully supplies the words that answer it: "the sepulcher was nigh at hand." Even then we can hardly doubt that John and the women from Galilee must have lent some help. At all events, it is distinctly recorded that the women were present, and that they were sitting by and beheld where the body was laid. Thus ended the most wonderful funeral the sun ever shone upon. Such a death and such a burial—so little understood by man and so important in the sight of God—there never was and never can be again. Who need doubt the love of Christ

when we consider the deep humiliation that Christ went through for our sakes! To tabernacle in our flesh at all, to die after the manner of a man, to allow his holy body to hang naked on a cross, to suffer it to be lifted, handled, carried like a lump of cold clay and shut up in a dark, silent, solitary tomb—this was indeed love that passes knowledge. What true believer need fear the grave now? Solemn as is the thought of our last narrow bed, we must never forget that "it is the place where the Lord lay" (Matt. 28:6). "The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:56).

Henry observes: "Christ's death should comfort us against the fear of death. The grave could not long keep Christ, and it shall not long keep us. It was a loathsome prison before, it is a perfumed bed now. He whose Head is in heaven need not fear to put his feet into the grave." Every Bible reader knows that Isaiah's famous prophecy contains the words, "He made His grave with the wicked, and with the rich in His death" (Isa. 53:9). But not everyone knows the interesting fact that the more correct translation of the Hebrew words would be, "His grave was appointed to be with the wicked; but with the rich man was His tomb." This is the opinion of such eminent scholars as Capellus, Vitringa, Bishop Lowth, and Bishop Horsley.

John – Chap. 20

JOHN 20:1-10

Now very early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been moved away from the entrance. So she went running to Simon Peter and the other disciple whom Jesus loved and told them, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" Then Peter and the other disciple set out to go to the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down and saw the strips of linen cloth lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter, who had been following him, arrived and went right into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen cloth lying there, and the face cloth, which had been around Jesus' head, not lying with the strips of linen cloth but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple who had reached the tomb first came in, and he saw and believed. (For they did not yet understand the scripture that Jesus must rise from the dead.) So the disciples went back to their homes.

The chapter we have now begun takes us from Christ's death to Christ's resurrection. Like Matthew, Mark, and Luke, John dwells on these two great events with peculiar fullness and particularity. And we need not wonder. The whole of saving Christianity hinges on the

two facts, that Christ died for our sins, and rose again for our justification. The chapter before our eyes deserves special attention. Of all the four evangelists, none supplies such deeply interesting evidence of the resurrection, as the disciple whom Jesus loved.

We are taught in the passage before us, ***that those who love Christ most are those who have received most benefit from him.***

The first whom John names among those who came to Christ's sepulcher, is Mary Magdalene. The history of this faithful woman, no doubt, is hidden in much obscurity. A vast amount of needless ridicule has been heaped upon her memory, as if she was once an habitual sinner against the seventh commandment. Yet there is literally no evidence whatever that she was anything of the kind! But we are distinctly told that she was one out of whom the Lord had cast "seven devils" (Mark 16:9; Luke 8:2)—one who had been subjected in a peculiar way to Satan's possession—and one whose gratitude to our Lord for deliverance was a gratitude that knew no bounds. In short, of all our Lord's followers on earth, none seem to have loved Him so much as Mary Magdalene. None felt that they owed so much to Christ. None felt so strongly that there was nothing too great to do for Christ. Hence, as Andrews beautifully puts it— "She was last at His cross, and first at His grave. She stayed longest *there,* and was soonest *here.* She could not rest until she was up to seek Him. She sought Him while it was yet dark, even before she had light to seek

Him by." In a word, having received much, she loved much; and loving much, she did much, in order to prove the reality of her love.

The case before us throws broad and clear light on a question, which ought to be deeply interesting to every true-hearted servant of Christ. How is it that many who profess and call themselves Christians, do so little for the Savior whose name they bear? How is it that many, whose faith and grace it would be uncharitable to deny, work so little, give so little, say so little, take so little pains, to promote Christ's cause, and bring glory to Christ in the world? These questions admit of only one answer. It is a low sense of debt and obligation to Christ, which is the account of the whole matter. Where sin is not felt at all, nothing is done; and where sin is little felt, little is done. The man who is deeply conscious of his own guilt and corruption, and deeply convinced that without the death and intercession of Christ he would sink deservedly into the lowest hell, this is the man who will spend and be spent for Jesus, and think that he can never do enough to show forth His praise. Let us daily pray that we may see the sinfulness of sin, and the amazing grace of Christ, more clearly and distinctly. Then, and then only, shall we cease to be cool, and lukewarm, and slovenly in our work for Jesus. Then, and then only, shall we understand such burning zeal as that of Mary; and comprehend what Paul meant when he said, "The love of Christ constrains us; because we thus judge that if One died for all, then were all dead—and that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again." (2 Cor. 5:14, 15.)

We are taught, secondly, in these verses, ***that there are widely different temperaments in different believers.***

This is a point which is curiously brought out in the conduct of Peter and John, when Mary Magdalene told them that the Lord's body was gone. We are told that they both ran to the sepulcher; but John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, outran Peter, and reached the empty grave first. Then comes out the difference between the two men. John, of the two more gentle, quiet, tender, reserved, retiring, deep-feeling, stooped down and looked in, but went no further. Peter, more hot, and zealous, and impulsive, and fervent, and forward, cannot be content without going down into the sepulcher, and actually seeing with his own eyes. Both, we may be sure, were deeply attached to our Lord. The hearts of both, at this critical juncture, were full of hopes, and fears, and anxieties, and expectations, all tangled together. Yet each behaves in his own characteristic fashion. We need not doubt that these things were intentionally written for our learning.

Let us learn, from the case before us, to make allowances for wide varieties in the inward character of believers. To do so will save us much trouble in the journey of life, and prevent many an uncharitable thought. Let us not judge brethren harshly, and set them down in a low place, because they do not see or feel things exactly as we see and feel, and because things do not affect or strike them just as they affect and strike us. The flowers in the Lord's garden are not all of one color and one scent, though they are all

planted by one Spirit. The subjects of His kingdom are not all exactly of one tone and temperament, though they all love the same Savior, and are written in the same book of life. The Church of Christ has some in its ranks who are like Peter, and some who are like John; and a place for all, and a work for all to do. Let us love all who love Christ in sincerity, and thank God that they love Him at all. The great thing is to love Jesus.

We are taught, finally, in these verses, ***that there may be much ignorance even in true believers.***

This is a point which is brought out here with singular force and distinctness. John himself, the writer of this Gospel, records of himself and his companion Peter, "As yet they knew not the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead." How truly incredible this seems! For three long years these two leading Apostles had heard our Lord speak of His own resurrection as a fact, and yet they had not understood Him. Again and again He had staked the truth of His Messiahship on His rising from the dead, and yet they had never taken in His meaning. *We little realize the power over the mind which is exercised by wrong teaching in childhood, and by early prejudices imbibed in our youth.* Surely the Christian minister has little right to complain of ignorance among his hearers, when he marks the ignorance of Peter and John, under the teaching of Christ Himself.

After all we must remember that true grace, and not head knowledge, is the one thing needful. We are in the hands of a

merciful and compassionate Savior, who passes by and pardons much ignorance, when He sees “a heart right in the sight of God.” Some things indeed we must know, and without knowing them we cannot be saved. Our own sinfulness and guilt, the office of Christ as a Savior, the necessity of repentance and faith—such things as these are essential to salvation. But he that knows these things may, in other respects, be a very ignorant man. In fact, the extent to which one man may have grace together with much ignorance, and another may have much knowledge and yet no grace, is one of the greatest mysteries in religion, and one which the last day alone will unfold. Let us then seek knowledge, and be ashamed of ignorance. But above all let us make sure that, like Peter and John, we have grace and right hearts.

Technical Notes:

1. The first *day* of the week Mary Magdalene went to the sepulcher early, while it was still dark, and saw *that* the stone had been taken away from the sepulcher. 2. Then she ran and came to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and said to them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulcher, and we do not know where they have laid him. 3. Peter therefore went out, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulcher. 4. So they both ran together, and the other disciple outran Peter and came to the sepulcher first. 5. And he, stooping down *and looking in*, saw the linen cloths lying; yet he did not go in.

6. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the sepulcher; and he saw the linen cloths lie, 7. and the napkin that had been around his head, not lying with the linen cloths, but wrapped together in a place by itself. 8. Then the other disciple, who came to the sepulcher first, went in also; and he saw and believed. 9. For as yet they did not know the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead. 10. Then the disciples went away again to their own home.

The last two chapters of St. John's Gospel are taken up with accounts of our Lord's appearances after His resurrection. Like Matthew, Mark, and Luke, St. John dwells very fully on the history of the crucifixion and resurrection. But, as in other parts of his Gospel, so here also, he supplies many deeply interesting details that the other Evangelists, for some wise reasons, have not recorded. A few preliminary remarks on the whole subject will not perhaps be found uninteresting. The matter is one about which every Christian ought to have very clear and correct views.

(a) Concerning the importance of Jesus Christ's resurrection from the dead, it would be hard to speak too strongly. It is a cardinal article of the Christian faith, second to none in value. It is the grand proof that He was the promised Messiah whom the Prophets had foretold. It is the one great sign which He named to the Jews when asked to give convincing evidence of His Divine mission—the sign of the Prophet Jonah, the rebuilding of the temple after destruction.

(Matt. 12:39, John 2:19-21.) If He did not rise again after three days, they were not to believe Him. It is the completion of the work of redemption which He came into the world to accomplish. It proved that the ransom was accepted and the victory over sin and death obtained. Christ "was delivered for our offenses, and raised again for our justification." "We are begotten again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." (Rom. 4:25, 1 Pet. 1:3.) If He had not risen again, our hope would have been a huge uncertainty. It is a fact which has the closest connection with the spiritual life and position before God of all believers. They are counted by God as "risen with Christ," and they should regard themselves as partakers of Christ's resurrection life and sitting in heavenly places. Not least, it is the pledge and assurance of our own resurrection at the last day. We need not fear death and look at the grave with despair, when we remember that Jesus Christ rose again in the body. As surely as the Head rose, so shall the members be raised. Let these points never be forgotten. When we think of them we may understand why the Apostles, in their preaching and Epistles, dwell so much upon the resurrection. Well would it be if modern Christians thought more about it. Myriads seem unable to look at anything in the Gospel except the sacrifice and death of Christ, and altogether pass over His resurrection.

(b) Concerning the evidences of Christ's resurrection (the proofs that He actually did rise again from the grave with His body), it is more remarkable to observe how full and various they are. He was seen at least eleven times after He rose again, at different times of day, in

different ways, and by different witnesses. He was seen first by one woman alone, then by several women together, then by one man, then by two men, and each time in the open air. Then He was seen by ten disciples in the evening in a room, then by eleven disciples again in a room, and afterwards on five different occasions, at one of which no less than five hundred people were present. Those to whom He appeared touched Him, talked with Him, and saw Him eat and drink. (Matt. 28:9, John 20:27, Luke 24:42.) Nor must it be forgotten that all who saw Him were most unwilling at first to believe, and most slow to credit the report of His resurrection. Yet they were all finally convinced! If there is any fact in Christianity that is well supported by evidence, it is the fact of Christ rising again from the dead. It is the one fact that no infidel has ever fairly grappled with. One thing at any rate is most undeniably certain, and no infidel can escape it—the Apostles a few weeks after our Lord's crucifixion were utterly and entirely different men in every way from what they were before the crucifixion. They were bolder, more decided, more unhesitating followers of Jesus of Nazareth than they used to be, to a most enormous extent. Even such men as the German Rationalists Paulus and Strauss, according to Tholuck, are obliged to make the curious admission, "Something extraordinary must have occurred."

(c) Concerning the best mode of harmonizing the accounts that the four Evangelists give of our Lord's appearances after He rose again from the dead, there is undeniably some difficulty. But it is probably far more apparent than real. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John each tell their own story. There is a most decided absence of any

appearance of concert or collusion about them. How to reconcile the seeming discrepancies in their narratives has exercised the skill of commentators in every age. Dean Alford says flatly that he "attempts no harmony of the accounts," and that he "believes all such attempts to be fruitless." I do not agree with him at all, and I think the statement to be unworthy of the able writer who makes it. I think the accounts can be harmonized and reconciled, and that too without any unfair violence to the narratives of the four Gospels. The order of Christ's eleven appearances between His resurrection and ascension I believe to be as follows:

1. To Mary Magdalene alone (Mark 16:9, John 20:14).
2. To certain women returning from the tomb (Matt. 28:9,10).
3. To Simon Peter alone (Luke 24:34).
4. To two disciples going to Emmaus (Luke 24:13).
5. To ten Apostles at Jerusalem and some other disciples, Thomas being absent (John 20:19).
6. To eleven Apostles at Jerusalem, Thomas being present (John 20:26-29).
7. To seven disciples fishing at the sea of Tiberias (John 21:1).
8. To eleven Apostles on a mountain in Galilee, and perhaps some others with them (Matt. 28:16).
9. To over five hundred brethren at once (1 Cor. 15:7).
10. To James only (1 Cor. 15:7).
11. To all the Apostles, and probably some others, on Mount Olivet at His ascension.

Most of these eleven appearances require little or no explanation. The ninth and tenth in the list are only recorded by St. Paul, and some think that the appearance to five hundred at one time is the same as that to the eleven in Galilee, though I doubt it. The appearance to Peter is one of which we know nothing except the fact; and, in my judgment, it certainly is not the same as the appearance to the two who were walking to Emmaus. The only appearances, after all, about which there is any difficulty are the first two in the list, and to my own mind the difficulty is by no means insuperable. The knot to be untied is this. St. Mark expressly says that our Lord appeared first to Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9). St. John also describes this appearance, and it is quite plain from his account that Mary Magdalene was alone (John 20:11-13). Yet St. Matthew says that Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to the tomb together, saw an angel, heard that our Lord had risen, ran to bring the tidings to the disciples, and were met on the way by Jesus; both saw Him at the same time. Now how is this to be explained? How can the account of these three witnesses be made to harmonize and agree? I will try to show.

(1) I believe that Mary Magdalene and the other Mary did not go alone to the tomb on the morning of the resurrection. By comparing Mark 16:1, Luke 23:55, and Luke 24:1 with Matt. 28:1, it is quite evident that several “other women” accompanied them.

(2) I believe that on drawing near the tomb, the company of women saw the stone rolled away from its mouth. At once, on seeing this, it

flashed on the mind of Mary Magdalene that the body of Jesus had been removed from the tomb, and without waiting a moment she ran off to Peter and John and told them, as recorded in John 20:1.2. This is the view of Chrysostom and Cyril.

(3) I believe that while Mary Magdalene ran off to tell Peter and John, the other women went up to the tomb, found the body gone, saw a vision of angels, were told that Jesus had risen, and were commanded to go and tell the disciples. They departed to tell the news. Some went in one direction and some in another, Mary and Salome with one party and Joanna with another.

(4) I believe that while this was going on, Mary Magdalene, who had run off alone to tell Peter and John, had found them, and that they all three came to the tomb shortly after the other women went away. Whether Mary got there so soon as Peter and John perhaps admits of doubt.

(5) I believe that Peter and John saw the empty tomb and went away, leaving Mary Magdalene weeping there.

(6) I believe that as soon as Peter and John went away, Mary Magdalene saw the two angels, and immediately after saw our Lord Himself and was told to carry a message to His brethren (John 20:17).

(7) I believe that in the meantime the other women had gone in two

or three directions to tell the other disciples, who lived in a different part of Jerusalem from that where Peter and John lived. Mary the wife of Clopas and Salome were yet on their way when Jesus met them very shortly after He had appeared to Mary Magdalene.

(8) I believe that one party of the women, with Joanna at their head, saw nothing of our Lord, but went to the disciples and told them the message of the angels.

(9) I believe that shortly after this our Lord appeared to Simon Peter, who very likely had gone again to the grave on hearing Mary Magdalene's report.

(10) I believe that in the course of the same day, our Lord appeared to the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, who had left Jerusalem after Joanna and the women reported the vision of angels but before our Lord had appeared to Peter.

(11) Finally, I believe that in the evening of the same day our Lord appeared to the Apostles, and others with them, Thomas being absent. Luke says, "The *eleven* Apostles were gathered together." But he evidently means the Apostles generally, as *a body*. (See my note on Luke 24:34.) This was our Lord's fifth appearance on the day that He rose. I know not whether this scheme of reconciliation will satisfy all my readers. On a point so much controverted, it becomes a commentator to speak humbly and diffidently. I content myself with saying that I see far fewer difficulties in it than in any other scheme

that I have met with. I see, moreover, nothing unfair or unreasonable about it, and nothing that is not consistent with the variety that may justly be expected from the testimony of four independent witnesses. To those who wish to study the subject more fully, I strongly recommend a careful study of "West on the Resurrection," and "Birks's Horæ Evangelicæ."

1.—[*The first day of the week.*] This, I need hardly say, means our Sunday, the Lord's day, the first day following the Jewish sabbath. Between the end of the 19th chapter and these words, we must suppose an interval of thirty-six hours to have passed away. During these hours our blessed Lord's body lay still in the tomb, and His soul was in paradise, while the disciples were quiet in their respective abodes and honored the fourth commandment. The chief and principal breakers of this Sabbath were the priests and Pharisees, who came to Pilate and obtained leave to set a watch around the tomb and put a seal on the stone that lay at its mouth. The very men who made a boast of the law dishonored God and disgraced themselves through the breaking of the law. The very followers of Him whom they had slain kept the law more strictly than they.

[*Mary Magdalene went…still dark.*] St. John names none but Mary. Yet it is clear, by examining the account of the other three Gospel writers, that she did not go alone. She was only one among several women from Galilee— including Mary the wife of Clopas, or Alpheus, Salome the mother of John and James, and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward. These all appear to have been near our Lord

when He was crucified, and to have looked on, if they did not actively help, when He was buried. They then probably agreed to go to the tomb early on the morning after the sabbath in order to do more for our Lord's body than there was time to do on Friday afternoon. On the sabbath they rested according to the commandment. They now came as early as they could, even before the sun was up, in order to begin their pious work as soon as they had light to do it. Foremost among the whole party was Mary Magdalene.

Rupertus and Ferus maintain that Mary Magdalene lived at Bethany and therefore went alone to the tomb, from a different road to that by which the other women went. But this seems pure conjecture, and probably arises from confounding Mary Magdalene with Mary the sister of Lazarus.

[*And saw…stone…sepulcher*.] It seems to me, from these words, that Mary Magdalene was the first who detected in the dim twilight that the stone was rolled away from the mouth of the tomb. It may be that she was in advance of the other women and thus saw it first. It may be that strong feeling and anxiety made her more quick-sighted and keen of observation than her companions. Indeed, we do not know for a certainty that all the women came together in a body. For anything I can see, they may have come separately or by twos and threes, and Mary may have been the first of the party. It is quite consistent with her character to suppose this. In any case, her conduct this memorable morning was so remarkable and prominent that St. John speaks of her alone. All the women showed faith and

courage and love, he seems to intimate, but none so pre-eminently as Mary Magdalene. She was first to come near the tomb, first to discover that the stone was rolled away, first to conjecture that something remarkable had happened, and first to act at once on what she saw.

Let us note Mary's courage and zeal to honor her buried Lord. Not every woman would have dared to go outside the city while it was yet dark, to a grave, and specially during the Passover feast when thousands of strangers were probably sleeping under any slight shelter near the walls of Jerusalem.

Let us note how St. John takes it for granted that his readers were acquainted with the other three Gospels and knew that "a stone" had been rolled to the door of the tomb. He here speaks of "the stone," yet he has said nothing about it before.
There seems strong internal evidence that Mary and the other women, who agreed to go with her to the tomb, could not have known of the Roman guard having been placed around it. It seems, at all events, highly improbable that they would have gone there before the sun was up if they had expected to find Roman soldiers at the place.

Andrews observes that four special favors were granted to Mary in one day:

(1) to see the angels, (2) to see Christ at all, (3) to see Him first of all,

and (4) to be employed by Christ to carry a heavenly errand. And why? Because she loved much. He adds: “We cannot say that she believed much. By repeating three times that her Lord was ‘taken away’ (verses 2, 13, 15), it seems she believed no more than the high priest would have the world believe—that He was taken away by night.”

2.—[*Then she ran.*] I believe this expression means that Mary Magdalene, the moment she saw the stone rolled away from its place, ran off alone to tell the news to Peter and John. She did not go a step nearer the tomb but left the other women to go up to the grave and look in, and thus missed seeing the angel whom they saw. She waited for nothing. The stone was moved. The body, she at once concluded, had been taken away. She turned on her heel at once and ran off to tell the two chief Apostles. The rest of the party probably drew near to the grave slowly and hesitatingly, not knowing what to think or expect. Mary was probably a long way on the road to the dwelling of Peter and John before they finally turned away from the tomb. This should be carefully noticed if we would reconcile the narratives of Matthew and John. It is clear to my own mind that there was something peculiar and striking in the conduct of Mary Magdalene this wonderful morning, and St. John desires on that account to direct our special attention to it. “Mary,” he seems to say, “was the first to come to the tomb, the first to see that the stone was removed, and the one who ran off alone to tell me and Peter. Many of the Galilean women showed faith and love and zeal that morning, but none more than Mary.”

[And came… Peter…other…loved.] The other disciple here mentioned was unquestionably John. Mary's reasons for running to tell these two first were probably these.

(a) They were chief men among the Apostles.

(b) They had been the two who had stuck most closely to Jesus up to the last, and shown most faith and love, and were naturally most anxious to know about His body.

(c) Wherever John was, Mary the mother of our Lord was. Can we doubt that Mary Magdalene would think of her as one among the first to be told about the stone being rolled away? It is moreover highly probable, though a matter of conjecture only, that Peter and John were staying at some house very near the sepulcher. It is most likely that the other Apostles were "scattered," according to our Lord's prophecy, in different parts of Jerusalem, and none were so near the tomb as Peter and John. It is interesting to notice all through the Gospels and Acts how Peter and John seem to have been peculiarly drawn together and to have been close friends and companions. As fishermen, we are told that James and John were partners with Simon (Luke 5:10). Three times the name of James is joined with theirs—on the Mount of Transfiguration, at the house of Jairus, and in the garden of Gethsemane. But the special intimacy between Peter and John comes out at the last supper, in the high priest's house, on the occasion now before us, at the Sea of Tiberias, at the end of this Gospel, and in the third of Acts, where the lame

man was healed. All point to that mysterious drawing together between two men of widely different temperaments, which every observing eye must occasionally see in the world. John alone, of all the Apostles, had witnessed Peter's sad fall in the high priest's house and observed his bitter weeping afterward. Can we not understand that from Friday night to Sunday morning John would be lovingly employed in binding up the broken heart of his brother and telling him of our Lord's last words? Can we doubt that they were absorbed and occupied in conversation about their Master on this very morning when Mary Magdalene suddenly ran in with her wonderful news?

The love and tender charity of John's character come out beautifully in his affection for Peter, even after his denial of Christ. How many modern churches would have excommunicated Peter and put him in a low place for months. John clings to him and has him under his own roof, wherever that was. When Judas fell he had no friend to raise and cheer him. When Peter fell there was a "brother born for adversity" who did not despise him. Bengel thinks, from the repetition of the preposition "to" in the Greek— "to Peter, to John"— that the disciples were not together. But I cannot think this at all likely.

[And said…do not know…laid Him.] Mary's announcement was a very short one. Whether she had actually looked inside the tomb and seen that it was empty seems more than doubtful. It would rather appear, by comparison of the four Gospels, that she had only seen

the stone rolled away from the door. But that was enough for her. She had at once jumped to the conclusion that the body of the Lord was taken away, and so she announces it. And, after all, she had reason on her side. Who would have taken the trouble of rolling away the stone but one who wanted to take away the body? If the stone was rolled away, she justly concluded the body was gone. One thing, at any rate, will be observed by everyone who carefully compares St. John's narrative with that of the other three Evangelists. Mary Magdalene had evidently not seen "the vision of angels" which the other women saw, or else she would certainly have mentioned it to Peter and John. She does not say a word about it! She had not heard the comfortable tidings that the Lord had risen, or else she would surely have told it. She clearly knew nothing of all this; and the conclusion is plain to my mind that she ran off as soon as she saw the stone rolled away, and waited for no companion.

Another thing should be observed. St. John's narrative here lets out the fact that Mary Magdalene did not go to the tomb alone. For what doe she say? She speaks in the plural number: "*We* do not know where they have laid Him." That "we" can only apply to herself and the other women who had gone with her to the grave.

We should notice that Mary's mournful announcement is almost the same that she made to the angels when they asked her why she wept (vs. 13). Her repeated dwelling on the body being gone, and her wanting to know where it was "laid," should be noticed. May we not suspect that this holy woman, with all her faith and love, had not yet

realized the great truth that Jesus was to rise again? She talks of His *body* and longs to know where it is laid, and seems to think it must be a cold dead corpse still, and wishes to do it more honor. But she has forgotten altogether His repeated prediction that He would rise again! Alas, how little of Christ's teaching the best of us take in. How much we let fall.

By the word "they," we must suppose Mary meant our Lord's enemies—the chief priests or the Roman soldiers. Perhaps we should not press the word too closely. It may be that the good woman, in her excitement and trouble, hardly knew whom she meant and spoke indefinitely: "somebody" has taken away. She can hardly have meant that the chief priests had taken away the body in order to exhibit it as the dead corpse of a conquered, wicked impostor.

It is fair to say that Ecolampadius actually thinks that Mary saw the angels, talked with them, and received the message for the disciples that Christ had risen, but quite forgot it! This, however, seems to me an extremely improbable view.

3.—[*Peter therefore went, etc.*] The announcement of Mary Magdalene was so startling that the two disciples arose at once and went to the tomb, in order to find out what this rolling away of the stone meant and to make sure that the Lord's body was gone. We need not doubt that they would at once ask Mary, "How do you know the body is gone?" and would receive the answer, "Because the stone is rolled away." But then finding that Mary had not actually been

inside the tomb and seen it empty, they judged it best to go and see for themselves. When we remember that Mary the mother of our Lord was, in all human probability, in the house where Peter and John were, we may well imagine that she would be deeply anxious to have the whole matter cleared up at once.

St. Luke, we may recollect, only mentions Peter going to the tomb. The verse before us fills up the narrative and tells us that John went with him. Two witnesses would be better than one.

4.—[*So they both ran, etc.*] The simple fact here mentioned shows the anxiety and excitement of the two loving Apostles. We can well suppose that Mary Magdalene's sudden announcement completely overwhelmed them, so that they knew not what to think. Who can tell that thoughts did not come into their minds, as they ran, about our Lord's oft-repeated prediction of His resurrection? Could it really be true? Could it possibly prove that all their deep sorrow was going to turn to joy? These are all conjectures, no doubt. Yet a vast quantity of thoughts may run through a mind at a great crisis in a very few minutes. Those who have had a narrow escape from drowning know that very well.

Why John outran Peter we do not know. The common opinion is that John was the younger man of the two, and so he has been always represented by painters in every age of the Church. The only evidence, however, we have of this difference of age is the fact that John's father is mentioned as being alive and following his calling as

a fisherman together with his sons, while Peter's father, Jonas, is not mentioned in the same way. Moreover, John outlived all the rest of the Apostles by many years. So he may have been a comparatively young man when our Lord called him to be an Apostle.

After all, the matter is of little importance. Bodily strength and agility are no evidence that a man possesses superior grace. The holiest saints have often had very weak and infirm bodies. Holy and zealous as John was, we have no right to contend that he felt more zeal than penitent brokenhearted Peter, when he outran him on this eventful morning. Lampe thinks it just possible that Peter was troubled in conscience by reason of his recent fall, and therefore went to the grave with a slow and hesitating step. But I doubt this.

5.—[*And he, stooping down, etc.*] The opinion of well-informed persons who have seen the tombs near Jerusalem, is that our Lord's sepulcher was a kind of cave hewn out of the side of a rocky hill, and that there was either a hollow place hewn out at a little distance within the entrance of the cave to receive the body, or that the grave sloped gradually backwards and the body was laid at the back part of the cave. In either case, we may understand that a person coming to the door of the cave (which must have been small if a single stone could close it) could only see what was inside by stooping down, as we are here told John did. When John looked in, he saw nothing whatever but the empty grave and the linen cloths lying together in which our Lord's body had been wrapped. Not going in, it is evident that he could not see very clearly the precise state of a dark cave with

only one small entrance. He only saw enough to satisfy him at a glance that the body of Christ was not there, and that the linen cloths were there.

Why the beloved apostle did not go in, we do not know and are left to conjecture. It may be that he was at once satisfied that the body of his Master was gone, and that was all he cared to know. It may be that he felt a holy reverence for the place where our Lord had lain and shrank from going in. It may possibly be that he felt some fear and hardly knew what to expect next, remembering the earthquake and the rending of graves on the previous Friday. It may be that, being the younger man of the two, he waited for his elder brother to take the lead, and would touch nothing, do nothing, and take no step without another witness besides himself. We cannot tell. The incident is precisely one of those little circumstantial details that bring out men's natural temperament. It is noteworthy that John himself is the writer who records that he "did not go in." Be the motive what it may, he generously gives his brother Peter the whole honor and credit of being the first of the two to go inside the grave and thoroughly investigate the condition of it in every particular.

We should not forget that the simple fact of the "linen cloths lying" was enough to satisfy any thinking mind that something extraordinary must have occurred. No enemy or thief, in removing our Lord's body, would have taken the trouble to remove the linen cloths in which he was wrapped. Reason points out that it would save time and trouble to take the body as it was, with the linen wrapped

around it.

Lampe thinks it possible that John did not go in from fear of being made unclean by a dead body. But I can hardly think this.

6.—[*Then Simon Peter came, etc.*] In this verse we see how differently men act under the same circumstances. Grace does not alter natural temperaments when it changes hearts. What John for some reason would not do, Peter did. On arriving, he went down at once through the mouth of the cave into the inside of the tomb. Then he saw, as John had seen, that the body of our Lord was not there, and that the linen cloths in which the body had been wrapped were lying there, having been removed in some way from the body. How much linen was used by Joseph and Nicodemus we cannot tell. But when we consider that one hundred pounds of aromatic powder had been used in wrapping up the body, it is not unreasonable to suppose that many yards of linen had been employed. The quantity of linen wrapped round the corpse of an Egyptian, we know from the mummies, was prodigious. It is probable that the linen wrapped round our Lord's body, which Peter saw "lying," was no small heap.

It is noteworthy that two different Greek words are used in this and the preceding verse to express *seeing*. St. John "saw" at a glance. St. Peter saw as a spectator—looking round and examining. The Greek word rendered "lying" in one verse and "lie" in the other is precisely the same, and without reason our translation varies. In both it should be "lying."

7.—[*And the napkin, etc.*] The object of this verse seems to be to show that Peter found in the empty tomb the clearest evidence of a deliberate, orderly, and calmly-done transaction. The linen cloths in which our Lord's body had been wrapped were lying by themselves. The napkin that had been tied round his head was rolled up by itself in another place, separate from the linen cloths. There were no symptoms of hurry, haste, or fear. All had been done decently and in order. Everything that Peter saw contradicted the idea that the body had been stolen. No thief would have taken so much trouble about the cloths and napkin. In fact, the person who had removed the body, whoever it was, must have entailed on himself needless labor, if he removed it as a dead corpse by unwrapping the linen cloths in which the corpse was buried. The easiest plan would have been to carry away the body just as he found it, wrapped up in linen. Why were the linen cloths taken off and left behind? Why were the removers of the body so careful to take away nothing but the body? Questions like these must have sorely perplexed Peter's mind. The body, he saw plainly, was gone. But there was something in the whole appearance of things which he could not understand. Chrysostom observes: "The linen cloths lying was a sign of the resurrection, for if any person had removed the body, they would not have stripped it before doing so. If any had stolen it, they would not have taken the trouble to remove the napkin and roll it up and lay it in a place by itself. They would have taken the body as it was. On this account, John tell us, by anticipation, that it was buried with much myrrh, which glues linen to the body not less firmly than lead, in order that when you hear that the napkin lay apart, you may not endure those who say He was

stolen. A thief would not have been so foolish as to spend so much time on a superfluous matter. Why should he undo the cloths? How could he have escaped detection if he had done so? He would probably have spent much time in doing it, and been found out by delaying. But why did the cloths lie apart while the napkin was wrapped together by itself? That you may learn that it was not the action of men in confusion or haste, the placing some in one place and some in another, and the wrapping them together." Theophylact, as usual, follows Chrysostom, and adds that linen cloths wrapped round the body with myrrh would stick to it like pitch. The word translated "napkin" is only used four times in the New Testament.
On one occasion—and one only—t is rendered "handkerchief" (Acts 19:12).

8.—[*Then the other disciple, etc.*] We are here told how John at last followed Peter and went inside the tomb. He does not seem to have gone in at first with Peter, but to have waited outside while his brother Apostle investigated and examined everything. Then on hearing his report, he resolved to go inside himself and see with his own eyes. Why he hesitated at first we are left to conjecture. Perhaps, like Mary Magdalene, he was so absorbed and overwhelmed by the fact that his Master's body was gone that he could pay no attention to the minor details of the transaction. But when he did go inside the tomb, and saw with his own eyes the clear evidence of a deliberate and orderly removal of the body only, and the cloths left behind, it seems to have flashed across his mind that the Lord must have risen. For we are told that he "believed." Concerning the true meaning of

this word “believed” in this place, there has been some dispute, but without good cause. It cannot of course mean that John became a true believer now for the first time. Such an idea is absurd. Nor yet can it only mean, I think, that John at last believed that the body of our Lord was not there. Such an interpretation seems to me cold, tame, and shallow. I hold that it can only bear one meaning—that John, when he saw the state of the tomb, believed that Christ had really risen from the dead. In short, he was the first of all our Lord’s followers who believed His resurrection.

9.—[*For as yet, etc.*] This parenthetical comment of the Evangelist is hardly rendered with accuracy in our English version. It would be more literally translated, “As yet they had not known,” in the pluperfect tense. The meaning obviously is: “Up to this time these two disciples, like all the rest of our Lord’s followers, had not fully understood the meaning of the Scriptures, which taught that Christ must rise again from the dead after dying for our sins.”

Augustine suggests that one reason why the disciples did not understand our Lord’s prediction of His own resurrection was His custom of using parables in His teaching. “Being accustomed to being spoken to in parables by Him, they supposed Him to be signifying some other thing.” But the worthy Father rather seems to forget that although our Lord spoke parables to the multitude, “when He was alone He expounded all things to His disciples.” Yet the suggestion is worth remembering. Dwellers in the cold prosaic north can have little idea of the enormous quantity of figurative and

flowery language used in oriental countries. An Englishman going for the first time among Orientals finds it hard to know whether those around him are using flowery expressions that mean nothing or speaking of facts. Whether St. John referred to any particular text in using this expression about "Scripture," is matter of doubt. To me it is far more likely that he had in view the general teaching of the whole Old Testament, both in types and typical events as well as in direct texts. I suspect that he refers to such things as the receiving back of Isaac by Abraham on Moriah after he had offered him, the whale casting up Jonah on the dry land, the living bird being let go free in cleansing the leper, the scapegoat being let go alive on the day of atonement, and other like things written for our learning.

The subject, I must honestly say, is a very deep one. It is vain to deny that the manner in which texts are quoted from the Old Testament in the New Testament is sometimes very puzzling. The safest and most reverent line of thought is to believe that there is a fullness in Scripture that many of us have never realized, and that scores of texts refer to Christ's life, death, and resurrection though we know it not.

When it says here "He must rise again," the meaning is literally, "It is necessary, or it is becoming that He should rise." It was necessary for the accomplishment of man's redemption, and for the completion of the work that Jesus came to do as our Substitute and Representative. The second Adam must die and rise again in order to win back what the first Adam lost. The case of the Apostles is a striking example of

the extent of spiritual ignorance there may be in a man while his heart is right with God. Who would think of denying that Peter and John were true believers, loved Christ, and were on the way to heaven? Yet here we are plainly told that up to this time they had not understood that Jesus must rise again on the third day after dying for our sins on the cross. Surely we must take care that we do not hastily condemn men as heretics and set them down as graceless and godless because they are deficient in head knowledge. After all, how many Christians there are in the present day who talk about Christ's blood and Christ's death but seem to know nothing of Christ's resurrection, and hardly give it a place in their religion except as a fact.

It is very noteworthy that while Peter and John and their companions seem to have overlooked and forgotten our Lord's predictions that He would rise again the third day, there were certain Jews who did not forget them at all. And who were they? The very last men that we might have expected— the chief priests and Pharisees! It is written in Matthew 27:62-64 that they went to Pilate and said, "We *remember,* that deceiver said while He was yet alive, after three days I will rise again." What a curious fact is that! Peter and John forgot their Lord's predictions, while Caiaphas and his wicked companions remembered them!

Burgon quotes from Ainsworth a saying of a Jew commenting on Gen. 22:4: "There are many a three things in the Holy Scripture, of which one is the resurrection of the Messiah." I add to this that

anyone who examines Ainsworth's commentary on this verse will find that he gathers together as many as fifteen places in the Old Testament where "three" is spoken of as a mystical number.

10.—[*Then the disciples…own home.*] This verse describes the end of the visit that Peter and John made to the grave. They had seen with their own eyes proofs positive that Mary Magdalene's report was true. The grave was empty, and their Master's body was gone. They both felt that there was no need for tarrying at any empty tomb, and resolved to return to their lodging. They could do no good by staying longer. They might do good by going away. They therefore went home; Peter confounded and perplexed and unable to account for what he had seen, and John convinced and persuaded by what he had seen—that his Master had risen from the dead. Doubtless he could not prove it yet, had not seen Him alive, and could not convince Peter of it. But for all that he believed it.

The Greek words which we render "to their own home" mean literally "to themselves." It can only signify, in my judgment, the lodging that they occupied in Jerusalem. Though John was acquainted with the high priest and may have occasionally visited Jerusalem on the business of his fisherman's calling, there is not the least likelihood that he had a house there. Wherever John was in Jerusalem, it is interesting to remember, in looking at the events of this wonderful morning, that Mary, the mother of our Lord, was probably under his roof in accordance with our Lord's last command. May we not fairly suppose that one reason why the disciples did not linger at the tomb,

like Mary Magdalene, was their earnest desire to return home and tell the mother of our Lord what they had seen? I see nothing fanciful or unreasonable in the thought.
Cyril suggests, with some probability, that one reason why Peter and John went away from the tomb so soon was fear of the Jews. They might well expect that the anger of Caiaphas and his companions on finding the sepulchre empty and the body of Jesus gone would be very great, and they would naturally turn their wrath on the helpless disciples. The day was breaking, and the sooner they got home the better. Mary Magdalene might stay near the tomb with more safety.

Beza thinks that this verse leaves John, Peter, and Mary in three different states of mind. John was convinced and believed that Jesus was risen from the dead. Peter was uncertain, wondering, and amazed. Mary could not yet believe it at all.

JOHN 20:11-18

But Mary stood outside the tomb weeping. As she wept, she bent down and looked into the tomb. And she saw two angels in white sitting where Jesus' body had been lying, one at the head and one at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" Mary replied, "They have taken my Lord away, and I do not know where they have put him!" When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus.

Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Who are you looking for?" Because she thought he was the gardener, she said to

him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will take him." Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabboni" (which means Teacher). Jesus replied, "Do not touch me, for I have not yet ascended to my Father. Go to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene came and informed the disciples, "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them what Jesus had said to her.

The interview between the Lord Jesus and Mary Magdalene immediately after His resurrection, described in these verses, is a narrative peculiar to John. No other Evangelist has been inspired to record it. Of all the accounts of the appearances of our Lord, after He rose from the dead, none perhaps is so affecting and touching as this. He that can read this simple story without a deep interest, must have a very cold and unfeeling heart.

We see, first, in these verses, ***that those who love Christ most diligently and perseveringly, are those who receive most privileges from Christ's hand.*** It is a touching fact, and one to be carefully noted, that Mary Magdalene would not leave the sepulcher, when Peter and John went away to their own home. Love to her gracious Master would not let her leave the place where He had been lain. Where He was now she could not tell. What had become of Him she did not know. But love made her linger about the empty tomb, where Joseph and Nicodemus had recently laid Him. Love made her honor the last place where His precious body had

been seen by mortal eyes. And her love reaped a rich reward. She saw the angels whom Peter and John had never observed. She actually heard them speak, and had soothing words addressed to her. She was the first to see our Lord after He rose from the dead, the first to hear His voice, the first to hold conversation with Him. Can any one doubt that this was written for our learning? Wherever the Gospel is preached throughout the world, this little incident testifies that those who honor Christ will be honored by Christ.

As it was in the morning of the first Resurrection day, so will it be as long as the Church stands. The great principle contained in the passage before us, will hold good until the Lord comes again. All believers have not the same degree of faith, or hope, or knowledge, or courage, or wisdom; and it is vain to expect it. But it is a certain fact that those who love Christ most fervently, and cleave to Him most closely, will always enjoy most communion with Him, and feel most of the witness of the Spirit in their hearts. It is precisely those who wait on the Lord, in the temper of Mary Magdalene, to whom the Lord will reveal Himself most fully, and make them know and feel more than others. To know Christ is good; but to "know that we know Him" is far better.

We see, secondly, in these verses, ***that the fears and sorrows of believers are often quite needless.*** We are told that Mary stood at the sepulcher weeping, and wept as if nothing could comfort her. She wept when the angels spoke to her; "Woman," they said, "why are you weeping?" She was weeping still when our Lord spoke

to her— “Woman,” He also said, “why are you weeping?” And the burden of her complaint was always the same— “They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him.” Yet all this time her risen Master was close to her, with “body, flesh, and bones, and all things pertaining to the perfection of man’s nature.” Her tears were needless. Her anxiety was unnecessary. Like Hagar in the wilderness, she had a well of water by her side, but she had not eyes to see it.

What thoughtful Christian can fail to see, that we have here a faithful picture of many a believer’s experience? How often we are anxious when there is no just cause for anxiety! How often we mourn over the absence of things which in reality are within our grasp, and even at our right hand! Two-thirds of the things we fear in life never happen at all, and two-thirds of the tears we shed are thrown away, and shed in vain. Let us pray for more faith and patience, and allow more time for the full development of God’s purposes. Let us believe that things are often working together for our peace and joy, which seem at one time to contain nothing but bitterness and sorrow. Old Jacob said at one time of his life, “all these things are against me” (Gen. 42:36); yet he lived to see Joseph again, rich and prosperous, and to thank God for all that had happened. If Mary had found the seal of the tomb unbroken, and her Master’s body lying cold within, she might well have wept! The very absence of the body which made her weep, was a token for good, and a cause of joy for herself and all mankind.

We see, thirdly, in these verses, ***what low and earthly thoughts of Christ may creep into the mind of a true believer.*** It seems impossible to gather any other lesson from the solemn words which our Lord addressed to Mary Magdalene, when He said, “Touch Me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father.” No doubt the language is somewhat mysterious, and ought to be delicately and reverently handled. Yet it is only reasonable to suppose that the first surprise, and the reaction from great sorrow to great joy, was more than the mind of Mary could bear. She was only a woman, though a holy and faithful woman. It is highly probable that, in the first excess of her joy, she threw herself at our Lord’s feet, and made greater demonstrations of feeling than were seemly or becoming. Very likely she behaved too much like one who thought all must be right if she had her Lord’s bodily presence, and all must be wrong in His bodily absence. This was not the highest style of faith. She acted, in short, like one who forgot that her Master was God as well as man. She made too little of His divinity, and too much of His humanity. And hence she called forth our Lord’s gentle rebuke, “Touch Me not! There is no need of this excessive demonstration of feeling. I am not yet ascending to my Father for forty days—your present duty is not to linger at my feet, but to go and tell my brethren that I have risen. Think of the feelings of others as well as of your own.”

After all, we must confess that the fault of this holy woman was one into which Christians have always been too ready to fall. In every age there has been a tendency in the minds of many, to make too

much of Christ's bodily presence, and to forget that He is not a mere earthly friend, but one who is "God over all, blessed forever," as well as man. The pertinacity with which Romanists and their allies cling to the doctrine of Christ's real corporal presence in the Lord's Supper, is only another exhibition of Mary's feeling when she wanted Christ's body, or no Christ at all. Let us pray for a right judgment in this matter, as in all other things concerning our Lord's person. Let us be content to have Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith, and present when two or three are met in His name, and to wait for the real presence of Christ's body until He comes again. What we really need is not His literal flesh, but His Spirit. It is not for nothing that it is written, "It is the Spirit that quickens—the flesh profits nothing." "If we have known Christ after the flesh, yet henceforth know we Him no more." (John 6:63; 2 Cor. 5:16.)

We see, lastly, in these verses, ***how kindly and graciously our Lord speaks of His disciples.*** He bids Mary Magdalene carry a message to them as "His brethren." He bids her tell those who His Father was their Father, and His God their God. It was but three days before that they had all forsaken Him shamefully, and fled. Yet this merciful Master speaks as if all was forgiven and forgotten. His first thought is to bring back the wanderers, to bind up the wounds of their consciences, to reanimate their courage, to restore them to their former place. This was indeed a love that passes knowledge. To trust deserters, and to show confidence in backsliders, was a compassion which man can hardly understand. So true is that word of David—"Like as a Father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear

Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust." (Psalm 103:13, 14.)

Let us leave the passage with the comfortable reflection that Jesus Christ never changes. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. As He dealt with His erring disciples in the morning of His resurrection, so will He deal with all who believe and love Him, until He comes again. When we wander out of the way He will bring us back. When we fall He will raise us again. But he will never break His royal word— "Him that comes to Me I will in no wise cast out." (John 6:37.) The saints in glory will have one anthem in which every voice and heart will join— "He has not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities." (Psalm 103:10.)

Technical Notes:

11. But Mary stood outside at the sepulcher weeping, and as she wept she stooped down *and looked* into the sepulcher. 12. And she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. 13. And they said to her, Woman, why are you weeping? She said to them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him. 14. Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, and did not know that it was Jesus. 15. Jesus said to her, Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking? She, supposing him to be the gardener, said to him, Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me

where you have laid him, and I will take him away. 16. Jesus said to her, Mary. She turned herself and said to him, Rabboni! (which is to say, Teacher). 17. Jesus said to her, Do not touch me, for I am not yet ascended to my Father; but go to my brethren and say to them, I ascend to my Father, and your Father, and *to* my God and your God.
18. Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and *that* he had spoken these things to her.

11.—[*But Mary stood…weeping*.] The question naturally arises, "Why did not Mary go away from the tomb with Peter and John?" The answer to that question must probably be found in the curiously different temperaments of men and women. Mary acted like a woman, and Peter and John acted like men. The head of a woman is generally weaker than that of a man, but the affections are generally stronger. In the case before us, the heart of Mary was not satisfied. Her mind was not convinced, like that of John, that our Lord had risen from the dead. It was not enough for her to know that the body was gone and the tomb empty, and something wonderful had occurred, as it was for Peter. Her strong love and gratitude toward our Lord made her linger near the tomb in the faint hope that something might yet turn up to explain where the body was gone. At any rate, she could not tear herself away from the place where her Master's body had last been seen, and when Peter and John departed she stayed behind, like a real warmhearted woman, and gave a natural vent to her feelings in tears. She felt as if she must see

something before she could be satisfied, and so lingered near the grave, perhaps hardly knowing what she expected to see. The Lord had compassion on her. Her deep love was richly rewarded. On Mary staying at the tomb, Andrews remarks: “The going away of Peter and John commends Mary’s staying behind. To the grave she came before them, from the grave she went to tell them, to the grave she returned with them, at the grave she remains behind them.” “To stay while others do so, while company stays, that is the world’s love. But Peter is gone, and John too; all are gone and she left alone. Thus to stay is love, and constant love.” Epiphanius (an ancient writer, A. D. 390), according to Heinsius, maintains the monstrous theory that the Mary here spoken of is the mother of our Lord and not Mary Magdalene! It is well to know that the ancient Fathers were not always wise, and are certainly not infallible in expounding Scripture. Tholuck thinks that Mary did not go to the tomb with Peter and John, but followed them alone, more slowly. This is possible; but I rather doubt it.

[*And as she wept…sepulcher*.] How long Mary wept after she was left alone we are left to conjecture. Probably not very long. At last it came into her mind to stoop down and look into the tomb through the small door or opening against which the stone had been rolled. It is worth noticing that we are not told that she had either entered or looked into the tomb before. Up to this time, apparently, she had only heard the report of Peter and John. Now, left alone, she probably felt a natural curiosity and anxiety to see with her own eyes what they had reported, and so, in the middle of her weeping, she

stooped down and looked in and at once saw a wondrous sight.

I think Mary's case teaches us that heart is of more value in God's sight than intellect. Those who feel most and love most get most privileges. The more we love, the more we are like Christ.

12.—[*And she saw two angels, etc.*] The incident here recorded is very remarkable and interesting. Mary saw figures in white sitting inside the tomb. They evidently looked like men, but they were in reality angels—two of those mysterious ministering spirits whom the Bible teaches us God is pleased to employ on great occasions. An angel announced the coming birth of John Baptist and of Christ himself. Angels told the shepherds that Christ was born. Angels ministered to our Lord after the temptation, and an angel strengthened him in Gethsemane. And now also angels appeared in the day of our Lord's resurrection. They first announced that He was born, and they again, after 33 years, announced that He was risen. The whole subject of angels is very deep and mysterious, and one about which we must beware of holding anything that is not revealed. But the case before us teaches one or two wonderful things that we should do well to remember. These angels evidently came and went away, appeared and disappeared, after a manner supernatural, invisible, and inexplicable to our minds. It is clear that angels were at the tomb when the party of women arrived there, after Mary Magdalene had run to tell Peter and John. It is equally clear that they were not to be seen when Peter and John ran to the grave on hearing Mary's report. Not one word do we read of their seeing

angels. Yet it is equally clear that when Mary Magdalene looked in, after Peter and John went away, she saw two angels and talked with them. These are very deep things. They prove plainly that the angels of God appear and disappear, are visible or invisible, instantaneously and supernaturally according as God commissions them. In short, they are beings of a totally different nature to our own, and are in all the conditions of their constitution totally unlike us. For anything we know, they were in the tomb when Peter and John inspected it, but at that moment were invisible. For anything we know, they are now very near us every minute of our existence and doing God's will concerning us, though we are utterly unaware of their presence. All this, no doubt, is very mysterious and past the power of man to explain and comprehend. One thing, however, is very certain. Neither here nor elsewhere do we ever find the slightest warrant in Scripture for praying to angels any more than to dead saints, or for giving them the smallest portion of worship as if they were divine. Like ourselves, after all, they are only God's creatures. The expression "in white" means literally "in white robes or garments." It is an adjective and we are left to supply the substantive. The Holy Ghost here abstains from telling us the precise fashion of apparel that these angels wore. The garment worn by the angel mentioned in Mark, at the resurrection, was a long stole or flowing robe (Mark 16:5). It is worth noticing that white was the color of the Lord's raiment in the transfiguration, and that it is the color in which the angels always seem to have appeared. It need hardly be said that the color is symbolic of that perfect purity and freedom from defilement, which is the character of the inhabitants of heaven. It will be the

garment of the saved souls in glory (Rev. 3:4, 7:9).

The attitude in which the angels were seen by Mary deserves attention. “Sitting one at the head and the other at the feet” where our Lord’s body had lain, they would seem to have been placed there by God as watchmen and guards over the sacred body of our Lord during the time He was in the grave. It is written, “He shall give His angels charge over Thee” (Psa. 91:11).

Some have thought that the position of the angels points to that of the cherubim who sat on the two ends of the mercy seat over the ark, with their faces toward each other. (Exod. 25:20, 2 Chr. 3:13.) Bengel thinks that this sitting was meant to intimate that their work was done. This seems to me doubtful, because angels need no rest. Cyril thinks that the attitude of the two angels was meant to show Mary that our Lord’s body had been safely guarded by them, and that no one could have stolen it away against their consent. If one angel could slay 180,000 of Sennacherib’s army, what could two do?

Andrews observes: “We learn that between the angels there was no striving for places. He who sat at the feet was as well content with his place as he who sat at the head. We should learn from their example. With us, both angels would have been at the head and never a one at the feet. With us, none would be at the feet by his good will; we must be head-angels all!”

13.—[*And they said to her, Woman, etc.*] The address of the angels to Mary is that of gentle and kind inquiry. We cannot doubt that they knew well why she wept. They ask the question in order to stir up in her mind self-inquiry as to whether she had cause to weep or not. “What is the reason of this excessive lamentation? Search your own heart. Are you quite sure that this empty tomb does not show that you ought to be rejoicing?” Mary’s reply to the angels is almost word for word what she had told Peter and John, only in the singular number. It shows plainly that the one thing that weighed on her mind was the disappearance of our Lord’s body and her ignorance as to what had become of it. Of His resurrection she evidently had no idea at present. Her only thought was that his body was dead, that it had been taken away, and that she wanted to know where it was. To this one notion she sticks, and not even the appearance of angels can make her give it up. And yet the good woman must have often heard our Lord foretell His death and resurrection. How slow we are to give up long-standing prejudices! How backward to receive truths that contradict our little private systems of religion!

It should be observed that Mary told Peter and John that “the Lord” was taken away. When she speaks to the angels here, she says “My Lord.” In both cases she speaks indefinitely of “they,” without indicating whom she means.

The calmness of manner with which Mary speaks to these two angels can hardly fail to strike us. She cannot have supposed that they were

two men only, whether enemies or friends. The mere fact that Peter and John had not seen them in the tomb must surely have shown her that they were angels. Yet she answers their question without hesitation, like one who feared nothing in her anxiety about her Lord. May we not, however, consider that a belief in the reality and ministry of angels was far more common among Jews than it is among Christians? They perhaps believed too much about them. It may be feared that we go into the opposite extreme and believe too little.

Andrews remarks on Mary's needless weeping: "All was in error; tears of grief, but false grief—imagining that to be which was not, and Him to be dead who was alive. She weeps because she finds the grave empty, which, God forbid, she should have found full. For then Christ must have been dead still, and there would be no resurrection. And this case of Mary Magdalene is our case oftentimes. It is the error of our conceit to weep when we have no cause, and to rejoice when we have as little. False joys and false sorrows, false hopes and false fears this life of ours is full of. God help us!"

14.—[*Now when... Jesus standing*.] Why Mary turned around at this moment we are not told. I feel no doubt there was some reason. The Greek words are very emphatic: "She turned to the things or places behind her." (a) It may be that she turned away from the questioners as not caring to continue conversation with them. (b) It may be that she heard a footstep behind her and turned to see who it was. (c) It may be that the shadow of someone behind her fell on the entrance

to the tomb. The sun would be in the east, and if the tomb faced that way, its horizontal rays would throw the shadow of any person behind her onto the tomb. (d) It may be that she observed some gesture or motion on the part of the angels with whom she was talking, which told her that someone was behind her. Who can tell but these holy spirits, who doubtless recognized the Lord, rose respectfully from their sitting position as soon as they saw Jesus appear. I like this last solution best, for my own part. I cannot for a moment suppose that the angels would remain sitting motionless when Jesus appeared. And I believe that Mary, as she talked with them, detected at once by their altered manner that there was someone behind her. This it was that made her turn around. Such little touches give a wonderful life and reality to the whole narrative, in my judgment.

Chrysostom observes: "While Mary was speaking, Christ suddenly appearing behind her struck the angels with awe; and they, beholding their Ruler, showed immediately by their bearing, their look, their movements, that they saw the Lord. This drew the woman's attention and caused her to turn." The same view is taken by Athanasius, Theophylact, Brentius, Gerhard, and Andrews.

[*And did not know that it was Jesus*.] There are but three ways in which we can explain Mary not recognizing Christ at once.

(a) She was weeping bitterly, and her eyes were dim with tears. This, however, seems very improbable.

(b) It was not broad daylight yet, and it was too dusky to distinguish anyone. This is Cyril's view; but it can hardly be correct considering all that had already occurred this Sunday morning.

(c) Her eyes were held supernaturally, like those of the disciples walking to Emmaus, so that she did not distinguish the figure before her to be that of our Lord. This appears to me by far the most likely solution, miraculous as the circumstance certainly was. But the condition of our Lord's risen body was altogether different from that of His body before crucifixion. We cannot pretend to explain in the least where He was and what He was doing in the intervals between His various appearances during the forty days before His ascension. We need not, therefore, hesitate to believe that He could assume such an appearance that even a disciple like Mary did not recognize Him at first, or that He could cause her eyes to be unable to distinguish Him even when close to her.

After all, what a striking emblem this little incident supplies of the spiritual experience of hundreds of Christ's believing people even at this very day. How many are ever mourning and sorrowing, and have no comfort in their religion, while Christ is close to them. But they do not know it and, like Mary, go on weeping.

15.—[Jesus said... Why...seeking?] The first question that Jesus asked Mary was precisely the same that the angels had asked. "Woman, why are you weeping? Are you quite sure that you're right to weep over this empty grave and ought not rather to rejoice?" The

second question was even more searching than the first. “Whom are you seeking? Who is this person that you are seeking among the dead? Have you not forgotten that He whom you seek is one who has power to take life again, and who predicted that He would rise?” I must think that in both these questions there was a gentle latent reproof intended for this holy woman. Faithful and loving as she was, she had too much forgotten her Master’s teaching about His death and resurrection. These questions were meant to rouse her to a recollection of things often said in her hearing. Of course, our Lord knew perfectly well why she was weeping and whom she was seeking. He did not need to ask her. He asked for her benefit rather than His own information. But excessive grief has an absorbing and stupefying effect on the mind and memory. Mary could think of nothing but that her Lord’s body was gone, and this swallowed up all her thoughts.

[*She, supposing Him to be, etc.*] Here we see what Mary’s first thought was when she heard a strange voice and saw a strange figure. She catches at the idea that this person may be the keeper of the garden in which Joseph’s tomb was, and that, having probably been keeping watch over the garden all night, he may know what had become of her Master’s body, or may even have removed it himself. “Sir,” she says, “if you are the person who has taken away my Lord out of the tomb, only tell me where you have carried His body and I will take Him away.” Once more we see that this holy woman could only think of her Master as one dead, and that her one absorbing idea was how she could recover His corpse and do it honor. As for

His resurrection and victory over death, she seems utterly unable to get hold of it at present. Amazing is it to see how much of Christ's teaching was apparently thrown away on His disciples and clean forgotten! Ministers who complain of the ignorance of their hearers should learn patience, when they mark the imperfect knowledge of Christ's own followers.

The Greek word rendered "Sir" in this verse might have been equally correctly rendered "Lord." But it is rendered "Sir" in like manner as in the conversation between our Lord and the Samaritan woman in the fourth chapter of this Gospel. In both cases it is a term of respect, such as a Jewish woman would address to a man.

It is noteworthy that Mary does not name her Master to the supposed gardener. She simply says "Him". "If you have carried *Him* hence, I will take *Him* away." It is the language of one so absorbed in the thought of our Lord that she thinks it needless to name Him, and assumes, as a matter of course, that the gardener will understand whom she means. It is noteworthy that Mary talks of taking Him away. How one weak woman like her could suppose that she was able to lift and carry away the dead body of a man we cannot, of course, understand. It is clear that she either meant (a) that she would soon find friends who would remove the body, or else (b) that she spoke hurriedly, fervently, impulsively, and passionately without reflecting on what she was saying. I incline to think the latter view is the correct one.

Luther, quoted by Besser, remarks on this verse: “Mary’s heart was so filled up with Christ and thoughts about Christ, that besides Him she neither hears nor sees anything. She is not frightened at the sight of angels. She addresses Christ abruptly, supposing Him to be the gardener; and if he has taken Him away, she is ready to carry Him back to the tomb.” Andrews observes: “*Him* is enough with love. Who knows not who it is, though we never tell His name, nor say a word more?”

16.—[*Jesus said to her, Mary, etc.*] We are here told how our Lord at last revealed Himself to this faithful disciple, after her patience, love, and boldness had been fully proved. Little as she had shown herself able to understand the great truth of her Savior’s resurrection, she had at any rate shown that none loved Him more or clung to Him more tenaciously than she did. And she had her reward. One single word was enough to open her eyes, to let the whole truth shine in upon her mind, and to reveal the great fact that her Savior was not dead but alive, and that He had won a victory over the grave. Speaking in His usual well-known voice, our Lord addressed her by her name—the name by which, no doubt, He had often addressed her before. That single word touched a spring, as it were, and opened her eyes in a moment. Need we doubt that at once the whole world seemed turned upside down to the astonished woman, and that under the influence of such an amazing revulsion [response] of feeling as that much loved voice must have caused, her mind could only find expression in one passionate word— “Rabboni,” or Master.

The expression “turned herself” in this verse is rather curious. We know, from the fourteenth verse, that Mary had already turned once from the grave when Jesus appeared behind her. Here again we are told that she “turned herself.” The simplest explanation seems to be that when she did not recognize the person who spoke to her and thought He had been the gardener, she partially turned away, as a woman naturally would from a strange man, and hardly looked at Him while she spoke of taking the body away. But the moment the voice of Jesus sounded in her ears, she turned again directly to Him, and made some movement toward Him as she uttered the cry “Rabboni!” Thus there were three movements: first, a turning round to see who was behind her; second, a partial turning away when she heard a voice she did not recognize; and finally, a quick, passionate turning round entirely when the well-known voice of her Master said “Mary.” So at least it appears to me.

Chrysostom says: “It seems to me that after having said ‘Where have you laid Him,’ she turned to the angels to ask why they were astonished; and that then Christ, by calling her by name, turned her back to Himself from them and revealed Himself by His voice.”
The boundless compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ to His believing people comes out wonderfully in this verse. He can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. He knows how weak our bodily frame is, and how excessive sorrow can so unnerve and stupefy our minds. He can pass over much darkness of understanding and much slowness of comprehension when He sees real, genuine, hearty, bold, persevering, thorough love to Himself and His Person. We see this

prominently brought out in His dealing with Mary Magdalene, when He revealed Himself to her. He graciously pardons her forgetfulness of His oft-repeated declaration that He would rise again after His death, pities her deep sorrow, and abundantly rewards her love. These things are written for our learning. Jesus never changes. What He was when He revealed Himself to Mary Magdalene, He is at this day. "Rabboni," according to Parkhurst, is nearly of the same import as Rabbi. St. John explains both by the same word—teacher. But Lightfoot and others say it was a term of higher respect. Parkhurst thinks it is formed from the Chaldee and includes the idea of "MY Master."

17.—[Jesus said…not touch…my Father.] This saying of our Lord is undeniably a very "deep thing," and the real meaning of it is a point that has greatly perplexed commentators. I suspect it is one of those things that will never be fully settled until the Lord comes. In the meantime, we must be content to make humble conjectures. It will clear our way to remember that our Lord could not possibly mean, by saying "Do not touch Me," that there was anything sinful or wrong in Mary touching His risen body. The mere fact that a few minutes after this interview with Mary he allowed the other women who had been to the grave to "hold Him by the feet" (Matt. 28:9), completely settles that point. Moreover, within a week after this very day He says to Thomas, "Reach forth your hand and thrust it into my side" (John 20:27). This alone entirely contradicts the notion that our Lord's body might not be touched before His ascension. But having cleared the way negatively, the question yet remains, "What did our Lord

mean positively?"

In order to understand the meaning of "Do not touch me," we must try to realize the state of mind in which Mary Magdalene was when our Lord revealed Himself to her. A very slight knowledge of human nature, and especially of woman's nature, will tell us that the sudden discovery that Jesus was alive and standing before her would throw her into a violent state of excitement and produce an immense revulsion [response] of feeling—from deep despondency to extravagant joy. May we not well believe that under the influence of this excitement this holy woman might be more demonstrative than was seemly, and might exhibit her feelings by actions and gestures that our Lord saw it absolutely needful to repress? Can we not understand that a warm-hearted, impulsive Jewish woman, holy and pure-minded as she certainly was, would be likely to cast herself at our Lord's feet, to say the least, in a passionate ecstasy of delight and to hold them fast, kissing and embracing them (like the woman in Simon's house) as if she would never let them go? And can we not well understand that our wise Master, who knew all hearts, thought it good to check and repress her and, therefore, for her soul's benefit kindly said, "Do not touch Me." Nothing would be more likely to calm the good woman's mind and to recall her to a reverent sense of what was due to herself and to her Lord than this prohibition to "touch." Such is my view of this wonderful expression. It is to my mind a very suggestive one and deserves especially the attention of ministers in carrying on their private pastoral work. But I forbear. Let it however never be forgotten (and I desire to speak with the

utmost reverence and delicacy) that when our Lord allowed the women mentioned by St. Matthew (28:9) to "hold Him by the feet," there were several women present together, and some of them mothers and not young. When on the contrary He said to Mary Magdalene, "Do not touch Me," He spoke to one who in all probability was a young woman, and He and she were alone! The Greek word we render "touch," according to Liddell and Scott's Lexicon, frequently means "fasten oneself to, cling to, hang on by, lay hold of, or grasp." Homer constantly uses the word in this sense. This deserves special notice. Schleusner and Parkhurst agree with Liddell and Scott. The words "for I am not yet ascended to my Father" are even more difficult than "Do not touch Me," and the connection between the two sayings is the hardest knot of all the sentence.

(a) Some think that the sense is: "I have not yet ascended to my Father. Till I have ascended and taken my seat at His right hand, my work as your Savior is not perfect and complete. Do not therefore touch Me and fasten upon Me, as if you would fain [gladly, willingly] keep Me upon earth forever now that I have risen again. Remember that my ascension is as much a part of my great work of redemption as my crucifixion and resurrection. I have not yet ascended. Do not, therefore, behave as though you wished to detain Me here below and never to part with Me again."

(b) Some think that the sense is: "I am not yet ascending to my Father. I shall not ascend for forty days. There will, therefore, be abundant time for seeing, touching, hearing, and conferring with Me.

Do not, therefore, waste precious time now on this eventful morning by embracing my feet and demonstrating your affection to my person. Rather rise and lose no time in going to my brethren and telling them that I am risen. Think of others and do not occupy yourself, as you are disposed to do, in touching my feet and gratifying your own feelings. Natural as it is, there is other work to do now. Go and do it and do not linger here. Do not touch Me." This is the view of Beza, Brentius, and Bishop Hall.

(c) Some think, as Melancthon, that our Lord had in view His second advent and kingdom, when all who have known and loved Him on earth shall at length dwell with Him in holy familiarity and go out from His presence no more. Melancthon says: "It is as if Christ would say, Then shall you touch Me, when I have ascended to my Father; that is, when I shall bring you and all my Church to the Father at the last day. Another kingdom and another life remains yet to be given, in which you shall enjoy fellowship with Me and my Father."

I honestly confess that I find it almost impossible to say which of the three opinions I have here described deserves most attention. If I must decide, I incline to prefer the second one, and I think it is more in keeping with the latter part of the verse. The weakest point of this view is the future sense which it puts on the words "I am not ascended." The Greek word is in the perfect tense, and the perfect is undoubtedly used sometimes in the sense of a future. (Compare Rom. 14:23, John 17:10; also see Telf's Greek Grammar, vol. ii., p. 65, and Winer's Grammer p. 288, Clark's edition.) But it is rather

awkward that “I ascend” comes immediately after in the present tense. The reader must decide for himself which view he prefers.

Chrysostom says: “I think Mary still wished to converse with Jesus as before, and in her joy perceived nothing great [different] in Him, although He had become far more excellent in the flesh. To lead her therefore from this idea, and that she might speak to Him with awe (for neither with the disciples does He thereafter appear so familiar as before), He raises her thoughts that she should give more reverent heed to Him. To have said, ‘Do not approach Me as you did before, because matters are not in the same state; nor shall I from now on be with you in the same way,’ would have been harsh and high-sounding. But the saying ‘I am not yet ascended to my Father’ accomplished the same thing and was not painful to hear. For by saying ‘I am not yet ascended,’ He shows that He hastens and passes there, and that it was not meet [suitable] that one about to depart there—and no longer to converse with men—should be looked on with the same feelings as before.”

Augustine says: “There is a spiritual meaning latent here. Either this is spoken, “Do not touch me, for I am not yet ascended,” that the woman is a figure of the Church of the Gentiles, which did not believe in Christ until He was ascended to the Father; or else Jesus would have men so believe in Him, or touch Him spiritually, as knowing that Himself and the Father are one. Mary might believe in such a way as if she thought Him unequal to the Father, which thought is forbidden to her. ‘Do not touch Me,’ *i.e.*, ‘Do not believe in

Me in such a way as you are yet minded in your thoughts of Me. Do not let your perception reach only to the thing I was made for you without passing beyond to that by which you were made. I am not yet ascended to my Father. Then shall you touch Me when you believe Me to be God not unequal to the Father."

Calvin says: "The meaning of these words is that Christ's state of resurrection would not be full and complete until He should sit down in heaven at the right hand of the Father. Therefore Mary did wrong in satisfying herself with having nothing more than the half of His resurrection, and desiring only to enjoy His presence in the world."

Lightfoot says: "These words relate to what Christ had spoken formerly about sending the Comforter, and that He would not leave them comfortless but would come to them. Christ says to Mary, 'I must first ascend to my Father before I can bestow those things upon you which I have promised. Do not therefore touch Me and *detain* Me upon any expectation of that kind. Rather wait for my ascension, and go and tell the same thing to my brethren for their encouragement."

Poole says: "The best opinion seems to be the opinion of those who think our Savior saw Mary [being] too fond, as if she thought He had been raised up to such a converse [familiar association] with them as He had before His death. This error is all that He takes her to task for —not forbidding any kind of touching so as to satisfy herself that He was truly risen, but restraining any gross conception. He reminded Mary that He was about to ascend to His Father, though He had not yet ascended, and was therefore not to be enjoyed by them with so

much freedom and familiarity as before." Bishop Hall says: "There may be a kind of carnality in spiritual notions. If I have known Christ after the flesh, from henceforth I know Him no more. That You live here, my Savior, in this shape, that color, this stature, that habit, I should be glad to know; nothing that concerns You can be unuseful. Could I say, 'Here You sat, here You lay, here You were crucified, here You were buried,' I should with much contentment see and recount those ceremonials of Your presence. But if I shall so fasten my thoughts on them so as not to look higher to the spiritual part of these achievements—to the power and issue of Your resurrection—I am none the better."

Rollock says: "The meaning in effect is this. It is not time for you to touch Me now, till that time I be in glory, and then touch Me by the arm of faith as much as you can or may. You must consider that she was too much addicted to His bodily presence. She thought He should have remained and dwelt on earth as He did before. Therefore, He would not let her come near Him until He instructed her of a spiritual touching, and that He was not to stay here but to dwell with His Father in heaven."

"Mark this lesson. Some men love the Lord entirely, and yet when they come to His service they fail; for such is the grossness of our nature that we cannot incline to that spiritual service which He chiefly requires. Popery is full of this grossness. They can do nothing if they have not His carnal presence—either in Himself or in a stock or stone or in a piece of bread— and therefore they draw a bodily

presence of Him in the sacrament. All their religion is earthly—no grace, no spirit in it. But did the Lord accept that gross service that Mary offered? I am certain He loved Mary better than the Pope and all his priests; yet well as He liked Mary, He liked not her service. He says to her, 'Do not touch me!' The Lord keep us from gross service and make us touch Him by faith." Andrews says: "The most we can make is that here Mary failed in somewhat. Not that she did it in any immodest or indecent manner. God forbid! Never think of that. But she was only a little too forward, it may be; not with the due respect that was meet." "I tell you plainly, I do not like her Rabboni. It was no Easter-day salutation; it should have been some better term, expressing more reverence." "The touch was not the right touch, and all for lack of expressing more regard; not for lack of reverence at all, but of reverence enough." "It is no excuse to say it was all out of love. Never lay it upon that. Love, Christ loves well. But love, if it be right, does nothing uncomely, keeps decorum, forgets not what belongs to duty and decency, carries itself accordingly." "A strange kind of love, when for very love to Christ we care not how we use Him, or carry ourselves toward Him. Which, being Mary's case, she heard and heard quickly. Do not touch me. You are not now in case till you shall have learned to touch after a more regardful manner."

Sibbes says: "Mary was too much addicted to Christ's bodily presence. It is this that men have labored for from the beginning of the world—to be too much addicted to present things and to sense. They will worship Christ, but they must have a picture before them. They will adore Christ, but they must bring His body down to a piece

of bread—they must have a presence. And so instead of raising their hearts to God and Christ in a heavenly manner, they pull down God and Christ to them. And, therefore, Christ says, 'Do not touch Me in that manner; it is not with Me as it was before.' We must take heed of mean and base conceits of Christ." Sherlock, in his "Trial of the Witnesses," says: "The natural sense of this passage is this: Mary Magdalene, upon seeing Jesus, fell at His feet and laid hold on them, and held them as if she never meant to let them go. Then Christ said to her, "Touch Me not, or hang not about Me now. You will have other opportunities of seeing Me, for I go not yet to my Father. Lose no time then, but go quickly with my message to my brethren." West, on the Resurrection, says: "I take Christ's forbidding Mary to touch Him to have been meant as a signification of His intention to see her and the disciples again. Just as in ordinary life, when one friend says to another 'Do not take leave for I am not going yet,' he means to let him know that he purposes to see him again before he sets out on his journey." Lampe mentions a strange view of "Touch Me not," maintained by Bauldry, a German professor. He would put a full stop at "not" and place it first in the sentence, rendering it thus: "No! I am not the gardener. Touch Me, and see that I am your Savior risen." He also mentions a view, held by many, that it means, "Do not try whether I am risen by touching Me. It is I myself." Both views, however, seem very improbable. Paulus, the German theologian, maintains the monstrous notion that our Lord meant, "Do not lay a finger on Me, because my wounds still smart." This is simply ridiculous, to say the least.

Hengstenberg says: “The reason of the prohibition must be sought in the personal character of Mary and in the passionate nature of the touch which sprang from that character. She thought that the limits which had formerly existed between herself and the Lord (*the old style of confidence is a very incorrect idea*) were, now that the Savior had passed into another form of existence, removed and she might now give free course to her feelings without fearing the admixture of anything human in her sentiment toward her Lord. But her Lord repelled her: Touch Me not.”

Wordsworth says: “The term (in the Greek) indicates not only a prohibition of a particular act, but forbids a habit: *i.e.* of clinging to Him with a bodily touch. And the words ‘I have not ascended’ contain a precept concerning the time when the habit of touching Christ may be exercised. He is to be touched after He has ascended—that is, He is then to be truly touched, when He is beyond the reach of the bodily touch. And one of the purposes of His absence and His ascension into heaven was to elicit and exercise that touch, the touch of faith.”
Burgon remarks what a strange thing it is that “both the old world and the new should have begun with the same prohibition, *Touch not.*”

[*But go…say to them.*] This sentence is strikingly full of wisdom, tender thoughtfulness, and kindness. Wisely our Lord summons Mary Magdalene to an act of duty to others. He bids her not spend time in demonstrations of affection, but to arise and be useful.

Thoughtfully our Lord's first consideration is for His poor scattered disciples. Weak and erring as they had been, He still loved them and at once sends them a message. He did not mean to cast them off or forget them. Kindly He calls them "my brethren." All was pardoned and forgiven. He still regarded them as His dear brethren (risen conqueror over the grave as He was), and would have them look on Him as an elder brother. This is the first time our Lord ever called the disciples "brethren."

Bucer thinks that "my brethren" in this place really means "my brethren according to the flesh," *i.e.* James and others, whose faith was weaker perhaps than that of the other Apostles. But the vast majority of commentators see in the expression nothing of the kind and regard it only as a term of affection applied to all the Apostles. Calvin properly refers us to Psalm 22:22: "I will declare thy name to my brethren." See also Heb. 2:11.

Andrews remarks that the words "my brethren" was "a word to be touched and taken hold of. It was so once when Benhadad's servant laid hold on the word of the King of Israel, 'He is my brother'" (1 Kings 20:32,33). He adds that it implied identity of nature and identity of love and affection after the resurrection, and no change.

Let us mark what a strong proof we have here of the duty of telling others the good news of the Gospel. The very first work that a risen Christ proposes to the first disciple to whom He revealed Himself is the work of telling others. It was a deep saying of the four leprous

men: “This day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace. If we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will come upon us” (2 Kings 7:9). Cyril remarks what an honor was put on woman when a woman was commissioned to be the first person to proclaim the tidings of the resurrection. [*I ascend…your God.*] The message that our Lord desires Mary to carry to His disciples is remarkable. He does not bid her say “I have risen,” but “I ascend.” He would evidently have them understand that His resurrection was only a step toward His ascension. He did not rise again in order to tarry with them upon earth, but in order to go up to heaven as a conqueror and sit down at God’s right hand as their forerunner, representative, priest, advocate, and friend. The message is clearly elliptical. It is as though our Lord said, “Say to them that I have risen from the dead, and that I am soon about to ascend into heaven to Him who is my Father and my God, and their Father and their God also.”

When our Lord dwells on His ascension more than His resurrection, it seems to me that He names it as the great conclusion and accomplishment of the work He came to do and the necessary consequence of His rising again. It is as though He said, “My work is finished, my battle is won, and I shall not be much longer with you in the world. Get ready to receive my last instructions.”

Calvin says: “Christ forbids the Apostles to fix their whole attention on His resurrection viewed simply in itself, but exhorts them to proceed further until they come to the spiritual kingdom, the heavenly glory, and God Himself.” Andrews remarks: “It would be

better for us to lie still in our graves and never rise, than to rise and not ascend."

Flavel remarks: "If Christ had not ascended He could not have interceded, as He now does in heaven for us. And but take away Christ's intercession, and you starve the hope of the saints." When our Lord speaks of God as "my Father and my God," He seems, as usual, to point to the close and intimate union that He always declared to exist between Himself and the First Person in the Trinity. "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:8) is a kindred expression. He does not, we should observe, say that He ascends to "our Father," but "my Father and your Father." He thus shows that there is a certain distinction between His relation to the Father and ours. Believers are not naturally sons of God; they only become so by grace, by adoption, and by virtue of union with Christ. Christ, on the contrary, is in His nature the Son of God by an eternal generation.

When our Lord speaks of "your Father and your God," He seems to me to speak with a special view to the consolation of His disciples. It is as though He said, "Do not be troubled because I go away. He to whom I go is *your* Father and *your* God as well as mine. All that He is to me the Head, He is also to you the members."

It may well be doubted, when we read this verse, whether Christians as a rule assign sufficient importance to the great truth of Christ's ascension into heaven. Let us never forget that if our Lord had not

ascended into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God, His resurrection would have been but of little value. It is His going into heaven itself, to appear in the presence of God for us, that is the great secret of Christian comfort. It is not for nothing that St. Paul answers the question "Who is he who condemns?" by saying, "Christ has died, yea, rather has risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us" (Rom. 8:34). The death, the resurrection, the ascension, the intercession of Christ, are four great facts that should never be separated. It ought not to be forgotten that there seems to be a close connection between the ascension of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Ghost. This, at least, seems to be the meaning of the text in the Psalms, quoted by St. Paul: "When He had ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and received gifts for men" (Ps. 68:18, Eph. 4:8).

18.—[*Mary Magdalene came, etc.*] In this verse we see the effect that our Lord's words had on the loving disciple to whom He first appeared. She meekly accepts the reproof of her over-forward zeal to touch Him, without gainsaying [disputing] or answering again. Like a good servant, she proceeds at once to do what she is told. The use of the present tense shows the promptness of her obedience. The Greek words would be more literally rendered, "Mary Magdalene comes, telling or declaring to the disciples that she has seen the Lord, and that He has said these things to her"—that He has given her this message to carry to them, and that He calls them His brethren. The use of the participle makes the words sound as if she went open mouthed, telling every disciple as she went, and hardly stopping to

sit down till she had told everyone whom she could find in Jerusalem. We need not doubt that the first house she went to was that where Peter and John lodged, and one of the first persons to whom she told the joyful news was the mother of our Lord. A few minutes after she departed on her joyful errand (running, we need not doubt, as she had run before), our Lord appeared to the other women, as is recorded by St. Matthew (Matt. 28:9).

Brentius remarks what honor this passage puts on women. Sin came into the world by Eve, a woman. Yet God in mercy ordered things so that of a woman Christ was born, to a woman Christ first appeared after He rose from the dead, and a woman was the first to carry the news of His resurrection. He quaintly says, "Jesus made Mary Magdalene an Apostle to the Apostles." Cecil remarks: "Singular honor is reserved for solitary faith. Mary has the first personal manifestation of Christ after His resurrection. She is the first witness of this most important and illustrious fact, and the first messenger of it to His disciples."

JOHN 20:19-23

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the disciples had gathered together and locked the doors of the place for fear of the Jewish authorities. Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. So Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. Just

as the Father has sent me, I also send you." And after he said this, he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven; if you retain anyone's sins, they are retained."

The verses we have now read contain things hard to be understood. Like all the events which followed our Lord's resurrection, there is much in the facts before us which is mysterious, and requires reverent handling. Our Lord's actions, in suddenly appearing among the disciples when the doors were closed, and in breathing upon them, might soon draw us into unprofitable speculation. It is easy, in such cases, to darken counsel by words without knowledge. We shall find it safer and wiser to *confine our attention to points which are plain and instructive.*

We should observe, for one thing, **the *remarkable language with which our Lord greeted the apostles, when He first met them after His resurrection.*** Twice over he addressed them with the kindly words, "Peace be unto you." We may dismiss as untenable, in all probability, the cold and cautious suggestion, that this was nothing better than an unmeaning phrase of courtesy. He who "spoke as never man spoke," said nothing without meaning. He spoke, we may be sure, with special reference to the state of mind of the eleven apostles, with special reference to the events of the last few days, and with special reference to their future ministry. "Peace" and not blame— "peace" and not fault-finding— "peace" and not

rebuke—was the first word which this little company heard from their Master's lips, after He left the tomb.

It was right and fitting, that it should be so, and in full harmony with things that had gone before. "Peace on earth" was the song of the heavenly host, when Christ was born. Peace and rest of soul, was the general subject that Christ continually preached for three years. Peace, and not riches, had been the great legacy which He had left with the eleven the night before His crucifixion. Surely it was in full keeping with all the tenor of our Lord's dealings, that, when He revisited His little company of disciples after His resurrection, His first word should be "Peace." It was a word that would soothe and calm their minds.

Peace, we may safely conclude, was intended by our Lord to be the key-note to the Christian ministry. That same peace which was so continually on the lips of the Master, was to be the grand subject of the teaching of His disciples. Peace between God and man through the precious blood of atonement—peace between man and man through the infusion of grace and charity—to spread such peace as this was to be the work of the Church. Any religion, like that of Mahomet, who made converts with the sword, is not from above, but from beneath. Any form of Christianity which burns men at the stake, in order to promote its own success, carries about with it the stamp of an apostasy. That is the truest and best religion which does most to spread real, true peace.

We should observe, for another thing, in these verses, ***the remarkable evidence which our Lord supplied of His own resurrection.*** He graciously appealed to the senses of His trembling disciples. He showed them "His hands and His side." He bade them see with their own eyes, that He had a real material body, and that He was not a spirit or a spirit. "Handle Me and see," were His words, according to Luke— "a spirit has not flesh and bone, as you see Me have." Great indeed was the condescension of our blessed Master, in thus coming down to the feeble faith of the eleven Apostles! But great also was the principle which He established for the use of His Church in every age, until He returns. That principle is, that our Master requires us to believe nothing is *contrary* to our senses. Things *above* our reason we must expect to find in a religion that comes from God, but not things *contrary* to reason.

Let us lay firm hold on this great principle, and never forget to use it. Specially let us take care that we use it, in estimating the effect of the sacraments and the work of the Holy Spirit. To require people to believe that men have the quickening power of the Holy Spirit, when our eyes tell us they are living in habitual carelessness and sin, or that the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper are Christ's real body and blood, when our senses tell us they are still bread and wine—this is to require more belief than Christ ever required of His disciples. It is to require that which is flatly contradictory to reason and common sense. Such requisitions Christ never made. Let us not try to be wiser than our Lord.

We should observe, lastly, in these verses, ***the remarkable commission which our Lord conferred upon His eleven Apostles.*** We are told that He said, "Just as the Father has sent me, I also send you. And after he said this, he breathed on them and said, Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven; if you retain anyone's sins, they are retained." It is vain to deny that the true sense of these solemn words has been for centuries a subject of controversy and dispute. It is useless perhaps to expect that the controversy will ever be closed. The utmost that we can hope to do with the passage is to supply a probable exposition.

It seems then highly probable that our Lord in this place solemnly commissioned His Apostles to go into all the world, and preach the Gospel as He had preached it. He also conferred on them the power of *declaring* with peculiar authority whose sins were forgiven, and whose sins were not forgiven. That this is precisely what the Apostles did is a simple matter of fact, which any one may verify for himself by reading the book of the Acts. When Peter proclaimed to the Jews, "Repent, and be converted,"—and when Paul declared at Antioch of Iconium— "to you is the word of this salvation sent"— "Through this man is preached the forgiveness of sins, and by Him all that believe are justified"—they were doing what this passage commissioned the Apostles to do. They were opening with authority the door of salvation, and inviting with authority all sinners to enter in by it and be saved. (Acts 3:19; 13:26-38.) It seems, on the other hand, most improbable that our Lord intended in this verse to sanction the practice of private absolution, after private confession of sins.

Whatever some may please to say, there is not a single instance to be found in the Acts of any Apostle using such absolution after confession. Above all, there is not a trace in the two pastoral Epistles to Timothy and Titus, of such confession and absolution being recommended, or thought desirable. In short, whatever men may say about private priestly absolution, there is not a single precedent for it in God's Word.

Let us leave the whole passage with a deep sense of the importance of the minister's office, when that office is duly exercised according to the mind of Christ. No higher honor can be imagined than that of being Christ's ambassadors, and proclaiming in Christ's name the forgiveness of sins to a lost world. But let us ever beware of investing the ministerial office with one jot more of power and authority than Christ conferred upon it. To treat ministers as being in any sense mediators between God and man, is to rob Christ of His prerogative, to hide saving truth from sinners, and to exalt ordained men to a position which they are totally unqualified to fill.

Technical Notes:

19. Then the same day at evening, being the first *day* of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst and said to them, Peace *be* unto you. 20. And when he had said this, he showed them *his* hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. 21. Then Jesus said to them again, Peace be unto you; as

my **Father has sent me, even so I send you. 22. And when he had said this, he breathed on *them*, and said to them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost. 23. Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted to them; *and* whose soever *sins* ye retain, they are retained.**

19.—[*Then the same day, etc.*] This verse describes our Lord Jesus Christ's first appearance to the Apostles, in a body, after He rose from the dead. It took place in the evening of the same Sunday when He had appeared to Mary Magdalene in the morning. Between that morning and that evening He had already appeared three times—once to the company of women returning from the sepulcher, as described by St. Matthew; once to Simon Peter, as we are told by St. Luke and St. Paul; and once to the two disciples walking to Emmaus. (Matt. 28:9, Luke 24:34, 1 Cor. 15:5, Luke 24:13, etc.) This, therefore, was the fifth appearance that our Lord graciously vouchsafed. Each of the five appearances, we should observe, was peculiar in its circumstances and unlike the others. We need not wonder that this Sunday, from the earliest ages, was always marked by the Church as a day which ought to be had in remembrance and kept with peculiar honor.

The beginning of the verse would be more literally rendered, "When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week." The precise *hour* is not specified; but, considering all things, it seems probable that it was after sunset and when it was dark, in order to avoid observation. The *cause* of the disciples assembling, we may

reasonably suppose, was the tidings received from no less than four distinct sets of witnesses, that Jesus had risen from the dead and was alive. It would have been strange indeed if they did not assemble on hearing such news. The *place* where the disciples assembled is not mentioned. But at a time like the Passover feast, it would not be difficult to find some "upper room" where ten men might meet together. I can see no improbability in the supposition that the very room where the Lord's Supper was instituted on the previous Thursday evening might be the same room where the disciples gathered together on Sunday night. The words of St. Mark incline me to think that the person to whom the "upper room" belonged was one of those Jews who were friendly to Christ, though he had not courage to confess Him openly. (Mark 14:13-15.) That the doors should be shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, is a circumstance that need not surprise us. The Apostles might well regard their lives as being in imminent danger when they remembered how their Master had just been treated. Moreover, the story of the guard that was placed around the tomb—that "the disciples had stolen the body of Jesus"—might reasonably incline them to expect further ill treatment themselves. They did their best therefore to avoid observation, and closed the doors of the room where they assembled after sunset. Concerning the precise manner in which our Lord appeared to the disciples, there is no little difference of opinion.

(a) Some think, as Calvin and many of the divines of the seventeenth century, that He suddenly caused the doors to open,

passed through them when open, and suddenly stood in the midst of the company assembled.

(b) Some think, as Chrysostom, Cyril, Augustine, the Romanists, and nearly all Lutherans, that the doors continued fastened, and that our Lord miraculously appeared standing in the room where the disciples were, instantaneously, in a moment, and without notice. I do not know that it signifies much which view we take. *In either case a miracle was worked.* Our Lord's risen body must evidently have had a power of moving from one place to another, and of being visible or invisible as He thought fit, according to His good pleasure, after a manner that we cannot understand. In any case, we must carefully remember that it was a real material body—a body that could be touched, felt, seen, and handled, and yet a supernatural and peculiar body. With such a body it was as easy for our Lord to appear suddenly standing in the middle of the room, while the doors remained fastened, as it was to open the doors (as He did the doors of Peter's prison), and to walk into the room like any other man. To my own mind there is no proof positive either way, and I must leave it to my readers to choose for themselves. One thing alone we must not forget. Even if our Lord did appear in the room without unfastening the doors, it is no proof that He can be literally, and locally, and corporally present in the Lord's Supper under the forms of bread and wine. Moreover, it does not follow, because He could move from place to place invisibly, that His body could ever be in more than one place at one and the same time. When He rose from the dead, He rose with a body of a far more spiritual kind than He

had before, but a body for all that which was a real human body, and not a mere seeming and shadowy body like that of a ghost or a spirit.

The first words that our Lord spoke to the disciples afford a beautiful proof of His loving, merciful, tender, thoughtful, pitiful, and compassionate spirit. He said “Peace be unto you.” That expression, in my opinion, must on no account be taken as a mere formal salutation without meaning. It was intended to reassure and cheer the minds of the disciples by exhibiting at once His mind towards them. Not a word of reproof, rebuke, fault-finding, or blame falls from our Lord’s lips, notwithstanding all their sad faint-heartedness and desertion on the preceding Thursday night. All is forgiven and forgotten. The very first word is “Peace.” This was almost the last word that our Lord had spoken on Thursday night before He prayed: “These things I have spoken that in Me ye might have peace” (John 16:33). This was the last legacy He had left His disciples. “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled” (John 14:27). Can we doubt that this comfortable word would cheer and calm the minds of the little company when our Lord suddenly appeared? “Once more I stand among you, and once more I proclaim peace—not excommunication, not rejection from my friendship, not rebuke, but peace.” We cannot realize the fullness of comfort that the word would supply unless we bear in mind the events of the last few days, and especially the conduct of the Apostles on the night before the crucifixion when, after loudly professing their faithfulness, they all “forsook Him and fled.”

The parallel account in St. Luke would lead us to conclude that there were others present on this occasion beside the Apostles. He speaks of "them that were with them" (Luke 24:33).

20.—[*And when He had said this, etc.*] After speaking, our Lord proceeded most graciously to supply tangible evidence that He had really risen from the dead and stood before His disciples with a material living body. When it says that He showed them His hands and side, we cannot doubt that He invited them to touch Him. In fact St. Luke, when describing this very same interview, expressly records that our Lord said, "Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Handle me, and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones, as ye see I have" (Luke 24:39). The mention of the hands and side points clearly to the wounds made by the nails on the one, and by the spear in the other. Those wounds appeared visibly and unmistakably in His risen body, and our blessed Master was not ashamed of them. Even in the glory of heaven, according to Revelation, John saw Him appear as a "Lamb that had been slain" (Rev. 5:6). I think we need not doubt that when He ascended up into heaven, those wounds went with Him, and they are a perpetual witness to angels that He has actually suffered for man's sins. When we see His real presence in the day of His appearing, we shall see "the man Christ Jesus," and see the marks of His crucifixion. I give this, however, as my private opinion, and I think it is fair to say that many divines think differently. For instance, Calvin strongly holds that our Lord's "use of the wounds was only temporary, until the Apostles were fully convinced, and that His glorified body is without them." I cannot, however, agree with

him. After a great victory, the scars of a conqueror are marks of honor.

Concerning the actual condition of our Lord's wounds, it becomes us to speak reverently. A very slight acquaintance with surgery will tell us, of course, that a lacerated wound in the hand or foot, or a deep wound in the side inflicted on Friday would naturally, to say the least, be very painful and inflamed on Sunday night. But we must carefully remember that our Lord's risen body, though a real and material body, was evidently not subject to all the conditions of an ordinary human body, or of His own body before His death. It was, in fact, such a body as we may hope to have when we rise again. We may therefore conclude that the wounds made by the nails and spear were not wounds that were sore and inflamed, though it is equally certain that they were not closed up and only scars left behind. How it was that the two disciples going to Emmaus did not recognize our Lord by the wounds in His hands and feet is a question that admits of two answers. Either we must suppose that "their eyes were holden," and that they were miraculously unable to discern who it was who walked with them and did not even know Him by His voice; or else we must suppose that our Lord's hands and feet were covered during the walk, and that they only saw the wounds in His hands when He broke the bread. St. Mark's account would lead us to believe that our Lord was pleased to assume another body on the way to Emmaus. He says, "He appeared in another form" (Mark 16:12). The expression "were glad when they saw" would be more literally rendered "rejoiced seeing" and "having seen." I cannot myself think

that these words fulfilled our Lord's saying, "I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice" (John 16:22). That joy, I believe, is the joy of the whole Church at the Lord's second advent, and is yet to come. It is a joy of which our Lord said, "No man takes it from you." I believe the phrase before us simply means that the disciples were greatly delighted, and that they rejoiced when they saw before them their risen Master. It relieved their anxious minds, revived their hopes, and set at rest all their fears. "Our Master is actually alive again and has overcome death. Now all will be right."

We should not fail to observe how our Lord condescended to satisfy the senses of His disciples—the sense of sight and the sense of touch—when He showed Himself to them after His resurrection. If their senses had contradicted the news that His body had risen again to life, He would not have required them to believe it. Things above reason and sense, the Gospel calls on us to believe often; things contrary to reason and sense, never. This is precisely what we should remember when a Romanist bids us believe that the consecrated wafer in the Lord's Supper is the real Body of Christ. Sense, sight, taste, and chemical analysis combine to tell us that the wafer is still bread. The Romanist, therefore, has no right to demand our belief.

Rollock remarks: "When I mark this place, I see in it what then shall be the estate of the godly when they shall meet with their Lord. The first sight shall so ravish them that they shall wonder there ever could be such glory."

21.—[*Then Jesus said…again, etc.*] In this verse our Lord proceeds to tell the disciples the work that He now wished them to do, but in general terms. He meant to send them forth into the world to be His ministers, messengers, and witnesses, even as the Father had sent Him into the world to be His messenger and witness. (Heb. 3:1, John 18:37.) As He had gone up and down preaching the Gospel, testifying against the evil of the world, and proclaiming rest and peace to the heavy laden, so He intended them to go up and down as soon as He had ascended up into heaven. In short, He at once prepared their minds for the work that was before them. They were to dismiss from their minds the idea that the day of ease and reward had come, now that their Master had risen and was with them once more. So far from that being the case, their real work was now to begin. He Himself was about to leave the world, and He meant them to take His place. And one purpose for which He appeared among them was to give them their commission. The repetition of the salutation "Peace be unto you" is very noteworthy. I cannot doubt that it was specially intended to cheer, comfort, and animate the disciples. Glad as they doubtless were to see the Lord, we may easily believe that they were frightened and overcome by a mixture of feelings; and the more so when they remembered how they had behaved when they had last seen their Lord. Jesus read the condition of their hearts and mercifully makes assurance doubly sure by repeating the gracious words "Peace be unto you," just as Joseph said to Pharaoh, "the thing was doubled" in order to make it sure and prevent the possibility of mistake. Augustine says: "The iteration is confirmation. It is the 'peace upon peace' promised by the prophet" (Isa. 57:19).

It is curious that two entirely different Greek words are used to express the English "sent" and "send" in this verse. Parkhurst says that the word used where our Lord says "My Father has sent Me" is a more *solemn* word than the one used when our Lord says "I send you." Yet I do not think this is proved; and certainly Liddell and Scott flatly contradict the idea. At any rate, the second or less solemn word is repeatedly used in St. Luke [*sic*; John?] in the most solemn sense. (John 5:23,24,30.) It is just one of those things that we ought to notice, but cannot explain. There is doubtless some reason why two words are used, but what it is has not yet been discovered.

22.—[And when He had said…breathed, etc.] In this verse our Lord proceeds to confer a special gift on the disciples and, as it were, to ordain them for the great work which He intended them to do. And we have in it a remarkable emblematic action and a no less remarkable saying. The action of our Lord— "He breathed on them"—is one that stands completely alone in the New Testament, and the Greek word is nowhere else used. On no occasion but this do we find the Lord "breathing" on anyone. Of course it was a symbolic action, and the only question is, "What did it symbolize and why was it used?" My own belief is that the true explanation is to be found in the account of man's creation in Genesis. There we read, "The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and *breathed* into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul" (Gen. 2:7). Just as there was no life in man until God breathed into him the breath of life, so I believe our Lord taught the disciples by this action

of breathing on them that the beginning of all ministerial qualification is to have the Holy Spirit breathed into us; and that, until the Holy Ghost is planted in our hearts, we are not rightly commissioned for the work of the ministry.

I do not, however, feel sure that this view completely exhausts the meaning of our Lord, when He breathed on the disciples. I cannot forget that they had all forsaken their Master the night that He was taken prisoner, fallen away from their profession, and forfeited their title to confidence as Apostles. May we not therefore reasonably believe that this breathing pointed to a *revival of life* in the hearts of the Apostles and to a restoration of their privileges as trusted and commissioned messengers, notwithstanding their grievous fall? I cannot help suspecting that this lesson was contained in the action of breathing. It not only symbolized the infusion for the first time of special ministerial gifts and graces, but it also symbolized the restoration to complete power and confidence in their Master's eyes, even after their faith had so nearly breathed its last and given up the ghost. The first symptom of returning life, when a man is recovered from drowning, is his beginning to breathe again. To set the lungs breathing, in such cases, is the first aim of a skillful doctor. When we remember that the wind is preeminently an emblem of the Holy Ghost (John 3:8, Ezek. 37:9, Acts 2:2), we cannot fail to see that there is a beautiful fitness in the symbolic action which our Lord has employed. Lampe thinks that our Lord breathed on all the disciples at once and not on each one separately. It is probable that it was so, in my judgment. Hooker remarks (Eccles. Pol.6, v.c.77): "The cause

why we breathe not, as Christ did on the disciples to whom He imparted power, is that neither Spirit nor spiritual authority may be thought to proceed from us, who are but delegates and assigns to give men possession of His grace." The words "Receive ye the Holy Ghost" are almost as deep and mysterious as the action of breathing. They can only signify "I bestow on you the Holy Ghost." But in what sense the Holy Ghost was bestowed is a point that demands attention, and we must beware that we do not run into error.

(a) Our Lord cannot have meant that the disciples were now to receive the Holy Ghost for the first time. They had doubtless received Him in the day when they were first converted and believed. Whether they realized it or not, the Holy Ghost was in their hearts already. "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost" (1 Cor. 12:3).

(b) Our Lord cannot have meant that the disciples were now to receive the Holy Ghost for the purpose of working miracles and speaking with tongues. They had worked many miracles already, and the gift of speaking with tongues was specially conferred afterward, on the day of Pentecost, when they were endued with power from on high.

(c) Our Lord, in my opinion, must have meant, "Receive the Holy Ghost as the Spirit of knowledge and understanding." He must have meant that He now conferred on them a degree of light and knowledge of divine truth which up till now they had not possessed.

They had been greatly deficient in light and knowledge up to this time. With all their faith and love toward our Lord's Person, they had been sadly ignorant of many things, and particularly of the true purpose of His coming and the necessity of His death and resurrection. "Now," says our Lord, "I bestow on you the Spirit of knowledge. Let the time past suffice to have seen through a glass darkly. Receive the Holy Ghost, open your eyes and see all things clearly." In fact, I believe the words point to the very thing that St. Luke says our Lord did on this occasion: "Then opened He their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures" (Luke 24:45). Light was the first thing made in the day of creation. Light in the heart is the first beginning of true conversion. And light in the understanding is the first thing required in order to make a man an able minister of the New Testament. Our Lord was commissioning His first ministers and sending them out to carry on His work. He begins by giving them light and knowledge: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost. I commission you this day and confer on you the office of ministers. And the first gift I confer on you is spiritual knowledge." That this is the true view of the words is proved to my own mind by the extraordinary difference in doctrinal knowledge which from this day the Apostles exhibited.

Theophylact thinks that our Lord only meant, "Become fit for receiving the Holy Ghost." This seems weak and poor.

The expression before us is one of those that seem to me to supply strong indirect proof of the doctrine of the procession of the Holy

Ghost from the Son as well as from the Father. It seems to me that when the Lord Jesus Christ could say with authority “Receive the Holy Ghost,” it is very strange to say that the Holy Ghost does not proceed from Him! Yet the Greek Church does not admit this.

The expression before us is one that, strictly speaking, no one but our Lord Jesus Christ could use. It is evident that no mortal man has the power of conferring the Holy Ghost upon another. This is a prerogative of God alone and of His Christ. When, therefore, the ordination service for Presbyters, in the Church of England Prayer-book, puts into the Bishop’s mouth these solemn words “Receive the Holy Ghost,” I have never felt a doubt that the compilers of our Liturgy only meant the words to be used as in an optative, and not a positive sense, as *a prayer:* “I pray that you may receive the Holy Ghost.” Archbishop Whitgift in his reply to the objections of the famous Cartwright says: “To use these words in ordaining of ministers, which Christ Himself used in appointing His Apostles, is no more ridiculous and blasphemous than it is to use the words that he used in the Lord’s Supper.” “The Bishop, by speaking these words, does not take upon him to give the Holy Ghost no more than he does to remit sins when he pronounces the remission of sins; but by speaking these words of Christ, he does show the principal duty of a minister, and assures him of the assistance of God’s Holy Spirit, if he labor in the same accordingly.” (See Blakeney on the Common Prayer, p. 513.) While, however, I say this, I shall never shrink from expressing my regret that the words “Receive the Holy Ghost” were adopted by the compilers of our Prayer-book. They do not trouble my

conscience, but I consider them likely to offend the consciences of many, and I think it would have been wiser to throw them distinctly and unmistakably into the form of a prayer. It is a simple historical fact, which ought not to be forgotten, that these words were never used in the ordination of ministers for more than a thousand years after Christ! (See Nicholls and Blakeney on the Common-Prayer.) One practical lesson, at any rate, is very plain in this expression. The first thing that is necessary in order to make a man a true minister of the Gospel is the indwelling of the Holy Ghost. Bishops and presbyters can lay hands on men and make them clergymen. The Holy Ghost alone can make a "man of God," and a minister of God's Word.

23.—[*Whose soever sins ye remit, etc.*] In this verse our Lord continues and concludes the commission for the office of ministers which He now, after rising from the dead, gives to His Apostles. His work as a public Teacher was now finished. The Apostles henceforth were to carry it on. The words which form this commission are very peculiar and demand close attention. The meaning of the words, I believe, may be paraphrased thus:

"I confer on you the power of declaring and pronouncing authoritatively whose sins are forgiven and whose sins are not forgiven. I bestow on you the office of pronouncing who are pardoned and who are not, just as the Jewish high priest pronounced who were clean and who were unclean in cases of leprosy." I believe that nothing more than this *authority to declare* can be got out of the

words, and I entirely repudiate and reject the strange notion maintained by some that our Lord meant to depute [assign] to the Apostles, or any others, the power of absolutely pardoning or not pardoning, absolving or not absolving, anyone's soul. My reasons for maintaining this view of the text are as follows:

(a) The power of forgiving sins in Scripture is always spoken of as the special prerogative of God. The Jews themselves admitted this when they said, "Who can forgive sins but God only?" (Mark 2:7, Luke 5:21). It is monstrous to suppose that our Lord meant to overthrow and alter this great principle when He commissioned His disciples.

(b) The language of the Old Testament Scripture shows conclusively that the Prophets were said to "DO" things when they "DECLARED" them about to be done. Thus Jeremiah's commission runs in these words: "I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant" (Jer. 1:10). This can only mean to *declare* the rooting out and pulling down, etc. So also Ezekiel says "I came to destroy the city" (Ezek. 43:3), where the marginal reading is "I came to prophesy the city should be destroyed." The Apostles were doubtless well acquainted with prophetical language, and I believe they interpreted our Lord's words in this place accordingly.

(c) There is not a single instance in the Acts or Epistles of an Apostle taking on himself to absolve, pardon, or forgive anyone. The Apostles and preachers of the New Testament declare in the plainest language

whose sin is pardoned and absolved, but they never take on themselves to pardon and absolve. When Peter said to Cornelius and his friends “Whosoever believes in Him shall receive remission of sins” (Acts 16:43), when Paul said at Antioch in Pisidia “We declare to you glad tidings” and “Through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins” (Acts 13:32,38), and when Paul said to the Philippian jailor “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved” (Acts 16:31), in each case they fulfilled the commission of the text before us. They “declared whose sins were remitted and whose were retained.”

(d) There is not a single word in the three pastoral Epistles written by St. Paul to Timothy and Titus to show that the Apostle regarded absolution as part of the ministerial office. If it was he would surely have mentioned it, and urged the practice of it on young ministers for the relief of burdened souls.

(e) The weakness of human nature is so great that it is grossly improbable that such a tremendous power as that of absolutely pardoning and absolving souls would ever be committed to any mortal man. It would be highly injurious to any man to trust him with such a power, and would be a continued temptation to him to usurp the office of a Mediator between God and man.

(f) The experience of the Romish Church, in which the priests are practically regarded as having the power to absolve sinners and shut heaven against persons not absolved, affords the strongest indirect

evidence that our Lord's words can only have meant to bear a "declarative" sense. Anything worse or more mischievous, both to minister and people, than the results of the Romish system of penance and absolution it is impossible to conceive. It is a system that has practically degraded the laity, puffed up and damaged the clergy, turned people away from Christ, and kept them in spiritual darkness and bondage.

A question of no small interest arises out of the text before us, which it may be well to consider. Was the ministerial office and commission conferred on the Apostles by our Lord in this place an office which they transmitted to others, with all its privileges and powers? I answer, without hesitation, that in the strictest sense the commission of the Apostles was not transmitted but was confined to them and St. Paul. I challenge anyone to deny that the Apostles possessed certain ministerial qualifications which were quite peculiar to them and which they could not transmit and did not transmit to others. (1) They had the gift of declaring the Gospel without error and with infallible accuracy to an extent that no one after them did. (2) They confirmed their teaching by miracles. (3) They were, some of them, plenarily inspired by the Holy Ghost to write portions of the New Testament. (4) They had the power of discerning spirits and knowing the hearts of others to an extent that no one after them possessed, as we see in the case of Peter's dealing with Ananias, Sapphira, and Simon Magus. In all these respects they stood alone and had no successors. *In the strictest sense, there is no such thing as Apostolical succession.* Modern ministers are not successors of the

Apostles, but of Timothy and Titus. The Apostles were peculiarly qualified, and gifted, and furnished for the very peculiar work they had to do as the first founders of Churches. But, in the strictest and most accurate sense, their office was one that was not transmitted. With them it began and with them it ended.

But while I say all this, I maintain as strongly as anyone that there is a sense in which the verse now before us applies to all Christian ministers, and in this sense their commission resembles that of the Apostles. It is the office of every minister of Christ to declare boldly, authoritatively, and with decision, out of God's Word, who they are whose sins are forgiven and who they are whose sins are retained. This is his commission, and this the work for which he is set apart and ordained. Whenever a minister in his pulpit proclaims the full Gospel of Christ faithfully, he does the work that our Lord in this verse commissioned the Apostles to do, and may take comfort in the thought that he may expect our Lord's blessing. He cannot do it with such infallible power as the Apostles, but in a sense he is really their follower and successor.

The whole subject opened up in this verse is so important in modern days that I make no apology for quoting the following passage from Bishop Jewell's Apology, which throws light on it.

Jewell says: "We say that Christ has given to His ministers the power of binding and loosing, of opening and shutting. And we say that the power of loosing consists in this: that the minister (by the preaching of the Gospel) offers to dejected minds and true penitents, through

the merits of Christ, absolution and does assure them a certain remission of their sins and the hopes of eternal salvation; or, secondly, reconciles, restores, and receives into the congregation and unity of the faithful those penitents who by any grievous scandal or known and public offense have offended the minds of their brethren, and in a sort alienated and separated themselves from the common society of the Church and the body of Christ. And we say the minister does exercise the power of binding or shutting when he shuts the gate of the kingdom of heaven against unbelievers and obstinate persons, and denounces to them the vengeance of God and eternal punishment; or excludes out of the bosom of the Church those who are publicly excommunicated. God Himself does so far approve whatever sentence His ministers shall so give, that whatsoever is either loosed or bound by their ministry here on earth He will in like manner bind or loose and confirm in heaven. The key with which these ministers do shut or open the kingdom of heaven, we say with St. Chrysostom, is *the knowledge of the Scripture*; with Tertullian, is *the interpretation of the law*; and with Eusebius, is *the Word of God*. We say the disciples of Christ received this power (from Him) not that they might hear the private confessions of the people and catch their whispering murmurs as the Popish priests everywhere now do (and that in such a manner as if all the force and use of the keys consisted only in this), but that they might go and preach and publish the Gospel, that so they might be a savor of life unto life to those who did believe, and that they might be also a savor of death unto death to those who did not believe; that the minds of those who were frightened with the sense of their former ill lives and errors,

after they beheld the light of the Gospel and believed in Christ, might be opened by the Word of God, as doors are with a key; and that the wicked and stubborn who would not believe and return into the way might be left, shut up, and locked, and (as St. Paul expresses it in 2 Tim. 3:13) might "wax *worse and worse*." *This* we take to be the meaning of the *keys*, and that in this manner the consciences of men are either bound or loosed."

Calvin observes: "When Christ enjoins [instructs] the Apostles to forgive sins, He does not convey to them what is peculiar to Himself. It belongs to Him to forgive sins. This honor, so far as it belongs peculiarly to Himself, He does not surrender to the Apostles. He only enjoins them, in His name, to proclaim the forgiveness of sins, that through their agency He may reconcile men to God."

Brentius says: "This is the true and heavenly mode of remitting sins, to wit, the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Those who do not preach the Gospel of Christ have no power of either remitting or retaining sins." Bullinger says: "The Apostles remitted men's sins when by the preaching of the Gospel they taught that the sins of believers were remitted, and eternal life granted through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They retained men's sins when they announced that the wrath of God remained on those who did not believe."

Gualter says: "At this day ministers are said to remit sins when they promise remission of them in Christ to those who believe, and to

retain sins when they denounce damnation on the unbelieving and obstinately impenitent."

Musculus says that this promise does not belong "to every and any minister, but to the real minister of the Gospel, who teaches nothing and promises nothing else but this—that those who repent and believe on Christ have remission of sin and eternal life, and that those who are impenitent and unbelieving remain in their sins and death. Doctrine like this is ratified and confirmed before God, because it is agreeable to the Gospel of the Son of God."

Lightfoot thinks that in interpreting these words we must carefully remember that they were probably spoken in close connection with our Lord's words in St. Luke, when He says that "repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:46). He thinks that on hearing these words, scruples might arise in the Apostles' minds: "Is this so indeed? Must remission of sin be really preached in Jerusalem to men stained with Messiah's blood?" And then he thinks these words are spoken to encourage them. "Yes, you are to begin at Jerusalem. For whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them." Finally, Lightfoot asks with much sense, "On what foundation and with what confidence could the Apostles have preached remission of sins to such wretched men as the murderers of their Lord, unless authorized by a peculiar commission granted by the Lord Himself?" Poole says: "The question among divines is whether Christ in this text has given authority to His ministers actually to discharge men of the guilt of

their sins, or only to declare to them that if their repentance and faith are true, that their sins are really forgiven. The former view is contended for by many. But it does not seem reasonable (1) that God should entrust man with such a piece of His prerogative, and (2) that God—who knows the falsehood of men's hearts and the inability of the best minister to judge the truth of any man's repentance and faith, as also the passions to which they are subject—should give to any of the sons of men an absolute power under Him to discharge any from the guilt of sin. It is certain that without true repentance and faith in Christ no man has his sins forgiven, and therefore no minister who does not know the hearts of men can possibly say to any man with certainty, '*Thy sins are forgiven.*' What certainty the Apostles might have had by the Spirit of discernment, we cannot say. But it is certain that no one now has such certainty of any man's faith and repentance. For that reason it is to me apparent that no man has any further power from Christ than to declare to men that if they truly repent and believe their sins are really forgiven. Only the minister, being Christ's interpreter and ambassador and better able to judge of true faith and repentance than others (though not certainly and infallibly), such declarations from a faithful able minister are of more weight and authority than from others. This is the most, I conceive, should be in this matter."

I leave the whole passage with one general word of caution. Whatever sense we place on the words, let us beware that we do not give to ministers, of any name or denomination, a place, power, authority, position, or privilege which Christ never gave them.

Putting ministers out of their proper place has been the root of endless superstition and corruption in Christ's Church. To regard ministers as mediators between Christ and the soul, to confess to them privately and receive private absolution from them, is a system for which there is no authority in the New Testament and is the high road to every kind of evil. It is a system equally mischievous to ministers and to people, utterly subversive of the Gospel, and thoroughly dishonoring to the priestly office of Christ.

The three absolutions found in the Liturgy of the Church of England —that in the Morning and Evening Prayer, that in the Communion Service, and that in the Visitation for the Sick—were all, in my judgment, intended to bear only a *declarative* sense. But I can never refrain from saying that the absolution in the Visitation Service is liable to be misunderstood, and its wording is to be regretted.

Shepherd, on the Common Prayer, remarks: "The Church of England neither maintains nor countenances the opinion that a priest, by virtue of his ordination, has an absolute, unconditional power to forgive sin. The power that the clergy has received and exercised is purely ministerial, being defined and limited by the Word of God, which expressly declares upon what condition sin shall be remitted and upon what retained. To suppose that any minister of Christ since the Apostles possesses the power of remitting or retaining sin at his discretion is repugnant to the whole tenor of Scripture, as well as to every dictate of reason and common sense."

JOHN 20:24-31

Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he replied, "Unless I see the wounds from the nails in his hands, and put my finger into the wounds from the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will never believe it!"

Eight days later the disciples were again together in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and examine my hands. Extend your hand and put it into my side. Do not continue in your unbelief, but believe." Thomas replied to him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are the people who have not seen and yet have believed."

Now Jesus performed many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples that are not recorded in this book. But these are recorded so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

The story of the unbelief of Thomas, related in these verses, is a narrative peculiar to the Gospel of John. For wise and good reasons it is passed over in silence by Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and was probably not given to the world until Thomas was dead. It is precisely one of those passages of Scripture which supply strong

internal evidence of the honesty of the inspired writers. If impostors and deceivers had compiled the Bible for their own private advantage, they would never have told mankind that one of the first founders of a new religion behaved as Thomas here did.

We should mark, for one thing, in these verses, ***how much Christians may lose by not regularly attending the assemblies of God's people.*** Thomas was absent the first time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after His resurrection, and consequently Thomas missed a blessing. Of course we have no certain proof that the absence of the Apostle could not admit of explanation. Yet, at such a crisis in the lives of the eleven, it seems highly improbable that he had any good reason for not being with his brethren, and it is far more likely that in some way he was to blame. One thing, at any rate, is clear and plain. By being absent he was kept in suspense and unbelief a whole week, while all around him were rejoicing in the thought of a risen Lord. It is difficult to suppose that this would have been the case, if there had not been a fault somewhere. It is hard to avoid the suspicion that Thomas was absent when he might have been present.

We shall all do well to remember the charge of the Apostle Paul—"Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is." (Heb. 10:25.) Never to be absent from God's house on Sundays, without good reason—never to miss the Lord's Supper when administered in our own congregation—never to let our place be empty when means of grace are going on, this is one way to be a

growing and prosperous Christian. The very sermon that we needlessly miss, may contain a precious word in season for our souls. The very assembly for prayer and praise from which we stay away, may be the very gathering that would have cheered, and established, and quickened our hearts. We little know how dependent our spiritual health is on little, regular, habitual helps, and how much we suffer if we miss our medicine. The wretched argument that many attend means of grace and are no better for them, should be no argument to a Christian. It may satisfy those who are blind to their own state, and destitute of grace, but it should never satisfy a real servant of Christ. Such a one should remember the words of Solomon — "Blessed is the man that hears me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors." (Prov. 8:34.) Above all he should bind around his heart the Master's promise— "Wheresoever two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." (Matt. 18:20.) Such a man will rarely be left like Thomas, shut out in the cold chill of unbelief, while others are warmed and filled.

We should mark for another thing in this verse, ***how kind and merciful Christ is to dull and slow believers.*** Nowhere, perhaps, in all the four Gospels, do we find this part of our Lord's character so beautifully illustrated as in the story before our eyes. It is hard to imagine anything more tiresome and provoking than the conduct of Thomas, when even the testimony of ten faithful brethren had no effect on him, and he doggedly declared, "Except I see with my own eyes and touch with my own hands, I will not believe." But it is impossible to imagine anything more patient and compassionate,

than our Lord's treatment of this weak disciple. He does not reject him, or dismiss him, or excommunicate him. He comes again at the end of a week, and apparently for the special benefit of Thomas. He deals with him according to his weakness, like a gentle nurse dealing with a froward child— "Reach here your finger, and behold my hands; reach here your hand, and thrust it into my side." If nothing but the grossest, coarsest, most material evidence could satisfy him, even that evidence was supplied. Surely this was a love that passes knowledge, and a patience that passes understanding.

A passage of Scripture like this, we need not doubt, was written for the special comfort of all true believers. The Holy Spirit knew well that the dull, and the slow, and the stupid, and the doubting, are by far the commonest type of disciples in this evil world. The Holy Spirit has taken care to supply abundant evidence that Jesus is rich in patience as well as compassion, and that He bears with the infirmities of all His people. Let us take care that we drink into our Lord's spirit, and copy His example. Let us never set down men in a low place, as gracious and godless, because their faith is feeble and their love is cold. Let us remember the case of Thomas, and be very compassionate and of tender mercy. Our Lord has many weak children in His family, many dull pupils in His school, many raw soldiers in His army, many lame sheep in His flock. Yet He bears with them all, and casts none away. Happy is that Christian who has learned to deal likewise with his brethren. There are many in the Church, who, like Thomas, are dull and slow, but for all that, like Thomas, are real and true believers.

We should mark, lastly, in these verses, ***how Christ was addressed by a disciple as "God," without prohibition or rebuke on His part.*** The noble exclamation which burst from the lips of Thomas, when convinced that his Lord had risen indeed; the noble exclamation, "My Lord and my God"—admits of only one meaning. It was a distinct testimony to our blessed Lord's divinity. It was a clear, unmistakable declaration that Thomas believed Him, whom he saw and touched that day, to be not only man, but God. Above all, it was a testimony which our Lord received and did not prohibit, and a declaration which He did not say one word to rebuke. When Cornelius fell down at the feet of Peter and would have worshiped him, the Apostle refused such honor at once— "Stand up; I myself also am a man." (Acts 10:26.) When the people of Lystra would have done sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas, "they tore their clothes, and ran in among the people, saying, Sirs, why do you these things? We also are men of like passions with you." (Acts 14:14.) But when Thomas says to Jesus, "My Lord and my God," the words do not elicit a syllable of reproof from our holy and truth-loving Master. Can we doubt that these things were written for our learning?

Let us settle it firmly in our minds that the divinity of Christ is one of the grand foundation truths of Christianity, and let us be willing to go to the stake rather than let it go. Unless our Lord Jesus is very God of very God, there is an end of His mediation, His atonement, His advocacy, His priesthood, His whole work of redemption. These glorious doctrines are useless blasphemies, unless Christ is divine. Forever let us bless God that the divinity of our Lord

is taught everywhere in the Scriptures, and stands on evidence that can never be overthrown. Above all, let us daily repose our sinful souls on Christ with undoubting confidence, as one who is perfect God as well as perfect man. He is man, and therefore can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. He is God, and therefore is "able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by Him." That Christian has no cause to fear, who can look to Jesus by faith, and say with Thomas, "My Lord and my God." With such a Savior we need not be afraid to begin the life of real religion, and with such a Savior we may boldly go on.

Technical Notes:

24. But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. 25. The other disciples therefore said to him, We have seen the Lord. But he said to them, Unless I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe. 26. And after eight days His disciples were again within, and Thomas with them. *Then* Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace *be* unto you. 27. Then He said to Thomas, Reach here your finger, and behold my hands; and reach here your hand, and thrust *it* into my side. Do not be faithless, but believing. 28. And Thomas answered and said to him, My Lord and my God. 29. Jesus said to him, Thomas, because you have seen me,

you have believed. Blessed *are* they who have not seen and *yet* have believed. 30. And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; 31. but these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name.

24.—[*But Thomas... Didymus.*] The story of the second appearance of Christ to the whole company of the Apostles, for the special benefit of Thomas, is one of those narratives only found in St. John's Gospel. We ought to feel thankful that it has been recorded. It is precisely one of those stories that supply strong indirect evidence of the divine inspiration of the Scriptures and the genuine honesty of the Gospel writers. An uninspired man, much less a dishonest impostor, would not have told us of the unbelief of a chosen Apostle. Moreover, it is one of those stories that throw most useful light on a very interesting subject. That subject is the great variety of temperament that may be found among true Christians. Chrysostom remarks: "Observe the truthfulness of the disciples. They hide no faults, either their own or others, but record them with great veracity."

Cardinal Bellarmine, according to Gerhard, goes so far as to say that the history of Thomas—like that of Noah's drunkenness, David's adultery, and Peter's denial—is a reason why the laity ought not to read the Bible, lest they should get harm! The worthy Cardinal forgets that we need beacons to warn us against danger and examples of Christ's mercy to sinful and dull people in order to

encourage us to repent.

Concerning the Apostle Thomas, we know little. Twice in the Gospel of St. John we find him saying something, and on each occasion he appears in the same character. When our Lord declared His intention of going to Bethany, and says plainly that Lazarus is dead, Thomas says to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with Him” (John 11:16). When our Lord in His parting address to His disciples said, “Where I go ye know, and the way ye know,” Thomas said to Him, “Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?” (John 14:4,5). He always seems to be one of those despondent, fearful, gloomy-minded Christians who look at the dark side of every subject and condition and can never see a bit of blue sky; who go on their way to heaven with real faith and true grace, but are so full of doubts and fears that they are unable to enjoy religion, and are a trouble to themselves and all around them. This I believe to be the true account of his character. The modern theory—that he was a man of *free thought and wide range of intellect*, who wisely required reasonable evidence of everything in religion and properly dreaded taking anything on trust—is a theory that I believe to be utterly without foundation, and I cannot receive it for a moment. He was simply a good man with a very doubting and gloomy turn of mind, who really loved Jesus and was willing to die with Him, but who saw little but the dangers attending everything that a disciple had to do and the difficulties belonging to everything that a disciple had to believe. There are many like him. It is a very useful picture. John Bunyan’s “Fearing,” “Despondency,” and “Much

Afraid" in Pilgrim's Progress, are types of a large class of Christians who are successors of the Apostle Thomas.

[*Was not with them when Jesus came.*] The reasons why Thomas was not with the other ten Apostles on Sunday night when Jesus appeared to them are not given, and we have no clue whatever to them. Most commentators consider that he was to blame, and that by his absence he missed a blessing and was kept in suspense a week. I admit that this may be true, and I think his example teaches indirectly that it is unwise to be ever absent from the assembly of God's people without good cause. But I believe we must not press this point too far and must not lay too much blame on the Apostle in the absence of direct evidence that he was in fault. For anything we know, he may have lodged at a greater distance from the place of meeting than any of the eleven, and thus been unable to reach the place at an earlier hour; or he may have been detained by necessary business. One thing is very certain: the disciples found no fault with Thomas for his absence when they said, "We have seen the Lord." Moreover, our Lord Himself, when He appears, does not blame Thomas for having been absent on a former occasion, but only chides his unbelief. To me, the simplest view of the subject appears to be that Thomas' absence was a part of his character. He was slow and dull in action as well as in perception—the sort of man who would always have been last in Church and last in a meeting. In the present instance I venture to conjecture that he meant no harm and intended to have been present when the ten Apostles met, but that he probably started late, walked slowly, and was so absorbed in doubts and fears

and anxious meditations about the prospects of Christ's disciples that he never reached the place of meeting till Christ had withdrawn Himself. The question has been needlessly raised by some as to whether Thomas was not deprived of the gifts and privileges conferred on the other Apostles by his absence. Lightfoot sensibly replies: "Surely not. It was a privilege common to the whole Apostolate, and peculiar to them as Apostles. St. Paul was distant while these things happened, both from apostleship and religion. Yet when made an Apostle, he was at once adorned with this privilege." Some think that his case is like that of Eldad and Medad who, though absent, had their share of the Spirit like the rest of the seventy elders (Num. 11:27).

25.—[*The other disciples…seen the Lord.*] We are not told when and where the disciples said this. I incline to believe that they said it the very evening that our Lord first appeared to them, and that Thomas came into the assembly very shortly after the Lord disappeared. To my eyes it reads as if the ten Apostles all exclaimed together, full of joy and delight at what they had seen and heard, "Thomas, we have just seen our Lord and Master! If you had been here a little sooner, you also would have seen Him." I think this for two reasons. (1) The words of the 26th verse, "after eight days," seem to indicate that there were eight days between our Lord's first appearance and his second, and also eight days between Thomas' expression of unbelief and his being convinced. (2) It seems highly improbable that Thomas would allow a whole day and night to pass away, after the rumor of our Lord's body having been removed from the tomb had spread

through Jerusalem, without seeking out the other Apostles and inquiring what it meant. Slow and dull in faith as he was, he would hardly sleep without finding out something about it. These considerations incline me to believe that, before the ten Apostles had time to separate after our Lord's appearance to them, Thomas came in. Then they told him immediately that they had just seen the Lord. And then came the remarkable declaration which the doubting Apostle made.

[*But he said to them, etc.*] The unbelief of Thomas, expressed in this famous sentence, was a sad fault in a good man, which cannot be explained away. He refused to believe the testimony of ten competent witnesses who had seen Christ in the body with their own eyes. He refused to believe the testimony of ten true friends and brethren who could have no object in deceiving him. He passionately declares that he will not believe unless he himself sees and touches our Lord's body. He presumes to prescribe certain conditions that must be fulfilled before he can credit the report of his brethren. He uses singularly emphatic language to express his skepticism:

"Others may believe if they like, but I shall not and will not believe until I see and touch for myself." All this was very sad and very sinful. Thomas might have remembered that at this rate nothing could ever be proved by witnesses; and that he himself, as a teacher, could never expect men to believe him. His case shows us how foolishly and weakly a believer may speak sometimes, and how, under the influence of depression and doubt, he may say things of

which afterwards he is heartily ashamed. After all, the case of Thomas is not an uncommon one. Some people are so strangely constituted that they distrust everybody, regard all men as liars, and will believe nothing except they can see it all and work it all out for themselves. They have a rooted dislike to receive anything on trust or from the testimony of others, and must always go over the ground for themselves. In people of this kind, though they know it not, there is often a vast amount of latent pride and self-conceit; and it is almost ludicrous to observe how entirely they forget that the business of daily life could never go on if we were always doubting everything which we could not see for ourselves. Nevertheless, they exist in the Church and always will exist; and the case of Thomas shows what trouble they bring on themselves.

Two things must in fairness be remembered, which form some slight extenuation of Thomas' unbelief. For one thing, it does not appear that any one of our Lord's Apostles ever understood, up to the time of our Lord's crucifixion, that he was really going to be crucified, buried, and rise again. Simple as these great facts appear to us now, it is perfectly certain that they formed no part of the creed of the Apostles so long as our Lord was with them. They may seem astonishing, but it is true. They believed that Christ was the Messiah, but they did not realize a crucified Messiah. Of these Apostles, I would remind the reader, Thomas was one. Does not all this throw a little light on his extraordinary skepticism about the reality of the resurrection? For another thing, we must remember that Thomas, like all Jews, had a firm belief in the reality of spirits and ghosts, and

the possibility of their appearing. Even after this, when Peter was delivered from prison and came to the house of John Mark, the disciples said, “It is his angel” (Acts 12:15). May we not therefore conceive it possible that Thomas, overwhelmed and confounded at the astounding news that Christ had been seen, would cling with his characteristic incredulity to the notion that the Apostles had only seen Christ’s spirit or ghost, something he himself did not dispute; and that what they had seen—the real material body of his Lord—he could not bring himself to believe? These things are worth considering. I do not for a moment excuse or defend Thomas. I only remind those who condemn him wholesale and can find no words strong enough to use about his unbelief, that it was not quite so easy for a pious Jew, brought up and trained as Thomas had been, to receive at once the resurrection of our Lord as a proved thing, as it may appear at first sight to an English mind. Musculus remarks how extraordinary the unbelief of Thomas seems when we consider that he not only had heard our Lord frequently foretell His resurrection, but had actually within a few weeks seen Lazarus raised from the dead at Bethany!

Bengel remarks: “No doubt Thomas seemed to himself to be entertaining and expressing sentiments altogether judicious. But unbelief, while it attributes defects in judgment to others, often itself discovers and betrays hardness of heart, and in that hardness slowness of belief.” [*And after eight days, etc.*] This verse describes how Jesus was graciously pleased to appear again to the company of the Apostles for the express purpose of convincing and satisfying the

mind of Thomas. He came “after eight days.” That means a week, according to the Jewish manner of expressing a space of time by which the first and last days were always reckoned in, if any part of them was employed. Thus our Lord was buried on Friday afternoon and rose again on Sunday morning, and was actually only thirty-six hours in the grave. But a Jew would say that He was “three days” buried. It thus appears that both on the first and second times when our Lord appeared to the Apostles, it was a Sunday. Poole remarks that we have here the beginning of keeping holy the first day of the week.

He came when the disciple were “within.” That means that they were assembled in a room, and probably in the same house where they had assembled before. The conviction and reproof of a weak disciple was a thing that was mercifully transacted in private and among friends. We cannot doubt, moreover, that at this period the disciples would hardly dare to assemble in the open air anywhere about Jerusalem. The rumor that they stole the body of our Lord would still be rife in the city, and they might well feel the necessity of caution.

He came when “Thomas was with them.” That means that He timed His visit so that not one of the Apostles was missing. He knew exactly who were assembled and where they were assembled, and He ordered His appearance accordingly. It should be a great comfort to believers to remember that their Lord’s eye is always upon them, and that He knows exactly in what place and in what company they are.

He came “when the doors were shut.” That means that He appeared exactly under the same circumstances under which He appeared a

week before, in an evening when the doors were carefully closed for fear of the Jews. Thus, as on the previous Sunday, He suddenly, without a moment's notice, stood in the midst of the assembled disciples.

He came with the same gracious salutation with which He had appeared before. Once more, the first word that fell from His lips is "Peace be unto you." Thomas was there. The disciple who made his emphatic declaration of unbelief might well expect to hear some word of rebuke. But our Lord makes no exception. He saw Thomas, and knew well all that Thomas had said; and yet to him, as well as to the other ten, He once more says "Peace."

We should note carefully the amazing kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ to a weak disciple, and the trouble He was pleased to take, if I may use such a phrase with due reverence, about one single soul. The unbelief of Thomas was most provoking and inexcusable, and if he had been cast out of the company of disciples, we could not have said His excommunication was undeserved. But our Lord cares tenderly for this weak member of His mystical body, and specially appears in order to heal and restore him. What a wonderful example He gives to all His people! How kind we ought to be to weak brethren, and how ready to take any pains and trouble if we can only do them good! The Christian of modern times who is ready to excommunicate everyone who cannot speak his shibboleth and see every point of doctrine and ceremonial as he does, who is ready to turn away from every brother overtaken in a fault, seeing him as graceless, godless, and

unconverted—such a Christian may flatter himself that he is very zealous and faithful. But he is a Christian who has not got the mind of Christ. What Christ did for Thomas, we ought to be ready to do for others. Let us not forget that Thomas continued a whole week in unbelief and doubt, while his brethren around him were rejoicing. We may well believe that it was not a very happy week with him. He that sows a short period of skepticism often reaps a long period of trouble.

Rupertus, almost alone, maintains that the second appearance of our Lord for the special benefit of Thomas was in Galilee, in Nazareth, at the house of Mary. But the vast majority of commentators think that it was at Jerusalem.

Musculus observes how kind and brotherly was the dealing of the ten Apostles with Thomas. They did not excommunicate him and cast him out of their society for his unbelief, but allowed him to assemble with them as before.

Rollock observes: “The loving dealing of the Lord with Thomas teaches us this comfortable lesson. The Lord marks not narrowly the infirmities and wants that are in His own. He looks not narrowly to the weakness of their faith, to the imperfections and wants of their prayers and requests, for their prayers are full of imperfection, He oversees their infirmities, He misknows [deliberately failing to recognize] the corruption wherein their faith and prayers and desires are involved, and has a regard to their faith, albeit they have it in

small measure."

27.—[*Then He said to Thomas, etc.*] The verse before us is a wonderful instance of Christ's pity and condescension. To come into the world at all and take a body on Him, to allow that body to be scourged, crowned with thorns, nailed to the cross, and laid in the grave—all this, beyond doubt, was astonishing condescension. But when the victory over sin and death was won, and He had taken on Him His resurrection body to come to a doubting, skeptical disciple and bid him touch Him, put his finger into the nail prints in His hands and put his hand into the great wound in His side—all this was a condescension which we can never sufficiently admire and adore. The last sentence of the verse is a rebuke and an exhortation at the same time. It would have been more literally rendered, "Be not an unbeliever, but a believer." It is not merely a reproof to Thomas for his skepticism on this particular occasion, but an urgent counsel to be of a more believing turn of mind for time to come. "Shake off this habit of doubting, questioning, and discrediting everyone. Give up your unbelieving disposition. Become more willing to believe and trust, and give credit to testimony for time to come." No doubt the primary object of the sentence was to correct and chastise Thomas for his skeptical declaration on the preceding Sunday. But I believe our Lord had in view the further object of correcting Thomas' whole character, and directing his attention to his besetting sin. How many there are among us who ought to take to themselves our Lord's words! How faithless we often are, and how slow to believe! Let us note here, as already remarked, that the wounds on our Lord's body

must have been still open, from the language He addresses to Thomas, and that the wound in His side must have been a very large wound, from His telling Thomas to thrust in *his hand*.

Let us not fail to observe our Lord's perfect knowledge of all that passed on the previous Sunday, of all that the Apostles had said, and of the skeptical declaration that Thomas had made. Such knowledge showed clearly that He was God and not man. He hears every idle word that we say and notes all our conversation.

Let us observe our Lord's thorough acquaintance with the special faults and besetting sins of every one of His people. He saw that Thomas' defect was his unbelief, and so He says "Be not faithless, but believing."

28.—[*And Thomas answered…my God.*] The famous answer of Thomas, contained in this verse, is precisely the short interjectional exclamation of a man taken by surprise, convinced at once of his own grievous mistake, and so overwhelmed by a variety of feelings that he is unable for the moment to use many words. It is the language of amazement, delight, repentance, faith, and adoration all combined in one sentence. Whether it is to be taken in the third person, as an exclamation— "It is my Lord and my God!"—or in the second person, as an adoring, loving, believing address— "You are my Lord and my God"—is an open question which the original Greek does not settle. If I must give an opinion, I prefer the second person. But in either case the sense is good. The text before us is one of those which are

justly quoted as an unanswerable proof of the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is called "God" in the presence of ten witnesses, and He accepts the language and does not say one word to reprove the person who uses it. Unless a person is prepared to deny the inspiration of St. John's Gospel generally, or the genuineness and correctness of this text in particular, it is hard to see how the force of the sentence in favor of Christ's divinity can be evaded. The suggestion of Theodorus of Mopsuestia and some modern Socinians, that Thomas only used a kind of oath or exclamation which he did not mean to apply to Christ Himself, is utterly untenable and almost profane. It is unreasonable to suppose that a pious Jew like Thomas would take God's name in vain and break the third commandment, however much he might be surprised. Moreover, there is no proof whatever (although a careless Greek, Roman, or Englishman might say "*My God*" when suddenly taken by surprise) that any such expression was in use among the Jews. In short, there is in my judgment but one way of regarding the text if we treat it honestly. It is an incontrovertible proof that Thomas looked on Christ as God and addressed Him to His face as God, and that our Lord made no objection and did not reprove him.

Bullinger remarks how emphatically Thomas says, "MY Lord and MY God," showing the reality of his faith. Rollock says: "If we compare Thomas with the other Apostles, we shall see that as he surpassed them all in unbelief, so he surpassed them far in believing and confessing the Lord." But he adds: "Jesus praises not Thomas for his faith, because he tied his faith to his senses. He calls him not blessed

for it, but pronounces them blessed who believe without seeing." Whether, after all, Thomas did actually touch our Lord's wounds as he was told to do, is an open question that we have no means of deciding. There is certainly, as Augustine observes, no proof that he did, and his exclamation reads as if it was sudden and immediate and not the result of examination and deliberation. May we not well believe that the discovery of our Lord's perfect acquaintance with every word that he had said on the previous Sunday, combined with the evidence of his own eyes that he saw before him a material body and not a spirit, would be enough to convince him? The question is an open one and every reader must form his own opinion about it. We are neither told that Thomas did touch our Lord nor yet that he did not. Certainly our Lord says in the next verse, "Because you have *seen Me,* you have believed."

29.—[*Jesus said to him, Thomas, etc.*] This verse contains a grave and solemn rebuke to Thomas, and a warning to all who are disposed to demand an excessive amount of evidence before they believe. The first part of our Lord's words would be translated more literally, "Because you have seen Me, Thomas, you have believed." The whole sentence may be thus paraphrased and expounded. "Thomas, you have at last believed my resurrection because you have seen Me with your own eyes and touched Me with your own hands. It is well. But it would have been far better if you had believed a week ago on the testimony of your ten brethren, and not waited to see Me. Remember from now on that in my kingdom they are more blessed and honorable who believe on good testimony without seeing, than those

who insist first on seeing before they believe."

The sentence, "Blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed," would be rendered literally "Blessed are those persons not having seen and having believed," consisting as it does of two participles connected with "blessed." The idea that our Lord had in view any particular person, such as Abraham, Moses, David, the prophets, and generally the Old Testament saints, appears to me utterly untenable. I believe our Lord had in view no individual case but only laid down a great general principle, which Thomas had forgotten, as a lesson to him and the whole Church in every age. The construction of the Greek language allows us to regard the past tense as a present in such a sentence as this. (See Jelf's Greek Grammar, 401,403, and Farrar's Greek Syntax, 130.)

Gregory well says: "The incredulity of Thomas has done us more good than the faith of Mary." He means that if Thomas had never doubted, we should not have had such full proof that Christ rose from the dead. The principle contained in the sentence before us is one of vast importance in every age, and specially in our own. In a day of skepticism, free inquiry and rationalism, so-called, when hundreds are continually railing against creeds, dogmatism, and priestcraft, the sentence deserves close attention and consideration. Nothing is more common now-a-days than to hear people say that they "decline to believe things above their reason, that they cannot believe what they cannot entirely understand in religion, that they must see everything clearly before they can believe." Such talk as this

sounds very fine, and is very taking with young persons and superficially educated people, because it supplies a convenient reason for neglecting vital religion altogether. But it is a style of talking which shows a mind either proud, or foolish, or inconsistent. In matters of science, what sensible man does not know that we must begin by believing much that we do not understand, taking many positions on trust, and accepting many things on the testimony of others? Even in the most exact science the scholar must begin with axioms and postulates. Faith and trust in our teachers is the very first condition of acquiring knowledge. He who begins his studies by saying "I shall not believe anything which I do not see clearly demonstrated from the very first," will make very little progress.

In the daily business of life, what sensible man does not know that we take many important steps on no other ground than the testimony of others? Parents send sons to Australia, New Zealand, China, and India without ever having seen these countries, in faith that the report about them is dependable and true. Probability, in fact, is the only guide of most parts of our life.

In the face of such facts as these, where is the common sense of saying, as many rationalists and skeptics now do, that in such a mysterious matter as the concern of our souls we ought to believe nothing that we do not see, and ought to receive nothing as true that will not admit of mathematical demonstration? Christianity does not at all refuse to appeal to our intellects, and does not require of us a blind, unreasoning faith. But Christianity does ask us to begin by

believing many things that are above our reason, and promises us that, so beginning, we shall have more light and see all things clearly. The would-be wise man of modern times says, “I dislike any religion that contains any mystery. I must first see and then I will believe.” Christianity replies, “You cannot avoid mystery, unless you go out of the world. You are only asked to do with religion what you are always doing with science. You must first believe and then you will see.” The cry of the modern skeptic is, “If I could see I would believe.” The answer of the Christian ought to be, “If you would only believe and humbly ask for Divine teaching, you would soon see.” The plain truth is that modern freethinkers are like the Jews, who were always demanding some visible sign that our Lord was the Messiah, and pretended that they would believe if they only saw it. Just in the same way there are hundreds of people in this latter age of the world who tell us they can believe nothing which is above their reason, and that they want stronger evidences of the truth of the doctrine and fact of Christianity than probability. Like Thomas, they must first see before they believe. But what an extraordinary fact it is that the very men who say all this are continually acting all their lives on no better evidence than probability! They are continually doing things on no other ground than the report of others and their own belief that this report is probably true. The very principle on which they are incessantly acting, in the affairs of their bodies, their families, and their money, is the principle on which they refuse to act in the affairs of their souls! In the things of this world they believe all sorts of things which they have not seen and only know to be probable, and act on their belief. In the things of the eternal world they say they can

believe nothing which they do not see, and refuse the argument of probability altogether. Never, in fact, was there anything so unreasonable and inconsistent as rationalism, so called! No wonder that our Lord laid down, for the benefit of Thomas and the whole Church, that mighty principle, “Blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed.”

The remarks of Richard Cecil on the subject before us are so apposite [highly pertinent, relevant] that I make no apology for quoting them. They will be found in his “Original Thoughts” (vol. i., p.440-442). “When a man doubts, after proper evidence, God calls it folly. When we complain and want more evidence, the fault is in us and not in God’s dispensations. A humble spirit will accept a glimmering light and not refuse to walk because it has not the noonday sun. Incredulity, as to divine truth, has its root in pride and self-sufficiency and is accompanied by much rashness and ignorance. It presumes to understand and comprehend everything that is proposed to it. The incredulous man calls for demonstration. The feeble creature, who cannot explain the nature of his own formation, would have things made out as plain as ‘two and two make four.’ The true believer receives the truths of the Bible as he receives the kingdom of heaven—with the simplicity of a little child.” “Let us beware of the danger of following our own imaginations. A man may make one demand after another till, at last, nothing will satisfy him; and the next step is that when he will not be content with what God shows him, he shall be left in darkness and perplexity. Consider the nature of believing. It is not like believing that two and two make

four. Do not men believe on probability in other things? God has given all the evidence that man requires or needs; and if in a right mind, we shall thank God for the dispensation of light we have, willing to walk by faith and not by sight. If we do not get on in this way, we shall not get on at all. Divine justice punishes incredulity by credulity; by giving up the unbelieving to the dominion and bondage of strong delusions. When men get into a high mind and an unbelieving spirit, and reject the truth, God punishes them by letting them 'believe a lie.' Let us take heed how we say, like Thomas, we will not walk at all without such light as we think proper."

The opinion expressed by Dean Stanley, following Dr. Arnold (in Smith's "Bible Dictionary," Article "Thomas"), that Thomas is a remarkable example of "free inquiry combined with fervent belief," is one that I only mention in order to express my dissent from it. I see nothing like "free inquiry" in this Apostle. I read of no question he asked of his brethren. I see no trace of any willingness to investigate, sift, weigh, and consider the testimony that they bore. I discover no readiness to go to the grave, to examine the linen cloths, to talk with Mary Magdalene, to question the two disciples who journeyed to Emmaus. All this would have been "free inquiry." But I see nothing of the kind. I only see a dull, obstinate, despondent declaration that, whatever his ten friends may say, he will not believe till he sees. This cannot surely deserve the name of "free inquiry"! As to the "fervent belief" of Thomas, no doubt, at last (when his most compassionate Savior almost forced conviction on him in pity for his dullness and made unbelief quite impossible) he made a most beautiful confession

of faith. But it was a confession, we must remember, that came out only at the last moment and was extracted, as it were, by a miracle of kindness. Above all, beautiful as it was, it did not prevent his gracious Master speaking words of grave and solemn rebuke. Beyond doubt, Thomas lay down that night a pardoned and forgiven man—a man raised from faithlessness to strong faith. But we must not forget that he was not praised and commended though raised, convinced, and pardoned. If words mean anything, he had received a reproof, and one that I doubt not he felt deeply. To me, therefore, it appears that to represent him as an example of "free inquiry combined with fervent belief" is an entire mistake and a misapprehension both of his character and of the whole drift of the remarkable narrative of this passage.

If, as I believe, St. Mark's remarkable words apply to this appearance of our Lord for the special benefit of Thomas, it is impossible to regard our Lord's language to Thomas in any other sense than that of rebuke. St. Mark says: "He appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them who had seen Him after He was risen" (Mark 16:14). Most commentators certainly take this view. Chrysostom says that Thomas received a "sharp rebuke."

30,31.—[*And truly Jesus did many other signs, etc.*] The last two verses in this chapter contain one of those parenthetical comments, or glosses, which are so peculiar to the Gospel of St. John. It must be admitted that they seem to break the thread of the narrative and

come in with a rather startling effect. We need not, therefore, wonder that the right meaning of the two verses has long been a subject of dispute.

(a) Some think, as Calvin, Ecolampadius, Brentius, Poole, Rollock, Lampe, Hengstenberg, Pearce, and Alford, that St. John refers to the whole history of Christ's ministry and is comparing his own Gospel with the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. They would paraphrase the two verses in the following way: "Jesus did many other miracles during His ministry, under the eyes of His disciples, which are not recorded in this Gospel of mine, though they are recorded in the other three. But those few which are recorded in this, my Gospel, are recorded in order that you who read it may be convinced that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ of God, and that believing on Him you may have eternal life through His name." It is a heavy objection to this interpretation that the two verses, on this view, appear to come in rather abruptly and without much connection with what goes either before or after. In short, it is not very easy to explain why they come in here at all. Moreover, it is not very easy to see the drift of the expression "signs in the presence of His disciples," considering that many of our Lord's greatest miracles were worked before people who were not disciples at all. Furthermore, it is not very clear what St. John can mean by saying "other" signs. That word "other" seems to point to miracles just performed, yet there was no special miracle performed at this particular, beyond, of course, our Lord's miraculous appearances.

(b) Others, as Chrysostom, Theophylact, Rupertus, Beza, Bullinger, Calovius, Musculus, Gerhard, Ferus, Toletus, Maldonatus, Henry, Tholuck, Scott, Bloomfield, and Olshausen, think that St. John writes these two verses with a special reference to the wondrous signs and evidences which the Lord had just given to the disciples of His own resurrection from the dead. They would paraphrase the two verses in this way: "Many other wondrous proofs did the Lord give to the Apostles of His own resurrection, which are not written down in this Gospel, though they are written in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. But the three appearances which I have narrated are written down in order to convince you that Jesus is the true Messiah, the Christ of God, and that believing this firmly you may have eternal life through faith in His name." According to this view the two verses refer to nothing but this 20th chapter and are a parenthetical comment on it. It is as though John would say, "Do not suppose that these three appearances of Christ are the only wondrous signs and proofs of His resurrection. There are others that you will find recorded in the other three Gospels. But I have related these three in order to confirm your faith, and to show you that in believing on a risen Savior you are resting on solid ground." Of the two views I prefer the second one as involving the fewest difficulties. It is more probable, considering John's peculiar style of writing, to suppose that he makes a short parenthetical remark about a single chapter than to suppose that he makes it about the whole of his Gospel. Above all, this second view gets over the heavy objection that, after bringing his whole Gospel to a conclusion by a general remark on the whole of it as compared to the other three Gospels, St. John seems to begin again in the 21st

chapter and to write a postscript or appendix. In short, the common theory—that these two verses apply to the whole Gospel—makes St. John finish his history, lay down his pen, complete his work, and then suddenly take up his pen again and add the 21st chapter as a kind of afterthought. To say the least, this is an undignified, not to say rather irreverent, view of the composition of an inspired writer! The other theory, or the theory which strictly confines the application of the two concluding verses of the 20th chapter to the matter contained in that chapter, viz., the signs that our Lord gave of His resurrection, is entirely in keeping with St. John's style of writing his Gospel. He simply remarks parenthetically that there are other proofs of Christ's resurrection, which are to be found in the other Gospels, and that he has only written down such accounts as he was guided by the Spirit to consider most calculated to establish the faith of his readers. I frankly confess that the passage appears to come in abruptly under any view, and I cannot expect that all will adopt the explanation that I have advocated. If the Gospel of St. John had ended with this 20th chapter, I might perhaps have acquiesced in the theory that the two verses were meant to form a brief concluding remark about the whole of the Evangelist's work, and a brief admission of the fact that he passed over many miracles recorded by Matthew, Mark, and Luke. But I cannot acquiesce in the theory when I see that St. John goes on to write the 21st chapter. The existence of that chapter alone satisfies me that in the two verses before us St. John is only speaking of the signs of Christ's resurrection, which he has supplied, and is admitting that there are others in the other Gospels. As a rule, moreover, when I find a parenthetical comment

or gloss in St. John's Gospel, I prefer to apply it to the immediate subject of which he is speaking. It is the habit of this Evangelist to turn aside for a moment and make a short explanatory remark, and then to take up the thread again and go on with his history. I think the two verses before us are an example of this habit. When the Holy Ghost plenarily inspired the writer of any Book of Scripture, both as to his faith and his words, He did not prevent him writing in his own peculiar style.

Whatever view we may take of the matter in dispute about these two verses, there are things in them that are abundantly clear and ought never to be forgotten. For one thing, St. John generously recognizes the existence of other books beside his own, and disclaims the idea of his own Gospel being the only one that Christians ought to read. Happy is that author who can humbly say, "My book does not contain everything about the subject it handles. There are other books about it. Read them." For another thing, we should note the grand end and object for which this and all the books of the New Testament were written. They were written to glorify Christ, to make us believe in Him as the only Savior of sinners, and to lead us to eternal life through faith in His name.

It is interesting to remember that ecclesiastical historians assign to Thomas the honor of being the Apostle who first preached the Gospel in India; and they also say that he there suffered martyrdom. A society of Christians in Malabar is said to be still known by his name.

Unhappily, the truth of all this is very doubtful, and rests on a very sandy foundation.

John – Chap. 21

JOHN 21:1-14

After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias. Now this is how he did so. Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael (who was from Cana in Galilee), the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples of his were together. Simon Peter told them, "I am going fishing." "We will go with you," they replied. They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

When it was already very early morning, Jesus stood on the beach, but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. So Jesus said to them, "Children, you don't have any fish, do you?" They replied, "No." He told them, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they threw the net, and were not able to pull it in because of the large number of fish.

Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" So Simon Peter, when he heard that it was the Lord, tucked in his outer garment (for he had nothing on underneath it), and plunged into the sea. Meanwhile the other disciples came with the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from land, only about a hundred yards.

When they got out on the beach, they saw a charcoal fire ready with a fish placed on it, and bread. Jesus said, "Bring some of the fish you have just now caught." So Simon Peter went aboard and pulled the net to shore. It was full of large fish, one hundred fifty-three, but although there were so many, the net was not torn. "Come, have breakfast," Jesus said. But none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

The appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ after His resurrection, described in these verses, is a deeply interesting portion of the Gospel history. The circumstances attending it have always been regarded as highly allegorical and figurative, in every age of the Church. It may, however, be justly doubted whether commentators and interpreters have not gone too far in this direction. It is quite possible to spiritualize and filter away the narratives of the Gospels, until we completely lose sight of the plain meaning of words. In the present case we shall find it wise to confine ourselves to the great, simple lessons, which the passage undoubtedly contains.

We should observe, for one thing, in these verses, **the poverty of the first disciples of Christ.** We find them working with their own hands, in order to supply their temporal needs, and working at one of the humblest of callings—the calling of a fisherman. Silver and gold they had none, lands and revenues they had none, and therefore

they were not ashamed to return to the business to which they had, most of them, been trained. Striking is the fact, that some of the seven here named were fishing, when our Lord first called them to be Apostles, and again fishing, when He appeared to them almost the last time. We need not doubt that to the minds of Peter, James, and John, the coincidence would come home with peculiar power.

The poverty of the Apostles goes far to prove the divine origin of Christianity. These very men who toiled all night in a boat, dragging about a cold wet net, and taking nothing—these very men who found it necessary to work hard in order that they might eat—these very men were some of the first founders of the mighty Church of Christ, which has now overspread one-third of the globe. These were they who went forth from an obscure corner of the earth, and turned the world upside down. These were the unlearned and ignorant men, who boldly confronted the subtle systems of ancient philosophy, and silenced its advocates by the preaching of the cross. These were the men who at Ephesus, and Athens, and Rome, emptied the heathen temples of their worshipers, and turned away multitudes to a new and better faith. He that can explain these facts, except by admitting that Christianity came down from God, must be a strangely incredulous man. Reason and common sense lead us to only one conclusion in the matter. Nothing can account for the rise and progress of Christianity but the direct interposition of God.

We should observe, for another thing, in these verses, **the different characters of different disciples of Christ.** Once

more, on this deeply interesting occasion, we see Peter and John side by side in the same boat, and once more, as at the sepulcher, we see these two good men behaving in different ways. When Jesus stood on the shore, in the dim twilight of the morning, John was the first to perceive who it was, and to say, “It is the Lord;” but Peter was the first to spring into the water, and to struggle to get close to his Master. In a word, John was the first to see; but Peter was the first to act. John’s gentle loving spirit was quickest to discern; but Peter’s fiery, impulsive nature was quickest to stir and move. And yet both were believers, both were true-hearted disciples, both loved the Lord in life, and were faithful to Him unto death. But their natural temperaments were not the same.

Let us never forget the practical lesson before us. As long as we live, let us diligently use it in forming our estimate of believers. Let us not condemn others as graceless and unconverted, because they do not see the path of duty from our stand-point, or feel things exactly as we feel them. “There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.” (1 Cor. 12:4.) The gifts of God’s children are not bestowed precisely in the same measure and degree. Some have more of one gift, and some have more of another. Some have gifts which shine more in public, and some which shine more in private. Some are more bright in a passive life, and some are more bright in an active one. Yet each and all the members of God’s family, in their own way and in their own season, bring glory to God. Martha was “careful and troubled about much serving,” when Mary “sat at the feet of Jesus and heard His word.” Yet there came a day at Bethany, when Mary

was crushed and prostrated by overmuch sorrow, and Martha's faith shone more brightly than her sister's. (Luke 10:39, 40; John 11:20-28.) Nevertheless both were loved by our Lord. The one thing needful is to have the grace of the Spirit, and to love Christ. Let us love all of whom this can be said, though they may not see with our eyes in everything. The Church of Christ needs servants of all kinds, and instruments of every sort; pen-knives as well as swords, axes as well as hammers, chisels as well as saws, Marthas as well as Mary's, Peters as well as Johns. Let our ruling maxim be this, "Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." (Ephes. 6:24.)

We should observe, lastly, in these verses**, the abundant evidence which Scripture supplies of our Lord Jesus Christ's resurrection.** Here, as in other places, we find an unanswerable proof that our Lord rose again with a real material body, and a proof seen by seven grown-up men with their own eyes, at one and the same time. We see Him sitting, talking, eating, drinking, on the shore of the lake of Galilee, and to all appearance for a considerable time. The morning sun of spring shines down on the little party. They are alone by the well-known Galilean lake, far away from the crowd and noise of Jerusalem. In the midst sits the Master, with the nail-prints in His hands—the very Master whom they had all followed for three years, and one of them, at least, had seen hanging on the cross. They could not be deceived. Will anyone pretend to say that stronger proof could be given that Jesus rose from the dead? Can any one imagine better evidence of a fact? That Peter was convinced and satisfied we know. He says himself to Cornelius, We

“ate and drink with Him after He rose from the dead.” (Acts 10:41.) Those who in modern times say they are not convinced, may as well say that they are determined not to believe any evidence at all.

Let us all thank God that we have such a cloud of witnesses to prove that our Lord rose again. The resurrection of Christ is the grand proof of Christ’s divine mission. He told the Jews they need not believe He was the Messiah, if He did not rise again the third day. The resurrection of Christ is the top-stone of the work of redemption. It proved that He finished the work He came to do, and, as our Substitute, had overcome the grave. The resurrection of Christ is a miracle that no infidel can explain away. Men may carp and cavil at Balaam’s donkey, and Jonah in the whale’s belly, if they please, but until they can prove that Christ did not rise again we need not be moved. Above all, the resurrection of Christ is the pledge of our own. As the grave could not detain the Head, so it shall not detain the members. Well may we say with Peter, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has begotten us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” (1 Peter 1:3.)

Technical Notes:

1. After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias, and in this way he showed *himself*. 2. There were together Simon Peter, Thomas called Didymus, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the *sons* of Zebedee, and two other of his disciples. 3. Simon Peter said

to them, I am going fishing. They said to him, We are going with you also. They went forth and immediately got into a boat, and that night they caught nothing. 4. But when the morning had now come, Jesus stood on the shore; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. 5. Then Jesus said to them, Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No. 6. And he said to them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it in because of the multitude of fish. 7. Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, It is the Lord. Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on *his* fisher's coat (for he was naked), and plunged into the sea. 8. And the other disciples came in a little boat (for they were not far from land, but about two hundred cubits), dragging the net with fish. 9. Then as soon as they had come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid on it, and bread. 10. Jesus said to them, Bring some of the fish which ye have now caught. 11. Simon Peter went up and drew the net to land, full of large fish, one hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not broken. 12. Jesus said to them, Come *and* dine. And none of the disciples dared ask him, Who are you?—knowing that it was the Lord. 13. Jesus then came and took the bread and gave it to them, and likewise the fish. 14. This is now the third time that Jesus showed himself to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

The last chapter of St. John's Gospel requires a few preliminary observations. Certain very objectionable theories have been propounded about it.

(a) Some, as Grotius, maintain that the chapter was not written by John at all, that his Gospel ended with the last verse of the 20th chapter and that the 21st chapter is the work of another writer, perhaps one John, an Ephesian presbyter!

(b) Others do not go so far as this and yet maintain that the chapter must be regarded as a postscript or appendix to the Gospel, and was probably added as an afterthought by St. John himself some years after the rest of the Gospel. The chief ground on which these theories are built is the passage with which the 20th chapter ends. Men tell us that the two concluding verses of that chapter were evidently intended to finish and wind up John's narrative, and that the 21st chapter comes in awkwardly and abruptly.

From all these theories I entirely dissent and repudiate them altogether. I see no proof whatever that the two last verses of the 20th chapter were intended to be a winding up of the whole Gospel. To me they appear to be a characteristic comment of the Evangelist, such as he often makes, on the account he has given in the chapter of our Lord's appearances to the disciples after His resurrection, and nothing more. To me it appears perfectly natural that he should go on writing and give a further account of our Lord's most instructive appearance at the sea of Galilee; and I see in the narrative no

abruptness or awkward fitting whatever. On the contrary, I see a peculiar beauty in the selection of the matter which the 21st chapter contains. It seems to me a most fitting conclusion to the whole narrative of the Gospel to tell us our Lord's last sayings about two Apostles as Peter and John. Concerning Peter, it should be remembered that none of the Apostles had professed so much and yet fallen so sadly as he had. John takes care to tell us how graciously and emphatically Jesus restores him to his commission, and specially bids him feed His Church, and foretells his end. Concerning John, it should be remembered that he had been peculiarly mentioned as the disciple whom Jesus loved. He meekly tells us that the only prediction about himself, if it can be called one, was that his future end was left in obscurity by his Lord. And thus he concludes his Gospel. If anyone thinks that such a chapter comes in awkwardly and is not a fitting conclusion to John's narrative after the 20th chapter, I cannot agree with him.

Of evidence—whether external or internal—that the theories I have referred to deserve consideration, there is a conspicuous absence. There is not the slightest proof that any trustworthy ancient writer ever regarded the last chapter of St. John's Gospel as less genuine and less inspired than the rest of the book. There is nothing in the language or style of the chapter to create any suspicion that any other person than John composed it. Those who wish to see this subject fully investigated are advised to study Wordsworth's Appendix to St. John's Gospel, in his Commentary.

When I add to this statement the fact that in every age the wisest and holiest commentators have seen in this chapter several singularly deep and interesting types of the history and position of Christ's Church in the world, I think I shall have said enough to satisfy many readers that they may approach the last chapter of St. John's Gospel with as much reverence and as much reasonable expectation of getting benefit from it as any other chapter in the book.

1.—[*After these things*.] This expression is indefinite. It only means that the appearance of our Lord, about to be described in this chapter, took place after His appearance on the eighth day following His resurrection. The time therefore, in the verse before us, is some day between the eighth and the fortieth day, when He ascended up into heaven. But what precise day we cannot tell. One thing, at any rate, we may be sure of. It was not the Sabbath day, or else the disciples would not have gone fishing. Even on the day following the crucifixion, Christ's disciples "rested according to the commandment" (Luke 23:56).

[*Jesus showed Himself…disciples*.] A deep question naturally arises out of the expression before us. Where was our Lord on the days when He did not "manifest or show Himself" to His disciples? It is evident that He was not with them always, and that He only visited them at intervals. Where was He then in the meantime? Not in heaven, we may be sure, because He had not yet ascended. But where was He on earth? I speak of course of His human nature. As God, He is everywhere. But where was He as a man? This is a mysterious

matter, and one about which it is useless to speculate. Enough for us to know that our Lord was visible or invisible, and appeared suddenly in one place or another place, and assumed one form or another form at His own will, after a manner that we cannot understand. But it is quite plain that when we read the words in Acts, "being seen of them forty days" (Acts 1:3), we must not suppose them to mean that our Lord was seen every day. It only means that during forty days He was seen at intervals. Each appearance, we doubt not, had its own special purpose and intention. Chrysostom remarks: "It is clear from the words 'showed Himself,' that Christ was not seen (after His resurrection) unless He condescended, because His body was henceforth incorruptible and of unmixed purity."

[*At the Sea of Tiberias.*] Concerning this remarkable piece of water, sometimes called the Lake of Gennesaret and sometimes the Sea of Galilee, I have already said something in my note on John 6:1. It is a freshwater lake, through which the river Jordan runs, twelve and a half miles long and six and three-quarters broad and remarkable in a geological point of view, being 655 feet below the level of the Mediterranean Sea (according to Tristram's "Topography of the Holy Land"). In a theological point of view it must always be most interesting to a Christian, because some of our Lord's mightiest miracles were worked on it, or close to it. Here our Lord walked on the waters and came to the disciples toiling in rowing. Here He stilled the wind and waves with a word. Here He granted to four of His Apostles a miraculous catch of fish. Here He provided payment of the tribute money out of the mouth of a fish which He commanded

Peter to catch. On the banks of this lake He fed a multitude with a few loaves and fishes. On a high ground overhanging this lake He cast out the legion of devils and allowed them to drive 2,000 swine into the sea. In the towns upon this lake—Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum—He did some of His mightiest works. Sitting in a boat on this lake, He delivered the Parable of the Sower. In short, of all the districts in which our Lord preached and worked miracles, there was none that saw and heard so much as the district around the Sea of Tiberias.

Can we doubt, when we remember all this, that our Lord had a deep purpose and meaning in appearing to His disciples at the Sea of Tiberias? Can we doubt that He meant to remind them of all they had seen in former days of his wisdom, love, and power by the side of these well-known waters? He knew well the influence that scenery and places exercise over the mind of man. He would recall to the memory of His disciples all that they had witnessed in the early days of His ministry. Above all, He would stir the hearts of Peter, James, and John by saying some of His last things to them at the very place where He had first called them to leave their boats and nets to follow Him, and to become fishers of men. Where He had begun with them, there He would have one of His last interviews with them before leaving the world.

The exact spot where our Lord appeared at the Sea of Tiberias is, of course, unknown. But when we remember that Bethsaida, at the north end of the lake, was “the city of Andrew and Peter” (John

1:44), we may safely conjecture that the scene of this chapter was somewhere near Bethsaida. The boat in which Peter went fishing would most probably either be his own boat or the property of some relative or friend in his native city.

[*And in this way He showed Himself.*] This is a somewhat curious sentence. It does not, I think, only mean "the manner of His appearance was as follows." I suspect that it was inserted emphatically in order to direct our special attention to all the little details of the occurrence, and to remind us that even the minutest parts of it have a deep spiritual meaning.

2.—[*There were together Simon Peter, etc.*] This verse contains the names of the seven witnesses before whom the remarkable appearance of Christ, about to be described, took place. Seven, we may remember, is the number of perfection, and the evidence of seven witnesses was regarded as the most complete evidence that could be given. Two of the seven, we shall observe, are not named, and we are left entirely to conjecture who these two were. Most commentators think they must have been Andrew and Philip—Andrew because he was Peter's brother, and Philip because he was an inhabitant of Bethsaida on the lake. But we really do not know, and it is useless to guess.

Why these seven *alone* out of the eleven were here, we are not told. But we need not doubt there was good reason. All the company of the Apostles, we may believe, went into Galilee when the Passover feast

was over, according to our Lord's command, and probably very soon after His appearance for the benefit of Thomas. But where Matthew, Simon, James the less, and Jude were on the present occasion, we do not know.

It is worth noting that this is the only place in St. John's Gospel where he mentions the name of his own father, Zebedee. Why these seven disciples *in particular* were together is worth inquiry. The presence of Simon Peter, as he lived in Galilee and had a special message from our Lord that He was going into Galilee, we can understand. Thomas, once convinced that Jesus had risen, would very likely take care to stick close to Peter and John. Nathanael lived at Cana in Galilee, and was probably Bartholomew. Augustine, however, doubt this. The two sons of Zebedee were Simon's partners and are always found together with him on great occasions.

The message of our Lord about Galilee, we must remember, was "Tell my brethren that they go into Galilee; there shall they see Me" (Matt. 28:10). These were our Lord's own words. The angel also said to the women, "He goes before you into Galilee; there shall ye see Him" (Matt. 28:7). We might reasonably expect to find the Apostles in Galilee after this. On Thomas being one of the party, Henry remarks: "Thomas is named next to Peter, as if he now kept closer to the meetings of the Apostles than ever. It is well if losses by our neglect make us more careful afterward not to let opportunities slip."

3.—[*Simon Peter said to them, etc.*] Some worthy commentators

have presumed to find fault with Peter for going fishing. They say that he showed a disposition to return to the world and to follow his worldly calling once more. From this view I entirely dissent. I see no harm whatever in Peter's conduct on this occasion. He and his companion were poor men and must needs work in order to provide for their subsistence. There was nothing wrong in the act of fishing, and it was only natural to take up the business with which they were most familiar. The great business of going out as our Lord's messengers to preach the Gospel was not to begin until His ascension, and in the interval it was better to follow an honest calling than to be idle. Neither in Peter's proposal nor in the simple frank consent of his companions can I detect a jot of proof that anything wrong was done. Idleness does Christians far more injury than work. Among the Jews, every man—whatever his rank or position might be — was required to learn a worldly calling.

Chrysostom remarks: "Since neither Christ was with them continually, nor was the Spirit yet given, nor they at that time entrusted with anything, having nothing to do they went after their trade." Augustine observes: "The Apostles were not forbidden to seek their necessary subsistence by the exercise of their craft, a lawful and permitted one, if at any time they had no other means of subsistence." He also remarks that they were no more to blame than St. Paul was when he worked with his own hands as a tent-maker (Acts 18:3). Calvin remarks: "Peter had not yet been enjoined to appear in public for the discharge of his office of teaching, but had only been reminded of his future calling (John 20:21-23), that he and

others might understand that they had not in vain been chosen from the beginning. Meanwhile, they were to do what they were accustomed to do and what belonged to men in private life."

Ferus remarks that a lawful business is not sinful. If Matthew had gone back to a publican's life, it would have been a very different thing from Peter going to fish. Stier remarks that this going to fish was only carrying out our Lord's words. "But *now*, he that has a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip; and he that has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one" (Luke 22:36). The expression "a boat" should have been translated "the boat." Does not the use of the article show that this was that well-known boat that our Lord and His disciples had always used when they went on the lake? In the fact that they caught nothing that night, there is nothing that would surprise a fisherman. Of all callings by which men earn their living, none is more uncertain that that of a fisherman (Luke 5:4). Night is the time when most fish are caught, as all who are familiar with fishing know. That there was probably a deep typical meaning in all this, I shall hope to show when I reach the end of the passage. I think it better to reserve all remarks upon that point until I can present them to the reader in one continuous form. For the present, both here and throughout the passage I shall simply comment on the facts as facts. Burgon remarks: "One thing is certain, and the circumstance is full of interest. It must have been their *necessities* that sent forth the Apostles on this lowly errand of fishing. And yet these were they on whom the Church was to be built! These seven were among the names written on the twelve

foundations of the heavenly Jerusalem."

Burgon also thinks that the words "went forth" point to the Apostles sitting together indoors, in the evening, and very likely on a Sabbath evening.

4.—[*But when the morning had now come.*] This probably means, "When the day began to break, so that an object at a little distance could be seen." As soon as there was enough light, through the gray dawn, the party in the boat saw the figure of a person on the shore. There is little or no twilight in countries so far south as Palestine. Night goes and day follows much more suddenly than with us.

[*Jesus stood on the shore.*] This reads like a sudden and instantaneous appearance, like that which took place when our Lord appeared the first time in the midst of the disciples. Just in the same manner, it seems to me, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, Jesus appeared standing on the shore of the lake. The risen body of our Lord, we must remember, appeared or disappeared, was present or absent, according to His will in a moment of time.

Grotius remarks that our Lord never went on the sea after His resurrection.

(Comp. Rev. 21:1— "There was no more sea.")

[*But…did not know… Jesus.*] The disciples did not recognize our

Lord, in my opinion, because He appeared in another form, just as He appeared to the two who were journeying to Emmaus. I reject entirely the idea that the dim light of the early morning was the reason why they did not know Him. It is evident to me that our Lord's risen body did not—on any occasion after He rose again, for some mysterious reason—look exactly like the body He had before His crucifixion. It was the same, and yet not the same, if I may so speak. Will it not be so with our own bodies when we rise again at the last day? We shall be the same, and yet not the same. It is noteworthy that the Greek words here used were exactly those that were used about Mary Magdalene, when she thought the gardener spoke to her and "knew not that it was Jesus" (John 20:14).

5.—[*Then Jesus said, etc.*] We cannot suppose for a moment that our Lord did not know whether the disciples had any food, when He asked the question of this verse. It is clear to me that He asked it in order to raise attention in the minds of the disciples and to put them at ease in conversing with them. He appeared as a stranger, who was graciously pleased to say something familiar and friendly. Does it not remind us of the way in which He began conversation with the woman of Samaria and broke the ice, as it were, between Himself and her? "Give me a drink," He said (John 4:7). Nothing sets people so much at ease, when they meet as strangers, as courteous inquiries about the simple matters of daily life. The word "meat" is a striking example of the change that comes over the meaning of English words in the course of time. It means literally "anything edible." Two centuries ago the word "meat" was a translation which no

Englishman would misunderstand. Now, unfortunately, it is a word confined entirely to “flesh.” No translation can ever be perfect. All require occasional reverent revision.

The context seems to me to show that our Lord’s inquiry was specially meant to apply to the success of the disciples in fishing. “Have ye caught anything that can be eaten?” The disciples evidently took it in this sense.

It is worth noticing that our Lord must have spoken in a very loud voice when He addressed His disciples in this verse. We are distinctly told in the eighth verse that the boat was two hundred cubits (at least one hundred yards) from land, and there is nothing to show that the disciples put out further into the lake when our Lord told them to cast in their net again. I mention this because some, as Gerhard, Henry, and Besser, think that there was something curt, rough, and rather abrupt in the answer of the disciples. But they seem to forget that a conversation carried on over a hundred yards of water could only be carried on in very brief and abrupt phrases.

The word “children” in this verse, rendered “sirs” in the margin, is to my mind rightly rendered in the text. It is a familiar, friendly mode of address, like our English “boys” or “lads,” not necessarily implying great youth in the persons addressed.

6.—[*And He said… Cast…find.*] Our Lord now goes a step further in order to reveal Himself to His disciples. He gives a command or

counsel to cast their net, which they had apparently hauled into the boat, once more into the water and upon the right side of the boat. Such advice and such a promise of success from a stranger could hardly fail to strike the disciples. Would it not raise in the quick mind of John a suspicion that this was no common stranger who spoke? Would not he and Peter both remember a former occasion, when they "toiled all the night and took nothing," and yet at the command of their Master had let down their nets again with marvelous success? I think they would. To me it seems highly probable that the disciples had finished their night's work, had hauled up their net into the boat and were rowing toward home, tired of their profitless toil, when our Lord appeared and spoke to them.

[*They cast therefore…multitude of fish*.] In the fact that the disciples found a multitude of fishes in their net the moment they acted on our Lord's advice, there is, in one point of view, nothing extraordinary. Many fish swim in shoals, and it is quite a matter of common experience among fishermen that one boat may take nothing while a few yards off another boat has an immense haul. The miracle consisted in the perfect knowledge that our Lord possessed as to where the fish were, and on which side of the boat to cast the net. This alone proved that He was omniscient. Whether it is likely that seven tired fishermen, after working all night and hauling up their net and stowing it away, would stop on their way home at the advice of a stranger and cast in their net once more in broad daylight, is a point that admits of question. My own impression is that a secret power and influence went with our Lord's words, and without

knowing why, the seven disciples felt irresistibly constrained to do what the mysterious stranger advised.

7.—[*Therefore that disciple…the Lord.*] The first to recognize Jesus was the disciple who first believed the resurrection—the beloved disciple John—who as usual does not give his own name. With characteristic quickness and sensitiveness, he at once felt convinced that the mysterious stranger must be his beloved Master. Love is always keen-sighted. It suddenly flashed across his mind that the advice given by the stranger, and the result of following the advice, had been precisely the same three years before. The stranger must surely know what happened then, and must have been present! The stranger must be the Lord Himself! Thoughts such as these most probably passed through his mind far quicker than we can describe them; and at once he said to his friend Peter, who was most likely the leading man in the boat, "It is the Lord."

Rollock thinks it was the wonderful catch of fish that made John know it was the Lord. "He saw in it not only miraculous power, but wonderful bountifulness and liberality," just like His Divine Master.

[*Now when Simon Peter heard, etc.*] The conduct of the Apostle Peter here described is eminently characteristic of the man. It is just what might have been expected from the disciple who went out of the ship to walk on the water on a former occasion, and drew his sword and began to smite when our Lord was surrounded by His enemies. Fervent, warm-hearted, impulsive, impetuous, affectionate, thinking

nothing of consequences, acting on the spur of present feeling, he at once plunges into the sea when he hears that his Lord is on the shore, and struggles to get close to Him. Whatever we may think of his hasty behavior, we must all admire his love. Zeal for Christ deserves respect, even when it leads a man into hasty action. Enthusiasm, even when it runs to seed, is better than indifference. We should note how Peter rushed into action the very moment he heard the words "It is the Lord." He did not wait to see, like Thomas on another occasion, but was satisfied with a word from his brother John. A single spark is enough to kindle tinder, and a single word is enough to stir a heart, when its affections are deeply concerned. The Greek word which is rendered "fisher's coat" is only found here in the New Testament. Theophylact says it was the upper garment of a Syrian fisherman. The context seems to show that it was a sort of garment which a fisherman laid aside when in the very act of handling his nets. When we read that Peter was naked, I see no reason why we should suppose that he was entirely without clothes. I think the meaning is that he was *comparatively* naked, having laid aside all his looser garments, as a fisherman in that hot climate naturally would in order to be able to handle wet nets and fish with greater convenience. And when we read that he girt around him his fisher's coat, I think it simply means that he took up the loose outward garment that he wore when he went on the lake to fish and girded it tightly around his waist before jumping into the sea.

When we read that Peter "cast himself into the sea," I see no reason for supposing that he swam to land. In order to swim, it is not likely that he would put on more clothes! I rather think that the water

where he and his companions were was shallow, and that he waded to land. He knew that his large fishing boat drew too much water to get near shore, and he was too impatient to wait for the slow process of launching the little boat and coming ashore in it. I cannot doubt, as he jumped into the water, that he remembered going out of the same ship on a former occasion and walking on the water "to go to Jesus."

It is only fair to say that Chrysostom thinks that Peter swam. On the other hand, Brentius, Gerhard, and Archbishop Whately (see Bengel's "Gnomon," English translation), think that he walked on the water in a miraculous manner, as on the former occasion!

8.—[*And the other disciples came, etc.*] Here we see, placed in strong contrast with Peter's action, the way in which the six remaining Apostles came to land. They came in the boat ("a little ship" is a defective translation), which means the skiff or punt that most large fishing vessels have with them. The water was evidently too shallow for the large fishing vessel to get near shore. And they came slowly, we may be sure, because for two hundred cubits (one hundred yards) they had to drag behind their little boat a net full of fish. How heavy a drag such a net makes on a little boat's progress through the water, those only know who have had experience.

It is noteworthy that we are not told that Peter got to shore at all sooner than his brethren. This point is, singularly enough, passed over in silence. But wading through deep water is slow work, and the

fact that Peter put his coat on before plunging into the sea is, to my own mind, strong indirect proof that he did not swim, but waded. It is noteworthy that Peter forgot fish, net, boat, and everything else in his anxiety to reach Christ. It was like the Samaritan woman who "left her waterpot" (John 4:28).

9.—[Then as soon as...coals...bread.] I cannot doubt that this verse records a miracle. Our blessed Lord made preparation for the bodily needs of His wearied disciples, and mercifully "furnished a table for them in the wilderness" (Ps. 78:19). The burning fire, the fish lying on it, the bread, were all the creation of Him who had but to will a thing and it was done. Ever thoughtful, ever compassionate, our Lord thought good at this appearing to show His poor toiling disciples that He cared for their bodies as well as their souls, and remembered that they were men. Who can tell but this miracle took place near the very spot where He had formerly fed five thousand men with a little bread and fish? I cannot doubt that the bread and fish thus miraculously created would remind the Apostles of "loaves and fishes" multiplied. Once more they saw the same miraculous food—*bread and fish*—provided by the same Almighty power of their Lord. The Greek word rendered "fire of coals" is only found in two places in the New Testament—here and in the account of the scene in the High Priest's hall at our blessed Lord's examination before Annas (John 18:18). It was a "fire of coals" at which the servants of the High Priest warmed themselves and before which the Apostle Peter denied his Lord. Some think that our Lord had a special object in view by having a fire of coals in this place, and that was to remind Peter of his fall. But

perhaps the idea is farfetched. Stier argues strongly, but needlessly in my judgment, that this provision of bread and fish was made by the angels. In any case, it was a miracle, and an act of creation.

Quesnel observes: “Here are miracles upon miracles. The same power that filled the net with fishes in the midst of the sea created others upon land, to show His disciples that it was not from lack of power to give them fish that Christ asked for some and ordered them to fish for them.” 10.—[*Jesus said to them, Bring, etc.*] In this verse our Lord calls on the disciples to bring proof that in casting the net at His command they had not labored in vain. It was the second saying that He spoke, we must remember, on this occasion. The first saying was, “Cast the net on the right side, and ye shall find.” The second saying was, “Bring up the fish which ye have now caught,” with a strong emphasis on the word “now.” I believe our Lord’s object was to show the disciples that the secret of success was to work at His command, and to act with implicit obedience to His word. It is as though He said, “Draw up the net and see for yourselves how profitable it is to do what I tell you.” Fish for food they did not need now, for that was provided for them. Proof of the power of Christ’s blessing and the importance of working under Him was the lesson to be taught, and as they drew up the net they would learn it.

11.—[*Simon Peter went up, etc.*] I see no reason for supposing in this verse that Peter alone drew up the net. I think it reasonable to suppose that he is named as leader of the party and captain of the boat. But I believe that all the others helped him. The “going up”

must mean that Peter went on board the little boat.

Once more we see two miracles recorded in this verse. One miracle was the singularly large catch of fish which the net contained, a quantity evidently exceeding what was generally taken at one haul. The other miracle was the singular fact that in spite of this large quantity of fish the net was not broken. Miracle on miracle passed under the eyes of the astonished disciples. Can we doubt that their minds recalled the miraculous catch of fish on a former occasion when "their net did not break," and our Lord's words, "Fear not; from henceforth you shall catch men;" and also his original saying, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men?" And can we doubt that some of them remembered the parable of the kingdom of Heaven being likened to "a net cast into the sea" and finally drawn to shore? (Luke 5:10, Matt. 4:19, 13:47.)

Concerning the number 153, we know nothing; and it is useless to speculate. Some have thought that it refers to the languages, and some to the tribes or nations of the world—each, it is alleged, about 150 in number. But this is only guesswork. Yet it is worth remembering that the strangers whom Solomon employed in building the first temple were precisely 153,600. Let the remark be taken for what it is worth. (2 Chron. 2:17.) Pearce calls attention to a remark of Jerome that Oppian (a Greek poet of Cilicia in the second century who wrote on fishing) "has given an account of the number of fishes known to him in his time, being exactly 153." This, at any rate, is curious.

Scott makes the remark that “this catch of fish might be sold for a considerable sum of money, which the Apostles would have need of on their return to Jerusalem before the day of Pentecost.” There may be something in the idea.

12.—[*Jesus said…dine.*] The object of this gracious invitation seems to me to have been two-fold. It was meant partly to show our Lord’s tender compassion for the weary bodies of His disciples. Though risen, He knew and felt for their needs, and would supply food for them when hungry and fatigued. It was meant partly to show that though risen from the dead with a glorified body, He would be on the same loving terms of familiarity and kindness as before with His disciples. They need not be frightened at Him. He had not forgotten them. He did not mean to keep them at a distance. He was still one who would eat and drink with them, as a man eats and drinks with his friends. It is written, “I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with Me” (Rev. 3:20). An old divine says, “Christ loves to deal familiarly with men.”

The Greek word rendered “dine” does not necessarily mean a midday meal. Parkhurst shows, on the contrary, from Xenophon, that it may mean a morning repast. As things are in England now, the translation is a peculiarly unfortunate one. Two or three centuries ago, when people dined at eleven o’clock, the unfitness of it would not have been so remarkable. The meaning evidently is, “Come and partake of a morning meal.”

[*And none…dared ask… Lord.*] These words describe the state of mind in which the disciples were at this moment. They all felt convinced and satisfied that the Person before them was the Lord. They felt no doubt; and no one was the least disposed to say, "Who are you?" Nevertheless, they all felt awed and solemnized by His presence. A deep sense of the mysterious nature of their Lord, in consequence of His resurrection, filled their minds with an indefinable sensation of mingled embarrassment, reverence, and fear. Surely we can all understand this! Even when Joseph spoke lovingly to his brethren and reveled himself to them, they were "troubled at his presence" (Gen. 45:3). To sit, eat, and drink in the company of one who had risen from the dead, and appeared and disappeared after a supernatural manner, was no light thing. Who can wonder that they felt awed?

Chrysostom says: "Seeing that His form was altered and full of awfulness, they were amazed and desired to ask something concerning it. But fear and their knowledge that He was not some other but the same, checked the inquiry; and they only ate what He, with greater exertion of power than before, created for them. For here Jesus no more looked up to heaven, nor performed those human acts, showing that those also which He did formerly were done by way of condescension."

13.—[*Jesus then came and took, etc.*] This verse describes what took place at this meal, or as our Bible calls it, this dinner. Our Lord came forward as the host and entertainer of the seven astonished disciples

and gave them bread and fish, as He had doubtless often done on former occasions and perhaps at the same place. He doubtless meant to give the disciples one more plain proof that He had risen from the dead. Alone by the Sea of Galilee, in the open air, far from the fear of interruption, in broad daylight, He eats and drinks at a social meal. Could these seven men ever doubt from that day, if they had doubted before, that Jesus rose from the dead? He meant, furthermore, to encourage them to continue looking to Him, as they had done before, as a loving, familiar, sympathizing friend. Though risen, He would have them see practical proof that He could be touched with the feeling of their infirmities and cared for their bodies as well as their souls. He meant, not least, to remind them of His great miracle of feeding the multitude with a few loaves and fishes. He would freshen their memory of that wondrous miracle and show them that He would continue doing for them what He had formerly done for those who followed Him in the wilderness.

Chrysostom here remarks that we are not directly told that Jesus ate with the disciples, but from Luke's words in Acts 1:4, that it is probable He did. "How," he remarks, "it is not ours to say. These things came to pass in too strange a manner. His nature did not even need food. It was an act of condescension in proof of the resurrection" (see Gen. 18:8).

14.—[*This is now the third time, etc.*] In this verse St. John winds up the wonderful story he has just told by one of his peculiar parenthetical comments. Concerning the meaning of the expression

"third time," there has been, in my judgment, much needless dispute. No doubt it is perfectly true that this was not literally the third time that our Lord was seen by anyone after His resurrection. On the contrary, we know of at least six different appearances before this one: (1) to Mary Magdalene, (2) to Joanna and other women, (3) to Simon Peter, (4) to two disciples going to Emmaus, (5) to ten Apostles together, (6) to the eleven for the special benefit of Thomas. But it is no less true that this is strictly and literally the *third time* that Jesus appeared to any number of the disciples gathered together. And it is also the *third day*, as Augustine remarks, that our Lord was pleased to appear at all. The first five appearances were all on the very same day when He rose from the dead. The sixth was a week afterward, when He appeared to rebuke the unbelief of Thomas. And the appearance recorded in this chapter, though the seventh in number, took place on the third day only, that any one on earth saw Him after He rose. The question now remains to be considered. Has the narrative contained in these fourteen verses any deep spiritual and allegorical meaning? Were we intended to read the passage simply as a description of one of our Lord's appearances after His resurrection and an account of one of His miracles? Or is the narrative a typical one? Is the passage intended to convey, under figures and symbols, great prophetical truths concerning the work of the ministry and the history of the Church in every age until the Lord comes? The question is a serious one and demands serious consideration.

(a) On the one hand, there is undeniable danger in the habit of

seeking spiritual and allegorical meanings in the plain historical facts of God's Word. We may go so far in this direction that, like Origen and too often Augustine, we may lose sight of the primary simple meaning of Scripture and turn the Bible into a mere book of riddles, which is useless to any common man and useful only to those who have very fertile and fanciful imaginations. In fact, if we are always extracting figurative meanings out of Scripture, we may destroy the usefulness of the Book altogether. There must be some limit to the system of figurative interpretation. As a rule, I shrink intuitively from putting any sense on God's Word that is not the obvious and plain sense of its language. Hooker's words are weighty and wise: "When a literal construction of a text will stand, that which is furthest from the letter is commonly the worst."

(b) On the other hand, it is impossible to deny that all Christ's miracles were meant, more or less, to teach great spiritual truths under allegories and figures; and the passage before us is a miracle. In addition to this, we must remember that the occasion of the miracle before us was a peculiarly solemn one—that the Apostles needed certain great truths to be impressed on their attention with peculiar force, by facts as well as by words—and that, on the eve of His ascension into heaven our Lord would be exceedingly likely to remind them of their duty and their position as ministers by things under their eyes as well as by instruction in their ears. Finally let us try to put ourselves in the position of the seven Apostles on the occasion before us, and try to imagine what they thought and felt about the incidents of this remarkable morning. It is very hard to

imagine that they saw nothing but a simple miracle in all that happened. I cannot think so. I think their hearts must have burned within them, and old spiritual truths, which they had heard before, must have revived in their minds with fresh power and been written on their souls as with the point of a diamond, never to be effaced.

On the whole, then, I cannot avoid the conclusion that the familiar verses before us probably contain, under symbolical facts, great spiritual truths. I think we are fairly justified in regarding the passage as a great parable or vision or allegory, intended to convey to the Church of Christ lessons for all time. And I am strengthened in this conclusion by the remarkable fact that almost all commentators of every school and in every age have taken this view of the passage. Even Grotius, cold and rationalistic as his tone of exposition too frequently is, puts a figurative sense on several circumstances of the passage. Other expositors, of a more figurative and imaginative turn of mind, go into heights and depths where I cannot pretend to follow them. I shall content myself with pointing out the more obvious spiritual lessons which I think the passage was probably meant to convey.

(a) I think that Christ's remarkable appearance to the disciples, when they were in the act of fishing, was meant to remind them and the whole Church of the primary duty of ministers. They were doing work which was strikingly emblematic of their calling. They were to be "fishers of men."

(b) I think the lack of success in catching fish, which the disciples had until the Lord appeared, was meant to teach that without Christ's presence and blessing ministers can do nothing.

(c) I think the marvelous success that attended the cast of the net, when Christ gave the command, was meant to teach that when Christ is pleased to give success to ministers, nothing can prevent souls being brought into the Gospel net, converted and saved.

(d) I think the drawing of the net to shore at last was meant to remind the disciples and all ministers of what will happen when the Lord comes again. The work of the Church will be completed, and the reckoning of results will take place.

(e) I think the dinner prepared and provided for the disciples, when the net was drawn to the shore, was meant to remind ministers that there will be the great "marriage supper of the Lamb" at last, when Christ Himself shall welcome His faithful servants and ministers, and "come forth and serve them" (Luke 12:37).

(f) I think, besides this, that the respective positions of the disciples and Christ, when they first saw Him, may *possibly* be intended to represent the respective positions of Christ and His people during this dispensation. They were on the water of the sea. He was looking at them from the land. Just so Christ is in heaven looking at us, and we are voyaging over the troublous waters of this world.

(g) Finally, I think that our Lord's sudden appearing on shore, when the morning broke, may *possibly* represent our Lord's second advent. "The night is far spent, and the day is at hand." When the morning dawns, Christ will appear.

With these conjectures I leave the passage. They may not commend themselves to some readers. I only say that they appear to me to deserve consideration and reflection.

JOHN 21:15-17

Then when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these do?" He replied, "Yes, Lord, you know I love you." Jesus told him, "Feed my lambs." Jesus said a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He replied, "Yes, Lord, you know I love you." Jesus told him, "Shepherd my sheep." Jesus said a third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was distressed that Jesus asked him a third time, "Do you love me?" and said, "Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you." Jesus replied, "Feed my sheep."

These verses describe a remarkable conversation between our Lord Jesus Christ and the Apostle Peter. To the careful Bible reader, who remembers the Apostle's thrice-repeated denial of Christ, the passage cannot fail to be a deeply interesting portion of Scripture. Well would it be for the Church, if all "after-meal" conversations among Christians were as useful and edifying as this.

We should notice first, in these verses, **Christ's question to Peter**— "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" Three times we find the same inquiry made. It seems most probable that this three-fold repetition was meant to remind the Apostle of his own thrice-repeated denial. Once we find a remarkable addition to the inquiry— "do you love Me more than these?" It is a reasonable supposition that those three words "more than these," were meant to remind Peter of his over-confident assertion— "Though all men deny You, yet I will not." It is just as if our Lord would say, "Will you now exalt yourself above others? Have you yet learned your own weakness?"

"Do you love Me" may seem at first sight a simple question. In one sense it is so. Even a child can understand love, and can say whether he loves another or not. Yet "Do you love Me" is, in reality, a very searching question. We may know much, and do much, and profess much, and talk much, and work much, and give much, and go through much, and make much show in our religion, and yet be dead before God, from lack of love, and at last go down to the pit. Do we love Christ? That is the great question. Without this there is no vitality about our Christianity. We are no better than painted wax figures, lifeless stuffed beasts in a museum, sounding brass and tinkling cymbals. There is no life where there is no love.

Let us take heed that there is some feeling in our religion. Knowledge, orthodoxy, correct views, regular use of forms, a respectable moral life—all these do not make up a true Christian. There must be some personal feeling towards Christ. Feeling alone,

no doubt, is a poor useless thing, and may be here today and gone tomorrow. But the entire absence of feeling is a very bad symptom, and speaks ill for the state of a man's soul. The men and women to whom Paul wrote his Epistles had feelings, and were not ashamed of them. There was One in heaven whom they loved, and that One was Jesus the Son of God. Let us strive to be like them, and to have some real feeling in our Christianity, if we hope to share their reward.

We should notice, secondly, in these verses, **Peter's answer to Christ's question.** Three times we find the Apostle saying, "You know that I love You." Once we are told that he said, "You know all things." Once we have the touching remark made, that he was "grieved to be asked the third time." We need not doubt that our Lord, like a skillful physician, stirred up this grief intentionally. He intended to pierce the Apostle's conscience, and to teach him a solemn lesson. If it was grievous to the disciple to be questioned, how much more grievous must it have been to the Master to be denied!

The answer that the humbled Apostle gave, is the one account that the true servant of Christ in every age can give of his religion. Such a one may be weak, and fearful, and ignorant, and unstable, and failing in many things, but at any rate he is real and sincere. Ask him whether he is converted, whether he is a believer, whether he has grace, whether he is justified, whether he is sanctified, whether he is elect, whether he is a child of God—ask him any one of these questions and he may perhaps reply that he really does not know! But ask him whether he loves Christ, and he will reply, "I do!" He

may add that he does not love Him as much as he ought to do; but he will not say that he does not love Him at all. The rule will be found true with very few exceptions. Wherever there is true grace, there will be a consciousness of love towards Christ.

What, after all, is the great secret of loving Christ? It is an inward sense of having received from Him pardon and forgiveness of sins. Those love much who feel much forgiven. He who has come to Christ with his sins, and tasted the blessedness of free and full absolution, he is the man whose heart will be full of love towards his Savior. The more we realize that Christ has suffered for us, and paid our debt to God, and that we are washed and justified through His blood, the more we shall love Him for having loved us, and given Himself for us. Our knowledge of doctrines may be defective. Our ability to defend our views in argument may be small. But we cannot be prevented feeling. And our feeling will be like that of the Apostle Peter— "You, Lord, who know all things, You know my heart; and You know that I love You."

We should notice, lastly, in these verses, **Christ's command to Peter.** Three times we find Him saying, "Feed my flock." Once, "Feed my lambs;" and twice, "Feed my sheep." Can we doubt for a moment that this thrice-repeated charge was full of deep meaning? It was meant to commission Peter once more to do the work of an Apostle, notwithstanding his recent fall. But this was only a small part of the meaning. It was meant to teach Peter and the whole Church the mighty lesson, that usefulness to others is the grand test

of love, and working for Christ the great proof of really loving Christ. It is not loud talk and high profession; it is not even impetuous, spasmodic zeal, and readiness to draw the sword and fight—it is steady, patient, laborious effort to do good to Christ's sheep scattered throughout this sinful world, which is the best evidence of being a true-hearted disciple. This is the real secret of Christian greatness. It is written in another place, "Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must become your slave." (Matt. 20:26-28.)

Forever let the parting charge of our blessed Master abide in our consciences, and come up in the practice of our daily lives. It is not for nothing we may be sure, that we find these things recorded for our learning, just before He left the world. Let us aim at a loving, doing, useful, hard-working, unselfish, kind, unpretentious religion. Let it be our daily desire to think of others, care for others, do good to others, and to lessen the sorrow, and increase the joy of this sinful world. This is to realize the great principle which our Lord's command to Peter was intended to teach. So living, and so laboring to order our ways, we shall find it abundantly true, that "it is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:35.)

Technical Notes:

15. So when they had dined, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon *son* of Jonas, do you love me more than these? He said to him, Yes, Lord; you know that I love you. He said to him, Feed my lambs. 16. He said to him again the second

time, Simon, *son* of Jonas, do you love me? He said to him, Yes, Lord; you know that I love you. He said to him, Feed my sheep. 17. He said to him the third time, Simon, *son* of Jonas, do you love me? Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, Do you love me? And he said to him, Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you. Jesus said to him, Feed my sheep.

15.—[*So when they had dined*.] In the verses we now begin, we pass away from the region of allegory, parable, symbol, miracle, and vision to a plain, unmistakable conversation between our Lord Jesus Christ and the Apostle Peter. It is a conversation of a deeply interesting character, of which every letter deserves to be written in gold. He who supposes that any "John," except John the Apostle, could have written these three verses, gives little evidence of possessing a sound judgment. It is noteworthy that our Lord does not begin His conversation until the social meal was over. Trifling as this circumstance may seem, it deserves attention, and conveys a lesson. Nothing was so likely to set the Apostles at ease with their Master, and to prepare them to receive any word that fell from His lips with love and affection, as to deal familiarly and intimately with them, and let them "eat and drink" in His company.

[*Jesus said to Simon Peter*.] The object of our Lord in addressing Simon Peter in these verses should be carefully remembered and not misunderstood. That there was a distinct object in singling him out from the seven disciples sitting round our Lord, and specially

speaking to him, I cannot doubt. But what was that object? This question can only be answered by considering the peculiar character of St. Peter and the peculiar circumstances of his history during the last day of our Lord's ministry, before the crucifixion. None had made so high a profession. None had spoken so confidently of his own strength. None had shown such instability in the hour of trial. None had fallen so sadly by denying his Master three times. Remembering all this, I believe that our Lord had a special object in addressing Peter on this occasion, and I see a special wisdom in the address and conversation being recorded as taking place before six witnesses.

(a) I believe our Lord's first object was to remind Peter of his sad fall, through over-confidence and lack of watchfulness and prayer. He would have him know that, though raised, pardoned and forgiven, he must never forget what had happened. Three times he had denied his Master. Three times he must be publicly asked whether he loved his Master. Hengstenberg maintains that Peter's fall was not at all in our Lord's mind in this remarkable conversation. But I cannot agree with him.

(b) I believe our Lord's second object was, as Cyril remarks, to restore Peter to his former position as a trusted Apostle and minister in the presence of six witnesses. The thought might possibly come across the minds of some Christians, in future days, that Peter forfeited his claim to be an Apostle and leader of the Church by his thrice repeated denial of his Master. Our Lord in mercy guards

against this possibility by publicly commissioning Peter once more to do the work of a pastor in the Church.

(c) I believe our Lord's third object was to teach Peter what should be the primary aim of an Apostle and minister. The true qualification for the ministerial office, he must learn, was not high profession of more courage and zeal than others, not loud talk or even readiness to fight, but loving, patient usefulness to the souls of others and diligent care for the sheep of Christ's flock.

Calvin remarks: "The Evangelist now relates in what manner Peter was restored to that rank of honor from which he had fallen. The treacherous denial, which has been formerly described, had undoubtedly rendered him unworthy of the apostleship. For how could he be capable of instructing others in the faith, who had basely revolted from it? He had been made an Apostle, but it was along with Judas; and from the time that he acted the part of a coward and traitor, he had been deprived of the honor of apostleship. Now therefore the liberty as well as the authority of teaching is restored to him, both of which he had lost through his own fault. And that the disgrace of his apostasy might not stand in the way, Christ blots out and destroys the remembrance of it. Such a restoration was necessary both for Peter and his hearers. For Peter, that he might the more boldly execute his office, being assured of the calling with which Christ had again invested him. For his hearers, that the stain which attached to his person might not be the occasion of despising the Gospel. To us also in the present day, it is of very great

importance that Peter comes forth to us as a new man, from whom the disgrace that might have lessened his authority is removed."

The Roman Catholic theory—that our Lord specially addressed Peter on this occasion in order to mark him out as head of the Church—is one which I repudiate as preposterous, unreasonable, improbable, and utterly destitute of solid foundation. Neither here nor elsewhere is there a tittle of evidence to show that any primacy was ever intended to be given to Peter. On the contrary, the fact that our Lord specially appeared on one occasion to James alone, and that afterward James was the presiding Apostle in the first Council at Jerusalem, would seem to indicate that if He conferred primacy on any Apostle, He conferred it on James. But there is no proof that primacy was conferred on anyone at all.

Burgon says: "The profane and ridiculous pretentions of the Church of Rome are based in great part on the words of our Savior addressed to St. Peter in this passage. The Papists assume (1) that He hereby appointed St. Peter to be His vicar upon earth; (2) that St. Peter was the first Bishop of Rome; (3) that St. Peter transmitted to the Bishops of the same See, in endless succession, his own supposed authority over the rest of Christendom. Each one of these assumptions is simply unfounded and untrue; opposed alike to Scripture and to reason, to the records of the Early Church, and the opinions of the primitive Fathers. With such fictions, nevertheless, do Romish writers distort the true image of Christianity; disfiguring their commentaries therewith and betraying with a reckless

eagerness to obtrude their ambitious and unscriptural theory on all occasions, their secret misgivings as to its real value."

[*Simon, son of Jonas.*] This mode of address, thrice repeated in this remarkable conversation, is only used by our Lord on this occasion and when Peter first came to Him (John 1:42). I do not find that any Commentator gives a satisfactory explanation of it, and we are left to conjecture the reason.

(a) Some think that our Lord purposely avoided the name Peter in order to remind the Apostle how on a recent occasion he had shown himself not firm as a "rock," agreeably to his name, but weak as a reed.

(b) Some think that our Lord meant to remind the Apostle of the memorable day when he first began to be a disciple, when Jesus said to him, "You are Simon, the son of Jona."

(c) Some think that our Lord would remind the Apostle of the day when he said, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona," after the good confession which Peter had made (Matt. 16:17).

(d) Some think that our Lord intended to remind Peter of the lowly origin from which he sprung as son of one who, like Zebedee, in all probability was only a humble fisherman.

(e) Some think that the expression was only used to distinguish Simon Peter from the other Simon, who may *possibly* have been in company as one of the two unnamed disciples (ch. 21:2). My own

impression is, if I must give an opinion, that our Lord intended to carry Peter's mind back to the day when he first began to be a disciple of Christ, and to all the three years that had elapsed. It is as though He said: "Simon, son of Jonas, you remember the day when you first came to Me and believed on Me as the Lamb of God. (John 1:35-42.) You know all that you have been and all that you have gone through since that day. Once more I address you by the same name with which I began. Before sending you forth and commissioning you once more, in the presence of these six brethren, as a restored and trusted disciple, I ask you, do you love Me?" I throw out the thought as a conjecture. I see more in it than in any other view.

[*Do you love Me?*] The question that Jesus asked of Peter was very simple but very searching It was simple because it appealed to his feelings. Even a child knows what he feels and whom he loves. If our Lord has asked "Do you believe? Are you converted? Are you elect? Have you faith? Have you grace? Are you born again? Have you the Spirit? Are you sanctified? Are you justified?"—any one of these questions would have been, perhaps, very difficult to answer. But Peter could surely tell what he felt toward Christ. At the same time, the question was very searching. It is as though our Lord said: "Simon, I know all your history. I know what you have done and what you have been during the time of my betrayal and crucifixion, and I am ready to look over all and pardon all. But one thing I must have in my disciples, and that is a sincere and loving heart. I can look over lack of knowledge and lack of faith, but I must have love. Now, before these six brethren, before commissioning you once more as an

accredited and trustworthy Apostle, I ask you solemnly, do you love Me?" Cyril thinks that Peter had received such special mercy, pardon, and forgiveness that he might be reasonably required to feel special love.

[*More than these.*] This remarkable expression, which is only used in this verse, admits of three interpretations.

(a) It may mean, "Do you love Me more than you love these your brethren and friends around you, and are you willing to give them up for my sake and follow Me alone if need be?"

(b) It may mean, as Whitby says, "Do you love Me more than these boats and fishing nets, among which you have spent so much of your life, from which I did first call you, and in the midst of which I find you today? Are you willing for my sake to give them all up and devote yourself to preaching the Gospel?"

(c) It may mean, as the great majority of commentators think, "Do you love Me more than your brethren love Me? You remember a certain day when you confidently said, 'Though all men forsake You, yet I will not.' You were confident then that you were more faithful than others. Will you say that now? After all that has happened, are you sure that your heart is better than that of others?" I decidedly prefer this last view to either of the others. I think it was meant to teach Peter that the two grand qualifications for a faithful pastor were love and humility. Musculus observes that Jesus did not ask Peter this thrice-repeated question as if He was ignorant and desired

to learn, but in order to remind him before others of his future duty.

Bullinger suggests that one reason among others why Jesus said "more than these" was Peter's forwardness to spring into the water and come to shore before the other six Apostles who were in the boat with him.

Rollock observes on our Lord's merciful and loving dealing with Peter:

"Rebukers should be lovers. If you rebuke a man, love him; otherwise do not speak to him, but close your mouth. If you do not season your rebukes with love, then that which should have been as medicine will be turned into poison. They who would be instructors and admonishers should be lovers. Therefore, whatever you do, do it in lenity [gentleness] and meekness. A bitter teacher is not worth a penny. This is what St. Paul requires when he says, 'The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle to all men' (2 Tim. 2:24.) All should be in gentleness; teaching in gentleness. Why? Because if gentleness be lacking, there will be no edification, no comforting, no instruction."

[*He said… I love You.*] The answer of Simon Peter in this verse is a beautiful example of sincerity and humility. He appeals to our Lord's knowledge of his heart: "I may be very defective in knowledge, faith, courage, wisdom. I am a debtor to mercy and grace above many. Yet, Lord, You know that, with all my faults and infirmities, I do love

You." He does not venture to say a word about others. He does not pretend to compare his love with that of his brethren. If he has done so in time past, he will do so no more. "I know not whether others love You more or less than I do. I only know my own heart, and I feel sure that I love You." Let us carefully note that love to Christ is one of the simplest tests of a true Christian. He may not feel sure that he is converted, or that he repents or believes aright. But if he is real, he will be able to say that he loves Christ.

[*He said... Feed my lambs.*] Having received from Peter a public profession of his sincere love, our Lord proceeds to tell him how that love is to be shown, and to give him his commission for the future. He bids him prove the reality of his love by "feeding His lambs." When our Lord said "feed," I believe He meant that Peter was to feed souls with the precious food of God's Word, to supply them with that bread of life which a man must eat or die, and to watch carefully and diligently over their spiritual interests, like a good shepherd watching his flock. When our Lord spoke of lambs, I believe He meant the least, the weakest, and feeblest members of that flock which is His Church. It is as though Jesus said: "Simon, if indeed you love Me, know that the best proof of love is to devote yourself to the great work of shepherding souls. Live for others. Care for others. Minister to others. Do good to others. Seek out and search for my sheep in this wicked world and think it not beneath you to attend to the needs of the feeblest among them. Herein, remember, is true love. It does not consist in talking, professing, fighting, or seeking preeminence over others. It is best seen in walking in my steps. I

came to seek and save those who are lost. I came not to be ministered unto but to minister. Go and do likewise. He loves most who is most like Me." I cannot think that "lambs" in this place was intended to apply to young children, as it is often interpreted. All such interpretations I regard as nothing better than pious accommodations. I believe that lambs, in contradistinction to sheep, mean those who are young and weak in spiritual experience. Peter was not to neglect and despise them because weak. Peter remembered these ringing words, we may be sure, when he wrote in his Epistle, "Feed the flock of God that is among you" (1 Peter 5:2). Augustine observes that Christ, both here and in the two following verses, says "MY" and not "YOUR." The Church is His property and not the property of ministers.

Bullinger observes that Christ passes from the calling of the fisherman to that of the shepherd, as representing more than any other callings the ministerial office.

16.—[*He said to him again, etc.*] This verse is simply a repetition of the preceding one, with three exceptions. For one thing, the expression "more than these" is omitted. For another thing, in the Greek the word which we render "feed" is a wider, fuller word than the one employed in the preceding verse. For another thing, our Lord speak of His "sheep" instead of His "lambs." By sheep I believe our Lord meant those members of His flock who were of more advanced experience and strength in grace than the class He had spoken of in the preceding verse. Both classes demanded the attention of a

faithful pastor.

The repetition of the inquiry was doubtless intended to rouse Peter's attention and to impress the whole subject on his mind. Lightfoot thinks that the "threefold repetition—feed, feed, feed, may most fitly apply to the threefold object of St. Peter's ministry: viz., the Gentiles, the Jews, and the dispersed ten tribes." But this seems to me fanciful. Bengel thinks it refers to the three periods of Peter's ministry.

Whitby observes: "Those who argue for Peter's supremacy above other Apostles, from this passage, are vain in their imagination. If by these words Christ required Peter to feed all His sheep and lambs, it is certain he was lacking in his duty. He never exercised an act of supremacy over the rest of the Apostles; but being sent by them, obeyed (Acts 8:14), and being reproved by St. Paul, held his peace (Gal. 2:11-16), and was so far from feeding all Christ's sheep that he never fed any of the province of St. Paul."

17.—[*He said to him the third time, etc.*] This verse again is a repetition of the two preceding verses, but contains two points of difference. For one thing, we are told that "Peter was grieved" on being asked the same question three times. For another thing, Peter uses stronger language when he appeals to our Lord's knowledge of his heart. "Lord," he says, "You know all things."

I cannot for a moment doubt that our Lord asked Peter this remarkable question three times in order to remind him that he had

denied Him three times. Our sins ought never to be forgotten by us, though they are wiped out of the book of God's remembrance. The very grief which Peter felt at being thrice asked about his love was intended to do him good. It was meant to remind him that if he was grieved to be asked three times "Do you love Me," how much more must his Master have been grieved when he thrice denied Him!

Whitby observes: "Here is an argument that Christ, in Peter's judgment, was truly God. He says, 'You know all things.' It is to God alone that the secrets of all hearts lie open."

There are little nice distinctions in the original Greek of these three verses in the words that are used, which the English language cannot convey. But they deserve notice and are not without meaning. Two different words are used to express our one word "love." One of these two words means a higher, calmer, nobler kind of love than the other. This is the word that our Lord uses in the 15th and 16th verses where He asks the question "Do you love Me?" The other of the two words means a more passionate and lower kind of love. This is the word that Peter always uses when he says "I love you!" and our Lord once uses in the 17th verse. Again two different words are employed to express our one English word "feed." One means simply "provide food and pasture" and is used in the 15th and 17th verses. The other means not only provide food, but "govern, lead, direct, and generally do the work of a shepherd." Some of the Roman Catholic writers try to make out that "lambs" in this remarkable passage mean the laity and "sheep" the clergy, and that supremacy over clergy and laity alike

is intended by these words to be conferred on Peter and his successors at Rome! Archbishop Trench (on Miracles) justly condemns this interpretation as "groundless and trifling." He observes: "The commission should at least have run 'Feed my sheep and feed my shepherds' if any such conclusion could be drawn from Christ's words, though an infinite deal would still remain to be proved." The lessons which the whole passage is meant to teach the Church of Christ are many and deep, and have been far too much neglected in every age. I can only indicate them and then leave the reader to work them out in his own mind.

(a) Love to Christ's person is one of the most important graces that can adorn a Christian, and specially a minister. Without it, correct doctrinal views, zeal for proselytizing, knowledge, eloquence, liberality, diligence in visiting the sick and relieving the poor, are worth very little and will do very little good. With it, God is pleased to look over many infirmities. A minister may be somewhat defective in some of his views, and even in some of his proceedings, but if he loves Christ and has a warm heart, God will seldom allow him to lack a blessing.

Hengstenberg shrewdly remarks that Christ's emphatic question about love to Himself and omission of any question about *love to God*, is strong indirect proof of Christ's divinity.

(b) True love to Christ is chiefly to be seen in usefulness to others, in doing as Christ did, in walking in His steps, in laboring to do good in this bad world. He who talks of loving Christ and idles on through

life, never trying to do good to others, is deceiving himself and will find at length that he had better never have been born.

(c) A vast amount of so-called Christianity is perfectly useless in the sight of God and will only add to people's condemnation. Church goers and chapel goers who are content to attend services and hear sermons, but know nothing of fervent love to Christ's person and never lay themselves out to imitate Him, are in the broad way that leads to destruction. Rollock observes: "A profane man or woman will say, 'I love God,' but if it does not manifest itself in an action, you are but a liar and do not love Him. Faith and love must ever show themselves in good actions. Have you a heart, hands, and feet? Do some good. Otherwise, if you never do a good deed, your profession of faith and love is vain." He also says: "The pastor is not worth a penny who does not strive to get a sense of the love of Christ into his heart. There are so many difficulties and impediments cast before a pastor when he is about to discharge his duty, that he never can be able to overcome them unless he both loves the Lord and is sensible of the Lord's love to him. If the Apostles and martyrs had not loved Jesus exceedingly, they would soon have fainted." Leighton observes: "Love is the great endowment of a true pastor of Christ's flock. He does not say to Peter, 'Are you wise, or learned, or eloquent?' But He says, 'Do you love Me?' If so, then 'feed.' Love to Christ begets love to His people's souls, which are so precious to Him, and a care of feeding them."

Scott observes: "Those who have been greatly tempted, and have had

much humbling experience of their own sinfulness, and have had much forgiven them, generally prove the most tender, compassionate, and attentive pastors of weak, bruised, and trembling believers."

(d) The true test of reality in our religion is to be able to appeal confidently to God's knowledge of our hearts. It matters nothing what friends and relatives and fellow worshippers may think and say of us. They may praise us when we do not deserve it, or condemn us when we are innocent. It matters nothing. If we have the witness of our own hearts, that we can appeal to Jesus, the Searcher of hearts, and say, "You who know all things, know that I love You," we need not be afraid.

(e) If we really and truly feel love to Christ, we may thank God and take courage. Of our own faith, grace, conversion, and sanctification, we are poor judges. But do we really and sincerely feel that we love Christ? That is the great question. The very existence of such love is a good sign. We should not love Christ if we had not got something from Him. Brentius remarks that Peter's charge to the elders in his epistle clearly shows that our Lord's thrice-repeated charge, "Feed," was not meant for him only, as the Romanists say, but for all ministers of the Church of Christ without exception. "The elders who are among you, I exhort: Feed the flock of God" (1 Peter 5:1).

JOHN 21:18-25

“I tell you the solemn truth, when you were young, you tied your clothes around you and went wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and others will tie you up and bring you where you do not want to go.” (Now Jesus said this to indicate clearly by what kind of death Peter was going to glorify God.) After he said this, Jesus told Peter, “Follow me.”

Peter turned around and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them. (This was the disciple who had leaned back against Jesus’ chest at the meal and asked, “Lord, who is the one who is going to betray you?”) So when Peter saw him, he asked Jesus, “Lord, what about him?” Jesus replied, “If I want him to live until I come back, what concern is that of yours? You follow me!” So the saying circulated among the brothers and sisters that this disciple was not going to die. But Jesus did not say to him that he was not going to die, but rather, “If I want him to live until I come back, what concern is that of yours?”

This is the disciple who testifies about these things and has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true.

There are many other things that Jesus did. If every one of them were written down, I suppose the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

These verses form the conclusion of John’s Gospel, and bring to an end *the most precious book in the Bible*. The man is much to be pitied who can read the passage without serious and solemn feelings.

It is like listening to the parting words of a friend, whom we may possibly not see again. Let us reverently consider the lessons which this Scripture contains.

We learn, for one thing, from these verses, ***that the future history of Christians, both in life and death, is foreknown by Christ.*** The Lord tells Simon Peter, "When you are old, you shall stretch forth your hands, and another shall gird you, and carry you where you would not." These words, without controversy, were a prediction of the manner of the Apostle's death. They were fulfilled in after days, it is commonly supposed, when Peter was crucified as a martyr for Christ's sake. The time, the place, the manner, the painfulness to flesh and blood of the disciple's death, were all matters foreseen by the Master.

The truth before us is eminently full of comfort to a true believer. To obtain foreknowledge of things to come would, in most cases, be a sorrowful possession. To know what was going to befall us, and yet not to be able to prevent it, would make us simply miserable. But it is an unspeakable consolation to remember, that our whole future is known and fore-arranged by Christ. There is no such thing as luck, chance, or accident, in the journey of our life. Everything from beginning to end is foreseen—arranged by One who is too wise to err, and too loving to do us harm.

Let us store up this truth in our minds, and use it diligently in all the days of darkness through which we may yet have to pass. In such days we should lean back on the thought, "Christ knows this, and

knew it when He called me to be His disciple." It is foolish to repine and murmur over the troubles of those whom we love. We should rather fall back on the thought that all is well done. It is useless to fret and be rebellious, when we ourselves have bitter cups to drink. We should rather say, "This also is from the Lord—He foresaw it, and would have prevented it, if it had not been for my good." Happy are those who can enter into the spirit of that old saint, who said, "I have made a covenant with my Lord, that I will never take amiss anything that He does to me." We may have to walk sometimes through rough places, on our way to heaven. But surely it is a comforting, soothing reflection, "Every step of my journey was foreknown by Christ."

We learn, secondly, in these verses, ***that a believer's death is intended to glorify God.*** The Holy Spirit tells us this truth in plain language. He graciously interprets the dark saying, which fell from our Lord's lips about Peter's end. He tells us that Jesus spoke this, "signifying by what death he should glorify God."

The thing before us is probably not considered as much as it ought to be. We are so apt to regard life as the only season for honoring Christ, and action as the only mode of showing our religion, that we overlook death, except as a painful termination of usefulness. Yet surely this ought not so to be. We may *die* to the Lord; as well as *live* to the Lord; we may be *patient sufferers* as well as *active workers*. Like Samson, we may do more for God in our death, than we ever did in our lives. It is probable that the patient deaths of our martyred Reformers had more effect on the minds of

Englishmen, than all the sermons they preached, and all the books they wrote. One thing, at all events, is certain—the blood of the English martyrs was the seed of the English Church.

We may glorify God in death, by being ready for it whenever it comes. The Christian who is found like a sentinel at his post, like a servant with his loins girded and his lamp burning, with a heart packed up and ready to go, the man to whom sudden death, by the common consent of all who knew him, is sudden glory—this, this is a man whose end brings glory to God. We may glorify God in death, by patiently enduring its pains. The Christian whose spirit has complete victory over the flesh, who quietly feels the pins of his earthly tabernacle plucked up with great bodily agonies, and yet never murmurs or complains, but silently enjoys inward peace—this, this again, is a man whose end brings glory to God. We may glorify God in death, by testifying to others the comfort and support that we find in the grace of Christ. It is a great thing, when a mortal man can say with David, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil." (Psalm 23:4.) The Christian who, like *Standfast* in "Pilgrim's Progress," can stand for a while in the river, and talk calmly to his companions, saying, "My foot is fixed sure—my toilsome days are ended,"—this, this is a man whose end brings glory to God. Deaths like these leave a mark on the living, and are not soon forgotten.

Let us pray, while we live in health, that we may glorify God in our end. Let us leave it to God to choose the where, and when, and

how, and all the manner of our departing. Let us only ask that it may "glorify God." He is a wise man who takes John Bunyan's advice, and keeps his last hour continually in mind, and makes it his company-keeper. It was a weighty saying of John Wesley, when one found fault with the doctrines and practices of the Methodists— "At any rate our people die well."

We learn, thirdly, in these verses, ***that whatever we may think about the condition of other people, we should think first about our own.*** When Peter inquired curiously and anxiously about the future of the Apostle John, he received from our Lord an answer of deep meaning— "If I will that he tarry until I come, *what is that to you? Follow Me."* Hard to understand as some part of that sentence may be, it contains a practical lesson which cannot be mistaken. It commands every Christian to remember his own heart first, and to look at home.

Of course our blessed Lord does not wish us to neglect the souls of others, or to take no interest in their condition. Such a state of mind would be nothing less than uncharitable selfishness, and would prove plainly that we had not the grace of God. The servant of Christ will have a wide, broad heart, like his Master, and will desire the present and eternal happiness of all around him. He will long and labor to lessen the sorrows, and to increase the joys, of every one within his reach, and, as he has opportunity, to do good to all men. But, in all his doing, the servant of Christ must never forget his own soul. Charity, and true religion, must both begin at home.

It is vain to deny that our Lord's solemn caution to His impetuous disciple is greatly needed in the present day. Such is the weakness of human nature, that even true Christians are continually liable to run into extremes. Some are so entirely absorbed in their own inward experience, and their own heart's conflict, that they forget the world outside. Others are so busy about doing good to the world, that they neglect to cultivate their own souls. Both are wrong, and both need to see a more excellent way; but none perhaps do so much harm to religion as those who are busy-bodies about others' salvation, and at the same time neglecters of their own. From such a snare as this may the ringing words of our Lord deliver us! Whatever we do for others (and we never can do enough), let us not forget our own inner man. Unhappily, the Bride, in Canticles, is not the only person who has cause to complain— "They made me keeper of the vineyards; but my own vineyard I have not kept." (Cant. 1:6.)

We learn, lastly, from these verses, ***the number and greatness of Christ's works during His earthly ministry.*** John concludes his Gospel with these remarkable words, "There are many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose the world itself could not contain the books that should be written."—Of course we must not torture these words, by pressing them to an excessively literal interpretation. To suppose that the Evangelist meant the world could not hold the material volumes which would be written, is evidently unreasonable and absurd. The only sensible interpretation must be a spiritual and figurative one.

As much of Christ's sayings and doings is recorded as the mind of man can take in. It would not be good for the world to have more. The human mind, like the body, can only digest a certain quantity. The world could not contain more, because it would not. As many miracles, as many parables, as many sermons, as many conversions, as many words of kindness, as many deeds of mercy, as many journeys, as many prayers, as many warnings, as many promises, are recorded, as the world can possibly require. If more had been recorded they would have been only thrown away. There is enough to make every unbeliever without excuse, enough to show every inquirer the way to heaven, enough to satisfy the heart of every honest believer, enough to condemn man if he does not repent and believe, enough to glorify God. The largest vessel can only contain a certain quantity of liquid. The mind of all mankind would not appreciate more about Christ, if more had been written. There is enough and to spare. This witness is true. Let us deny it if we can.

And now let us close the Gospel of John with mingled feelings of deep humility and deep thankfulness. We may well be humble when we think how ignorant we are, and how little we comprehend of the treasures which this Gospel contains. But we may well be thankful, when we reflect how clear and plain is the instruction which it gives us about the way of salvation. The man who reads this Gospel profitably, is he who "believes that Jesus is the Christ, and, believing, has life through His Name." Do we so believe? Let us never rest till we can give a satisfactory answer to that question!

Technical Notes:

18. Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you shall stretch forth your hands, and another shall gird you and carry *you* where you do not wish. 19. This He spoke, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he said to him, Follow me. 20. Then Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following, who also had leaned on His breast at the supper, and said, Lord, who is he who betrays you? 21. Peter, seeing him, said to Jesus, Lord, and what *shall* this man *do*? 22. Jesus said to him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what *is that* to you? You follow me. 23. Then this saying went out among the brethren that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what *is that* to you?" 24. This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true. 25. And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen.

18.—[*Truly, truly, I say to you, etc.*] In this verse our Lord forewarns the Apostle Peter what death he must expect to be the conclusion of his ministry. After restoring him to his office and commissioning him

to be a pastor, He tells him plainly what his end will be. He holds out no prospect of temporal ease and an earthly kingdom. On the contrary, He bids him look forward to a violent death. If he shows his love by feeding his Master's sheep, he must not be surprised if he is made partaker of his Master's sufferings. And so it was. Peter lived to be persecuted, beaten, imprisoned, and at length slain for Christ's sake. It happened exactly as his Master had predicted. Most ecclesiastical historians say that he suffered martyrdom at Rome in one of the first persecutions, and was crucified with his head downwards.

Melancthon remarks that Peter, like most Jews, was probably expecting that after our Lord's resurrection, He would take to Himself His kingdom and reign in glory with His disciples. Jesus warns him that he must expect nothing of the kind. Tribulation and not glory was the prospect before him in this world.

It is fair to say that some learned writers deny entirely that Peter ever was at Rome, and consequently deny the truth of the ecclesiastical tradition that he was crucified there with his head downward. Calovius gives a long passage from Casaubon maintaining this view. Whether it was so or not does not affect the passage before us. In any case, wherever he died, there is no reason to doubt that Peter died a violent death. The expression, "Truly, truly, I say to you," is thoroughly characteristic of St. John's Gospel. We cannot doubt that Peter would remember how solemn were the former occasions when our Lord used this phrase, and would see a peculiar solemnity in the

words of this verse. Specially would Peter remember the night when our Lord was betrayed, when His Master said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the cock shall not crow till you have denied Me thrice” (John 13:38).

The expression, “when you were young,” is commonly thought to indicate that Peter was now an old man when these words were spoken. Perhaps too much stress is laid on the words, especially considering the context. I think the safe plan is to interpret is as meaning, “when you were a younger man than you are now.”

The expression, “you girded yourself and walked where you wished,” appears to me a general phrase denoting the freedom from restraint and independence of movement which Peter enjoyed when he followed his calling as a young fisherman, before he was called to be a disciple and Apostle. I cannot, like some commentators, see any allusion to Peter’s recent action, when he put his “fisher’s coat about him,” cast himself into the sea, and waded to the shore. I rather regard it as a proverbial phrase. A young Jewish fisherman, when inclined to go here or there, would, according to oriental custom, gird up his loins and walk off upon his journey at the pleasure of his own will. “This,” say our Lord to Peter, “you use to do when a young man.”

The expression, “when you are old,” seems to denote, at any rate, that Peter would be an older man than he then was, before he died, and would suffer martyrdom in his old age. It certainly condemns the

idea entertained by many that the Apostle Peter was an aged man when our Lord left the world. Old age, in his case, is clearly represented as a thing future.

The expression, “You shall stretch forth your hands, and another shall gird you,” is regarded by almost all commentators as an intimation of the manner of Peter’s death. He was to stretch forth his hands at the command of another, that is, of an executioner, and in all probability to be bound by that executioner to the cross on which he was to suffer. If this be a correct interpretation of the words, it certainly favors the idea that crucified persons were “bound” as well as “nailed” to the cross. The phrase “gird” may possibly refer to a custom of girding a person’s loins and putting cords around his middle before crucifying him. The contrast would then be more natural between a man girding up his own loins to walk and another girding him around the loins for execution. The expression, “carry you where you do not wish,” must mean that the executioner, having bound Peter to the cross, would carry him so bound to the place where the cross would be reared up, after a manner that would be repugnant and painful to flesh and blood. It cannot, of course, mean that Peter would object to his punishment and resist it. It can only mean that his punishment would be one that must needs be a heavy trial to his natural will.

Brentius thinks that “another” in this sentence refers to Nero or the executioner. We should note in this wonderful prophecy the unhesitating positiveness and decision with which our Lord speaks of

things to come. He knew perfectly all the circumstances of His Apostle's death long before it took place. We should note how faithfully and unreservedly our Lord tells Peter what the consequences of his apostleship would be. He does not tempt him onward by promises of earthly success and temporal rewards. Suffering, death, and the cross are plainly exhibited before the eyes of his mind as the end to which he must look forward.

We should note how even our Lord intimates that suffering is painful to flesh and blood. He speaks of it as a thing that Peter will most naturally shrink from: "You do not wish." Our Lord does not expect us to "enjoy" bodily pain and suffering, though He asks us to be willing to endure it for His sake.

Chrysostom observes: "Christ here speaks of natural feeling and the necessity of the flesh, and shows that the soul is unwillingly torn away from the body. Though the will was firm, even then nature would be found in fault. For no one lays aside the body without feeling; God having suitably ordained this in order that violent deaths might not be many. For if, even as things are now, the devil has been able to effect this and has led thousands (by suicide) to precipices and pits, had not the soul felt such an affection for the body many would have rushed to this under any common discouragement."

Augustine observes: "No man likes to die; a state of feeling so natural that not even old age had power to remove it from blessed Peter, to

whom Jesus said, 'You shall be led where you do not wish.' For our consolation, we may remember that even our Savior took this state of feeling on Himself, saying, 'Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me!'" He also says: "Were there nothing, or little of irksomeness in death, the glory of the martyr would not be so great as it is."

Calvin observes: "This must be understood as referring to the conflict between the flesh and the Spirit, which believers feel within themselves. We cannot obey God in a manner so free and unrestrained as not to be drawn, as it were, by ropes in an opposite direction by the world and the flesh. Besides, it ought to be remembered that the dread of death is naturally implanted in us; for, to wish to be separated from the body is revolting to nature." Again he says: "Even the martyrs experienced a fear of death similar to our own, so that they could not gain a triumph over the enemies of truth but by contending with themselves."

Beza remarks that on one occasion, when Peter and John had been beaten and threatened by the Jewish Council, "they departed, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His Name" (Acts 5:41). The expression, "where you would not," can therefore only refer to the natural will of flesh and blood. Flesh will feel. Holy Baxter in his last illness used to say, "I groan, but I do not grumble."

When Bishop Ridley was being chained to the stake, before he was

burned as a martyr at Oxford, he said to the smith who was knocking in the staple, “Good fellow, knock it in hard, for the flesh will have its way.” Ambrose, quoted by Jansenius, mentions a legend that when Peter was in prison at Rome before his martyrdom, he escaped and was going out of the city. Then Jesus Christ Himself appeared to him in a vision, and on Peter asking “Where are you going?” replied, “To Rome, to be crucified again.” On hearing this, Peter returned to prison. The whole story is apocryphal and destitute of historical foundation. But it shows the current of feeling among early Christians.

19.—[*This he spoke…glorify God.*] We have here one of John’s peculiar parenthetical comments, and one for which we may be specially thankful. Who can tell what commentators might have made of our Lord’s prediction to Peter if John had not been mercifully inspired to tell us that Jesus spoke of his death?

The expression “what death” means “what kind of death” and is generally considered to indicate that the preceding verse describes death by crucifixion.

The expression “glorify God” is peculiarly interesting, because it teaches that a Christian may bring glory to God by his death as well as by his life. He does so when he bears it patiently, does not murmur, exhibits sensible peace, enjoys evident hope of a better world, testifies to others of the truth and consolation of the Gospel, and leaves broad evidences of the reality of his religion behind him.

He who so dies glorifies God. The deaths of Latimer, Ridley, Hooper, Bradford, Rogers, Rowland Taylor, and many other English martyrs, in the days of Queen Mary, were said to have done more good even than their lives, and to have had immense influence in helping forward the Protestant Reformation.

[And when…said… Follow Me.] The precise meaning of this short and emphatic phrase is not very plain.

(a) Some think that it must be interpreted literally, and that our Lord simply meant, "Follow Me in the direction where I am now going. We have tarried here long enough. Let us be going." At first sight, this seems a thin and weak interpretation. But before we reject it entirely, we should carefully observe the language of the next verse.

(b) Some think that "Follow Me" must be interpreted spiritually, and that our Lord used the expression as a kind of watchword for Peter's course in life from that day forward. "Walk in my steps. Do as I have done. Follow Me wherever I lead you, even though it be to prison and death." I see no reason why we should not adopt both views. There is such a depth and fullness in our Lord's sayings that I think we may safely do so. I therefore think it most probable that our Lord not only meant "Arise, and follow Me now," but also meant, "Always follow Me through life, whatever be the consequences." After all, Christ's three great words to Christians are "Come to Me, Learn of Me, and Follow Me" (Matt. 11:28,29). Is there not in the words "Follow Me" a latent reference to the remarkable saying of our Lord to Peter on the

night that Peter denied Him thrice? “Where I go, you cannot follow Me now; but you shall follow Me afterward” (John 13:36).

20.—[*Then Peter, turning, etc.*] This verse brings in the Apostle John himself, described with more than usual feeling and particularity as “the disciple whom Jesus loved, and who leaned on his breast at supper,” as if to prevent the possibility of mistake. The expressions “turning” and “following” seem to me to place it beyond doubt that our Lord began to move away from the scene of the social meal when He said “Follow Me.” No other view can explain them. There was a movement in a certain direction. As our Lord moved away, Peter followed Him. As he followed, Peter turned round and saw John following also. After John, I believe, the other five disciples followed also, or else they could hardly have heard the remarkable saying about “tarrying till I come,” which they evidently did hear.

Tittman suggests that “When Peter saw John following, he was displeased, as Jesus had ordered Peter alone to follow with the intention of saying something to him apart. He therefore asked why Jesus permitted John to follow unbidden” He then thinks, if we adopt this interpretation, that the remarkable words of the following verse may only mean, “If I wish him to remain with the other disciples until I return to them, that is no business of yours. Just follow Me.” This, however, seems to me rather a tame interpretation.

Stier observes: “There was something wrong at first in Peter’s act of turning himself. He was commanded to follow and not to look

around. Thus there was certainly an uncalled for and not artless looking aside, a side glance once more of comparison with others! After his deep humiliation, here is still some light trace of the ancient Simon." 21.—[*Peter, seeing…this man do?*] The Greek words of Peter's question would be literally rendered, "Lord: and this man what?" The precise meaning and object of the question are a point that has been much disputed.

(a) Some think that the question was entirely one of brotherly love, interest, and affection. They regard the inquiry as one which arose from Peter's tender feeling toward John, as the disciple whom he loved most among the Apostles. He would fain [eagerly, gladly] know what was to be the future lot of his beloved friend and brother.

(b) Some think that the question was one of unseemly curiosity. They regard it as one which Peter ought not to have asked. If our Lord did not volunteer any prediction about John, Peter ought not to have made any inquiry.

(c) Some think, as Flacius, that there was a latent jealousy in Peter's question, and that he seemed to suspect that John, not having denied Christ, would die an easier death than himself! I cannot think this for a moment.

My own belief is that there is truth in both the first two views. Our Lord's reply to Peter, recorded in the next verse, certainly indicates to my mind that Peter ought not to have been so forward to ask. On the other hand I should be sorry to say that Peter's inquiry arose

entirely out of curiosity, when I mark Peter's unvarying connection with John on all occasions and evident brotherly love toward him. In feeling concern about John's future, after hearing about his own, Peter was not to blame. Grace does not require us to be cold and unfeeling about our friends. But in the manner of Peter's inquiry, there certainly seems to have been something to blame. Is there not about it a little touch of the old over-readiness to talk of others? It was once, "Though all men—all others—forsake You yet I will not." It is now, "If I am to die a violent death, what are others to do?"

It is certainly my own impression that Peter's question had special reference to John's end: "If I am to die a violent death, what is to be the end of my brother John?"

Leighton, quoted by Burgon, remarks: "This was a transient stumbling in one who, but lately recovered of a great disease, did not walk firmly. But it is the common track of most to wear out their days with impertinent inquiries. There is a natural desire in men to know the things of others and neglect their own, and to be more concerning about things to come than things present."

Henry remarks: "Peter seems more concerned for another than for himself. So apt are we to be busy in other men's matters but negligent in the concerns of our own souls, quick-sighted abroad but dim-sighted at home, judging others and prognosticating what they will do when we have enough to do to prove our own works and understand our own ways. Peter seems more concerned about events

than about duty. John was younger than himself, and in the course of nature likely to survive him. 'Lord,' he says, 'what times shall he be reserved for?' Whereas if God by His grace enable us to persevere to the end and finish well and get safely to heaven, we need not ask, 'What shall be the lot of those that shall come after us?' Is it not well if peace and truth shall be in my days? Scripture predictions must be eyed for the direction of our conscience, not for the satisfying of our curiosity."

It is a curious fact worth remembering that John was one of the only two Apostles whose future lot had already been spoken of by Christ. "He shall drink of the cup that I drink of, and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with" (Mark 10:39).

22.—[*Jesus said to him, If I will, etc.*] Our Lord's answer to Peter can only be taken, in my judgment, as a rebuke. It was meant to teach the Apostle that he must first attend to his own duty, mind his own soul, fulfill his own course, and leave the future of other brethren in the hands of a wise and merciful Savior. He must not pry too curiously into God's counsels concerning John. What good would it do him to know whether John was to live a long life or a short one, to die a violent death or a natural one? Our Lord seems to say, "Stop inquiring about your brother's future lot. You know that he is one of my sheep, and as such shall never perish and is in safe keeping. What is the rest to you? Have faith to believe that all will be well done about him. Look to your own soul and be content to follow Me." I cannot help seeing a latent resemblance between this place and the

well-known passage at the end of Daniel's prophecy. "Then said I, O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things? And He said, Go your way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end." "But you, go your way till the end be; for you shall rest, and stand in your lot at the end of the days" (Dan. 12:8,9,13). Theophylact suggests that our Lord saw that Peter was vehemently attached to John and unwilling to be separated from him, and therefore meant to teach him that he must do his own work and follow Christ, wherever He might lead him, even though separation from John might be the consequence. After all we must take care that we do not omit the special point of our Lord's words. What our Lord rebukes is not general concern about the souls of others, but over-anxiety and restless curiosity about the future of our friends. Such over-anxiety indicates lack of faith; we ought to be willing to leave their future in God's hands. To know their future would, in all probability, not make us one jot more happy. I can imagine nothing more miserable than to see in the distance tribulation and sorrow coming on our friends, and not to be able to avert it. Of what use would it have been to Peter to know that his beloved brother John would one day be cast into a cauldron of boiling oil at Ephesus during a persecution? What good would it have done Peter to know that John would spend years of weary captivity on the Isle of Patmos, and finally outlive all the company of the Apostles, and be left last and latest on the stormy sea of this troublous world? To know all this would not have done Peter the slightest good, and would more likely have added to his own sorrow. Wisely and well did our Lord say, "What is that to you?" Wisely and well does He teach us not to be

overanxious about the future of our children, our relatives, and our friends. Far better for us, and far happier, to have faith in God and to let the great unknown future alone.

Burkitt observes: "There are two great varieties in men with reference to knowledge. The one is a neglect to know what it is our duty to know. The other is a curiosity to know what it does not belong to us to know." In any case, the words "Follow Me" should always teach us that our first duty in religion is to look to our own souls, and to take heed that we ourselves follow Christ and walk with God. Whatever others may do or not do, suffer or not suffer, our own duty is clear and plain. People who are always looking at others, and considering others, and shaping their own course accordingly, commit a great mistake. Of all weak and foolish reasons assigned by some for not coming to the Lord's Supper, the weakest perhaps is that very common one, the *conduct of others* who are communicants! To such persons the words of our Lord apply with emphatic force— "What is that to you? You follow Me."

The words of our Lord, "If I will that he tarry till I come," are a deep and mysterious saying, and in every age of the Church have received different interpretations.

(a) Some, as Gerhard, Maldonatus, and Wordsworth, hold that Jesus meant, "If I will that he tarry a long time on earth, lingering here long after you are gone, until I come for him at death, what is that to you?" I cannot, however, admit this interpretation for a moment.

Death and the coming of Christ are two totally different things, and it is an entire mistake to confound them, as people often do (with very good intentions) in selecting texts for tombstones as part of epitaphs. There is not a single passage in the New Testament where the coming of the Lord means death. Moreover, the very next verse in this chapter seems to place the two things in strong contrast, as not the same.

(b) Some actually hold that Jesus meant that the Apostle John was never to die at all but to remain alive until the second advent! This, however, is a wild and preposterous interpretation, which will satisfy no sober mind. Moreover, it is contradicted by the whole tenor of ecclesiastical history. All early writers, of any weight and authority, declare that John died a natural death in extreme old age.

Theophylact mentions a strange tradition that John is kept alive somewhere, and is to be slain together with Elias by Antichrist when he appears!

(c) Some, as Grotius, Hammond, Lightfoot, Whitby, Scott, Alford, and Ellicott, hold that Jesus meant by His coming, not His second advent at the end of the world, but His coming spiritually in judgment for the punishment of the Jews, the destruction of the temple, and the overthrow of the whole Jewish dispensation by the Romans. I cannot see this at all. I find no clear proof in the New Testament that the overthrow of the Jewish dispensation is ever called the “coming of the Lord.” Moreover, it is an awkward fact that

it is commonly agreed that the Apostle John lived for many years after Jerusalem was taken and the temple burned by Titus. Gerhard declares positively that there is not one instance in Scripture of the destruction of Jerusalem being called the "coming of the Lord."

(d) Bengel and Stier think it means that John was to tarry till the Lord came to reveal to him the visions recorded in the Book of Revelation.

(e) Some, as Hutcheson and Trench, think that Jesus did not mean to predict anything particular about John's future, but only used a general hypothetical expression. "Supposing I do will that he stay till I come, what is that to you? I do not say that I do will him to stay. But supposing it is my will, this is no affair of yours, and it becomes you not to inquire."

The question is one that will never be settled, and the sentence seems purposely left under a veil of mystery. If I must give an opinion, I decidedly lean to the last of the five views which I have stated.

23.—[*Then this saying went out, etc.*] In this verse John carefully describes the rise of the earliest ecclesiastical tradition. He says that it became a common saying among the brethren that he was not to die. Some very likely took it into their heads that, like Enoch and Elijah, he was to be translated and never see death but pass into glory without dying. The Apostle takes pains to point out that Jesus never said that he was not to die and had only supposed the

possibility of his “tarrying till He came.” To my own mind, his manner of stating the point is strongly confirmatory of the view I have already supported: viz., that our Lord only used a hypothetical expression and did not at all intend to make a positive prediction.

We should carefully notice in this passage how easy it is for traditions to begin; and how soon, even with the best intentions, unfounded reports originate among religious men. Nothing is more unsatisfactory, nothing more uncertain, nothing more destitute of solid foundation than that huge mass of matter which the Roman Catholic Church has heaped together, and professes to respect, called “Catholic tradition.” The moment a Christian departs from God’s written Word and allows “Catholic tradition” any authority, he plunges into a jungle of uncertainty and will be happy if he does not make shipwreck of his faith altogether. Flacius observes that not observing our Lord’s “if” gave rise to a tradition! A single word omitted in a text may do harm. Henry remarks: “Let us learn here the uncertainty of human tradition and the folly of building faith upon it. Here was a tradition, an apostolic tradition, a saying that went abroad among the brethren. It was early, it was common, it was public, and yet it was false. How little then are those unwritten traditions to be relied upon, which the Council of Trent has decreed to be worthy to be received with a veneration and pious affection equal to that which is owing to Holy Scripture.”

Henry also remarks: “Let us learn the aptness of men to misinterpret the sayings of Christ. The grossest errors have sometimes shrouded

themselves under the umbrage of incontestable truth, and the Scriptures themselves have been wrested by the unlearned and unstable. We must not think it strange if we hear the sayings of Christ misinterpreted, and quoted to patronize the errors of antichrist."

The Greek phrase which we render "should not die" is literally "does not die."

It seems impossible to avoid the conclusion that the words which Jesus addressed to Peter were heard by the other five Apostles. Otherwise the saying or report referred to in this verse could not have gone forth. 24.—[*This is the disciple, etc.*] In this verse the Apostle John makes a solemn declaration of his own authorship of the Gospel which bears his name, and of the truth of the matters which the Gospel itself contains. As usual, with characteristic humility, he does not give his name but modestly speaks of himself in the third person. It is as though he said: "Finally, I, John the Apostle, who leaned on Jesus' breast, declare that I am the person who here testifies of these sayings and doings of Christ, and who has here written them down in this book; and I know that I have told nothing but what is true, and that my testimony may be implicitly trusted." The first person plural is here used by John, we should observe, just as it is in the beginning of his first Epistle.

The verse seems written in order to assure all readers of John's Gospel that they need feel no doubt whatever that they have in this

Gospel a faithful and true record of things that Jesus said and did, and that this, the last of the four narratives of Christ's history, is just as trustworthy, credible, and dependable as the books written by Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

25.—[*And there are also many other things, etc.*] In this verse John seems to wind up his book by breaking forth into a fervent declaration about the wonderful things that his Lord and Master had done. It is as though he said: "Though I finish my Gospel here, I have not told all the marvelous things that Jesus did while He was upon earth. There are many other things that he did, and many other word that He spoke, which are not recorded in my Gospel, nor yet in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Indeed, if every one were written down, I suppose the world would not receive them and could not comprehend their value."

The words which we render, "The books that should be written," would be more literally translated, "The books written."

Brentius calls attention to the very large number of miracles which, according to St. Matthew, were worked by our Lord of which we have no special record in any of the Gospels. (See Matt. 4:23,24; 11:5.) He justly argues that if these were all put down and described, it would greatly swell the Gospel narrative. What we have recorded is only a sample of what Jesus did.

Henry observes that books might easily have been multiplied about

Christ. “Everything that Christ said or did was worth our notice and capable of being improved. He never spoke an idle word and never did an idle thing; nay, He never spoke or did anything mean, little, or trifling, which is more than can be said of the wisest of men.” But he wisely adds, “If we do not believe and improve what is written already, neither should we if there had been much more.”

The expression which St. John uses in this verse about “the world not receiving the books” is not without difficulty. It cannot of course mean that the material bulk of the books would be so large that the universe could not receive them. This would be absurd, as the “things” spoken of are only the things that Jesus did and said during the three years of His ministry. But what does the expression mean?

(a) Some, as Heinsius and Whitby, think that it means “the world—or unconverted portion of mankind—could not receive, take in, or comprehend more if more was written. There is enough recorded for the conviction of sinners and for the guidance of all who honestly want to be saved.” It is a grave objection to this view that the text does not say “the world” simply, but “the world itself.” Yet in fairness it must be allowed that in this sense the expression is rather like that in Amos: “The land is not able to bear all His words” (Amos 7:10).

(b) Some think that the phrase must be taken as a strong hyperbolic description of the quantity and value of Christ’s works and words during the period of His ministry, and that we must not press an excessively literal interpretation of the phrase. They argue that the

figure [of speech] called “hyperbole” is not at all uncommon in Scripture; and that language is often used—when the idea to be conveyed is that of very great size, value, quantity, or number—which evidently cannot be interpreted *literally*. On the whole, I incline to think that this is the right view of the expression, and that it harmonizes well with the fervent, warm-hearted, loving character of the Apostle who lay on Jesus’ breast and was commissioned to write the fourth Gospel. He ends with a heart full of Christ, and running over with love to Him, and zeal for His glory, and so he winds up just like himself.

The objection sometimes made, that hyperbolic language is not consistent with inspiration, does not appear to me at all valid. No intelligent and careful reader of the Bible can fail to see that the inspired writers often use hyperbolic phrases—phrases, I mean, that cannot possibly bear a *literal* interpretation and must be regarded as a condescending accommodation to the weakness of man. For example: “Cities walled up to heaven” (Deut. 1:28). “A land that flowed with milk and honey” (Josh. 5:6). “Camels as the sand of the sea for multitude” (Judg. 7:12). All these are phrases which cannot be interpreted *literally,* and which any sensible person knows to be figurative and hyperbolic. Our Lord Himself speaks of “Capernaum being exalted unto heaven;” and says, “If any man come after Me, and hate not his father and mother, he cannot be my disciple.” (Matt. 11:23; Luke 14:26.) In both cases His language evidently cannot be construed literally.

Calvin observes: “If the Evangelist, casting his eyes on the mightiness of the majesty of Christ, exclaims in astonishment that even the whole world could not contain a full narrative of it, ought we to wonder? Nor is he at all to be blamed if he employs a frequent and ordinary figure of speech for commending the excellence of Christ’s works. For he knew how God accommodates Himself to the ordinary way of speaking, on account of our ignorance.”

This view is adopted by Augustine, Cyril, Bucer, Musculus, Gualter, Gerhard, Flacius, Ferus, Toletus, Maldonatus, Cornelius à Lapide, Jansenius, Pearson, Henry, Pearce, Scott, Tittman, Bloomfield, Barnes, Alford, Wordsworth, and Burgon.

Lampe protests strongly against the idea of any hyperbole being used, as barely reverent. But I cannot see any force in his argument. The Greek word that we render “contain” is the same that is rendered in Matt. 19:11 “receive,” and in the same sense that it appears used here:
“All men cannot receive this saying.”

The change from the plural “we know” in verse 24 to the singular “I suppose” in this verse is undoubtedly peculiar. But there are parallel cases quoted by Doddrige (Rom. 7:14 and 1 Thess. 2:18). Euthymius notes it and thinks the insertion of “I suppose” was meant to soften down the hyperbole.

It is noteworthy that the word “Amen” is the concluding word of each

of the four Gospels. It is equivalent to saying, “In truth, verily, it is so.” It is equally noteworthy that our Lord is the only person who ever uses the word at the beginning of a sentence.

FINIS.