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The Gospel According To Matthew

Editor's Note1

Chapters 1-13

It is seldom that a chapter of the word is so isolated that we can give the exposition of it without taking account of the connection with what precedes and what follows. There are some which contain a single subject developed enough for us to be able to consider it separately. Sometimes, even a single verse presents some feature of the precious Saviour which may supply matter for meditation during many blessed hours. But to unfold the ideas which are presented in a chapter, it is always necessary to consider it in relation to those things with which, according to the intention of the Spirit, it is connected. This is what I shall endeavour to do with regard to the chapter before us.

This Gospel may be called the gospel of the kingdom. That is, it relates the history and discourses of Christ, specially with a view to the establishment of the kingdom of heaven. This thirteenth chapter reveals to us the mysteries of the kingdom.

Let us consider the position in which the revelation of the kingdom was found when the Lord pronounced it; in other words, what were its relations to the Jewish people at that time. With this object, let us review a little the contents of this Gospel.

In the first chapter we find, after the plan of Genesis, Numbers and Chronicles, the genealogy of the royal family, and the two great stems with which the promises

were bound up, and from which Christ descended: David and Abraham. The promises were made to the seed of each. The miraculous conception of Jesus, according to the predictions of scripture, is then related.

Next, in the second chapter, we are told of this royal birth (a subject of alarm to Herod, who was in the enjoyment of the Jewish royalty), as well as of testimony and joy to the ends of the earth; the flight of Jesus into Egypt and His return; and in all these circumstances the fulfilment of the prophecies is established.

In the following chapter (3) the approach of the kingdom of heaven is announced. The prophet warns the people of the wrath to come, from which it was necessary to flee; of the axe which was laid to the root of the trees; then he announces that God was seeking fruits, and that it would be useless to boast of being a child of Abraham, if one produced none. Jesus subjects Himself to the condition of the Jews and receives at the same time the testimony that He is the Son of God. His subjection and humiliation, and the testimony thereupon rendered, and rendered to Himself respecting the glory of His person, are here profoundly instructive.

In chapter 4, Jesus, thus identified in humiliation with the Jews, and owned as the Son of God by the Father, undergoes the temptation of the enemy who must be conquered and bound, as the strong man, if one would spoil his goods; a temptation suited to the circumstances in which the Messiah stood. Satan seeks to turn the Lord aside from the path of obedience, by urging Him to make use of His glory, or to take it according to His will, and as being Himself in subjection to Satan; by His natural wants, as hunger; by His privileges, that is to

say, the promises which had been made to Him (His Jewish privileges or those of Messiah, according to Psalm 91); and by glory in the world, a glory indeed which He will really possess as the gift of God hereafter, even “all the kingdoms of the world”; and all this by prevailing upon Him to deviate from the path of obedience on which He had entered. But in vain. Then Jesus begins, after John is put in prison, to preach the approach of the kingdom, His abode in the place described in Isaiah 9 giving place to the foretold difference between the last afflictions of the Jews and all those which preceded the manifestation of the light of Messiah.2 He preaches the gospel of the kingdom and confirms His doctrine, and gives testimony to the glorious truth of His presence, by miracles of goodness which announced the visitation of the God of Israel.

Having thus attracted the attention of the multitudes, He unfolds the principles of the kingdom and the effect of the testimony which was to be rendered to Him (chaps. 5-7). Observe, there is no question here about redemption. There is the spirituality of many parts of the law, or rather the application made by Jesus of His ordinances to the heart as well as to acts, and the introduction of the name of the Father as the motive, principle and rule of conduct. Israel is here, as it were, on the way, in danger of being given up to the judge if he agrees not with his adversary. It is the light of heaven which shines on the conduct of men, by means of Him who came from heaven.

In chapter 8, before the historical dealings with Israel, we have an introductory display of the power come in and its effects. It was Jehovah cleansing the leper or leprosy in Israel, and sending the cleansed one to the

priests. It was, since it was Jehovah, that which reached in power over the limits of Israel and shewed that, while Gentiles would come in from east and west, the children of the kingdom would be thrust out. Next He was come down in gracious participation in all their sorrows and infirmities; but hence withal, having no place amongst men; but in the midst of the tossings and heavings through which those who were content to identify themselves with this rejected One for His own sake must pass, they were secure by that very fact in all, in the same boat with Him who was there in divine power and counsels, however low He might be come. This was the place of the remnant. As to the others, they would turn Him away; but Israel, left to the power of Satan, would rush as unclean headlong to destruction. Such is the whole history of the coming of Messiah, Jehovah, Jesus. Note here, we have not the demoniac sent back to tell of the power which had healed him. For it is the ministry of the Lord which is pointed out, and its course, reception and effect. Hence this is the connection of these events in order to present the history of the Lord’s presenting Himself. It is in a certain sense complete in itself.

In chapter 9 He continues to labour personally in the ministry of the kingdom. Acknowledged as the Son of David by the blind men, and received by the multitudes with admiration, He is accused by the jealousy of the Pharisees of casting out devils by the prince of the devils; but the time of grace towards this poor people was not yet over. When Jesus sees the multitudes, He has compassion upon them; they were as sheep without a shepherd.

In chapter 10, as the Lord of the vineyard, He sends His disciples to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel,” to

declare to them that the kingdom was at hand; a prefiguration (so to speak) of the transmission of this ministry to His disciples, when He should have been Himself rejected. But there is no question of any but Israel. They were not to go into the way of the Gentiles. Nevertheless, on account of this general mission, the Lord, in His directions and encouragements, expresses Himself in a manner which might serve them as a guide in all circumstances wherein they might be found, whether in their actual mission, or during His absence from the earth: still, He regards their mission simply as a mission to Israel, whether then, or even at the last times. They were not to have gone over the cities of Israel till the Son of man should have come. The capture of Jerusalem has deferred that event until God resumes His labours towards Israel.

The Lord, resuming His labours of love, recounts, on the occasion of the arrival of the disciples of John, all the history of that work among the Jews (chap. n). John Baptist, himself, takes the place of a disciple instead of that of a prophet, and the Lord bears testimony to him, instead of receiving testimony from him. The kingdom of heaven, instead of being established in power, being rejected, is invaded by violence only, in defiance of difficulties and the opposition of men; for the Jews, whether one had lamented or piped to them, had not responded to the testimony of God. The rejection of Jesus, a rejection which He accepts with entire submission, is explained by this: only the Father could know the Son, and only the Son could reveal the Father. The Messiah disappears, so to speak, in His glory too pure for man to receive. But grace only springs up in greater abundance, and all things having been delivered

to the Son, it is no longer a question about the Messiah of the Jews. He invites all those who are “weary and heavy laden” to come to Him. It is a chapter of the highest interest.

Hereupon in chapter 12 the Lord breaks with the Jews decidedly. He is Lord of the sabbath given as a sign of the covenant with them, the Lord in grace, but still Lord. The Pharisees seek to kill Him. He hides Himself, and the light of the Gentiles begins to dawn in the testimony of God. Acknowledged anew by an astonished people as the Son of David, the Pharisees put the seal to their iniquity and their condemnation, in again attributing His works to the power of the prince of the devils. Thereupon Jesus pronounces their judgment: the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost is not pardoned. The sign asked for by the perverse generation is refused them: there shall no other sign be given them than the sign of the prophet Jonas. Even the people of Nineveh and the queen of the South shall condemn them, and at last the unclean spirit that had gone out of the people shall return into them with other more wicked spirits, and its last state shall be worse than the first.3 Such will be the end of the generation that rejected the Saviour. Thereupon He renounces the ties of nature which connected Him, as the Messiah after the flesh, with this people, and acknowledges no other relationship than obedience to His Father.

This rapid sketch of the contents of these twelve chapters of the precious revelation of God will shew us the importance of the position of chapter 13, at which we are now arrived, and which is to occupy us more particularly. It is based on the rejection of the Son of man, the Messiah, by the self-righteousness of Israel;

and, in fact, on the judgment passed on the latter in consequence of this rejection of the Heir of the promises.

Wherefore, addressing Himself the same day to the multitudes, Jesus appears as no more seeking fruit. It was no longer a question of His vine or His fig-tree. He sows—He is a sower. He finds nothing: He brings with Him that which by His grace may spring and produce fruit. He fully distinguishes His disciples; to them it is given to understand the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, which is not granted to the multitudes whose heart is made fat. He speaks to them in parables—a precious light for the remnant led of God; darkness to the people led of their own blindness.

Here, then, the Lord takes the place of a sower, and the word falls, here and there, on every kind of ground. But, having taken this character, it is no longer a question about the Jews merely (there one would have sought fruit), but, in principle, about every hearer of the word. However, we have not here the unity of the church, the body of Christ, in heaven, but His work on earth; and then, after that, the forms which the kingdom and the judgment connected with it, on the earth, should take. I would not say that the consequences of that would not go further, but herein is contained the subject of this chapter. It was sowing time, because there was nothing. Every individual that heard bore fruit according to the nature of the ground where the seed fell. For here we have, not the secrets of the efficacy of the grace of God, but the responsibility of man, and the outward effects that would follow in consequence of the work wrought in this world. Thus the word was “the word of the kingdom,”—the testimony borne to the rights of Christ

by the grace of God—the proclamation of the establishment of the authority of God on the earth—in grace it might be, but still requiring the subjection of man. The kingdom thus proclaimed had a moral character, because it was the kingdom of God, having precious promises and a security which was beyond all price. But it was, at the same time, the kingdom of the heavens whose authority was to be established over the earth, the government of God here below, and His work in respect of this government; and not the church united to Christ in heaven.

Still, in this first parable the Lord does not present a similitude of the kingdom of the heavens, although the word was “the word of the kingdom,” because here the question is not about the effects and results of the seed generally, under the government of God, but about the fact of the sowing and the individual result, according to the ground where the seed fell. As far as the work of the sower was concerned, it was an affair of individuals. The result would be a whole, which would indeed require a work of separation, but which was nevertheless meanwhile a whole. The work did not adopt the Jewish corporality as its ground; it did not acknowledge the ancient vineyard. A sower sowed, and each grain, so to speak, had such or such an effect in the heart where it fell. Herein there was an important point in the work, or in the preaching of the kingdom; individuality and individual responsibility.4 This was a principle, moreover, always true, but which the work itself brought out,—which was at the root of the work, because God and man were fully manifested. It was not merely a question about the government of a people; but the first principle, the basis of Christianity, was to be that each

one should bear his own burden. Grace unites those who have received this seed with good effect, for the life is common and the Spirit is one. Still, each one receives for himself, and cannot withdraw himself from his own responsibility in that respect; a responsibility which has reference, not only to his moral conduct as a man, but to the reception of the testimony which the activity of the love of God comes to scatter, like seed among men, upon the heart. The principle of individual responsibility was ever true for the purpose of eternal judgment, and must be so if God is judge! He will judge every man; nevertheless, it was not the principle on which the Jewish system was based here below; but, after the rejection of the Messiah by this people, this principle was brought out, and connected itself with the only thing which remained as a ground of relationship between God and man; namely, the testimony of His love and the revelation of His claims upon the heart.

I forbear to enter deeply into the meaning of this first parable, not because it is unimportant (far from it), but only because I think it must have been so often dwelt upon, both in public and in private, in the presence of the readers of these pages, that it is hardly necessary. The only thing that I will repeat here is, that what we have presented is not a doctrinal explanation of the origin of good, but the actual work, and its actual result under the responsibility of man—the facts of the new dispensation, and not the counsels of God.

That which distinguishes the good ground, as far as the reception of the word is concerned, is a man’s understanding the word. In the contrary case, strictly speaking, he does not understand it: in the two other

cases, there is the appearance of it, but no fruit: here one regards nothing but fruit.

Thus far, we have only “the word of the kingdom.” In the six following parables we have similitudes of the kingdom itself, or the forms which the kingdom takes after the rejection of the king on the earth, and in consequence of the word being sown. It is easy to distinguish them into two parts; namely, the three first and the three last with the explanation of one of the first. The former are addressed to the multitudes; the latter, to the disciples apart. The former, it seems to me, present to us the exterior of the kingdom in the world, its state such as the world views it, without absolutely pronouncing the judgment of God thereupon. They are historical, as we have already seen. The latter give us the thoughts and intentions of God in the kingdom which exists here, and the result of this external whole. The efficacy of grace is never touched upon in this chapter; it is a history and not an explanation of doctrine.5 It will be remarked that we find here, as in many other places, when the Spirit would present to us some general view of the thoughts of God, the perfect number of seven, divided, as is generally the case, into four and three—four parables addressed to the multitudes, and three to the disciples.

I have said that the three first parables present to us the exterior, the aspect of the kingdom towards the world; but that does not prevent a spiritual man discerning the principles which are there at work, nor his judging them according to the mind of God; on the contrary, it is what we ought constantly to do, in order to walk rightly according to the wisdom of God.

However, I shall chiefly concern myself with the explanation of that which occurs in the parable itself. The first idea which is presented to us of the kingdom thus described in these mysteries, is a work done in a field by its owner; but all that he does now is to sow the good seed there. The work which he has wrought may fail in its general result, in the field, although the seed cannot be changed; and this is what comes to pass.

While men sleep, the enemy of Him who sows the good seed and to whom the field belongs, comes to sow tares; and the field, or the beauty of the harvest, is spoilt. The owner of the field leaves those two things to bear their proper fruits. He to whom the field belonged had done His work; the enemy had done his, while men slept; then he also went his way: the effect was a sad mixture in the world, of which men might accuse the owner of the field; but the thing being manifested by its effects (for it had been done in secret) the servants discover it when it becomes public. The master explains to the servants who come to Him and receive their instruction from Him, that it is the work of the enemy, and that the harvest, as far as the world is concerned, will be spoiled. At the time of the harvest He will apply a remedy, that is to say, at the time of the judgment, which will make a distinction in the field between the good and the bad. It was not the servants' business to destroy the tares. They were not the executioners of the world's judgment, and the time itself was not yet come.

The kingdom only being established by sowing here below during the absence of the king, and not in power, and consequently by judgment, the confusion resulting therefrom would be the sad character of the kingdom,

until it should be established in power, and the judgment should put an end to the disorder produced by Satan.

Compare here the manner in which the Lord presents His ways with the account of the seed in Mark 4:26. The kingdom of God is as if a man, after having cast seed into the ground, should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow, he knows not how; for the earth produces of itself, first the blade, then the ear, and then the full corn in the ear; and when the corn is ripe, immediately they put in the sickle, because the harvest is ready. During the time of the mixture, and while the corn is not yet ripe, no judgment takes place; if it did, it might root out of the world the unripe corn.

An attempt has been made to confound all this with church discipline; but the subject is different. The question is not about the church or discipline, but about the kingdom and about judgment to be exercised on the evil which Satan has introduced among the good corn.6 As for discipline, properly so called, that is always exercised on corn, and that not with a view to rooting it up, but curing it and even restoring it here below, if possible. The incestuous man was given up to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord. In fact, he was restored on earth, because he repented. It is not my intention to pursue this subject, but to expound the parables. I have only referred to it for the purpose of saying, that the two subjects have not one idea in common. We may here observe also how the Lord regards the kingdom and everything in it as a whole, from the beginning to the end of it.

In fine, that which we have revealed is, that the effect of Satan's work where Christ had sown the children of the kingdom, that is, this state of things on the earth, must remain till the harvest. The tares are not simply unconverted men; they are persons whom Satan has brought in, under the form of Christianity, to spoil God's harvest in the earth—in the place where Christianity was established. It was not the church in heaven, it was not churches gathered in certain localities; these ideas are not found here. They are the children of the kingdom, regarded as plants of God in this world, but who are found in the place where Satan had power to sow his own seed. The effect, apparently not to the honour of the owner, is explained for those who learn from Him. The judgment will explain it to such as will not be taught.

As regards the judgment, the parable states that there is a time of harvest, and not the harvest merely. At that time the tares are first gathered and bound in bundles for the purpose of being burnt, the corn is laid up in the granary.7 Generally speaking, the judgment or the harvest, such as it is presented in the parable itself, does not go beyond that which is manifested in this world. The tares are gathered for the purpose of being burnt: that is all; this is what is proper to the earth. The only thing which goes beyond what is external here below is the fact that the wheat is gathered into barns. It is a negative fact—the wheat no longer belongs to the field: that which takes place in the barn does not appear. God interposes by means of the reapers to bind the tares in bundles (not heathen or unconverted men as such, but the wicked ones of Christendom, at least of the place where the good seed was sown) and He quite removes

His own people from the scene. The natural state of the tares is destroyed, but it is not removed from the field. This then is the result in this world, the field which belongs to Christ, the sowing which He has performed.

The second parable presents to us the kingdom during this period. Of the small grain of seed, such as it was at the beginning, there is formed a great power in the earth, so that men seek its protection, sheltering themselves under its branches. For the explanation of this symbol, compare Ezekiel 17:23, also 31; Daniel 4:10, 12, 14.

The third presents it to us, not in its outward, secular power, but as a principle or doctrine which spreads and completely pervades that which is submitted to its influence. It is not here the heart, or the world, but the kingdom established in this world. The idea of the doctrine of Christ, in other words, His name, must spread.

A certain definite sphere is submitted to its influence, and entirely filled with the profession of the name of Christ. I see here that the particular subject in hand is the existence within certain limits of the external profession of the doctrine or the name of Christ. These parables, as it seems to me, have no reference to spiritual good, neither is it the purpose of them to present the dark side of that which has come to pass. They are, as we have said, historical. A spiritual perception, perhaps cultivated and improved by other passages of scripture, may enable me to see that a secular power, like Nebuchadnezzar or the Assyrian, is not a good thing, when the question is about what Christ has established and about my spiritual standing; but

here the matter is presented to us as an historical fact; the kingdom, was to receive such a character.

The word leaven, in general, does not suggest the idea of good to one who is familiar with the scriptures; but the purpose of the parable is to state the fact of the general existence of the external profession of the name of Christ, leaving it to the spiritual discernment of the child of God to judge of that which so exists.

We now come to the explanations given to the disciples, and to the parables which were for their ears only. Here the seed is not properly the word; it is the children of the kingdom brought into the world by Christ, who have their life—their moral existence—from Him. We sow the word; but here the great fact is, that the Son of man brings His own into the world; it is a work which He begins. The vineyard being rejected, He does not look for that in the world which was not found in Israel. He introduces, but in the world, His own, because it was all over for the time, at least with Israel. When He has done that, Satan does the same; active in evil, on the ground where good has been done.

Israel, the people of God, is become wicked, and, led by the prince of this world, they reject their Saviour, their Messiah. God being thereupon active in good in the world, Satan assumes an attitude of active hostility. To spoil the effect here below, is all he can do. But the judgment takes effect upon it: the harvest is the end of the age, the reapers are the angels; for the question here is about the government of this world by God. As to the expression “this age” we are accustomed to apply it to the church; but it is not here a question of the church, but of the introduction of the kingdom of heaven,

Messiah being rejected by the Jews. What was the age in which the Lord was found with His disciples? Was it the church, or the dispensation of the church? By no means. It was a certain age of this world, which was to end by the reception of the Messiah, and the re-establishment of the law as a rule by the government of this Messiah. The people of Israel having rejected Him, this age becomes purely and simply this present evil world (age), from which Christ delivers us, but in the course of which God has set up His kingdom, in the way we have just spoken of.

The final close of the age is suspended while these acts are in progress, but at last its end arrives. Then the Son of man (for here the world is concerned, not merely the Jews and their Messiah) will purge His kingdom of all things that offend, and of them that commit iniquity, and they shall be cast into the furnace of fire. That will be the judgment of everything that is opposed to the glory of Christ, when He will execute it. But here He appears as the Head of the providential government of God, not as the Bridegroom coming to seek His bride, nor as the King coming to reign in Israel, or over the Gentiles in immediate relationship with them. It is the Son of man, supreme Head of the government of God, who sends the angels of His power to purge His kingdom, long defiled by the presence of the children of the wicked one, of everything that offends.8 It is an act of His own power, acting as from on high; it is not the servants who will execute it. He sends His own messengers to gather the tares and cast them into the fire. He does not Himself enter into the earthly kingdom already established. He acts as from on high by His messengers, and the righteous are not established and blessed in the marred

kingdom, but they shine as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.9 This, then, is the result of the kingdom having been defiled by means of the work of the enemy; the judgment is the answer to the absence of all judgment in the kingdom, in the interval between the sowing time and the harvest. It is neither the joy of the church nor the establishment of the throne of judgment over the earth, but the purification of the kingdom, the general idea of government from on high. The servants had thought of re-establishing here below, by rooting the wicked out of the world, the order of things which existed then at the commencement, that the field here below might be in accordance with the intention of Him who had sown; or, in other words, that the field that He had sown should be a just representation of His labour and His thoughts; but this was not what was to take place there—this was no longer possible.

It is a matter of further revelation, that then the righteous (and it seems to me that the term is not necessarily limited to those who had lived after the seed of the kingdom had been sown) will shine as the sun in the kingdom of the Father. This then is the reason why there was no question in the meanwhile of purifying the field here below. God had better counsels in store for us. It is a revelation which belongs to the disciples. The rest was the public government of God, intelligible, or what ought to have been intelligible, to a Jew.

The succeeding parables present to us rather the secrets of the kingdom—that which only concerns the initiated, the disciples. It was no longer that which was merely external for the multitudes which surrounded Him. In what was said to the multitudes, everything took place in the world, that is to say, in the field, with the

exception of the one fact that the good seed would be taken from it and hid in the barn. All belonged, properly speaking, to this age, unless we may except the existence of the barn. But in the explanation of this first parable, the Lord goes beyond what He had said, passes the limit, so to speak, and shews us the terrible result of the judgment of the tares in the weeping and gnashing of teeth: then He raises the curtain on the other side also, and the righteous shine as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. But this throws an entirely new light on the principle of the kingdom. It is a motive to action wherever this revelation is understood, and wherever we act according to the understanding of this purpose of God.

It is no longer a question how to establish clearly the relations between the old system and the forms which it took after the rejection of Christ, or on account of the barren state of the vineyard; but how to comprehend the effect of the counsels of God, which went much farther. There was something there to influence the heart. We have before had the effects here below of the sowing: the fact of the mixture, and the separation, and the form which in consequence of that the kingdom took in the world; here we have the revelation to the disciples of the effect outside the world, and consequently the motive which directed him who had understanding in the kingdom (it was this that characterised the kingdom in this respect); lastly, the discernment which knew how to act, even in the circumstances of this confused state of the kingdom, and not only the fact of this confusion in the world. That explains the order of the parables. In the two cases, the historical part for the multitude gives the sowing and the divine judgment at the end (this is all

that the mind of the multitude takes notice of); and after that, the great historical facts, the tree and the leaven.

But here we have the motive which governs and influences the man who has the mind of Christ—in the first place, Christ Himself and us by His Spirit—in regard to that which has been revealed within the veil; then the separation made with discernment when the net is full. It is not a case of sowing seed, which issues in a mingled crop left in its natural state till the time of God's acting. It is an activity, the result of understanding and motive, based on the discovery of a hidden thing, or on the perception and search of a loveliness that is appreciated, and which is worth the giving up of all; or on the need of having separated, and so united together, those who constituted the sole object of all the toil, and who previously had been mingled in the net with that which was worth nothing to the fishers.

The one part presents the exterior, on which God will certainly act at last, but which is left as a picture in its complete character before the eyes of the world: a great tree, a leaven which leavens the whole mass. The other, the intelligence and activity of the Spirit of Christ, which gives up everything, and perceives good things to seize upon them in giving up all else.

Now, the first principle, the general principle of the two first of these three parables, based, as I have said, on the revelation of the glory of the righteous, made in the explanation of the first of the three former, is the energy which renounces everything on account of the discovery of that which becomes of inestimable value to the soul. This would not have been the character of the kingdom, if it had been established among the Jews; there were

principles and a conduct which would have suited it. Its authority would have been exercised for the maintenance of good and justice, and great happiness would have been the fruit of its establishment. But the kingdom, once rejected by those who were the children of it, was no longer of this world, and it became necessary for one to give up everything that he possessed, according to the discovery made of the glory, which thereupon belonged to the faithful in the kingdom of their Father. This glory causes a renunciation of everything in order to possess it, according to the counsels of God, of which He has made a discovery in the revelation of this treasure—the church, properly so called. Christ Himself did so, and even in two different ways.

He gave up everything, He emptied Himself to accomplish this work and buy the church. But again, of how great value to Himself and for God must the church, thus brought to glory before Him, have been, that He should quit the glory of His Father, His bosom, to have and to bring back His church with Him! In effect, it was because it was infinitely precious to the Father, and because He wished to have it before Him holy and without blame, that the Son, according to His love for the Father, gave Himself for it, the Father having entrusted to Him this work, and the church itself, that He might bring it to Him; for if the Father loves the Son, and has delivered all things to Him, so also the Son has given His life, that the world may know that He loves the Father, and that as the Father has given Him commandment, so He does. For He came to do His Father’s will.

Still, as royal Heir of the kingdom, lawful and perfect Head, according to God, of the Jews, the people of God, and heirs of the promises according to the flesh, it was necessary for Him to give up all that, even this peculiar height of exaltation. He could weep over Jerusalem, whose children He would so often have gathered. He could understand the value of whatever was glorious in that situation. He could feel all the force of those words: “thou hast lifted me up and cast me down,” Ps. 102. Nevertheless, for the joy of possessing the church, this fair and precious creation of the Father in grace and light, this jewel of the light of God, this expression of the thoughts of the Father in grace, witness during the ages to come of the grace which it has received (and that because it is the reflection of it)—for the joy, I say, which followed upon the discovery of this treasure which was not of the world, but of God, in the light, He gave up all He possessed among the Jews; He looked upon all else as nothing.

Answering perfectly to the thought of God His Father, in regard of that which was the glorious object of the love of God, a creation not external to Himself as Creator, but formed to be before Him, according to His nature which He had communicated to it as far as was possible, Christ —who had emptied Himself indeed, but who answered not the less on that account but so much the more to the whole thought of the Father, gave up everything to fulfil the will of the Father and to possess Himself of this treasure. So the kingdom takes this character. It is in Christ that we see it, even this reflection of the nature of the Father, for He is not only by grace (a creative and communicative grace) but essentially the reflection and the image of the glory of the invisible God. He is morally

the manifestation of it in all things, and beyond that, inasmuch as all the Godhead dwells in Him bodily. Thus we also, for the sake of Christ glorified before the Father, for this glory which we shall have with Him, when we shall be like Him, seeing Him as He is, but which henceforth we see in Him—we also renounce everything now. (Compare Phil. 3:7, 8.) Still it is Christ who has given us the example of it, by devotedness to His Father; Paul was only a weak imitator of Him who inspired him, and had supplied him with the perfect model of that devotedness.

But then Christ, however He might renounce His earthly glory and rights could not yet possess the church all pure and glorious as being His peculiar property, separate to Himself. He must take it in the world; but that does not hinder Him, He places it there and buys the whole field. But the treasure is His object, and is sufficient to engage Him to take the whole field; for the subject here is not the beneficent government which shall be established over the world, when the judgments which will have purified it will have been executed, but of something which He takes for the sake of the treasure which is hid there. Elsewhere, in the prophets we see all the blessings which will flow from His reign (the church, the new Jerusalem, being glorified, so that the nations will walk in its light), blessings which will be the effect of the public administration of the kingdom of the Son of man. But here we have the mysteries of this kingdom presented to a spiritual understanding.

But, first of all, let us notice here: Where these revelations of the secrets of the kingdom take place; Where this joy which is motive sufficient to cause Him who possesses it to give up all, which causes Him to feel

that all is loss in comparison with this glory; Where this discernment which can so perceive the beauty of the pearl of great price, as to enable us to understand that we gain everything in giving up everything;—this discernment, whereby the spiritual understanding, which can judge all things, perceives that to keep anything else is only to hinder the possession of that which this divine intelligence tastes and appreciates, and which decides thus in the full knowledge of the case. The choice is made, the nature which seeks pearls has found the pearl which suits it. Where is the place, I say, that these revelations, which excite and satisfy this divine nature, take place? It is “in the house” they were made known to the disciples who followed Jesus, who were attached to Him. They followed Him already, they followed Him in separation; in separation they received that from which belonged to Him, as being Himself in separation from the world. The multitude does not receive them.

Let us come to the application, or rather to the explanation, followed by the parable of the treasure hid in the field. We have here the secret thought of God. The subject is not properly that external character of the kingdom, but the inward thought of Him who is acting there. Christ Himself has taken to Himself a field, but for one who understands His thought—is the field His object in taking it now? No; it is the treasure in it. There is that which fills His heart, and which was the motive to that which He did. God gave Him power over all men, that He might give eternal fife to all those whom the Father had given to Him. I would not be understood by that to say that all men are the field, but only to shew how there could be two thoughts in the counsels of God.

In the kingdom of heaven a field has been purchased. In appearance perhaps, the field is the object which the purchaser had in view. Christ has the right of possession over this field; His authority should be acknowledged there, because He has purchased it; but the joy of His heart, His object in all that, is the treasure (the church) which is hid there. That which was purchased by Christ and which belongs visibly to Him, there where His name is externally acknowledged in the times of the mysteries of the kingdom, that which is His right, and which the understanding of man might recognise as the purchase which He made, that which is as a field which a man bought, is not what He has at heart, for He thinks of the treasure which is hidden there. It is the form which the kingdom has taken.

He cannot yet possess the church, all pure, removed to heaven to reign with Him. In the meanwhile, it is in the world; and the kingdom takes the character of a whole which, in appearance and by right, is a lordship, a possession which belongs to Christ, but of which the secret and the real object is only known to those who have the mind of Christ. He has taken the field for the sake of the treasure,10 but it is the treasure quite pure as it is known to Himself that He has at heart. The ministry of Peter did not yet distinguish the two, although he and all the saints after him made part of the purchased treasure. Peter had the keys of the kingdom. Paul was converted by the doctrine of the union of Christ and the church attached to Him in glory; he did not know Christ after the flesh.

This is what His disciples must understand, when they see that which is as a possession that has accrued to Christ, that which belongs to Him. His disciples would

understand what was the real object of His heart, and would clearly distinguish between the field and the treasure which it contained, although the treasure or the church being for the time hid in the field, the administration of the government of God must take this outward form.11 Moreover, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant-man seeking goodly pearls. Here we see the Lord judging, according to His perfect intelligence, the moral beauty of that which He would have for Himself at any price. It is not here merely the joy of possessing a treasure, but of discriminating and valuing the treasure which He sought and which He was able to prize and distinguish from every other. Thus the Spirit of Christ in its actual operation only rests definitely upon the church, and that not in the joy of possessing it only, nor of that of accomplishing salvation in the redemption of it, but in the accomplishment of all the thoughts of God, of all that moral beauty which can have its source in the heart and reproduce itself for Him in that church which He gave to Christ. The epistle to the Ephesians in particular presents to us this thought: the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we might be holy and without blame before Him in love. This is its reproducing itself in grace. And what is the calling according to which we ought to walk? It is that we are “the habitation of God by the Spirit.” He has given us a place which is to the praise of the glory of His grace.

The more we examine this epistle, and the more we comprehend the thought of God which appears there, the more we shall perceive the pearl which is of great price in the esteeem of the merchantman who alone is capable of estimating it. The repetition of the emphatic

word Himself, His own will, etc., which occurs in the Greek, gives additional force to this remark.12 What thoughts, then, ought we to have, my brethren, of such a calling of the church, and of the church itself, thus before God, such as He can have before Himself, and find satisfaction therein, and find again His own thoughts in it, that it may be the delight of Him who is Himself the only source of that which can be suitable to Him, and that it may be fit to be ever before Him! But, in order to receive it, in order to give it to Christ, it was necessary that He should make it such. What a thought for us! In order that we might enjoy it, He gave us the Spirit itself, and of His own Spirit. Compare Ephesians 3:16-21; see also 1 John 4:13. In this latter passage, the subject is an individual—his state, and the practical proof resulting from it. But there is yet another idea for us to bring out, and which causes this to explain the state of the kingdom; it is, that Christ stripped Himself of everything, in order to possess this treasure. Where is His glory, His kingdom, His judgment, His power?

The kingdom has not one of these characters; but we, disciples, we know Christ, who, though He was rich, became poor for us, that we by His poverty might be made rich. He is hid in God. The epistle to the Ephesians speaks of these counsels of God in regard to us, of these counsels so precious for us. Here we have the same idea, but the idea of the kingdom lost in that of grace. Christ loves the treasure, He prizes the pearl. He is Himself not merely the reflection, but the perfect expression of what the Father was. He knows how to present to Himself the church, without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing. The pearl is in His thought before He finds it as the object of His love. But then He is

presented here as a man who finds, not as God who creates and who is the source of the beauty of the object found, as His thoughts are the prototype of it, of the beauty which suits the finder and the Creator.

Although the church is of God in its existence and its beauty, we must also take account of that which Christ has done, according to the counsels of God, according to the fulness of His desire, and the delight which He takes in these counsels. He gives Himself up to that, and strips Himself of everything, in order to possess the church, such as it is according to the thought of God; and, to the disciple who has understanding, this is the character which the kingdom takes. It is Christ's treasure in this world, in the field which He buys; it is the pearl quite pure, out of whatever shell it may have come, which answers to all that His heart seeks.

Hitherto we have the spiritual intelligence, in order to the understanding of the principle which characterises the kingdom in the thought of Christ, upon which, in consequence, the believer acts, according to the measure of his intelligence. But there is, besides, an actual separation of the elements which are mingled within it. In effect, the net has gathered all kinds of persons out of the sea of peoples. When the net is full, those who have drawn it, the fishermen, sit on the shore; they gather the good into vessels, and throw aside the bad. Here let us pause a moment, because important principles present themselves to our thoughts. The fishermen are occupied about the good: they put them into vessels. As for the bad, they only reject them, and put them aside: there is the effect of the understanding of the fisherman. What is his object? with what does he concern himself? With the good fish. To have them

according to his desire and purpose, he must in passing, reject the others, but it is only that he may have the good. Except in this respect, he has nothing to do with the bad—they are not his concern; they are only an encumbrance to him: the net was not cast for them. He gathers the good into vessels. Neither is their ultimate destination his concern: his business is to catch them, and gather them into vessels apart. In this his capacity, his diligence, and the success of his toils, appear. Without these, he could not do it. All this is addressed exclusively to a spiritual mind, without which we cannot understand these instructions. But there is one work, the effects of which will be of necessity intelligible; and as in the exposition of the parable of the tares, we have the additional fact of the glory of the righteous in another sphere—a fact which represented in a good light the seeming negligence that had taken place in the government of the kingdom; so in the explanation of the net, we have a fact which is not in the parable, namely, the judgment of the wicked.

The angels will come forth at the end of the age, and will separate the wicked from among the righteous (they do not here concern themselves with the righteous, as the fishermen did), and they will cast them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. It is quite clear that this is a procedure quite different from what is related in the parable, and which goes beyond the contents of it. The subject is not the net merely, it is a general and definite separation of the wicked from among the righteous at that time. The fishermen were only concerned with the contents of their net, and with the good found in it. The angels, at the end of the age, separate the wicked; it is a general

work; and in this world, where they are mingled, it is not the angels that have to do with the net.

The two things, we should remark well, take place in this world. There is nothing about separating the good and bad in heaven. Neither is there anything here about the great white throne, but about the end of this age. The good which are found in the net will be separated and put in vessels by those who have drawn the net to shore, according to their discernment of the good and bad; then the angels will take the bad in this world, and separate them from the righteous who will be found there, and will cast the former into the furnace of fire. This was not the affair of the fishermen. But the two events take place in the world*, at the end of the age. The angels have nothing to do with the good, but to leave them; while the fishermen occupy themselves with the good, to dispose of them, in rejecting and leaving the bad.

The disciples here are supposed to understand all these things; the Lord looks upon them in this light; they are wise, the understanding ones of Daniel. Wherefore, says He, every scribe instructed in the kingdom of heaven, is like a householder, who brings out of his treasure things new and old. We see by these words the character of the instructions which the Lord has just given; there is no question about the church as the church. It is true the disciples became part of it afterwards, but He does not look upon them in that character. What we have here is the application of lessons on the kingdom of heaven to knowledge acquired as by scribes in the Old Testament. There is nothing about the mystery hidden and afterwards revealed by the Holy Ghost to the apostles and prophets; but we have light thrown by the kingdom

and its mysteries on the promises and the government of God, which a scribe would have found in the law and the prophets. These were new things, but they were connected with the old things; they did not set them aside. If Paul had known Christ after the flesh, he did not know Him so any more. In his case, the subject was things altogether heavenly, even Christ Himself. He notices, it is true, in some digressions, in the way of argument, that which relates to the old things; but as far as his direct ministry is concerned, he knows them no more.

Having completed what I had to say on this chapter, I pause. Others may probably add much to what I have communicated. In every passage of the word there is always the germ of that which is infinite. I only bring forward a general explanation, but I have no doubt of its being of God, certainly mingled with imperfection, but still of God. Another time, if God will, I may send a continuation of the summary of this gospel.

Appendix

Some think there is an historical order in the parables, an order which I proceed to state without making any comment upon it, as a thought upon which every brother will form an opinion according to the light which he possesses. First, the general fact of the sowing of the word, begun by Jesus Himself; then, as we have seen, the beginning of the mysteries of the kingdom: the Son of man sows the good seed, the enemy does his own work there. The first effect: the hierarchical or ecclesiastico-secular power in the world. The second effect: nominal Christianity, a leaven which only corrupts the whole lump. Then comes the discovery that it is the

treasure hid in this field which is precious; those who have spiritual understanding distinguish this treasure, although it is hidden in the field. This would be the Augustinian and Protestant doctrine of an invisible church. But, beyond that, there is the perception of the beauty and purity which become this treasure, and they are sought by those who are led by the Spirit of Christ. Lastly, there is the practical separation of the good fish put into vessels by those who are concerned with that work.

This then is the idea; each Christian, I repeat, will judge of it, according to his measure of spiritual understanding. However it may be, there is yet something to be said on the subject of the great tree and the leaven, in reference to what may be discovered in them by a spiritual mind. The difference between that which is described in these parables, and what is said in the three last, is very remarkable. Here there is no trace of spiritual affection, nor of a taste for divine things, nor of distinction between good and evil. The love of the Spirit is completely missing, and is even lost. I say lost, because at the beginning the servants distinguished between the good seed and the tares, and that perfectly well, and were astonished to find tares in a field where their master had been sowing, although it did not belong to them to execute the judgment on the tares. They were employed near the master, attending to the good condition of the field which belonged to him, but the field could only be cleansed by judgment. Didst Thou not sow good seed in Thy field? (that was their question): from whence then hath it tares? Afterwards, a spiritual understanding perceives that the field is only a secondary object, fully admitting that it was bought; it

seeks for the pure and precious pearl, and also separates the good fish and puts them into vessels.

But here it is not that; it is a picture of a dark worldly and outward effect. The attachment to the interests of Christ fails; it is an external matter, a common condition, where nothing appears but what the world can see. We do not say that there are not children of God hidden in this system, or such as have been separated from it; but the Spirit of God takes no account of them in these parables, nor of any spirituality which perceives them, or which distinguishes between that which is agreeable to Christ in His kingdom and the contrary: the result of the work exactly corresponds with the world. We could not (according to these parables) distinguish them: it is "a great tree," a symbol, throughout scripture, of human power and pride, the objects of God's judgment.

It is only when Christ will establish His own kingdom in power, that this kingdom will become a great tree in the earth, according to the counsels of God in righteousness. (See Ezekiel 17:22-24.) Meanwhile the event takes place, but as we have seen, with a total absence of spiritual discernment, which contrasts with what precedes and what follows. Also observe, with respect to the leaven: this is not external and earthly power; it is the universal diffusion of a doctrine within certain limits. Here we must remark that it is not the Son of man who sows the good seed, that idea is lost: it is the state of the kingdom which will bear a resemblance to the effect of a woman's deed who acts thus. Thus there is not any distinction made here between the sowing of the Son of man, and the work of the enemy. If there is good seed, it is quite lost sight of. The parable of the good seed and the tares proves to us

that this distinction had been made by the servants of Christ, but all appearance of it is lost; we cannot say that all is good, for the tares must grow till the harvest. All spiritual discernment is therefore completely excluded from this state of things; all true testimony to the work of God is lost; for one cannot say that all is good, that would be the testimony according to the heart of God. All distinction between the good and evil is destroyed; it is one lump, so that this testimony to the difference of good and evil is also lost; and thus evil under the name of Christ is that which presents itself as a uniform mass.

I would not here say that the Holy Spirit designed to present this idea to the multitude. I have already said that these parables speak of what is outward, of the external aspect of the kingdom; but he who studies the word judges according to the mind of Christ of that which is presented thus to the world. There is that which distinguishes the true Christian— the spiritual man discerns all things. He does not think that the lump will be changed, for the spiritual man distinguishes and loves what is good; but the state of the mass does not govern him: he knows for himself that everywhere else the great tree is the symbol of exalted man. Ought man to be exalted before the manifestation of Christ? He knows that leaven everywhere else is the symbol of that which is bad. Has not the history of Christendom supplied that which fully corresponds to such a symbol? If it is so, it is that which according to the Lord characterises the state of the kingdom. In that case, what ought the Christian to do? Ought he to be contented with bearing such a testimony as being Christ’s?

Note.—It is most important for us to remember, that all that, which is the power of death in the unbeliever, is the hindrance and blight of the fruit-bearing power of the believer's life, to which the energies afforded us in the divine Persons apply themselves. This is brought out into full fight, with its specific remedy, in the graciousness of God in this parable. There is the case of the fowls of the air, the stony ground, the sowing among thorns, and in the good ground, thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold. The first of these we know is the power of Satan—the power of death. There is no life in the soul. When the word of it is sown in the unbroken heart, the devil takes it away as soon as it is sown; he holds it in unremoved death. The word is the power of life. "Of his own will begat he us by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures." It is indeed the lie of the devil, by which he brought in death and holds men in it, in which he is a murderer; so on the other hand, by the truth of God are we made alive.

But there is One (Himself indeed the word), who is specifically the quickening power, even the Son of God. "The last Adam is the quickening Spirit." He then who vindicates from this state of death, and makes alive, is the Son of God. The Son of man sows the seed, but it is the Son of God who quickens; "for this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." It is the special distinctive character of His sonship, that He quickens with divine power, as indeed none else could. Compare John 5:21, 24, 26. This is most explicit, and no one acquainted with scripture can have failed to recognise this power of life in the Son of God, as distinctly representing His power and character. He declares Himself, "I am the resurrection and the life ";

and this by His word, “Lazarus, come forth.” The results of this we shall not follow; but we have the Son of God, by the word, destroying the works of the devil in the state and power of death. This is the first case of the parable. That which is in Him is the opposite power, which overcomes the evil case mentioned; and a man brings forth thirtyfold, for being really alive he must increase and bring forth fruit.

But there is another case put, not so apparently desperate, but equally destructive—the receiving the word into shallow ground. There was no root. It was received superficially; it speedily “sprang up, became it had no deepness of earth”; it had no searching process of power in which it entered into the conscience and quickened the inner man. It rested in the natural affections and understanding which are after all the flesh; it is received merely by the natural feelings, and therefore immediately acts, and with joy, since it reaches not the conscience; and the same natural feelings were of course as speedily acted on by trouble and persecution, and “immediately they are offended.” Compare Mark 4. This, then, is all merely the flesh, and comes to nothing. To this we know how uniformly the Spirit is opposed. “The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other.” “They that are after the flesh mind the things of the flesh; and they that are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.” “If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds,” etc. It needs not to multiply passages of scripture to shew the opposition of these two.

But, we must observe that we have here in the Spirit the antagonist power which overcomes the flesh, and

assuming a man to be alive, still does so. “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit”; hence we know that this case is still the natural man, and that the things of the Spirit are what he has never received, though affections or intellect may have been moved or delighted with the marvellous plan of redemption. But the same point holds good in a believer; that is, we And when men do not walk in the Spirit, of course they are profitless and low in their estate. It is in mortifying the flesh by the Spirit, that the fruits of the Spirit find comparatively free growth—it produces sixtyfold. This, then, is the contrast here—the flesh and the Spirit; and we find in it, that the fairest form of the flesh, the apparently joyful reception of the word of the kingdom, whether it be in affection or intellect, comes to nothing; whatever it be occupied on, it is but “the desires of the flesh and of the mind.”

The third case, compared with other scriptures, is equally clear I think. The hindering power is declared directly, “the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things.” Compare Mark 4; Luke 8. Now, the world and the love of it we continually find opposed to the Father. “All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but of the world.” “Love not the world, neither the things of the world; if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” The hatred of the world to the Son, shewed that it was not of the Father; and the children were not of this world any more than the Father, as allied to Him, even as Christ the Son was not of the world.

Every one familiarly and spiritually acquainted with the Gospel of John must have noticed the opposition

between the world and the sonship of Christ; one being associated with the Father, and the other directly opposed to the glory of the Father, in the great question of that sonship in which alone it was known. Our Lord thus concludes the whole presenting of His work and His people to the Father: “O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee, but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me.” The whole chapter illustrates the question. Now we shall hence well understand the opposition between the two, and how He “who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us out of this present evil world,” closes that statement by saying: “and I have declared unto them thy name and I will declare it, that the love,” etc. But, in the believer, even when not only quickened, but in the Spirit exercising himself to mortify the deeds of the body, who recognises at once the evil of the flesh (though we are little aware how subtly and widely its beguiling and deceiving influence is spread, how fair a form inbred selfishness may assume), and in whom, in an ordinary sense, the flesh is habitually in a measure mortified; how often do we find the world holding a prevailing power and recognised title over the judgment or habit, and the fruitfulness, comparatively speaking, utterly marred!

“Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit, so shall ye be my disciples.” Let us then recognise, on the sole basis of scripture (excluding the consideration of the circumstances in which the lie of this world has power over our mind), that the world is a positive hinderer of fruitfulness, the much fruit in which the Father is glorified; and for this plain reason, that our sonship, our inheritance, the kingdom is not recognised. The devil, as he acts on us by the flesh, “the lust of the

flesh," "good for food," or "of the eyes," and the like, is the god and prince of this world; and the Spirit in them that are quickened, where not dimmed and darkened by the spirit of this world, is not only the power of the difference of the carnal and spiritual nature, but bears witness that we are sons and heirs. Thus at hberty, we cry by it, Abba, Father; and the fruits are an hundredfold, where we are free from the system in which we are fettered. The energy of the kingdom is there, the Saviour of the kingdom is there, the stamp of the Father of glory, and hence, in deadness to the world, power over it. The whole stamp of nature is different; we are not of the world as Christ is not of the world. Accordingly, as we find the Lord the true vine, so we find the Father the husbandman, purging the branches, that they may bring forth more fruit. We may be isolated indeed, but isolated sons, upon whom the glory of the Father shines in hope and the power of inward association; the sons of God, though in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation. In a word, the children of God (the God who hath called us to "His own kingdom and glory," the living God) is our distinguishing title; and, as the Jews were affianced to Jehovah, we are called to be "perfect as our Father which is in heaven is perfect."

I cannot pursue this subject farther here, though I may touch on it, with the Lord's permission, at a future time. As regards the explanation of the parable, I would say a very few words more. The inseparableness of the evils, as well as of the gracious agents of covenant remedy, is not in question; the devil, the world, and the flesh, are too intimately associated to need explanation of our distinct consideration of them; and I believe more

intimately than people are commonly aware of. Of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, I need not speak; but while we have spoken of them in operation as to profit, we must not forget their unity in every act, whether of creation, or anything else: they invariably act in one, and as invariably, as far as I see, in the same order, that is, by the Son, through the energy of the Spirit.

Another remark is necessary. Although we have looked at the love of the world, as hindering the full characteristic fruitfulness of the children of God, and the knowledge and love of the Father as the contrasted character, we must remember that this knowledge in principle is the portion of every believer. “I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father”; nor could we otherwise put all believers under this responsibility. But I believe it will be found that the measure of the fruitfulness of the life that is in them much depends on their exercise in the truths here noticed and dwelt on; and that the character of their fruitfulness also much depends on their fuller and deeper apprehension of the one or the other; and that the apprehension of the Father in the full development of the sonship glory attaches quite a new character on the whole course of the Christians life. This is our proper calling; and, while we must watch against the neglect of distinct reference to the Son (as administering the power of the kingdom against the “wicked one”), to the Spirit (as overcoming or detecting the workings and deceitful power of the flesh), to the Father (in contrast with the love of the world), a defective apprehension of the principle of heavenly glory will somewhere or other break down the efficiency of our christian service. The fulness of all was in our Lord;

the fulness of all help in them is our practical responsibility; the enjoyment of fellowship with them our privilege. Ill-proportioned Christianity, I believe, continually springs from the power of Satan, through neglect of, or hindering the special power of one or another of the Persons, while indulgence of any of the evils is apt to throw us into the hands of Satan; and here is the wisdom of ministering to sick souls, for the source of the evil may be one, its manifestation may be another. How blessed to be able to refer to covenant assurance of a threefold Almighty help for the several difficulties one evil may bring! A believer will be healthful and strong against the enemy in proportion as he has just reference to all.

I do not say that a believer's progress is, from knowing the Son, to the Spirit and the Father—far from it; but I believe the manifestation of the power and glory of their work will gradually unfold itself, even as the quickening by the Son will make the believer discern well the operations of the Spirit against the flesh, and both of these find their full development in the manifestation of the Father's glory, in the consciousness (if he grow healthfully) that His kingdom is not of this world. In some cases of unusual energy of divine life, we see by God's calling, all these apprehensions promptly developed, and the man consequently abundantly exercised, and his service great, corresponding to the knowledge received of the Son in the kingdom, as in the apostles Peter and Paul; but I must not outstep the practical part of the subject.

I am quite conscious, indeed particularly so, of the imperfection of these remarks; but I feel the importance of the subject deeply, and the basis of the view has been

given: they are open to the correction or fuller application of those more versed in divine life. The wondrous and blessed grace of a developed covenant, the bright witness of the Son, and of the Father, and of glory: the grace in which they minister to the necessities of those who have no help in themselves, while they are the growingly understood and adored objects alike of communion and worship, separating from all that is not of themselves. I feel too, that in speaking thus, I am treading on holy ground, but ground which our God in His mercy has opened to us, and on which we are set to walk; freed from every fear, unless of not justly estimating it, by the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; cleansed from all that could offend Them, by His blood, and acquainted with the boundless love which has brought these by it, while never reaching it, never able to be filled with it, knowing that it has reached even to us and filled us into its own fulness.

Let us also remember, that the indulgence in one of these seemingly remote evils brings in the power of the others; for God is not there. Thus Solomon's indulgence of the world brought in the indulgence of the flesh, and the consequence was the direct power of Satan in the idolatrous worship of his wives. We might mention similar instances; but I close for the present.

Only one thing it is important to remark. It is not either by speculation or knowledge these things are obtained, though they may be ministered. "We are sanctified unto obedience." The spirit of obedience is the great secret of all the present and practical blessings of the believer; for the Spirit is not grieved, and so becomes the minister of the grace and knowledge both of the Father and of the Son; and the poorest simplest believer,

walking thus, enjoys the blessings of the pledged faithfulness both of the Father, and the Lord, and the Spirit, to the blessed purposes of love in which we stand, and of divine glory.

We have only spoken of the parables which are found in this chapter. There remain still some verses which close it: they contain the judgment formed about the Lord by the unbelief of the Jews. He was in His own country; His works were not denied; but the Jews stumble against the stone of offence. He is the prophet without honour in His own country and in His own house. He is the son of the carpenter. In a word, He is judged even in Israel, according to the flesh.

Chapter 14

But this carnal and blinded judgment of the people was not the whole of their history. The passions of the false king push him on to destroy the testimony of God, and Jesus withdraws. He shews, nevertheless, by acts marked in the Psalms, the presence of Jehovah who healed them, and all His compassion and His tenderness toward His people (Psalm 103:3; 132:15); but, having borne this testimony, He sends His disciples alone in the ship, He Himself dismisses the multitude and goes up towards God—the present position of Christ: having fully borne this testimony to the multitude in Israel, He separated His disciples from them and went on high to pray. His disciples are found alone in the midst of the tempest; the Lord rejoins them, and all again becomes calm.13 It is ever here, it seems to me, the disciples viewed as Jews, though in principle Christians of all times, ought to have identified themselves with Him, and to take this position. A remnant of those who expect Him

(among the Jews) would also go out to Him in the midst of this tempest of peoples, before He enters into the tossed boat of the heirs of the promises, and the Lord agrees to it; but their steps totter because of the trouble: the Lord sustains them, and, calm being restored by His presence, all those who are in the ship recognise Him as the Son of God. Thus will it be with Israel. In Peter, we have the remnant which goes before them; and in those who leave not the ship, we have the type of all those who remain in the ordinary course of Judaism until Christ is there Himself.

Chapter 15.

Having given this sketch of the position of the Jews, as the result of their rejection, as before had been given one of the kingdom of heaven, the Lord pronounces His moral judgment upon the religious forms and pretensions of the most religious among the people. It was only outside and hypocrisy, a walk already condemned by Isaiah: their worship was vain, their doctrines were but the commandments of man. God wished for realities.

Thence He passes to a more general thesis. Out of the heart of man (and the Jew was but a man, as to his heart, before God) proceed evil thoughts. Such is a man alas! whether Jew or Gentile; but let him be of the cursed race of the Canaanites, and from among the cities whose repentance would have been as a miracle, he who, owning his misery, should rest by faith upon the super-abounding mercy of God, would be heard according to his wish, for God is there, and He is love. Here it is not precisely the church. The rights of Israel, at least of its lost sheep, are owned; but this cannot

hinder the grace and nature of God; far different from the selfishness and the ennui of the disciples, which attaches no value to the privileges of God's people. The Lord avows His special mission; but He cannot deny what God is, when faith penetrates to that point. Having thus shewn (all the while recognising Israel) that the poor Gentile is to be delivered, He returns to Israel, healing the people and refreshing them with bread. He feeds the poor of the flock.

Chapter 16.

These views of the kingdom and of the ways of God toward Israel having been given; the uselessness of a religion of forms by ordinances, however privileged, having been declared; the principles of man's heart, and the impossibility of closing the heart of God having been shewn; the Spirit of God enters, in this chapter, upon another ground. The existing generation is abandoned; there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas. It was not so difficult to discern the times. Thereupon the Lord, amidst the uncertainty of the masses, on the answer of the faith of Simon Peter, reveals what is to succeed this generation, namely, the church, never named before.

Here it is not Christ who sows, but the faith of another, faith given to Peter, which discerns in Jesus the Son of the living God. The Jews had only the sign of a risen Saviour; the generation was then rejected, and nothing built upon the first mission of Jesus (the Messiah should "be cut off and shall have nothing");14 but the Son of the living God—here is a power and a strength which the energy of the prince of this world could not overturn, against which evidently the gates of hades should not

prevail; for in His resurrection, on the contrary, they should be broken by Christ. The resurrection of the Son of God, according to the power of life which was in Him, the foundation and measure of the life and security of the church, was sheltered, and the church by it, from all the attacks of him who had the power of death. In vain the tomb shrouded itself in darkness, out of the midst of which came forth the life more powerful than ever. Simon makes this confession by the revelation of the Father, and it is upon that the church is founded. Indeed Peter is the only one who adds this word “living” to the expression “Son of God.” Nathaniel just owns Him as the Son of God and King of Israel; but Peter has the secret of the immovable security of the church of God. It will be found in his epistles that this idea of “living,” associated with the resurrection of Christ, forms their basis and ruling thought.

Moreover, not only the church, more powerful than death, like its divine Founder, should be based on the confession of Peter; but the administration of the kingdom here below should be entrusted to him. Not he, but Christ builds the church upon the foundations which the Father Himself had laid in the revelation of His life in the Son; but the keys of the kingdom are entrusted to Peter. This administration was to begin among the Jews, and Peter was specially their apostle.

Here the Lord forbids them to announce Him as the Christ—that is no more the question, and from this time He speaks to them of His rejection and death; but the heart of Peter, favoured as he was, answered in no wise (for he was still in the flesh, not having received the Spirit) to this revelation which had been made to him. He opposes himself to the cross, and the Lord treats him

as being identified with Satan and doing his work. Such is the flesh; whatever may be the revelations enjoyed by him who is not yet set free. On this occasion the Lord presents the cross as the portion of all those who followed Him, but He supports them in difficulty by the revelation of His coming in glory, and there were even some there who should see before their death the Son of man coming in His kingdom.

The church is built upon this confession of Jesus, the Son of the living God, manifested in resurrection; this supposes the death and cross of Christ; but one is sustained in cleaving to the good of the soul, even though life should be lost; for the Son of man will come in the glory of His Father.

Here we may remark that in verse 21, it is Jerusalem, the scribes, the chief priests who alone are presented as culpable. It is not the question yet of the Gentiles; but their very guilt puts Jesus in the position, not of Messiah only, but of Son of God in power, and of Son of man, coming in the glory of His Father with His angels, with a view to judging all men.

Chapter 17.

The immediate answer to this revelation which the Saviour makes of His glory as Son of man, is, in the three first Gospels, the transfiguration, compared by Peter himself to the power and coming of our Lord Jesus (2 Peter 1:16-18); the future glory of the Son of man, such as it will be manifested to the faithful remnant of the people, is revealed to the astonished eyes of the poor disciples. The risen and the changed are in the same glory as the Saviour, they are with Him, and hold

converse with Him; the law and the prophets give way to the glorified Son of God, who alone is to be heard.

From this moment Jesus speaks only of suffering this faithless and perverse generation, but He is unwearied in doing them good. He shews to His disciples the part that men (not the Jews only) would have in His death. The Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men! The point for the disciples is the power of faith; nevertheless it was needful to live near to God in withdrawment from all that belonged to the flesh, in order to conquer and cast out the power of the enemy.

At the end of the chapter, the Lord takes advantage of His rights as Son, to identify His disciples with Him in this same privilege; but still, not to offend, He submits to His position as a subject Jew, which Peter was forward to attribute to Him. In this beautiful passage He shews His divinity in the two-fold respect of knowledge of the thoughts, and of power over creation; but at the same time He identifies Himself with Peter (who had made of Him a Jew like any other), saying “lest we”; and if a fish is made to bring the money needed for Him, it is for His poor disciple as well as for Him—” for Me and thee.” He places them with Him in the position of sons, and places Himself with them in theirs, though He was the God of all knowledge, whom every creature, save man, was eager to obey. He puts Himself on the same footing with them, where love and humility were happy in grace towards the poor, the poorest of all Himself!

Chapter 18.

It is upon this basis of the humiliation of the Saviour, a principle which is linked with grace and is its perfect manifestation, that all which follows here is founded.

Jesus would have His disciples to take this place, and identifying themselves with what is least, as He had done Himself, to act also in grace; for He was come (a position infinitely more glorious than that of the Messiah, whence the Jews repulsed Him, because He spoke the truth) to seek and to save that which was lost. And such was the case with all men, children as well as others; for the Lord applies here to a little child the principles of Luke 15; but if they were lost, it was not the Father's will that they should perish. Even so in the church (for it is founded upon the rejection of the Messiah) His own ought to act in grace towards a brother, come what will.

Here is the rule, his brother must be gained; self-humiliation raises us to this elevation, and permits us to act in grace toward all. But this grace, pursued even to the end by the care of the congregation, and rejected by him who was the object of it, would place him (whether Jew or Gentile) in the position of a publican and a pagan. On the one hand, grace becomes the principle of action; on the other, the church, established and acting on the principle of grace, becomes the enclosure with reference to which one should speak of the without and the within of a publican and a pagan; for all that the disciples should bind on earth would be bound in heaven. Such is the marvellous effect of the rejection of the Messiah and the position of those identified with Him in this rejection; for now, where two or three are gathered in His name, Jesus is found in their midst. There has He put His name for a blessing. See Exod. 20:24; Deut. 12:5,11, etc. Thus the effects of His rejection on the power of this accomplished work before

the Father are unrolled (though this was as in a shadow) before His eyes.

In answer to Peter, who asks how far this walking in grace ought to be carried, the Lord shews that, as it was a principle essential to the nature which acted in grace, there was no limit; it would be a limit to the privilege of man and to the nature of God. In the kingdom of heaven, mercy triumphs over judgment.

The Lord gives, notwithstanding, not only a principle, but a similitude of the kingdom, which applies, it seems to me, historically. The Jews being guilty of ten thousand talents by the crucifixion of the Son of God, God acts in grace by the preaching of the gospel to the nation, in virtue of the intercession of Jesus, to which answers the preaching of Peter on the testimony of the Holy Ghost (Acts 3); but they refuse the grace to the Gentiles, much less guilty toward them than they themselves were toward God, and the wrath came upon them to the uttermost. Luke 23:34; Acts 3:17; 1 Thess. 2:16.

Chapter 19.

The Lord pursues the principles on which the relationships of the people with God subsist. He does not weaken those that existed: on the contrary, He confirms them; but He advances now and leaves the people under the consequences of the violation of the covenant under which they were found, and without the enjoyment of the new blessings into which He introduced those who accompanied Him in His rejection.

In answer to the Pharisees, who tempted Him by questions of their schools, where the fear of God was not —He traces things higher up than the law. He speaks as

the Son of man. He confirms, in all their extent, the ties that God had formed; the ordinance of Moses did but suffer the hardness of their heart. The law just recognised the relationships which preceded it; what was more than those relationships was only for a time.

The second principle He enunciates is the humility, the teachableness, and the confidence of a little child: such is the principle whereby one enters the kingdom.

Thirdly, all goodness in man is denied; God alone is good. (See the position that Christ takes at the beginning of Psalm 16. He has said to God, Thou art My Lord; My goodness extendeth not to Thee, but to the saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent, in whom is all My delight.) Then the Lord, repeating and taking up the word of the young man, confirms the law as a condition of life, and says to him: “If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.” There was the principle of the law, and it is also what the young man had done outwardly.

On his answer to that effect, the Lord goes farther: Give up thy heart then—I myself am the touchstone for that—and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: other hopes are open through My rejection. The young man went away sorrowful. The only answer to this difficulty insurmountable for sinful man, the only key which opened the door of the kingdom of God, was, “With God all things are possible.”

The chapter is remarkable in this respect, that is to say, for the manner in which Jesus confirms for the Jews that which was fundamental in the law, “These things do, and thou shalt live.” He maintains the everlasting righteousness of God as regards the ties of nature: He

founds all this upon that which preceded even the law, and (since the relations on which the law was based preceded the law) He appeals from it to what was of God at the beginning. He also goes beyond the law for him who observed it in his ordinary relationship, and presents Himself as the true touchstone for the heart—Him, the rejected One, who was not of the world. What is the only means of arriving at it? The answer is: “With God all things are possible.” He recognises all that God had put in Judaism; but he ceases to be a Jew: the young man could not live on such a footing.

These words of Jesus excite in the spirit of Peter this question: What shall we have therefore—we who have forsaken all and followed thee? The answer, founded on the glory already revealed on the mount of transfiguration, is, that when the Son of man shall return in His glory, in the regeneration, the twelve shall be in their place on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

This answer leaves all aside, until the restoration of Israel, and places again the disciples in connection with this principle, omitting what, in the interval, was for the church; but it is also wholly outside the legal relationships of the people with God. If the law were accomplished, life would be the result. Those who followed Christ, when the Jews under the law rejected Him, should judge Israel in the day of the glory of the Son of man. They had followed the Lord in His rejection by Israel; they should participate in His glory when He should be the glorious Head of His people and of the entire world. Moreover, whoever had acted faithfully in this relation and taken Christ for his portion should receive an hundredfold here below, and besides life

everlasting. Nevertheless one can judge nothing beforehand as to the relative degree of glory of individuals by their present position.

Chapter 20.

The kingdom was established by the sovereignty of grace, and if God called the labourers at the eleventh hour, He could reward them as He pleased. Thus the last should be first, and the first last. On one side, then, there was the encouragement of the reward of labours and sacrifices; but, on the other, if one lost sight of the principle of grace, with a view to demanding this reward as of right, and so that others should not have it, then here is the answer: “Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?” Cheered by the prospect of an unbounded reward, we are wholly upon the principle of grace.

Having thus set forth the motives of labour in the kingdom of heaven, after having explained the transition, from obedience to the law (in order to have life) to christian devotedness, the Lord puts clearly before the eyes of His disciples the path here below which conducts to glory. The Son of man should be rejected, delivered to the Gentiles, and crucified; but here still the Lord shews His profound and entire submission to His Father. His disciples shall drink, it is true, of His cup (it is His answer to those who asked of Him the first places), but as to their reward, He left it with His Father; He pretends not to assign it to others. An entire dependence on His Father—such was the position of Christ. He had not even, so to speak, the patronage of His kingdom.

This desire of the two disciples was in itself only a manifestation of the spirit of the flesh; the Gentiles so acted. Jesus speaks of the Gentiles, for He recognises the remnant of Israel in His disciples, a remnant which, apparently, lost its place in following Him. It is in glory that their relation with Israel should be manifested; but let him who would be great among them be a servant. It is what the Son of man had done; He was come to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many.

Since the transfiguration, the Lord acts according to principles which go beyond the law, while recognising its force according to what God had said of it—principles which assert a rejected Messiah, and shew where it is necessary to come, that is, to accompany Him without the camp. It was the Son of man ministering and giving His life as a ransom, and not the Messiah crowned with the glory of Israel: they are chapters of transition.15 The church is not there. They are the relationships of the Son of man, rejected by the Jews and taking another place, but assuring, to those who followed Him, their true position in glory in the age to come, when the Jews shall be restored; but, referring to the Father, being subject, and having only to suffer Himself. It was the Father who should glorify them; then those who followed Him now should act anew on the Jews, and that from the bosom of glory.

At the close of the chapter, the Holy Ghost resumes the thread of history: Christ presents Himself for the last time to the people, as such; and, owned as Messiah, the Son of David, He acts in power, in favour of those who owned Him, namely, two blind men; and in

a public testimony is borne to Him, as the Son of David; then comes the judgment of all the people in His presence. In the gospel according to John, the testimony is borne to the glory of Jesus as Son of God, by the resurrection of Lazarus; to His glory as Son of David, by His entrance into Jerusalem, which is also recounted here; and to His glory as Son of man, by the arrival of the Greeks, who ask to see Him, which gave Him room to announce His death. But here, in this gospel, which is occupied with the Messiah and His relations with the Jews—relations interrupted by their sins, and resumed later in glory—the question is only of His messianic glory, to which God bears a testimony according to the word of the prophet.

And, first, it is the Lord who announced Himself; all is at His disposal. He sends to seek the ass, and commands His disciples to reply to those who asked why they acted thus, “The Lord has need of them.” Mounted on the ass, He enters Jerusalem as a King, according to the prediction of Zechariah. The multitudes salute Him, according to Psalm 118, and announce to the excited city that it is Jesus, the prophet of Nazareth, that they thus receive as King.

Jesus, having entered into the temple, executes judgment, purifies the house of God, denouncing the iniquity which had defiled it, and heals those who could neither see nor walk. He recalls to mind how the Psalms shewed that the Lord would vindicate His rights by the mouth of little children, and leaves the city in order to repair to Bethany. He enters as Lord, King and Judge; but He is no more of Jerusalem. By the curse of the fig-

tree He shews the condemnation of Israel, full of appearance, but without fruit, and declares to the disciples, astonished at that which had happened to the tree, that, if they had faith, they should cause the mountain which was before them to disappear, all the stability of the nation, which should be cast among the peoples.

The next day, as they demanded by what authority He did these things, He returns the point of the question upon the conscience of those who addressed it to Him; a conscience too little upright to answer, and which, hiding itself under a pretended ignorance, left Him by that very thing the liberty of refusing to answer them. Also, it was evident that they would not avow that which they knew well; to answer would have been impossible, and only a sanction given to iniquity. Besides, the Lord sounds their conscience in place of recognising their authority; it is what was then fitting. He is the Messiah in spite of them, and He judges, and thereupon He presents them, commencing with themselves, with the true picture of their conduct, worse than that of the publicans and of the harlots. Then He describes all the conduct of the nation toward the messengers that God had sent them, even to His own Son, and He makes them pronounce their own sentence, which He supports by a citation of Psalm 118:22. Finally, He announces to them, alluding to this Psalm, the consequence of stumbling on this stone, and the still more terrible lot of those on whom it should fall in judgment.16

Chapter 22.

Up to this point the Lord had taken them on their own ground, as Jews, citing their own scriptures, and judging

their state, considering them as the vineyard of the Lord; it was the Son of the King Himself who sought fruit in the vineyard which He had entrusted to the husbandmen. But there was another point of view, the activity of His Son; and the kingdom of heaven is presented of the love of God and His counsels on the subject as the marriage supper of the King's Son, to which they had been invited and would not come: upon that their rejection and the call of the Gentiles, but, consequent upon that call, the judgment of those who had not really put on Christ. The nation, in general, had then been judged according to its actual position, and in view of the grace which it had rejected, grace which invited it to the wedding of the King's Son, where it was going to be succeeded by poor wretches collected from all sides, but received of God. The different classes of Israel now in their blindness are presented for judgment. The partisans of the law and of the rights of the Jews, join themselves with the impiety which sold them to the Gentiles, and ask Him if they should own this dominion of the Gentiles over the people of God. The Lord leaves them where their iniquity had placed them, demanding that they should render to God His true service. After that came the Sadducees, who are judged by the simple but powerful testimony of the word. The Lord Jesus gives the great fundamental principles of all the law and the prophets—principles which, moreover, should be realised only in the gospel and in the renewed man. Then He presents the enigma of His own position, according to Psalm no: the Jews were entirely incapable of resolving it. From that moment no man durst ask Him any more questions.

Chapter 23.

The Lord, while quite owning the judicial authority of that which existed among the Jews, an authority based upon the law, pronounces a judgment, levelled at all those who administered that authority, insisting that the form even of it should no more subsist in the midst of His own and that the greatest among them should be servant, for he who exalted himself should be abased.17 What was yet wanting to fill up the measure of the scribes and Pharisees was to imbrue their hands in the blood of God's witnesses, from which they boasted that they were pure. They were about to be put to the proof, and all the blood shed should be required of that generation. Finally, the Lord, moved with affection for the city beloved of God, declares that their house should be left desolate, and that those to whom He was speaking should see Him no more till they would say, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord!" according to Psalm 118 already cited twice: testimony of their restoration in peace at the time of the coming of Christ and of the preparation of their heart before His advent.

Chapters 24, 25.

The nation was judged, and its restoration foretold, when its heart should be prepared to receive Him whom God had sent; but the disciples were not yet instructed in the circumstances which should take place in the interval, nor was their heart separated from the glory of the former order of things. This chapter brings us to the communications of Christ on this subject, and furnishes the warnings necessary to the faithful remnant.

The first thing that Jesus announces to them is the judgment of God upon that which existed at that time before their eyes, and of which the disciples had such an exalted idea. There should not remain there one stone on another. The Lord being seated on the mount of Olives, His disciples come to Him. That which the Lord had said to them suggested this question, or rather, these questions: When will these things take place, namely, the destruction of the temple? What will be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the age?

We must remember, that the age for the disciples, was not Christianity, but, on the contrary, the state of Judaism, until the coming of the Messiah; so that these things were connected in their mind. The Lord had spoken of the destruction of the temple, which has more or less connection with the same thought; nevertheless it is rather the revelation which the Lord had made thereupon that gave rise to the questions which had already pre-occupied their mind.

In His answer He does not touch upon the first of these questions, namely, the era of the destruction of the temple. In fact that did not concern them; for that temple was as nothing for them now in the eyes of the Lord. He considers their position in two points of view, namely, the general point of view, according to which they found themselves in a position of witness; and the special point of view, when the abomination of desolation would be at Jerusalem. The first extends to the end of the thirteenth verse; the second from the fifteenth verse to the twenty-eighth.

The first thing that the Lord points out is, that the ruin in which His departure was to leave Jerusalem would

give place to many false Christs, which would come in His name. The disciples must not suffer themselves to be deceived by them. There would be also wars and rumours of wars,18 but they must not be disturbed by them; these things must take place, but the end would not be yet. For nation would rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there would be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes in divers places, and all these things would only be the beginning of sorrows. Such is the outside, the providential events of which they would have knowledge.

Such would be the state of the world, and what would happen there in this time of waiting for the Lord and for the end of the age; when the time would draw near, and that those who should have intelligence must await His coming on the earth and for the earth, a waiting which identified itself with the interests of the Jews in a manner, it is true, more or less clear, nevertheless according to God. He speaks of His disciples as of the Jewish remnant; but, though they were surrounded by Jewish circumstances, the hatred against them, while having its source among the Jews, would extend still further; they would be hated of all the Gentiles for the name of Christ. There would be also treasons, many would be offended—false prophets among those who pretended to have the same hopes, and the excess of iniquity would chill many of them. But, whoever endured unto the end should be saved. All this supposes the disciples in Jewish relations; not that the testimony of God was limited to that; but, whatever may have been elsewhere the extent of the testimony, the Lord speaks here of those who were connected with the hopes, the thoughts, and the circumstances of the Jews. The

testimony of the gospel of the kingdom would be borne effectively in all the extent of the habitable world to all the nations, to all the Gentiles. It is not a question here of salvation and of the union of the church in a single body with Christ, but of the gospel of the kingdom: “this gospel of the kingdom” (the gospel which Jesus preached to the Jews; not His death, which was not a gospel to the Jews, for it was an effect of their unbelief with regard to the gospel which He preached; but the testimony that the kingdom was at hand) would be announced to the Gentiles.

If the ground of all that abides, for the Christian, there is a speciality which is proper to the testimony of John the Baptist, of Christ on earth, and of the disciples in the latter days.

This fourteenth verse is taken quite alone as a fact which is to happen before the end of this age is come on earth. Here then the Lord, though He may have given warnings useful for His disciples, as Christians, in those days, takes the same starting-point as they take in their questions, and returns to the point whither their thoughts tended, without correcting anything as to this tendency. He interests Himself as to the same things; He does not own, it is true, the nation and the temple as they then existed; but He does not seek to raise their hopes to heaven. He supposes that their connections always subsist with the earth, with Israel, but according to God; as a remnant, and as having the testimony of God in the midst of all that. It is just what happened during part of their life; then that was, as it were, eclipsed by the church, but it will be fully accomplished in the latter times, at the beginning of the travail of bringing forth, which will introduce the end of the age.

Therefore, at the fifteenth verse, the Lord determines the thing plainly by a date, or at least by an event which is local, and which has a known relation with the end; and here is the second part of His discourse, where all is marked with precision. The abomination of desolation, of which Daniel has spoken, will be placed in the holy place; and here we must refer entirely to Daniel ("whoso readeth, let him understand"), that is to say, that this has reference to what will happen at Jerusalem and in those countries, in this locality definitely, and to nothing else, and that in the latter days. When this will happen, the disciples, instructed by the prophecy, are to flee. Here the hope is entirely Jewish. It is evident that it is not for me to save my life in flying from Jerusalem; that the aim of the Christian is no more that flesh should be saved, that is to say, that his life here below should be spared. In a word, they are Jews, having faith, but in Jewish circumstances, thoughts and intelligence. They were to pray to God that their flight might not be on the Sabbath day, etc.

Meanwhile, dear reader, see what tenderness, of God in the midst of these scenes of horror, which, if the hand of God was not extended in grace, should spare no flesh! See the majesty of the heavens, which deigns to think of the time that He will provide for the flight of His poor creatures and of the Sabbath which might shackle them! But here there is a very important remark to make, which is that the Lord says, Your flight, and When ye shall see, that is to say, that, although the circumstances might alter, He always regards His disciples under their Jewish character.

From the fifteenth verse of chapter 24, it is evident that the Lord addresses Himself to them as to the same as

those of whom the question is in the preceding verses: “Take heed that no one deceive you” (v. 4); “when ye, therefore, shall see” (v. 15); that is, He views His disciples as Jewish disciples in connection with the nation, as He had done towards the nation itself in the preceding chapter, verse 37, where He identifies it with the nation in the latter days, “Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.” Nevertheless, there is in the circumstances a sufficiently important difference. He supposes the death of many during the first period without date. When the abomination is there, it is a question of saving one’s fife. In these beginnings of sorrows, which have no fixed date, but which suppose Jewish disciples in Palestine, betrayed by one another and hated by the Gentiles, the hope of many is to be founded still more upon the resurrection than upon the deliverance wrought by the advent of the Messiah. The Psalms (which present to my mind the relations with the Jews, of Christ considered either as the just man, or as the King on Zion) speak either of Himself prophetically, or of the faithful remnant, animated by His Spirit with more or less intelligence, and of His circumstances in the latter days.

Now, the book of Psalms is divided into five parts, which treat each of a different subject. In the first the hope of resurrection is very frequently found there; in the others, almost more; in all is seen the expectation of deliverance; but in the first this expectation is passed beyond, which has hardly place in the others. Now, from the beginning of the second part, the Spirit of Christ, in the remnant, speaks as having been forced to abandon Jerusalem, of which the remembrance is precious to

Him. He appeals from it to God against the Gentiles in Psalm 42; and against the ungodly Jews in Psalm 43.

It is very evident that the disciples, to whom Jesus addressed Himself, while they had, at the moment of His speaking with them, Jewish hopes, enjoyed at a later period the hope of the resurrection, and more beyond; but He speaks to them here according to their actual position before Him, and, as Prophet, He declares to them what concerned the faithful remnant of the people called to bear testimony, as in the preceding chapter He had shewn them the fate of the nation. The disciples were those “of understanding,” of Daniel 11 and I2f who are called here to understand that of which the intelligence is promised them in those chapters.

The warnings for the time of testimony are then given to the end of the thirteenth verse, and, having announced the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom among all nations; at least among all those of the prophetic (habitable) earth, we have from the fifteenth the instructions of Jesus for the time of the last twelve hundred and sixty days. Then will the false Christs seduce, if it were possible, even the elect; but the coming of the Son of man will be hike the lightning, for where the carcase is, there, as the flight of the eagle, will fall the judgment of God.

Here ends the second part, which treats of the great tribulation at Jerusalem, and of the dangers which accompany it even for the very elect, dangers to which the advent of the Son of man puts an end. The circumstances of that time, when it shall come, will furnish a date and signs. Moreover, and as a general result, immediately after the tribulation of those days,

all the powers of heaven shall be shaken; and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven. Many warnings had been given to the disciples, but no sign to the people on earth; it had even been refused: the sign of the Son of man would now be in heaven at His coming. The generation having been already rejected, it would have been out of place to have given it a sign; it was too late, for it was about to be judged: as the tribes of the land (of Israel) shall mourn, according to Zechariah 12, and shall see the Lord come in the clouds of heaven. Every eye shall see Him; but here I believe that Jesus restricts Himself to Israel, I do not say to Jerusalem: they are all the tribes of the land of Israel who are called to mind here. But this will not be all: He will gather together the elect19 of this people from the four winds, from all the countries where they will be scattered in those days. Two things, as to the epoch, are here distinctly marked by the Lord:

Firstly, the circumstances of which He has just been speaking. When all these things shall come to pass, His coming and the end of the age will be at the door; secondly, the actual generation of the Jews shall not pass away till all these things should be accomplished. There are circumstances for them that understand. As to dates, if the day or hour be inquired of, the Father alone knew them.20 As to the generation, I doubt not but that the Lord uses this expression morally, which is constantly done in the word. “He shall go to the generation of his fathers, they shall never see light,” Ps. 49:19. “A seed shall serve him, it shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation,” Ps. 22:30. See specially Deuteronomy 32, which precisely treats of this subject, in verses 5 and 20.

If the day is not known save to the Father alone, that accords, I think, with what is said in Psalm no: “Sit thou at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool.” The Lord, who expects all here below as servant of His Father, has received but this word at His mouth, “until.” Nothing shall fail, no uncertainty in the events, not one word that has proceeded out of His mouth shall fall to the ground. As to the moment, it would be as in the days of Noah; that is to say, a sudden judgment, and unexpected on the earth; they should be overtaken by it, when they should least expect it. Yet the Lord will know how to distinguish them, and to leave those whom He should think worthy, even though two men should be in the same field, or two women at the same mill.

It was then for the disciples, instructed beforehand, to watch, for they did not know in what hour their Lord would come.

But it may be asked, how it is that the Lord identifies His apostles with the rebellious Jews, who will be overtaken by the judgment; and since the church is to ascend to Him in the air, how can it happen that two shall be found in the same field in the day of the Son of man? It is true, this will not happen for the church, as it is very certain that it did not happen for the apostles to whom these words were addressed; but in this discourse the Lord speaks to no one individually, but to classes, to certain categories of people. We have an evident proof of it in verse 39 of chapter 23 touching the Jews, and in verse 15 of chapter 24 touching the disciples. “When ye shall see the abomination of desolation,” etc. It is certain that the disciples had never seen it; it is even certain, from the book of Daniel, that it refers to the last days.

The comparison of the twenty first verse with the commencement of chapter 12 of Daniel, then the date attached to this event at the end of this last chapter, demonstrate it with the plainest evidence.

Thus then, in the twenty-third chapter, as here, the Lord speaks of certain classes of persons: and here, of the faithful remnant of the Jews. It is true that those who composed this faithful remnant at that time were in the enjoyment of privileges far superior to the position here in question; but the Lord is not speaking of this now. He is occupied with the remnant, and He could speak to His apostles under this aspect, because they were in that moment the remnant, and put by the nation in the presence of the rejection of the Messiah, whatever may have been the superior privileges which afterwards they may have individually enjoyed.

All this supposes a gospel of the kingdom, specially preached in the last times; as moreover it supposes persons who will be persecuted for Christ's name's sake, but who, at the same time, will be more or less identified with Jewish hopes, who will even be of the Jewish remnant; and I believe the word tells us so. I see, at the end of Isaiah and of Daniel, chosen ones distinguished from the mass of those who shall be spared; but they are Jews, they occupy themselves with Jewish interests, and they will enjoy the deliverance of this people and the blessings which will result from it on earth. See Dan. 10, 11, 12. Isa. 65, 66. It appears that some will be put to death, whether during the period called the beginning of sorrows, or during the last tribulation.

It is evident that these two classes will have part in the first resurrection; which is also what the Apocalypse,

chapter 20, shews clearly. Also, as a principle, this ought to be sufficiently clear. We have said that the same thing is repeatedly found in the Psalms, only much more (as least as a hope) before the great tribulation of the last half-week. But this changes not the destiny of the greater part of these saints. It seems to me (but here I do not go father than that), that those who have been at this epoch faithful witnesses, but without being put to death, will be particularly identified with the Lord Jesus, as King of the Jews upon earth. They will have been, according to the measure given them, that which He Himself was upon earth; that is, a witness in the midst of a people who rejected Him. Of this the Psalms bear the imprint. Only we must add, as a fact, the testimony of the kingdom to the Gentiles; for, if there is place for mercy, the Lord could not strike without a testimony having been previously borne. Until now this preaching has not been assigned to the remnant; it was given only as a sign, as that which is to happen before the end of the age comes, and the Son of man comes down upon the earth; but it is not said that it should be the work of the Jewish remnant. It is a sign which is given them.

Definitively we have the commencement of the sorrows, and the counsels and warnings proper to this period; the time of the great tribulation when the abomination of desolation should be set up in the holy place, and the special dangers of that terrible moment; the overthrowing of all the powers of the heavens, the appearing of the Son of man, and the gathering together of the Jews dispersed in all the world. Or, if you will take the thing farther back, the Jews are put aside, and the principles on which the relations of God, whether with them or with the Gentiles, shall be renewed, are in

chaps. 14, 15; then in 16 the church; in 17 the glory of the advent of the Son of man; the position of grace and lowliness that Christ took, and that His were to take in the meantime, end of chapter 17, 18; and in general all the principles of the kingdom established by faith, and the ways of God in this respect, to the twenty-eighth verse of chapter 20. It is in this part (and therefore I have made this summary) that we have the individual portion of the apostles, that is, at the end of chapter 19; then the judgment of the nation, or if you will of that generation, in chapters 21 to 23; the exposition of all that concerned the remnant, in chapter 24.

But this leads our divine Master to consider the remnant under another aspect, that the disciples scarce understood then, that is, its relations no longer with Israel and the hopes of this people, but with Himself; in other words, to consider this remnant as charged with His service, as the retinue of His joy, come forth to await His return, or finally, as charged with His interests here below in His absence. This is what follows from chap. 24:45, to 25:30. In the first case, it does but present the position and the effect of fidelity during His absence, and the manner in which unbelief would identify itself with the state of heart which puts off the thought of His return. If, during the absence of the Master, a true service is yielded by the wise and faithful servant (it is not a question here of “good”) who keeps his place to accomplish, in care bestowed upon those who compose the household,21 that which was entrusted him in the house, blessed is that servant; at the time of the return of the Master, he will be made ruler over all His goods. Here this is a great principle of service to which the apostles were called—true for their service in

Christianity, and applicable also for each of us in his place. But the position and the principle only are laid down here. If there was infidelity, if the servant put off the thought of the return of the Master, and went on his way with those who made themselves drunken in the world, he should be counted among the hypocrites and taken in an hour when he least expected it.

But the Lord pursues farther this general principle, and brings us back to the kingdom of the heavens. At that time here is that to which it would be like. It is not here the church, properly so-called, for the Lord could not present the church as the church in this manner; that is, He could not, in presenting the church as such, compare it to virgins who were in the attitude of waiting, as the retinue of the marriage supper of the Lord, with a bride quite different from the church, and the latter acting no other part than that of the companions of the marriage supper. But the state of the kingdom at this time may very well be compared to such circumstances: in effect, when the Lord will come as Son of man, to execute judgment against the wicked servant, and against Israel, and to receive Jerusalem and the Jewish people as His own, then the kingdom of heaven might be regarded in this point of view; there will be persons who will go out to meet Him; there was that which represented the kingdom. It was not a question of sowing, nor of buying fields, nor of separating good fish; nor was it any more a question of the activity of the kingdom, but of the conduct of those who, having been called, were gone out to meet the Bridegroom. The matter in hand here is not a bride, but the condition of those who wait for the return of the Bridegroom.22 And this is what had become of it; the expectation of the Bridegroom was

lost: the virgins, at first, had acted after this principle; they could not abandon this position, however unfaithful they might have been to that which they had taken.

Here it will be asked, Does the Lord speak of the church? Is it meant by that, Do these exhortations and these parables apply to you who are members of it? I answer, assuredly so. But the explanation of the word does not stop here. Church is a word which is of all importance. If we search out the use of it in the epistles, we shall see that it is not found in those of Peter, and only accidentally in that of James, and once in 3 John 3, in speaking of the conduct of an individual here below. In the Apocalypse, it is a question of particular churches but never of the church, save in the expression “The bride says, Come.” In a word, Paul alone treats of this subject and employs this word, applying it to the unity of the members of Christ, to one sole church, or to one only body. Here we have: The kingdom of heaven shall be like, etc.

The church presents always the idea of a body, on earth during the period of her trial, but united to Christ on high; entirely for Him alone, separated to be His, as a wife to her husband. The kingdom of heaven supposes men on the earth, the government of God exercised over a certain state of things, the reign of heaven which continues the course of government of things here below, although in new circumstances; not in the same manner as in Israel: a government limited in its application, which puts on a particular form, until Christ comes, because He does not yet judge; and this is what gives place, He having been rejected, to the specialities contained in these parables. Nevertheless all those who recognise the authority of Christ are here under their

responsibility. Perhaps, in certain cases, they are the same persons as those who compose the church; but they are looked at in another point of view.

Here then the kingdom would be like virgins gone forth to meet a bridegroom who comes to the house of his bride. He supposes them gone forth; but alas! while the bridegroom delays His coming, they sleep and are awakened at midnight by this cry: “Behold the bridegroom.” What characterised the state of the kingdom, is, that all had forgotten their vocation; it was not that there were no faithful ones; the wise virgins had their oil in their vessels. But all, wise or foolish in the kingdom, whether the sincere and pious, or whether they deceived themselves, all had lost the sense of their vocation. This great truth, the coming of the Master, had its influence; they are awakened, but to be separated by the arrival and the judgment of the Master. Time enough had been given for the trial of their state, but it was no longer the time to get provided with oil. The return of the Lord, as to our service, is always judgment, and not grace. And here we see that it is not the church as bride, for He takes us with Himself at His advent, as His bride; crowning the work of His grace in power of life and fulness of acceptance.

But we shall find that the return of Christ here below, His manifestation, is always matter of judgment and responsibility for Christians as for others. Our rapture whensoever it may come to pass (I am not discussing that now) is always grace and full favour common to the whole church. And it is because His return is judgment that He adds “Watch”; for when He shall be there, it will no longer be the time of grace.

In the first parable we have the contrast between him who served the master humbly, and the heart which said, He delayeth His coming; in that of the virgins, the effect of this delay which should eventually take place, an effect which should be manifested even with the faithful; namely, that the kingdom should be characterised by the complete forgetfulness of the Master's return. However, the great difference was the possession of the oil of grace hidden in the heart, the Spirit of God.

For, in fact, all this would be like a man who, going to a distant country, trusts his goods to his servants, according to their ability; then, after a long interval, he returns. That is to say, the question is as to the fidelity of the servants, when they are left (to outward appearance) to themselves, and that during a long time, so that their heart is put to the proof to see whether it is truly the Master's, if they identify themselves with His interests when there is no appearance of His return; or if they forget Him, as Israel at Sinai, who believed that it was all over with Moses. But here pay attention, that it is not simply the fact of being ready in grace, but the activity which confidence in the Lord inspires, the activity of service in love of persons identified with the interests of Christ, seeking but that, and seeking it with the zeal imparted by that love, not in His presence directed by His eye, but in His absence; in the intelligence and activity which the Spirit gives, and with a knowledge of His thoughts sufficiently intimate to be able to act in His absence. The servants are left to themselves; I do not mean by this that they can do these things without grace. The contrary is sufficiently demonstrated by the case of the wicked servant. But they are placed under

responsibility; their condition is put to the trial; all that the Master does is to trust His goods to them. We shall see what they are by the result. Moreover, the question here is not of the moral conduct of the servant, as in the first parable (chap. 24:45), nor of fidelity to a position in which he was actually placed; but of intelligence, of activity, of the good-will of a servant, who has for his spring of action nothing but the mark of confidence which His Master gives him in committing His goods to him.23 Let us say a few words more on the parable of the talents. Here the servant is called “good and faithful.” It is that which occurs during the absence of Christ. He has delivered His goods to His servants; if they have understood His grace, if they have been touched by this mark of His confidence, they will have laboured with that which was given them, or else they will have wronged the character of their Master, not to have had an entire confidence in Him. There was only faithfulness, it is true, in the conduct of the two who had traded; for, why commit goods to them, if it was not to improve them? But the Lord keeps account of it; what He had confided was but a little thing in His eyes; but they had known Him and had been faithful. There was but one heart between Him and them, and now, at His return, they must enter into His joy; one heart in service, and one heart in joy. Also, “many things” were confided to them in His kingdom at the hour of His glory.

It is a sweet picture; the heart of the Lord trusts in them for His glory in His absence, and their hearts trust in Him for the result; and at His return their hearts are united in the joy. The heart of a servant on one side, and that of a Master on the other, doubtless, yet of a Master one-hearted with them, whose joy was to bless them,

and to extend the sphere of their confidence according to the glory which He will have then acquired. As to His joy, they are to share it. The third servant does not lose the inheritance only; he is cast outside; he had never known his Master. This is what was wanting to him. The circumstances of the service might be the means of proving it, but there was the ground of the affair. Alas! for the details; it is that which happens too often to real Christians, and there is always the history of our failures in our service—we have not known the Master. Confidence in Him was wanting; now, can one know Him without confiding in Him? Nevertheless, to have to do with Christ takes away even the intelligence of ordinary duty from those who do not love Him, because the heart is soured by the consciousness of ill-will, and only regards Jesus as a severe judge. He will have acted toward us according to our faith. Alas, how little it is! but at least the Master is good.

In these three parables we see the history of what occurs as regards those who profess to be His, during His absence and at the time of His return, with respect to their responsibility. Next, I will only add here, that I do not believe that these three parables can be applied to the special testimony of the kingdom which will be borne at the end. The first only speaks of the charge and responsibility in the house towards the people whom the Master had left there. The second does not at all speak of this activity of grace, but of the condition of persons already called to wait for the Lord, the Bridegroom who was to come. The third speaks of those to whom the Lord delivers His gifts when He goes away, telling them that He will return after a long interval: then they will enter into the joy of their Master Himself. This last is not

a likening of the kingdom of heaven, because it is not a state of things, a complete whole, the object of the care or of the judgments of God; but an individual responsibility, according to that which had been entrusted to each, and in which each also will receive according to what he had done under this responsibility, and according to the confidence that his Master had in him, and that which he himself had in the goodness of his Master.

There is no more a question here of the Jews in the latter days, at least in these two last parables; in the last, above all, this is evident; for it is about those to whom Christ entrusted His goods on His departure, and during the long interval which elapses before His return. As to the second, it is a likening of the kingdom of heaven; and the Jews will not go out with intelligence to meet the Lord, nor afterwards slumber in the midst of affliction, forgetting—even the wise—that He may come. Such is at least what it seems to me to be, and its connection with the parable that follows confirms this thought. That there is something analogous, in certain respects, I believe; that is, there will be those of greater intelligence, who will be morally separated from the others, and who will understand. But I do not think that the conditions of the parable can be coherently applied to them. Their state had already been the subject of the Lord's instructions, in speaking of Jerusalem and of the latter days.

We come now to the third part of the discourse: the Lord arrived. This is what our precious Master announces. When the Son of man24 (for it is always in this character that He is presented, when He speaks definitely of His presence here, and not merely in that of Messiah, a title

in which He had been rejected), when the Son of man, I say, shall come in His glory,25 it will not be merely an instantaneous act of appearing. “He will sit upon the throne of his glory”; there will be something permanent there; “and before him shall be gathered all the nations, and he shall separate them, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats.” The Gentiles will be thus judged. I do not believe that it is necessary to prove at greater length that what is called the last judgment is not the question here. The Son of man is returned in His glory; He is not sitting on the great white throne, from whose face the heavens and the earth flee away; Rev. 20:11. He is King now; He is about to reign, and not to give up the kingdom. He judges only the living Gentiles, for here there is no question of resurrection. He judges them on a principle inapplicable to the immense majority of those who will appear when God will judge the secrets of the heart; namely, according to the manner in which they shall have received certain messengers of Christ whom He calls His brethren. It is clear this does not apply to those who have lived in paganism before Christ, nor to the immense majority of those who have lived between His advent and His death. In a word, it is Christ who, as King here below, judges the Gentiles that shall be then on the earth—the nations.

Let us observe by the way here His tenderness to the Jewish nation. We have trouble to find the judgment of this nation in these chapters!26 He speaks indeed of the end of the age, but rather of tribulation than of judgment, of shortening those days for His elect. At His appearing all the tribes of the earth mourn, and He gathers together the elect (Jews) from the four winds. There is chastisement, it is true, but it terminates in

blessing: the heart of Christ is busied with the remnant. He had said to the Jews, “Ye shall not see me henceforth until ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.” His heart turns in blessing towards the chosen people. Ungodly Jerusalem had rilled His eyes with tears, but here He puts an end to her chastisement. There is one who has known to say, “How long?”27 Compare Psalm 74:9. The fact is, that the gifts and calling of God are without repentance, that is to say, that God does not change in His counsels with Israel. “In measure, when it shooteth forth, thou wilt debate with it; he stayeth his rough wind in the day of the east wind.” Read the whole passage, Isaiah 27:6-9; for “this is all the fruit to take away his sin.”

Will there then be no cutting off? Not in the absolute sense. This is what will happen, as may be seen in the last chapters of Isaiah and elsewhere (compare the end of Zech. 13); the majority of the nation will join itself to the Gentiles and will be idolatrous. The unclean spirit which had gone out will return with seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and the last state of that generation shall be worse than the first. They will be joined with Antichrist, and will receive him who will come in his own name. They will thus be the cruel nation (and not the godly or holy nation) of Psalm 43, and they will perish with the apostate Gentiles. The indignation and the chastisement having, along with the testimony of God, separated the remnant, they will no more be counted as the nation, and He will “make of a remnant a strong nation.”

Where then, in that which the Lord says here, is found positive judgment? It is contained, almost concealed, in these words: “For wheresoever the carcase is, there will

the eagles be gathered”; a passage which makes allusion, I think, to an expression of the book of Job 39:30, and treats the Jews, who have thus united themselves with the enemies of God, as lost and dead, without wishing to name them anew. It is but a corpse united with the Gentiles, who, haughty as they are, will be judged on earth; for as it is said elsewhere of Babylon: “Strong is the Lord God who judgeth her,” likewise strong is He who judgeth them, however they may have despised Him.

Here, in order to make the application of the passage precise, Christ does not merely come, but it is told us that, when He will come, He will sit upon the throne of His glory; whilst it will be as lightning that He will come to put an end to the tribulation and the desolation which the abomination has caused. He had set the faithful servant over all His goods: those who have their portion with the hypocrites, the wicked and slothful servants have been cast outside when they waited not for Him; but here Jesus takes His place upon His throne. There is no more a question nor a doubt about His rights nor about the submission of all to the ends of the earth. He is now “the King” (v. 34).

There are in this scene three classes of persons: the goats, the sheep, and His brethren. The judgment of the two first classes depends on their conduct toward the third. To have done these things to one of His brethren is to have done them to Himself; not to have done them to one of the least of these is not to have done them to Himself. The “brethren,” I have no doubt, will be the remnant who will have preached the gospel of the kingdom among the Gentiles; the reception given to those messengers decides the lot of those who appear

now in judgment. No more do I doubt that they are Jews who will bear this testimony, and whom Jesus calls His brethren, at this time; as those to whom He spoke, and that, after His resurrection, He calls His brethren, according to Psalm 22. I know very well that the Gentiles were grafted in later, but the Lord speaks according to that which resulted already from the fact that the disciples followed Him at that time rejected; and He employs this expression to mark those who among the Jews should be in the latter days in a kindred position of testimony. In principle, the disciples might apply it to themselves, and the Lord would have them know well that one day He should be King, and all the Gentiles should be forced to appear in judgment before Him, the rejected Messiah, and that they should enjoy all that which the Jews hoped as to the glory of their Messiah.

The brethren of Jesus, according to the constant language of the passages where this expression is employed, are the believing Jews, the remnant that believed in the Messiah (it is clear that all the Gentile believers have been admitted to the same privilege); but in this passage Jesus occupies Himself with those who surrounded Him, to encourage and direct them. As King He judges on earth. Those among the Gentiles who received well the brethren of Jesus enjoy, as blessed of the Father, the kingdom He had prepared for them from the foundation of the world; having received the gospel of the kingdom, they enjoy the effect of their faith, namely, the kingdom itself. Those who preached it, having been in the position of Jesus in testimony, will be recognised as His brethren in the blessing. But He is now King come on earth, so that His brethren are

recognised here below; those put to death will have part in the first resurrection, but such is not the subject treated of here. The King is on earth, the nations on earth; so that there is nothing which can make it supposed that the brethren spoken of here are of heaven.28 There will be those, but here it appears to me that they are rather the messengers of the kingdom, who have been preserved in spite of all the difficulties of the time.

This kingdom is in the counsels of the Father from the foundation of the world; the church is chosen to be the spouse of Christ before the foundation of the world. The sheep are not called children, but only blessed of the Father. They enjoy eternal life, as those who refused to receive the brethren suffer everlasting pains. It is the final judgment of the Gentiles who will be on earth when Christ shall have established His throne there. Once more, it is not a question here of the resurrection.

Chapters 26, 27.

After having given us the future prospect of the remnant in all respects, the Spirit resumes the history of the events, and presents us with the recital, at once painful and touching, but for us infinitely precious, of the sufferings and of the resurrection of the Saviour. I do not think, dear brethren, of entering into many details of these chapters, because that which is here demanded is adoration, is the heart, rather than exegesis. I will only point out some particular points which belong to the character of this Gospel. And, first, some words on what the Lord says in giving the cup. It is good to remember that we eat the given body of Christ. One with Him in His glorious state, it is not of that we partake in the

supper. Enjoying vitally this position infinitely exalted, we remember the sufferings which have purchased it for us; our hearts, our consciences, our souls, are nourished with the broken body; it is to Jesus dead that our thoughts recur, and to a love more powerful than death. If the body had not been broken, as Gentiles we should even have remained strangers as regards the promises, and sinners destitute of all hope.

A living Messiah was the crown of glory for the Jews; but, if He is lifted up from the earth, He draws all men. His broken body is the door for sinners from the Gentiles. On this the heart of the Christian is nourished, not merely as on manna come down from heaven, which typifies Jesus, a man upon earth, nor on Jesus in the heavens (where we are one with Him)—it is there the hidden manna; but on this devoted victim of propitiation which I see brought to the altar, and there sacrificed, slain for us—a victim full of love and of devotedness.

I pause before this mysterious scene, where He all alone (for no man could be there save to bend his head and adore) where the victim of propitiation, the man Jesus, presents Himself before the face of Him who, in His offended majesty, comes out to take cognizance of sin, in order that we might find on the tracks of the righteousness of God, which has burst forth and is accomplished, nothing but an infinite and immutable love: the love of the Father, enhanced by the accomplishment of the eternal righteousness to His glory. It is then the precious Saviour, humbled to death, that we have here, His body given (and one could not go lower down), and His blood shed out of His body. In that manifestly it is not a question of Jesus, such as He is at the present time; for He is glorified. This natural life He

has left for us. He only presents it to God as a thing already given elsewhere; but He speaks here of a double effect of this blood which He has shed; first, He speaks of it as the foundation, or at least the seal, of the new covenant; and, secondly, as the foundation of the remission of the sins of many. That is, the basis of the new covenant is now laid, and, moreover, it is not a question of an act which relates to Jesus only to shew His obedience: this blood is efncacious for the sins of others. That does not merely secure new privileges, which one enjoys as a Christian, but procures the pardon of the sins of many of the Jews—not only so, but, in a general manner, of many. As to the new covenant, I will say some words here.

The old covenant, it is clear, is the covenant made with the Jews at Sinai. The Gentiles are not there for anything. The new one refers to the old; it will be established really with Judah and Israel, according to the prophecy of Jeremiah (chap. 31:31-34). What then have we to do with the new alliance, we other Gentiles, may we ask ourselves? This is the answer. It is clear that the covenant itself treats with the Jews and with Israel, but upon principles of grace, and based upon blood of perfect efficacy before God. Now, for the moment, Israel is put aside as a nation. It enjoys no covenant.

What then is the state of things with respect to the covenant? It is that the Mediator of the covenant has shed His blood, and thus the basis of the covenant is laid: it is confirmed and established immutable before God. Christ is ascended on high, and we are one with Him, enjoying all the effect which is essentially attached to His person and to His position. We have the blood of the covenant. Those who are called to it exercise the

ministry of the new covenant. Our position is to be united with the Mediator of the new covenant, and to enjoy all the privileges which He enjoys Himself, as having it established in His blood; though the covenant is not formed with us, it is established in Him before God, and we, we are in Him here below. What is the consequence of it? We drink of blood. If a Jew had drunk of blood under old covenant, it was death: could a man be nourished on death? It is the fruit of sin, it is his condemnation, it is the wrath of God, as the blood in the body was the life; and a Jew had no right to that. But Christ has suffered death. And can the Christian be nourished on death? Yes; it is salvation, the death of sin, the infinite proof of love. It is his life, the peace of his soul, the deliverance from sin, before God. What a difference! We drink of His blood, the proof of salvation and of grace, and the source of life. Nevertheless it is Jesus dead, of whom it is a question here.

There is in Hebrews 13:20, another expression to which allusion may be made: God has “brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant.” This shews us that Christ Himself is above, and has been raised according to the efficaciousness of the blood that He has shed to satisfy the glory of God. He, the only and beloved Son of the Father, charged Himself with our responsibility and our sins, and thus with the glory of God in this respect; and if this glory had not been completely satisfied, He could not evidently either rise again, or appear before Him whose majesty required that nothing should fail to the work. But He accomplished this work gloriously, and in that the Son of man has been glorified, and God glorified in Him; and

He is ascended on high, not only as Son of God, but according to the efficaciousness of His work, in virtue of which He appears before the Father, the everlasting covenant being thus established in His blood. The question here is not of an old or a new covenant, which refers to particular circumstances, but of the intrinsic and essential worth of the blood of Christ. But perhaps I go too far away from our Gospel; I allow myself to be drawn away by the importance of the subject, and also by the precious worth and glory of the work of Him who has so much loved us.

I return now to the more humble precincts of my labour. We see here that the Spirit declares the value of the blood in a general way; it is shed for many for the remission of sins. The Gospel which treats of the kingdom, and of the Messiah in the Jewish point of view, must necessarily shew that the death of Christ had another aspect. In Luke, where this distinction was not obligatory, because of the non-Jewish character of his Gospel, it is said: “My blood which is shed for you.” We have then the blood of the new covenant and the remission of sins. The disciples were to drink of it, as they were also to eat of His given body. Such is their portion: to be nourished on the death of Jesus, and to shew it till He come.

Until then, He would drink no more with them of the fruit of the vine. They would be nourished on Him, but He would not be nourished with them. The fruit of the vine is the sign of social joy, “wine which cheereth the heart of God and man,” which they continually sprinkled in the burnt-oflferings and the peace-offerings, that is to say, of a sweet savour. (See Num. 15:5, 7, 10, where the question is not of offering for sin.) Now, of this fruit of

the vine He would drink no more, whilst His disciples should drink abundantly of His death, the true drink, but a drink of separation from sin, and of Christ also, as regards His personal presence; the heavens must receive Him until the time of restitution of all things of which the prophets had spoken. Thus His social life with His disciples here below was closed; it would no more even be renewed after the same manner. They would enter spiritually into the power of His death, and would be one day anew with Him in joy in the kingdom of His Father.

In Luke, this is expressed in a manner a little different. It is said: “I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God shall come”; and of the passover: “I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God.” Here the things are much more left in general forms, because it is not occupied with the order of the dispensations of God on earth, but with the moral principles which are bound up with the introduction in grace of the new man.

In Matthew 26:53 we have a circumstance which belongs particularly to this Gospel; it was just the right of Jesus, as Messiah, the Son of God, to have angels at His disposal. In chapter 27:25 we have the solemn and frightful execration which this poor blinded people pronounces on itself, and which still weighs upon it to this day—an execration which will nevertheless be blotted out by grace, and the power of this same blood which they shed in their blindness, and which refers specially to the subject of this Gospel: “His blood be on us, and on our children! “Terrible words! O what then the heart of blinded man! Their entire apostasy from their position is more plainly delineated in John, who,

besides, always presents them thus, “We have no king but Caesar,” say they. Here it is their chastisement, as a nation, from the hand of God, which they invoke upon their head. They are owned in chastisement. Compare Isaiah 40.

If the reader compare the account Luke gives us of this moment so solemn to us all, he will find that there they are the moral circumstances which are related; here, those which refer to the degradation of the Messiah. The daughters of Jerusalem lament over Him; His prayer for His murderers, the conversion of the thief are found in Luke. If we examine John, we find the details of the sufferings omitted. The Spirit has there kept that which brings out the dignity of Him who traversed in grace, and according to the glory of His person, whatever might be otherwise His humiliation, those painful but precious moments,29 precious for the present, as well as for eternity; for it is with the glory of His person, as Son of God, that the Gospel of John is specially occupied.

I will not pause longer on these circumstances, but I invite my brethren to meditate upon them. The more we are penetrated with them, the more also our poor and feeble hearts will appreciate the Saviour whom we love, but whom no one knows as He is worthy of being known. There are yet, in this chapter 27, the circumstances of verses 52, 53; circumstances important in this respect, that they bear testimony to the manner in which the Spirit of God treats Jerusalem, as being the holy city, when it is completely abandoned as regards the judgment of God. It may be forgotten for a moment, trampled under the feet of the Gentiles; but if the eye of God takes cognizance of it, in His eyes it is ever the holy city. The bodies of the saints come out of their graves

after the resurrection of Jesus, and enter into the holy city. The death and resurrection of Jesus had abolished for heaven the middle wall of partition; but this does not hinder it (though, as regards His government, God had given up to chastisement the holy city, because it was not holy) from always keeping in His eyes that position; for He has chosen Jerusalem, and He will not repent of it. The same thing is seen in Daniel (compare especially chapter 9): faith thinks and speaks always thus.

Chapter 28.

We have in this chapter the account of the service which the angel renders to the Messiah, as also some remarkable circumstances to point out. The evangelist in no way occupies himself with the greater part of the details of the forty days that ran out after the resurrection. Each Gospel is the deposit of what refers to a special aim of the Holy Spirit, for the glory of Christ is diverse.

The only thing recounted by the Lord here is His interview in Galilee with His disciples, an interview which sets them in the position of testimony which He left them as Messiah, now the depository of all power in heaven and on earth. The invention of the unbelief of the Jews to keep their minds still in blindness is related to us. This is all that remained to tell of the Jews as a nation, so that if we take away the last feature, we have only this: the angel says to the disciples to go into Galilee, that they may there see the Lord. Jesus says the same thing to the women, in order that they might tell it to the disciples, now “His brethren.” There had He been continually with them during His life; there the light was to have appeared for the time of distress; there the

Messiah found a refiige at the time of the pride of Jerusalem (compare John 4 and all the history of the Gospels); the disciples were themselves of that country. All the associations of Jewish ideas, as regards the relations of the disciples with Christ in the midst of the Jewish people, were there. He had acted on Jerusalem, but this was now closed. He had been rejected. The law will go out from thence, when He shall have returned in power. “There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer”; but for the time He had done with Jerusalem as regards His Messianic testimony. Further, it must be remarked that the ascension of Jesus is not related here, but solely His relations with His disciples, relations continued after His resurrection and upon this principle, that all power is given unto Him in heaven and on earth.

The Lord has already renounced Jerusalem, saying that it should see Him no more till it repented. Jerusalem, or at least its chiefs, had cried, His blood be on us, and on our children. He takes no more cognizance of it here for the moment; in principle, His disciples were the remnant of the people. As acting from on high, He sends the gospel to Jerusalem; but it is the subject of Luke’s Gospel, and of the book of the Acts, which is the continuation of it (see Luke 24:46-53); it is there the grace of heaven, which kept to the promise of the Holy Spirit. Compare Acts i:1-9.

Here it is the power of Messiah already rejected at Jerusalem. The apostles were to go and instruct all nations, baptizing the disciples in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all that He had commanded, and He would be with the apostles even unto the end of the age. Let us examine a little their mission according to these words,

comparing it with those which were given them in the other Gospels.

Here are the terms of these diverse missions. In Mark, who bears testimony to the ministry, to the service of Christ in the gospel, it is said to them, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.” Here is the most simple, the most general mission, and it is added, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” It was quite simply the preaching of the gospel for the salvation of souls, and the judgment of those who would not believe.

Here is the mission in Luke, the gospel which gives us grace, which introduces the new man and Christ in this character, “Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, and said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.” Here it is intelligence and power, this last being the consequence of the exaltation of Jesus on high, and the disciples being bound to tarry at Jerusalem until they were endowed with it. As witnesses of Jesus, the disciples could not depart from the place of His rejection until they were linked with Jesus at the right hand of God, and thus, by the power of the Holy Ghost, bore testimony from Him, as being there above. A thing wholly new! it was the Son of man proceeding from Adam in a certain sense, but a new man and near to God: also, a new testimony is borne and recommence:

with Jerusalem—a testimony which thence shall reach men in all nations, according to the power of the Holy Ghost. It is a heavenly testimony. This, as we have said, is resumed in the Acts, God having been forced to recommence it with Paul at Antioch, because of the incredulity of Jerusalem once more reiterated.

In John 20:21, we find their mission. Jesus says to them, “Peace be unto you! As my Father has sent me, even so send I you; and when he had said this, he breathed on them and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whosesoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosesoever sins ye retain, they are retained.” Here the thing is closer. Jesus is not yet ascended on high, but He has, according to the power of the resurrection, the life of God in Him; put to death as to the flesh, quickened according to the power of God in Spirit, He communicates to them life according to the power of the Spirit. Vitally they are one spirit with Him; for it was as man that He possessed it, although He was the power of God. Thus God breathed into the nostrils of Adam, and he became a living man. Now the last Adam is a quickening Spirit, but as He, according to the power of this life, has been sent of the Father, administrator, as man, of the pardon that man quickened by Him needed to possess to be in relation with God (compare Luke 5:20, 24), so now He sent His disciples, made partakers by Him, and with Him of this life, to discharge from Him this office, to bear this pardon to men, and to render them partakers of it; a pardon which, by His death and resurrection, was now completely effected before God, and administered on earth according to the power of the Spirit of life, whether in receiving into the church those who should be saved, and who, being thus received,

possessed this pardon; or whether, in the second place, in administering discipline. This administration of pardon received and possessed, following the exercise of this discipline, by him who is the object of it, is in the hands of every man in whom Christ has breathed His Spirit according to the degree of the power of this Spirit in him. And the pardon here spoken of is not a pardon looked at as granted in heaven, but a pardon administered on earth and ratified in heaven.

The apostles did that according to the perfection of the gift of God which was granted them; but we have in the word the revelation of this so important administration, according as it has been communicated to all the saints by the order of God. First, individual charity covers thus a multitude of sins; that is, in pardoning the wrongs in my brother, his sins no more exist, with regard to the government of God, as scandals and offences in the church: before His eyes love has completely displaced them. Such is the individual privilege; but this is not yet the official administration of the thing; on the contrary, it anticipates the exercise of it.

In the examples of Ananias and Sapphira, and even of Simon the magician, sins were retained. They were remitted—I say not in the same manner, but de facto—to three thousand persons on the day of Pentecost. In 2 Corinthians 2:10 we have the sins remitted by the apostle and by the church, officially, in the exercise of discipline. That is, we have, as to this pardon, the apostolic mission, distinct from the church—a mission specially confided to the apostles, as delegated of Christ with His authority; and the administration of this pardon, communicated to a church without

intermediary, the church counselled and directed in this administration, but accomplishing the act herself.

I should not have enlarged so much on this subject, if this passage did not present a difficulty which often pre-occupies the mind, and of which adversaries lay hold while the faithful do not very well know how to answer. It is then not only the pardon of sin granted by God Himself, according to a truth revealed by the Holy Spirit; it is an administration of this pardon confided to man, a pardon thus revealed on earth, confirmed perhaps, and sometimes demonstrated, by miracles, or accompanied by a deliverance or a chastening sent from God. It was an administration confided to the apostles, who were sent to gather the church introduced into her privileges by this pardon; and afterwards exercised by the church herself to maintain her members in the holy enjoyment of these privileges, and at the same time to sustain the glory of God. In the fact of chastening, where the question is neither of pardon in the sense of which we speak, nor of the official act of pardon, but simply of the efficacy of prayer; compare James 5:14, 15.

I do not in any wise touch the question, What has been the effect of the actual state of the church on this administration? Apostolic delegates of this kind, there are absolutely no more. As to all the rest, it is a question of intelligence and spiritual power; but it is important to understand enough of these things to be ready to answer the pretension to forgive sins, of men who would allege, perhaps without scruple, the verses of James, of which we speak, which do in no wise belong to them.

Doubtless, God, by His grace, will keep the simple from such pretensions, and that from other motives; but it is

well to have an answer. The Lord has meant to say something, and if we know what He meant to say, men cannot lead us astray and shut our mouths to make us fall into their snares. There is pardon administered here below, whether by apostles, or by the whole body; and a priest or a minister has nothing at all to do therein. If he is wise enough to give spiritual counsels, it is well; but it is not he who acts. The Holy Spirit is needed for this act. “Receive ye the Holy Spirit; to whomsoever,” etc. The judgment of a body which flows not from that is perhaps a very suitable act for a human society, but which is not pronounced on the part of God; and if one speaks of acting by the Holy Spirit, this will be demonstrated in other things also.

I return now to the mission given in Matthew, having only considered the others in order the better to seize the difference. It is not here then the Son of God, sent from the Father, who sends, according to the power of life which is in Him, disciples to whom He can communicate the energy of this life, that they may accomplish their mission according to His heart of love filled by the Father. Neither is it Jesus, minister of the gospel, servant of all, sending those who are to replace Him, that every creature may hear the good news, Which can now be addressed to them in His name who has fulfilled all things—such is the Jesus of Mark.

Neither is it the Son of man, raised to the right hand of the Father, who is about to give the Holy Spirit of power, in order that His sent ones may answer, in their work, to the exalted position that man occupies in His person (compare Psalm 68; Eph. 4), and who has already30 opened their understanding that they may understand the scriptures, or the revelation of the thoughts of God,

in the economies and dispensations on which this work and this presence of the Holy Spirit will cast their light. That is the exalted Christ of Luke, giver of the Holy Spirit.

But here, in Matthew, we have a rejected crucified Messiah, who, for the moment, abandons Jerusalem to its folly and its sin, and who, now risen, sends to the nations the message that His death, His resurrection, and the gift of the Father to Him risen, have enabled Him to put into the mouth of His disciples a message (no longer suitable to the Jews, who have already rejected the subject of it, their Messiah). It is no longer simply the only true God in His unity, surrounded by a people which should have kept this good and precious deposit. Now, other things in God had been put in the light for men, things which opened the door to the Gentiles, or rather which could be sent to them. Christ could not be there without the Son being named, and if the Son, then the Father and the Holy Spirit (the Holy Spirit, who acted with efficacy in the communication of the knowledge of the Father and of the Son); and, on the other hand, both the Father and the Holy Spirit had been necessarily manifested in Christ and His acts, while He lived and acted on earth; for in being Messiah, He was also Son, and it was because He called Himself such that the Jews rejected Him.

Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, all this could be sent in grace to the Gentiles. The disciples were to make them know the Messiah and the God of the Jews in this manner, or to make them enter into relation with God under this name, as by circumcision the Jews were put in relation with the Eternal or Jehovah; and this because all power was now given to

Jesus in heaven and upon earth. Here is then (the rights of the Messiah being rejected by the Jews) not the establishment of the throne of David, whose influence should spread over all the earth, but He who, depository of all governing power in heaven and on earth, sent His disciples to put the Gentiles (nations) in relation with God, according to the revelation of that which was no longer hidden behind the veil from the eyes of the blind Jews, the Trinity of persons which faith recognised by means of Jesus: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.31 But this mission depends on the power of Jesus as being given, and is to subject the nations that they may be His disciples, according to the claims that this power conferred on Him. It was a mission belonging yet to the age, which, though the Messiah had been rejected, was not yet terminated; it looked consequently at the submission of the Gentiles to the Messiah, in a new way, it is true, and left Jerusalem aside, because it had rejected the Messiah; but it supposes a going forward in the ways of God towards the end of this age, before which the gospel is to be preached in the whole habitable world. Those who carried this message might have higher privileges, which would be made evident when the Lord would be removed, and their first testimony rejected; those same messengers, individually, might be charged, from the commencement, with the message of the grace which was in Jesus, according to the other forms of mission that we have seen in the three other Gospels: they might preach the gospel to every creature, beginning at Jerusalem as representatives of Him who was exalted at the right hand of God, or remit the sins, on the part of Him who said, “Peace be unto you”; but it is none the less true that the speciality of the mission found in this Gospel is

a mission to the nations from Jesus, speaking as the rejected Messiah, who has now all power, leaving aside Jerusalem, and mentioning the continuation of this age; promising to be with the witnesses to the end of this age, and saying nothing, either of the church, or of heaven, or of the Holy Spirit given, or of the deliverance from this present evil age, or of the privilege of not being of this world as the Son of God was not of it; but speaking of subjecting the Gentiles to the ordinances of Christ, in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, to bring the age to its close, according to the promise of Him who should be with them till then.32 That this might have an application to the unreported labours of the apostles, I doubt not; but the Bible furnishes us with no tokens on that head, at least if it be not, in the most indeterminate manner, in the last verse of the Gospel of Mark. That which the detailed history of the Acts presents us with is the fulfilment of the mission given in Luke, the rejection of the messengers at Jerusalem, where they nevertheless remained; then the labours of Peter in the midst of the Jews, and a new apostle raised up of God, to carry the word to the Gentiles by a new revelation of Jesus, so new indeed that he says, if he had known Jesus as the others had known Him, he knew Him no more after that manner. The salvation preached remained ever the same, without doubt, but with new light which God accorded.

What is the conclusion which one should draw from all this? It is, that there will be an accomplishment of this mission before the end of the age, and that the message of the gospel, here entrusted to the remnant, to the disciples, will be carried from Christ, of whom it remains always true (whatever be the state of things) that all

power is given unto Him in heaven and on earth. From Christ, I say, acting in this character, the message of this same gospel will be carried to all the nations, and Christ will be with the messengers even to the end of the age.

The testimony to Jerusalem will be different, it seems to me; we have already said some words on it in chapter 24. I do not speak of the conversion of such or such a Jew to make part of the church, which is another thing far more precious; it is the duty of each day to teach them, according to what is given us, as it is also to preach the gospel to every creature. But as there will be a testimony at the beginning of the sorrows (as there was one in the Jewish nation at the beginning of the gospel), a testimony which will be particularly addressed to the Jewish people; so there will be a special testimony borne to the Gentiles at the end, according to the principles of the mission here entrusted to the disciples. For the promise of the presence and succour of the Lord is not only bound up with the idea of the age, but it extends to its end, and we must always remember that here, as in chapters 13 and 24, “the age” in no way applies to Christianity as an epoch. Though Christianity might happen, and did happen, before the end of the age, the age already existed at that moment, and was in a great measure run out; it was a period of the world’s history in the Jewish point of view, which the presence of the Messiah was to terminate.

Perhaps, employed in all the force of the term according to the circumstances in which the Lord spoke, this expression supposes Jerusalem existing but rejected, and, though rejected, the object of the thoughts of God, but of His thoughts in judgment, God going to put an end to all that, and after great tribulations, to restore

the city in blessing by the coming of the Messiah in glory. The gospel, sent to the Gentiles, might run independently of all that, for Jesus entrusts it to the disciples outside Jerusalem, and as having abandoned it. Nevertheless, till it was judged and restored by the coming of the Messiah, and after the repentance of its inhabitants, the age could not end; so that when we have well considered the passages, we have here a gospel or mission of the disciples, independent of Jerusalem, from Messiah rejected here below, but having received all power in heaven and on earth; a gospel addressed to the Gentiles, Jerusalem being abandoned, to make of these nations disciples of Christ in the name, not of Jehovah, but of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; a mission, nevertheless, which (though independent of Jerusalem and coming from Christ, who had quitted it until it repent) is identified with the course of an age here below, which supposes, before its end, Jerusalem the object of God's thoughts and judgments (that is, Jerusalem under the Jewish point of view), and the centre of all His thoughts, in judgment or in blessing, whilst this same gospel is propagated among the nations. For before the end of the age (supposed here by the Lord to be still in existence) Jerusalem will be all that anew (as it was so at the time the Lord was speaking), and yet more. It is a gospel, then, which may subsist among the nations at the same time that Jerusalem is the object of God's thoughts, and anew the centre of all His ways.

One may suppose that the preaching of this gospel begins before that is manifested. Nevertheless these were the circumstances in which the Lord already was speaking. Jerusalem standing, abandoned,33 the object

of the thoughts and judgments of God, and afterwards of His blessing; and Christ awaiting the time of this end of the age, sending the gospel to the nations by His disciples, independently of Jerusalem, but by the side of its existence in this state, and transporting Himself, as to the term of the testimony, to the epoch which should terminate this state of things in Jerusalem, by the manifestation of the judgment of God and the blessing which should thence ensue and flow out. We have already seen (chap. 25) the Gentiles judged on earth, according to the manner in which they shall have treated the messengers which Christ calls His brethren, as Jesus here calls His disciples, and we have seen the preliminary and final circumstances in Palestine and at Jerusalem (chap. 24), accompanied by a declaration (by the side of all that) that this gospel of the kingdom should be preached in all the world, as a testimony to all the Gentiles, and that then the end will come—the end of the age which is in question here. I invite my brethren to think of this testimony, which is to be borne in the latter days; it would be to explain prophecy rather than the gospel to pursue this subject farther here. I desired to point it out, as this Gospel does so.

Here is the result of my researches at this time upon this Gospel; a result very imperfect, I feel, and researches which have made me feel how far we are still ignorant of all the ways of God; but which may aid my brethren to make others, perhaps, more happy and better followed up; and, if they are led to make them and are as happy as I in thus sounding the ways of God, I shall not have lost my trouble in communicating to them these, such as they are.

In the main, I do not doubt that the great principles, the thread of the ways of God (in this part of His ways) are found in these pages, and that, as a whole, it was given by Him. It is very possible that in some details my own mind has wrought, and that thus I may have overstepped the measure of what was given me; in this case there will certainly be error, or at least obscurity, even when all I have said is understood. On the other hand, those who have not yet taken the trouble to sound the scriptures ought not to be astonished if they find some things still difficult and obscure for them in these pages. They ought not to be discouraged, like a child who should plunge into the middle of a book which he ought to begin, and which he might judge too difficult; but they should set about the work, beginning with the beginning. They will find, let them be assured, many proofs of their ignorance, and very humiliating proofs; but they will also find the Lord with them, and a joy and a satisfaction of which they have not even the idea, not in the things only, but in the fact of being taught of Him; a joy and satisfaction which sanctify and attach to Him who deigns thus to be busied about our instruction, to endure with patience our ignorance, and to instruct us Himself in the truth. And how sweet is this converse with Him, in which He gently leads us on in the knowledge of His ways and unveils for us in His word all the goodness and wisdom of His counsels! Is it not evident that such converse, pursued in such a spirit, must sanctify the soul?

Let us remember that all this belongs to children, to those who, by the power of the good news of the pure grace of God, are grounded in the work which this grace has accomplished, and rejoice in the confidence which

His love inspires; the communications of His ways being for them daily proofs of this love, which nourish and maintain this confidence, and make them to know better Him, who is its object and source. May His Spirit and His grace direct all those who read these pages in the enjoyment of the everlasting salvation which He has accomplished for us!

1 [The first part of these notes was originally given as an exposition of Matthew 13, and was so published, translated from the French. But, as even here the esposition gives a general sketch of the preceding chapters, and as I am enabled to add a version of the notes on the chapters which follow, I have ventured so to modify the title as to suit the paper as a whole. The early part dwells only on chapter 13.—Ed.]

2 When Satan cannot prevail to withdraw the believer from the path of obedience, he begins to act upon his adversaries, and to excite them to opposition and persecution. Jesus retreats before this rejection thus began, and hence becomes the centre of light and blessing, in the midst of the distress of Israel, according to the passage quoted.

3 I believe this will be verified in the idolatry of the Jews under Antichrist, in the last days.

4 It is a principle which Popery completely destroys, by putting the church and the acknowledgment of its authority before the reception of the word under individual responsibility, while still, in the end, it leaves to every man his own burden. It is the church making war against God, and not the fruit of the blessing to which man is called.

5 In the three first, it is the actual result of the seed in the world. In the three last, it is the powerful motive which governed the heart of him who was led by this motive according to the secret of God.

6 My object is not controversy, but exposition of the parables; nevertheless, I must here add a word on the value of an interpretation often put upon this parable. That there is a mixture of Christians with the world is a matter of fact.

Many take advantage of this parable to justify themselves, or at least to say that we cannot root up the tares or exercise discipline. In the world-church this may be all very true; but, in the first place, if any one would reason thus to prove that the world-church system is good (for its existence is allowed as a matter of fact), such an one professes as a Christian to be willing to bring down the church on earth, in principle, to the level to which Satan has reduced it in fact; which is enough to convince me that one who has the glory of Christ at heart will not lend himself for a moment to such an idea. Again, when I find the whole is bad, I do not begin by rooting out the tares from this evil system; that is what they would do who stay there and would try to purify it. I do not quit the field; I cannot do it, for “the field is the world “j but the evil which I did I cease to do. I am still corn in the tare-field, I have not touched the tares; I have only as a Christian corrected my individual walk in some respects, and am thus separated by the fact itself from those who persist in the evil. If I can unite myself in peace with others to find the presence of Jesus according to His promise, so much the better; it is a great blessing. But I do not enter upon that question.

My object is only to expound the parable, avoiding what is a mere sophism.

7 The rapture of the church belongs to this age, to the harvest, to the end, but to this age, as to its time. It seems it will appear in another age.

8 The first act here regards the wicked, the tares. In the case of the net, the first step was to separate the good. Because, in the case of the tares, it is the exerior of the government in the world, the present result; in the latter parables, the motives and the spiritual discernment; although the judgment arrives at last afterwards.

9 The righteous shining as the sun shews us how these parables apply at the same time to Christ and to believers. He gives up His earthly glory, despises the shame, and endures the cross, in view of the joy that was set before Him; but this necessarily involves the church seen in glory according to the counsels of God:—the righteous will shine. We see our own glory in the sun to which we shall be like. In the two cases there is the glory. “The glory which thou hast given me, I have given them,” so that He, while yet looking forward to it for Himself, gives up all His Jewish and even personal glory, in a certain sense, as of right, to bring the church in there; in a word, He gives it up for the church. We, seeing that glory as ours, see it in Christ; and so in the application of the parable, we may say, Jesus has done it for the church as His treasure—we do it for Christ as our treasure. The counsel of God is, that we should be together in that glory.

10 Although the great principle of giving up all for Christ is a true one (and we have already spoken of it), we cannot apply the details of this parable to the history

of an individual soul. A soul is never called on to buy anything to have the treasure; but to seek to have nothing except it. In fact, in the history of souls, something similar often occurs; that is to say, one embraces Christianity, true Christianity, with a joy which seizes all in an indiscriminate manner, so to speak. The soul possesses in effect the true treasure, but has not yet at all discerned the whole beauty of this exquisite pearl. The joy then becomes in appearance more subdued, but the spiritual perception of the thoughts of God is far more real and deep.

11 All this does not by any means affect the question of the conduct or the duty of a saint in these circumstances. The parable only presents the thoughts of God in regard to facts. This was the form which the kingdom would take, or rather a figure which represents it. The purchased field is quite an abstract thought; we are always in danger of confounding it with the actual state of things, while the parable only presents to us the principle. I have endeavoured to avoid this snare, but am not sure that I have succeeded. In principle, Christ has bought the world, and the church is in it. His authority only extends to a very small part of the world; and one part, formerly subject to His authority, has now even revolted from it; but the parable does not at all touch upon these facts. It only presents the principle, that is to say, that there is a treasure hidden, which was not even bought but found, and something external was bought for the love of this treasure, thus hidden there, necessarily, and as a matter of fact; whether the treasure exists as an individual whole, or in several pieces, is not the question here. The purchaser takes the whole, such as it is, for the sake of the treasure. The

delight which He finds in the beauty of it (the church) is the subject of this parable. Here it is the fact of the field purchased as a whole, that He might possess the treasure that was dear to Him. Neither is it a question of the establishment of the authority of Christ in blessing in this world, nor of His joy in the deliverance of the creation itself. That will take place in the world to come, when there will no longer be a question about the mysteries of the kingdom. This mystery of God will be finished; the natural results of the reign of the Saviour will be manifested, also the beauty of the church will be manifested on high; and its glory will shine everywhere.

12 I give these expressions here according to their force in the Greek: “According as he has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we might be holy and without blame before himself, in love, having predestinated us to the adoption to himself by Jesus Christ, … to the praise of the glory of His own grace.” Again, verse 8, “Having made known to us the mystery of His own will, according to his own good pleasure which he purposed in himself,” and, verse 11, the “counsels of his own will.”

13 In chapter 8:23-27, where the state of the church rather is marked, Jesus goes into the ship with His disciples. Apparently He pays no attention to the danger; but their unbelief makes them afraid, as if Jesus, who had identified Himself with them, could perish, and with Him all the counsels of God.

14 The true translation of Daniel 9:26.

15 The transition from the position of Messiah to that of the Son of man is very striking in this Gospel, and this last title has always in view the future glory of Christ,

though He was the Son of man in humiliation already. The province of His rule, and all the thought which is bound up with it, are of a far larger extent than that which is bound up with the title of Messiah. We have seen the church founded on the confession of the Son of God, because there is found the life whereby it lives and the principle of its relations with the Father; but, as Son of man, Christ is the heir of man, and that according to the counsels of God as regards man, and not only according to the extent of the dominion of Adam. It is quite another idea and another position from heir of David, whatever may have been His glory in this character. (See Psalm 8.)

16 This beautiful passage, from chapter 21:28, to 22:14, depicts with astonishing exactness all the ways of the Lord with respect to the Jews and their ways. The second invitation to the Jews, after the death of Jesus Himself, is there presented. When God could say in all its force, “All things are ready,” it is then that they killed the messengers, as the Lord predicts to them lower down, chapter 23.

17 But this passage is remarkable in shewing how little, in this gospel, the Lord withdrew His own from the position of the Jewish remnant. Among them this direction had no place; to them there were neither scribes nor Pharisees nor Moses’ seat j but he desires to view them in this gospel also, as a Jewish remnant, having, as such, relationship with the nation.

18 Here commences, it seems to me, the bearing more properly historical.

19 See Isaiah 65:22—a passage, however, which seems to confine itself to the elect already in the country; here

they are sought from afar. I only quote it for the force of the word “elect” here.

20 For my part, I believe that all the calculations that have been made are without foundation. There may be many very interesting things in the works in which they are found, as I have often found; but the calculations themselves are baseless. I believe there have been analogous things, wherein the principles of evil, which shall break out in the last days, have been more or less developed; but as to the exact calculations, they are based on a false principle, because these dates, in their exact application, apply to the Jews of the last days.

21 We may remark here that the service refers to the house or to those who compose the Master’s household, and the care which ought to be bestowed on them. If it is to those who formed the church, it is at least to them and to their service in its Jewish character, whether as to a body, or in an interior appropriated to the Lord, as this people was in the world. In the parable of the virgins, it is the expectation of grace, the state of those who went forth to meet Him. The third parable is the activity of service with His goods.

22 I believe that if one absolutely wishes to introduce the bride here (and the Lord does not) it is a question about Jerusalem on earth.

23 The difference between this parable and Luke 19, which in the main is the same, is, that there the principle of man’s responsibility is brought much more forward; here, the sovereignty and the wisdom of the Master. There are other things which pertain also to the character of this Gospel, but that is the principal. In Luke each receives cities according to his work; here, all

enter into their Master's joy. That is necessary where individual responsibility is in question. What was important here was to shew that disciples left as Jews would be in the same joy as their Master, when He should return in glory as Son of man, being no longer a Jew, though fulfilling the promises made to the fathers. But His servants should be in the same position as Himself, not as He had left them when He went away, and His joy would be the glory. Yet it would be found also in accomplishing His promises to His people, however it might have been. But the question was not exactly about possessing cities.

24 Perhaps I have not sufficiently brought out this distinction: as Messiah, He came into the midst of the Jews to accomplish the promises made to the fathers, to the family of David, and to the Jews therein; but later on He takes the kingdom in all the extent of His rights as Son of man, to whom the Father had subjected all things. The transition from the one of these positions to the other is often perceptible in the gospel.

25 All the verses, from verse 31 of chapter 24 to verse 31 of chapter 25, are a parenthesis, and contain moral instructions, based upon preceding revelations: the history, or the continuation of the prophecy, is resumed at verse 31, "When the Son of man shall come," etc.

26 In Luke, which is not so much occupied with the Jews, the Lord shews clearly the judgment which will come on the nation and which He Himself will execute (Luke 19:27). The truth, as a warning, had been already given in this Gospel, chapter 21:44.

27 It is not that He indicates the day. As Jehovah had said to the Lord, "Sit thou at my right hand, until I make

thine enemies thy footstool"; so the Lord said, "Ye shall not see me henceforth until," etc. The repentance of the Jews is for His heart the sign that He can see them again and that they also can see Him again. Peter gives them the same sign, in Acts 3. "Be converted … so that the times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send Jesus Christ."

We see here the importance of the repentance of the Jews as a nation, for thousands since that time have repented as individuals. This repentance is to have respect to the sent One of God, for it is to be repentance for the sin which has caused their ruin and their rejection. They will say, "Blessed is He that cometh!" a word which follows these, "The stone which the builders rejected is become the head-stone of the corner. This is Jehovah's doing, it is marvellous in our eyes," Psalm 118. This explains also why the Lord, at His coming, has yet a great deal to do to place the Jews in full peace and prosperity, according to the figure of Solomon. This is because He takes up the Jews where He left them, not such as they were in the days of Solomon, or onward to the captivity of Babylon as with Judah. But He can identify Himself with them; this is what He could not do at His first coming, because they would not. He had besides other things to accomplish according to the counsels of God. Now, when they have repented of their last national fault, and they say, "Blessed is He that cometh," He can undertake their cause; and this is what He does, and it is not a small thing. The indignation will have ceased; but the thing is to put the remnant-nation in the possession of all their privileges and all their country. It is the work of Messiah when He is there, and of none other. Zechariah, Joel, Isaiah, and Jeremiah,

speak of these things. There is then the action of the word of God by the Spirit, on the hearts of the Jews, as Jews, before the appearing of Jesus, which action will leave them Jews; and on the other hand, the acts of power, He having recognised the nation, to put them in possession of all their privileges after the appearing. Read Isaiah 50 and 51 for the first of these things and the transition. See Psalms 42 to 49, and Zech. 9. The moment of transition is found in chapter 12. See also Jer. 51:20; Isaiah 41:15, 16; Mic. 4:13; 5; Isaiah 40:10-14.

28 There will be heavenly brethren, our hope and joy: if men will insist on the idea that it is they who are in question here, I contest it not. I express my conviction, formed on the study of all the chapter, and of all the Gospel itself, with the instructions which refer to it; but since there is but the word brethren here, and we all admit that the members of the church bear this name in principle, and that thus it depends on spiritual discernment to apply it, each will judge of it according to what is given him; it is not that I doubt; but I do not insist on the thing in comparison with others. See the last chapter.

29 There is not what is found in Matthew 26:37-45, nor verse 67, etc., nor chapter 27:46, nor verses 39-44, or the parallel passages in Mark and Luke. In place of that, we have John 18:4-9,11; 19:28,30, or in place of “expired,” Mark 15:37, we have “delivered up his Spirit,” John 19:30; it was the act which He did (according to John 10:18), knowing that all was finished.

Compare also chapter 19:7, 8, and the character of all the discourses of the Lord, whether before the high priest, or before Pontius Pilate, in the two Gospels.

30 It appears to me that an example of this is found in the choice of Matthias, before the gift of the Holy Spirit —a choice based on the explanation of Psalm 109; an explanation of which, it would seem to me, the disciples would have been incapable before that time, but the act itself had nothing in it of the power of the Holy Spirit. They draw lots, as Jews, after having understood this Psalm. Though we have received the Holy Ghost, it is of importance for us to distinguish between the understanding (though it were a gift) and power. It is evident, from the end of Luke and the commencement of the Acts, that a person may have the one and not have the other.

31 There was, in this, a revelation evidently much clearer, and relations different from those which the Jews enjoyed, as the people of Jehovah. These terms were not entirely unknown to the Jews j but they were always employed by the prophets in the prospect of the times when there would be this clearer revelation to call the Gentiles, and when blessing would be manifested for the Jews in a new measure. “Kiss the Son” is a summons to the kings of the earth in Psalm 2, and the promise of the outpouring of the Spirit, whether upon the Jews and their posterity or upon all flesh, is sufficiently known. See, amongst others, in Joel; in Isa. 44:3; see also chap. 48:16. Before the accomplishment of these things, or at least before they are fully accomplished to the letter, the revelation has been made of what is their foundation in God, and this name of Father, of Son, and of Holy Spirit has been proclaimed amongst the Gentiles. I do not think that it is here the unity of the Son with the Father, and of the church with Jesus by the Holy Spirit (that is taught elsewhere); but the revelation of the name of

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for the submission of the Gentiles by faith, in anticipation of that day when the Son will be manifested in power, and the Holy Spirit fully shed abroad. But this is very precious for us, because it shews us these things in God, and makes us see that there are not only certain acts of manifestation which will take place hereafter, but the truth of God, of which one can speak before these manifestations take place. For the knowledge which the Jews and the earth will have of the Son, for example in His reign according to Psalm 2 is very inferior, it seems to me, to the knowledge which we have of Him, as being in the Father and the Father in Him, one with the Father, hidden in God. It is the same person, undoubtedly, but we have a much deeper knowledge of what He is. Further, we learn, in thus comparing Psalm 2, that the preaching of the name of the Son does not necessarily suppose the blessings of the church: now it does, because God gathers the church in Him; but the call made to the kings to submit to the royalty of Christ in the last times is made in the name of the Son, “Kiss the Son, lest he be angry.” We have acknowledged Him before through grace, and we know Him as one with the Father. In this Psalm it is spoken of Him as presented to the world in time, “To-day I have begotten thee.”

32 One may examine Psalm 95 (and also Psalms 91 to 100), which treats of these times, as well as Daniel 11:33 and 12:3, 9; Isaiah 65:13, etc., where, however, the testimony is rather practical than in word. Here is the connection of this subject in Isaiah, which may interest those who search the word; and it is only for such that I give it.

God desires to comfort His people (Isaiah 40); and in the midst of present deliverances (pledges of better ones to come), the servant, Christ, is introduced, chap. 42. Israel should have been so, but was blind; nevertheless he should be delivered, being forgiven. Cyrus and Babylon pass then before our eyes, to the end of chapter 48, the pledge of better deliverances, as we have said. God announces, notwithstanding, that He distinguishes the wicked: there is no peace for them.

Chapter 49, the Gentiles are summoned by Israel as called of God to be a servant, in whom God should be glorified. Thereupon the Messiah says, “I have then laboured in vain”; nevertheless His judgment and work were with God. The Spirit answers that it was a small thing to raise up Israel, that He should be a light to the Gentiles. From that time it is Christ, the true vine, who holds the promises as a faithful servant. Chapter 50 explains the dismissal of Israel for the rejection of Christ, Jehovah God who had made Himself a servant; and thereupon is brought out the distinction of the remnant who fear Jehovah and obey the voice of His servant, not here the church in the joy of the Son, though that has been true of a certain number from among the remnant. In these passages the church finds itself only as hidden in the person of Christ Himself; which will be seen in comparing Isaiah 50:8, 9, and Romans 8:33, 34, where the apostle applies to the church the substance of those verses which speak of Christ in Isaiah. I will observe, by the way, that the Lausanne translation, in general very faithful to the letter, has spoilt these verses in the form it has given to them. Here, I believe, is the true contrast. God justifies; who shall condemn? Christ is dead, etc.: who shall

separate us from the love of Christ? The Old Testament does not take up the union of Christ and the church: here it is the remnant that obey the voice of the servant of God, of Christ, come as Messiah here below. Nevertheless the obedient walk in darkness. Consolation is given them, a consolation properly Jewish, by calls (chap. 51:1-4, 7), in which there is progress in their position (v. 9). They themselves call, by the Spirit of prophecy, the arm of Jehovah to awake. He answers at last (v. 17), summons Jerusalem to awake in her turn, and (chap. 52) to clothe herself with glory and honour. This passage, ending at verse 12, is all beautiful. Chapters 52:13, and 53 give the expiatory character of the work of the "servant," recognised by the Jews in the latter days. Then come the details of blessings (chaps. 54, 55, 56, 57), and of the ways of God, and of what hinders, namely, the deep iniquity of the people in the latter days.

From chapter 58, testimony is strongly borne to this iniquity, which finally forces Jehovah to arise (chap. 59:15, 16, etc.), and the Deliverer comes to Sion according to Romans 11:26. Then in chapter 60, Jerusalem is glorified, and the same subject (introducing, in order to identify His person in the two advents, what Christ was at His first, chapter 61:1, and the first half of verse 2), and the judgment of the Gentiles, are treated to the end of chapter 63:6. Then, upon the touching call of the prophet, there is a detailed explanation of all their ways, how grace had seized the occasion, given by the folly of Israel, to be found of those who sought it not, whilst He had ever stretched out His hands towards rebellious Israel (quoted by the apostle, Romans 10:20, 21), which explains these same

points. And here, finally, we find a special remnant (all those who are spared; see Isaiah 66:19, 20), treated as the “servants “to whom the blessing of all the nation would be a particular subject of joy. Such is what has led us to this summary of the latter part of this prophetic book: the special remnant owned of God, but having all its affections in the well-being of Jerusalem and of Israel. One may, for the last testimony to the Gentiles, compare Psalm 97 and Revelation 14:6, 7.

The key of this summary of Isaiah 40-48 is Israel the servant:— nevertheless, no peace for the wicked. Christ, the true servant, is rejected. The remnant, true servants, are owned in that; they obey the voice of the “servant,” but in prospect of Jewish interests. Translate chapter 49:3, “Thou art my servant, O Israel, he in whom I will be glorified.”

33 Perhaps there may be trouble to reconcile these two ideas, “abandoned,” and yet “the object of the thoughts and judgments of God”; but it is precisely the position of Jerusalem in the latter days, when His work recommences with the earth. It will be desolate and abandoned until it says, “Blessed is he that cometh in the name of Jehovah!” But God acts with it in testimony, in chastisement, in indignation. Such was already the case in the time of the apostles. In chapter 23 of this Gospel, it was abandoned. Nevertheless the testimony and indignation are there. See upon that, in Zechariah, specially the end of chapter 11 and the beginning of chapter 12, and all his prophecy; the end of Daniel 9; 11 and 12 also, and Isaiah 65, 66; see also Jeremiah 30:4, 8, etc. In these chapters, and in so many others, Jerusalem is not owned, but it is the object of God’s thoughts and ways; according to the expressions as to Ephraim

Jeremiah 31:20, and as to Jerusalem itself, Isaiah 49:14, etc. The fact is that Jerusalem is chosen as the Jewish people. Psalm 132:13,14.

We have a principle which is bound up with this, and which is very precious in its analogy for us. God, at the time of the Babylonish captivity, had written, Lo-Ammi, not my people. Notwithstanding that, in Haggai 2:5 we find that the Spirit remained with them, as when they came out of Egypt. What encouragement for us, whatever may be the state of the church! If they had said, No, we are not in this state of Lo-Ammi, it would have been unbelief; if they had been discouraged, as if the Spirit was not with them, as at the departure from Egypt, it would have been practical unbelief also under another form. In the two cases, faith in the goodness and in the chastisement of God would have been lost.

On The Gospel Of Matthew

Most readers already know, I suppose, that the Lord Jesus is presented to us in each of the four Gospels in a different point of view. It is only with one of the Gospels that I am going, with God's help, to occupy them at present; and if I here point out the character of each of the four, it is to put more in relief that of the Gospel taken up. First of all, the Gospels are divided into two classes: on one side, the Gospel of John; and, on the other, the first three called synoptic. This division is just. Every one in reading feels how different John is from the three others. I proceed to point out more precisely the difference.

In the first three Gospels Christ is present to men, more particularly to the Jews, for the purpose of being received, and each of them closes with the account of His rejection. It is not so with John. From the first chapter we find the Lord rejected. He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not, He came to His own, and His own people received Him not. And in the following verses we see that it is grace which causes Him to be received by any. He is received by those who are born (not of the flesh, but) of God. In the entire Gospel the Jews are treated as reprobate, and the sovereign grace of the Father who draws and election are put forward. The sheep hear His voice. The Jews do not hear Him because they are not of His sheep. Moreover He is come from the Father, and come into the world. There is also no genealogy which goes up to the stock of promise in Abraham and David, no human genealogy which goes up to Adam (son) of

God. It is God, the Word, who was with God and who was God; in whom was life, and the life the light of men, light shining in darkness which the darkness comprehended not; then the Word made flesh, God manifested here below. And all agrees with that: no agony in Gethsemane, nor cry on the cross. When the moment arrived, He delivers up His spirit, the hour being come to pass from this world to the Father. It is what He is that is presented to us in this Gospel; and, whether Jew or Gentile, we must be born anew. At the end the coming of the Holy Spirit, testimony before the world, is to replace Him among His own, for the world also is judged. John passes at the close to some ulterior manifestations of His glory on the earth in a manner designedly mysterious, and without any ascension scene. It is Himself, Son of man, but God manifested here below.

The first three Gospels, we have said, relate the manner in which Christ was presented to men to be received, and His rejection, then His resurrection; Mark and Luke add His ascension. In Luke, after the most delicious picture of the little remnant faithful in the midst of the corruption of Israel, we find the Son of man and grace toward men by Him. The genealogy goes up to Adam; and He, the second Man, the last Adam, ascends to heaven from Bethany, blessing His own. The commission given to the apostles comes from heaven and embraces all, Jews and Gentiles.

In Mark we find the servant and prophet. This Gospel begins with His ministry, preceded by that of John the Baptist. We find at the end His meeting with the disciples in Galilee after His resurrection as in Matthew; but besides an appendix from verse 9, in which what is

found in Luke and even in John is briefly stated, that is to say, the heavenly side of these last events, and a commission given to the disciples more general and more universal. It carries salvation or condemnation to all the creation under heaven.

I have reserved Matthew for the last of the Gospels because I must occupy myself with it in more detail. It presents to us Emmanuel, the Messiah, object of the promises and the prophecies, Jehovah in the midst of Israel, Saviour of His people but rejected as in Isaiah 49 and 50,34 and His presence on earth replaced by the kingdom in mystery (chap. 13), by the church (chap. 16), the kingdom in glory (chap. 17); but, whilst insinuating the substitution of the church and of the kingdom, the principal subject is always the Lord in His relation with His earthly people, His meeting with His disciples after His resurrection in Galilee. They are sent to the Gentiles, and there is no ascension.

Consequently we begin quite naturally with the Son of David and the Son of Abraham. Jesus is viewed as the Heir of the promises, as the Son of David. We find ourselves in the atmosphere of the thoughts and the hopes of Israel, but of Israel’s thoughts and hopes according to God. The genealogy is traced in the line of Joseph, from whom He inherited royalty according to the law. But His birth really of Mary presents facts evidently still more important, being close to His person as far as manifested on the earth. Save to draw the attention of the reader to them, these facts, all-important though they be, are so well known and so simply related that I have hardly need to enlarge on them. His human nature (conceived in the womb of die Virgin, without spot or stain, by the power of the Holy Spirit) is a thing

perfectly holy; also it is, according to the flesh, born of God whilst being the Seed of the woman, true man in this world. And not this only. He was to be named Jesus (Joshua, or Jehoshea), Jehovah the Saviour, for He should save His people from their sins. As He was Jehovah, the people was His people.

Thus we have a man without sin and Jehovah manifested in flesh: a fact which is a proof of infinite grace, to which nothing is like, which abides alone in the annals of man as in the counsels of God. It is true that redemption was necessary, namely His death, in order that this fact should be available for men, and that the counsels of God should be accomplished. But all depended on the fact that God became man, that the Word was made flesh.

Never elsewhere had there been a man having perfectly knowledge of good and evil without sin, never divine perfection—God Himself—manifested in flesh, which will remain eternally true, and without which redemption itself could not have been accomplished. We shall find in all His life the perfect obedience of man, the perfect manifestation of God. Also He is owned of the prophecy in Isaiah 7, Emmanuel, God with us! and Joseph gives Him the name which was assigned Him by the angel, the name of Jesus. Thus according to the testimony of God He has taken His place in the midst of His people.

But the nations were to hope in the Branch out of the root of Jesse (Isa. 11:1-10), and Magi from the East arrive to do homage to Him who is born King of the Jews. Already, from that tender age, must He know what it is to be rejected. The false king of Israel seeks to have Him put to death; and Joseph, directed peculiarly by

God, takes Him to Egypt, whence He was to come up again, the true vine, to begin afresh the history of Israel as the green tree, the living vine; as when risen He would recommence the history of man, the last Adam. He returns, called out of Egypt, Son of God, but has to take His place where one truly an Israelite in whom was no guile could not believe anything good was to be found. He dwells at Nazareth. All this is most significant, but is only preliminary as a preface which indicates the subject-matter treated in the book of His life which follows.

In chapter 3 we begin His history with the preparatory testimony of John the Baptist, who goes before the face of Jehovah. Such is the clear and precise declaration of Malachi 3:1, or, if we take the quotation of Matthew himself, it is. the voice of him who prepares the way of Jehovah. Such is Christ. Jehovah in the midst of men and in particular of the Jews, such, in a striking way, is the Christ of Matthew; but the Son of God also has taken the form of a servant as we are going to see.

The testimony of John did not accept the fact that one was son of Abraham as to the flesh. God could raise up sons to Abraham by His mighty power. The judgment or the kingdom was in view. Repentance must be in order to bear good fruit; and for sinful man the very first of those fruits was repentance. His baptism, in a word, was the beginning of repentance at the approach of the kingdom and as a preparation for entering in. The people not repenting could not enter in as a lump. But if he, John, baptized for repentance, One was there who was about to execute judgment by purifying His floor, but He baptized with the Holy Ghost. These three characteristics belonged to this testimony:—particular

and separative judgment (v. 10), already the axe was at the root of the trees; He who baptized with the Holy Ghost was there; He would purge His floor by a definitive judgment which would gather the good grain and burn the chaff with unquenchable fire.

Jesus presents Himself for baptism. It is His floor which is going to be purged; the granary is His; it is He who burns the chaff in the judgment. But He comes to place Himself in the midst of His people. Nothing more striking than this juxtaposition; nothing more positive than the declaration that He is Jehovah; nothing clearer than the fact that He places Himself in the midst of His people in the path where grace conducts them. Assuredly He does not join Himself with the rebellious and intractable people, but from the first step taken by those who by grace listen to the word of the testimony of God, from the first step in the. good way, He is found with them in His infinite grace. The heart answers at once to the testimony of John that He who came had no need of repentance: we know it. Quite the contrary, He was fulfilling righteousness. But for His own it was just the thing according to God. The life of God, which put forth its first breath in the atmosphere of God but in the midst of men, took its first step in the divine way—the way toward the kingdom which was going to appear. He would not leave them there alone. He takes His place with them. Infinite grace, sweet thought, full of His love for the heart of His own!

Remark also how He abases Himself here to the level of His messenger: “thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.” You have your part, I mine, in accomplishing the will of God. There He is already a servant! He is baptized, and His place taken in the midst

of His own, in the midst of the faithful remnant that walked under the effect of the power of God's word. And now where is He, the Servant, He who humbled Himself, who has His place with His poor people, the poorest of His flock? Heaven is open, the Holy Spirit descends on Him, the Father owns Him as His Son. He is the model of the position He has taken for us by redemption. Never had heaven so opened before; never had there been on earth an object which He could own as making His good pleasure. Now there was. For us too the veil is rent, and heaven is open. We have been anointed and sealed of the Holy Spirit as Jesus was; the Father has owned us to be His beloved sons already in this world. Jesus was such in His own proper and full right, worthy of being so in Himself; we are introduced by grace and redemption. But entered into the midst of His people He shews what is the position which in Him belongs to them; as I have just said, He is its model. What happiness! what grace! But, carefully remark, His divine person remains always such, a difference besides which is never lost, whatever be His abasement and His grace toward us. When heaven is open for Jesus, He has no object above to which He looks to fix His attention. He is Himself the object that heaven contemplates. When heaven is open for Stephen, as for us by faith, Jesus the Son of man is the object in heaven which is open for His servant. In grace the Lord takes a place with us; He never loses His own either for the Father or for the heart of the believer. The nearer we are to Him, the more we adore Him.

Remark here also another thing altogether notable. It is in and by the voluntary humiliation of Jesus that all the Trinity is for the first time fully revealed. The Son is there, the object specially conspicuous as man; the Holy

Spirit comes and abides on Him; and the voice of the Father owns Him: marvellous revelation associated with the position that the Son had taken! The Son is recognised as Jehovah in Psalm 2. The Holy Spirit is found everywhere in the Old Testament. But the full revelation of the three persons in the oneness of God—the basis of Christianity—is reserved for the moment when the Son of God takes His place in the midst of the poor of His flock, His true place in the race in which He had His delights, the sons of men. What grace is that of Christianity! what a place is that where our hearts are found. If taught of God we have learned to know this grace and Him in whom it is come to us! Here then is our position according to this grace in Christ Jesus, before God our Father, accepted in the Beloved.

Nevertheless, if such is our relation with God, we are in conflict here below with the enemy of our souls. Well, here too Jesus must go into it for us. This follows immediately. Jesus is led by the Holy Spirit to be tempted by the devil. If He takes or rather makes our place with God, He must take it in face of the enemy to bind the strong man that held us captive. I know not, dear brother, if this grace strikes you as is strikes me: but it seems to me to go beyond all the bearing of our thoughts, as much as the effort to reproduce it in human words for drawing the attention of souls to it only betrays the weakness which speaks of it. However let us pursue our essay, since it can be studied in the word itself, once the attention is thus drawn to it.

Jesus takes our place in conflict: solemn moment where all depended on His victory! It was not possible doubtless that He should not bear off the victory; but if the second Man had fallen like the first, all was ended

and lost. Yes, that could not be; but He must conquer for us and conquer as man. It is exactly out of this position that the enemy wished to withdraw Him, out of the position of a servant, of man as such. “If thou art the Son of God” (and the Father had just owned Him thus)—if thou art Son of God, speak that these stones may become loaves. Act as Son. There is no harm in eating when one is hungry. You have only to say this word and have the wherewithal to satisfy your wishes. That is, do your will; leave the position of servant you have taken. Not for a moment! He, being in the form of God, had taken the form of a servant; and He abides servant of His God.

And, in these days of slighting the word, it is good for the heart to remark how He answers. A single text of the word, of the scripture, suffices for the fidelity and the almightiness of the Lord, for the wisdom of the Son of God; a single text suffices to reduce to silence the devil who wished to lead Him astray. The Son of God remains in His position of man, the servant; and the word of God directs, is the opening of, His ways. “It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word which proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” What a beautiful and perfect example! Not a movement of His heart toward any other thing than the authority of His God, of whom He had made Himself servant. The word of God issues from the mouth of God—the words issued from His mouth, blessed be His name, direct to man. Christ maintains Himself in the place of man. Man shall not live by bread alone. The word is the source of His conduct; He lives by it. It is His directory doubtless; but it is also what puts His will in movement: without it He does nothing. He is come to do the will of God. The words

which proceed out of His mouth declare this will and put in movement the soul of man the servant. Such is the obedience of Christ. The devil can do nothing there; he is silent.

Remember here, though they be only accessory circumstances, that this conflict did not occur in the garden of Eden, not in the midst of enjoyments which testified the goodness of God. Christ had already passed forty days, a solemn period of exercise and endurance, as we know by Moses and Elijah, and in an analogous manner by the forty years of Israel in the wilderness. He had been withdrawn from the ordinary state of humanity, not to prepare Him for the presence of God, as Moses and Elijah had been. He was in the wilderness, far from the pleasant things which, by the goodness of God, remain to man in this fallen world, for a struggle (not that we know that this was with special temptations, but for a struggle), with the enemy. His position was such as that of the world in its moral reality as God sees it, a desert where Satan rules (Mark i:13). Put to the proof thus by love for us and, while accomplishing the counsels of God, submitting fully in the ways of God (for He was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness) to the sufferings which come by the power of Satan into this world, He enters into the special conflict that He had to carry on with Satan, where we have to follow Him, but fighting against an enemy already beaten. He is not weary of His service of fidelity, He remains man the servant in obedience, He owns the absolute authority of the word, resting thereon as the basis of all His conduct. It is simplicity which is absolute perfection. Satan is vanquished. I repeat, a single text of the word—whatever be the foolish

pretensions of man—suffices for the Lord, suffices for Satan. May this word suffice for us! Only may God give us grace to make use of it under the guidance of the Spirit of God whose sword it is, in order that it may be effectual in our hands.

But to dare obey God in this world there must be confidence in God. This is the second trial the Lord undergoes for us. “If thou art Son of God, cast thyself down.” Try if God will be faithful to His promise (Ps. 91). This too was just out of the path of obedience. In this path He could always count upon God; but to put God to the proof to see if He would be faithful is not to confide in Him as assuredly such. This is what is meant by the expression “tempting God,” and not, to go too far in confiding in Him (Exod. 17:7). The confidence is perfect like the obedience. He waits on Jehovah. jSure that He will be faithful, that He is so always, He has but to follow the path of obedience and to depend on Him. His word will direct His steps and His thoughts, and will be accomplished in His promises. Such are the two elements of the life of the new man, of the life of Christ in us—obedience, and dependence. Christ was perfect in both, in an obedience which had the word, the will, of God, as the source of His activity, not simply as its rule. When Satan presents the word falsely as a snare, the word suffices as a perfect answer to conduct the steps and the thoughts of man.

Remark further in these instructive answers of the Lord that, when it is a question of the wiles of the devil, the wisdom of the Lord confines itself to a striking simplicity, and in this that there is no need to think save of one’s own duty. This is enough, and Satan can do no more. Man must live not by bread only, but by every

word which proceeds out of the mouth of God. There is all; but it is all. His conduct is perfectly traced. It is submission, the path marked by the words of God. He does not enter into controversy with the enemy. He is found in this later with men. Here it is the perfect path of obedient man, His walk with Him. The word of God traces for Himself this path, and the end is completely attained. Satan is vanquished.

Afterwards Satan shews himself; it is no more a question of his wiles. He offers the world and its glory to the Lord if He will pay him homage. For the obedient man that owned God it was to betray himself, and for such a man Satan manifested has no power. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. The world is the bait that Satan can offer that one should follow him. The man who wishes nothing but his God is sheltered from every real danger here. Nevertheless it is still by the word that the Lord answers. It is the Spirit's sword for man, the sword of God, but made for man who by the Spirit makes use of it; and if he seeks only to obey, it is enough for the certain defeat of the enemy of souls. The devil quits the Saviour; and if man must fight and conquer by an obedience so simple, angels of God Himself are there to render Him service. Without being able here to bring out the instruction found in these details, I desires particularly to draw the attention of readers to the way the Lord made and took our place on both sides, so to speak: on God's side, Son, anointed of the Holy Spirit, before the Father, with heaven opened; then in conflict with Satan when in fact He bound for us the strong man.

The Lord, man here below, had been owned by the Father as His beloved Son, heaven being open on Him, and Himself anointed by the Holy Spirit. He had thus

presented in Himself the place which according to God's counsels those should hold whom He is not ashamed to call His brethren. He had for them entered on the conflict that the strong man wages with them and, having conquered him for them, had shewn them how, by His grace, they could conquer in their turn. He must exercise His ministry in the midst of the people, and, whilst announcing the gospel of the kingdom, spoil the goods of the strong man that He had bound.

But from the beginning the disposition of man manifests itself. John the Baptist is put in prison. Jesus, from Judea where He had wrought, goes away to Galilee amongst the poor and despised of the people. He abides at Capernaum, a place even called His city. It is there according to prophecy (and Matthew always gives us Him who is the subject of prophecy) that the light must shine: neither at Jerusalem in the midist of the proud chiefs of the Jews, nor where He was at home does He begin His work. The poor of the flock, the testimony of God, the Spirit of the Lord perfect in spiritual wisdom unite to direct His steps towards the place willed of God. I do not say that prophecy directed His steps; but His acts accomplished prophecy.

What Jesus announced was what John had published. It was a call to repentance because the kingdom of the heavens had drawn nigh. The throne of God had been established on the earth at Jerusalem; the Eternal had forsaken it at the time of the Babylonish captivity, and the seat of the supreme power was transported there, and this power confided to the Gentiles. But the heavens were to reign and God to establish from above His beneficent power over the earth. Up to this day He has not taken His great power and acted as king; but the

king is seated in heaven on the throne of the Father, and the kingdom exists in mystery.

It is important to remark here that it is not a question only of the salvation of such or such an individual (while the things may be bound together, and in fact are so, as John 3 proves), but of the establishment of a system of authority by which the heavens impress their character in blessing on the earth. The rejection of Christ has introduced better things, and relations more intimate and more entirely heavenly; but the kingdom will be established with a still fuller development when the Lord returns. This however is not the place to pursue this theme: let us follow our Gospel.

The Lord becomes the centre of a people which are attached entirely to Him: an important principle, a right belonging to Him alone. He preaches repentance to all. One must return to God in self-judgment, for Israel was far from Him, and the crisis of their history arrived. But, besides, the powerful attraction of the Lord’s call attached souls to Him by making them leave all and break every other tie. Emmanuel was there; and those He called were His. The call was to be the fishers of men.

After this the ministry of Jesus is summarily recounted in chapter 4, verses 23-25, indeed in the single verse 23. The more these verses 17-23 are examined, the more one sees that they contain, and designedly, a compendium of all the Lord’s ministry. Verses 24,25, tell us the effect of this ministry in Palestine and all the neighbouring countries. Besides it makes a ministry accompanied by a power suited to draw their attention. He gathered disciples round Him. The gospel of the

kingdom was announced; and the character of the miracles was as important as the power which accomplished them: it was the power of God manifested in goodness on the earth. Great crowds followed Him. It was of importance that His disciples and even the multitude should understand what was the true character of the kingdom about to be introduced and of those about to have part in it. John's ministry however had detached a remnant from the impenitent mass of the people.

The Lord then, seeing that His teaching had attracted the crowd, gathers His disciples and proclaims the great essential principles which were to serve as moral foundations for His kingdom, and to characterise those who were to have part in it. The first sixteen verses of chapter 5 contain the enunciation of these principles, as well as the character and position of the true sons of the kingdom. What follows to the end of chapter 7 consists of warning against the wanderings of the heart of man, and puts the ancient sayings and precepts which had currency among the Jews in contrast with the morality required by the kingdom of the heavens. It was a question of having the heart pure and clear from hatred, and the spirit submissive in such a way that impatience should not rise up, and that its evil should not come to light in the heart itself; it was a question of the patience and the gentleness which is more bent on keeping the heavenly character than one's own goods—of the goodness ready to give and resembling the character of God Himself their Father who loves without being loved.

Next, in chapter 6, the Lord would have the motives pure, and prayer in reference to the true relations at that time of His own with God and to the desires flowing

from them. He would have the aim of the heart heavenly, and that it should have confidence in God for this low world; then again (chap. 7) that one should not judge when it was a question of motives, but that one should not misunderstand when the insolent contempt of God and of morality manifested itself; that dependence and confidence should be diligently expressed in presenting our requests to God, which He would hear as our loving Father: lastly, that practical obedience should lay a solid basis for the hope of the future.

It is evident then that the subject spoken of is not redemption, nor the sinner, but the character which suits the kingdom and necessary to enter it. The state wished for precedes entrance into the kingdom. Their righteousness must surpass Pharisaism, for God was looking at the heart. Israel was in the way with Jehovah and must make friends with Him. The kingdom of the heavens was going to be established: there was what one must have for entering in. One had to do with God. As to the disciples, opposition is supposed to their testimony, and conflicts; which gives occasion to the revelation of the heavenly part of the kingdom; chapter 5, verses 11, 12.

Thus the positive part of our Lord’s teaching embraces the promises (as v. 5) for the earth, and for the heavens the verses already referred to. Others apply generally to the spirit desired by God, which, at bottom, is the character of Christ Himself. The disciples were set as the salt of the earth (of that which was in relation with God) in contrast with every corruption, and as the light of the world, the testimony of God to those who lay in the dark outside. Their testimony ought to be clear enough for men to know to what they should attribute

the fruits manifested in them. The place of the disciples was thus sketched clearly, the remnant called by grace.

The sermon on the Mount is in no way a spiritualising of the law. There are but two commandments one could say that allusion is made to; and even this is not true, for the Lord gives a teaching which does not agree with that which was current among the ancients, if He does not even contradict it; and never would He have spoken thus of the law of God. He says that every word of the law and of the prophets shall come to pass; He Himself came not to make void, but to fulfil. Moreover to “fulfil” has not at all the sense of obeying, but just simply what is said of giving the fulness. Disobedience of the law when it was in force was not the means of entering into the kingdom. The Lord, like the gospel, confirms fully the law as come from God. When it subsisted, to be obedient to it was the path of God; but here, while saying so, the Lord puts His teaching in contrast with the discourses of the times of the law. The narrow gate and the strait way characterised the walk of the disciples: their fruits would shew the true nature of those who sought to make them go out of it.

The sermon is not the rich grace preached to sinners any more than redemption, but the path traced for the faithful who would have part in the kingdom which was going to be established. It will be remarked that the name of Father is very distinctly employed in this discourse of the Saviour. As it is said in John 17, “I have declared unto them thy name”; the Son being there, the name of the Father was revealed. Such is the measure of conduct ordained for the disciples with respect to others — “perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” From this name flow the principles of their walk in this world.

It is true that they were here, and He in heaven; and they addressed Him accordingly; but the Father was revealed. It is for the coming of the Father's kingdom that they were to pray.

Having presented the great principles of the kingdom of the heavens, the Lord comes down from the mountain, and then begins the presentation to Israel of Jehovah come in grace in the midst of the people, Emmanuel, God with them, und of all the features of goodness, compassion, love, revealed in His ways towards them up to His rejection: a picture of every beauty and of the most profound interest! These features we will endeavour as much as we can to reproduce, while feeling how much the pen, alas! the heart also even though involuntarily, fails in it. But before entering this divine garden to enjoy the flowers and the fruits that grow there, it will be well to say a word on the kingdom and on the sermon, which we have just summed up briefly in reference to the kingdom.

This kingdom, as a whole, is in view in its heavenly part and its earthly part in verses 5 and 12; and that which they were to pray for, we have seen, is the kingdom of the Father. But the disciples are all in the midst of difficulties and of persecutions, the salt in the midst of corruption, the light in a world of darkness. The law and the prophets were to be accomplished; but another thing is now introduced. Such was to be the kingdom of the heavens. The King was there in an adverse world, and in the midst of a people which was going to reject Him. But the kingdom of the heavens could not take place. For this the King was to go up to heaven; for the kingdom of the heavens is the kingdom of God, while the King and the government are in heaven.

In what precedes we have a sketch of the Lord's ministry and of the principles of His kingdom. It is a complete whole. In what follows we see Him as He is presented personally to the people with the result of this presentation. He is rejected by Israel, and Israel is replaced for the moment by the church and the kingdom, though owned anew in grace when the kingdom shall be restored. For the moment it is the personal presentation of the Lord to the people with the consequences of this presentation. As He descended from the mountain with the crowd,35 a leper came to meet Him. Now Jehovah alone healed leprosy. The man had learned that Jesus possessed the necessary power, but was not assured of His goodwill. If Thou wilt, said he, Thou canst cure it. But love and power were found there: Jehovah was there in grace to heal. I will, said Jesus, be thou clean. To whom did it pertain to say thus, I will, be thou? To One only: and the thing was done. But He who said so was also there to draw near the man, as Himself man. He lays His hand on the man, He touches the leper. Beautiful picture of that which was really there! God capable of doing everything, love and goodwill to do it, but man in the midst of a contaminated race which He has touched in His grace without being driven back by the evil, without being contaminated by the defilement though He touched it to heal it; and the man was healed, for Jehovah was there, man in the midst of His people.

Such was the great fact by which this part of the Gospel begins. It is the essential fact of everything—Emmanuel. Another element accompanies it. He owns the authority of the system in the midst of which He found Himself. The healed leper must go and shew himself to the priest;

who, while pronouncing him clean and accepting his sacrifice, was owning in fact the divine power of Him who had thus healed the leper. The Man who is truly of humanity though without defilement, and whom the evil He came into contact with could not defile, was Emmanuel, Jehovah who healed, but entering by the door and subject to all that Jehovah had ordained in Israel.

The second fact is a fact parallel to this one. A man from among the Gentiles, with a faith which was not cramped by the proud egotism which confined all of it to the promises made to the people and to the privileges which belonged to them, but saw the divine power (if it was there) more in its own vastness, beseeches Jesus to heal his servant. The faith which places a man in the presence of God, which realises His presence, is always humble. The Gentile does not deem himself worthy that Jesus should come under his roof. He has only to say a word: everything would obey Him, as his soldiers himself. Jesus owns his faith; and the word is said: his servant is healed. But see another great truth which comes out here: the faith of the Gentile is owned, and the children of the kingdom according to the flesh shall be cast out. Where God is found, He cannot limit Himself to a particular people, whilst coming into the midst of them according to His promise; and, what is more, He cannot deny Himself nor change His character. If those who were of His people answered not to His character, they could not be with Him; and now He was revealing Himself and was the necessary centre of all that which could be owned.

Afterwards He is present in that power of goodness which puts aside all the effects of sin and of Satan’s

dominion in this world. At one word from Jesus diseases cease, and demons flee away, and those possessed are delivered. It is not only power, but goodness. It is God who is there, but at the same time the Man who has a perfect sympathy with men carries their miseries on His heart and burdens Himself with the sorrows of their infirmities. He heals while feeling them; as we hear Him groan deeply at the tomb of Lazarus, though He raises Himself from among the dead.

But it is none the less true that He is the despised and rejected of men: the Son of man has not where to lay His head—has not the privileges of the foxes and of the birds in this world. He is not of this world; and to follow Him is to break entirely with everything which is of it. God come into this world is come because the world is without Him, and ought to have absolute right to the heart; and this to separate it from the world and from the flesh which has arranged itself without Him, and to attach the heart wholly to Him who was come to seek it. And the most powerful motives for the human heart were null before the rights of God come in grace because man was lost. It is not that God does not own the relations that He Himself has formed; but that when they make good their rights against Him who formed them, these rights are lost entirely, being derived from His will: to resist Him while asserting them is therefore to destroy them. Besides, if the Lord is there, His rights rise above everything.

The Lord does not seek the admiration of the crowd; He does His work, but a curious multitude is nothing for Him. He goes to the other side of the lake. But to accompany the Lord, to be truly with Him, is not tranquillity, but the exercise of faith. A tempest arose,

and the ship is covered with waves. According to appearances, the Lord is a stranger to the peril of His own; He sleeps, and the disciples think they will be swallowed up by the waters. They had a certain faith in Him if He were awake: at least He could occupy Himself with the danger. But all the same, what want of faith to think that the counsels of God and the Lord Himself were going to be swallowed up together by a storm, or according to the world by an accident! They were in the same ship with the Lord, the object of all the counsels of God. Accidents do not happen there, not to say anywhere else. A word on His part calms the waves and the wind.- The companionship of the Lord when He is rejected conducts us in the storm, yet He seems to let all go without paying heed to it; but we are, thank God, in the same ship with Him. He exercises faith and appears to be indifferent with regard to difficulties; He is not uneasy, and His grace and power awake at an opportune moment. It is the character of the road to which the Lord has introduced His own in quitting the multitude of this world.

But there is more. Come with power to destroy the work of the devil, His presence manifests the power of the enemy; it awakes and displays itself; and, just because He acts, the Lord allows that the reality of this power should be manifested. The impure beings which become the vessels of this energy of the enemy hurl themselves down to destruction. A word of the Lord delivers him whom the world could not bind; but the world cannot endure God so near it, and under the quiet influence of Satan, more dangerous than His force, gets quit of the Lord. It is not the power of Satan which was the question (for that a word was enough), but of his

influence over the heart, yea, over the heart, just as the heart of man will not have God. What manifests Him no doubt manifests Satan; but it is the deliverance of those who are in subjection to his power. But then it is God; and man wishes none of Him, even when He is delivering. It is the history of the Saviour, of God, in this poor world.

Such is the summary presentation of Emmanuel, of the path of Jesus towards the earth; the fulness of grace; but man will not have God. It was in Israel indeed that all this took place, and it is thus presented here; but the work is extended to the world in grace and in judgment. It is a remarkable picture of the presence of Emmanuel and of its effect: grace, goodness in power on the earth, the manner in which it was received, and the result of its manifestation for the heart of man. What follows, chapter 9, is His ministry.

In chapter 9 we find the work of the Lord, His character in grace; as in chapter 8. His person (more precisely however in Israel), but rejected. The Lord returns to His own city (Capernaum), but far from the scene which closes the last chapter (which is complete in itself), the world rejecting Him and He quitting the world.

Now He is seen afresh in the midst of His service in Israel. Faith brings a man paralysed in his body. The Lord is still here as Emmanuel, yet man in their midst, but there He is announced with the promised blessing of Jehovah’s presence in grace. Here it is no question of redemption (though certainly without it there could not be such a pardon), but of the application of pardon in grace in Israel as we see in Psalm 103; and for present blessing Israel must be pardoned. The Lord comes with

this blessing, and it is a direct testimony to pardon: else He would have simply healed the paralytic as in other cases. But when Jehovah came in grace, He pardoned all their sins and healed all their iniquities. The Lord announces the presence of Jehovah to do the first of these things. The scribes murmured in themselves. Who but Jehovah could pardon? But He who knew their thoughts was there and proves by the other portion of the verse that the Lord was there in the power of His grace. He heals immediately the infirmity of the sick man.

We may remark here that, in this as in the preceding chapter, He takes the title of Son of man, His title of predilection or love for us, of a much larger import than that of Christ, which, though He was the Christ, He was not come to take and never does take in Israel. He is there as Emmanuel, Jehovah to save His people, but as Son of man, a title of all importance. He who takes the kingdom in glory from heaven, who even has all things under His feet, Christ, never presents Himself as Christ. The Son of man was to be strong for God (Psalm 80:17); but at present He must suffer. But, though in the midst of His people, necessarily when here below God must take in His nature and in His work His place in respect to men above all relationship according to the law as the rejected One on the earth. The Son of man has power on earth to forgive sins; as the crowd say that God has given such power to men.

The pardon then was there, and grace toward sinners. He was there in this character. He goes and eats with the tax-gatherers after having called Matthew who was one of them. It was not the outside which guided His walk. God was there, and the work was to be the effect

of His presence and of His grace, not to depend on what He found. He knew also the heart and the vessels to choose and bring under the effect of this grace as His instruments. But the principle of the work was the principle of His grace: He was come not to find but to bring what was necessary: and the vessels to receive this for service were chosen vessels, known of God and disposed by grace as new and suited instruments.

Therefore He is there forgiving sins and eating with sinners; but it is Jehovah who heals (Psalm 103). The revelation as to the work goes farther. It could not be put into the old Jewish forms, nor could one take what was found in them as vessels containing it. A tax-gatherer was to be an apostle; a Pharisee at most to learn that he must absolutely be born anew. None of the old forms of righteousness really in relationship with the flesh and man in the flesh could receive the new wine: the doctrine of grace in power came by Jesus Christ. The old leathern bottles belonged to the flesh; but now was come the divine power in grace, and being completely new, it would have its own vessels. Besides, the Bridegroom was there. It was not the time for the sons of the bridechamber to fast: the time would come for that. It is a striking thing to see how the Lord always holds His rejection as an integral part of His history. The Son of man must suffer, the Bridegroom be taken away. It was Jehovah there in grace: this could not adapt itself to the old bottles and could only excite the hatred of man and of Israel who preferred their bottles, as giving them importance, to God Himself, and that when He was revealed in grace.

The following account contains the real history of Israel arrived at the point of dying.36 Christ has to do with

them as dead, and so He can; but those who in the way with Him have faith in Him are completely healed when every resource had failed. The virtue and the power of life were in Him, whilst in result He had to quicken Israel really dead. Such is the history of the Son of man's ministry—of Jehovah in Israel. To this are added two accessory effects of His power, as to His special character relative to Israel when appeal is made to Him under the name of Son of David. However the general character although manifested in Israel goes in its nature beyond them—Jehovah and the Son of man—and this it is which has a character of interest so profound to be remarked; but He was the Son of David in Israel.

In verse 27 we enter exclusively on the Israelitish ground, where the spirit of the heads is fully manifested, whilst the patience of the Lord continues still in grace. The blind in Israel recover sight by faith in the Son of David, and here He is in the house, and then He opens there also the mouth of the dumb. The attention of the crowd is drawn, and they confess that they have never seen the like. But if He casts out the power of the devil, the heads of the people call His power that of the devil. The spirit of an unpardonable apostasy was already manifested; but Jesus had not done37 His work of goodness in Israel, and He goes through the villages and the small towns, teaching, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and working cures. His heart was touched with compassion for Israel, for those multitudes which were as sheep without shepherds. For if He was Jehovah in His goodness, His heart could be moved with what He saw as man and until that goodness could find no more place for its exercise. His time found no obstacle in the wickedness of those who were His enemies; the harvest

was yet abundant, the labourers but few. Oh, how much the heart can still feel this! He wishes as yet to accomplish His work, to have His sheep. Our part is to pray the Lord of the harvest to send forth labourers.

We have then in this chapter the grace of His ministry, its true character, the ministry of Jehovah in grace, profitable for faith, but which is to raise the dead, and which, as an actual thing, is rejected and blasphemed. His person and His work have no place here save in grace. Whilst He can work thus, He continues to occupy Himself with all those who can be reached.

The Lord, who touched with compassion for the destitute masses, had told His disciples to ask the Lord of the harvest to send workmen into the harvest, moved by the same compassion, sends them Himself; for He is also Lord of the harvest. But here it is always for searching out the lost sheep of the house of Israel: He has always His rejection in view, but He acts still in the circle of the promises, and does not quit it whilst announcing that others would come from the west and from the east. The servant accomplishes His service in the limits of His mission; but God in His grace cannot be thus confined. The grace of His divinity and of His rights pierces across the humiliation to which He subjected Himself. But He serves in these limits still and sends His disciples into the field where He still seeks His sheep. They were not to go by the way of the Gentiles, nor to enter a town of the Samaritans. They were to preach the near arrival of the kingdom of the heavens, then to exercise the power that Jesus had confided to them, that of destroying among men all the power of the enemy up to death itself. Remark here that not only did Jesus work miracles, but He could confer the power of working

them. It was the divine power which was revealed in His person whilst serving as He had been sent.

The discourse of the Lord is divided into two parts: one referring to the mission in which the disciples were engaged at that moment; the other more general, referring at the same time to the service which the disciples should accomplish after His death, really up to His return, to the presence of the Holy Spirit and to the return of die Son of man, but always to a service rendered in the midst of Israel, though the effect is extended to the Gentiles, yet by means of the persecution excited by the Jews. The first part extends from verse 5 to 15; the second from verse 16 to the end, comprising the general principles of their position.

As the disciples went from God, invested with His power to overthrow all that of the enemy, they were also to trust entirely to Him, to take nothing with them, nor to make provision of that which was necessary for their journey. Emmanuel present disposed the hearts and took care of them. The time would come without doubt, when it would not be so with them. (See Luke 22:35, and following verses.) However, in going into a city they were to ask who was worthy, and to remain there till they went away from the city. It was, we may say, the last testimony rendered to Israel. There was still that of the seventy, the last time that He went up to Jerusalem; but there is no question of them in this Gospel. The Lord was warning the remnant in Israel. In wishing peace to a house, if the son of peace dwelt there, the peace would abide there: otherwise it would return on them. This is not the gospel sent to the world, to sinners, but the gospel of the kingdom sent to those who had ears to hear in Israel. Afterwards, where they were not

received, they were to wipe off the dust from their feet. We see the final character of the testimony they were to bear. The judgment of such a city would be more terrible than that of Sodom and Gomorrah. Here closes the first part of their mission. The Lord Himself sends them with the consciousness, and He expresses it, that He was sending them like sheep in the midst of wolves, and that they must be wise as serpents and harmless as doves—counsel impossible to follow but for those who are taught of God.

The world may be prudent, knowing evil; the heart may be simple by ignorance and find itself betrayed; the Christian may be wise or prudent, by the wisdom of God who directs him, and simple because he walks according to the life which is in him, and expresses nothing else than that which is found there. The two things are connected; because by the positive possession of good one discerns evil, and snares do not succeed; because the motives which engage men to touch them exert no influence on the heart. One preserves simplicity in acting according to what one is; and we are prudent because, knowing that we are in the midst of evil, we avoid it by the intelligence which belongs to spirituality! It is not the simplicity of ignorance, but of good which avoids whatever should make one quit one's true position before God. But (terrible word for man), "Beware of men" says the Lord; and all are cast as such now into the same mass—He does not say, of Israel. It was exactly in Israel that they laboured, but Israel is blinded with the mass of human iniquity. God could think of them and the promises, but in fact the heart of man was there as elsewhere. They would be forced to appear before the Jewish authorities by their malice, and not

only so but before the Gentiles tribunals, and thus bear a witness which would reach the high places of the earth; for it is thus God carries His testimony into the high quarters of the world, and not by rendering His own worldly. But God would be with them.

And here we see clearly that this part of the chapter referred to the time when the Lord would be away. It would be the Spirit of their Father speaking in them. But the hatred of the human heart against the testimony of God would be shewn in pushing men on to break the ties that God had formed at the time of creation; the affections of the flesh, of the human heart, would be changed into positive antipathy. The more intimate the relation, the more implacable its hatred. There are rights in these relationships; but now it would be the rights of hatred: brother would deliver brother to death.

What a solemn effect of the rejection of Christ, the only true tie of man with man, because the will is restrained and God owned! God can hold the bridle, and He has done so in mercy, but when He is rejected in grace, there remains only the manifestation of man’s heart as it is. Nature does not bridle nature; and the testimony of God merely awakens the hatred of him who wishes none of His rights, who does not wish that there should be any, because he knows that he has abandoned Him. But His grace pursues His work to attract souls.

If the disciples were persecuted in one city, they were to go to another. They should not have accomplished their task in Israel before the Son of man was come. Thus we see that this testimony of the disciples in Israel extends even to the return of the Lord. Interrupted by the destruction of Jerusalem, and unfinished, it was to be

accompHshed. Another testimony has been raised up of God in the person of Paul, apostle of circumcision; but here we have the mission of the disciples formally limited to Israel, and the Gentiles excluded. They were to expect reproach; they were not above their Master whom their adversaries had already called Beelzebub. Their part was to confide in God, whatever the concealed plots of their enemies; all should be set in light, and they were to act as being in it already. They were not to fear. First, they should fear Him who could cast body and soul into hell much more than those who could do nothing but kill the body. But besides, without their Father—Him who guarded them as a Father—not a sparrow fell to the ground. They had more value in His eye than many sparrows. Lastly, he who confessed Jesus before men, Jesus would confess him before the angels of His Father. These are the three motives that He gives for firmness; but they were not to think that He was come to send peace on earth. As the final result He will, reigning as Prince of peace; but a Saviour rejected is another thing. This would bring intestine war into the house; such the sad effect of the arrival of God and of truth on the earth. Man could not endure them, and still less at home; but on the other side He was the touchstone for the heart.

It was all over with man according to nature—nature which God owned in itself fully, but which on the rejection of Christ, the key of the arch if it could have been blessed, was fallen into ruin; and now all depended on Jesus alone; and if man violated the natural relationships by hatred, His own devoted to Him were to be above nature by grace. He was, He is, all: when it is a question of Him, all must yield, and this in regard not

only to these relationships but to self (and it is always self that is in question). We must take up the cross and follow Christ. He that would find his life should lose it, and he that would lose it for Christ's sake would find it. All depended now, in a fallen and judged world, on the reception of the word and on the estimate made of it, and on righteousness according to God. He that received a prophet in the name of a prophet, because he was such, had in the eyes of God the usual value of the word that he carried (for it was the word that he loved, such as it was from God); and so with practice. Ceremonies had come to nothing. The point was the word of God and what He loved in a world which had broken with Him. If it were only a cup of water given because of Christ, the soul that gave it loved Christ and would not be forgotten. It is exactly as to God's ways in the midst of Israel that all these things are displayed. To their work in Israel the instruction given to the twelve disciples applies; but what instruction for us all as to the effect of the rejection of Christ! The chapter after this shews us the change that followed historically, and the place taken by Christ when rejected by man, alone remaining upright before God in the ruin of the world and of Israel.

The question is raised by John now in prison if Jesus was the Christ when no deliverance had been wrought for Israel. This was not a failure of confidence in the word of the Lord, for John does not refer to this word; but all is changed in the relations between John and Christ and Israel. As to intelligence John probably as an individual was embarrassed; but the effect of this embarrassment was to exchange his part of prophet for a question of individual faith, and the turn that things take and that Jesus gives them is according to divine wisdom. Fully

owned of Him as more than prophet, John has to believe in Jesus individually by the testimony that Jesus gives of Himself, able to do everything, full of grace to think of the poor, and bring them the gospel, but already rejected, and a little remannt owned in His words, “blessed is he who is not offended in me.”

So that we have still Jehovah in Israel a stone of stumbling, but a sanctuary for those who trust in Him. John must receive Jesus on this testimony. Thus it is Christ who renders testimony to John, Jehovah who owns His servant, and not John to Jesus. The testimony of the two had been tendered; the mournful strains of John, the attractive sound of the flute had been heard, both in the market place; but Israel would neither be humbled for the one nor rejoice in the other. All that was closed. Only there was a remnant according to grace, and the wisdom of God in the two had been justified in the two by these children of wisdom: and Jesus remained alone in His grace, Jehovah in the world, in a world where man had shewn that he wished none of Him, to manifest what He was in Himself for the wants of those who, in such a world, had made the discovery of their wants and their miseries. The world had been put fully to the proof, and Jesus who had done so and knew that there was nothing there to console a tried heart, who knew that His Spirit had been like the dove sent by Noah in that grace which shone only with so much the more splendour that the world was dark, presents Himself to every burdened heart as the resource, and a perfect resource, for its wants. He gives rest by the revelation of the love of the Father in His person; then, by the perfect submission of a heart bowed under the

will of God, practical rest in life. But the details demand a little more attention.

The Lord was not at all insensible to His rejection; He felt it profoundly, although it was in a spirit of grace. We see Him weep later over the final obstinacy of Jerusalem; His heart of love thought with grief of the hardening of Jerusalem in seeing the city, beloved but wicked, reject the last effort of God to bring her back and bless her. Here the feeling of His heart was a little different. He had displayed His power in blessings and in testimony; and all had been in vain. He had reproached them with the hardness of their heart. He had spent Himself for them; but their heart had remained insensible. Neither Tyre nor Sidon, neither Sodom nor Gomorrah, would have remained insensible in the same circumstances; they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. Their judgment would be so much the more terrible; but then in the same hour He accepts all from the hand of His Father: perfect subjection! He had seen good to humble the pride of man, and had hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and had xevealed them to babes. In the eye of God these ways were good, and Jesus accepts them without question.

Then in this perfect submission of man opens out before Him all the truth of His glory, and of the relative position of Israel and of Him, and of Himself with men. The Son of God was there. All things had been delivered to Him by the Father, and none knew the Son but He. He was in the truth of His person which none knew. The divinity of the Son is guarded in His humiliation by the inscrutability of His person. The testimony rendered to that which men in Israel were called to believe had been

accepted; but the full truth went much farther and came forth out of obscurity, now that the testimony of John, of Christ, and of His works was rejected. As for Him, He was unknown; He revealed the Father. The sovereign grace of God in this revelation is then manifested. One has but to come to Him, and he will have rest. It was no longer the kingdom in Israel, but, by the revelation of the Father, rest for the weary soul. Thus it is God in grace for him who has need of it—the Son revealing the Father.

But there is another element in this touching picture of grace. The perfect submission of a man humble of heart had been the occasion of the revelation of glory and of grace in His person. It is just the same in" John 12. It is always so. Submission to the ways of God opens the door to the knowledge of His grace and of His glory. Now it was thus with Jesus as man; and He engages His hearers to take the yoke, the yoke that He had taken Himself, and to learn of Him in this manifestation of submission and of poverty of spirit, and they should find rest for their souls. It is perfect grace, the revelation of the Father in the Son, which gives rest to hearts weary of this world of sin; it is the perfect submission of the will which gives practical peace to the heart, whilst one crosses it. It is Christ the Son revealing the Father, the man Christ perfectly subject to the yoke, which gives both.

In chapter 12 we find the final rejection of the Jewish system and of those who were at its head. Christ breaks with the system and judges the leaders of it, takes a place above the sabbath, which was the seal of the covenant, foretells the complete ruin of the perverse generation of Israel, and refuses to acknowledge His

words according to the flesh with that people, and will only acknowledge disciples who were brought in by the word and who had obeyed it. But we must examine the chapter more closely.

The Pharisees reproved the disciples for having plucked the ears of corn and rubbed them in their hands. The Lord answers, that when David, the anointed of God, had been rejected, the law of Moses had lost its force. The priests also violated the sabbath, when an occasion called for it: and there was One greater than the temple, the living God Himself making His temple in man. They ought then to have understood the meaning of those words that mercy rejoices over judgment. Further, the Son of man was Lord of the sabbath; He was above the system that He had Himself established as Jehovah, and His title as Son of man placed Him outside and above the claims which the old covenant had over man, and the rest which it demanded but could not give. He besides shews their hypocrisy in these things, in the case of the man with the withered hand. The love and goodness of God are above ceremonies, however holy these may be. Thus His person, being rejected as David's had been, is above the Jewish system, and the goodness" of God cannot yield the sovereign right of His divine grace towards man. But the time of judgment was not yet. His voice is not heard in the street till the moment comes when He will raise it in judgment in the day of His glory, and when He will send forth this judgment victorious over all opposition, and even the Gentiles will trust in Him. He casts out another demon, and the enmity without heart and without conscience of the Pharisees breaks out. They could not deny the miracle, and rather than acknowledge Jesus they

attribute it to a demon; that is to say, acknowledging in spite of themselves that power was there, but, being enemies of God, they called the Holy Spirit, by whom the miracle was wrought, a demon. There was no forgiveness for this.

After this the Lord then comes to the complete condemnation of the Jews. Full of unbelief, they, who had just attributed the sign to the devil rather than believe it, ask for a sign; but the Lord gives them none other than that of Jonas, a prefiguration of His time of being in the grave, but a sign that it was now too late for them, that the One whom they had already rejected was the Son of God, and that all connection with this generation was for ever at an end. He brings forward the men of Nineveh and a queen of the south who would rise in judgment against this generation; for a greater than Jonas or Solomon was there.

It seems to me that a deep feeling of sorrow betrays itself in the words of Jesus at the sight of the unbelief of the leaders of Israel, blind men who pretended to lead the blind. But the time of judgment was come, and the Lord pronounces that judgment. The unclean spirit had gone out of that people, the spirit of idolatry, I doubt not, for since the captivity of Babylon they had not fallen into idolatry; but the demon needed, so to speak, this people among whom the name of God was found, but where God was no longer, and whom they had rejected when He came into their midst in the person of Jesus. The house was empty, swept and garnished: religious forms and external piety were found there; but God Himself was no longer there. The unclean spirit would enter with seven spirits more wicked than himself, and the last state would be worse than the first. The last state of the

people, at least that of the perverse generation, would be worse than its former sins. They have already shewn themselves as the swine of Gennesaret, after the death of the Lord; but the words of the Lord will be accomplished at the end of the times, when the Jews will again become idolaters, and when all the devil's power will be developed under the Antichrist.

It is well to understand each for himself how, if a vice is conquered without God, nothing is really gained. A gross vice may be given up for a more subtle sin. If there is not really the work of God in the heart, it may be hardened, and Satan will reign there more than ever. But here the Lord applies what He had said to the generation which had rejected Him, to the unbelieving and perverse Jews from whom God hid His face to see their end.

Then those who were the expression of the bonds by which He was attached to the Jewish people according to the flesh came pressing this claim. The Lord would not acknowledge them, and pointing out His disciples, said, Behold my mother and my brethren; the relationships I acknowledge are those formed by the word of God. As to the history of the Jews, all was at an end. Grace might continue and take up the people in a remnant owned of God; but as to responsibility, their history was ended. The Lord seeks no more for fruit on a tree manifestly bad, and shews Himself, as a sower, by the wayside, bringing that which, when received in the heart, would produce fruit. This, however, introduced the kingdom of the heavens in which the Gentiles could share.

The chapter to which we are now come has been so often handled that I shall have no need to dwell much on the details. Only we shall need a general glance at the position it holds in the Gospel, and some words on the last parable. We have seen the Lord pronounce on the Jewish people a judgment which extends even to the last days, breaking, as come in flesh, all His relations with them. The heads of the people had blasphemed against the Holy Spirit and brought this judgment on the entire system, although the patience of God still sought all those who had ears to hear. The Lord sought no more fruit in His vineyard. There was only verjuice after all His pains. Such really was man; for Israel was only man placed under law with all the advantages God could lavish on him. In the trial to which man had been subjected two things had been proved: that he could not attain to righteousness according to the law; and that he would not receive God come in grace, manifested in humanity to gain man and exercising a power to heal all the evils to which man had been subjected by sin.

He quits the house, a sign, I doubt not, of the immense change in the ways of God, and sits in a ship on the sea, and presents Himself as a sower, that is, as no more seeking fruit, but carrying with Him in this world what was to produce it. The Lord goes no farther than the word of the kingdom. The verses 10-17 state the judgment of the people according to the prophecy of Isaiah, of which the Lord in His patience had so long put off the accomplishment, and the separation of a remnant owned of the Lord—a remnant whose ears and eyes were opened by grace.

It is well to recall that there are seven parables: the first is not a similitude of the kingdom, the others are. Of

these the first three present to us the form the kingdom took in the world; the last three, the thoughts of God in establishing in this manner the kingdom, and then the result of all at the end of the age. The first is occupied with individuals and the visible effect of the word. There is no question of the work of the Holy Spirit, which is found elsewhere doubtless; but here it is the exterior work of Christ in sowing, and in effect the consequence as far as manifested on the earth. We have just the word of the kingdom, but neither the kingdom nor the end of the age. Christ sows, and there is the result in this world, in man on the earth: the seed produces fruit in one case out of four. In the first the seed does not penetrate at all: Satan takes it away as soon as it is sown. There is levity of heart, an indifference which receives nothing; the word is not understood, the heart is occupied with something else. However it is a word adapted to man and sown in his heart. In the second case, on the contrary, the heart is gained as to its feelings for a moment, but the conscience is not reached. There is no rest: the doctrine has been received for the joy that the message brings; and when the word brought sufferings instead of joy, the heart wished no more of it. There was not a true want. The Holy Spirit always produces wants. It was not as with the apostles: “Lord, to whom shall we go? “In the third case the world has choked the good seed. Alas! there is no need to explain it: we see it every day. However it is a subtler thing: the world, business has not the evil look of gross sin; but the word is choken and produces nothing.

The danger and the tendency of these things are found in the Christian: according to the measure the world exercises empire over him, his life suffers from it. Be it

he is not dead but he sleeps, he does not understand spiritual things; he does not see or even enjoy them. Unhappy in the presence of spiritual Christians, he enjoys not the things they enjoy, and suffers even from reproofs of his conscience. And if he goes with the world, he suffers also in reflecting on it, his conscience reproaching him with want of faithfulness; like a sick man who suffers, he is not dead: otherwise he would not suffer; but it is a sad means of knowing that life is there.

In the fourth case the word is understood: it penetrates, grows, and produces fruit in different degrees in different persons. In the first case it is said that the word was not understood, in this case it is said that it was; in the other cases the point is not touched. In the first case it was seen that nothing had penetrated. In the two following there was the appearance of it, but there was nothing: the plant perished without fruit. In the last case the seed is developed in the interior of the heart, and fruit is produced: precious effect according to the nature of what was sown, fruit for Him who had sown the seed and for him who had received it! There is no judgment, but the patent facts stated by the Lord in contrast with the vineyard and His fig-tree where He was seeking fruit, and in contrast also with the kingdom or state of things in the world, and their result in the judgment at the end.

The first of the following parables shews the effect of the sowing in the world up to the end of the age, but does not take in the execution of judgment: this is found, as well as the manifestation of glory, in the explanation made to the disciples in the house. It should be remarked that, in the parable of the sower, He is not named. It is the effect of the word in the heart of man,

whoever may have sown. Here, on the contrary, we have a similitude of the kingdom, and He who sows takes the character (not of Christ—we have seen His work closed in His rejection, the Messiah seeking fruit was come to be received in Israel, but) of Son of man. He who sows is the Son of man, and the field is the world; but I anticipate.

We have always the general character of the work that the Lord wrought: He sowed; but not the personal result in the world. He has sown good seed in His field, but the responsibility of man is in question in the result produced; and whilst they slept, the enemy came and sowed tares. That did not hinder the good grain from being in the garner, but spoilt the whole of the crop in the field, and the evil which had been done was without remedy. It is forbidden the servants to root up the tares for fear of rooting up the good grain with them, precisely what happened when men would do so: the two were to grow together till the harvest. The kingdom of the heavens presented in this world a spoilt crop, fruit, on one side of the Lord's work, on the other of the enemy's work. Now in the parable we have only what happens in the kingdom before the manifestation of the Ring and the execution of judgment by Him. When He shall be manifested and the public judgment come, there will be no more parables, the mystery of God will be closed. In the parables we have mysteries, that which demands a revelation to know them; the execution of judgment is in itself the most striking revelation. In the parable we have then at the end in general the time of the harvest; and the tares are gathered first in bundles to burn them. The tares are there in bundles on the field of this world, and the good grain is hid in the garner.

Afterwards, before explaining the parable of the tares, the Lord gives two other similitudes of the kingdom; and remember that it is a question here of the kingdom. It is well to remark that the word for likeness is not the same in these parables and that of the tares. Here it is only the character the kingdom will take; it is “like” to, etc. In the parable of the tares, “it is become,” or has been made, “like.” It is a character that it has taken in actual circumstances considering the rejection of the King.

It is worth while also to remark in these parables those in which the thing in itself is the subject of comparison, and those where it is the individual or those who form the essential part of the parable. The kingdom itself is like a little grain of mustard seed becoming a great tree, symbol in the Old Testament of a thing elevated in the world, of a political power. We know well that this is come—that the birds nesting in its branches signifies the protection it affords. Compare Daniel 4:12. It is the public appearance of the kingdom system such as it has been for ages: here is no judgment.

Next comes the parable of the leaven. The likeness is the leaven. The woman is not a sower; it is not the Lord who sows what is designated as the good seed; it is not a great tree in the world. It is a doctrine which insinuates itself everywhere in certain limits, and forms the entire lump according to its own nature. The whole is leavened: it is Christendom. But in neither of these two parables do we arrive at judgment. It is the kingdom such as it is when the grain of mustard seed or the leaven has fully acted and produced its effect. It is true that leaven is always employed in an evil sense; yet I do not think this is the aim of the parable, but the doctrine which forms all in one sole lump where it penetrates. If

it was purely the evil as evil, we should have had some exception. This is marked in the tares, but on another side. It is not the good that is sown, nor the Lord who sows; so that the notion of positive good is carefully avoided as well as of him who does so. The point is not the word of God, but the fact of the general profession of Christians and in a form where no idea of good is presented; for certainly leaven is not, in the word, an image of good. No more is the parable the description of an individual. There is hardly need to discuss this point, because it is a similitude of the kingdom of the heavens, and in no case is an individual the kingdom of the heavens. Besides, the result in an individual is not that which is depicted here.

These then are the three descriptions of the kingdom on the earth during the absence of the king, such as the kingdom is presented to the eyes of all: a mixture of good and bad, the harvest thus spoilt as a whole; afterwards a great human and political power on the earth; and a general profession of doctrine without question of the individual state of anyone whatever. Afterwards the good corn is hid in the garner; and providence prepares the seed of the enemy to be burnt by binding them together in bundles on earth.

Then the Lord enters the house; and there, speaking to the disciples alone, He enters more into the inner principles of the kingdom of which He speaks, communicating not the effect in the world, but the thoughts of God, the great result which would explain all in judgment and glory manifested on earth, and the real aim of what the Lord had done as well as the action of those who enter with intelligence into His ways.

First He explains the parable of the tares. We have already spoken of the chief features, but the Lord adds here what concerns the manifestation of the result in this world. In the parable we have left the wheat in the garner and the tares in bundles on the field, the wicked gathered by the angels or by the providence of God. But here appears on the scene the Son of man to remove every scandal from His kingdom (which He does), and He casts the wicked into a furnace of fire where is weeping and gnashing of teeth. It is the judgment executed. The servants were to let the tares grow. Then after the judgment the righteous shine in the kingdom like the sun—in effect like Jesus Himself. This is the result and this the divine explanation of what was a mystery before, for the judgment manifests what faith discerns. Remark that all which is revealed is in the world, first the kingdom before, then the judgment after. The fact is stated that the corn is hidden; but nothing is said of the garner nor of the state of the corn when it is there.

In the parables which follow we have, as it has been said, the thoughts of God, the aim of the Lord in the kingdom, but still those thoughts, without speaking of a result in judgment, as we have seen in that of the mustard seed and that of the leaven. The first shews us the kingdom as the discovery of a treasure formerly unknown, hidden in a field; and he who had found it renounces all that he has to have it, and for this buys the field. This is what Christ did. All that He had as Messiah on earth He left to have the treasure of His people by taking the field where they were found, the world, to have them. They were hidden in this world; but Christ knew about them, taught of the Father as Man on the

earth, and surrendered all up to His life to have us. If in fact we renounce all to have Christ, nevertheless it is no question (as people too much forget) of an individual, but of the kingdom; and, further, we buy no field to have Him.

The second case is a little different. The point is not a discovery. The merchant was in search of good pearls. He knew what a good pearl was, he could appreciate them, he wanted good ones. Now Christ has found in the church the object of His search, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. I do not think of the church as a body or system, but of its moral beauty. The merchant had taste for beauty in pearls, Christ for what was beautiful in the eyes of God, and, to have it, He left His Messianic glory and His life. What happiness to think that He satisfies His heart in us, and what perfection of beauty in God's eyes is the thing wrought out! Zion is called the perfection of beauty, but there it was earthly; here it is heavenly according to the heart of God.

The last parable demands the most serious attention. For my part I do not doubt that it applies particularly to these days. The net of the gospel is cast into the sea of people and gathers fish of every sort. The effect of the gospel is not that all the fish enter into its meshes, but that a quantity of all sorts, good and bad, are gathered within the net. This is the result. Then those who drew the net sit down there, on the shore, and engage in what they have at heart, in the aim for which they have drawn the net—to get good fish; and they choose, separate them from the bad, and put them apart in vessels, rejecting the bad and leaving them there. It is the fishermen who do that, and occupy themselves with the good. That is to say, when Christianity has gathered, as

it has done, a certain mass of people who are placed altogether in the net of Christendom, at the end of the days the servants of Christ occupy themselves with the mass and gather the good into vessels. They are the servants of Christ who have intelligence and can distinguish them, knowing what they want. When the public government shall arrive, there will be the inverse. The angels, ministers of the providence and the government of God, take not the good but the wicked on the earth and cast them into the fire. The principle, I believe, applies always when the gospel in a district has gathered many persons: the aim of the Lord is to put His own together in companies apart. But the parable seems to speak directly of the result of the operation of the gospel in gathering many persons as having part in the christian name; then, as a second operation, on the shore they sort them and engage in putting the good apart. The execution of judgment is another thing. In this parable as in the two preceding, we find spiritual discernment with respect to the aim of God. In the second this characterises the action of the merchant; in the first and the third the field is bought, the net filled, but in the two cases the treasure and the good fish are distinguished from what is taken outwardly and govern the action both of the merchant and of the fishermen.

It is to be remarked that four of these similitudes do not speak of judgment, but of the outward appearance or of the aim of God in the kingdom, and of the result whether in the world or with God. The great tree and the leaven —such is the result in the world; the treasure and the pearl—such is what is acquired for God. In the first and the last we have the judgment; but the difference is sensible. In the first, naturally, we see the Lord begin

the work; and He has done so, of course, without mixture of evil, the good corn being all good. The enemy makes a distinct work—cannot do otherwise. There is a harvest; but the word has produced individual plants: the mixture is found in the harvest. But there are two works distinct, and the two things remain such till the end, and the preparation for judgment is the action of God in the world, and He is occupied first with the wicked to prepare them for the judgment. Men do not act; they are forbidden to act. What is produced is the effect of the action of the Lord and of the enemy. The servants slept: that is all. Wheat and tares were always wheat and tares, fruit of a distinct work.

In the net the mixture was the result of the work of man, the kind of fish distinct, doubtless, but all gathered into the net by a single toil, and that on the part of men, the fishermen. This is not here a work of the enemy, but the imperfect work of man. It is only the fact however which is stated. The net is full, then drawn on shore; and those who have the intelligence of what is a good fish, those whose aim (and it is that of God) is to have good fish, sort them and put the good into vessels. The explanation, as previously, is the judgment which shows publicly what was true and understood spiritually before. But the angels occupy themselves only with the bad. In the first parable it is a question of rooting out of the world the bad, which was not allowed to the servants. In the last it is a question of putting the good together into vessels, which was their intelligent work. We must not forget that the last times were already come in the days of the apostle.

The immediate connections then existing of the Lord with the Jews were, as we have seen, terminated, and

the kingdom of heaven was proclaimed according to the form which it was to take in consequence of His rejection. He was no longer seeking fruit from His vine, but was sowing that He might have fruit through the word. But Jesus continued to think of the people, shewing what He was, and alas! what they themselves were, and what was to take the place of His connections with the Jews, such as they would have been, if He had been received by them.

Chapters 14 and 16 shew us what He was then for the Jews, and what the remnant would become through His absence from that people, and the rejection or setting aside of the people. Chapter 15 brings in what He was for them as a divine person, even when the people were wicked and rejected; but being so, because He was God, and His counsels could not change. This favour extended itself to the Gentiles who had no right to the promises, although He did not abandon His positive connections with Israel; for the gifts and calling of God are without repentance. But we must remember that in this unfolding of the ways of God the grace of the Lord, divine and personal grace, is manifested in the most touching and instructive manner, and practical lessons for us are brought out continually from what is passing.

The rejection of the testimony of God begins to be realised in facts. John the Baptist is put to death by Herod through the instigation of his wife. The Lord, touched and sensible of the violence done to His faithful servant, retires into the desert. Elias, as it is said elsewhere, had come, and they had done unto him whatsoever they listed; and the Son of man was also to suffer at their hands. This act of cruelty was not only the death of the faithful proclaimer of the Lord, but to the

heart of the faithful Witness it spoke of the state of the people. But however painful His feelings were, as having come into their midst, divine love rises above all, above the sufferings of the Son of man.

The multitude hear that He has retired into the desert, and hasten thither. Coming forth from His retreat He sees the crowd, and, moved with compassion, He heals them. His goodness did not become weary in presence of the iniquity of man, now hastening to accomplish it. Even being come, the multitude was there, having nothing to eat. The disciples feel the inconvenience of their position, and wish to send them away, the natural resource of man. But God was in Israel and wished that His disciples, after so many proofs, should have the consciousness of the power that was there.

But their heart had no other resource but that which was visible to man and according to a human measure. Give ye them to eat, said the Saviour, and I myself will give to them. But they, instead of having faith in God, in the divine power of the Saviour, had five loaves and two fishes. What a difference between faith and the flesh! between God who can do everything and the poor resources which are in our hands. But the flesh sees no farther. The disciples could not make use of the power which was there. Alas! they did not think of it. But here the Lord was manifesting what He was in the midst of evil; not putting Himself in relation with Israel, if Israel wished it, but shewing Himself above Israel, the Jehovah who blessed His people, according to His heart. It was but a testimony to that grace, but it was to that grace that the testimony was rendered. In Psalm 132 it is said of the time, in which Jehovah will arise and will remember David and will act in grace according to His

own heart, “I will satisfy her poor with bread”; and He does so, a testimony useless for Israel, and even for the disciples save for grace, but not for His glory. The rejected Christ is Jehovah, the Saviour of His people, spite of all. The prelude to His rejection and to His death leads Him to give the proof of His divine and almighty grace, which is above the evil and unbelief even of those who belong to Him. But it is none the less true that this is only a testimony, and that things take their course, and this is intimated here in the facts.

He sends His disciples to cross the sea alone, dismisses the people and goes up into a mountain apart to pray; a living picture, in a few strokes, of all that has happened. The Jewish people is sent away, Christ is on high and His own on the sea. However, as we have seen all through in this Gospel, the Jews or the disciples as a remnant are in the foreground. I have no doubt but that even the number of the baskets of fragments, however slight the indication may be, has reference to the full blessing of the latter days in the reign. It is the number sacred to that, twelve tribes, twelve apostles, twelve thrones for them judging the twelve tribes, twelve stars on the woman. It is the idea of the perfection of the government of God in man. This is why it is also found in the heavenly Jerusalem. But let us pass on to the more formal facts of this history.

The Lord makes His disciples embark in a little boat without Him, then He dismissed the multitude of the Jews, who had rejoiced in His presence. It is not here judgment on the people, but Himself disappears, so to speak. Those who belong to the Lord, the little remnant, are besides exposed to the violence of the storm, without having the Saviour personally present with

them. He is on high alone. Mark the situation. But some other facts are brought in. The Lord rejoins them, master of all the elements which try them on the road. The water and the waves are the pathway of His feet, and as soon as He joins them all is calm, and those in the boat recognise Him as Son of God, the world likewise. Gennesareth which had rejected Him now joyfully receives Him, and its wounds are healed as the remnant of Israel had found peace.

We have not yet spoken of another fact. Peter leaves the ship to go to Jesus, before He rejoined the disciples. He walks upon the water when Peter goes to meet Him. This part of the history presents us, I doubt not, with the christian position outside Judaism. Jesus has not rejoined His disciples whom He had made embark when He had separated from them. Christ alone is the strength and the motive: “if it be Thou”; one must walk where there is nothing, as Christ walked. Trouble of the waves causes Peter’s faith to fail, but the grace and the power of the Saviour are there for the others, as for himself. He stretches out His hand and supports His poor servant. This is what He has done in order that we should walk as He walked where there is no support but Himself. Once Christ is come back to His disciples, all is peace and the voyage ends; but there are some precious personal instructions here.

The Christian has to walk over the water, to walk by faith, as Jesus walked, where there is no path, but divine power, for man cannot walk—is totally incapable of doing so. To walk there is the fruit of the power of Christ and of faith in the Christian, but this is not all. The eye must be fixed upon the Saviour: without this, one sinks. Peter had looked at the agitated sea and was sinking.

Christ being out of his view, there was a comparison made between the difficulties and himself. Impossible so to walk. He was right; but the divine power was utterly forgotten. So Israel with the spies. The cities are walled up to heaven, the Anakims were there, we were like grasshoppers. This was to forget God. Was He like a grasshopper before the Anakims? And what did the walls up to heaven? They fell down at the sound of a ram's horn. No, it is a question of looking to God and the path of His will, as Joshua and Caleb said, If the Lord take delight in us, we are well able. Peter had said, "If it be Thou," but then he should always have looked to Him. And see how foolish is unbelief. He saw the sea agitated. What if it had been calm? The reason of the difference was not there, but in looking to Jesus—or not. If one looks to Him, all is possible and all succeeds, because He can and will do all, all blessing, all the fruit of faith, thanks be to God. He is there to sustain us even when our faith comes short. If Jesus is the object who makes us walk oh the water, Jesus is the strength to walk there; but the eye must be kept fixed on Him. If His power is there, the storm does nothing. If His power is not there, we sink in the calm as much as in the storm. The walk is in every case by faith: and we need Jesus always and with Him can do everything. Storm and calm are alike.

In the next chapter the great controversy with the people, a controversy at bottom with the heart of man, is continued, but on moral ground; always in the midst of Israel, but full of instruction for all ages. It is ordinance in contrast with the morality willed by God, which is immutable in this sense that it refers to the relations in which man is found placed whether with God or with man, which consists in the maintenance in walk of that

which suits those relations. Once God has found these relations, whether of the creature with Himself or of His creatures among themselves, the duties exist of themselves, being only the practical expression of the relation, as a true worship rendered to God, or piety and filial obedience with every other consequence of those relations. Now the corrupted heart of man loves its own will and the satisfaction of its lusts too much to fulfil its duties; and forms of piety which feed its self-love please it more than duties and leave it free to follow its lusts. Neither God nor His character is truly known. God is not honoured by the heart, and the heart is not purified. To wash his hands suits such a man better than a pure heart or approaching God really.

The Lord touches distinctly this moral plague, shewing at the same time that the worship of these hypocrites was as far as possible from being accepted of God; that the commandments of men could not but put God aside and exalt man to the detriment of the divine glory. The commandments of God were nullified. His worship encroached on by the false authority of man, and in vain offered by the same persons who were dragged along in the current (for the heart of man is easily subdued by such pretensions to piety), and man replaced God in what acted on the heart.

The Lord takes care to protest openly against the very principles which led to this hypocrisy while addressing the crowd that He called to Him. There is nothing the Lord detests more than human religion, the traditions of men. Nothing shuts out God more while abusing His name and thus subjecting consciences which do not know Him truly. Nothing however is more simple; what issues from the heart is what defiles the man. But we

see how the heart of man is influenced by these things, and how the simple by this means fall under the influence of hypocrites and of every class of religious teachers. The Pharisees were scandalised at it, said the disciples. And no wonder. To have a conscience before God according to His word, and in the light of God for itself, spoilt all their business. But through love for us, through the necessity of what is true and good, this is what must be. Then, at the point at which we have arrived in the history of the Saviour, it was no longer a question of minding these false doctors—these were not plants that the heavenly Father of our Lord had planted. They were to be rooted up. It was needful to leave them —a solemn thought with regard to the people and still more for Christianity! These were blind leaders of the blind; both were falling into the ditch.

As to the disciples, the Lord's answer goes much farther, while at the same time it makes evident the apostle's want of intelligence; in effect, the principle is evident. But what a picture of the heart of man followed, thanks be to God, by that of the heart of God and of His ways in grace! That which went out of the heart defiled the man. All is simple. But what is it that went out from it? Evil thoughts, murders, then a terrible list of those dark productions of a depraved and corrupt heart. But cannot the Lord relieve a little this gloomy picture by touches of light which are found in these hearts! He finds none. Thus characterised, He leaves the heart of man. He was not wanting in goodness, He knew the heart—knew everything about man; but beyond that list He is silent. It is not saying that there are not amiable features in the natural heart (that may be so even in animals), but morally this is what comes out of the heart, the fruits of

the root of the sin which is there, restrained, kept in, modified, yet the fruit that man's heart produces wherever he is permitted to follow his inclinations.

Thus the Lord passes from the hypocritical customs used by man to cover what he is and to give himself a religious character (even though the truths which he professes may be divine, and the system in its origin emanating from God)— passes, from traditions of men and the vain worship of human ordinances, to the heart which it seeks to cover, and lays it bare. We learn what is in the heart, as God sees it in those who are not among the plants planted by the Father. And their religion which concealed it—what was it? Hypocrisy, and God set aside by human ordinances. Thus we see, in a people that God had brought near to Himself and in a religion that He had Himself established, God set aside in order to bring in man, his own traditions and his commandments, with hands washed in the place of his heart; and then, what the natural heart is in its fruits before God.

Now the Lord passes in the most striking manner to what is outside all the promises, to a race that was accursed according to the promises made to the people of God, to the place that the Lord quotes as an example of hardness of heart (chap, n), and shews, whilst at the same time recognising the dispensations of God towards His people, and His faithfulness in sending them the Messiah, what a heart comes to that is driven by its need and by the faith with goes right to the heart of God, and what that divine heart is for the wants that faith brings to Him, what He is in Himself outside dispensational rules. The Lord goes towards Tyre and Sidon. A Canaanitish woman comes towards Him. Her

daughter was tormented with a demon. She recognises the Lord, as the heir of the promises in Israel, as Son of David. This was truly faith as to His person; but what part had a Canaanitish woman with the promises made to Israel or with the blessings that were granted to them as the people of God? The Lord does not answer her. Deeper lessons were to be given of what man is, but also of what God is.

The disciples would have wished the Lord to grant her what she asked, in order to get rid of her; but the Lord maintains His place as Son of David. He is sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. The need of the poor woman rises above her formal acknowledgment of Jesus as Son of David. “Lord, help me.” Her wants are simple. They are plainly declared. But the Lord wishes to put her thoroughly to the test. “It is not meet to take the children’s bread and cast it unto dogs.” The Lord acknowledges the dispensations of God with respect to His people, however wicked they might be, and the woman does so also; but lessons far deeper are here taught. The poor woman—man as shewn in her finds his place. He is under the curse, without promise, having right to nothing, or under the power of the demon. He must own his condition, and this is what the woman does. She is a dog, but in need. Her hope is not in any right that she possesses, but in the free goodness of God. It is a need which comes face to face with God come in grace. She fully recognises what she is, a dog; but she maintains that, if it be so, there is sufficient goodness in God for such beings. Could God say, No, there is not? Could Christ represent Himself thus? Impossible. By faith want is met across all the obstacles of Jewish rites and of personal unworthiness, thoroughly

owning them, but placing itself outside every right in immediate contact with the goodness of God.

Such is faith. It recognises the state of ruin and of wretchedness in which we are; humble and true, it brings its need to God, but counts on what He is. Now He cannot deny Himself. Besides, it is the key to all the Gospel. Jesus was the Christ, the Son of David, a minister of the circumcision; but behind, so to speak, God was there, in all the fulness of His grace, and He passed over the strait limits of Israel and of the promises to be Himself in grace—grace which sufficed for everything. The curse might be there, complete unworthiness; but if want was there and placed itself by faith on the ground of the grace and goodness of God, the barriers disappeared, want and God met together, and the answer was according to His sovereign goodness, the riches of His grace, and according to the faith which counted upon it. The daughter was healed, the Canaanitish woman happy, and God in Christ revealed.

Chapters 14, 15.

I have been occupied with these chapters; for they occupy evidently a special place between the mysteries of the kingdom on the judicial rejection of the Jews at the end of chapter 12 (which goes on to the end of the age) and the church and kingdom glory in chapters 16, 17. The contexts are naturally special; for the kingdom is set forth after the ruin of Judaism in chapter 13, and the church, and the glory of the kingdom come after. What is this special place?

It is plain that chapter 13 gives the kingdom of heaven in the peculiar character it assumes when the King is in

heaven, not manifested, and, as Mark says, it grows and springs up he seemingly knows not how. What then is brought out between this and the revelation of the church on earth? It is the actual proof of present rejection and the incapacity of the disciples to avail themselves of His then present power; the moral darkness of the scribes and Pharisees, the intrinsic falseness of their religious principles; but the disciples really got no farther. The Pharisees were not plants of God's planting at all; the disciples were, blind on many things as they were. The Lord is here getting on strong moral ground—what God has planted, and the human heart being the source of evil. God, not Judaism or tradition, was the spring and guide of good; man's heart is only evil.

But Christ, still in His own place, takes only His service in Israel; but He goes where one of the accursed races and of wicked Tyre has access to Him, owning Him as Son of David. As such He could not help her. But this brings out what must go beyond these limits—the goodness of God. This, to faith, He could not deny. Thus, while man's heart even in the Jew was only evil, God was —could not but be—good to faith. But He had not given up Israel, though all this was true; and the hungry multitude of Galilee are again fed, though the disciples are not now called to do it; He takes the loaves and does it Himself. The baskets that contained the fragments are not now the number which is the sign of perfect government in man, but of special or divine perfection—seven, not twelve. It is grace above promise, and not simply divine power able to fulfil it.

This leads me to say a few words more in detail of chapter 14. The work of rejection begins; John is

beheaded, and Jesus retires, but only to find a multitude whom He meets in grace. He then shews Himself as the Jehovah that was to satisfy the poor with bread, let Him be rejected by the nations as He may. He expects the disciples to understand and use this power; but they do not—they judge by sight. “Give ye them to eat.” “We have here but five loaves and two fishes!” Then He sends the disciples away while He is on high, and joins them still in the ship, connected, I apprehend, with Judaism which He had left to cross the world by divine power—our part. But Peter cannot—only but for being helped he was sinking and (like the Jewish remnant) re-enters the ship, but with Christ. The walking on water was in principle church position, walking simply by faith to meet Jesus, with no known hold, only by faith. When He rejoins the ship, they own Him, not as Messiah in a carnal way and expectation as even the disciples had done, but as Sen of God, which was just what the nation would not do, and the disciples practically never did, though God taught individuals so. The country of Gennesaret which once rejected Him now receives Him with open arms. It is a divine Person then here, when not only Israel but the disciples could not own, or at any rate profit by, His manifestation to Israel.

We have then, as noted above, the moral judgment of Israel’s state and of their teachers; but again the disciples are without understanding. Yet in this very chapter, where essential divine principles of truth and grace are brought so clearly out, there is a special recognition of Israel. The Canaanitish woman not only called Him Son of David, but owned Israel as the children and herself as only a dog. The Lord takes this

ground, though necessarily owning God to be good to others. And the people glorify the God of Israel.

On the whole, we have Israel rejecting the witness of God; Christ present as Immanuel, but the disciples unable to profit by it, left and rejoined; moral principles, of man's heart, and God's overflowing goodness; but plants must be of God's planting or rooted up; Israel rejected but owned. Still the Lord distinguished the disciples as possessed of personal faith (save of course Judas)—plants of the Lord's planting; and when He now simply leaves the Pharisees, He appeals to that faith; chap. 16. Ignorant as they were of God's ways and incapable of availing themselves of what Christ was, yet the inquiry addressed to their personal faith brings out the answer (given of the Father) of that on which the church should be built. They cling to Him—to His person when the nation rejected Him, and when even they could not profit rightly by His presence in Israel. But then, when Israel was for the time rejected, that person became the foundation of everything, and the Lord (who had put the question to draw out this distinctive faith, however prejudiced and buried in traditions even they were) at once recognises the direct teaching of the Father. Now Israel was gone, on this the church would be built. The contrast of verses 1-5, then 6-12, and what then follows, is very striking. Read in verse 18, "And I also say unto thee," in contrast with or addition to the Father's revelation, and also to Peter's confessing. He had said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Christ says, "Thou art Peter"; but this was the authority, the really divine or divinely given title to give a name.

The rest of the verse is a kind of parenthesis. By the revelation of what Christ was by the Father, he partook of the nature of the foundation, as all true believers do, though not distinguished as Peter. But the building of the assembly comes out as Christ's new revelation consequent on the setting aside of all preceding leading up to the Father's revelation of His Son (to Simon), triumphant by His divine Person and nature over death, whence Satan's power could not prevail against it, though Israel's (even the disciples') hopes were ended by His death. But the Son of the living God would on this title build a church over which hades' gate could have no power to prevail. Not Peter, but Christ builds the church; but Peter does administer the kingdom. Nothing is said to him as to having anything to do with the church—save a name, which shews his confession, put him into connection with it. For if the church was built on that truth, and he had confessed it as taught of God, he was in principle (though the church was not yet revealed or begun) on the footing of it as to his acknowledgment of Christ. Hence they are charged not to say He is "the Christ." The Father has revealed Him in another way. The kingdom of heaven Peter was to administer. Every scribe instructed into the kingdom of heaven brings out of his treasure things new and old.

The name of Christ on which the church was built was a wholly new revelation of the Father. So in the manifestation of the kingdom of the Son of man Moses and Elias disappear, the beloved Son in whom the Father was well pleased (not merely a faithful messenger) was to be Head. Now Peter was entrusted with the keys of the kingdom of heaven. What was administered on that ground did not exclude the old things thus. This again,

though given in a voice, was the Father's revelation. Individually, Peter in both cases was as yet fully under the prejudices of a Jew as to the kingdom.

34 The second part of the prophecy of Isaiah, that is, chapters 40-47, speaks of the sin of the people with respect to the controversy of Jehovah with idols; chapters 49-58, the rejection of the Messiah; from chapter 59 the restoration of the people is the matter handled.

35 [In fact, however, we know from comparing the Gospel of Mark that this leper was cleansed before the Lord went up the mountain. —Ed.]

36 Literally "is just now deceased," Matt. 9:18; "dead at the moment." We know that the father while on the road received the news that she was really dead. Just now—the point up to which the time was extended.

37 i.e., finished.

Matthew’s Gospel

The presenting of God’s grace in the Person of the Lord, in the Gospel of Matthew, brings before us in a very striking way, how the blessed Lord took our place, and was a pattern of ours in the relationship into which He has brought us by redemption, whether of blessing or conflict, only overcoming for us. Many, many passages shew His grace in it, but in this He takes the place itself. I refer to the end of Matthew 3 and beginning of Matthew 4. The law and the prophets were till John. Then the kingdom of heaven, as presently coming in, was announced. There was repentance for the people, but a new thing to be set up. The first step in good was receiving the testimony and coming to that repentance; and their hearts, touched by grace, go.

The gracious Lord could not let His people take one step alone. He goes to be baptized by John. He, I need not say, needed no such baptism. So John receives Him: “I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? “The Lord answers, “Suffer it to be so now; for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him.” In Him it was fulfilling righteousness. Still He takes the lowly place. You, John, have your part to do, I mine. “Us “is not, I believe, a plural of dignity, though it is not of much moment; it refers to John as to Jesus: compare chapter 17:26, 27, a beautiful example of the same grace, only there He shines out as a divine Person. The Lord does not identify Himself with rebellious and perverse Israel, but with the path of God, and those who were walking in it, but He makes Himself one of them when they had taken it. The word of God

entered into the ear, and led the heart of His perfect servant as fulfilling all righteousness; the blessed Son of God. He has now taken His place amongst the godly and upright though feeble sons of men, the remnant according to the election of grace in Israel. His person and personal perfectness was there, but among them according to the will of God; and He gives us the pattern and model of that into which we are introduced by redemption according to the counsels of God. When He comes up out of the water, having taken this place, He stood according to the perfect will of God as man before Him. Here heaven must respond. Lo, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Holy Ghost descending upon Him.

Heaven may have been opened in glorious visions of the judicial throne or the like, but never before had there been an object upon earth to which they could be opened. Divine favour might rest on Abraham, and God visit him in grace, and Enoch who walked with God find a lonely way (once indeed though in a different form followed by Elijah) into heaven; but never were the heavens opened before to man upon the earth: now they were. Further, this blessed man was sealed38 and anointed39 with the Holy Ghost and with power. Thirdly, the Father owns Him, a man, as His beloved Son. Now this is all our place, of which He is here the type and pattern. Heaven is open to us, the veil rent from top to bottom, the way into the holiest open. We are sealed and anointed with the Holy Ghost, and the Father owns us as sons, loved even as Jesus is loved: only we of course have it through redemption and faith in Him; He was in it personally. But He gives us the full and blessed pattern of the place in which we stand. Our connection

with Him in it, and His own taking it, its being His place, is not its least blessed feature.

Nor is this all. Here, in the Lord's taking this human place yet of full acceptance, the Trinity is first fully revealed. We find indeed remarkable intimations of it in the Old Testament, for the Son in Psalm 2 is Jehovah; people are to trust in Him; and the Spirit, I need not say, is continually mentioned. But it cannot be said it was clearly revealed. That was the effect of Christianity when the Son and the Spirit had come, and the Father was fully revealed in Him, and to us made sons. And in connection with His person it is so here. The Son was there as man, the Holy Ghost came upon Him, and the Father's voice came from heaven to own Him Son. What a wonderful connection for us to see Him identified with us, or rather ourselves with Him, and that in this place, He being Son, the whole Trinity comes out revealed, and in that He is a man. Take, as an example of the effect, 1 John 2:28, 29; 3:1-3; where the Godhead and manhood are spoken of in one sentence of the same person, only taking up each side as suited; but we are so identified with Him that, though glory be not revealed, this much is certain as to it, that when He shall appear we shall be like Him. Is not this a wonderful connection? If He was Jehovah's delight, rejoicing always before Him, His delight was in the sons of men.

Many such cases, and even reasonings from it, may be found in scripture. However, such is the Son's place as man, the model place for us. It is a blessed thought, and how precious becomes His love. Still remark how the person of the Lord is maintained in its glory. Heaven is opened to us as to Him; but when it is opened, is there any object on which His eye is fixed to give heaven its

character to Him, and form Him after it as in Stephen, and to saints in their measure of faith? If heaven is opened, He is the object of it. It looks at Him, seals Him, owns Him here. He could not be on earth without heaven being opened on Him, the supreme object of every thought there. This we continually see. On the Mount of transfiguration Moses and Elias are in the same glory as Christ, and confer familiarly with Him of what was first in the counsels of God; but the moment Peter would put them on a level in some sort with the Lord, they disappear, and the Father's voice owns Him as the Son, His Son who was to be heard; and Jesus was found alone. So ever. Here then, the Lord having associated Himself with His people, we have the place into which He has brought them, Himself the model of it. It is His place. He is now gone to His Father, and our Father, His God, and our God.

But the blessed and gracious Lord has fully entered into our case, the place of His people, and He now takes that in which they are in conflict with Satan, as well as that in which they are in relationship with God. Thus anointed as man, He was led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. Many things here suggest themselves to the mind: the difference of the position of Adam and Eve, when they were tempted; the difference of the character of the forty days during which Moses and Elias were estranged, so to speak, from the common lot of humanity; but I confine myself here to the great fact of the temptation, and the Lord's undergoing it, as the other side of our position from our relationship in Him with God. Only remark that the temptation follows this. That is fully established, and it is as anointed therein of the Holy Ghost that He enters

into it. The tempter comes to Him. The point of His temptation was to lead Him out of the place He had taken as man, and first out of that of obedience, or of a servant, His perfect place as man. If Thou be the Son of God, use your authority, speak so that these stones become bread. In a word, do an act of your own will, since you are nothing less than Son of God. But the blessed Lord holds fast to the simple place of obedience, of the servant, of man, but perfect Man.

But several things are to be noted here. First, He has no need to go farther than His own duty, no long controversy or reasoning with Satan. The latter comes with wile; but deceit has no place in simple duty, and the Lord, as a servant, occupies Himself with that, and it is enough. Next, God's will is His motive for acting, not merely His rule. That of course it was, but His motive also: an important principle. It is not selfwill arrested by a rule even cheerfully submitted to. The obedience of Christ has the will of God for the source of His actions. Thirdly, the word of God, the scriptures, are the adequate, complete, and sufficient expression of this for man. He quotes a text and that is all. But that is all God's will expressed for man. Man lives by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.

Wondrous expression! It is divine, absolutely so in its source and character, out of God's mouth, but perfectly adapted for man to live by. There is nothing like that; only Christ is the living expression of it—the Word made flesh. Man may talk very high about it, as the foolish slave of the enemy, deceived by him; but a single text is enough for Him who is the Wisdom of God, the Lord, and enough for Satan, so that he has no reply. It gave Christ His place as man, and with that Satan could do nothing.

He betrayed himself and his weakness if he suggested anything contrary to it. Scripture is enough for the Lord Himself, for man here below, and for the devil. It comes from the mouth of God and man lives by it. Christ guarantees this to us.

And note the occasion. Be it so, He could not fail; but He went through the trial. All depended on His victory. If the second Man had failed for man, there was no hope; but a text is sufficient: by it He gains an absolute victory. There was no reply to it. On the authority, truth, sufficiency, and suitableness of scripture, the victory on which all hope for man depended was founded and won. The last Adam had prevailed, and prevailed by it; Satan succumbed, and succumbed to it: only it was justly used by the Holy Ghost. No will was elicited by the temptation; obedience was, and its true character and power shewn.

Next, the enemy would draw Him out of confidence in God and therein too, out of the true path of obedience, for it would have been Christ's own will and act. Cast thyself down. He has promised to keep you: try and see if He will be as good as His word. Perfect confidence had no need to try, no will to exercise. Again, the word is quoted: "Thou shalt not tempt Jehovah thy God." Exodus 17:7 gives us the true force of the expression, often used as a meaning pretty nearly the opposite to the true. We have need of perfect confidence to obey and to await the Lord's time. Anticipating the Lord's time is one proof of want of confidence and want of obedience. See the case of Saul waiting for Samuel. His confidence fails and his will works, and all is lost, though he thought to shew faith and service to God. Obedience and dependence, for which confidence in God is needed, were now fully

manifested, and Satan had nothing to do but to shew himself, and then the case is simple: he is Satan and may go. For “resist the devil and he will flee from you.” The Lord has destroyed his force, has bound the strong man. The first two cases are wiles. And then, abiding in the simple place of obedience according to the word, waiting for God’s will, obedience to the word, and confidence in what is said that God will accomplish it, entirely frustrate every attempt of Satan. He may seek to lead us openly from God by the word, but it is owning the power of it. The word of God is absolute as to that. It is still “It is written,” but it is not now simply obedience, but openly affiance to God, and all is simple; and if the heart be right, Satan, revealed as such, dismissed. Angels are the ministering servants of the obedient Son of man; so for us, as scripture shews; Heb. 1.

The way in which the Lord met the enemy is exceedingly instructive; but that to which I desired especially to draw the attention of your readers was the blessed way in which the Lord took our place, put Himself in it, a model and a pattern of ours for its simple but highest privileges, and in the combat which belongs to it, in which we are, and there, in the lowliness and perfectness of a servant’s place, has shewn us to our path too. But in both He really was, and the combat now over as to the relationship and blessing, He is only in glory, but as man, and has brought us into it by redemption and grace. I know no more blessed picture of our connection with the Lord, the man of God’s counsels, and that because we see Him in it alone in His own perfectness.

In what follows the temptation, we have the sum of all the Lord’s ministry; not His discussions at Jerusalem,

which have another character and are chiefly in John, in the midst of a condemned people, but amongst the poor of the flock, spoiling the goods of him whom He had overcome. The rejection of John was His rejection, the close of John's ministry the beginning of His own, and leaving Judaea He seeks the poor of the flock, where prophecy had already declared that the light should spring up. He was carrying on the testimony begun by prophets, and more immediately before by John the baptist, himself a testimony not to what was, but what was to come. His person, Jehovah in grace, in their midst, was the great testimony: but His ministry followed in the train of those who had gone before, only announcing the near approach of the kingdom and calling to repentance, because the kingdom of heaven was at hand. It is the same testimony as that of John Baptist, not owning the title of the people to have the kingdom as the people of iniquity (compare Isaiah 48:2; 57:21), but calling to repentance, separating morally those who had ears to hear, and on the ground that the kingdom of heaven was close at hand. But there is necessarily this difference between John the baptist and the Lord, that, though they may have surrounded him as a teacher, John pointed to another, while the Lord—and great grace it was—gathered round Himself: proof that a divine Person was there: such alone had title to do it. They leave all and follow Him. He is a commanding and binding power of attraction. The whole of His general ministry is summed up in verse 23. This single verse embraces characteristically His whole ministry. The two following state the effect: His fame spread through the country, so that sick were brought to Him, and He was followed by multitudes from all parts.

The history of His ministry is here complete, multitudes surrounding Him, which gave occasion to His taking His disciples apart to a mountain (though it appears the multitude followed so as to hear what He said), and teach them what were the real principles of the kingdom which was going to be set up. Such is the sermon on the Mount. The first sixteen verses give the whole positive statement of the character and position of those who belong to it in truth, or rather to whom it belongs. It is taken, remark, in its whole extent. First, the general character of those to whom it belongs, the poor in spirit, not the haughty of this world, but those who mourn in the midst of evil. It is a characteristic of grace when evil is in the place of righteousness. Peace-making characterises God. It is striking how peace is associated with God and His work. He is the God of peace. Peace on the earth is announced with Christ: He has made peace. “Peace be with you” was His twice repeated word. The fruits of righteousness are sown in peace. Pure in heart comes no doubt first, as elsewhere: first pure, then peaceable. Pure in Himself, He is at peace, and so makes it in grace. When we are pure in heart, the Spirit of peace seeks it in others.

In the fourth verse we see that the promises of the kingdom rise to its highest privileges. The moral character looked for in those who were to have part in the kingdom having been stated, rising to its highest privileges and activity in grace, the consequences in a world of evil, till it was set up in power, are then pointed out; persecutions for righteousness and persecutions for Christ’s name. The former shewed the kingdom of heaven theirs, the latter pointed to reward in heaven itself. Thus, while verse 5 assures the meek of the

earthly portion, this points to the possessions of the reward in heaven itself. Their position in the world is then stated, the salt of the earth and the light of the world—what is in contrast with and so far hinders the corruption of that in which it is, and the testimony of God's light to those in darkness in the world around.

We have thus the character fitted for the kingdom of heaven; its earthly and heavenly portion, but its carrying out in a state of things adverse to it, persecution, corruption, and darkness— only that which was of God in it. What follows is the relationship it bears to what had subsisted up to then, and the contrast with the workings of the human heart, which may put on the form of good, or render external service to God, but not have purity within, nor God for its motive in everything; which can listen to the words of God, but not build its house in obedience to them. The law is not referred to, save in the declaration that it and the prophets must all be fulfilled. It is not obedience, but fulfilling, every jot and tittle of it accomplished. What preceded was fully confirmed, but in the person of the Lord a new thing brought in. The lusts and unsubdued movements of the human heart are wholly disallowed. The Father's name is introduced, Christ declares His name, a very important element. The kingdom to be desired by the disciples was the Father's kingdom, though He, as to the present condition, be seen in heaven, while they were on earth. But love according to His ways was to be exercised, goodness without motive save in itself. They were there to serve, not to judge, but with insolent evil not to misapply their blessings. It was a strait gate and a narrow way, and few would go in at it. False prophets, for Satan would have every hindrance, would be known

by their fruits. The true character and condition of the children of the kingdom, the Father's name, and the contrast of this new place in holiness, grace, and obedience, with what had gone before, while sanctioning fully what God had given previously, the law and the prophets, which must all be fulfilled. Thus the true character of the ministry of Jesus the Lord, in grace and power, and in its bearing and character in Israel, is fully given from chapter 4:12 to the end of chapter 7. Now begin the details of His personal presentation in Israel, so that what should have acted on the hearts and minds of those He walked amongst is fully set before us, ending in His rejection by and through that, for the time, of Israel, and the substitution of the church and kingdom-Let us then now follow the blessed character of the Lord thus revealed, Emmanuel in the midst of His people. A leper comes to Him on His descent from the mountain, accompanied by the multitudes. None but Jehovah cleansed the leper, but Jehovah was there. The leper, while doing homage to the Lord and owning His power to heal of which abundant proof had been given, was not quite assured of His good will and readiness to do it. "If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." But the Man of grace was there. Jesus put forth His hand and touched him. He is come to the sorrows and wretchedness of man—a man with them. One not to be contaminated, but in grace come to those who were; not driven away by the corruption and evil, but come to man when in them, touching him as man to relieve and help, yet Jehovah. Wondrous truth! "I will," who can say it, or say it with right or with effect? God. Why should He say it, when sin, and misery, and defilement were there to produce repugnance? Perfect grace— the grace man's heart was no way sure of—was there; divine goodness

touching man as man, with the will to heal, but in power, man in his defilement, but to remove it from him: such was Jesus, Himself undefined.

We can hardly have a more wondrous picture or presentation of His coming to the earth, Jehovah-Man, touching man in grace, power, and^ove, good-will to heal in grace, and present there with man. Grace is there—a word heals—the work of Jehovah, but Man touching, laying His hand on man. At the same time the Lord, while giving this proof of His divine presence, recognises the Jewish economy as still subsisting. The cleansed leper was to go to the priest and offer his offering for a testimony. In accepting it, they owned he was healed, they owned that Jehovah was there—Jehovah there in grace, but still owning Israel as to its standing. But this divine grace manifested in Israel, being divine, could not limit itself to Israel. A Gentile—owning far more fully, as not shut up in Jewish thoughts, the divine power that was in exercise, that the Lord could dispose of all things, as he sent his soldiers hither and thither—looks for mercy for his servant, but, with a faith which, as ever when it realises the divine presence, produced true lowliness of heart, counts himself unworthy that Jesus should come under his roof. A word from the Lord, ready as He was to go to him, sufficed, and the word was spoken. Such faith had not been found in Israel. It is for the Lord the occasion to declare that many from all parts, Gentiles, shall come and enjoy the promises with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and the children of the kingdom, its natural heirs, Israel, would be cast out into outer darkness. Faith and the person of the Lord take the place of natural succession, because God is revealed, and, as He must be if He is, in grace;

and once revealed must have what suits Himself, and acts in a grace which is above ordinances. It was now because the person of the blessed One was there, As thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. Yet He was still subject, coming in by the door, we have seen, to the law in Israel, yet in power, and grace could not be limited to it. Jehovah healing in Israel, a man amongst them, but one who must reach to the Gentiles, going forth in grace towards them.

But we have further traits of His character in this chapter. Not only is He Emmanuel in Israel, and the God of grace to Gentile need, but He is come for the sorrows and evils that sin has brought in here below. The sick mother-in-law of Peter rises up at His word and serves them, and the evil spirits depart at once from the possessed, and all the sick are healed. But it was not merely power. His heart was in it and felt it all. “Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses.” His miracles were miracles of goodness. It was not merely some as a testimony, but deliverance from all the effect of sin and Satan’s power. One was there who revealed God in goodness, able to remove all the effects of sin in man. He was there who did it and could give power to others to do it, not a mere confirmation of testimony, but He who was to be testified of, present in that power. Nor only that, but present as One who entered into them all. But He sought no honour from men, and when His works attracted the crowd, He left the place. It was His work, not admiration He sought.

And this brings out another side of His character as the Son of man. He hath not where to lay His head. Such an one as the doer of miracles, the scribes would follow; but He has not lost sight and would not have others lose

sight of it, that He is the rejected One, hidden and despised in the world. “Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air nests; the Son of man has not where to lay his head.” If followed, He must be followed with nowhere in this world to go to; followed for His own sake only. And thus it involves following Him absolutely—with an absolute breach with all that is of the life of the flesh, however near or dear. “Suffer me first,” will not do, though it seemed the strongest possible claim. If Christ was there and went that road, His disciples must follow Him and leave all behind, nor look back. He was come into the world because the world was far from God, and in it was gathering to Himself out of it. His disciples did follow Him, and into a storm where He seemed to have left them disregarded in danger, wholly regardless of their difficulties and danger. But foolish creatures that they were, that we are, they were in the same ship with the Lord. Was He, the centre of all God’s counsels, the Lord of glory, going to sink, and all God’s plans, by an accident? Alas, what are we! But the Lord was there and with the deep lesson—alas! how often to learn—of their unbelief, a word from Him calms the winds and waves. There was a great calm. And the men marvelled when they had not believed.

But we are not quite at the close of this presentation of Emmanuel, the Lord manifested on earth. He comes into the country of the Gadarenes. There the power of Satan meets Him, a power which was terror to subject man: a word from Him and all is over. The men possessed speak under the influence of those they were possessed by as if themselves. Man does not know how Satan governs and uses him when under his power; but, to shew the reality of it, the Lord suffers the devils to go out into the

swine, and the unclean animals rush into ruin. But the quiet world will not have God's presence (Satan's it cannot help now); but if God's power and presence is revealed, it cannot bear this. They beseech Jesus to depart out of their coasts, and He went. So it has been with the world. In Luke we have more details and an application to other points. Here it is the great truth of the result of God's revelation of Himself in grace in this world. The world would not have Him, and He departed out of their coasts. Terrible as will be the end of the unclean vessels of Satan's power, the quiet world rejects the Lord. In general the chapter is in the midst of Israel, but shews the dealing in grace with the Gentiles and the judgment of the children of the kingdom; and here we have passed over to a wider scene without leaving Israel. God is ever the same, and the heart of man, but proved in Israel—the world has rejected Christ. It loves its quiet and ruin; the destruction of Satan brings with it the revelation of his power. But it is God that the people will not have. Our chapter gives us thus a full picture of the Lord's presence in the world in grace and power. He is there. In chapter 9 we have more the principles of His dealings.

We find in chapter 9 the work of the Lord, its character in grace; as His person, in chapter 8 (still more definitely in Israel), but rejected. The Lord returns to His own city (Capernaum), but away from the scene which closed the last chapter, which is complete in itself; the world rejecting Him, and He leaving it. Now He is again seen in the midst of His service in Israel. Faith brings one smitten in his body. The Lord is still here as Emmanuel, yet Man in their midst, but declares Himself there with the promised blessing of Jehovah's

presence in grace. It is not here redemption, though indeed there could be no such forgiveness without it, but the application of forgiveness in grace in Israel as in Psalm 103, and for present blessing Israel must be forgiven. The Lord comes with it, and it is a direct testimony to forgiveness, or He might have simply healed as elsewhere. But when Jehovah came in grace, He forgave all their sins and healed all their infirmities. The Lord announces the presence of Jehovah to do the former. The scribes murmur within themselves, Who could forgive but Jehovah? But He who knows the thoughts was there and proves by the other part of the verse that the Lord was there in the power of grace. He heals the infirmity at once.

We may remark that in this, as in the last chapter, He takes the title of Son of man, His title of predilection in love to us, wider than Christ, which though He was, He did not come to take, and never takes in Israel. He is there as Emmanuel Jehovah, to save His people; but as Son of man, a title of all-importance; the One who takes the kingdom in glory from heaven; yea has all things under His feet. Christ never presents Himself as Christ. The Son of man was to be strong for God (Psalm 80:17); but now He was to suffer. But God, though in the midst of His people, must, when down here, take, in His nature and work, His place in connection with men beyond all relationship in law, the rejected One on earth. The Son of man has power on earth to forgive sins; so the crowd says, “such power to men.” Forgiveness then was there; and grace to sinners. He was there in that character. He goes and eats with publicans, having called Matthew who was one. It was not the outside which governed His path. God was there and the work was to be the effect of

His presence and grace, not dependent on what He found. And He knew the heart, and the vessels to choose to be under the effect of that grace as instruments of it. But the principle of the work was the principle of grace; He came not to find, but to bring what was needed, and the vessels to receive it for service were vessels chosen, divinely known, and wrought by grace into new and fitting instruments. He is there then forgiving sins, and eating with sinners, but it is Jehovah who heals; Psalm 103.

But the revelation as to the work goes farther. It could not be put into old Jewish forms and take up what was there as vessels to hold it. A publican was to be an apostle, a Pharisee at best learn that he must be wholly born again. And none of the old forms of righteousness really connected with the flesh, and man in the flesh, could receive the new wine; the doctrine of grace in power came by Jesus Christ. All this belonged to flesh, but could not hold divine power. It had seemed to test man's flesh, but what was come now was divine power in grace, and what was wholly new must have its own vessels. Besides, the Bridegroom was there: it was not the time for the children of the bridechamber to fast. The time would come for that. It is striking how the Lord always holds out His own rejection as a part of His history. The Son of man must suffer, the Bridegroom be taken away. It was Jehovah there in grace, which could not adapt itself to the old vessels, and only drew out the hatred of man, and of Israel, who preferred its vessels as giving them importance, to God Himself, and that revealed in grace.

The following recital contains the true history of Israel. Coming to it as just dying,40 He has to deal with it as

dead, and can, but those who on the way with Him have faith in Him are fully healed when all help failed. The virtue and power of life was in Him, though in result He had to vivify a really dead Israel. Such is the history of the ministry of the Son of man—Jehovah in Israel. Two accessory effects of His power are added as to its special character as to Israel, appealed to under the name of Son of David. The general character, though manifested in Israel, yet in its nature goes beyond it—Jehovah and Son of man—and this it is which is of such profound interest to trace: but He was the Son of David in Israel. And in verse 27 we enter exclusively on Israelitish ground, where the spirit of the leaders is fully manifested, and the patience of the Lord still goes on in grace. The blind in Israel receive sight by faith in the Son of David, and here He is in the house, and He opens the mouth of the dumb there too: the attention of the multitude is attracted and owns it was never so seen: but if He casts out the devil's power, the leaders of the people call His power that of the devil. The spirit of unpardonable apostasy was already manifested; but Jesus had not finished His work of goodness in the midst of Israel, and He goes around cities and villages, teaching, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing. His heart moved for Israel, multitudes as sheep without a shepherd. For if Jehovah in goodness, His heart could be moved by what He saw as a man, and till that goodness found no more room for its exercise. His time was not hindered by the wickedness of those who were enemies; the harvest was yet plenteous, the labourers few. Oh, how the heart may still feel this! Still He will accomplish His work, have His sheep. Our part is to seek from the Lord of the harvest that He will send out labourers. In this chapter then we have the grace of

His ministry, its true character, the ministry of Jehovah come in grace available to faith, but which must raise the dead; and as a present thing is refused and blasphemed. His person and His work have no place here save in grace. While this can work, He still goes on caring for all that may be reached.

In chapter 10 He calls His twelve disciples and sends out labourers, giving them power, a new proof of the divine person with whom they had to do. It is not merely that He works miracles, a testimony to divine clemency come into the world, but He can give power to others to work them—power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease.

I have remarked that Matthew gives an order in his recital which is the mind of the Spirit as to the bearing of the facts (that is, after the birth and before the last scene at Jerusalem). The whole history, as such, between these epochs we have seen given in one verse at the end of chapter 4. We have here first the whole number of apostles chosen, as we see in Luke, after prayer, before the sermon on the Mount. One finds at the outset of their commission how the testimony as a present service is, in this Gospel, confined to Israel as enjoying Emmanuel's presence, though it could not end there, closing at the same time by Israel's rejection of that Emmanuel. God's presence on earth could but be only for Jews, if He was the minister of the circumcision for the truth of God. The twelve are forbidden to go elsewhere. The way of the Gentiles they were not to tread, and no city of the Samaritans was to receive their visit. The lost sheep of the house of Israel were to be the objects of their care. They were to preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. All evil was to be subject

to them—death itself, the power of the enemy, and the sorrows and human ills brought in by sin—leprosy and all. And as they received gratuitously—Jehovah's power to use in their hands in grace—they were to use it in the same grace; and they were to trust His power and care equally and take no provision for the way. It was Jehovah who sent. They did His service, and the labourer was worthy of his hire. Jehovah's care was there, and they, as we read afterwards in Luke, lack nothing. Further, they were to seek out the godly remnant, inquire who was worthy in the city, and abide there, and the sons of peace were to receive a blessing. Those that refused this all but last testimony, and here treated as practically the last (there was only partially the seventy on His way to Jerusalem afterwards), were judged and rejected as worse than Sodom and Gomorrha. This verse closes the direct present commission. What follows from verse 16 continues indeed their service on the same mission, that is, exclusively to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, but goes on beyond the Lord's rejection and on to His coming again (v. 22).

The full character of their mission as thus left to serve is gone into—persecution, death—but the Spirit of their Father speaking in them, and a care over them which counted the hairs of their head. But this part of the chapter shews how deeply the Lord felt His rejection in Israel, noticed as we have seen all through. The full power needed would be given no doubt every moment, but the testimony would draw out the passions of men in a way that would break through every natural tie. Relations of nature divinely formed would not resist the hatred of the human heart against the testimony of God, and they would be hated of all men for Christ's name

sake; strange feeling, which only the hatred of man's heart against God can explain! They would be brought before kings and governors, for so the Lord would bring this testimony before the great and before the Gentiles: the hatred of the Jews would do it, a plain testimony that we are here still in Israel. But the hatred would be universal: they were to endure to the end. They were to go, when persecuted in one city, to another; nor would have gone through the cities of Israel till the Son of man came. It was Christ's portion. They had called the Master of the house Beelzebub: He looked at it fully; they must face it, if they were in the place of testimony; enough for them to be as He. But they were not to fear, all would come out and they were to be out in open daylight in service; death might be there on the road, they were not to fear but Him, who could judge and deal with body and soul both. But it is remarkable how the Lord, as to Himself and them, takes the power of evil for granted, though God was with full care of His own above all; yet till judgment came as to the present manifestations of power, evil reigned (compare Rev. 2:10); for He, the power of God, was about to be rejected, and all this power of evil pressed upon His spirit in sending them out. Now indeed as Emmanuel present He guarded them, but in this second part the presence of the Spirit marks Him gone, and already treated as Beelzebub. Such warning is not found (though the fire was already kindled) in the first fifteen verses: but He knew His portion, and warned them of theirs. But they were of value to God, and not to fear. He is to be confessed before men at all cost. But nature and the flesh, which, as to power, He could have restored, were over in His rejection. What man broke through in hatred to God they must give up in devotedness to Christ.

The closing of the old creation is not here doctrinally taught, but the deep feehngs of the Lord, as to the practical effect of the coming in of what was divine into the scene of man proved apostate by its effect, are wonderfully portrayed. It is not only the warning to the disciples (v. 21, 22), when the enmity is spoken of, but the general effect of His coming (v. 34-36). Peace on earth was not the word now, but enmity in the closest relations. Owning the Lord is intolerable to man. The closer the relationship, the greater the hostility. But Christ came a test of everything, and as His presence and the true confession of Him awakened hostility, so the heart of His servant must take Him, the new divine thing, instead of everything. The world had proved the incompatibility of the old and the new, nature as it was and grace, and the servant and minister of grace must give up all (v. 37). Christ tests the heart as well as the world. He was the rejected One. His servant must take up the cross and follow Him. Natural life was of course the track of nature, and that must be given up too in nature to find it new with God. But then they were thus associated with Christ, and he that received them received Him. The recognition of the testimony come into the world was the reception of Him of whom it spake, and the reception of Him was the reception of Him who sent Him, and whose Witness in the world He was. This was the turning-point, the owning Him, His name and word, if a cup of cold water only was given. The difference of verses 1-15, though the principle of testimony was the same, with verses 16 to the end is very marked; the power of the then final testimony with judgment on him that did not receive it, while He was there present as Emmanuel, and the moral mark in the world of a rejected Saviour. His grace continued in

patience, but the fact that He was called Beelzebub had borne its witness in His soul. The present was a final testimony in Israel; the rest, the witness of a rejected Saviour; but all in Israel, save as it brought them as guilty before Gentiles.

This rejection and the entire change of dispensation and ground of relationship with God are fully brought out in the chapters which follow. When I say relationship, none could really be but on the new ground of grace; but I speak of God's ways. The Lord as yet continued His testimony in the midst of Israel. And thus the chapter (11) gives us a full view of the true position of the witnesses God had sent, and the real place Christ held; His place as founded on His person and personal grace contrasted with His coming after John in His service.

In the following chapter 12 we have the setting aside the old covenant or its principles, and nature's rest with it, with the full iniquity and judgment of the Jews on the other side. But in chapter 11 we have the open history and the secret history of all that was going on. Patience of goodness as yet continued, but all was now changing. The provisional service of John before Christ, and his favoured position in it, are fully recognised. The Lord delights to own His faithful servant in it: but it is over. He came after John, was before him; and it is in this character He is now coming out, though all the rest was true. John is in fact in prison, man's evil will and enmity already shewn as the unbelief of Israel towards the Lord (v. 20-24); and John himself must believe Christ on the witness He gives of Himself. He gives testimony to John instead of receiving it from him. The chief point in John's message is to shew this change, for though in prison some uncertainty doubtless had arisen in his heart—for

if Messiah, Jesus brought no deliverance—yet his heart was all right. He did not doubt the testimony of Him to whom he sent. The Lord throws the answer on the testimony all had, which His word and work rendered to Himself, yet as already the rejected One in whom the reasoners of the people were offended: blessed he who was not. The Lord then proceeds to give testimony to John Baptist, but with witness of the coming change—change which His person brought in, for as a divine person He receives not testimony from men, but He gives it to His faithful servant. And John was only a forerunner of the thing itself that was to come: the least actually in it was greater than he. Of born of woman, of gifts to Adam's children, none was greater; but the kingdom set up by Emmanuel was on the other ground, founded on the second Adam. The law and the prophets dealing with men in flesh had reached up to John: since then the kingdom of heaven was preached (not come). And this was no matter of giving a law to an acquired people alive in the flesh, or recalling them to it, but set up with flesh opposed and trial brought in. The energy of faith alone could make its way into it. This, if faith could receive it, was the Elias to come—was he who had gone before Jehovah in his spirit and power, this special coming of Jehovah; but in grace, not in judgment.

The rejection of His testimony is now definitely entered on, and the true character of what was taking place. He shews the state of the people as to the reception of John and Himself (v. 17-19). Warnings and grace were alike rejected. But a remnant, wisdom's children, justified God's ways in both. Such was the state of things. Then the Lord comes especially to His own testimony and the mighty works by which it had been confirmed. It was not

merely moral warning closing the old warning, the list of prophets owning Israel and doing no miracles, but the manifestation of power and one working miracles claiming attention by divine power, not reckoning on any present acknowledgment of Jehovah on which the word as of the prophets could be based. It was a Person present, Himself the subject, source, and power of testimony, its object, and that from which it flowed. But Israel would not repent. His works left them without excuse, His grace made the sin the greater. It would be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon, Sodom and Gomorrha in their day of judgment, than for these cities; such was the testimony they had rejected.

But now we come to what was inside all this, the glory of His person known to none, and the revelation made by Him of that name of grace which, in the rejection of the Son and Servant, was brought out for the soul of him that was weary in a Christ-rejecting world. The unbelief, justly rebuked by the Lord, found with it no gall nor bitterness in the spirit of the blessed Lord, so that He should not be pure with His Father, it only threw Him from man into the fulness of the mind of God; but first in lowliness and submission in the place of the servant, ascribing all to His Father, yet as Son, perfect submission, but entire confidence of love, thus intelligence clear, no delay in solving the mystery, seeing it on the side of God. At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father. Then He is owned as supreme in everything, Lord of heaven and earth, and with the owning of this supremacy, the sense of the fitness of the dealing; human wisdom failed, it was fitting, necessary; how should it, base and earthly, understand divine ways? They were hidden, and hidden

by the Lord of all from the wise and prudent. He puts man's wisdom in its place, its true moral place. But grace revealed them to the simple and unpretending, the unsuspecting confidingness of the babe. So it seemed good in the Father's sight; man, and old things with him, had passed away; Christ, the second Man, the Son in grace, replaced them all.

No one knows Him but the Father. The Father in grace can be known through Him, but God come as man in the form of a servant, none could know; and though He had presented works and words which left them without excuse in His service, yet His person none could know. But this submission, and relinquishment of all as sent, brings into His own spirit what belongs to Him in the place He now was in His person and service. All things were delivered to Him of the Father; the Son and faithful Servant had now all things in His hands, in this new place where He received them indeed, for He made Himself servant, but as Son; for He could not cease to be that, whatever His service; and now rejected of all, none knew, nor, in this His personal glory, could know Him; but He knew, and in this place revealed the Father. In this place of grace He stands alone, unknown of all (being in His service and testimony to them in their place rejected) and alone in sovereign grace to reveal the Father—that is, He who sends the Son in grace, and in such a world wholly tested, and its history, that is, man's and Israel's, over in His rejection—to say, "Come to me." If there were hearts weary of themselves and a world that thus rejected Him—perhaps could not well explain why, but weary of evil—though evil—let them come to Him. This solitary place of Christ, in grace revealing the Father, is very striking. Heir of all things,

and the Son revealing the Father, but the deposit—thus alone the beginning of all anew from the Father—of all grace and perfect grace, rest for the weary, not help, though help He does, but rest by the revelation of this grace.

But there is another thing that then comes, but comes after this, though accompanying it: “Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me.” The first point was He had brought the grace and rest for him who came to Him by it, but He had shewn in His rejection the lowliness and meekness which bowed to the Father’s will and accepted His rejection, looking absolutely to His Father’s will and good pleasure, and thus thanking, even in the midst of sorrow, not looking at the evil to be vexed, but to His Father out of it working in His wise and holy ways. Meek and lowly of heart He gives rest to the soul; as to its state, perfect rest through the knowledge of grace, with God by coming to Christ, and rest of heart through lowliness and the absence of all working of will. His yoke is easy and His burden light, the one which He had borne.

It is interesting to see how what is stated doctrinally in John 1 is here wrought out experimentally in the history of Christ, as heretofore remarked, that the first three Gospels present Christ to men, and result in His rejection. John begins with His rejection and presents the person of Him who was rejected, and man must be born again, and then the Comforter when He was gone, and an elect remnant with others such, among the Gentiles, the Jew reprobate. Compare too chapter 17.

Chapter 12 presents the setting aside the old system, first by the principles of the new, and then by the full

judgment of the wickedness of the leaders of the old, and closes with the declaration that Christ's connection was not with those with whom He was naturally united according to the flesh; but with those who received His word. Judaism was over. Judah or Israel was neither the true servant nor the true vine, but Christ; and those who received His word, the branches; for John still gives in doctrine what we learn here experimentally. The question as to the old and new principles rested on the sabbath. Law and grace were connected immediately with it, for the sabbath was given as God's rest, and a seal of the covenant; but the old as the rest of the first creation. The new principle flowed from the person of the Lord, Jehovah, Son of man, withal present on earth, and the grace in which He came. But He is still viewed as the rejected Messiah; to this the Lord refers. His disciples rubbed and ate the ears of corn; the Pharisees object that it is the sabbath, and they put the question, "Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day?" The rejection of God's Anointed dissolves the bond of legal enactment. All was common, there was no rest in nature possible. For a fugitive David the bread was in a manner common. And the priests in the temple itself profaned the sabbath to maintain the command of God, and circumcise sinful flesh and accomplish the due service of God. But One greater than the. temple was there. The setting of mercy above sacrifice, moral intelligence of God's ways in grace, would have saved them from their mistake in condemning even the Lord Himself. The Son of man was entirely above the ordinances of the law. The One who was to come in glory, set over all the works of God's hands, was above not only in His person and place (for He was the Ancient of Days) but as the new head of all

things, alone seal of the old covenant. He is, as Son of man, Lord of the sabbath too.

Another principle was, that power was there in grace. These hypocrites would have done more for their own interests. It is lawful to do good on the sabbath. Thus with a rejected Messiah, old things were gone, the Son of man was Lord of the sabbath, Jehovah wrought in grace, and old things really had passed away. The animus of the leaders was shewn, and Jesus withdrew Himself according to the prophetic character given to Him. He sought no rumour, nor glory for Himself; still His power would burst forth and bring the Gentiles under His sway, and they would trust in Him. For the rejected Messiah the sabbath was gone, and rest over for the world. Jehovah in grace wrought in mercy and had not rest in man's sorrow, and the Son of man, the glorious One, was above the ordinances of the sabbath, Lord of it, the head of the new creation.

But the Lord continues His work of patient grace, destroying the power of the enemy, though seeking no present glory nor lifting up His voice in the streets. But the Pharisees, unable to deny the power with which He wrought, attribute it to Satan. This brought all to a crisis. To speak against Christ in blindness could be pardoned, but to own the power and call the Holy Ghost Satan was unpardonable. It was open antagonism to divine power undenied. The Lord shews the folly of it, Satan destroying Satan's kingdom. It was the fruit of the abundance of their heart, and that wilful enmity against God in goodness, and every word spoken shewed what was there, and men would be judged by such. They are given up. The only sign they would now have was Jonas, a rejected one in the tomb. But men of Nineveh and a

queen of the south would rise up in judgment with that generation, for a greater was there in testimony than Jonas or Solomon, a greater prophet, a greater and wiser king.

Their final judgment is pronounced. The old unclean spirit (of idolatry and rejection of Jehovah) would return with seven others worse, and Judah's state be worse than when they went to Babylon. Then they were judged for the former sin (see Isaiah 40-48), now for rejecting the Son of man (Jehovah Emmanuel in grace) see Isaiah 49-57 (though their restoration is also taught): the end would be the giving up the nation to the worst power of the enemy. Here the deliverance is not spoken of; it is the state of the generation. And then the great result, present result, as to Christ, to which I have alluded (present ties by birth in flesh as Son of David and man on the earth) gives place to those formed by the word in the hearts of the sons of men—of the sons of grace, who did His Father's will. It is the close, not of goodness even here below, but of the history of a Christ presented to Israel and man; and the beginning of the going forth of the fulness of grace in a divine person; and the Word that brought the blessing in grace with it, and sought no fruit on His vine nor reception from man in flesh. A sower went forth to sow; and all is formed on this footing. He leaves the house, for Israel had been Jehovah's habitation; but, for the present at least, it was left by Him, and He goes to the sea-side—the moving multitude of the world—and there taught.

The first parable then gives the general character of the Lord's work. He is a sower sowing the seed of the word to bear fruit. And this parable is individual, not a likeness of the kingdom of heaven. The great principle is

that the Lord brings with Him what is to produce fruit, He does not seek it in the field. It stands alone thus in the seven. The other six are similitudes of the kingdom of heaven. It is not on the other hand the teaching as to the effects of grace but of sowing; as manifested in result as to the fruit produced, one only of four produced any. Satan took away at once what was sown in the first. Conscience not being reached, the profession sprang up at once in the second, and when trouble came, because of this it was given up as lightly, and withered. In the third case there seemed more hope, but the cares of this world and lusts of other things choked it, and the man is unfruitful. In one the word of the Blessed was understood, the conscience and heart, the need of the soul awakened, received it, and various degrees of fruitfulness followed. The first did not understand—nothing was awakened, it rested on the surface. The two others seemed to receive, but it came to nothing. All, I repeat, is individual here, a constant truth, but an immense change from seeking fruit in the nation. It is put thus to him who has ears to hear, urgent and individual.

The disciples ask why He speaks in parables, and in His answer He makes at once the solemn difference of the position of the disciples. To them who had received His word it was given to know the mysteries of the kingdom, but to the mass of the people it was not given. They saw, and saw not; they heard and heard not, nor understood; and the judgment pronounced in Isaiah was fulfilled in them, and they were not to be treated as a nation then: all was over with them. To him that had more would be given, and he would have abundance. From him that had not would be taken even what he had. So with that

people. But the eyes of the disciples were blessed, for they saw; their ears, for they heard; they saw and heard what many favoured of God had desired to see and hear, and had not. Here we see clearly the people held as rejected and blind, and the remnant separated to Christ for the knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom, but for this very reason a kingdom with a rejected king, and which took a form that was the consequence of this.

These similitudes of the kingdom of heaven begin with verse 24. There are six: three addressed to the multitude, and three, with the explanation of one of the first three, to the disciples. I will not here enlarge because these parables have been so often explained, but give some general remarks connected with the point we are at in the Gospel.

By this rejection of the king, and His going on high, and not taking the direct power of the kingdom till His return (compare Mark 4:26-29), the kingdom of the heavens had become like a man who sowed good seed in the field, etc. We have only had the fact of His rejection on earth and breach with Israel and the world, and the fact of what the kingdom was made like. The further truth of His exaltation and what flows from it are here; it is the kingdom such as it had become by His rejection, and I may add the kingdom on the earth, only that in the last three we have the thoughts of God as to it. The only allusion to what is out of this world is the gathering the wheat into His garner. But this is not explained. In the explanation the Lord returns to the earth again.

On the earth the crop should be spoiled. This would not hinder the wheat from being brought into the garner. Note, here only we have the Son of man sowing formally

affirmed. It may be supposed in a general way in the mustard seed, but it is merely the fact of a small seed sown and a great tree produced, but here we have good distinctively sown by the Son of man, and another sowing by the enemy; and the effect of each, though in the same field, has its own distinctive character, and even manifestly so to the servants though they could not remedy it. If they meddled with the evil plants, they would pull up the wheat with them, and so did those who attempted it. But this was not in the church, it was in the field, the world; for our individual conduct we have other directions in the epistles, and in our church conduct. This was a question of service towards others of the servants personally in their place of servants, and plucking up evil ones out of the field, which was the world, and of nothing else. Satan's work in spoiling Christianity as a result here below, called Christendom, cannot be remedied by Christ's servants; it is a matter of judgment and divine power carried on by the instrument of that power, and in part providentially. We do not reap, cut down out of this world, either to lodge fruit in heaven, or to arrange evil in itself on earth. God will do that otherwise by His power. Indeed in this parable the servants do nothing at all. They have the intelligence of Christ as to what is going on, and what the crop is, and how it came about. This parable is the full and explained account of the whole scene in its sources, their effects, the general result here, and the intervention of God to close the scene and the effect and manner of that.

But the explanation belongs to the disciples, not to the multitude. For them, the whole scene on earth is unfolded, but not manifested judgment and its effects; that belongs too to the disciples, to the communications

of Jesus to them in the house. The providential gathering of tares, God's judicial acts in the world (for it is part of the course of the history of the kingdom here), and then the single heavenly fact in the whole series— "gather the wheat into My garner"; both which are left unexplained—that is, the bundles of tares and the garner. It was necessary to introduce them, or the after public effects on earth would not have had their place, but they are no part of the parabolic instruction in itself; that is the kingdom on earth. The end of the present scene is the providential gathering of the wicked in corporate bodies, and the taking of the saints into heaven. The judgment exercised on earth will have other effects. How the evil came in is stated to the multitude, a needed instruction for all. While men slept, Satan was active. The irremediable consequence has often been noticed, and I do not go farther into it here, though of all importance.

All this belonged to the public history of the kingdom of heaven. The explanation of the next two has to be rather limited than extended. It is the fact—not directly by the sowing of the Son of man—that the planting of Christianity would result in a great political power, and would fill a limited sphere with a system of professed doctrine. I recognise fully that leaven is always used in a bad sense; there is no sowing of the word here that produces plants which grow up from it, not a leavened mass; and it is intended, I doubt not, to shew it was not this. But the object was not to shew it was bad, but the mere filling a mass with a system, not the word of life to souls. Moreover, when individuals are spoken of, we have plants in the kingdom or fishes out of the sea. Care is taken to shew it is not the word which works

effectually in those that believe, but a general effect, and for this a word always used elsewhere for evil. We have then the general effect of Christ's work spoiled, as a whole, in this world by the enemy, and irremediably spoiled here; a great political power in the world, and a general profession spread through a limited sphere. I do not take the birds in verse 32 for evil spirits, but as used to shew the power to protect and shelter found in the tree, just as in Nebuchadnezzar's case in Daniel.

Having gone into the house the Lord explains the parable of the tares and wheat, and gives three more parables. Besides what I have said, there is only to remark that we have the actual judgment in this world at the end of the age. The Son of man gathers out of His kingdom, here on earth, all things that offend—no evil things allowed there—and those that do iniquity; and they are cast into a furnace of fire. Then the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father: I doubt not the heavenly part of the scene, but manifested in glory, not the joy within, but the glory without, still the Father's kingdom; and men are warned and encouraged to give heed. Then the Lord gives further parables, shewing His true intent and the divine mind in what was doing, however He might be rejected.

The kingdom of heaven was carrying the mind of God, however the Christ might be rejected, or its development on earth spoiled. The Lord had found a treasure hid in the field of this world. This was not Israel; Israel would none of Him. It was Israel's responsibility, and was over. Here He was seeking, He was acting, and takes the world because of what was there to be found in it, His heavenly people; and had given up all His earthly title and place to take this. It

was worth while. Surely He shall have it more gloriously as Son of man, but He gave all up then and took the world, for all things are now His. But it was not only the value of His people in His sight, but He knew and judged of the moral beauty the nature and heart of God desired. He was it; and the heavenly saints alone, formed into His likeness, answered to this delight. He sought goodly pearls—understood what was beautiful, found one very precious one, and gave up all and bought it. Think what a privilege, what an unspeakable privilege to be the express and singular object of divine delight 1 For the treasure and the value He had for it, He bought the whole world, has a title to all, but with the treasure as His object; but here He seeks what can be the divine delight, and has one thing which can be the satisfying object of it. It is wonderful. We can understand why we are taught to be imitators of God; why the beatitudes express Christ's character; why the exhortation in Phihppians 2 is the exact portrait of what Christ was. To have this object of His moral delight, Christ gave up all He was entitled to as Son of David then. The wickedness of man may reject Him, and shew what he is, and this we have learned in Matthew; but God always pursues meanwhile His own counsels.

There remains the parable of the fishes, also connected with the counsels of God, but carried out with intelligence by men who serve Him. Here only we have introduced the activity of men other than the Lord. Before, it was the Lord who sowed and the servants were only told they could do nothing. In the treasure we clearly buy no field to have Christ, nor do men naturally seek goodly pearls and so find Christ. Here, though the comparison be the net itself first, yet the fishermen have

their part and their object and work when the net is full. The net has not gathered all fishes nor embraced all the sea, but gathered a net-ful out of it, and of every kind; and then when full they sit down and select the fish that are proper and put them in vessels. The service in the beginning was of a different kind. Either the Lord added such as should be saved, or the word acted individually. All that came were received into the flock, though soon false brethren found their way in. They were put into vessels, but not out of a net full of every kind. This is at the end, when as a fact there is a net full. Then comes quiet and deliberate selection; they sat down, when it was drawn to shore, when the gathering work had taken place, and took out the good ones and put them into vessels. Their business was with the good ones (they were their object), and as intelligent fishermen they selected them and put them into vessels. With the bad fishes they had nothing to do, they cast them away and put them into no vessels. It was sufficient to reject them and leave them cast away on the shore. They were not left in the net. By the selection the net-ful was done with, and the bad fish rejected, but left on the shore as they were. But their object and their occupation was about the good fish; they put them with deliberate care out of the net into vessels. The net full there was no more, a solemn thought in itself.

So, when the servants came to the householder to have his mind, there was nothing for them to do with the tares: only there, in the public field, as at the beginning, the Lord having sowed, the crop was spoiled and remained so. The Lord’s servants had nothing to do with tares as to their service. Angels would make the separation in judgment. So here, the servants have to do

with die good and gather them out of the net. Afterwards at the end of the age the angels have to do with the wicked. They gather the wicked from among the just and cast them into a furnace of fire. They leave the just here where they were: with this judgment the fishermen had nothing to do; their business was with the good fish, to put them into vessels; with the bad they had only to reject and have done with them. The disciples had thus the old things of prophecy, the earthly things of the kingdom, and the new of the kingdom which they now learnt. But He who could with divine wisdom teach them these things was in His own country only the carpenter's son. There He could do but little.

Chapters 14, 15, seem to me of considerable importance. In this respect, that they introduce the abiding patience and grace of Christ as Jehovah when Israel is already judged, and the kingdom announced as coming in in mystery; so that His person and personal grace, and that even towards Israel, remained unchanged, only must go out beyond in the nature of things. We have now not Israelitish dealings, but the abiding character of the divine Person as in the end of chapter 11, when, I repeat, the kingdom as set up in His absence had been fully announced, as after these chapters we have the church and the kingdom in glory fully announced; but here Himself. John had been beheaded by the Idumean and Roman king in Israel, but He that satisfieth the poor with bread in Israel is there. He felt the blow of John's death and retired, but when the need of the people came, Jehovah was there. He satisfies the poor with bread, Psalm 132; here, with a character connecting itself with the full establishment of

governmental order41 in Israel in man, though man would not have Him.

Then Jesus goes up in His human character on high to pray, and the disciples are sent away alone on the stormy sea first, and He dismisses the multitude of Israel, taking the other place of intercession on high. When going to rejoin the disciples He walks on the sea; I apprehend the church's or Christian's place, the path of pure faith or of power, and faith in power with no ship, no boat, as a refuge: nothing external or human, as Israel was. The question then and particularly at the close, as a fact, is faith, personal faith in the Lord Himself. "If it be thou." Then if the eye is off Jesus, we are in no place at all for man to walk in. Peter began to sink. We can easily understand this, but it was really folly. He saw the wind boisterous, but He could no more have walked on a smooth sea than on a rough, and if the Lord was there on a rough as well as on a smooth. It was a question of faith and looking on the Lord, not on the sea, and so of himself. But Jesus will enter into the ship, again the earthly and human order, though glorified not humbled; then the wind will cease, and all in that ship will own Him Son of God, and the world that once rejected Him will own His power and presence, and gladly.

Such is the scheme, if I may so speak, connected with the Lord's unchangeable faithfulness and love to Israel as Jehovah, though leaving the remnant that had owned Him to themselves for a time. We have now the moral and simply divine character which cannot be hid or confine itself to Israel. First we have Jewish or formal religion judged, God's commandments hypocritically set aside, and especially by the clergy and religious doctors

for their traditions. Superstitious gifts to the clergy are specially noticed and outward forms; but the whole result of this teaching was, the people in general drawing near with their lips, but their hearts far from God; where human commandments are introduced, men worship God in vain. If man's tool passed on the altar, said the law, the altar was defiled. But human nakedness was equally defiling. Man's religion was condemned, but man's heart was condemned with it, man was set aside as well as Israel. Not what went into the mouth defiled a man, but what came out. Soon is stated what did; but first the leaders of the Jews, as the leaders of fleshly religion always are and must be, were offended at the rejection of a religion which heartless flesh and hypocrisy could fulfil, and the judging of all that came out of the heart. But all was over, though grace went on with flesh and the Jewish system. The Lord dismisses them with the short judgment, they were not plants of His heavenly Father's planting. Now every plant which His heavenly Father had not planted would be rooted up. The fallen earthly system was over, only what He planted He would own. All else would be rooted up.

Such was the public judgment. It was not now Israel or their hypocritical and self-righteous leaders who could pass. Judgment was on all not planted of the Father of Christ, characterised here as heavenly. But to His disciples He goes farther, and shews not formal hypocrisy judged, but what does come from the human heart, and this was evil of every kind. Has He, full of love and goodness, nothing to say of good that would come from it? not a word. These are the things which defile a man. Thus the moral judgment was complete, first of the formal systems, which Judaism now was; the

reality of heavenly planting, the only thing owned; all human religion vain, and interiorly and spiritually the human heart judged.

All was said as to man; but only to bring in sovereign grace. And now Jehovah's grace above all this appears, but as still owning Israel—for that is a main point in these two chapters when just going to set it aside (chaps. 16, 17) for the church, the kingdom, and the heavenly kingdom and glory. He is giving Israel up. Grace is going out in grace fully, according to divine fulness and prerogative; He is giving up His present place of Messiah there. God must be greater than that; still Israel's place is owned, though not set up in strength now. He goes where the cities noted for hardness of heart had their coasts, and a woman of the accursed race of Canaan meets Him. She takes Him on the ground of His place in Israel, "Thou Son of David." What had a Canaanite to do with that? He has no answer as such. The disciples put self first: Get rid of her (by granting her request), for she cries after us. The Lord in reply formally takes His place in Israel. "I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Then she comes up and pleads with Him, and meets with what seems the hardest answer. "It is not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it to [Gentile] dogs." The woman takes this place too. She owns the promises to Israel, Israel's rights; she owns them to be the children, but the felt want (through grace) drives her right to the heart and goodness of God Himself. It was so: she had no right, she was only a dog; Israel was in the place of the children. But there were resources in God for even the dogs, they might eat of the crumbs from their masters' table. God's appointment and purposes (the

true divine place of Israel) were owned, but the heart and goodness of God reached; masters they might be in God's plans, she owned it (that is, Him). But He who gave children's bread to children could supply the need of those who were not, and had but the crumbs around to look to. Christ could not deny the goodness of God, or limit it to Israel, however as sent He might own their exclusive title; but the sent one was Jehovah in Israel and could not be less than Himself, or other than God in His nature and goodness.

And now see how faith and God's character meet. I have thus spoken of the dispensational character of this history. Recognising Israel fully, the divine Person there necessarily over-passes its limits, but the moral character of the circumstances are of the deepest interest. Great faith produces great humility. There is the full recognition not only of entire unworthiness, accepting the place of a dog, but that there is no right, no claim, no promise, but then through grace, by reason of this, she goes right through to the goodness of God in Himself. That is true faith; she, as Christ, owned the dispensations of God, His right to have a people of His own, but saw Him revealed, Himself in Christ, and her need met the riches of the grace and love which were in Him. It is thus need by faith meets God, God Himself in goodness, but revealed in Christ, as part of the goodness was so to present Himself. We may learn afterwards to joy in God, when we know Him; but here we meet Him and as He is, as He puts Himself forth in Christ to be met. Hence Christ, to manifest this faith, puts forth the dispensational side in the strongest way, that faith, going on the ground of need, might pierce through all this up to God Himself, as the divine nature and

goodness pierced through in Christ the place of service He had taken in Israel. And thus the simplicity of need meets the riches of God's goodness by means of grace in Christ on one side, and through grace, faith on the other. In this respect it is a beautiful scene. And this is, I think, progress.

First it is Son of David, and this was right and true recognition of the promise and Christ's title to it. But then there is no answer. Then she comes more simply in her need, and, doing Him homage, says, Lord, help us. This brought an answer, but that He was sent to Israel, not to Canaanites; it was not meet to give the children's meat to dogs. And then she takes her full place of a dog with no title, but there was goodness enough in God, riches and plenty enough for such. The blessed Lord could not say there was not. He was it there, and then He recognises the woman's faith. Her desire was to be met according to itself—as thou wilt. But the woman has all the great principles of Paul's gospel in the world. Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God to confirm the promises made to the fathers, and that the Gentiles should glorify God for His mercy.

In what follows in the chapter we have the great general truth of the position of Christ brought out. He returns to His place in Israel where the light was to spring up; manifests His divine power and goodness in delivering from every evil, and the multitude glorify the God of Israel, but it is not now the twelve baskets full. It is not in the character of perfect ordained human power. The baskets are seven. The perfection remains, but it is purely divine in its spiritual character, not developed in human government. It remains, but it remains divine.

In that which follows we have the positive preparation for that which was going to take place before we come to the history of the event itself. That which was to take the place of Christ owned on earth is given, and in giving this, the inapprehensiveness of the disciples themselves, both as to intelligence and power, not that of Israel. Testimony to then as under their present leaders, and in their present state for the then mission of Christ, was closed. But with all the incapacity of the disciples to avail themselves of the grace of Christ then present, the revelation of what was to be the foundation of that which was to take the place of it, and of the coming glory, as well as what was the path to this, was made to some or all of them. But of the whole present position of Christ they were wholly unable to seize the true character, or use the power which belonged to it. This incapacity of the disciples is somewhat prominently brought forward in these chapters (16, 17). Still the revelation of what was needed for the new state of things coming is made to them. The Pharisees come with their unbelieving request of a sign; but the answer now is short—no sign but Jonas, Christ lost to Israel in the grave—and He left them and departed: only warns the disciples against their doctrine. But the testimony to the divine power and presence of Christ had left the disciples still without any intelligence which recognised who He was so as to own Him as testified of down here.

But here the patience of the Lord waits upon them and recalls the testimony so that they at length understand His warnings, but present understanding of His actual position there was none as then come; nothing in their state available in divine service for Him as then revealed or even available for their own souls. They were

attached to His person and this was real, but no intelligence, and, as we shall see, no power by faith in what He was, but here the want of intelligence was marked. Still the Lord's works had drawn attention every where, and the Lord asks them the effect of this on the people. It was various: opinions were formed, and there it ended. Some said one thing and some another.

But unable as the disciples might be to appreciate Christ as then there, God revealed to Simon Peter in an especial way that which was to be the foundation of the new blessing. That is, we find here, as all through, the two things, Christ presented to Israel then, and His person behind all that. Only here we find besides, the disciples unable to seize the former, and God revealing to one at least the latter. We know that all confessed Him such. "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." The Christ of course they owned Him, but here was a special revelation: His divine person as Son, Son of Him in whom was the divine and eternal power of life. This was demonstrated in the resurrection, but was there in His person: that He was the Christ they were not to say He was any more. This was over in Israel, His true name there; but on the name, being the Christ, of the Son of the living God, He was going to build His church. Here was the new thing. The Son of the living God revealed, and the church built by Christ on this great truth. The first full grand revelation of the new thing, ever in the counsels of God, but set up in Israel's place during their rejection, here, but for ever in heaven. Against this the gates of hades, the power of Satan should not prevail. Based on the person of Christ, Son of the living God, Satan could not succeed against it. This power of life proved and exercised in

resurrection victorious over death and hades, the power of death which had prevailed against the first Adam could not prevail against this. Such was the great truth, but many things require notice here.

Jesus recognises it as a new and special revelation; not flesh and blood, but His Father who was in heaven had revealed it to Him. It was a positively heavenly and personal revelation, not drawn, however justly, even from prophets and teachers; not merely that there was a Christ or even a Son, but a direct revelation of His Father in heaven, made to Peter, that Jesus was the Son of the living God. The prophets no doubt spoke of Him to come, and there was sufficient evidence that Jesus was He; but here was a personal revelation, the foundation of the new thing, the church.

Next, it was personal to Simon. The whole ground of the blessedness was that it was a personal revelation: “Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jonas, for—” This was the ground, though prophetically given before, why he was called Peter, but a particular special new revelation was the ground of the whole matter. A successor to a revelation to Simon Bar-jonas is nonsense, because he only has it. He only who has the revelation can have the place the revelation and it only gives. He was blessed and called Peter because he had it. On this immovable rock, the Son of the living God revealed and known, the Lord’s church was to be built.

But, further, who is the builder? The Lord only. “I will build”; not “I am building.” He was going to build it. But He only was the builder, and it is not finished yet. But His work no power of hell can prevail against. But it is only His work, what He builds. Hence, when Peter

alludes to it in his epistle, he has no idea of being a builder, any more than a foundation. “Unto whom coming [the Lord], as unto a living stone … ye also as living stones are built up,” 1 Pet. 2:4. They come and are built up, as living stones are built up. They are built on the Lord, as living stones they come. There is no human builder, and Christ is that on which they are built. Whatever others did, I suppose Peter understood as taught of God what his Master said. But Paul, speaking of the church in the same way at the end of Ephesians 2, says the same thing: “In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord.” There is no human builder, and Christ is the chief corner stone. There is a house of God where there are builders; 1 Cor. 3. Paul was a wise master-builder. Others might build wood, hay, and stubble, which Christ never does: corrupters might corrupt it. Here man was builder and his work might all be burned up.

I only notice this that by the contrast we may see the more clearly what is spoken of here: not a corporation subsisting at any one given time upon earth, of which scripture does speak, but of a working going on and wrought by Christ Himself, and as yet, of course, unfinished. Further, there are no keys to the church; neither Peter, nor anybody else, had any keys for the church. It was a building going on of which the Lord was the builder, and that does not want keys, nor are keys things to build with. The keys of the kingdom of heaven were given to him, and no doubt he used them, and to good purpose too. It is a very serious mistake to confound the kingdom of heaven and the church. They are distinguished here and never confounded anywhere. Chapter 13 has given us the kingdom of heaven. Chapter

16 tells us of the church, and then adds a distinct commission as to the kingdom; one is founded on the Father's revelation to Peter, and Christ is the builder, not Peter: the other is Christ's commission especially given as a distinct thing. "And I say also," or more clearly, and "I also say to thee"; the Greek can have no other sense. The Father's revelation had laid the foundation of the church, and Christ was going to build it. Christ names His servant, an act of authority, and entrusts him with the keys of the kingdom. If we must have a wise master-builder of the church on earth, it was Paul, if we are to believe him, not Peter. The keys of the kingdom were surely given to Peter, and he used them, and administered it for Jews and Gentiles. Every Christian owns that whatever in his apostolic ministry he did, as sent by Christ, heaven sanctioned. Remark, he bound nothing in heaven; but what he bound and loosed on earth, heaven held for good, and it was sanctioned as bound or loosed there, but the things bound or loosed were only on earth.

Having thus fully declared the new thing founded on His person, He forbids the disciples to say any more that He was the Christ. That was the old place, now done with as presented to Israel in promise. And He begins from this time to teach them His sufferings and death at Jerusalem, and His new place in resurrection. But this they did not understand any more than the rest. God had revealed to Peter the person of Christ as Son, but his state met in no way the necessary effect and meaning of this in the world. In their state, even with true affection, they might rejoice: their master was the Son of God; but that He should suffer and be rejected had no charm for them. Remark this for us all. There may be true divinely

given faith in a truth, without the flesh being subdued, so as to receive or estimate divinely the results of this truth in the world. Still it was just man, what man savours and the world; and Peter is treated as acting under the influence of the enemy of souls and the blessed Lord's work, in resisting the cross. If he had had his way, he would have hindered Christ completing His work. But the faithful Lord treats it as Satan; to savour of the things that be of man is so, it is not of God.

The Lord then openly warns the disciples that, if they follow Him, they must take up their cross and follow Him: that was His path. He then gives two reasons: first, gaining the world and losing one's soul was little profit; and, secondly, the Son of man was coming in the glory of the Father, though now humbled, and then would reward every man according to his works. The world was a passing and vain thing; but our path in it would meet its consequence in another. God and man were really opposed in their thoughts: the rejection of Christ proved it. The path of the Lord was to suffer here and His followers to follow Him; but He would come in His Father's glory and then the fruits would be judged according to the estimate of that new world to which He was hastening; and so sure was this, that some would be given to see it before they died. All this is the new thing taking the place of the old, but in the proof of man's opposition to God, and that as still in their moral thoughts in the flesh, even the disciples were unable to enter into the mind of God. They are really as far from apprehending it in the revelation of the glory; they are not out of the old things, nor able to see even the power Christ had brought into the world. They were really in

the flesh as to their minds. All in every way must be wholly new.

The church as built by Christ we have had in chapter 16, and the keys of the kingdom of heaven confided by Christ to Peter. We have now (chap. 17) the kingdom in glory, which in its time is also to replace Christ as He then was on earth. The Lord displays it to the three who were to be pillars: Christ formally standing alone by the authority of the Father's voice, the law and the prophets disappearing. This is the great point here. We have more in Luke of the intimacy of glorified saints with Christ, and especially more of the heavenly part, they (I suppose Moses and Elias) entering into the cloud; but here it is more the personal glory, and the kingdom —as Peter himself expresses it, the power and coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The manifested glory of His person is more fully put here. His countenance shone as the sun and His raiment is white as the light. So it is said, "Till ye see the Son of man coming in his kingdom "; in Mark and Luke, the kingdom come, or come in power. It is a bright cloud which overshadows them. In all, Peter would have joined the lawgiver and the great prophet with the Son of man; but this foolish proposal (nor is Peter alone in it) brings in the glory of the Father, the excellent glory, the cloud of God's presence, and the Son of man is owned Son of God Himself, and Moses and Elias are gone: a testimony most distinct and express.

It has been said, that the risen and changed are seen here. I have nothing against it, but I do not think here it is the object of the vision, but the personal glory of Christ, and the disappearing of law and prophets (surely all fulfilled) in the glory of the kingdom where the Son of man has His place alone, because the others are

fulfilled, and disappear in their service, and Christ is alone; and further, He, God's beloved Son, the kingdom and glory being revealed, is now alone to be heard. Not, of course, that we do not believe all the law and prophets have revealed, but they are what testify of Christ; and now the thing is come, the Person they spoke of; and further, not as the Messiah, and Christ of promise (as such He had been rejected, and He was speaking of this, chap. 16:20-28, and it is what introduces this vision), but as Son of man and Son of the Father, testified of immediately, personally, out of the excellent glory, as the object of delight and alone in it. It is not that He had left, or would leave, His people in the glory; He was talking with them in it, but as the One who appeared, the object testified of, He was all alone, the Father only, and we may necessarily and in His delight testifying of Him as He could and did reveal the Father.

It is a wonderful scene. But resurrection was needed to bring it out; a living Christ on earth could not be revealed in this place. It was the counterpart from it from heaven when rejected here below. The Messiah's place was God, and beside the Christ, it was the cross and the Son of man in glory, Son of God alone the object of the Father's delight. I say the Father's, for when He says Son, He reveals the Father; not Christ reveals the Father to us, but Himself in what He could not but be with the Son. It is a great thing to know, besides His person, that the Father's delight is in Christ. The Father said, "I have found my delight," such as He had been on earth, though in itself eternal. He can tell us the Father's mind perfectly. The Lord refers to this and similar testimonies in John 5. But it is not as in John 3:

He speaks that He knows and testifies that He had seen heavenly things as Son of man who is in heaven, not what John Baptist declares, and “what he has seen and heard that he testifies.” There Christ is revealing from heaven. Here the Father is testifying and shews His delight, that He has found His satisfying delight in that which Christ was on earth, and owns Him Son.

And now we find, as I have remarked, the incapacity of the disciples not merely to understand the new position Christ was taking, but even to make use of the old. Peter, with a forwardness which the Lord constantly used to bring out some truth, did not go beyond the similar glory of Moses and Elias to Christ to recognise the person of Christ. At this, though he had owned Him Son of the living God, so that he ought to have known better, we can hardly be surprised; but difficulties when they did know, and incapacity to use the power already come in with Christ, is all that marks their state. Only the Lord pursues His own grace and His own thoughts, as we shall see.

Some other important points arise out of this chapter. As regards this world, the coming of the Lord was a kind of provisional or tentative coming, though for far more important purposes. Just as He could say, till the Son of man comes, though He was there; and this double purpose is morally evident, because He came completing the trial and testing of man (compare John 15:22-24), and also to accomplish His Father’s will, and give His life a ransom for many. And it was His rejection in the first form which brought about the accomplishment of the second, so that responsibility and grace in atonement met in the cross. Thus, if they could receive it, John was Elias who was to come. The scribes

were right in expecting him, but John was come in the spirit and power of Elias. To him they had done what they listed. Only if Elias came, personally he must be another; when the Son of man comes, it will be the same, only risen and glorified. The Lord allowed the difficulty to be presented that the whole scene that was going on might be brought out.

We then come to the incapacity of the disciples to use by faith the power which was then present. The poor man with the demoniac son had brought him to the disciples, and they could not cast the demon out. This draws out from Jesus the expression of the uselessness of His stay with them, when even His disciples could not make use of His power. This it is which finally leads, not to the prophecy and declaration that He would suffer, and depart, and rise again, but to the immediate expression of what drove Him away. “O, faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you?” The unbelief even of His disciples, hindering the efficacious testimony to His power, led to His going away. His person remained the same, and His personal grace, but His work was hindered by the faithlessness even of His own. How long was He to stay and bear with them? Thus we learn what closes a dispensation and the Lord’s dealings in goodness, not the power of evil that brought Him here, but the powerlessness of those who follow Him, in making good the testimony He has given of His power and goodness. This does not cease, but in the same sentence in which He say, How long? He says, Bring thy son hither. It is what we have seen, the closing of His service here, but His person and grace only shining out the more brightly; the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; and exercised

wherever there was a want that came to Him, the actual meeting-place between man and God—a want, and grace in a Saviour.

Two things are then brought out as regards the exercise of this power of God by faith. First faith, unclouded confidence in Christ to do it, but, secondly, that there was a real adverse power of Satan, and that, in cases where that power was in its full exercise, as here, it could not be met and overcome but by nearness to God, bringing in His power by prayer and that self-restraint in which the heart was separated from nature to God. I expect no miracles in these last days, save false ones on the part of the enemy, though many things are counted miracles which in connection with God's government faith ought always to do; but for that to which faith now applies, according to the will of God, these directions are of the last importance; faith in God's power, and that in exercise in grace towards us, and this sought in prayer and separation of heart to God. Elias, we read, was a man of like passions with us, and he prayed, which I notice, because all we read of in the Old Testament is his declaration, "As the Lord liveth," etc.; 1 Kings 17:1. In spite of all this practical unbelief in the disciples, the personal glory and grace of the Lord, and the association of the disciples with Himself in grace, is no way hidden or diminished. The close of the chapter is a remarkable witness of this in connection with what we have been seeing.

The Jews come to collect the tribute for the temple, and come to Peter with the question if the Lord paid it, tantamount to the question, if He was a good Jew. The Lord anticipates Peter, shewing divine knowledge and divine power. He asks him of whom the kings of the

earth take custom, or tribute— of their own children or of strangers. Of strangers, replies Peter. Then, says the Lord, are the children free. Christ, that is, was Son of the great King of the temple, but in this character associates poor Peter with Himself. “Then are the children free: nevertheless that we offend not,” etc. He then shews His divine power and in the way of Peter’s natural calling disposes of the creation, of the fish of the sea, to bring him the needed money. Son of the most high God, knowing all things and disposing of creation, He nevertheless subjects Himself in grace to Jewish order; but in the title of His low place, in infinite grace He puts Peter in the same place with Himself: “that give for Me and thee.” The lowliness of Him who came in by the door, the divine person, and the perfect grace, are all shewn out together.

The true position at this moment too is clearly seen. In chapters 18 to 20 to the end of verse 28 are presented to us in a general way the principles in which they were to walk in the new order of things, and in general what characterised this new order in contrast with nature and Judaism, while God’s creation is fully owned. The Lord begins with the abnegation of self, and self-importance. We are to be as little children; one who was not such in principle could not enter into it, and he who was most so would be greatest in it. The Christian received Christ in receiving such in Christ’s name. But opposition and difficulties were to be expected. Woe to the world because of them! If they put a stumbling-block in the way of these little ones who did believe, for weakness might accompany simplicity, they had better have been hopelessly drowned in the sea. As to oneself, if one found anything in oneself that led one to stumble, no

self-sparing; better lose the best member one has than one's soul. The Lord always maintains in the strongest way the solemnity of God's judgment of evil. The fullest freest grace is taught us, blessed be God, but nothing to weaken the horror of evil, but the contrary.

There is comfort in what follows, if not professed doctrine, as to infants, and their salvation if going out of the world as such. The Lord's disciples were not to despise them: they were always present before Jesus' Father in heaven. I take "angel" in the common use of it in scripture, of one who represented another without his being personally there. Thus we have the Angel of the Lord; the Malak-Jehovah. They said of Peter, It is his angel. It may be an angel who does the service; but the object of the passage is not to shew who does it but what is done, and for this purpose popular language is used. But this blessing is not founded on sentimentality, or vague notions. It is founded on the parable used for sinners in general of the lost sheep, and that the Son of man was come to save what was lost; only here, with infants, it is not said to seek. But it is not the will of our Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish: of such is the kingdom of heaven. It is not, I judge, to be thought that the Lord speaks of the poor and humble in spirit; they are the greatest in the kingdom: it would be a small and insignificant thing to say of them that it was not the Father's will that they should perish.

We have then the case of a brother offending another, not the world; and this introduces the assembly in practice here below in the coming period. The injured person was to tell his offending brother, and win him if he could; if not, take one or two more, and if that failed,

it would not merely be, You say, and I say, but the whole matter before the whole assembly with clear evidence. If he refused the judgment of the assembly, he was to be as a heathen man and as a publican. The assembly takes in this the place of the synagogue. It is remarkable here that the successors to the power given to Peter to loose and to bind, so as to have heaven's sanction upon it, are the two or three gathered as an assembly. What the assembly decided, as such, was sanctioned in heaven. The Lord adds the promise of granting what was asked by two or three so assembled, for He Himself would be there. But what should characterise the disciple was grace, and, if personal forgiveness answered the end, it was to be given constantly. Church discipline is another thing, it comes to be judicial and needed for clearing conscience. The spirit of forgiveness belonged essentially to the Christian. By being forgiven he was one, and he was not partaker of it if he had not the spirit of it.

I apprehend, in the form of the parable, that there is an allusion to the Lord's forgiveness of the nation, even after killing Him if they repented (Acts 3), and their refusal of grace, as shewn towards the Gentiles, involving them in all the consequences of their first guilt against Christ.

The next, chapter 19, furnishes us, I think, with some very important principles. Nature, brought up, and as God formed it, was fully recognised, but a principle and power is brought in which is wholly above it, and in its actual moral state it is fully detected and judged; while the following of Christ out of nature's power has blessing in this world and in that to come. This—setting every thing in its place on the rejection of Christ, which

did reveal every thing, and brought in a new power—is full, it seems to me, of the deepest instruction. It has its occasion first as a question debated in the Jewish school, to which the Lord gives the divine answer which unfolds the whole state of things: “Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?” The Lord goes back behind the law to God’s original institution: “He which made them at the beginning…. From the beginning it was not so.” Thus God’s natural order, the relationship He had formed, origin of all other human relationships is restored by Christ’s authority. He returns to God and God’s institution of man. It is not Jehovah, it is not “my Father,” but God made them—a very important principle. The law takes its place as a provisional thing by the bye. Looked at as a Jewish law, a law of ordinances, God had made allowance for the hardness of the human heart, and now returned to His own thoughts and institutions. God’s order created order.

But besides this, another power is come in, which is not nature but divine, as in the power of the Spirit of God, because nature is all ruined, the power of evil is in the world, to which nature is no answer, because it is what is ruined; power therefore comes in, which is above nature, as being of God, but which consequently owns nature as He made it, and His institutions. To break them is sin, to live above them is the gift of God. “He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.”

Hence also the Lord receives little children, and blesses them. This was in God’s order, and of God’s creation, in a certain sense unspoiled. I speak not of the root of sin, but of the manifestation of evil in the world. In themselves they were the fruit of God’s natural order, as yet in a state unspoiled and natural. And so they are.

The kingdom of heaven set up this order again in natural relationships and nature as God made it. We are not talking of the church here; that has its relationships spoken of in, chapter 18.

But nature, however amiable and good in this sense, has the deep root of evil in it. This we see in the young man who runs up to the Lord. A beautiful character—his shewing desire of learning of Him, whom he saw to be the most perfect master of good, would inherit eternal life, had kept all those commandments which were the maintenance of the relationships we have spoken of. But the Lord cuts down the whole seed of man (for the young man came to Him as a man, a Rabbi). There was none good but one—God; still for man the commandments were His will, and, for man to enter into life he was to keep them in the system of the law. Relationship to God the Lord does not speak of, and He says life, dropping the word eternal, which the young man had used. But the way of life for man in this world was keeping the commandments. The young man, like Paul, was irreproachable in conduct. The Lord puts the test of lust and of his heart, and all was wrong. Instead of lust judged, and all counted dung for Christ, Christ is left for the riches which his lust clung to. This tale was told of man's heart; even where irreproachable, lust possessed it, and earth, not heaven, was its desire. The new and heavenly thing had come in which detected its state, and the fairest remains of creation: character and qualities were nothing; the heart was away from God. Riches—which to a Jew were a sign of divine favour, according to the government of this earth, now that God was revealed, and man's state made manifest, that it was a question of man's heart with God—were the

greatest hindrance. The reason was simple: they held the desires of the natural heart.

But if one with the best qualities, and the desire of doing good, and such an opportunity, were not saved, who was to be? The Lord's answer does not avoid the consequence; with man it was impossible: plain, earnest, and solemn testimony. But that did not hinder God; all was possible with Him, and He could save. We have, then, the consequence of giving up all for Christ, but not beyond the kingdom. All here concerns the kingdom. Peter, ever forward, puts the question, What were they to have who had forsaken all? In the renewed world, which was coming, they would be on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel, the first places in the centre of the kingdom; and every one who had left what nature loved for Christ's name would have a hundredfold in this world, and then everlasting life; for in following Christ eternal life comes in, not in doing the law.

But the principle on which it is done is also of all importance. Many then first should be last, and who were last first, but as a principle it is (chap. 20) always true. And the principle laid down is this—labouring through confidence in Christ, and not for so much reward; grace, and not law: reward is encouragement to endurance, not motive. Those who agreed for their penny got their penny, those who trusted the master of the vineyard got according to his heart. "What is right I will give," and they went on his word. The assurance of reward for sacrifice is there when Christ is the motive of the sacrifice; but where the reward is the motive of the service, it is poor pay, and indeed all is false. But thus there are (the converse) last first, those who, with

perhaps later opportunity of service, have more trust in the Lord's heart and faithfulness, and reap the fruit of it in Him. The sovereign grace of God is the source of true blessing. But here service, not conversion, is the question. Chapter 18, on to thus far in chapter 20, closes the moral instruction of His disciples, as giving the true character and state of things, brought in by His rejection, and the principles the disciples were to act upon: chapter 18 more within, among saints; chapter 19 men's state and the kingdom, the principle of service being shewn in chapter 20. The Lord then proceeds to tell them of His rejection as immediate in Jerusalem, where He was going; that He could give them the cup, that was all. He was taking the lowly place, ministering, and giving His life a ransom for many: the high places in His kingdom were for those for whom they were prepared of His Father. Then, as in all the three Gospels, begins the history of the last scenes with the blind man near Jericho.

In chapter 20:30 the Lord accepts the title of Son of David, acting in grace where the place of the curse had been. He is therefore now no longer with the poor of the flock in Galilee, but drawing nigh to Jerusalem, in the character in which He had to say to His people there as such; a last testimony to them before His rejection by them, and their judgment. Accordingly He enters into Jerusalem as King, according to the prophecy of Zechariah, only the first part of it is omitted, the accomplishment of which will be at another time. Then He will be just, and having salvation. He was it always; but it was not in that character that He rode into Jerusalem now. His whole character here is placing the Jews under the final test of the presence of Messiah

their King, bringing on their judgment as about to leave them; the rejected King passes them all in review before Him, and assigns them their place. It is the last closing act between Messiah and Jerusalem. God put the testimony in the mouths of the multitude, which shall be the cry of Israel in the last days, according to Psalm 118. He acts as holy King and Judge, and clears the temple of its defilements.

All that follows is the final procedure in which the dignity of the humble rejected One is vindicated against the withered pretensions of the unbelieving heads of Israel; in which each class, pretending to call Him in question and perplex Him, comes to receive its sentence from His mouth. Still, for every need His power is yet in grace. The blind and the lame come to Him in the temple, and are healed. When the chief priests see this done in the temple, in public and before the multitude, and the children crying, Hosanna to the Son of David, according to Psalm 118, they are sore displeased, and appeal to Jesus to stop it. He answers by Psalm 8. He must be glorified; and, if He gave Himself, still His glory must be maintained, and if the simplicity of children did not fulfil the task, as we read elsewhere, the stones would cry out. Here we have only the short and silencing allusion to Psalm 8, and He leaves them. He would no longer sleep in the condemned, though loved, city.

We have then the testimony to the final judgment of Israel as under the first covenant, that is, of man in his responsibility. He came to look for fruit; there were only leaves, and man is judged as utterly fruitless for ever. Israel thus judged would immediately wither away. But the whole power of the people, if the disciples had faith,

would be cast into the sea of the Gentiles; and so it was. At the same time the Lord insists on the power of the prayer of faith in their service.

The chief priests and scribes came to Him, as He was teaching, to demand His authority for what He did. This is the common question of what is really apostate ecclesiastical authority. That which is of God owns God's work: God's work proves itself. If God's work is done, God has wrought it, and God's authority to act is not a matter of question for those who, being of God, know His work. Man may sometimes mix that which is of himself with it, and so far spoil and enfeeble the testimony, but that which is of God they who are of God will own. In Christ all was perfect, of course. Hence the Lord puts them on their capacity to judge of God's work, and from carnal motives they avow their incapacity to judge of it. Why then should He tell them by what authority He acted? They were confessedly unable to judge of it. It was a humbling setting aside of their pretensions—avowed incapacity. But it is well to remember that God's work does not need authorisation. From whom is it to receive this? God assuredly needs none to work, or make others work, and he who pleads ecclesiastical authority for working proves that it is not God who is working, for who can authorise Him?

It may seem more difficult till the proofs are there, but that is a matter of faith. If Christ has given the talent to trade with, the seeking another authority gives proof that he who does so does not know his Master. He does not know that he is sent of Christ, for then he need not seek another. If he has another without that, it is simply nought. But the Lord goes farther with their religious authorities, and in the parable of the two sons shews

that the repentant sinner, not the pretended just one, was the doer of God's will. The publicans and harlots went into God's kingdom before such. Terrible and humbling sentence! but so it was. Nor had the bowing to John's testimony by these repentant sinners wrought on the conscience of these hardened self-righteous ones.

The Lord then gives utterance to a parable which was the divine judgment on the whole conduct of the leaders of Israel, represented by those before Him. He had done everything for His vineyard, and then in due season He sought fruit— sent the prophets, who were rejected, and persecuted, and killed—sent yet more, and they treated them in the same way; at last He sent His Son, saying, They will reverence my Son. Him they cast out and slew. The chief priests and scribes pronounce the only possible judgment on them in reply to the Lord. It was their own sentence. The Lord then from scripture— testimony which they could not deny— shews that what they rejected was made by God the head of the corner. There could not be a plainer testimony, more immediately applicable. God, and the chiefs of Israel, the builders, were in open contradiction. It was Jehovah's doing to exalt the rejected stone. It is still Psalm 118, the special oracle of God as to these events. We have then the Lord's open comment and statement as to the result with the Jews— the kingdom of God taken from them, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits of the kingdom. It was to Gentiles, but that is not the special point of the Lord's words. It was to a nation bringing forth the fruits of the kingdom. If that be not done, they cease to answer to the description, whatever the patience of God; and though that be not the subject

here, they also would have to be cut off. The same truth is otherwise told in Romans 11.

Further, the Stumbling-stone (Isa. 8) was there. It was indeed Jehovah Himself in grace. Whoever stumbled on it was offended in Him, and (this is of wider application than the chief priests) would be broken, but those on whom He fell, when coming again in judgment, would be ground to powder. Such was the present and future result of the responsibility of the Jews, to whom every advantage had been given, and to whom the Son of God Himself had come. Here the Lord is looking for fruit. The aspect of the crisis from the side of grace follows. Meanwhile the chief priests and Pharisees would have taken Him, but feared the people.

The Lord presents then the state of things on the side of grace, not of seeking fruit. A king is making a marriage for his son. This leads us on into the christian sphere of things, though taking it up first as to Jewish responsibility. It is the kingdom of heaven, only the Jewish invitation here takes no effect. The streets and lanes of the city, the poor of the flock in Israel, are not in the scene here. We have the invitation to the Jews as then given. They would not come. When all is prepared after Christ's death, they are again invited, but they made light of it, and went their way to their own occupations, or treated the messengers injuriously, even to death. This brought judgment on them and on their city Jerusalem. They were not worthy, and the King sends out to such as had no claim or hope of such a privilege—sent, as sinners of the Gentiles, and the wedding was furnished with guests. But all this was the external thing. The title really to partake is tested amongst those who have come in, a single example

being taken as the principle. He must be fit for the wedding: a wedding garment can alone be allowed at the wedding, and that is Christ. Fine clothes might be displayed, perhaps, but the wedding garment was indispensable. If a man has not really Christ, he cannot be allowed there.

This, then, is the outward profession of Christendom, tested by the possession of Christ. Judgment was exercised as to those who, being there, were not fitly there. What suited the King's mind and purpose could alone be allowed. The offender was cast out into outer darkness. The fullest grace that seeks the needy does not content itself with unfitness for the place that grace brings into. All blessing, the feast of God's delight and joy, was there; but if we have not really Christ, we cannot have part in it. One who has not really put Christ on is in a state discordant with the whole place and meaning of what is going on, and he must be cast out. He had no real title there.

We have now special classes who come up, but only to have the real state of the nation judged, and all the classes judged; they blamed each other. All were wholly wrong before God in the point they particularly contended for as their pride. But all the phases of Jewish moral condition are brought out, and the real truth of God in opposition to them. The Jews were under the power of the Gentiles since the time of the Babylonish captivity. This ought not to have been, but their unfaithfulness to Jehovah had brought it on, only God had spared a remnant to present Messiah to them, whom they were now rejecting. Till God gave deliverance they were to bow to the chastening. It was

God’s hand upon them. The last of the four great empires now held the rule.

But while one party accommodated itself to Caesar, and made nothing of unfaithfulness to God, the other, instead of bowing to the yoke as humbled under God’s hand for their sins, were in constant rebellion against the empire, insisting on their rights as God’s people, which they had really forfeited, hypocrites with Him, and not bowing to the yoke He had laid upon their necks for their sins. These two classes come together, that Jesus might be found in fault either way. No deliverer from the Roman yoke if he accepted the tribute easily; accused to the governor if he forbade it. The Lord puts all in its place. He asks whose authority this tribute-money represents: “Caesar’s,” they reply. Give to Caesar, He says, what is his, and to God what is God’s—the true secret of their place. They marvelled, and left Him.

Then came the Sadducees, the infidels of Israel. Israel was the sphere of God’s earthly government, and resurrection no express part of the law. They gave as a fine piece of reasoning what shewed their ignorance, but the Lord was plain on so capital a point. They erred, not knowing the scriptures nor the power of God. The Lord reveals the state of the raised, shewing the mere ignorance and folly of the reasoning of the Sadducees. It is a high and holy state where what is merely earthly will have passed away for ever. Things ordered of God, and owned here, will have passed away there. What is spiritual alone remains, and the body itself changed into suited glory. But the Lord goes farther, and shews that the origin and basis of Judaism before the law was given is God’s revelation of Himself, the basis of all hope for

them. His memorial name for ever condemned their thoughts.

If Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had ceased to exist, could God have still taken their names, the name of naught to characterise Himself to Israel? He might have said, I am He who was with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, when they existed; and even so it would have been an utterly unworthy relationship—the God of those who had a mere animal existence. God characterises Himself by them—is not ashamed to be called their God. Could He characterise Himself by a mere dying animal, who, when He calls Himself theirs, did not exist at all? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. But this truth went farther, for, as to separation of soul and body, Abraham was dead, and, though living for God, was not what God meant him to be as his God. God was not even in this sense, as an abiding state, the God of the dead. They must be according to what He would have man, soul and body. Till all was accomplished they might wait with their spirits blessed, but this was not God's thought as to man. He was to be complete, and hence raised from the dead. The name of God indicating His relationship with those, gone for the moment, demonstrated the resurrection. For Him indeed, as we read, all are alive; but the ground of the argument here is God's relationship with them. He cannot be the God of those who do not exist. It was a living Abraham, body and soul, of whom God could be the God. Death therefore, for he was dead, proved the resurrection. Thus divine truth was established in contradiction to the Sadducees.

This brings the Pharisees forward, who used the law as a repertory of good deeds of different value to make out worth for themselves. They ask the Lord which is the

greatest. This was all human pretension of doing and reasoning. The Lord goes to the root, and gives the summary and essence of the whole law in two verses, picked out of the mass of Moses' writings. This gave the law of God as He saw it. Thus we have resurrection, and another world, and the essence of the law established. Next, for Christ; whose Son was He? David's, they reply; and so He was according to the flesh, but that was only man's view of Him, and not what was being made good now. The truth that was to be fulfilled now was Psalm no. He was David's Lord too, and going to sit on God's right hand. This closed the whole pleading between God and the people. They could give no answer, nor durst ask any more questions. The scene was closed with Israel. Yet till judgment was executed, testimony has its place in their midst; for the patience of grace is great. Morally they were now fully judged.

Chapter 23 is a remarkable proof how in this Gospel, till we arrive at the very last chapter, all refers to the Jews, and even there it is not what actually took place among the Gentiles in our present Gospel. The scribes and Pharisees are still seen as sitting in Moses' seat with the book of God in their hand, and in the very chapter in which they are utterly denounced (for it is the object of this chapter) in every aspect, the disciples, moving still as Jewish disciples among the Jews, are to follow what they say from Moses' seat, and their testimony (v. 34) is sent to these same Jews. No one sits in that seat now. We may find some analogies, which the church found early when it was corrupting itself; but there is no seat of Moses to sit in. Father or Rabbi is alike out of place. How completely however the testimony is here viewed as among the Jews, is seen (v. 34) where the apostolic

and christian ministry is formally so treated, sent to those whom the Lord was now denouncing. With this is formally designated at once their place and ministry. The object of the chapter is to denounce those who led the people to reject their own mercy in Christ.

All the various sides of the Pharisaic evil are denounced. They impose burdens, and heavy ones, on others, but do not touch them with one of their fingers; to be seen of men, and solemn ritual observers for that purpose, is their object. To be made much of by men, set in high places, greetings, to be called Rabbi, theological doctrinal importance in the world, to be looked up to as having official religious reputation, such were they; but all this was forbidden to the disciples: he who set up to be great among them was to be servant; they were to follow the lowliness of Christ, who ever came down, yea, from the form of God to the dust of death. Christ was their Teacher and Rabbi, and their Father was in heaven.

Then come out the various aspects of ecclesiastical Pharisaism. First is the shutting up the kingdom of heaven against men; not going in themselves, they seek to hinder others; they profit by their religious profession to get widows' money, making long prayers; very great zeal to make a proselyte to their superstition, making him then worse than themselves; blind themselves, they lead the blind, but into the ditch. With refined casuistry as to what is evil, they shew their folly to the spiritual mind; excessively exact and zealous about the minute externals of religion, the substantial realities of it they neglect. They strain out the gnat and swallow the camel; as the chief priests bought Christ's blood for money without a scruple, but would not put it into the treasury

because it was the price of blood. They clean the outside of the platter to appear very religious and holy, within they are full of extortion and excess; as whited sepulchres, clean without, full of uncleanness within. They honoured the true witnesses of God who were of old, true children of those who had killed them, piously alleging that, had they lived then, they would not have been guilty of their blood. They would fill up the measure of their fathers. God would test them, sending them to prophets and wise men and scribes, as He did in the beginning of the gospel, and they would kill, scourge, and crucify them, that, the measure being filled up, all the righteous blood from Abel might be required of that generation.

Ecclesiastical solemnity and superstition, and often with the profession of orthodoxy, have been the persecuting power and spirit of opposition to truth in every age and in every land. Look around and see where the traits here depicted are found, and see if it be not in hierarchy in the measure of its influence. Be it Jewish or Christian, it is the same story. If we go out to Mohammedans, nay, even to heathens, it is the same thing. But, specially in a pretended orthodox hierarchy, persecution and all the traits noted by Christ will be found. I appeal to every history in every land; for Jewish and Christian I may appeal to scripture, for though the chief priests were Sadducees, the scripture shews the same spirit of persecution, and the Pharisees and the doctors of the law fill up the rest of the picture, the Lord Himself being witness. Who delivered to the secular arm in Christendom, hypocritically asking for mercy? And as in Jerusalem for Jews, so in Babylon for Christendom, was found the blood of prophets and of saints and of all that

were slain upon the earth. In the ecclesiastical power, from the pope downward, will be found in the measure of its realisation what the Lord describes here.

Finally, verse 37, the Lord, though in words of tender compassion, pronounces judgment on Jerusalem. Often would Christ, Jehovah her Lord, have gathered her children together as a hen her chickens under her wings, but they would not; but now her history was closed, their house was left to them desolate, and, until they took up the children's cry, the words of Psalm 118, they would not see their Lord again. The repentance of Israel (as proposed in the intercession of Christ, Acts 3, but then refused) would be the signal of His return to them. It is of importance to see clearly what I have remarked, that the position of the disciples and their ministry is in Israel more exactly among the Jews. It helps us in understanding what follows.

The testimony of the Lord to the Jews was closed. Their house was left unto them desolate, they were not to see the Lord, the rejected One, till they repented, when the prophecy of Psalm 118 comes to be fulfilled. This testimony of the Lord could be received only by faith, and that is what is available for the disciples and guides him out of the way of awaited peril. But there is another key and interpreter of prophecy, the fulfilment of judgment. What is discerned only by faith when it is matter of faith, is made plain by events in judgment. Warning prophecies are of no avail when the judgment is executed. It is too late. Thus we find in symbolical prophecies and parables that the explanation always goes beyond what it explains. At any rate, making events the proof of the truth of a revelation, while perfectly true, is not the ground of the Christian nor of faith at all.

The believer has God's word, and what concerns him in the prophecy is the warning or encouragement it affords when it is not fulfilled. What is a direction to flee to the mountains worth when the prophecy is fulfilled? Where is the exhortation to wait for Jehovah available in the midst of tribulation and trial with the prophetic assurance that He will come, but in the tribulation when He is not come?

Besides, prophecy is of no private interpretation; the whole plan and ways of God as to earthly government are unfolded. This is so in a very central and important point here, perhaps we may say, as to earth the most important of all. The throne of God had been on earth from the setting up of the tabernacle, and in a special way at Jerusalem from the dedication of the temple. This ceased at the Babylonish captivity. In the beginning of Ezekiel we see the glory on the threshold, then on the Mount of Olives, and then depart entirely. But a remnant of the two tribes were brought back to Jerusalem that Messiah might be presented to them, and He was so presented to them.

The true temple indeed was His body, as He said to the Jews: still He owned the temple as His Father's house, though they had made it a den of thieves. Now the sad word came, "your house is left unto you desolate." The Lord now predicts present judgment, in the destruction of it; and when they took this as the end of the age, and as the same time as His coming, He unfolds all God's ways as to their testimony in Israel, and then of the power of evil, and judgment at the end when He should come to the deliverance of His servants. The Lord had merely said their house would be desolate till He came. When His disciples, still possessed with the thought of

the temporal glory of Israel, boasted in what they could shew Him, the buildings of the temple, He declares that not one stone of it should be left upon another.

Then, on the disciples inquiring when the sign of His coming and of the end of the age would be, He unfolds the whole course of events as far as concerned Jerusalem, the disciples' testimony amongst that people when He was gone, and the state the Jews would get into, and the testimony such as He then could render it in the whole world; and, finally, in a distinct portion, the last events as they concerned them or those who might believe as they did.

The disciples connect what the Lord had already said with the end of the age and the hoped-for arrival of Messiah in glory which they awaited—were obliged in such case to await, and they looked for signs. This last point He does not touch till verse 30. In verse 29 He tells of overwhelming judgments and the subversion of all things supposed to be regular and stable, but no previous sign is given. These are after the tribulation and usher in His coming when it takes place. From Luke we learn that there is anticipation of judgments, at least terror as to what is coming when they take place as far as Judsea goes.

But I continue with Matthew. The prophecy divides at the end of verse 14, which verse goes to the end of the age. Then from verse 15 we have the special circumstances of Jerusalem and the tribulation there, closing in verses 29-31 with the coming of Christ and the gathering of the scattered Jews. But the Lord does not begin by satisfying their wish as a matter of curiosity, natural as it was, but treats it as a solemn

matter as to their own service. His absence would put them to the test. The rejection by the Jews of the true Christ exposed them to every false pretender. Many would come in His name. So it is always; the rejection of a truth throws it, as it were, into the hands of Satan who gives his version of it to deceive. This is a solemn thing, and examples are not wanting of it. But the Lord is faithful. And here many would be deceived. Such deceivers suit themselves to the flesh, perhaps religious flesh, and the deception is great; men are religiously bad and hardened in evil and deep in delusion. We have had an example of it in Irvingism as to the coming of the Lord and the presence of the Holy Ghost, and a great and abiding one in the pretension (foolish as to fact, yet wise as to man) to unity in the Roman ecclesiastical body.

Further, besides the false Christs, political disturbances, restlessness, actual wars and rumours of them would attract attention and characterise the state of things on earth. But the disciples were not to be troubled; all this would come to pass, they were no signs of His coming, the end was not yet. Thus the Lord is caring for what would guide and strengthen His witnesses, keeping them calm and steady in their places. The end was not yet. He gives such instruction as would make them calm in service, not agitated with circumstances or by false hopes, neither to say, Lo! here, nor Lo! there, nor to be agitated by what agitated the world. They might still serve quietly on.

But besides these things judgment would come: the contentions of nations, famine, pestilence, earthquakes in divers places. These were the beginning of the throes of Jewish sorrows in the midst of which they were to

render their testimony. It was surely the heaving of the nations; but the effect considered is on the disciples in their service among the earthly people, though that testimony would go farther. But there was more. Their own immediate sorrows and trials; they would be delivered up to be afflicted, killed, hated of all the Gentiles for Christ's sake. But this persecution from without would produce defections within; many would be offended, would turn against those once companions and betray them and hate them, and, because of abounding iniquity, many hearts not nourished directly from the flame of Christ's love would wax cold. He that went through all the difficulty and pressure to the end would be saved. This gospel of the kingdom would be preached to the Gentiles, and then the end would come.

In this passage the Lord seems to me to overleap the whole period in which we live, and gives the ministry of the disciples in the testimony they then had of the near setting up of the kingdom, in the midst of the Jews when He was gone and the house left desolate; and resumed when the Jews were again there to be spoken to; but especially to have in view the testimony amongst that people at the end. The destruction of Jerusalem interrupted this formally and judicially, and it would again be resumed when the church was gone, and be carried on in spite of opposition, till the end came. On to that end it clearly goes, and the present gospel of salvation is clearly passed over. Verse 14 comes in as an additional element by itself. In the beginning of His reply the Lord speaks of what would be applicable at any time after His departure, but soon passes essentially into what characterises the end in Judaea, and finally they are called to endure to the end.

Verse 14 gives us the gospel of the kingdom preached in all the world, which additionally shews us that we are here in the last days. It is for a witness to all the Gentiles and then the end comes. But it is important to remark here that it is the gospel of the kingdom. This gospel of the kingdom was what Christ could preach then, what He had been preaching, that is, that the kingdom was just coming, and that men must repent to meet it, only that it was to go out to all the Gentiles. It was to be preached, as naturally such a gospel must, as a witness, as the word was that the kingdom was at hand, only that then it was to come in with judgment and power, the end was to come according to, though then immediately and definitely, the everlasting gospel of Revelation 14 and Psalms 93-100. That was the end of the age in judgment.

According to this would the judgment of chapter 25 be carried on. Hence the brethren there, are, I doubt not, Jewish messengers of the kingdom, such as the Lord here speaks to, and of. I do not mean personally apostles, but His messengers to the nations, such as in Psalm 96, though that be modified by the prophetic tone. Only the end of the age is come when He sits to judge the nations. He has righteously judged and made wars, destroyed His adversaries, and sits on the throne of His glory; the whole state of things in the old age is judged, and Messiah comes, and sitting there. It is no longer the age to come, because it is come; only before it, the gospel goes out to all nations and then the end comes.

Thus the Lord has fully answered the question of the disciples, first in warnings as to their work in Judaea, available to them, then without any particular sign, save false Christs, and then more definitely what would

introduce the end. There was a provisional end to service in Palestine and among the Jews as a nation, and a half-week of Daniel wholly unaccomplished;—for unbelief a whole one. This is resumed or taken up again when the faithful have to endure to the end and be saved. Other details are given elsewhere, as in Revelation 11-13, but that is not our object here, only we have that half-week referred to generally here in what follows verse 15, a distinct revelation as to the events of that closing period which in the Old Testament is unfolded to us in Daniel 12, as it is alluded to in other places as in Jeremiah 30:7, and in the word "indignation," and consumption decreed, though this last refers rather to what arrives on the close of the great tribulation; it gives the full guidance and instruction for service.

The Lord now gives the needed warning as to the power of evil which would be in the time Daniel had spoken of when the idol that brought on the desolation should be set up in the holy place. This was not the time of their continued testimony as His witnesses in the land of Canaan; the testimony gone out among the heathen might continue, but the history of testimony is closed and the time of tribulation begins. The covenant is broken, every claim despised, and Jerusalem trodden down. I do not mean that there is no sackcloth testimony in spite of this; we read there is, when the power of evil is most displayed, but the time is not characterised by service as their then instruction and duty. Trials and persecutions there would have been then, but this as the natural accompaniment of faithful testimony in the midst of evil. Now the power of evil was dormant and characterised the state of things. The Jews accept

idolatry, that is, the great body of them accepted Antichrist, and the power of Satan reigns for the moment unhindered, save as God holds the upper hand after all.

But He has shortened the days, or no flesh would be saved. And it is the time when Michael, that great prince, stands up for Daniel's people. But it is the time of flight for him that reads and understands as to those who dwell in Judaea. It is a peremptory sign of the great tribulation, the beginning of the last half-week of Daniel's seventy weeks. Desolation is there caused by the setting up of idols. The unclean spirit with seven others worse had entered in. They were to flee from the wonted habitations of men, and frequented places, to the desolate mountains, not to descend to get anything from the house, nor return if working in the field to get the clothes they had left aside. Woe to those hindered in their flight! But God can think of His people who trust Him even at such a time, and think of everything for them. They were to pray that their flight might not be in winter, difficult for the travel and sojourn of fugitives in the mountains, nor on a sabbath when a flight measured by a sabbath-day's journey would give a bad hope of escape in times such as never were nor would be; God would think of this for them.

But here we have and are meant to have a clear proof that we have to do with Jews, Jewish laws, as with Judaea for the scene, and with nothing else. Further, a little consideration shews that it is only of the last terrible time that it speaks. The Lord refers us to Daniel, and there we find the unparalleled tribulation which cannot be repeated, and the three-years-and-a-half, with seventy-five days added for certain cleansing. There too

Michael stands up and the people are delivered, every one that is in the book. Now take 1260 days or years, nothing happened at either, after the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus. That is spoken of in Daniel 9 and then a period of continued calamity, desolations determined; so in Luke, where no abomination is spoken of, only Jerusalem encompassed with armies.

In a word it is the final and terrible tribulation of the Jews guilty of having rejected their Messiah, but whose deliverance will then take place in grace, those who are written in the book, for God has an elect people, and for their sakes the days shall be shortened. But in these last days we again find false Christs and false prophets encouraging the unbelieving with the hope of deliverance. They shall give signs and wonders so that if it were possible they would deceive the very elect. But these God will keep. The Lord warns them to believe none of them. They had His account of His coming; it would be sudden and unsuspected as a flash of lightning, where the object of judgment was there it would be, as the unseen bird of prey appears unlooked for where the carcase is. It is an allusion to Job 39:30. The shortening of the days I apprehend to be the confining them peremptorily to the 1260, whereas man's will and passions would carry them on indefinitely. But the Lord would come as a thief in the night and close it all.

Verse 28 closes that part which is warning for the disciples as to the dangers of every kind at the time of the great tribulation. Verse 29 is God's intervention in judgment. Immediately after the tribulation of those days there is a complete subversion of governmental order. All that held a place in the ordinances that ruled

the earth would be shaken and subverted, and then Christ would appear, for the sign of the Son of man in heaven is His appearing. It is not signs of a coming kingdom and then a Messiah on earth, but the Son of man, heir of all things, who appears in heaven. There may be indistinctness of glory before He is personally seen, but it is the Son of man Himself who comes and is seen. It is Himself appearing, no premonitory sign but Himself, and Himself from heaven who had gone up there, not a Jewish expected Messiah, Son of David, on earth. This shall be mourning to all the tribes of the earth or rather land—hopes disappointed, judgment come. All the earth will be dismayed surely, but here it is rather “of the land”; nor is it I conceive the mourning of Zechariah 12:10-14. There it is grace on the remnant, “the families that remain.” They mourn for Christ. Here it is seeing Him come in power and all the tribes mourn.

Yet not only does the Lord deal then with those in the land, but the elect of Israel will be gathered from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. This closes the direct revelation as to His ways with Israel. What follows is exhortation and warning testimony as to the character of His coming and moral details. From verse 45 we have the estimate of conduct while He is away, in principle, state, and service, all in reference to His coming. The Lord directs them to that by which those forewarned would know it was at the doors. To the disciples such things as the idol in the holy place and the false Christs would tell it was just there. The Lord’s warnings had given them the key. To Christians, as we now are with the Holy Ghost, such do not apply. A man who sets up to be Christ can have no deceiving power, for we know He is come, and when He yet comes, will

come in glory, even if we have not scriptural intelligence to know we shall appear with Him. The whole scene is Jewish. No mountains in Judaea are my deliverance. I am going to be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. The sabbath day's journey and all the circumstances point to a Jewish scene. To the Jew who expected deliverance a false Christ would be a great snare. With this warning no doubt all is plain, but in itself what the Lord warns against would be a great snare. Even to the Christians before the destruction of Jerusalem, profoundly Jewish as they were, it would not have been without danger, false as it was. At the end, to which this latter part applies, it becomes in the highest degree applicable.

We have then the well-known word: "this generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled." If we return to Deuteronomy 32, the expression becomes quite clear (see v. 5, 20); the last is just what is spoken of here. I attach great importance to the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus, because, consequent on the rejection of the Lord, the throne of God on the earth was finally set aside; but it is not the subject here, though there is analogy. Indeed it was more than an ordinary generation of men after the Lord's crucifixion, though perhaps not sufficiently so to use it as a proof that it does not apply. Nor has that unbelieving generation passed away; we have it amongst us to this day unmingled with the nations. The word of the Lord abides: heaven and earth will pass, Christ's word will not—a solemn assertion of divine testimony. The word of the Lord abides for ever. The "word of our God" says Isaiah. Precious and solemn truth! we have a testimony: God's word, essential truth that changes not, must be

always true. Things change, heaven and earth pass away, all is rolled up like a garment; but truth is always truth, and God's word is truth, has revealed the truth blessedly adapted to us and the state we are in; but God's own truth, what reveals Him and His ways, what is heavenly and divine is suited, as Jesus Himself, to what is human and weak down here. We have what never passes away, and faith possesses it, the believer is sanctified by it, and Christ is the fulness of it. Grace and truth came by Him. But of the day and hour of His coming knows no man or angel. It is not a thing revealed. It is kept in the secret of the Father's counsels, the divine mind, and is not in any wise a subject of revelation; it does not come to expression out of the secret of that mind.

When the abomination is set up, then indeed the short remaining time is known at any rate in general, and one taught of God knows by the warnings we have been reading if the end is nigh, but when that is, who can say? So Noah, once warned, knew the judgment was then fast coming, but none else. Judgment came as a thief in the night. But this judgment, sudden and unexpected as it may be, will be sure and discriminative. The eye of God will discern those that are His, though in identical circumstances with those who are not. Two men may be in the same field, two women at the same mill; judgment will leave the one unscathed, and take the other. To the heart that was really watching and waiting for Him He would come as a deliverer from all the power of evil. The disciples were to watch, they knew not at what hour their Lord would come.

At the time of the end, when the Lord judges as a whole the unfaithful servant, the kingdom of heaven shall take,

as to individual responsibility of those who make positive profession, the form or likeness of ten virgins who went forth to meet the Bridegroom, and servants to whom their Lord entrusted talents for service: the former referring to spiritual state; the latter to service.

The character attached to the saints at the beginning in the first parable is that they went out to meet the Bridegroom; as it is expressed doctrinally in I Thessalonians I, they were converted to wait for God's Son from heaven. This is all important as the living characteristic of the Christian. "And ye like unto men who wait for their Lord when he shall return from the wedding": their loins girded about, their lights burning —a clear and manifest confession of Christ, and all in order in the heart, and as men ready to open whenever the Master knocked. Not a mere notion or theological idea, but the actual waiting for Christ, and the heart in a state ready to receive Him. It is well before we go farther to remark that we have not the bride here. The church is not viewed as such. If we will make out a bride here, it is Jerusalem on the earth, and that according to the whole tenor of the Gospel; not Jerusalem above. Christians are viewed as virgins accompanying the Bridegroom in to the wedding.

The Lord had warned the disciples in the parable of the servant, chapter 24, of the church's losing the present sense of His coming; that if the evil servant said in his heart, My Lord delayeth His coming, he would begin to persecute and fall in with the world, as it has happened. This looks at the professed assembly as a whole. Here we find that in fact the Bridegroom tarried. The effect upon all was that all slumbered and slept. True Christians forgot it—lost their character of being gone

out to meet Him, as much as false professors. They had gone in, moreover, into worldly religion in spirit and principle whence they came out, though maintaining their profession, however dimly it shone; for the cry had to be resumed, “Go ye out to meet him.” This is very solemn; the whole church, the brightest and the best, had forgotten their true place and character. Their original calling was forgotten and lost, but the true saints had not of course ceased to be such. There was a general waking up of all who made profession. The foolish were like the others formally and had their lamps.42 But the cry came at an unlooked for, or as men would say, an unseasonable, hour, “Behold, the bridegroom cometh.” They were to go out again to meet Him, to take their original calling. They all arose and trimmed their lamps; but, with the five, oil was wanting, there was no living grace, and hence nothing could last. What really shewed a right state, inward thoughtfulness of w hat they went out for, the effect subjectively in what was not displayed of that which was objectively before them—this was all that was wanting. They were with the others; they had their lamp or profession like them. What was to feed it, living grace within, was wholly wanting; the profession soon began to fail. It was not the time to get what was wanting for it. They were not ready. This was the great essential point. All had been asleep; the whole church, pious and all, had forgotten the Lord’s coming. All that made any profession were awoke, the foolish as the wise, by the midnight cry. Any can be aroused to activity when the Lord sends forth the cry. They are not rejecters or infidels, quite the contrary, but there is no oil—the inward life and grace is wanting. Time is allowed after the awakening cry to test the reality of profession. It was soon going out. The Lord

came and they had no part in the blessing—the Lord did not know them. A solemn testimony for those who may make a positive profession of Christianity! The midnight cry, the Lord is corning, is what wakes up the sleeping professors. Till then the whole church had lost the expectation of His coming—were asleep to it; but only those who had the Spirit of Christ, real living grace within, were ready to meet Him.

The points of the parable are these: the church was called to go out to meet Christ; the Bridegroom tarries, and all go to sleep, ceasing to expect Him. What wakes them up is the cry of His coming; they are called back to their original calling; but only those who had the Spirit of Christ, living grace, were found ready to meet Him, and went in to the marriage. The state of souls professing Christianity is in question.

In the following parable their service is in question. The Lord on His going away leaves talents with His own servants. It is not here, remark, natural gifts, however responsible we may be for the use of them; it is what Christ gave to His own servants when He went away. The Lord gave spiritual gifts on His departing. What were the talents given, and given to servants, for? To serve with. Those who understood their Master’s mind, because they had confidence in their Master’s goodness, entered in heart into His interests, which is the way of love—traded with them; one did not, he waited to be authorised, and why? He did not know nor estimate his Master. Confidence in Him was wanting, and so confidence in acting grace was not there known in the heart. The Lord is not here unfolding dogmas or explaining how this happens, but presenting phenomena. The servant who did not really know his

Master did not serve Him; he feared to do so. He was in the place, had competency to act from the Lord, but did not feel interest enough in what concerned Him to act for Him while away; he had not heart enough to do it, because he did not know the Lord's heart.

The Lord does not treat the question whether there may be gift without grace; from other scriptures, as 1 Corinthians 13, we know there may; but it is not the question here, for there they might use them, where there was grace, for vanity. It is what renders one in the place of a servant an unprofitable one. Gifts of power are wholly distinct from grace. One in the place of a servant with capacity to serve (and every disciple of Jesus thus stood in that place when He was gone), who did not serve through distrust of His Master, proved he did not know Him, and was cast into outer darkness. Note here that the gift is distinct from natural capacity. This last is recognised here. The vessel was fitted and prepared, and the gift put into it. So Paul was a chosen vessel, and was then gifted for service.

In Luke the responsibility of man is more fully brought forward, and direct proportionate reward. Every one receives one pound, and he who gains ten gets ten cities. Here all the faithful ones enter alike into the joy of their Lord. They had known their Lord's character and acted on it, and had the blessing of it as associated with Him, were partakers of His joy, though also to be made ruler over many things. Here it is blessedness, there reward. Nor is the wicked person there cast into outer darkness; he loses even what he had— the subject is reward. If he had hard thoughts of his Master, he should have acted on it legally, if he could not according to grace. But now under grace, the want of the

knowledge of grace takes away the sense of responsibility. The man does nothing; under law it is not so. A man really under it will toil and labour through fear. The whole parable shews the spirit in which Christ's servant labours according to grace, and its result, not in the kingdom, but together in the Lord's joy, which is according to grace, in our enjoyment of it. If this be wanting all is gone.

Remark another thing here, which is always so. The Lord puts His coming so as not to allow a thought beyond a living man's life. The virgins who fell asleep are the virgins who awoke; the servants who got the talent are the same that are judged. Christ was always to be looked for; and "which are alive and remain" is the right word for faith. Both parables refer entirely to the responsibility of the saints; but there is this difference: the first shews to us the universal way in which, even with true Christians, the original calling of the church was wholly forgotten. The Lord was not waited for. Only grace woke them up in time when He was coming, so that those that had grace, being ready, went in with Him: only there was sufficient interval between the cry and the coming to test personal grace. In the second it is individual all through, and the effect of individual grace in that knowledge of the Lord Himself, which made them serve with the confidence of love, without as to that referring to the Lord's return. They laboured while He was away, but not here in direct reference to His return. The state of the saints of God, as a whole, depended on that; but many have served devotedly, knowing Christ, without knowing aught really of His coming as a present expectation, though knowing He would return and take

account, and their service was accepted with the blessed word, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

I would further remark that any application of these parables to the Jewish remnant is a mere mistake; God’s dealings with and by this remnant, as far as treated in this part of scripture, are unfolded in chapter 24 to the end of verse 31, and this connects itself as to historical events on earth directly with verse 31 of chapter 25. Verse 32 of chapter 24 begins personal exhortations to verse 44. These exhortations have their application to that remnant and close with personal separation by judgment, the spared one being left on earth. From verse 45 we pass over to general christian ground—the disciples up to the destruction of Jerusalem having both positions (though the twelve and Paul had a different dispensational position), both founding the assembly; though its place was not yet revealed as afterwards by Paul, and carrying the last testimony to the Jewish people. Thus in Arts 2 you have church testimony; in Acts 3 you have remnant Jewish testimony. This closed morally with the death of Stephen, where we first find Saul as an adversary in ignorance, and judicially in the destruction of Jerusalem. Stephen began the departure to heaven, forming the heavenly company of Christians.

Matthew 24:45-51 gives us the general history of the service willed of God, in the assembly as a whole, and the source of it in view of the Lord’s return, and the resulting alternative as regards the professing body upon earth; and the parable of the ten virgins, those who went out to meet the Bridegroom, which is not the character of the Jewish remnant. The Lord comes to the remnant where they are. These accompany Him to the wedding. The parable of the talents is the responsibility

of service all the time He is away, as to their service by the gifts of the Holy Ghost, personal grace or knowledge of Christ being the testing point. Now all this is a solemn warning to Christians, as to their state and service, founded on true knowledge of Christ.

In chapter 25:31, we have formally His coming to earth and seating Himself there on the throne of His glory, connecting itself immediately, as I have said with chapter 24:30, 31, which terminated the Jewish part of the prophecy and instruction. But when coming in glory with all the holy angels, He does not verily come as a flash of lightning, but takes, and seats Himself on, the throne of His glory, and gathers all the Gentiles before Him. He sits to judge the nations on the earth, the nations then living on it, to whom the message of the then coming kingdom, as declared in chapter 24:14, had come. They were judged consequently according to their reception of these messengers. No other test or ground of judgment was applied to sheep or goats.

Remark further that there are three classes here, the goats, the sheep, the brethren. There is no reference to the dead, nor to resurrection. When the Lord judges the dead at the end of the world, He does not come at all. He sits on the great white throne, and heaven and earth flee away, and the dead small and great are brought up before Him. They are judged according to the works.

And note here, that the ground of judgment in this parable does not apply to the great body of those of the Gentiles judged there when raised. They had had no messengers. The ground of their judgment is stated in Romans 1 and 2. What renders them inexcusable is quite different from the ground of judgment here. What is

here is not mentioned there, what is there is not referred to here. The judgment of the assembly on earth, and of special judgment as to the state of individuals and their service, we have already had in the three preceding parables. But before the end God, ever mindful of His mercy, sends out a message to warn the inhabitants of the whole world that judgment is just coming— what in chapter 24:14 is called this gospel of the kingdom; warning them, that is, that the kingdom was just going to be set up. The final character of the testimony is found in the everlasting gospel, Revelation 14, and Psalm 96, called, I believe, “everlasting gospel” as being, not the testimony of sovereign grace taking us to heaven and revealing Christ sitting in glory at God’s right hand, but that which was announced in die garden of Eden, that the Seed of the woman should bruise the serpent’s head. Compare Revelation n:17, 18, and chapter 12, the former passage going on fully to the end, for the casting into the bottomless pit is not the final bruising of Satan which is in Revelation 20:10. But Christ’s coming and the binding of Satan in the bottomless pit is the close of God’s earthly dispensational dealings, and the strange mystery of a disorder which God allows to go on while calling out souls in grace; Rev. 20:2, 3.

The whole prophetic history then is contained in chapter 24:1-31. In verses 31-44 is judgment on the Jews when He comes. Chapter 24:45, to 25:30 is the judgment of Christendom, of the whole state and system, their distinctive judgment. Then chapter 25:31 takes up the consequence of the establishment of Christ’s throne upon the earth in the judgment of the Gentiles. But for the immensely important fact of setting up the throne of

the earth, we might say all is judgment from chapter 24:31. But this fact is all-important, because God has a throne of judgment on the earth again, which He has never had since Nebuchadnezzar took Jerusalem. The Lord comes from heaven and judges the beast and the apostasy, all that rises up against the Lamb. But by this He establishes His power on earth, and in fact in Jerusalem, and thus takes His earthly throne in connection with the Jews and the heavenly saints, to whom judgment, in the sense of ruling government and power, is given. The war-judgment against the beast is in Revelation 19, the sessional-judgment in chapter 20.

This judgment of the Gentiles is spoken of in the Old Testament too. Indeed all the Psalms from 93-99 are the full inauguration of it, in the cry of the remnant, and then first giving the appeal to Israel and to the Gentiles, Psalm 100 being the call of the world up to worship after judgment is accomplished. In a word, our parable is the judgment of the quick only, exclusively the Gentiles (the Jews having been judged, chap. 24:32-35), and the ground of it their reception of the messengers who had been sent out to announce the coming kingdom. The judgment of the quick is as final as the judgment of the dead, “These shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.” The wicked have their lot with the devil and his angels in the everlasting fire prepared for these. The kingdom will be inherited down here by the righteous, blessed of His Father. It was prepared for them from the foundation of the world.

We may notice here that those who have preached the introduction of the millennial kingdom will have a place that those born under it will not, though these enjoy the fruit of it in peace. They have gone through tribulation

and are before the throne of God, and praise Him with a nearness the others cannot (see Rev. 7:9-17), though still on earth. I am disposed to think the 144,000, Revelation 14, are the Jewish remnant. I have so considered them habitually, and the everlasting gospel to the Gentiles comes after them. These spared ones who have received the messengers go into everlasting life. It is not merely the kingdom, but personal salvation. Those born during the millennium are not necessarily quickened; hence, when temptation comes, they follow Satan. Indeed, though we know that we have eternal life by many testimonies, yet the only passages in which it is spoken of in the Old Testament (Dan. 12 and Psa. 133) speak of it in reference to the millennium. We have it in a higher and better way, with and like Christ.

Some practical details I would yet notice. We have seen that what stamped the character and calling of the Christian was lost while the Bridegroom tarried, and the virgins were asleep. They had originally gone out to meet the Bridegroom— left the rudiments of the world and all religious association with it, for that especially is going out. They had got back into worldly religion, into the world for ease, while still making profession. There were living saints there; but what stamped their calling was lost, and therefore no separation took place. Asleep, a virgin without oil was as good as a virgin with it. “Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.” But the midnight cry awoke both. Religious activity was roused—how much we see of it! But this led to separation, the interval between the awakening cry and the Lord’s being there testing the reality of their state. They did not endure; their profession of Christ got dim and was not maintained.

Thus the midnight cry restores the character of the Christian and puts all professors into the place of their calling. But, secondly, their getting into this tests their real state. They cannot go on apart from the world. Their faith does not endure, and then comes the solemn fact: it is now too late. Just as in Thyatira (the papal body), she had time to repent and did not, and now it was judgment; she was replaced by the kingdom and the Morning Star. So here, it was too late to get the oil now and go in to the wedding. It was not the time of calling and supply of grace, but of separation and testing as to the possession of grace—a solemn thought! Who can say how soon it may come? whether individually it may not be come for some who have heard the cry, woke up and given up all, or gone back to the world?

This is the point, I believe, intended by not getting oil from the others; and no more than this; it was not the time of calling and communication of grace, but of testing as to possession of it. It was too late, and Christ does not know them. If this be so, and the cry is gone out, and in some measure I believe it has, it is a very solemn thought. A time does come when the calling of grace to this place and position closes, and the time of separation begins. As in another aspect of things it is true, the net was drawn to shore and the good put into vessels and the bad left on the shore, though there the tale continues to the actual execution of judgment; here they are only shut out. But that says all. The door was shut. A gospel to heathens who have not heard may and will go forth, but a possessed gospel definitely without effect there is no gospel for.

The prophetic testimony of the Lord was closed: the immediate circumstances of His last hours now rise up

before us. Still in these moments of humiliation He remains the same blessed object to teach us what the wisdom of God is, and even the power of God, though giving Himself up for a season to the will of man; and He shines only the more brightly by passing through it.

The introduction is very striking, though simple. In divine calmness the Lord tells His disciples what is about to happen: after two days was the passover, and at that time the Son of man was to be betrayed to be crucified. The true Passover was to be sacrificed, the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. Such was God's sure purpose. The chief priests anxiously seek not to have it then, fearing a tumult of the people who so eagerly listened to Him and had seen His miracles. They need not have feared; His hour was come, and the heart of man would be led by Satan's power, where alas! they wished. Enmity against God was to have its full course. At the passover at which they feared the people, the whole people would follow them to have Jesus crucified, to bring the victim on the altar—God's Lamb, but a rejected people. They would now have their will, but God's purpose was to be accomplished. Evil was to have its way, and all, save the special work of grace attaching the heart to Jesus, and so ordering a testimony to Him and to the heart it filled—all were to bow to the power, and yield to the tide of evil.

The Lord is at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper: a woman comes (we know elsewhere it was Mary the sister of Lazarus; but here it is Jesus who is in view and the state of mind as to Him) and spends what she had most precious on Him—right-hearted devotedness drawn out through grace by the growing power of evil. But the disciples, led away by the spirit of Judas, are

indignant at what they call waste. To be sure, spending anything on Jesus is waste in the eyes of the world. On what is useful for man, it is not waste. Even, if worldly-wise wisdom does not see too much encouragement of the poor contrary to the rules of political economy, spending something on them is not waste; but on Christ devotedness of affection to Him—to what purpose? Man's benefit may pass, but testimony of affection of heart to Him (be it that it only does that) cannot pass in the world, no, nor with disciples, where that devotedness is not. The calculations of hypocrites lead them astray, finding ready access to their heart in the state it is in. But the Lord owns it: care for the poor is all right and well; the Lord owns it, but love to Him, when the world's ruin and eternity depend on the manifestation of His self-sacrificing love, rejected or owned, is above all. It is not a corban to those who hold the place of priests, and use His name to the neglect of duty to God and those He has put us in relationship with; but a free and uncalculating heart which shews, as best it may, its unselfish devotedness to Him.

I have noticed elsewhere that it is this devotedness to Christ, to Himself, which obtains true knowledge instinctively in doing what is right, or in the revelation of Him and of truth. Thus Mary Magdalene's watching at the sepulchre makes her the vessel of communication of our highest privileges to the apostles themselves. So the gospel is first fully brought out in the blessed Lord's meeting the case of the poor woman that was a sinner in the city—like this Mary in affection, though so different in state; but each brings out the suited testimony of the Lord. But the attachment to His person draws it out, for He is the centre of all truth and blessing, and, when

rejected in this world, brings out further grace connected with Himself; for in Him all divine riches and purposes are found and fulfilled, and it is His breach with the lower position of this world and promise, that raises us up with Him into the higher world of purpose and glory, and it is just there we are now in the Gospel of Matthew. It was worthy to be recorded in all ages that one heart estimated the Saviour, when the world was gone against Him, when the disciples even had not heart or understanding to see and know His preciousness in that solemn moment. It was not insincerity in them but poverty of heart; it was man's heart that looked no deeper than prudence and common sense: divine perception was not there. Attachment to Christ felt what was fitting in heart and drew out divine knowledge for Him.

In Judas we have the full contrast with Mary. It may be that the spending the precious ointment on Christ, and so much money lost, as he would think, roused his cupidity. It is very probable—at any rate the hour was there, and good and evil were coming to their full crisis and contrast—money was his motive and Satan suggested to him, blinded utterly by his wretched avarice, to sell the blessed Lord. Nor is the price unnoticed by the Holy Ghost. It is fearful to think for how small a sum he could betray the Master he had so known; but man's heart was to be manifested, and here man's heart under the leading and hardening power of Satan. The love of money was there, this was the lust; Satan suggested the means of gratifying it, and then hardened his heart against even natural feeling. Many a natural man would recoil from betraying with a kiss one known in long kindness and grace. It is evident also that

being ever with Christ with evil in his heart and ways must have hardened him in hypocrisy.

For my own part I believe Judas expected Him to get off as He had so often escaped their power, blind as he was as to the hour being come; but this only makes it more horrible. Alas! he had sold himself, not Christ. For He could have got free, with twelve legions of angels, or gone away when they went backward and fell to the ground. But therefore it was the greater sin, and man was to be shewn by his dishonouring the Lord, measured in his mind by this goodly price. For Christ and Christ's perfectness bring out fully the evil of man's heart. What thief being alongside another would insult and outrage the companion of his misery? but, when Christ is there, the poor criminal can join in ribald insults against the Lord of glory. Oh, what a test He is, and what it shews is in the human heart under God's searching power, the searching power of Christ's presence!

But another scene was to take place before all was accomplished—the blessed testimony of grace in the institution of the Lord's supper. Yet here also the power of evil was to be ripened by the presence of grace. It was one that dipped his hand with Christ in the dish that was to betray Him, and as we read elsewhere, after the sop he went out. All is prepared of God and used by the Lord in the calmness of divine perfectness. A heart was ready to provide the room, nay, had it ready; and the Lord sends him word, My time is at hand (for that indeed He was come), I will keep the passover at thy house with My disciples. The Lord then refers to His betrayal in words which express, what indeed other passages reveal, His deep feeling as to its being one of the disciples who should betray Him. His knew who it

was, He told it here, but what was on His heart in His love to His disciples was, that one of them should do it. The disciples, I think, here shew a true and right spirit, which indeed spoke their innocence. They were sure the Lord knew and told what was certain. Some of them would, and they distrusted themselves; but their asking freely shews they had no such thought: sorrow and honesty of heart were there. The Lord's answer alludes to the prophetic statement which told of His sorrow and the cause of its being so poignant. See Psalm 41:9; 55:12. The Son of man must go as it was written of Him, but terrible was the doom of him who did it. In truth it was awful:— one who had seen His miracles, been sent out to work them himself, witnessed His grace and perfectness; and then to sell Him for thirty pieces of silver! This drew out unhappy Judas; who must speak like the rest, though avoiding doing it till thus denounced. Now he would say as all, to seem as clear as others; afraid, his doom thus denounced, to be different from the rest, but only to bring out the full testimony to his known guilt.

The Lord then institutes the supper, putting first Himself, then the blood of the new covenant, then its being shed for many, in the place of the Jewish passover, the old covenant, and the limitation of everything to that people. This is the distinctive character of the supper here, suited to this Gospel. Mark's account is essentially the same. Luke's is much more personal and connected with (surely divine, but also) human affection to the disciples. But in all it is the blood of the new covenant, or the new covenant in His blood. In Matthew it is leaving association with them, breaking with men, even with the disciples down here, drinking no more of the

fruit of the vine; only in Matthew and Mark His drinking it again with them after a wholly new sort is also spoken of. It was the simple and blessed testimony of the displacing all that was before, man and any previously presented ground of man's relationships with God.

No new covenant was yet established; but the blood on which it was to be founded was shed, and it could be announced so that Judaism was closed, that is, man's relationships with God as in flesh, and on the footing of man's righteousness; also closing any connection between the Lord come in flesh and man. His body, but His body as dead, was given as meat indeed. This carried the double testimony that there was no possible connection any more between man in the flesh and God; but also, that redemption was wrought, the true pass-over offered. Hence, as before that, death was death to man, now he lives by death, the death of Christ. It is not here as in Luke, "Do this in remembrance of me," but His separation from His disciples is strongly marked. He does not eat or drink with them, but gives what was the sign of His death to them, the sign of a perfect redemption by His death, but that His death, not His life with them was their portion with Him. This was a total and mighty change, the essence of their whole relationships with Him and having an eternal character. Death was the portion of the Son of God as man down here, and their part with Him and with God was founded on it.

The blood was shed for many for the remission of sins, and the new covenant was founded on it; all was dispensationally changed, but all was eternally founded also as to man, the believer's relationships with God. But present association was wholly broken off till renewed in

a new way in His Father's kingdom. This is an expression of Matthew's Gospel like the kingdom of heaven. It is the higher and heavenly part of the kingdom. In chapter 13 we find it in the explanation of the tares and the wheat. We read, "The Son of man shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend … then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father," that higher part where they shall be in the same glory as Christ Himself, predestinated to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself: only here it is My Father; there, "their." Then Christ will anew, but in a blessedly new way, enjoy companionship with His disciples and they with Him. Blessed place and blessed familiarity! If the Lord has given up the companionship of His disciples, it is to accomplish their redemption; and He waits, as we wait, to renew it in a better place and in brighter scenes, but as truly and more intimately than they could have it here. Nothing more beautiful or touching than this intimation of the Lord at the moment of His departure. He shewed where His heart was, His love to us. And they sung a hymn together, and went out to the mount of Olives, His wonted resort.

But on the way the Lord reveals to them what was about to happen, and that immediately, but still with His heart resting on them. They would find only an occasion of stumbling in Him. With what gracious calmness the Lord tells them of it! For it was a poor and base path, one alas! too natural to us; but He only thinks of them to warn and apprise them of it as those He loved. But, as it was written, they were the sheep of His pasture, and the Shepherd was to be smitten and the sheep scattered. He speaks of them as those gathered to the good Shepherd

in this world, the Jewish remnant gathered to Messiah the true Shepherd of Israel, though now to enter on brighter and better hopes and a more blessed service; but here the sheep of His flock already gathered, and now to be dispersed by the death of Messiah the Shepherd.

But He would rise again and then go before them into Galilee, the place where according to prophecy He had been the light of Israel, and gathered these poor of the flock around Him. As such they are looked at here, as such His death scattered them. For Messiah, the true Shepherd, was smitten, and cut off; and what was the flock with the Shepherd taken away? But risen, He would go before them again into the place where He had been associated with them; for in Matthew we have no ascension. The Acts are wholly founded on Luke's mission.

But Peter, trusting as ever his own strength, declares that he never would be offended if all were; if Jordan overflowed all its banks, he was not afraid to dip his foot in it. But self-confidence in a disciple must be corrected by abasement of self. Humble, we are safe, for God gives grace; self-confident and not humble, we must be humbled: so with poor Peter. The Lord warns him, but he maintains his confidence; and so, instead of watching and praying, he goes to sleep, and, though he knew it not, the enemy close at hand, man's hour and the power of darkness. And how easily we are led by what is wrong without exactly what is apparently evil, but what suits human nature! All the disciples are led away into the same self-confident assertion; so they chime in with Judas about the ointment; so they were carried away— even Barnabas— by Peter's dissimulation. What is of

man is contagious for men, be it false boldness, or servile fear.

But we are drawing to the last scenes of the blessed Lord's life. He is here, the tested but perfect victim, while alas! the disciples again shew what man is! but all only brings out the Lord's grace. It is not, as in John, a divine Person above all, offering up Himself, nor the man overcoming in dependence all that pressed upon Him. Obedience and grace must be perfect in the true and spotless victim. Death and the cup were there; and He must be put fully to the proof of His obedience. But He passes through it all with His Father and yet can think of others who can think but little of Him; for, as to them, it is the testing of the disciples more than what was special to Christ that is portrayed. He looked for their watching, and they failed Him. But we have Jesus perfect in patient obedience, Jesus perfect in referring all to His Father, though feeling, and when feeling, all He had to go through.

It is the perfectness of His mind when His being a victim is in view that is here specially brought before us. He takes all the disciples with Him to Gethsemane; and then, telling them to tarry there while He went on farther and prayed, He takes Peter, and James, and John, who had also been with Him on the mount of transfiguration, and afterwards had the place of pillars farther on; and there all that was before the blessed One came upon His spirit. He began to be sorrowful and very heavy; He felt as man what He had to undergo, not mere pain or suffering, the power of death weighed upon His spirit, weighed upon it as man, yet with a weight no man could fathom. Yet with what calm simplicity He tells it out! We ought to know it, though it may be beyond our

knowledge. “My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.” His need was there, and told out to hearts that ought to have felt it and watched earnestly, occupied with Him. He looked for this, some one to have compassion. “Tarry ye here and watch with me.” Blessed Saviour! what ought a heart to have felt to whom He said it? Oh how should it have watched, but alas! what are we?

He went on to be alone there with His Father about that which with Him only He could enter into, and which must be altogether with Him. He was perfect in referring it to His Father, and referring it alone. There the solemn question must have its solution. There alone it could, and there alone His perfectness could bring it. He fell on His face and prayed, saying, “O my Father,” in supplicating earnestness, “if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.” He should feel it fully and He did: submission would not have been perfect else, but then His obedience and submission were perfect: “nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.” In the perfect sense of the cup to be drunk, and the holy desire to avoid it, the piety of soul which desired it (for it was all the repulsion of sin from God, and what our wretched souls had fallen into— what man was as departed from God, which He must take upon His soul, if indeed He had to drink it, if He undertook our cause, and it was a holy desire to shrink from such a judgment and being made sin, even as bearing it before God), yet with perfect submission and obedience to His Father, whatever His will was, and to His Father He brings it there where it ought to be brought, alike perfect in desiring not to drink it, and obediently submitting to drink it if it was His Father’s will; and this was His

second utterance, “If this cup may not pass away from me except I drink it, thy will be done.” The no reply now to His first demand leaves His soul in the unclouded perfectness of the second and third, for He was with His Father in full and solemn sense of what it was, but with Him—He is occupied with it. How could it be otherwise? It ought to have been so. The disciples sleep, leaving Him alone with God. Where else could He have now been with such a work, such a cup, before Him? Now it is over, one can linger round this scene to learn His perfectness and love, the love we shall enjoy in brighter days when we shall see Him as He is—when He shall see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied. Yes, it was well; it was only right that He should be alone with His Father then. It could have been nowhere else, and He went naturally there, if I may so speak, for all His thoughts were perfect.

But where was he (let us think of ourselves) who was to go to prison and to death? With what touching grace He calls up to view the strange inconsistency. “Peter, could ye not watch with me one hour?” Where was the strength that was going through everything just now? yet with what grace He warns, with what grace He excuses! “Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” How must one nave hated oneself for such a want of earnestness and love to Him! alas, how we have to do with it! But here so perfectly is He with His Father for the depth of what was before Him, so perfectly had He had all that with Him only, that the free unhindered grace could in all liberty be as perfect towards His poor feeble but failing disciples: no weight on His spirit with them; that was borne with His Father. How perfect are

all His ways! what could they be else? But He can warn them, and warn them as to what was just going on. To Him it was now the path of obedience; but what was not that was temptation. So indeed with everything: all we meet with is occasion of temptation or obedience, only there brought out where all was brought to a crisis with man. But this intercourse with the disciples at this moment is a witness of a depth and calmness in His path which is divine perfection, though in man and in human ways and grace which calls for adoring recognition. We struggle or faint, or hide our sorrow in pride. I have known what it is not to know relief till I said, O my God, my soul is cast down within me. But He has all with God, and can state it as to the fact in perfect simplicity to man. We cannot tell our grief, we need support; and where are we to trust it if it be heavy? He had His resource so elsewhere—all His heart out, looking to His Father—that He could confide where really there was nothing to lean on, only truth of heart—the spirit was willing.

Now this is greatness, only in perfection, yet in lowliness, not in self-sufficiency, in conscious weakness of humanity, but all told in perfect faith and dependence to God His Father, yet never losing His human place, yea, the very expression of it. It is here it comes out so perfectly: never a thought that was not human indeed, but never one that was not suited to such a place in the presence of God, that is, to death and drinking the cup, yet, though a man’s feelings there in view of it, not one but what was according to the perfectness of One in whom the fulness of the Godhead dwelt bodily. It would not do that He should not have been fully in conscious manhood there, for He was there for us; nor that in that

place a thought or a feeling, that was not divine in its fitness for it, should have been there, and so it was. He was not drinking the cup, but He had to feel it as to all that it was, and feel rightly about it; had He not been God as well as man, that could not have been. Surely He could not have drunk it else, but He could not have thought about it adequately, if a divine source and measure of thought had not been the spring of it in man's necessity before God.

Blessed Lord, I do not pretend to fathom what Thou wast: who could? But we may learn from it and adore in our hearts, we may look on and learn Who was there, and with thankfulness of heart. No man knows the Son but the Father, but oh, what traits of paramount blessedness flow forth from this Son being a man! And we shall see that, very man as He is, (and who shall tell the joy of that?) yet He is as perfect in gracious gentleness to man. What it must have been to them, when they had the Holy Ghost, to look back to, and when they knew themselves in their flight from that which He was going to meet! Humbling surely, but a great thing for the heart to have been thus humbled; for after all, we must learn what we are where Christ was, save of course atonement, and even there in respect of guilt to know the perfectness that is in Him. It is not by our minds, but in looking at perfectness in the same place in our weakness. Who will know strength like the weak one that leans on it? Still we know it as taught of God, as He in the perfectness of His person.

In verse 45, in tender words which yet shewed them their service was over, and how He had been alone, He says, "Sleep on now [watching time is finished, the power of evil in act is here]. Arise, let us be going: he

that betrayeth me is at hand." But they must be fully proved, He does not send them away. They must be with Him to the end, learn the tale however gently they may. If there was over confidence as in Peter, yet even so it fitted him to strengthen his brethren when restored by a deeper knowledge of what human strength came to in the things of God. But we must learn ourselves where He was, save where He was wholly for us, instead of us, making propitiation for our sins. There He was perfectly alone, alone with God. Who else could have been? He was practically alone in Gethsemane; but He looked for their watching with Him, susceptible of human interest and watching with Him, though indeed He had only to feel how man failed Him even in that. If He looked for that watching, the sense of some one with Him, it was to feel that there was none. But the betrayer was there—and here man and the blessed Lord must be again in contrast. Unhappy Judas, over whom one's heart would draw a veil, betrays the Lord by that which was the expression of long intimacy and that held Him fast. It is horrible. Oh, he was up to his work, and would shew he was!

The Lord receives it with the calmness of One who, now in the path of obedience, had perfectly bowed to His Father's will. "Friend, wherefore art thou come?" For indeed, when He warned His disciples, He might have gone away, for it was dark, but for that He had not come. He could have had twelve legions of angels; but how then should the scriptures be fulfilled that thus it must be? It was now, having gone through all with His Father as to His path, a settled thing, not His feeling about it, but the divine path itself. It must be: scripture, the true revealed mind of God, had pointed out that

path. What a testimony to scripture and its authority 1 In that greatest and lonely hour, that stands out from all and has none like it, it sufficed. How then should the scripture be fulfilled that thus it must be? It was by that the Lord conquered in the wilderness, by that He was as to authority determined in this moment in which He gave up all to glorify God and atone for our sins. It is to be remarked here that there is no healing of the servant which we know was wrought; another subject is set forth by the Spirit here, the obedient and submissive victim. He was going as a lamb to the slaughter. This was His place. He ever perfectly obedient, He was learning obedience by the things that He suffered; and that path is ours: human violence and human weapons in the Christian will meet with human weapons and stronger ones in the world; submission to God's will and the cross, is the path marked out for God's glory, as the world is—a wondrous lesson but a blessed one.

If we do well, suffer for it, and take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. This Jesus was now doing, and in the most perfect sense. He could have had His legions of angels and used no violence; but He came to obey and suffer, and do so to the full, accomplishing the work given Him to do, not to contend or escape. But here too, as with the disciples, yea, even with Judas, He has His word for the multitudes. He had sat daily with them in the temple, and they laid no hands upon Him; now they came out against Him as against a thief. There is tenderness and compassion in these words toward them; and the sense that the truth was, His hour was come as to Himself. He had been quietly with them in the temple, and they hanging indeed on His lips, and they had laid no hands on Him. But so it was to be: He was to lay

down His life for the sheep, for all the glorious purposes of atonement. They were led by others, but would not have been, were they not away from God. Compassion on ignorance there might be, but this time was to signal Satan's power and Jesus' submission. He is conscious of the difference; He expresses calmly, as to His disciples, His sense of the state of things, and notices it in grace, and bows to it.

He was there to submit and accomplish His work. If such was the case, what were the disciples to do? Go His path they could not, though not with the evil. They were powerless, and the enemy exercises over them all the power he can. They forsake Him and fly; they fail utterly in faithful love, when danger is there. They save themselves: it is all they think of. Fight they might have done; flesh can do it; but this path flesh cannot tread. The ark must go alone first through those waters. It was the moment for devotedness; with man, a friend, that might have been; but with Christ— no—He must stand alone. The circumstances which follow do not call for explanation unless in a very small degree. The importance of them is not so much in the moral elements (though their manifestations be brighter than ever), but in the blessed and glorious work which was now accomplished. The chief priests and council held two meetings, but all was prepared already. They were enemies, accusers, and judges— had already paid the price of His capture, making an agreement for His betrayal. They were awaiting His capture in a meeting gathered together for that purpose.

The Lord was taken first to Annas, father-in-law to Caiaphas, actual high priest that year, and they question Him in the morning very early. The council was formally

assembled, but when they only ask Him the questions for form, on His answer that He was the Son of God, they condemn Him and take Him to Pilate. All of this is not found in this Gospel, but will be, I think, on comparing the Gospels together. All that is important to display the willing victim, and on whose testimony He was condemned, is found here. They lead Him to Caiaphas. And Peter follows afar off; John (we know he was known to the high priest and went in) gives details not necessary to the moral scene here depicted. They may be seen in John 18:13 and following. Here we have, first, the witness of truth in presence of vain falsehood and violence; Peter will come in his place. It is another scene. He sat with the servants to see the end, a natural feeling even as to one he loved, but which shewed no sense of what was going on. I do not think the apostles shine in all this part of the history. It teaches the difference between ministerial power when sent, and the state of a soul. How the Lord could see through and judge of fitting vessels when power should be conferred, and bear in patient grace with what man was through all! The chief priests and assessors seek for witness to put Him to death, but, ready as they and their followers might be, none was to be found.

At last they bring forward what was in the main a true statement, for we have it recorded in John; elsewhere we learn that the testimony, as testimony failed; there must be two for death, and they did not agree. But to man’s testimony against Him the Lord returns no answer. Defending Himself was not His object, nor even teaching now; He stood as the willing Victim, as the Lamb for the slaughter, and as the sheep before his shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth. The high

priest turns and adjures Him43 to answer if He be the Christ, the Son of God according, as we have seen, to His title (Psalm 2)—His true, full, Messiah-title among the Jews. To this the Lord at once answers, He was: for now it was His own testimony and He must give the whole truth, and adds, “moreover, also I say to you henceforth [not hereafter] ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.”

The affected indignation of the high priest and the willing assent of the rest I will not notice. But this is to be remarked, and we shall see it again, that the Lord is condemned for the truth, being the truth in what He said, and the truth as to His own person. He was the Victim again of insult and outrage. The truth He told was the truth, dangerous there but specially the truth there, I mean, which was in connection with Israel, and the point of faith or refutation of all for them, as He owned Himself king before the representative of the Emperor. It was the truth itself as to His person as the object of faith for them. There He was the Christ the Son of God, and rejected, He takes, as we have seen Him do, in peace, the place and title of Son of man coming in glory.

The word “henceforth” is of moment. It says that place of Messiah and Son of God, according to Psalm 2, was over from this, and they would only see Him coming in glory and for judgment, and so it is in fact for Israel. The end of chapter 23, though referring to the same judgment, applies to the remnant repentant through grace; this, to the nation in judgment. Peter’s history follows. What poor feeble man is, is shewn even where love is sincere. The flesh has no power in the presence

of the world; where it is leaned on, sincerity does not keep us. But it was the means of knowing himself and perfect grace to man being such, but that is not the point here. It is, as all through these scenes in Matthew, what man is in opposition to what Christ was, feeling the trial fully and crying to His Father; perfect in testimony, in truth, and in meekness, not seeking deliverance now but letting the will of God take its course. He is the silent Victim, as the sheep before its shearers, while man was boasting, sleeping, shrinking from the testimony, and denying the truth and his Master, to escape. It is a wonderful picture of a perfect Christ, and what poor wretched man is, in every respect.

Some difficulty having been felt and made current by rationalists, and some rationalists are such by trusting their minds on scripture, I will just briefly notice it, though it be hardly worth it. Matthew and Mark are the same. Luke has this difference, which is not really one: the two former speak of what the maid in the passage said to the men. Luke their remark on it, then all three Peter's denial. The last is the same in all; John is much more general, and mentions only two instances: first, when he was at the fire, when the maid spoke, in John it is merely, they said to him—and then he gives a precise point not noticed by others, that a kinsman of Malchus, whose ear Peter cut off, recognised him, which is given generally in the three others, "they that stood by"; very likely several spoke and convicted him so that he was angry, for from John 18:27 what is said in verse 26 was probably the last time. Peter, on whose face the fire shone (for in the original it is said in Luke "sitting in the light"), went out into the entrance, but it was only to fall into the hands of another maid. I suspect he had got

back into the central court, for the last time was an hour afterwards, and the Lord would look on him from where He was. Still the poor apostle's heart was true and the Lord's prayer effectual, his faith did not fail; the Lord's look, full of grace, broke him down, and he went out and wept bitterly. The sorrow of repentance, not despair, was the blessed effect in his heart.

After the morning's council, at which the Lord was formally condemned (for they had buffeted Him and insulted Him as a condemned person already), they led Him away to Pilate. But before the Lord's answering before the Gentile governor, we have the ways of unhappy Judas and the priests. It is remarkable how the account in Matthew brings out the wretched condition of man, believers or unbelievers, what man in the flesh is, even if won by grace to Christ; but here the wretched exhibition of those who were His enemies. Remorse seizes Judas when the evil one has done his work by him. He seems to have thought He would, as before, escape; but this made his sin worse, for he knew that power then was there, but money governed his heart, and by it Satan led him into the horrible sin, but he could not shield him when the sin was there. What was money to one who was in despair? The fruit and witness of sin is no comfort to one who is lost by it. He goes to those who ought to have led him in the right way, his heartless companions in the wickedness, and throws down the money in despair: "I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood." He knew well now what he had done, for lust hides sin from the conscience, and Satan will furnish excuses to the mind; but committed sin is on it, it is all dark in its trail behind; and if the love of God be not there to cling to, despair, dark, black

despair, only remains. The chief priests have gained their point by Judas' wickedness: what do they care about the effects for him? With consummate heartlessness they reply, See thou to that: what is that to us? A frightful picture of man's heart given up to wickedness. One can conceive nothing more frightful than such a state— more appalling than such a scene. Judas threw the money down on their answer. What comfort can sin when done find from Satan? And he was even here to be a witness of the terribleness of his sin; and he went and hanged himself. There is something strange in this part of the account which throws the money, and Judas, and the temple, and the priests, all together. He threw it down in the temple, naos; the word is that used for the house. How did he throw it there? I am not aware that the word is ever used for anything but the house itself. And then see the religiousness of those who can buy the blood of the Son of God for thirty pieces of silver. It was the price of blood, and they could not put it into the treasury. To buy the blood they had no scruple, to put such into the treasury was defiling. What a picture of man the Spirit of God gives all through here! and they bought the potter's field to bury strangers. They were common things, but they or any Jew was too holy to be profaned by being buried there. The most outward official religion, and the most absolute wickedness, run together; and even in a Christian, official religiousness is the bane of piety.

But the Lord now stood before Pilate, and it is remarkable that again His own testimony is the foundation of all. The governor asks Him if He be King of the Jews? The Lord replies (for He was the truth) in the affirmative, witnessing a good confession; for before

the chief priests His confession was to that which was dangerous there, but the truth; before Pilate, what was dangerous there. He was “Son of God” before the priests, “King” before the Roman governor. To the accusing Jews He answers nothing, as I have said; He was not there to defend Himself or escape, but a willing Victim, and He was witness to the truth. But the heads of the Jewish people are before us here as the enemies of God. Pilate, who saw it was all envy, seeks to deliver Him, so much the more anxiously that his wife had sent to press it on him, being alarmed by a warning dream, and presses His deliverance; but the Jews persevere in their enmity against the Lord; and, inexcusable as the governor was, who clearly was bound to protect one he knew to be innocent, yet the wilful sin rests on the head of the unhappy leaders of the people.

Ecclesiastical wickedness is always greater than civil; in a persecution it is what is religious and clerical that is the spring and mover in it. But we have the terrible testimony from their own mouth of their part in it, their judgment on themselves. The careless and reckless governor (to his eyes there was nothing much to care for) washes his hands of the matter and leaves His blood on their heads, and they take it in their folly. “His blood be on us, and on our children,” and so it is to this day. And he delivered Jesus to their will, releasing a murderer whom they desired according to Paschal custom.

And now the blessed Lord is the subject of outrage and insult from the soldiers—accustomed as this poor world is to revel in evil when it is congregated and can encourage one another in it. The Lord bows to it all with patient endurance; He is still the Lamb led to the

slaughter. The whole scene is still the patient and perfect victim. But man appears with his heart unveiled. Who would be found to insult and outrage a dying man if he were a criminal? What executed criminal would insult his fellow on the gibbet? but when Christ is there, all this happens. They wag their heads and say, He saved others, Himself He cannot save. Oh, terrible victory of sin over One who would not save Himself because He would save others. Yet if sin had its full display and seeming victory, it was to meet a grace which was, in the perfect work of obedience, accomplishing that which puts it away—a sovereign grace which allows the sin to run to its height to accomplish that which puts it away. The mere provision for present relief the Lord declines accepting, the cup His Father had given Him, that He drinks in peaceful submission, but to know its whole bitterness. But see, as has appeared all through, the awful state of these unhappy priests. They quote their part of Psalm 22 as Jesus did His afterwards. There is in that psalm a verse (8) which is the utterance of the insulting enemies of God, of unbelief; that they quote in utter moral blindness, and fulfil it.

To verse 44 we have the patient silent submission of the blessed Lord, and as heretofore, what man is when it is manifested in the light of His presence, only here ripened into perfect manifestation. From verse 45, though we find man’s utter insensibility to all, a stranger to all that was going on, yet we especially get His place with God as the true Victim of propitiation. He was shut in from man and all around to God, as “made sin who knew no sin.” Darkness was over all the land. At the close the Lord gives utterance to that which was going on within the veil of darkness which hid Him from all

earthly things—an utterance which in few words declares to our souls the cup that He was drinking, His perfectness who was drinking it, perfectness as sinless, perfectness in reference to God. He is the Victim of propitiation; and His voice, not to man but for him, which alone could rightly declare it, announces the solemn fact of what He was accomplishing. For here He is the offering for sin, bearing our sin, made sin for us.

It is not now communion with His Father, though perfect submission to His will, and love to Him; but before God as made sin, yet perfect in His confidence and reference of heart to Him. It is the holy and righteous God dealing with sin as sin, yet in Him who had none but was made it, and had voluntarily offered Himself for it; the wonderful work of settling the question of sin before God, and God glorified in dealing with it, where His love to us might be infinite in dealing with sin, in divine and absolute righteousness, and His Majesty and truth made good: where perfect obedience and love to His Father was found, where He stood as made sin, with no departure of heart from confidence in God. “Thou continuest holy.” It was not, as Job, reproaching God for His dealings with him, with a yet unbroken will. It is, “My God,” yet with a full sense that there was no cause in Him—“why?” and the absolute sense, according to His own enjoyment of that presence, of God’s forsaking Him, that which no horror is like. He is simply here the Victim, the offering to God in propitiation. We can say “why,” when brought to the cross; first, as bearing our sins, and then as glorifying God.

Other circumstances or words of the Lord are not brought forward here; He stands in the solitary solemness of the Victim before God, perfect in that place

of sin. This there is nothing like. It is once for all; God is perfectly glorified and sin dealt with for His glory. It stands alone in the history of eternity and all, for divine glory depends upon it, its results immutable; for it is done, and its value cannot change or God's must, which cannot be, for His nature is glorified here as well as our sins put away. Man understands nothing of it; they say, He calls for Elias! Then we find that the whole accomplished, and Jesus yet in the fulness of His strength, gives up His spirit. It is not here as in John 19:30, "delivered up his spirit," nor as in Mark 15:37, and Luke 24:46, "expired," breathed His last as we say. In Luke we have also the words, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" —words of faith in death, when its sting of terror and anguish which He has borne was gone. Yet death was still there, but His Father perfectly trusted in it.

Here all these deeply interesting parts of the scene are passed over, that the great fact of death in letting now His spirit go away from His body, really dying yet when in full strength, the dying but perfect and willing Victim might stand out before us in its own majesty and force. But all God's dispensation and God's creation, and the dead themselves, felt its power; yea, the rude heart of the Roman soldier was awed. The veil was rent, that which was the sign that man could not approach God. The whole Jewish dispensation in which man's responsibility to God was tested outside was rent from top to bottom; man's sin complete, and man down here had lost God for ever; but the way into the holiest, by a new and living way, fully opened. The sign of God's present power in creation was there; the earth quaked, and the rocks were rent, and the graves were opened,

but none stirred till the first-fruits of them that slept had broken the bonds of death, and then they appeared to many in Jerusalem, the witness of the wondrous work that had been accomplished. No wonder all felt its power, or that God gave witness there even to what had glorified Him. He has indeed suffered His Son, in the accomplishment of divine counsels, to be despised and rejected of men, but we shall find that in His humiliation He has always taken care to give a testimony to His glory and what He was to Him. The raising of Lazarus, the riding into Jerusalem, the voice from heaven, and the dove; the dove and His own voice when He bows to enter in by the door with John, taking His place among the poor of the flock; the chorus of angels when He stooped to the incarnation, all are witnesses to His glory in the very place where He humbles Himself, and so it was here in the closing act of all. Nor did the heart of the centurion withstand the power of all that passed; a poor dark heathen, but at least not hardened as the unhappy Jews were religiously, and susceptible of these outward signs of divine power; he and those with him, struck with awe and fear, echoed at least with natural conscience the testimony Jesus gave of Himself when questioned by the priests, “Truly this man was the Son of God.”

We cannot tell whether there was any divine and lasting operation, in his or the other’s soul; we may hope. The object here was the public divine testimony given to the dying Lord that went home irresistibly to the hearts.and consciences of those who watched Him, and brought out of their awed spirits the confession of who He was. The testimony had been spread abroad and even they knew

that this was the thing in question—Was He the Son of God? What unhardened heart could resist the witness?

But what a terrible witness was this against the Jews! When God gives testimony to His Son, so that the heart of the poor pagan bows under it, theirs remain unmoved! It is well to notice that, though the saints did not arise to shew themselves at Jerusalem, yet their resurrection is connected here with the Lord's death. There He destroyed the power of him who had the power of death. But all was now closed for man and Judaism. All is to begin on a new footing, foreknown indeed and predicted; but now, the work being accomplished on which all was to be founded—yea, had been in fact, though not revealed, man begins according to the counsels of God upon the ground of that accomplished work, wrought to put away sin, to glorify God, and lay the foundation of immutable blessing the result of that which could never lose its value with God. Here, as we shall see, we go on farther than the fact of resurrection and its power, and that in connection with the residue of Israel though sent out to the Gentiles on this ground. So that while historically brought out, as a present thing, yet its realisation bears on the days yet to come, when a restored residue, not having the heavenly place, will be a testimony to Christ's death and resurrection in their own blessing, but on earth, and they disciple the Gentiles on that ground, leading them in the path of Jesus' commandments to the disciples when on earth.

But the Father would have accomplished the testimonies of His word in honouring His Son rejected and crucified; for all here is really a contrast between the blind incredulity of the Jew and all else; even, as we have

seen, a poor ignorant Gentile. He was to be with the rich in His death. Not only the devoted women were watching their crucified Lord, but Joseph of Arimathea, when now He was surely dead, goes on to Pilate and begs His body and it is given to him, and he lays it in his own tomb wrapped in a linen cloth, there where never man was yet laid, and rolled a great stone to the mouth and departed. In them all it was respect and attachment, but in Joseph's act God had another purpose; not only to render due respect to Jesus, but to give the strongest proofs that He was really risen. The Jews remembered that He had said He would rise again. The fears of a bad conscience without God fear what they would not believe. Blinded they were, for what was all this in presence of power to rise again? And the thought of stealing His body was the suggestion of their own wicked heart, anything but reassured, and seeking what by self-deception might quiet the suspicious dread of a self-condemning heart. But their plans only make the matter doubly sure. They would have engaged Pilate, thinking all were to be under the powers of their restlessness, in securing the tomb. Pilate leaves it to them to settle the matter. It was their affair; they might make it as sure as they could. But what were seals or guards against the power and will of God? They might make the fiction of the apostles stealing the body absurd and impossible, but that is all. The angel does not quicken the Lord, nor raise Him, but shews—acting according to the majesty of Him who had sent him—the empty tomb. To the guards it is terror and dismay, for such any manifestation of the unseen world is to man; to them the angel says nothing. They were witnesses of the intervention of God, no guards against the working of His power. But to those attached to Jesus words of grace

and restoring comfort come from heaven, “I know that ye seek Jesus; he is not here, he is risen.”

Our Gospel here brings together in a brief statement the hearing of Jesus’ resurrection and what accompanied or rather followed it, on various persons—the women, the soldiers, the Jews. As to the first, it is comfort and grace, they are the messengers of the good news to the disciples. The soldiers are alarmed and as dead men. Such is the effect of the manifestation of God’s power and intervention. There is nothing which man is so unused to, and which is so strange to his heart and thoughts. A legion of devils might be sought to be restrained, but must be borne and people be used to it, save personal danger; but the presence of Jesus, who drives them out by divine power and goodness, brings the demand at once that He should leave them; and so He did. The soldiers are as dead men. It is the simple effect on the natural man of the manifestation of the power of God, of the unseen world, introduced into this. With the Jews it is deliberate hardness of heart. They seek to destroy the testimony they could not deny, that they had made secure themselves by setting the guard. The women have direct communication from God by means of the angel; they are the Lord’s messengers to the disciples. We see, as in so many cases, that love to the Saviour for His own sake brings us into the place where we receive the communications of His grace.

It is these communications which must occupy us now. They are comforted with the assurance that He is risen; they are to go at once to tell His disciples that He was. Here it is still the relationship of Christ with Israel which is before us. We have not the special communications of Jesus with Mary Magdalene, which

take us into the heavenly place of Jesus, and His interview with His disciples on this ground. We are not at Bethany with Luke, to see Him going up to heaven with hands outstretched to give a heavenly blessing, which could begin with guilty Jerusalem and reach to the ends of the earth. Nor are the various positions of the women brought out, different and distinct in their nearness to Christ; simply, briefly, the different relationships to Christ of the ignorant Gentiles, the women, and the Jews, in presence of the resurrection and what followed it.

The ascension is not found in Matthew. The Lord directs the disciples to go to Galilee where He would meet them. Nor was He content to leave it to the angel only to communi-ate His will to the disciples, though at the tomb this was needed to apprise them of His resurrection; He Himself meets these poor devoted women—ever the same gracious Saviour. He salutes them graciously, coming to meet them as they went joyfully in haste to deliver the angel's message and the good news of the resurrection to the disciples. And here with the gracious dealing of Jesus we are not on the ground of Mary Magdalene. There Christ presents Himself as going to the Father (His and His brethren's, the disciples), His God and their God. He was not come back to be on earth in visible and bodily presence risen, as Mary's heart hoped, but for what was better. Here He presents Himself to the remnant in connection with Israel, but calling His disciples "brethren." And this gives its character to the whole conclusion of the Gospel. It puts a risen (not ascended) Saviour in connection with the remnant of the Jews, owned as brethren, sending them, as thus owned, to bring in the

nations. The body of the nation remains in the blinded hostility which the presence of Jesus had drawn out. We see too how all the characteristic circumstances are drawn together here in a brief review. As the women were going on their errand, some of the watch go into the city to inform the chief priests what had happened. The elders are gathered; the facts communicated; and they deliberate what to do. Hostility to the Lord was the settled source of all. Deliberation as to receiving the clear testimony of the Lord's resurrection there was none; how to get rid of it was all these unhappy chiefs of the people deliberated about. The evidence was clear, clear by their own witnesses; they resort to bribery to engage them to give a different account of the matter, assuring them, if so grave a fault in a Roman soldier as being asleep on his post came to the governor's ears, they would secure them. Their desire to keep all quiet would be a sufficient motive, perhaps money for him too, as for Festus, and the heartless indifference of the governor would have thought as little of the resurrection as of the death of Jesus. Such at least was their ground as to the general result with the soldiers; and the money sufficed to make them run the risk. Such is the world. "The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart, that there is no fear of God before his eyes," Psalm 36:1.

Yet this was but the outside of what was closed, and passed away, though judgment yet lingered. The real and abiding fact with God is the risen Jesus. This, wholly new as to man, never passes away; it is the divine result, though not in all its consequences, of the perfect solution of every question as to good and evil; divine power being come in to solve it, the basis laid which spoke of evil passed away, and of the accomplishment of

all God's counsels of grace in righteousness, and man in a position in which, guilty or innocent, he had never been before, after all had been settled according to God, and immutable blessing secured. Here however we have its application, as I have said, the discipling the Gentiles, recognising the Jewish disciples, the remnant of Jews already gathered, as His brethren. The disciples go into Galilee, to the mountain Jesus had appointed. There He appears; when they see Him, they do homage, but some doubt. In the utmost simplicity of truth we find that if the Jews plotted to secure their infidelity, there was no plot in the disciples, for some doubted it was He. No one would have said this who sought to compose an account; the evidences would have made it flagrantly true, incontestable. It is made more incontestable by the doubt, but it is not man's way of making it so. He comes upon them by surprise and some are not sure. A plot arranged would have secured His acceptance; a testimony unfounded in fact would not have invented a doubt. The apostle tells us in simplicity, and guided of God, what occurred.

The Lord addresses them on the ground of the place which now belonged to Him, which He will fully take in power hereafter, which belonged to the risen Lord, being His in right of the new place into which He had entered as man. "All power is given to me in heaven and in earth." All is not accomplished, all things not yet put under His feet, but it is His place as the risen Man who has glorified God and accomplished the work given Him to do. Hence He sends them forth beyond the limits of the King of Israel in Zion, that had been set forth fully in chapter 10, then and on to the future. Here connected with the remnant of the Jews, associating them as

brethren with Himself, having accomplished redemption, they were to disciple the nations, baptizing them (not to Jehovah, not to Messiah or the Son of David, but) to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, that in which the one God of Israel was fully and completely revealed; teaching them to observe that which they had learned from Him on the earth; and He would be with them to the end of the age. It is thus before the millennium, not the mystery of the church, nor the future gathering of all things. The former was revealed and confided to Paul, the latter to come in when the age was finished. Not the mission from Bethany (which the Acts follow throughout), not starting from Jerusalem nor beginning it as that did; but accepting the poor of the flock as brethren to Christ; they were to bring in, disciple all the nations on the footing of their relationship with Him as thus risen.

It is well to notice what has been alluded to:—the ministry in the Acts is not the accomplishment of this but of the mission in Luke, the book itself being, as is known, the continuation of his Gospel; nor was the ministry of Paul, who took up by a separate divine mission the evangelisation of the nations, the carrying out of this. His was more fully even yet a mission from an ascended and glorified Saviour, to which was added the ministry of the church. It connects itself even much more in its first elements with Luke. The ministry here established stands alone. The disciples are not sent to Jews, as in Luke coming from an ascended Saviour they were to begin at Jerusalem. Jerusalem is rejected, and the remnant attached to Christ (His brethren, and owned in this character) sent out to Gentiles. This, as far as scripture teaches us, has never been fulfilled. The

course of events under the hand of God— another term, so to speak, the disciples remain at Jerusalem; and a new mission to the Gentiles is sent forth in the person of Paul and that connected with the establishment of the church on earth. The accomplishment of this mission has been thus interrupted, but there is the promise to be with those who went forth in it to the end of the age. Nor do I doubt it will be so. This testimony will go forth to the nations before the Lord comes. “The brethren” will carry it to warn the Gentiles. The commission was given then, but we find no accomplishment of it. It connects the testimony with the Jewish remnant owned by a risen Lord of all, with the earth and His earthly directions, and for the present it has in fact given place to a heavenly commission, and the church of God.

38 John 6:27.

39 Acts 10:38

40 Literally ‘is now at her end,’ see footnote, page 100.

41 In the number twelve, the loaves, the tribes, and all connected with this, the twelve apostles as connected with the kingdom, the twelve stars on the woman’s head in Revelation 12.

42 It seems these were rather torches, and they had oil in their vessels to feed them with.

43 Let the reader remark here that this also is an instance of obedience to Leviticus 5:1. It is just what being sworn as a witness is now; and the Lord, who forbids all voluntary oaths as coming of evil from ourselves, takes this at once.

Matthew 24 And 25

These chapters constitute the most distinct and definite portion of our Lord's service as a prophet. Strictly speaking, they only are the prophetic part of His ministry. The previous part of the Lord's history was the presentation of Himself as the object of previous prophecy, to those who were responsible for His reception as coming in by the door, according to that which those oracles of God had spoken concerning Him. This character and place of the Lord is particularly the subject of this Gospel, which bears in all its statements on the circumstances and condition in which the Jews were placed by previous scriptures. It closes in a very marked way in the previous chapter. The Lord had begun His ministry with the blessings of the character suited to His kingdom, revealed by the introduction of His Father's name. He closes on the continued and wilful rejection of Him by that people, by the woes justly denounced on them for their hypocrisy and iniquity. (Compare Matt. 5, 7, and 23.) From one evil they claimed exemption, but in terms which shewed their birthright in sin; they had not killed the prophets as their fathers had done. Jesus, assuming the character of Lord, hereon declares that He would send such unto them, and they should have an opportunity of shewing the difference of their spirit and conduct; then they would treat them in the same way, and, the measure of iniquity being filled up to the brim, God would dash the cup out of their hand to fill it with His own wrath to be poured upon them. Then the Lord apostrophises Jerusalem, for all this He speaks as the Lord; His beloved Jerusalem given up for the wickedness of them

that dwelt therein, but still loved in itself and abstractedly in her children, and rejected with a “till,” and not cast away as not foreknown, “Ye shall not see me henceforth till ye say, Blessed be he that cometh in the name of Jehovah.”

Here came in the proper place of prophecy, this people and Jerusalem the special and immediate subject. This will be more apparent if we see the character attached to prophecy, as originally given and brought forth to light. Previously, as His rejection of the Jewish people and the glories of a better hope and of a higher character began to dawn through the veil of their prejudiced hopes and His humiliation, the Lord had given privately to His disciples the intimation of His rejection and deliverance to the Gentiles, and the resurrection which was to be the foundation of a future state of things; but they understood it not. Nor was it to be revealed till after His resurrection; it might be instruction to them, but was no general prophecy of what should happen concerning God’s inheritance, though the centre on which all those counsels hung. But here the Lord resumed the prophetic character; I say “resumed,” for so it was. Prophecy is not the law, but the warning testimony of judgment when the law has been departed from, and the turning the eye of them that believe to better hopes, and foreshewn deliverance for the remnant. It supposes (though it may be in different form or extent) apostasy. Therefore we have, “beginning with Samuel and all the prophets,” for then Ichabod was written.

The great definite presentation of the place, end, and character, of prophecy is in Isaiah 6 (however the world might be affected by it), as to the great object of

Jehovah's care— the vineyard of Jehovah of hosts (for the nations He suffered to walk in their own ways). The whole head was sick and the whole heart faint, from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot it was wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores. As to the vineyard it brought forth wild grapes, its wall was to be broken down, it was to be laid waste. This was the state of things as to the righteousness of that people who formed the object of Jehovah's care, the centre of His earthly plans, the place of Messiah's visitation; but Jehovah was unaltered in character and purpose: in character, and therefore He must throw down; in purpose, and therefore He would not cast away.

But His throne is now to be set up as that from which prophecy was to flow, so it is, and His train fills the temple; and a man, though of unclean lips, is sent with lips purged by a coal from the altar, and then willing to go, but still dwelling among a people of unclean lips, having seen what the Lord was, the holy, holy, holy, Jehovah of hosts. His soul filled with and affected by the contrast, but touched with the coal, it is— "Here am I, send me"; and He said, Go; but what was His message? — "Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not; make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert and be healed"; and this till the cities be waste without inhabitant; and there was a great forsaking in the midst of the land. But in it there shall be a tenth, the holy seed was to be the substance thereof.

Now Jehovah had long patience—He sent prophets till there was no remedy; He smote and cut them short; He

let them go captive and restored them again; so that the land was filled, and the temple built; still the word ran on, though the prophets did not live for ever. Jehovah had long patience, till having yet one Son, He said, “it may be they will reverence my Son”; round His head prophetic testimony and present blessing closed for a crown of glory and witness. The word of the Lord, and the works of the Lord; the righteousness, and the patience, and the grace alike, with the Father’s voice, testified who He was, but the awful knell of God’s judgment still filled the unholy air of that favoured country— “Make the heart of this people fat.” Now it was after long patience and marvellous love that it really came out; the sentence of God’s judgment came to the earth, for all the patience of love had been tried. God had nothing more than His Son to be testified of. “How often would I have gathered “was now the word of reluctantly departing lovingkindness and favour, but stored in a heart from which it could not be abstracted, which nothing could reach to alter. If sin could drive it in there and shut it up, there it dwelt untouched in its own blessed and essential perfectness: no sin or failure could enter there to mar its perfectness or diminish its power. Such is God—such must He be known to us in Christ.

If love and favour be driven back by sin, it is but to separate it into the power of His own essential and unmingled perfectness, and there retired to dwell on, and delight in itself. Judgment shall make a way for it to break forth only in its own unhindered excellency, and unqualified and unparalysed blessing. Such is God, and such is the Lord’s way; but it was now only proved by His long patience, that well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias, the prophet, to their fathers (Acts 28:26), for in

them was fulfilled his prophecy which said, “By hearing ye shall hear and shall not understand,” Matt. 13:14. For the people’s heart was waxed gross; and what Isaiah had prophetically pronounced, when he saw His glory, was now fulfilled, when He whose was the glory came; John 12:40, 41. This, known to the Lord, was parabolically communicated in Matthew 13, for then His patience had not had its perfect work; now it had: and God’s dereliction, His going and returning to His place (Hosea 5:15), was publicly announced, and their house left to desolation. Then, on this same footing again prophecy begins, whether the vineyard, or (in closer judgment) the house itself left desolate; the broad foundation is the same; the remnant understand, believed, and are comforted. Nothing can be more solemn than our blessed Master’s word at the close of the previous chapter. How much does a little word from His mouth! What depth and terribleness the gentlest often convey! It was not in severest judgment: “make not my Father’s house a house of merchandise.” He had left it. It was their house: what was it worth? goodly stones, which a poor heathen would throw down. No self-exaltation—no harsh reproach—His heart, the Lord’s heart, yearned over Jerusalem; but so alas! it was. Terrible might be His judgment on the leaders of this people, who caused them to err, but of them, of the inhabitants of loved Jerusalem, He would only say in tenderness and sorrow, yet how terrible; “Your house is left unto you desolate for…” And He went out and departed from the temple. Thence came the prophecy. One’s heart is little disposed to turn, from the grace which filled the Lord’s, to the sad and needful sorrows and judgment which were the consequence of the rejection of that grace; but it was the Lord’s portion and

our path, the path in God's counsels, to make even that a small thing.

This temple, and the circumstances of it, were then discussed by the Lord. The previous observations will have shewn how entirely Jewish in its character this discourse is; how Jewish is the base on which it rests. It is addressed to them, to whom all prophecy has its burden, the remnant who listened to the word, and here the Jewish remnant. They might obey the voice of His servant, but they were here walking in darkness, and seeing no light; for the Lord had left the house, and heavenly and resurrection glory was not yet brought in; nay they understood none of these things, no—nor after the resurrection, till He opened their understandings; "they saw and believed, for as yet they understood not the scriptures, that he must rise again from the dead."

This then is the position of those to whom this instruction or prophecy was addressed: the Jews in a rejected state, though not cast off—in the land—the house there but their house, not God's; disobeying and rejecting the Lord; a remnant ignorant of a resurrection Saviour,44 entirely as to the truth, but obeying the voice of God's servant, but in the dark as to what such a state of things would be—when, or how, to look for His coming—what sign of it—where the end of this state of things should be, and Messiah in glory be on the earth, even amongst them and they in the midst of, and connected with, though separate from, the body of the Jewish nation, and they (I do not say all Israel as well as the remnant who were obedient) all in the land together.

This state of things is most important, I might say essential, to the right or any real understanding of these

chapters; and to the close of them the prophetic word proceeds on this earthly basis, though it may superinduce other things. But it is the Lord Christ speaking as a prophet raised up from among His brethren, on and from earth, not as afterwards in Paul's epistle to them, and elsewhere, "from heaven," "partakers of the heavenly calling." It may leave room for other things, as old prophecy did for the gospel; these are not the ground of the prophecy. This it is which makes the prophecy, while it might apply to the then condition of the disciples and direct their spirits in the details of present evil, have its force and weight, when the remnant should be in the condition which the disciples were then in, Christ only being gone; and here He spoke only as a prophet, so that it was the same thing, and that much more fully than when they were looking for heavenly things, seeing they were to put off their tabernacles, not to have "flesh saved," but to suffer in it, that they might be conformed to Him, and suffering reign with Him, having a good conscience by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who was gone into heaven; the God of all grace having called them to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus.

The Lord does not therefore immediately answer them as to the time, because it would afford direction in many details then; its accomplishment is yet future, for the end of the age is not yet come. The Jewish remnant were still in His mind, those with whom He had identified Himself in their earthly sorrow (though not with them only), of which the Psalms are so full and blessed a declaration. And as Isaiah's prophecy had its accomplishment in the foreseen coming of Messiah, though it had truth in principle then, so Messiah's

prophecy has its accomplishment at the period of the second coming and of the trouble preceding, though it had truth of application, while Jerusalem lasted as to many of its principles then, and would have guided the saints aright at the time, though it could not have fulfilled the types it created.

The chapters are clearly divided into three portions: the Jewish, Christian, and Gentile advent of the Lord, or, His advent as applied to these three classes, as the apostle designates them—the Jews, and Gentiles, and the church of God. The first portion, which is strictly Jewish in all its parts and exclusively so, reaches down to chapter 24:44, then the church, or Christian part, begins, which is continued in different characters to chapter 25:30. Verses 31-46 are the Gentiles.

Let me briefly recapitulate the position of the prophecy. Prophecy is the testimony of God's character and purpose upon the departure of those set in relationship with Himself from the standing in which they were originally placed by His revealed will and power. It condemns this departure, recalls to the original position and gives the purpose, and therefore object of hope, out of this state of ruin to the believing remnant, sorrowing over the evil; but it does this by shewing future incoming of blessing and glory in a new principle of grace and purpose. It necessarily refers therefore to Christ's coming, for His is the glory, and by Him comes the grace; but it always therefore testifies of abiding apostasy, because His coming is the proof of all previous failure, whether He come in grace or judgment; and this comforts and sustains the remnant under the failure. Thus Isaiah's prophecy— "make the heart of this people fat" —was on their departure from God; but it had, as we

have seen (Matt. 13; John 12; Acts 28), its accomplishment in the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord first comes as the presented object of hope to the nation, fulfilling prophecy and doing every attractive work of mercy, and speaking as man never spake; but the heart of the people was fat. Then as Lord, for such He was, that Lord whose glory Isaiah had seen, and whence the word came, which glory was the judgment of their state, He gives them up, and, though He often would have gathered them, their house is left desolate. Here the prophecy met its accomplishment, and "this generation "stands the witness of its truth on the rejection of the Son; abidingly true has it proved the heart of the people was fat. The first coming of Christ, under the influence of which they still are, was its fulfilment, true as it always was. Our Lord then, on this state of things, takes up the prophetic character which is to have its consummation and fulfilment in His second coming; and hence (though there are many principles true in mediate application, just as the dullness and fatness of Israel's heart in the former prophecy) the prophecy treats of what is brought out in connection with the Lord's second coming, involving therefore not the Jews only, but the church and the Gentile, but as to all at His second coming. We have nothing then to look for here as fulfilment, but what takes place then.

The relinquished temple is the thesis—the Mount of Olives, the place whence He was to depart, and where His feet were to stand on His return, the suited place where His communications to the remnant of what was to be expected are given. I shall only very briefly present, after this introduction, what the chapters themselves present, without framing any system. It

appears to me far the most wholesome way of inquiry; we know in part, I have seen no system which I do not believe false or extremely deficient. I repeat we know in part and yet all. These two statements shew the form of our knowledge.

What precedes the coming of Christ is divided into two parts, general and particular, at verses 14, 15; verses 5 and 6 stand by themselves as a warning—let no man deceive you— be not troubled—the end is not yet—there would be false Christs—and wars and rumours of wars; then the instruction. We must remember Jews are the subjects of it, but Jews owning Christ as a prophet, listening to Christ as a prophet, after He has given up Jerusalem, as Messiah, as the Lord had ceased to present Himself as the present object of faith. Nation should rise up against nation (v. 7). These were the beginning of sorrows, by which name we may describe this period, the beginning not the end. They were to be afflicted and delivered up to the Gentiles for His name sake, and be killed. This in the beginning of sorrows, evil amongst many associated with them apparently, treachery, coldness, false prophets, and many deceived, not yet false Christs; Antichrist being not yet distinctly revealed as a Jewish oppressor, and they (not he) should deliver up and kill them; the hatred was to be from the nations—Gentiles.

At the same time whoever endured unto the end should be saved. Further, as a great general fact, this gospel of the kingdom would be preached in all the world, for a witness to all the Gentiles, and the end of Jewish circumstances would not come till then; then it would. Now whatever analogy of principle there may be in the Lord’s dealings (and I think there is), I believe strictly

this is put in contrast with what we call the gospel. The death and resurrection of Christ could not be preached as the gospel before He was crucified and risen (previous to that He death was man's sin, though it were God's purpose); in the resurrection it could, because God had received it as atonement; but even Peter preaches it as their sin, and speaks of His return on their repentance, until further things came in. Stephen's death was the point of change as to this; but this gospel of the kingdom was, that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, that God was going to set up His kingdom, though from heaven, among the Jews, in the person of His Son, even the Lord Jesus Christ; and this was to be preached to the Gentiles before He did it, for this would be the end, and the Lord would, as He always does, send the testimony before He did the fact. It is this gospel of the kingdom, then, that is to be preached before the end comes of Jewish circumstances to Jewish disciples, and this to the nations. The cry to the virgins is the personal approach of Christ, the Bridegroom of the bride.

From verse 15 we have a much more precise scene, a local scene; we have the holy place, and Daniel, and Judaea, and definite local circumstances, and prescribed conduct, when the abomination of desolation was seen standing in the holy place. "He that readeth, let him understand." Then those in Judaea were to flee to the mountains, for then shall be great tribulation here when this idol dishonour is set up in the holy place; no more testimony, for they are the days of vengeance, in Jerusalem or Judaea; they are to flee to the mountains; for the elect's sake, however, these days of tribulation shall be shortened. Isaiah 65:9-22 will shew who these elect are. During this period there will not only be false

prophets, but false christs, present promised deliverers from the great tribulation, “Jacob’s trouble”; but the elect were told beforehand; they were to pray, being Jews, that their flight might not be on the sabbath.

This was Jewish tribulation, from which the obedient remnant were exempt (they fled), and in which there was therefore no immediate testimony; not a period in which they were delivering up the remnant to the Gentiles. Nothing now was to be done. After this (v. 29) earthly power was to be put out in its imperial, derivative, and subordinate character, and the powers generally should be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of man would appear, and the tribes of the land (and indeed every eye) should see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven; and next, after this, He would send and gather, by His power and providence, the scattered remnant of Israel yet abroad in the world. These days of tribulation were shortened, that flesh might be saved—the only salvation spoken of in this part of the chapter; and the taking would be as the taking in the days of Noah in judgment, the left as Noah’s family in mercy.

From verse 45 we have another scene, the place in which the then disciples were really going to be set, put on the ground of responsibility in which any would so stand who were in it, when the Lord came—Who then is a faithful and wise servant? They were made rulers over his household. We are the household of God, the Son’s house; meat was to be given; the effect of faithfulness in this, reigning with Christ when He comes, “He shall make him ruler over all his goods” (v. 47).

The apostasy of the church consists in saying in heart, as settling itself here, “my Lord delayeth his coming.”

And so it did. The effect shewn in ruling as lords over the fellow-servants (hierarchical or clerical assumption in the absence of Christ), beating instead of feeding, and intercourse and communion with the world, eating and drinking with the drunken. A portion with hypocrites (for they never lose the profession of servants) is adjudged to them, the Lord of that servant coming. At this coming of the Lord, the church will be viewed and brought into its real aspect as regards those that make profession.

It is like ten virgins who went forth to meet the Bridegroom; the original character of the instruction is here maintained. The bride is not mentioned; the virgins are Christians—the bride would be earthly Jerusalem. The virgins are called to meet Him in His coming to the marriage. But the bride is entirely omitted and passed over; for as yet, till the Lord came, the bride though loved, was nothing and nobody, hidden and lost, as it were, save to Him who, though He tarried long, still loved her. The virgins then, in whom we find therefore the similitude of the kingdom of heaven45 again introduced, present the professing church as to its character and position in grace, as the talents do its service and gifts; of this we have to note some simple but very important testimony.

First, the original character and calling of the church: “they went forth to meet the bridegroom”; the condition they were found to be in— “they all slumbered and slept.” When the end was coming, the godly and ungodly were found mixed together. Nor was this all: the godly had as much lost sight of their calling and original character as the mere professor, they all slumbered and slept. The sense of the Bridegroom’s immediate

approach they had lost; they became all insensible to this46 while the Bridegroom tarried.

Christ the Bridegroom tarried in His return to earth. The church at large, gracious or merely professing, all lost the present sense of this as their calling. Next, that which awoke them—awoke the professing church—was the cry, Behold the Bridegroom [cometh], go ye out to meet Him. The original call of the church they were aroused to, and in language which implied that, though not nominally, they had practically sunk into that world, out of which they had originally been called to meet Him: “Go ye out to meet him.” This then, and this only, is the cry which awakens the church to its original position. In the next place, it finds all sleeping, and in a situation out of which they were to go to meet Him. Further, some time elapses before the Bridegroom comes, after the cry, so as to prove who had grace and who had not; for the effect of putting them in this position was to try if they had grace, which could alone sustain awakened life-giving position. The separation of professors from the church who join with Him is revealed to be the effect of the cry before the Lord comes at all. The wise only are there to meet Him. There cannot be a more simple, or more important parable than this, if the force of the words, by divine aid and teaching, be simply followed. I believe the words, “in which the Son of man cometh,” chapter 25:13, should be omitted. The term Son of man being properly always of His earthly or Jewish coming.

The next parable is not the position and character of the church tried as ready to meet Him, but the service done in His absence.47 The Lord called His own servants and gave them according to their several ability, and took

His journey. Grace, we shall see, made all the difference in character and acceptance, though gift might meet, according to divine appointment, its appropriate reward, being exercised through grace. There are three things in the parable. First, the talents conferred by Christ on His own servants, which shews that they are not natural faculties or worldly opportunities, but such as are peculiar to the servants of Christ, as such, given on His departure; next, these are conferred according to the competency or fitness of the vessel, “a man is a chosen vessel” who receives the gifts, and there is the capacity of the vessel, as well as the extent and character of the gift. The use of it was a different thing, the one talent was given according to ability as well as the five; the giving according to ability proved the fitness of God’s appointment, and responsibility it may be in him to whom it was given; but the just or any use of the talent did not depend upon this. The possession of the talent constituted the responsibility for its use, for even men do not light a candle to put it under a bushel. That which led to its use is another thing, not the recognition of man or appointment through man; on the contrary, it is rested on something which is first framed to condemn and exclude that. The grace which used it is personal confidence in the character and acceptance of God; the grace is proved by, and rests for its exhibition on, that confidence in the Lord, which uses the talent by virtue of its personal acquaintance with and trust in His character; this is the thing characterising the difference between the good and evil servants. He was a good servant who acted on his personal confidence in the Lord’s character, a bad servant who did not. This absolutely and pointedly excludes human appointment or recognition as the ground of the use of the gift.

However the gift may be clearly recognised, and will be by spiritual judgment after it is used, yet faithfulness consists in using it in confidence in the Lord's character; unfaithfulness in waiting for something else. It cannot be personal grace thus characterised, if human appointment or any appointment by man be waited for. 48 The points marked as the consequence on the Lord's return are two. First, there is a large reward given in government, ruler over many things. Secondly, actual personal association with Christ in blessing, not being blessed under Him as ruled over, but "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." It does not seem that the energy and power of the Holy Ghost is taken away, though the scene of its exercise may be different (rule and joy instead of trading as a servant), save from the unprofitable servant, who is cast outside the light and glory of the kingdom. Let us remember that faithfulness consists in the use of a gift upon the ground of. personal individual confidence in the character of the Lord as our master; and that this is the evidence of grace; waiting for anything else, of the want of it. The not using the talent when he had it flowed from positively false notions of God, thoughts of evil, the absence of grace, and a principle entirely condemned by the Lord as the proof of evil.

Lastly. We come to the Gentiles; hitherto it has been instruction to a remnant on the earth, the Jews previous to His coming; then how He would deal with Christians upon His coming, they being caught up to meet Him, and going in with Him to the marriage (to wit, with Jerusalem and the Jews). Here we have what is consequent on His coming, "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, then shall he sit upon the throne of his

glory." This shall not be a passing act, but He shall then sit upon the throne of His glory, the glory of the Son of man, for now He is spoken of as coming as such to earth; not till then shall He sit upon the throne of the Son of man's glory, though divine glory be ever His. Then He shall not only come in His glory, but He shall sit upon the throne of it, and the nations, the Gentiles, as before the Jews and the church are brought before Him. As to them it is in elect purpose they are spared; the kingdom was prepared for them before the foundation of the world; they have life eternal, though as yet it is in earthly blessings; and the evidence of their condition was in the way they had treated His brethren, a distirfct class from both sheep and goats (the former for that reason not being called "children," that is, a title peculiar in its fulness to this dispensation, "there shall they be called the children of the living God"). Further, we find that the judgment to which the goats are subjected is previous to, and only one as yet prepared for, the devil and his angels.

There is no association here for the blessed with the Lord in His own joy and fellowship—the first-born among many brethren, but merely the enjoyment of the prepared kingdom by reason of the way in which they had treated certain other persons whom the Lord calls brethren. This, then, is the session of the Son of man in the throne of His glory, all nations gathered before Him; and the one portion adjudged to blessing in the kingdom prepared for them, and possessing eternal life, judged according to the manner in which they had treated the brethren, the messengers of the kingdom; the rest, to the place prepared for the devil and his angels.

Thus the Jews, the Christians, the Gentiles, are judged as to the position in which the Lord finds them here (Christians, however, actually meeting Him in His return). The judgment is taken up at the close, and none of the statements in many of the details are specifically applicable to any but those found ready or unready then, but the principles would apply even according to that which we have seen at the outset, concerning Isaiah's prophecy. It would always apply. It did so definitely for desolation on the rejection of Messiah; so here the principles will apply at any time. The time of real application and fulfilment is previous, at, and subsequent to, the personal coming of the Lord; then the words directly lay hold, and the description simply applies, and as all those to whom it simply applies meet with present temporal judgment, so those to whom it applies in principle are reserved for the day when God shall judge the secrets of men's hearts. So was it with Isaiah's "make the heart of this people fat"; in the case of blessing, there is a difference, because all the saints are to be then brought into the blessing. There the long tarrying is mentioned, and the virgins are looked at as a corporate representation of the professing church during this tarrying, with the effects added not of the coming but of the cry (for they were indeed to meet Him) in rousing them for His approach, the cry being here, and the immediate application therefore earthly as to the rest. This special application at the close, when the judgment actually reached, of what was true in principle all along, while judgment did not reach, but which shall take place as to them at the judgment, when God judges secrets, is nothing more than we find to be God's ordinary way of dealing. Thus the way in which any whom Jesus is not ashamed to call brethren are

treated would be ground of judgment in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men's hearts; but it has an actual manifested accomplishment in the judgment of the quick upon earth, instruction too and the object of faith. I mention this because it is often a difficulty, while this is the usage of God in His application of His word. I have now gone through as simply as I could these passages, deriving merely from the passage, according to that given me, what the passage actually taught. Thus it seems to me most is really communicated, and most progress made, such as can be relied upon as sure; however our minds may work under the influence of the Spirit of God, and connect many passages together for our own profit. And I pray the Lord to bless it, simple as it is, to the edification of His people, and to teach them in heart to watch and wait for His appearing. Having heard Him announce "Behold I come quickly," may they say in guileless truth by the Spirit, "Even so, come Lord Jesus," separate in the power of the Holy Ghost, and longing beyond all thought or human wish for that; and if He who is the Yea and the Amen of every promise, says "Yea, I am coming quickly, Amen!" answer in the power of the same Spirit, the echo of the Spirit in His heart from Him who says it, "Yea, Come!" and say Amen to grace as our only, constant, and sure hope of being with Him. Amen.

44 "We thought that it had been He who should have redeemed Israel."

45 The kingdom of heaven I believe to be the setting up of Christ's kingdom consequent upon His taking His place in heaven.

46 We have thus the clear scriptural statement of what has actually taken place, and God’s judgment of the state godly men were in, men who had oil in their vessels with their lamps.

47 This is characteristic of both these parables:—they suppose the knowledge of a Lord absent, of a Bridegroom coming, with whose coming in love to the Jews they are familiar and take an interest in. Consequently we find in the Jewish part previous signs, warnings, and what would happen, given to a remnant wanting all these things in the midst of a careless nation, “not desired”; to. the church none, for they are supposed to know and have their direction from a known but absent yet returning Lord. In the Gentile judgment it is neither of these, but a fresh testimony sent out, and they dealt with according to the manner they had received His witnesses who bore it.

48 Some running before they are sent, and having no gift, does not prove that they who are sent should not run; rather the contrary, these are the counteracting good. It is not, ought to have a talent to run, but ought they, having it, to wait for man’s sanction, or any sanction, before they run?

Mark’s Gospel

Introduction

If we wish for a better understanding of the Holy Ghost’s thought about Mark’s Gospel, we must briefly examine His teaching in the four Gospels. These present Christ to us, but Christ rejected: and, at the same time, they present the Saviour in four different aspects. Again, there is a difference between the three first and the last. The three first present Christ as the One whom the world ought to receive, although in result He be put to death. In the fourth we find the Lord Jesus rejected already, from the first chapter; and again, too, the Jews considered as cast off: those who are born of God are the only ones who receive the Lord: consequently we find in this Gospel the principles of grace more deeply unfolded— “No one can come unto me except the Father, who hath sent me, draw him”; and the sheep are distinct from the world before they are called. The first three Gospels present Christ to men in order that He may be received; then they give us the history of the increasing enmity of man against Him, and finally His rejection and death.

As regards the character of each Gospel, in Matthew the Lord is considered as Emmanuel the promised Messiah, Jehovah who saves His people from their sins. “Jehovah the Saviour” is the meaning of the name Jesus. Consequently the genealogy descends from Abraham and David, the heads and vessels of the promises from whence the Messiah was to descend. In this first Gospel, when Christ is manifested in His true character, and in the spirit of His mission, He is morally rejected; and the

Jews are set aside as a nation. The Lord seeks fruit in His vineyard no longer, but shews that He is really the sower; He reveals the kingdom, but in mystery (that is, in the manner in which it would exist in His absence); He reveals the church which He Himself would build, and the kingdom in its glorious state, which things should be substituted for His presence upon the earth; then the last events and discourses of His life.

Mark depicts the Servant-Prophet; and hence we have not the history of His birth; the Gospel begins with His ministry. We will speak afterwards of its contents. In the Gospel of Luke the Lord is presented to us as the Son of man, and in it we have a picture of grace, and of the work which is now going on; and the genealogy goes up to Adam. The two first chapters however reveal to us the state of the small though godly remnant amongst the Jews; a most exquisite picture of the working of the Spirit of God in the midst of the wicked and corrupt nation. These pious souls were well known to one another, they looked for the redemption of Israel; and the aged and godly Anna, who had seen the Saviour presented in the temple according to the law, announced to all who expected Him, the coming of the longed-for Messiah. In all the remaining part of this Gospel Christ is the Son of man for the Gentiles.

In the Gospel by John we have no genealogy at all. The Word of God, which is also God, appears in flesh upon the earth—He is the Creator, the Son of God. The world does not know Him. His own (the Jews) received Him not, but those who receive Him have the right to take the place of sons of God, being really born of Him. And since Christ is here presented as the manifestation of God, it is for this very cause that we find Him

immediately rejected. This Gospel presents Him to us in His own person; then He putteth forth His own sheep, and gathers those of the Gentiles, and gives to them all eternal life, and they can never perish. At the end of this Gospel the coming of the Holy Ghost is explained to us: but let us begin to consider the Gospel by Mark.

Chapter 1.

We have already said it begins with the Saviour's ministry. It is preceded only by the testimony of John. The latter prepares the way of the Lord, preaches the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, and announces a more glorious Servant of God, the latchet of whose shoes he is not worthy to unloose: He will baptize with the Holy Ghost. The baptism of fire is not mentioned here, because the subject is the Lord's service in blessing, and not that of exercising His power in judgment. Fire always signifies judgment.

The Lord submits to John's baptism; this is a fact full of importance and blessing for man. Here He takes the place of His people before God: I need not say that the Lord could have no need of repentance; but He wishes to accompany His people in the first good step they take, that is, in the first step they take under the influence of the word. For Him it was the fulfilling of all righteousness. Everywhere where sin had brought us, love and obedience led Him for our deliverance. Only here He comes with His own: in death He took our place, He bore the curse, He was made sin. Here He takes His place as a perfect man in relationship with God— with the Father; that place which He acquired for us by redemption in the which we are placed as sons of God.

The heavens are opened: the Holy Spirit descends upon man. The Father recognises us as His children; Jesus was anointed and sealed by the Holy Ghost, even as we are; He, because He was personally worthy of it; we, because He has made us worthy by His work and by His blood. For us heaven is opened, the veil rent, and we cry, “Abba, Father!” Marvellous grace! Infinite love! The Son of God has become man in order that we also should become sons of God, as He Himself said after His resurrection: “I ascend unto my Father and your Father, unto my God and your God.” Glorious unspeakable purpose of God to place us in the same glory, in the same relationship as His own Son: in the glory to which He has a right by His own perfection as being God’s own Son. “In order that he might shew in the ages to come the exceeding riches of his grace in kindness towards us, in Christ Jesus.” This will be fully accomplished when that which the Lord Jesus has said shall come to pass: “And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them … that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them as thou hast loved me.” Oh! what ought to be the love of Christians for the Saviour, who by His sufferings, even unto death, has acquired such a position for us, and the blessed assurance of being with Him and like Him for all eternity!

It is also important to remark that here the Trinity is fully revealed for the first time. In the Old Testament we read of the Son and of the Holy Ghost; but here, where we have the position of the second Man according to grace, the Holy Trinity is fully revealed. At the same time the revelation is clear, and the three persons appear together; the Son is revealed as a man, the Holy Spirit descends like a dove, and the Father’s voice owns

Jesus in whom He is well pleased. We may notice here the difference between man's responsibility and the purpose of grace. God's purpose was fixed before the world was created, but it was fixed in the last Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ. In the book of Proverbs (chap. 8) it is shewn that Christ, as Wisdom, was with God, that He was the object of God's delight, and that His own delight was found in the sons of men. But before revealing His counsels, or accomplishing the work which was to produce all the effects of this love, God created responsible man—the first Adam. But Adam failed to accomplish his duty, and all the means that God has employed have only brought out the wickedness of man, until the second Man should come. Thus the delight which God had in man has been manifested.

Nevertheless man has not been willing to receive it; there remained only the personal object of the perfect satisfaction of God; and thus in His person He has taken a position which we find revealed in this passage; that of Son of God, with the heaven opened, being sealed by the Holy Spirit. But He was alone. Upon the cross He did all that was necessary as regards our responsibility; and has done more—has fully glorified God in His love, in His majesty, in His truth, and has acquired for us the participation in His own position as man in the glory of God; not indeed as the right of God, that is, His own right as Son, but to be like Him in glory, in order that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. This is God's purpose: and when the work of Christ was accomplished, this purpose was brought to light. As to its being fulfilled in us upon the earth, we have an example of it in the passage we are considering. Compare 2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 1:2, 3.

But this is not all. As soon as Jesus had taken His place before God as man, and when He had been manifested as Son of God in human nature, He is led by the power of the Holy Ghost into the wilderness, and there undertakes the struggle with the devil in the which the first Adam had been conquered. It was necessary that He should conquer in order to set us free; and notice too that His circumstances were very different from those in which the first Adam found himself. The first Adam was surrounded with God's blessings, of which He had full enjoyment; they were a present testimony of His favour. Christ, on the contrary, was in the desert with the consciousness that Satan was now reigning over man, and all outward comforts are wanting; outwardly there was no testimony of God's goodness: indeed all was contrary to this.

In Mark the details of the temptation and the Lord's replies are not given, but only the fact is recorded (a precious fact for us) that the Lord has passed through this trial. He presented Himself according to the will of God, led of the Holy Ghost to meet the powerful enemy of mankind; immense grace! He first shewed our place before God, having taken it in His own person; and then He entered into conflict with the devil who held us captive. The third fact that we observe is that the angels have become the servants of those who shall be heirs of salvation. Here, then, are the three testimonies in connection with the manifestation of Jesus as man in the flesh;—our position as sons of God, Satan conquered, the angels our servants.

The Saviour (v. 14) having taken His place in the world, begins the exercise of His ministry, but not before John's imprisonment. After that this forerunner of the Messiah

was cast into prison, and not before, the Saviour began to preach the gospel of the kingdom. The testimony of John was very important to draw the people's attention to Him; but it would not have been right that he should have borne testimony to the Lord after that He Himself had begun to bear testimony to Himself. "I receive not testimony from man," saith the Lord, speaking of John the Baptist; John 5:34. He bore witness to John! He was the Truth in His own person, and His words and His works were the testimony of God in the world. "What sign doest thou?" said the people; "our fathers did eat manna in the desert…" And the Lord replied, "I am the bread come down from heaven."

The preaching of Jesus announced the kingdom, shewed that the time was fulfilled, that the kingdom of God was at hand, that the people must repent and believe the gospel. We should distinguish between the gospel of the kingdom and the gospel of our salvation. Christ is the centre of both; but there is a great difference between the preaching of a kingdom which is drawing near, and that of an eternal redemption accomplished upon the cross. It is quite possible that the two truths should be announced together. And indeed we find that the apostle Paul preached the kingdom, but he certainly also proclaimed an eternal redemption accomplished for us upon the cross. Christ prophesied of His death, and announced that the Son of man should give His life for the ransom of many; but He could not announce an accomplished redemption during His life. Men ought to have received Him and not to have put Him to death: hence His testimony was about the kingdom which was drawing nigh.

This kingdom in its public power has been delayed, because Christ has been rejected (see Rev. 11:17); and this delay lasts all the time that Christ is sitting at the right hand of God, until the time when He shall arise from the throne of His Father to judge. God has said, “Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool,” Psalm no. It is nevertheless true that the kingdom was already come in mystery according to Matthew 13; this goes on during the time that Jesus is seated at the right hand of God. But when God’s appointed moment shall come, the Lord will arise and set up the kingdom, and with His own power will judge the living; and peace and happiness shall be established upon the earth. And we who have received Him, whilst the world has rejected Him, shall go to meet Him in the air, we shall be for ever with the Lord, and shall come with Him in glory when He shall appear before the world, and shall reign with Him; and, what is still far better, we shall be like Him and always with Him in the heavenly places in the Father’s house.

The development of these truths and of these events is only found in the word of God after the Lord’s ascension, after that the foundation for the accomplishment of God’s purpose had been laid in the Saviour’s death. Here He announces only the drawing nigh of the kingdom, for men should have received it. But although Jesus taught in all the synagogues, there were not only those who heard Him, or who believed what He taught, but some who also followed Him. It is of the greatest importance to notice this: many in the present day profess to have received the gospel; but how small is the number of those who follow the Lord in the path of faith, in that humility and obedience which characterised the

Lord’s steps in this world! Let us try to follow Him: perhaps we cannot literally forsake all, as the first disciples did; but we can walk in the spirit in which they walked, and esteem Christ as the all for our souls; and that all other things are but as dung in order that we may win Christ in glory. The Lord here calls men to make them fishers of others; let us also seek others, that they too may be able to enjoy the ineffable and glorious happiness which the Holy Spirit gives. We may not be apostles perhaps, but whoever is full of Christ will give testimony to Christ; out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. Rivers of living water shall flow from the belly of him who comes to Christ and drinks; John 7.

The Gospel by Mark does not present the person of Emmanuel, and then the grace of His mission, as that by Matthew; but sets forth rapidly His ministry in its application to men. Necessarily the ministry is the same, but the development is different. His word and His works testify equally to the authority with which He taught the people. While He was speaking, the audience in the synagogue was astonished, for His speech was not like that of the scribes who insisted upon opinions, but He announced the truth as One who knew it and could present it from its very foundation. Even evil spirits were afraid of His presence, and prayed that they might not be destroyed. Nevertheless they were obliged to leave the wretched men whom they held as their prey under their power: so that the people said, “What is this? what is this doctrine?” A testimony was raised that God had intervened to set man free, and to communicate His perfect truth to him. Grace and truth had come by Jesus Christ.

His fame spread all over Galilee. Leaving the synagogue He enters into the house of Simon and Andrew: the apostle Peter had a wife, and her mother was sick of a fever. The Lord takes her by the hand; the fever disappears, and the woman begins to serve them in a perfect state of health. As soon as the sabbath is ended, all the city is gathered together at the door of the house: the Lord heals the sick and casts out demons; the demons recognise Him although men have not. Still He remains the Servant of God, and gets up before sunrise to go into a solitary place to pray. Peter seeks Him and, having found Him, says, “All seek thee”: but Jesus, always the Servant, does not seek numbers and fame for Himself, but goes away elsewhere to preach and to bring freedom from the yoke of Satan.

It is important to remark that here the Lord’s miracles are not simply a sign and proof of power, but also of the goodness which was acting in divine power. It is this which gives the true divine character to the miracles of Jesus. All His works are the fruit of love, and bear witness to the God of love upon the earth. There is only one apparent exception, which, after all, is a proof of the truth we are remarking. This exception is the cursing of the fig-tree; but this was a figure of the people Israel, and one may say of human nature, under God’s cultivation, which did not produce fruit—there were only leaves, that is, hypocrisy. Hence it was judged and condemned, and will never bear fruit again; the gardener dug about it, and dunged it, but all was useless; and then it was given up of God. Man must be born again—must be created again in Christ Jesus.

Of the love manifested in the works of the Lord Jesus we have a beautiful proof in that which follows. A leper

comes to Jesus well persuaded of His power, having seen His miracles, or heard tell of these mighty works; but he was not certain that he would find willingness in Him to heal him. He says to Him, “If thou wilt, thou canst.” The Lord, not content with being willing and with doing, touches the leper. Now leprosy—terrible disease!—was a figure of sin, and he that was ill of it was shut out of the camp as unclean; and even a man who might have touched him was shut out too, because he became contaminated by it. No means could be employed to cure the leper; it was Jehovah alone who could cure him; and then, when cured of Jehovah, the priest pronounced him clean, and he could, after certain ceremonies, partake of divine worship. Here the Lord comes in with this divine power and the love of God. “I will, be thou clean.” The willingness and power of God were there, and were exercised in favour of the poor excommunicated man. But there is something more—He touches the sufferer. God is present; Jesus cannot be contaminated; but He has come so near to the unclean man as to be able to touch him—true Man amongst men, God manifest in flesh. God, but God in a man, love itself, the power which can do all necessary to deliver man from the effect of Satan’s power. Undeniable purity is found upon earth—but love as well, that is, God is here, but Man also—and works for man’s blessing. The leper is healed immediately, the leprosy disappears.

But although God be manifested in His work of power and love, He does not leave the servant’s place, now that He has taken it; He sends away the healed man, saying, “See that thou say nothing to any man; but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing those things which Moses commanded.” We may remark

another circumstance in this history—that the Lord was moved with compassion when He saw the leper. God, in His love, is man touched with pity in His heart for the wretched state in which He finds man: we often find this fact in the Gospels. Now the cleansed leper spreads abroad the fame of Jesus all around, so that the testimony of the power of God present with His people makes itself felt in men's minds. Jesus did not seek human glory, but to accomplish the will of God and the work He had given Him to do. Surrounded by all, He cannot enter into the city, where the astonished crowd would have assembled itself around Him.

Chapter 2.

But after some days, when the expectation had lessened a little, the Lord enters again into the city. It was soon noised abroad that He was in the house, and so many came together that there was no room to receive them, not even about the door. Jesus preached the word to them, because this service was always His first object. He was the Word, He was the Truth, He was Himself that which His word announced, of whom man had need. His word, too, was confirmed by His works, and the people knew that He possessed the power that could deliver them from every evil.

They bring a paralytic man, carried of four; but not being able to get as far as Jesus, hindered as they were by the crowd, they uncover the roof—easily done in the East—and let down the paralytic man to the place where Jesus was. This was an evident proof of their faith; it was the deep sense of need, and confidence in Jesus, in His love, in His power. Without an urgent desire to be healed, and a full confidence in the power and love of

Jesus, they would have been discouraged by the difficulty presented by the crowd, and would have gone back, saying perhaps, “We will come again, we may be able to get at Him another time.” But there are no difficulties for faith; its principles are these—the need of finding the Saviour, of feeling our misery, and of feeling that Jesus alone can heal us—that His love is strong enough to look upon us in our wretchedness. It is of course the work of the Spirit which reveals Jesus to us; but He produces such a sense of our wretchedness that we are impelled to go to seek the Lord, and difficulties do not drive us back, because we know that Jesus alone can heal us, that His love is enough; not indeed that we are already sure of being healed, but enough to attract us to Himself in the assurance that He will do it. And if we have already come to Him, faith always produces need in the soul, and the assurance that the Saviour will respond to our need. And Christ never fails to answer to it; He may allow difficulties to prove the faith, but faith that perseveres finds the answer; and that which if we know the Lord’s sufficiency, produces this perseverance is the sense of our need. The source of all is the operation of the Holy Spirit in our heart.

The Lord takes occasion by the wretched state of the paralytic man to point out the true root of all evils—sin. He had come because sin was in the world, and with what object then but that sin might be forgiven? It is true that, since God is just, it is needful that a perfect atonement be made for sins in order that they may be forgiven. But Jehovah, who knew everything, could administer the pardon by means of the Son of man in that manner which now makes all believers participate in a perfect pardon by means of the gospel. As to His

government also He could pardon or leave under the effects of His punishment both individuals and the whole nation. Now He who was present had the right and power to forgive sins upon earth: and He gave the proof of it. In Psalm 103 He is celebrated as the One who would forgive all Israel's iniquities, and heal all his infirmities.

The great need of guilty Israel was this forgiveness: Christ announces it. As to the government of God itself, Israel could not be re-established in blessing, if he did not possess God's pardon. "Thy sins be forgiven thee," said the Lord: the scribes cry out against the blasphemy. But God, the Jehovah of Psalm 103, was there present ui the person of the Son of man; and He gives the proof that this right belonged to Him by fulfilling that which is said in that very Psalm: "who healeth all thine infirmities." "But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, He saith to the sick of the palsy, Arise, and take up thy bed and go thy way." The man gets up, takes up his bed and goes away. Pardon and power to heal were come upon earth in the person of the Son of man, of Him who, having divine rights and power, was down here in humiliation upon earth to bring the love and the power of God to the wretchedness of man, to the fatal miseries of the soul, giving a proof of it in freeing the body from the sufferings which sin had introduced.

God was present in love. The power to heal was there, but the important truth was that forgiveness was come upon earth. This is the first great truth of the gospel. That which is here announced by Christ is now proclaimed in the gospel which is the means of reconciling God's justice with free pardon, with the full

lasting pardon of sins clearly shewn forth before men in the Lord's words. The remission of sins is announced, founded on the Saviour's work. But if this be the spirit of the gospel, if this be the work of Jesus, He must come to call sinners, He must make Himself their friend, in order that they may have confidence, and may believe in this grace, and that the world may know the Saviour's true character.

That which follows in our history makes us understand clearly the mission and the ministry of Jesus. He calls Matthew who was sitting at the receipt of custom. The tax was hateful to the Jews, not only because they had to pay it against their will, but much more because it was the proof of their being in slavery to the Gentiles. They had lost their privileges as the free people of God; and when their fellow-countrymen took this office, as they were wont to do, under the Roman knights, their bitterness was very great, and the man who took such a situation became hated as a perfidious traitor of the religion and the nation. Thus these tax-gatherers were despised and detested. Now Matthew invites the Lord, and many other publicans were at table with Jesus and with His disciples.

The scribes and Pharisees raise the question as to how it could be possible that a righteous teacher should sit and eat with unclean men and sinners. Jesus hears this, and answers with divine wisdom. The simplicity of the answer equals its force. "They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick; I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Here it is grace that is working; and the work of Jesus presents a full contrast to the law. The law demanded human justice from man; Christ and the gospel announce divine

grace which reigns and reveals God's righteousness. Here we have grace; as to divine righteousness, it should be fully revealed when Christ should have accomplished His work upon the cross: truth as important as it is precious!

Christ, the Saviour, came to seek sinners, and does not seek righteous persons; even were there any such, there would be no need to seek them, but in His sovereign grace and perfect goodness He came to seek sinners; He does not send them away but seeks them, and can sit and eat with them whilst being Himself altogether holy. This is the manifestation of God in love in the midst of sinners to win the hearts of men, and to produce confidence toward God in these hearts, and to bind all the faculties of the soul with the power of a perfect object, and to form it according to the image of that which leads it, and which it contemplates; whence to inspire this confidence, since good was come into the midst of evil, and had taken part in the wretchedness in which fallen man lay— a goodness which did not drive away the sinner on account of his sins, but which invited him to come.

Man's ruin began when he lost his confidence in God: the devil had succeeded in persuading Eve that God had not permitted man to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, because He knew that, if he did it, he would be as God, knowing good and evil; that God had forbidden him to touch the tree from jealousy; and, if He did not wish that we should be happy, we must make ourselves happy. And this is what Eve sought, and what all men seek who do their own will. Thus man fell, and thus man remains in all the wretchedness which is the fruit of sin, awaiting God's judgment upon the sin itself.

Now, before executing judgment God came in love as Saviour to shew that His love is greater than sin, and that the worst sinner can have confidence in this love that seeks sinners and adapts itself to their wants, which does not demand righteousness from man, and brings him salvation and grace by which to present him finally to God as His righteousness through the work of Christ: but He comes in love to sinful men to reconcile them with Himself. Instead of punishing them for their sins, He finds occasion to manifest the immensity of His love in coming to those who were lying in sin, and in giving Himself as a sacrifice to put it away.

In His fife Christ presents this love of God, God Himself manifested in love to man; in His death He is as man before God, made sin for us in order that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him, and that the righteous God, the God of love, never might remember our sins. In the history which we are considering He manifests God's love towards man. The law was the perfect rule of that which man ought to be as son of Adam; it demanded of man that he should be such, and pronounced a curse upon the man who did not do that which it required. It added God's authority to that which was fitting to the relationships in which man finds himself, and gave a perfect rule for conduct to man in these relationships; a rule easily forgotten or broken in the fallen state of man. It did not give life, nor strength, nor objects to attract and rule the heart; but it established the relationship of man with God and with his fellows, and cursed all those who had not kept it, that is, all those that were under it.

The flesh does not submit, nor can it submit to the law of God: grace then, whilst it establishes the authority of the

law and the curse itself, since Christ the blessed Saviour has borne it, must needs change everything in the ways of God. Forgiveness is not the same as the curse, and paying a debt is very different from demanding the money. It is quite just to demand payment, but, if the debtor has nothing to pay, he is ruined; whereas, if he pays, he is set free. Christ has done more; not only does He pay the debt, but He has acquired glory for those that believe. Not only has He freed the debtor from his debts, but He has given him an immense fortune in God's presence.

But then the change is complete and perfect, and the Lord's words which follow shew us this. John's disciples and the Pharisees used to fast, and the Lord gives motives why His own could not do it. The Bridegroom was present and so it was not the time for fasting, but the time would soon come when the Bridegroom would be taken away; and then they should fast. The joy of His presence would be turned into sorrow by His absence, by the need which this absence would create in the heart. The other reason is this: it was impossible to mix the two systems; the new wine (the truth and the spiritual power of Christianity) could not be put into old bottles, into the old institutions and ceremonies of Judaism. If this were done, the new wine would destroy the bottles, and both would be spoiled, the wine would be lost and the bottles destroyed. In like manner a piece of new cloth does not suit an old garment: the garment would be torn, and the rent would only be greater. Indeed it is not possible to attach the spiritual power of Christianity to the carnal ceremonies which human nature loves, because it can make of them a religion without a new life, and without the conscience being

touched. The unconverted man, if he wishes, may thus do as much good as the converted man. No, the new wine must be kept in new bottles: it is important for us to remember it. The dispensation was changed, a new order was coming in, and all was altered; the nature of the things was different—they could not exist at the same time; fleshly ceremonies and the power of the Holy Ghost could never go together. Think of it, Christians! Christianity has tried to embellish itself with these ceremonies, and often even under Pagan forms; and what has it become? It has adapted itself to the world of which these forms were the rudiments, and has become really pagan, and its true spirituality can hardly be found at all.

But there was an institution founded by God, that is, the sign of His covenant with Israel—the sabbath—and it was too the sign of God's rest in the first creation. Now, in Israel man was put to the proof, to see whether, with a perfect rule, and with means offered by the law (God Himself being present in the tabernacle or temple), he could serve God and fulfil righteousness as a son of Adam in the flesh. The sabbath was not "a" seventh day but "the" seventh day, in the which at the end of creation God ceased creating, and rested. The question then arose as to whether man could share God's rest: and the answer is, that he has sinned, and therefore can never have any part in this rest. Under the law he was again put to the proof; and then he made the golden calf before Moses came down from the mountain. God then exercised patience with the people until they rejected Christ. But it was impossible to establish a covenant between God and man after the flesh; man could not enjoy God's rest. More than this; the sabbath of the first

creation was for man, and He who enjoyed all the rights of man according to God's counsels was Lord of the sabbath: thus these two principles are unfolded.

First, as when David, the anointed of the Lord, had been rejected, everything was common and profane; so when Christ, the last proof offered to man in the flesh, was rejected, nothing was holy for man; the seal of the first covenant had lost all its meaning. Then, when Christ renounces for a time His position in Israel as Messiah, He becomes (as we see often in the Gospels, Luke 9:21, 22, etc.) the Son of man. Thus He is the Lord of the sabbath which was made for man; thus the sign of the old covenant disappears through man's sin and his rejection of Christ.

Christ's resurrection is the beginning of the new creation, the foundation of the new covenant founded upon His blood. This is the sign of God's rest for us. Satisfied, glorified by the death of Jesus, God has raised Him from among the dead and has found a resting-place for His love and His righteousness; and we, the objects of this love, are made the righteousness of God in Christ.

Thus the Lord's day is a most precious gift from Him, and the true Christian enjoys it with all his heart; and, if he is faithful, he finds himself in the Spirit to enjoy God, happy to be freed from material labour to adore God as his Father, and to enjoy communion with the Lord. It is always a bad sign when a Christian talks of his liberty and makes use of it to neglect the Lord, in order to give himself to the material work of the world. However free a Christian may be, he is free from the world and from the law, in order to serve the Lord. How much good may

he not do on the Lord's day! And this is a third principle which is found in chapter 3 in this Gospel.

Chapter 3.

Grace had come (John 1:17), God Himself was present in grace; and this grace was free to do good on the sabbath. The Lord's true rest is the exercise of His love in the midst of evil. The Pharisees thought nothing of doing evil provided that their traditions were observed. God held Himself at liberty to do good; and for this reason the Lord heals the withered hand, calling the Jew's attention to this great principle in a formal way.

The Pharisees consult with the Herodians (who were their enemies) to find out how they might put Jesus to death; and the Lord departs. So the dispensation of the law is set aside by Christianity, which cannot be introduced into the old Jewish forms; and at the same time the rights of divine love, that is, the rights of God Himself are maintained. Thus the true character of the Lord's service is clearly set forth. Here the direct unfolding of the Lord's ministry ceases. That which follows consists of parables and facts, which develop it and shew clearly the relationships in which the Lord found Himself with the Jews. He withdraws Himself from the hatred of the rulers of the people, in order to carry on His service of love.

A great multitude from all parts of the country follow Him, having heard of the marvellous things that He did; we have here a living picture of the effect of His ministry. The Lord finds Himself obliged to have a little ship upon the lake, so large was the crowd that pressed upon Him wishing to touch Him to be healed. Also evil spirits when they saw Him, fell down before Him,

saying, “Thou art the Son of God.” Remark here, that which we often find in the Gospels, that evil spirits possessed people so completely, that their acts are attributed to the spirits; and the demoniacs said that which the spirits made them say, as it were of their own accord. The mind and body were so completely in possession of the spirit, that the possessed person thought that that which the spirit inspired was his own thoughts. The possession was complete. “Thou art come to torment us before the time … I know thee, the Holy One of God” —it is often thus. But the Lord would not receive the testimony of demons, nor allow them to make Him known.

He goes up a mountain that He may get away from the crowd for a little, in order to be alone; and calls to Him those He will, who come to Him. In Luke’s Gospel we read that He passed all the night in prayer before naming the apostles. In Luke we find much more of the Lord’s humanity, most important in its place. He prayed when heaven opened to Him; He prayed when He was transfigured; and when in agony in the garden, He prayed more earnestly. Here we have rather the progress of His ministry: He associates with Himself other servants to continue and extend His work. They were to be with Him, and then they are sent to preach the gospel with power, to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils. Remark here, that Christ not only does miracles Himself, but that He can give others the power of performing them. The apostles could lay their hands on a man that He might receive the Holy Ghost; but they could never give to others the power to perform miracles, and to cast out demons. This is something much more than performing miracles; it is the power

and the authority of God. He gives names also to some of His disciples—mark of supreme authority—and according to the knowledge He had of their character, before He had had any experience of it.

At the same time we see how the Lord's testimony is received; His own friends think Him mad; and the leaders of the people ascribe His wonderful works to the power of Satan. O what a world we live in! Man can see nothing in the activity of divine goodness but madness and the work of the devil. But surely Satan does not cast out Satan: it is this that is real folly. If a strong man's goods are taken from him, it is clear that a stronger has come and has bound him. May God be praised! But this sin—blasphemy against the Holy Ghost—cannot be pardoned. Whilst they said, "We do not believe: this man does not keep the sabbath, he deceives us," although it was bad enough, it was pardonable; but the scribes recognised the power—a power greater than that of demons, and, instead of owning there the finger of God, they ascribed it to the prince of the demons—called the Holy Ghost a demon. It was the end of all hope for Israel, as regards his responsibility. Grace could forgive the nation, and will do it when the Lord shall return in glory; but now, as a responsible people, their story is ended.

It is for this reason the Lord renounces all relationship with the people according to the flesh. His mother and brethren come to call Him, but the Lord will not recognise them. He brings in the word to form new links with souls, but every link with Israel is broken. His mother has no claim upon Him, He refuses to own her call: "Who is my mother or my brethren? "He says; and looking round upon those about Him, "Behold my

mother and my brethren: for whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister and mother." Here we find the break between the Lord and the people. The patience of the Lord continued to shew forth God's goodness, until the last Passover; but all was really over for the people; its condemnation could not fail to be pronounced; He no longer seeks fruit in His vineyard.

Chapter 4.

Seated in a boat at the lake side, the Lord presents the parable of the sower, who went forth to sow that which, if received in the heart, should bring forth by grace the fruit desired of God. The fruit was not to be found in the vineyard where man was to be tried just as he was in the flesh, under the old covenant, the law being written upon tables of stone. It is on this account that the Lord cursed the fig-tree which did not bring forth fruit, but leaves only; He had digged about it and dunged it, but in vain; therefore it was to be cut down. Solemn truth! Grace raises us above sin, but man in himself is lost as regards his responsibility. The Lord begins to teach the crowd in parables: saying "a sower went forth to sow." As we have said, He no longer seeks for fruit from man upon the earth, nor in His people, but sows that which ought to bring forth fruit.

As the sower sows, some falls by the way-side, some on stony ground, some in the midst of thorns, and some on good ground. It is no question here of doctrine, but the facts which follow the sowing of the word of the kingdom present themselves; it is a question of outward facts. Three parts bear no fruit. When the word is sown in the heart, in the first instance, it rests on the surface

of the ground, it does not penetrate the heart; the devil takes away the word, and no fruit is left. In the second instance the word is received with joy; the hearers are glad to listen to the sound of grace, of pardon, of the kingdom; but when this brings with it affliction or persecution, they leave it. The hearer had received it with joy; he leaves it when affliction comes: the conscience is not brought into God's presence; the need of a troubled conscience is not felt. It is in the conscience that the word of God fixes its roots; because the presence of God is revealed and awakens the conscience. God Himself is revealed to the heart, and one finds oneself in His presence with the consciousness of being there. Self-judgment follows, the darkness passes away, and the light of God shines in the heart. When the conscience has already been exercised, then the gospel brings joy at once, and God's answer to the soul's need. Whatever the grace and the love of God may be, when they are first revealed, they do not produce joy, because the conscience is reached; the light penetrates, because God is light. Love (for God is love) inspires confidence, the heart is attracted and trusts, like the sinful woman who washed the Lord's feet with her tears; but the conscience, not being yet purged, has no joy. If the announcement of pardon gives joy, there is reason to fear that the conscience is not awakened. The understanding (perhaps also the natural affections) has understood the beautiful story of love and pardon told in the gospel, but the work is only surface-deep and disappears.

Another part of the seed fell amongst thorns, and the thorns, growing up, choked it, and it did not bear any fruit. Last of all, that which fell on good ground brought

forth fruit in different proportions. The object of this discourse is not to shew how this takes place; it speaks only of the effect manifested. Doubtless it is grace, but the fact alone is told. We see the activity of grace in the heart in this last case, because it grows and bears fruit, and keeps on growing. He who has truly received the word in the heart is fitted to communicate it to others. He may not have the gift of preaching, but he loves the truth, he loves souls, and the glory of the Saviour; and the light which has been lit in his heart is to light all around him. He too sows according to his strength, and is responsible to do so. All will be manifested, faithfulness and unfaithfulness, with regard to this, as in everything else. God sends light into the heart in order to give it to others, and not to hide it. We shall receive more, if we are faithful in communicating what we possess; and, if there is love in us, this cannot fail. Truth and love both came in Christ, and unless the heart be full of Christ, the truth will not be manifested: if the heart be full of other things, or of itself, Christ cannot be manifested. If Christ—truth and love—be in the heart, the truth will shine out for the blessing of others, and we ourselves shall be blessed, and more will be given to us; and there will be liberty and joy in the soul. That which he already possesses will be taken away from the man who does not let others profit by the light he has.

We see here again that the Lord’s ministry amongst the Jews was ended. “To you it is given,” He says to the disciples, “to know the mysteries of the kingdom, but to those that are without all these things are spoken in parables, in order that seeing they may not perceive, and that hearing they may not understand, lest they be converted, and their sins be forgiven them.” They are

under the judgment of God. The Lord does not mean to say here that a soul might not believe in Jesus individually, and thus be forgiven; but that the nation, having rejected the testimony of Jesus, was now deserted of God, left outside, and exposed to His judgment. He reproves the disciples because they too could not understand the parable, nevertheless He explains it to them in His grace.

After this explanation and the respective warnings of which we have spoken, the Lord gives another parable which presents His ways very clearly. The kingdom is like unto a man that casts seed into the ground, who, rising and sleeping day and night, allows it to increase without taking any notice of it. The earth produces thus fruit of itself, first the blade, then the ear, and then the full grain in the ear. Now when the fruit is ripe, the sickle is put in at once, because the harvest is come. Thus the Lord worked personally, sowing the word of God upon earth; and at the end, He will return, and work again in person, when the time for the judgment of this world shall have come; but now in the meantime, He remains seated at the right hand of God, as though He did not occupy Himself with His field, although in secret He does work by His grace, and produces everything. But it is not manifest. Without being seen, He works to make the seed grow in a divine way by His grace, whilst apparently He allows the gospel to grow without having anything to do with it until the harvest. Then He will appear and will Himself work openly.

He teaches the people again with another parable. We do not find here the whole story of the kingdom as in the thirteenth chapter of Matthew, but only its great principles, and the Lord’s work in contrast with His

manifestation and the establishment of the kingdom by His own presence. It grows during His absence, no one knows how, at least as regards human knowledge. The kingdom, then, is like a grain of mustard seed, the smallest of all seeds; but as soon as it is sown it grows, and becomes a large plant, even a tree large enough for the birds of the air to rest upon its branches. Thus Christianity, a little seed, that of a man despised by the world, has become a great power upon the earth, and extends its branches everywhere. Here the Evangelist repeats that the Lord spoke to the crowds in parables, and that He did not address them without parables; then He explained the whole to His disciples, when they were alone with Him.

In that which follows, we have, I think, a picture of the departure of Jesus, and of His power; the security of His own even when He seemed to be indifferent to their difficulties; then the relationship in which He stood towards the Jews. Jesus, having sent away the multitude, gets into a boat and goes to sleep whilst a tempest arises upon the lake, so that the waves fill the boat. The disciples, full of fear, come to Jesus to awaken Him; Jesus arises, rebukes the wind, and says to the sea, “Peace, be still,” and all is quiet. But then He reproves the unbelieving fear of the disciples; and indeed, reader, do you think that the power of the Son of God, God’s counsels, could have failed because of an unexpected storm on the lake of Gennesaret? Impossible! the disciples were in the same boat with Jesus. Here is a lesson for us: in all the difficulties and dangers of the christian life, during the whole journey upon the waves, often agitated by the tempestuous sea of life and of christian service, we are always in the same boat with

Jesus, if we are doing His will. It may seem to us that He is sleeping; nevertheless, if He allows the tempest to rise in order to prove our faith, we shall not perish since we are with Him in the storm; evidently neither He nor we can perish. He may seem sometimes to be indifferent to our fate; but I repeat we are with Him; His security is our own.

Chapter 5.

If calming the winds and the sea shews the Lord's power over creation, that which follows shews it over demons; He casts out a Legion by His word. But now we find the effect of the manifestation of His power upon the world, even where it worked for the deliverance of men. They beseech Jesus to depart, and He goes away. Poor world! the quiet influence of Satan upon the heart is more disastrous than His outward and visible power; this is sad enough, but the power of the Lord is quite sufficient to drive it away: whereas, on the other hand, the quiet influence of Satan in the heart drives away Jesus Himself. And remark that, when the presence of God is felt, it is more terrible than that of Satan; man would wish to free himself from the latter, but cannot; but the presence of God is insupportable when it makes itself felt: and indeed man has driven God (in the person of Christ) out of this world. Jesus gave Himself for us, it is true; but, as regards man's responsibility, he has driven out the Lord. I do not doubt that all this scene is the representation of the end of the Lord's history; and that the swine present to us the end of the Jews, who were hurried into perdition as possessed of the devil at the end of their history. The world did not wish to have Jesus; the Jews are cast down into hopeless ruin.

The man who is cured is quiet; he wishes to be with Jesus who is going away, but this is not allowed him. He must go and announce to others what God has done for him. Here is the position of the disciples and of all Christians after the Lord's departure from this world. They desire to go and be with Him, but are sent again into the world to declare the blessed work that the Lord has done in their own persons; they can by their own experience say what is the grace and the power of Jesus. But how deplorable is the state of the world and of man! The presence of the devil is more tolerable for him than that of God. He would wish to check the violent manifestations of the power of Satan, but cannot—the bands are burst asunder, and the man is as bad as ever. God is not a tyrant like Satan; He is good, full of grace, and frees men in Christ from Satan's power; but, this being the proof of the presence and power of God, man shews that His presence is insupportable to him, even when God manifests Himself as the deliverer from all the evils which sin and Satan's power have introduced.

The history which follows reveals the true relationships between Jesus and Israel. Jesus came to heal Israel; but Israel was in fact dead, speaking spiritually; when Jesus arrived, it was necessary to raise him, if it were God's will that he should live; the Lord could do it, and will do it for this nation in the last days. But then being in the way with the people, the crowd of Israel surrounded Him; and, if individual faith touched Him, the person was healed, and this is what happened to the poor afflicted woman.

Let us notice some of the details of the story:—the Lord distinguishes between true faith and the eagerness of the crowd which was attracted by His miracles and by

the benefits it had received. Sincerity was not wanting in the crowd, the people saw the miracles and enjoyed their effects, but they had not faith in the person of Jesus. But there was good in the woman, by grace, that which is always found in faith, a felt need and the perception of the excellence of His person, and of the divine power that was in Jesus, accompanied with true humility with regard to herself. The poor woman is sure that, if she touch only the hem of His garment, she shall be healed; and in fact it is this that takes place. As soon as the woman is healed, Jesus perceives that the power which is in Him, and which has gone out from Him to the woman, has worked with efficacy. And it is always thus: many can hear the gospel and delight to listen to it, but faith is another thing; and faith always receives the Lord's answer to the need which it presents to Him. He may make one wait, if He finds it good to exercise the faith, but He always answers in love: the woman is perfectly healed. Faith makes the believer humble about his wretchedness; the woman wished to remain hidden, but the Lord encourages the believer, saying in this instance, "Daughter, be of good comfort, thy faith hath saved thee, go in peace." However timid and fearful the soul may be in the Lord's presence in spiritual things, and however much it may feel its wretchedness, when the call is true, it opens out and confesses His grace, not the misery which had rendered this grace needful. It is then that the Lord encourages and speaks peace to the heart. Personal faith is here plainly distinguished from the eagerness of the crowd which followed Him, whether for curiosity, or for the benefits which Jesus conferred upon it. But the power of resurrection was found in Him and through Him. Israel, though dead, was

only sleeping: the Lord’s voice will call him into life in His time.

Chapter 6.

But however great His divine power, He was manifested in a form that could lend nothing to the pride and vanity of human nature. Man was responsible to receive Him because He manifested the character of the Godhead: He would not flatter and give support to human passions, nor to those of the Jews as a nation. If man is to receive God, he must receive what God is; but this is just what his fallen nature will not do. The divine character was much more fully manifested in the humiliation of Jesus, than if He had come as a glorious King; but He was not that which man’s heart desired. He was the carpenter’s son, and that was enough to cause His rejection. They judged according to the flesh: the kindred of Jesus were in their midst; and they did not look any farther. Astonished at their unbelief, He leaves them after having done that which the wants of some of them demanded, for His grace never failed. A prophet is not without honour but in his own country; for it is there that he is known according to the flesh. So it was with Jesus, not only in Nazareth, but also in Israel. Remark what an obstacle unbelief is to the exercise of the power of God. The faith of the sick woman who touches His garment causes His power to come out, but the unbelief of the inhabitants of His own country hinders its exercise. We find, “He could not do any mighty work there,” etc. May God grant that we may not put any obstacle to the activity of His grace, which is always ready to act; but, on the contrary, may we know what it

is to profit by His power by causing it to act towards us by faith; chap. 6:1-6.

Now the Lord sends His disciples to preach, and we have a proof of His power more remarkable than that of His own miracles. He gives them the power to perform miracles themselves, power to cast out all demons. This is a power evidently divine; God makes man capable to perform signs and wonders; but what man can give this power to another? Christ gave it, and His disciples, capacitated by His gift, cast out demons in reality: Christ was God manifest in grace upon the earth. We have already called attention to the fact that all the Lord's miracles, and those of His disciples are not only the results of power, such as the miracles of Moses, of Elias, etc., but they are the fruits of divine goodness. One may except the cursing of the fig-tree, but this after all is a proof of the same thing. The testimony of the Lord, stamped as it was with love, and confirmed by His miraculous works, had been rejected; and Israel—man's heart—under the influence of this goodness, of the manifestation of God, of all the care which God had lavished upon it, had not brought forth any fruit. Therefore the bad tree is judged for ever, so that it can never bear fruit again. Thus man, having shewn himself to be nothing but guilty, and so guilty, that all the means employed by God, even to the gift of His only-begotten Son, have been found to be unable to awaken a single good sentiment towards God, as to his state in the flesh, he is finally rejected of God. God can save him in giving him a new nature by the Holy Spirit, but in himself he is without hope. Who will do more than that which God has done?

More than this; the Lord has not only power to give to His disciples authority over evil spirits, but He can also dispose of human hearts. The disciples were to start without taking anything for their journey; and nevertheless, as we read in Luke, the disciples bore witness, in answer to the Lord, that they had wanted for nothing. Sustained by the power of Emmanuel, whose power extended everywhere, and armed with His authority, they were to stay in the house into which they had entered until their departure from each place. Thus they were to conform themselves to this mission; possessing the Lord's authority for their message, they were to act accordingly. And wherever their message should not be received, they were to shake the dust off their feet as a witness against that city, whose fate should be worse than that of Sodom and Gomorrha. It is true that the Lord, full of goodness and patience, sent seventy disciples again before His face when He went up to Jerusalem at the end of His career upon earth, and these were to preach the gospel. But as to the principle of the mission, that which we find in Mark was the last testimony given to Israel before the judgment of the nation. This was to be a last appeal to the conscience and heart of the people, in order that it might receive the Saviour and repent and turn to God and escape the terrible judgment that awaited it; and that there might be at least a remnant which, moved by the powerful word of God, might return to God to enjoy His goodness in the Saviour, and a better hope than Judaism had been able to give them.

The disciples went forth preaching that men were to repent. What grace there is in the sending forth of the gospel! Not only does God give us to enjoy salvation and

His love, but employs men as the instruments of the activity of His love. O how we ought to bless God that He condescends to make use of us to carry the testimony of His ineffable love and of His truth to men's hearts—at least to their ears, in order that He Himself may cause it to reach their hearts in His grace! May we know at least what it is to have our hearts full of love, whether we preach or not, so that they may be a true expression of that grace which seeks men. Thus the power of God accompanied the disciples; they cast out devils and healed the sick.

At this time the report of the works and power of the Lord reached the king's ears; his conscience was troubled at it because he put John the Baptist to death. Here begins the history of the facts which shew practically the opposition of man's heart to the testimony of God. The enmity against the truth and the light which was fulfilled in the death of Jesus, manifested itself already in the death of His predecessor. Herod's natural conscience had induced him to listen to John; the fear that he had of the holy man who had been faithful in rebuking him caused him to have some regard for him, and to keep him from the enmity of Herodias; but that which is natural is not enough to form a barrier to the flesh. The excitement of a banquet and royal pride are enough to cause the prophet's death. Painful instance of the manner in which man deceives himself; and when he imagines himself strong enough to shew forth his power, all he can do is to reveal his weakness and his slavery to his passions. All this does but accomplish the will of God; this enmity of man's heart must shew itself, and must introduce, by the rejection of

John the Baptist and of Jesus Himself, things infinitely better, through the sovereign grace of God.

The disciples come back and relate to Jesus all that they have done and taught; it was natural that they should be full of it. But the Saviour does not say anything about it; for Him power was a natural thing, and He wishes the disciples to come apart in a desert place to rest a little in solitude. It is always a good thing, even necessary for us whatever the blessing may be—all the more the greater it is—for us poor creatures who are so incapable of bearing the effect of power when the work is by our means, so ready are we to attribute it to ourselves without perceiving it; it is necessary, I say, to retire into God's presence, and there in His presence to find out what we are in truth, to enjoy in safety His perfect love: but to be occupied with Him and not with ourselves. This is what the Lord did in His tender consideration for His own.

But the love of God does not find repose in this world; and man, finding but little love in human hearts, is afraid of wearying the Lord when He is present there; but divine love never refuses to attend to man's wants. The people recognised Jesus and ran together from every city, coming out of their solitude to see Jesus; and He, seeing this great multitude, was moved with compassion, because they were as sheep without a shepherd. He begins to teach them: this is the first and true need of the people abandoned of their human shepherds; but the Lord still thinks of all the needs of His hungry people. The disciples would have wished to have sent away the crowd, but Jesus wishes to feed it. This miracle has a great meaning in itself, from the place it holds in this Gospel. Jehovah was the true

Shepherd of Israel and was there present in the person of Christ, who in truth was rejected. Nevertheless His compassion and His love were not weakened by the ingratitude of the people.

To shew that He is really Jehovah, He acts according to Psalm 132:15; “I will satisfy her poor with bread.” This is a psalm which predicts the time of the Messiah, which will be fully accomplished in the latter days; but He who shall accomplish it was there present, and though He be rejected, He gives the proof that Jehovah has visited His people—He satisfies the poor with bread. His love was far superior to the malice of His people. He had already said that the Son of man would be put to death, and that the people would not receive their Saviour-God. With all this, Jehovah does not abandon His love; if the people do not want Jehovah, Jehovah wants the people. He gives the precious testimony that Jehovah’s love does not grow weary, but remains superior to all the folly of man. May His name be praised and adored for it! We can all the more count upon His unfailing goodness not to allow us to fall into negligence, but to sustain us in our weakness; for His love is greater than all our failings, so that we can adore His patience.

But there is another important truth which we find here. The Lord does not say, “I will give them to eat,” but, “Give them to eat.” The Lord wishes the disciples to know what it is to use His power for the good of others, and that they may know how to use it by faith. Oh, what a thought that true faith employs Jehovah’s power, and in circumstances which shew that His love is above our unfaithfulness and failure! How important a truth for us, that Christ is the expression of this love, of the superiority of God’s grace over all our sins; for “God

commendeth his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." This was the proof of it; but that which was manifested in His death is always true for us in His life. "Much more," says the apostle, "being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." Faith, therefore, counts upon the unfailing faithfulness of this love, and uses the strength which is made perfect in weakness. The flesh in the disciples sees nothing but carnal means, and does not look at God's love and power but at that which is seen. But the Lord gives food in abundance to the hungry multitude, and shews Himself to be both the God and Saviour of Israel.

The story which follows gives us the picture of the separation caused by the Lord's rejection, and the welcome which will be given to Him at the end of the history of this world which has rejected Him. He does not speak of the judgment of His adversaries, but of the change of the world itself. The Lord constrains His disciples to depart alone, whilst He sends away the multitude; and when they are gone, He departs into a mountain to pray. This is exactly what the Lord has now done: the disciples are tossed upon the tempestuous sea of the world; Jesus has sent away Israel, and has ascended to heaven to intercede for us. In the meantime the wind is contrary, and we toil in rowing with difficulty and trouble, being outwardly left to the Lord; but He intercedes for us always, and obtains mercy and grace for us in the time of need. Israel had been dismissed.

More exactly, the disciples upon the sea represent the Jewish remnant, which in fact has become the church: but here it is considered in its character of the Jewish remnant. Jesus overtakes the ship, walking upon the sea, for He can walk calmly upon circumstances which cause

us great trouble. The disciples are afraid, but Jesus comforts them, assuring them that it is Himself, their well-known friend and Saviour. Thus it will be at the end of the times: Jesus will appear superior to all the circumstances by which His people are troubled; and He will be the same meek and humble companion who walked upon earth with His disciples “in the days of his flesh.”

“Now when he entered into the ship, the wind ceased.” I repeat that the judgment of His adversaries is not mentioned here, but that which will happen to His people amongst the Jews, when He shall return. Then the world will be again full of joy. The land of Gennesaret, which had sent away the Saviour after He had healed the demoniac, receives Him now and owns Him, and all the people everywhere enjoy His presence with delight.

Are our hearts ready to receive this teaching? Have we learned that to carry one’s cross is the true position of the Christian, the path into which the Lord has led us? To walk thus we have need of an object which can rule the heart, which can possess its affections, and can fix them on what is on before, and lead them on; an object to which too the cross is united— that is, Christ who has loved us, and who gave Himself upon the cross for us; Christ who is now in glory to which He is leading us, and who shews us what the path of the cross is, in order that we may be with Him and like Him, following the path which the Lord has trod for us in His love. “If any man serve me, let him follow me: and where I am, there shall also my servant be.”

Chapter 7.

This seventh chapter is full of the most interesting teaching. First, the Lord's judgment upon the outward piety of the heads of Judaism, which was altogether external and nothing less than hypocrisy, and which set aside the law of God. All these washings are despised by God; the Pharisees had set aside the commandment of God to keep their own tradition. Secondly, the Lord shews that that which comes out of a man's mouth denies the man, because it arises from the heart; not that which enters into the man. Then having thus judged Israel and man, He shews forth in the most touching manner the sovereign grace of God which passes by every barrier to reach man's need: outside of all rights founded upon the promises, demanding only that the heart should recognise it in order that it may be entirely the pure grace of God in love which does the good; revealing itself as love when man is bad, and without any hope outside of this sovereign grace.

Outward things are easy to do; man likes to make his religion of them, for they do not need a pure heart; man likes to do them, and to exalt himself and to distinguish himself from others in doing them. By them man boasts of great piety before other men, and gains a great reputation for it; but he can be bad at the same time; these outward acts do not bring him into the presence of God who searches the heart. Man by these acts is religious without possessing holiness, and he finds that this just suits him. One does not find Pharisees only in our Lord's time; they are to be found in all times. This system always attaches itself to the influence which a man exerts over another by means of a position outwardly holy; it is not the faith which possesses truth

and grace for itself (which truth and grace came by Jesus Christ, and which produce holiness and communion with God who reveals Himself in them), but the official influence that a man uses to his own advantage, carelessly leaving on one side the will and the commandments of God. Thus it was amongst the Jews; they washed their hands, but not their hearts; they were very scrupulous about that which entered their mouth, and careless about that which came out of their heart.

Thus is man's religion always; he can observe such a religion as this, and deck himself with it as with a glory. But he cannot get real holiness in this way, and this is evident to the eyes of God, who sees all that goes on in the heart. True holiness shews itself in the practical walk; one may fail, but the soul sustained by grace only seeks the approbation of God; it has the consciousness of failure, and rejoices in God, for it is He who dwells in the soul, and keeps it humble. But the Pharisees and Sadducees amongst the Jews profited by their reputation and position to induce the pious to give many gifts to God, whom they represented. Thus duties towards parents were slighted, and God's law countermanded. They honoured God with their lips, but their heart was far from Him. They drew near to Him with their mouth, but not with their heart; this was full of covetousness and iniquity. God refuses altogether this kind of honour. "In vain do they worship me," says the prophet Isaiah, and the Lord repeats it. God wants a pure heart sanctified by the Spirit and by the truth; and He wants a worship which is to be rendered in spirit and in truth: the Father seeketh such to worship Him. He wants grace, but the truth is required to be able to draw near

to God, a heart where the divine life exists. All this human religion, outward, Pharisaical, priestly, is judged of the Lord once and for all times. God demands a pure heart and true obedience. Men put on this kind of religion, giving honour in it to antiquity and to the traditions of their ancestors, to which man's imagination attributes great value. All that is seen through the shades of antiquity is imposing enough; but with God it is a question of the heart, and it was the same then as it is now with us: we are before God, and He sees us just as we are. Man's actual state is the question.

But what are these poor hearts in their natural state? This is the second question the Lord takes up. He has already torn the veil of the hypocrisy by which the Pharisees and priests tried to conceal the impurity of their hearts, and to turn to their own account the external piety which they taught; the motives of their hearts are manifested, and the efforts which they make to cover the impurity and avarice of their heart appear; their hypocrisy is manifest. The Lord does not only rend the veil of hypocrisy, but discovers also that which the heart produces. This is what God does; He searches our hearts and manifests them, and then reveals His own. This is the uncovering not merely of the hearts of the Pharisees, but of the hearts of all men; that which goes out of the mouth defiles the man, because it proceeds from the heart. What a picture! The product of the human heart consists of malice, corruption, envy, … in a word, of nothing but vices.

Was the Lord wanting in benevolence or love toward man? His coming is the proof of God's love. Did He wish to hide the good that might be found in man? Was He the only one capable of discovering the evil? Could He

wish to slander the being He had come to bless, to save, and to whom He would give a place with Himself? Impossible: this could not be. But instead, knowing man's heart, He was obliged to say the truth. It was love which discloses the utter perversity of the human heart, in order that man may not remain in this, state. It is indeed better that it should be disclosed now in the presence of grace than in the day of judgment, when all that is manifested will be punished, and man condemned.

Observe also that, when practical holiness and obedience are no longer to be found in the life of the leaders, a religion founded by God becomes the power of sin and of hypocrisy, and tends always to pervert the mind, to destroy the conscience and uprightness in all; because that which is looked upon as God's authority encourages hypocrisy and iniquity, and also tends to produce unbelief, because men see that religion attaches itself to that which even the natural conscience condemns. Oh how sad a story is that of the human heart and of the church of God, such as men have made it! Observe also the influence of the corrupt religious authority to blind men and to destroy spiritual intelligence. What can be clearer than that which the Lord says? But the natural conscience does not recognise the truth that it is not that which entereth into a man's mouth that defileth the man, but that which comes out of it, for it proceeds from the heart. The thing is simple enough.

The disciples do not understand, and ask for an explanation of it; their natural intelligence had been blinded by the tradition of the elders. The manner of reasoning acquired by the authority of the latter had

spoilt their understanding. And indeed, do we not find many who believe that that which entereth into a man's mouth defileth him? And yet they are sincere souls; and not only so, they believe also that to eat a certain kind of food one day denies, and that another day it does not: and this because of the tradition of the elders. This really is what the disciples did substantially; and the Lord reproves them, saying, "Are ye so without understanding also?" Here we see the judgment of the Lord against many things which keep many souls in bondage, and sincere souls even, like those of the disciples.

But let us turn to the precious display of God's love in the words of the Lord to the poor woman. We find that all the privileges of the Jews are recognised first; but we find also the truth of God which rises far above such privileges to manifest grace and love wherever a need may be found; not indeed where there is a right to the promises, but towards an accursed race, towards a woman from a country notorious for its hardened state. God manifested Himself in rising above all the barriers that man's iniquity and the exclusive system of Judaism had set up, even the system which He had Himself established, which was shewn to be abolished by the rejection of Christ.

The Lord goes into the borders of Tyre and Sidon; He wishes to be quiet, but goodness joined with power are too rare in the world to remain unnoticed; and the need felt awakens the soul and makes it clear-sighted. A poor woman had a daughter subject to the power of an unclean spirit; feeling her own wretchedness and believing in Jesus' power, she goes to seek Him. The weight of misery that oppressed her made her hope in

His goodness. The Lord keeps to the promises made by God to the Jews, and in His answer puts forward the rights of God's people; He could not take the children's bread and give it to the dogs. Observe that the woman herself was of the accursed race; if we look at the ways of God in the midst of Israel, there was not a single promise for her; and she had no right belonging to her in common with the people of God. According to the Jews and the legal economy, she was nothing more than a dog: but present needs were there, and the power of God, always employed as it is for His own good purposes, was there too, and this inspires her confidence.

It is always thus; need and faith in the goodness and power of the Lord give perseverance, as in the case of those who carried the paralytic man when the crowd pressed around Jesus. But there is something in the woman's heart besides confidence which grace had produced there. She recognises the rights of the Jews as God's people; she owns that she is but a dog with regard to them; but she insists upon her demand, because she feels that, even though she be but a dog, the grace of God is sufficient for those who had no rights. "Even the dogs," she says, "eat of the children's crumbs "; she recognises what she is, but also what God is. She believes in His love towards those who have neither rights nor promises; and in the manifestation of God in Jesus outside of and above all dispensations. God is good, and the fact of being in misery is a claim with Him: could Christ say, "No, God is not good as thou dost suppose?" He could not say this: it would not have been the truth.

This is great faith, faith which recognises our own wretchedness, that we have right to nothing; but faith which believes in the love of God clearly revealed in Jesus, without any promise, yet fully revealed. God cannot deny Himself and say, “No I am not love.” We have no right to expect the exercise of this love towards us, but we can be sure that coming to Christ, impelled by our wants, we shall find perfect goodness, love that heals us, and the healing itself. Let us remember that true need perseveres because it cannot do without the aid of the power which was manifested in Christ; nor without the salvation which He has brought; nor is there salvation without the help which is to be found in Him for our weakness. And that which is in God is the source of our hope and of our faith; and if asked how we know what is in God’s heart, we can answer, “It is revealed perfectly in Christ.” Who put it into God’s heart to send His own Son to save us? Who put it into the Son’s heart to come and suffer everything for us? Not man. God’s heart is its source. We believe in this love, and in the value of that which Christ has done and accomplished upon the cross, to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. Besides He does all things well, He makes both the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak.

The grace of God was fully shewn towards the poor woman, who had no right to any blessing, nor to any promise; she was a daughter of the accursed Canaan; but faith reaches even to the heart of God manifested in Jesus, and in like manner the eye of God reaches to the bottom of man’s heart. Thus God’s heart and man’s heart meet, in the consciousness that man is altogether bad, that he has not a single right; indeed he owns truly this state, and in it gives himself up to the perfect

goodness of God. But the Jewish people, who pretended to possess righteousness and right to the promises, is set on one side; and, as to the old covenant, is shut out from God's favour. Only Jesus opens the eyes and the ears of the remnant brought to Him in faith. And it was not only the Jewish people which was to be set aside (and as to the first covenant for ever), but man also was set aside on the ground of righteousness, which is the principle of the first covenant.

Then the Lord leaves again the borders of Tyre and Sidon and returns to the country of Galilee; where He found Himself in the midst of the people of Israel. But, as we have said, He was virtually rejected by the people. Jesus has the consciousness that the beloved people is lost, and all that He does is to expect its ruin. They bring to Him a man who was deaf with an impediment in his speech, and beseech Him to put His hand upon him to heal him. Then Jesus takes the man and leads him aside from the crowd: and then puts His fingers in his ears, and, having spit, touches his tongue. Then He looks toward heaven: power is always present in Him, but sorrow oppresses His heart, because the people were really deaf to the voice of the Good Shepherd; their tongue was tied and incapable of praising God. The Lord's sighs are the expression of this feeling; inasmuch as the state of the poor man represented the state of the beloved people. Nevertheless they were happy in that the love of Him whose counsels never change rested, in spite of all, upon them. And indeed the Lord was there, and worked according to this love and these sighs; He looked up to heaven, the source of love and of power, and never grew weary until the people in favour of whom He exercised this power, would no longer support

His presence. It is true they would not have been able to put Him to death, if He had not given Himself up of His own free will, but the time would come in which He would give Himself up to accomplish redemption; and until that moment arrive, He shews Himself always as the God of goodness towards the afflicted, and for all people's need.

In verse 33 we see that He separates Himself from the mass of the people in healing the deaf man. In chapter 8:23, we have the same thing; He leads the blind man out of the town, but He heals him; only there the state of His disciples is shewn. It is touching to see this look that the Lord gives toward heaven, and the sigh of His heart as He sees the people deaf to God's voice, and incapable of blessing His name; and to see the Lord's heart for hardened men, and how this heart was in harmony with the heaven which He always manifested. There He found the certainty of this love that man rejected; and rested in the same feelings that reign in heaven, and of which He was the expression upon this ungrateful earth. The Lord's power shewed itself the very moment; the ears were opened, and the tongue was loosed. The people could not hold their peace, but published everywhere that which Jesus had done, saying, "He hath done all things well; he maketh both the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak." The Lord's work opens the ears, and gives cause to humble hearts to praise God, and to recognize His love. But alas! how many remain deaf to the voice of God's love! "They are like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear; which will not listen to the voice of charmers, charming never so wisely."

Chapter 8.

The Lord continues to manifest divine goodness. It is the chief thing to be noticed in this part of the Gospel. He had already given the hungry people to eat, a manifest sign of Jehovah's presence, as we have before remarked —a sign that should accompany His presence. Here it is more simply the divine power, without alluding to the kingdom which was to come. The number seven is the expression of perfection in spiritual things. The Lord's compassion makes Him think of the needs of the poor, whilst the disciples think only of human and visible means to satisfy themselves. This is the case only too often with real believers.

Then the Lord leaves the crowd, and goes into the parts of Dalmanutha. There the Pharisees ask for a sign from heaven, although they had already seen enough; but unbelief is never satisfied. But now the time of trial was passed, it was too late; the Lord leaves them. But observe the Lord's spirit towards the perverse generation; He sighed deeply in His spirit, saying, "Why doth this generation seek after a sign? There shall no sign be given to it." The end had come morally; it was useless to give proofs to hearts who had resolved not to believe. Perfect patience, love, deep pity, and sorrow in thinking of the unbelief of the leaders of the people were all there in Him, and manifested themselves all the more clearly as their hearts were hardened; and signs were useless for hearts who would not believe, and also it was not suited to God's majesty to give any to men who would not receive Him. It would be casting pearls before swine.

Now we find that the disciples themselves were really blind, not wilfully, but in fact. The Lord warns the disciples to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod. The disciples had forgotten to take any bread, and alas! also the power of Jesus manifested in the miracles, by which He had fed thousands of people with a few loaves. The Lord reproves them, saying, “Perceive ye not, neither understand? Have ye your heart yet hardened?” They were, as it were, hardened at seeing so many miracles, and had understood nothing of Jesus’ miracles in the multiplying of the loaves.

But the fact which follows shews the state of the disciples in contrast with the people. The latter did not see anything at all, and would not receive the light; the disciples saw indistinctly; they saw men as trees walking. They really loved the Lord, but Jewish habits prevented them from grasping fully His glory. They believed indeed that He was the Messiah, but the Messiah for their hearts was something else than the Christ of God, the Saviour of the world. They had attached themselves by grace to the person of the Lord, but they did not understand that divine glory which was, as it were, hid in that person, which revealed itself in His words and works. They had left all to follow the Lord; intelligence was wanting, not faith, however small it might be. The spirit was willing but the flesh was weak, as we have already remarked. The Lord leads the blind man out of the city, separating him from Israel. First of all the man only sees partially: men seemed to him like trees walking. But the Lord’s patience, as great as His power, gives a picture of the state of the disciples’ heart, and also a picture of His untiring goodness, which does not leave the blind man until he sees clearly. Thus

He did to the disciples, only here He does not speak of the means: when Jesus had ascended to heaven and had sat down at the right hand of God, He sent the Holy Ghost who led them into all truth. Then they saw clearly.

But the Lord forbids the blind man to enter into the town, or to tell it to anyone in the town, not only because He did not seek the vain glory of men, but also because He wished to avoid a large concourse of curious persons who were but an obstacle to His real work in consciences and hearts; and also because He wished to shew that the time of testimony in Israel was at an end. Rejected by the world, He commands the man who has been delivered from the power of the devils to return to his house, and there to proclaim that which God had done for him. The disciples would have done that—would have proclaimed His work—when Christ should have left this world; but here it was a question of Israel who had rejected the Lord, and God's testimony had no longer any place in their midst.

The Lord's discourse which follows touches upon this in the question which He asks His disciples, "Whom do men say that I am?" And they answered, "John the Baptist; but some, Elias; and others one of the prophets": different opinions, but no faith. Then He asks them, "But whom say ye that I am?" Peter answers, "Thou art the Christ"; and the Lord forbids the disciples to tell it to any man, in the most positive manner. This is the clearest proof that the testimony in the midst of the people was entirely at an end. He was nevertheless the Christ, but He was rejected by the people, which shewed itself to be its own enemy in rejecting the wondrous grace of God. Now He begins to teach His disciples openly that He must suffer as Son of man: a much

greater position and title, both as regards the extent of His power, and the greatness of the dominion which belonged to Him; for all things will be subjected to the sway of the Son of man. But in order that the Son of man might take His place in glory, He must first suffer, be put to death and rise again; it was necessary that redemption should be accomplished, and that man should enter into a new position, into an entirely new state, in which he had never been even when innocent. Christ's position as Messiah was now set aside for this time, and He enters into one greater where old things are left behind beyond death, and all that is founded upon Christ's work, upon His death—enters upon a state altogether new and eternal.

Here the subject is treated more with regard to His sufferings; He puts the cross before the disciples, but He always speaks of death and resurrection. "And he spake that saying openly." This was a stumbling stone for Peter who did not wish that his Master should be despised in the eyes of the crowd; but the cross is the portion of those who wish to follow the Saviour. Peter in saying this placed a stumbling block on the disciples' path; the Lord thinks of this, and, turning about and looking upon His disciples, He reproves Peter, who had confessed Him but a moment ago, by the grace of God, and says to him, "Get thee behind me, Satan, for thou savourest not of the things that be of God, but of the things that be of men." We have here an important lesson, indeed, more than one lesson. First, the Christian needs to understand well that the way of salvation, the way which leads to glory and to heaven, the way in which Christ Himself walked, and in which He wishes us to follow Him, is a way in which we must deny ourselves, suffer, and

conquer. Secondly, let us learn that a Christian can have true faith, and be taught of God, as in Peter's case here, without having the flesh in him judged so as to render him capable of walking in the way into which this truth brings him. It is important to remember this; sincerity may exist without knowing oneself. The new position of Christ, that of Son of man which embraced the heavenly glory of man in Him, and the supremacy over everything, rendered the cross absolutely necessary. But Peter's heart was not ready for the cross; when the Lord announces its practical effect, he cannot bear it.

How many hearts there are in this state! Sincere, no doubt; but they have not the spiritual courage to accept the consequences of the truth they believe. See the difference in Paul, made strong by the presence of the Holy Ghost and by faith. He says in the presence of death, "To know him [Christ] and the power of his resurrection, and the communion of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death," Phil. 3:10. But there was in him the power of the Holy Ghost, and he bore always in his body the dying of Jesus in order that the life of Jesus should manifest itself in his body. Happy man! always willing to suffer everything, rather than not follow fully the Lord Jesus, and to confess His name whatever the consequence might be; and, having walked faithfully, by grace to obtain at last the prize of his heavenly calling.

But the Lord does not conceal the consequence, nor does He wish to do so. He warns the crowd, and He warns us also that if we wish to be with Him, if we wish to follow Him, we must deny ourselves and take up our cross. Let us receive the Lord's words: if we wish to be with Him for ever, we must follow Him, and if we follow

Him, we shall find upon the road that which He found. Of course it is not a question of expiatory sufferings, of that which He suffered from God's hand for sin, but of His sufferings from man, the contradiction of sinners, the opposition of men, abuse and even death. We know but little what it is to suffer for the name of Jesus; but remember, Christians, that which the Lord says first, "Let him deny himself"; you can always do this by grace. It is by doing this that we learn to suffer with Him, if God should call us to it. And what shall we give in exchange for our soul? This leads us to a third lesson, which requires a little more development.

That which nourishes the flesh and self-love is the great system which is called the world. Man wishes to be something in his own eyes; he would like to forget God, and make himself happy, if possible, without Him. Thus Cain, when he was driven out from God's presence, after Abel's death, went away from before His face, judged in such a manner by God, that he could not hope to be admitted again into His presence to enjoy communion with Him; for God had made him to be a vagabond and a wanderer on the earth (a striking type of the Jews at this time, after having put to death the Lord Jesus, who had become, so to speak, their brother). But Cain was not willing to remain a poor vagabond; at all events he did not wish to leave his family in such a state; he wished it to escape his own proper lot; and to this end he built a city in the land of Nod ("Nod "is the Hebrew word translated vagabond in the first instance); he desired that his family should be estabhshed in the country where God had made him a vagabond. He names the city after his son, as do the great people of this world. There is to be found the father (that is, the inventor) of

music, the father of them that work in brass and iron; there the riches of this present age were heaped together, much cattle. This is the world!

Man's heart, alienated from God, tries to make the earth, where he was set at a distance from God, as pleasing to himself as possible; and, in order to accomplish this, he uses God's gifts and creatures to be able to do without Him. It is said that there is no harm in these things:—this is true, but this is not the question. They are good as being created things; it is said (as a figure) that there will be music in heaven also; but in heaven it will not be employed in order to divert the mind without God. It is a question of the use we make of these things. For instance, there is no harm in strength, but in the manner of employing it; with it one does harm to one's neighbour. Is it not true that the world which knows not God uses all kinds of pleasures to enjoy itself without Him? The heart which has not God in it endeavours to amuse itself, and for this it employs all the things which are seen, heard, and invented; as for instance, the theatre, music, and every kind of thing, because it is empty and sad and cannot satisfy itself; and after a few years, during which it has kept up its natural spirits, it finds itself tired and weary, even of trying everything, and says with Solomon after having essayed all, "All is vanity and vexation of spirit." God is neglected, and the soul lost.

For the Christian too, amusements only lead him away to a distance from God, and destroy his communion with Him. All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father but of the world. The world and its lust pass away, but he that does the will of God abides for ever. The prince of

this world is Satan, who seduced Eve with these things, having first of all destroyed her confidence in God; and it was with these things that he tried to seduce the Lord also, although, thank God, in vain. But with little trouble he succeeds but too often to seduce the hearts of men and of Christians; and to cause the pleasures of the world to have more power upon the soul than Christ Himself, than the love of a dying Saviour.

It was thus with poor Peter! It is true, he had not yet received the Holy Ghost, but this does not change the nature of his desires. He wished for this world's glory, and that under the appearance of love for the Lord. Notice here too the Lord's love for His disciples and how great is His tender care for them; He turns round and sees how great a stumbling-block Peter's words may be for the other disciples, and reproves him as severely as his words deserved. Then the Lord puts two principles before the disciples, first, the soul is worth more than everything, it is not to be exchanged for anything; secondly, the Lord is about to come in glory, and whosoever shall be ashamed of Him in this corrupt world where He is rejected, of him will the Son of man be ashamed when He shall come in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.

Chapter 9.

Now the Lord finds the occasion to manifest this personal glory of His to establish the disciples' faith, and also to shew that His presence in grace as Messiah, in the midst of Israel, was soon to come to an end; and that the new glory of the Son of man with His own was soon to be inaugurated, although it would be necessary to await the time when all the co-heirs should be gathered

together. “Verily I say unto you,” says the Lord, “There be some of them that stand here which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power.” Six days afterwards the Lord went up into a mountain with Peter, James, and John, and was transfigured before them; His raiment became shining and exceeding white as snow; Elias and Moses appeared with Him glorified in like manner, speaking with Him. We know that this apparition was the manifestation of Christ’s glorious reign over the earth.

We read in 2 Peter 1-16, “For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his Majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory, ‘This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased’; and this voice which came from heaven we heard when we were with him in the holy mount.” These are the words of the apostle Peter when he relates that which happened to him when he saw the wonderful vision of the mountain of the transfiguration. From this we learn what the kingdom is as regards its manifestation upon earth, for they were upon earth. The bright cloud which covered them was the Father’s dwelling-place, whence the voice came and into which, according to Luke, they had entered.

What a privilege for poor mortals, for sinners to have been able to gaze upon the Son of God in glory, and to have been manifested with Him in the same glory upon earth; to be His companions, to converse with Him; to possess the testimony that they have been loved as He has been loved (John 17:23); to be with Him, and like

Him in everything as Man, for His own glory; wonderful proof of the value of the redemption He has accomplished! And the nearer we shall be to Him, the more shall we adore Him, being with Him as we shall be in the Father's house. But here our evangelist does not speak of their entering; comparing however Luke 9 we find it nevertheless true that they entered into the cloud out of which came the Father's voice.

It was according to God's counsel that we should be with Christ, the second Man, the last Adam, and in the same glory with Him. We are predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son in order that He may be the first-born among many brethren. It is for this that He became man: He that sanctifieth and they that are sanctified are all of one, for which cause He is not ashamed to call us brethren. What would a Redeemer be without His redeemed? It is most certainly a far better thing to be a companion of the Lord Jesus in the Father's house, than co-heir of His glory before the world: yet both the one diing and the other are wonderful for poor creatures like ourselves. Elias and Moses are in the same glory; and we shall be like Him when He shall appear.

But the Lord's personal glory is always maintained; Peter wishes to make three tabernacles, putting Christ, Moses, and Ellas upon the same footing—the three grand characters of Israel's history. But Moses and Elias disappear immediately, and the Father's voice recognises Jesus as His beloved Son; it is to Jesus' testimony that we must listen. All that Moses and Elias said is the truth, God's word, and by their means we learn God's thoughts; but they give testimony to Christ, not with Him. It is from Him alone that we learn fully

the will of God, and His truth fully revealed. Jesus is the truth, and grace and truth came by Him. The death of Christ, His resurrection and completed redemption have put everything upon a new footing for men.

The believers who lived before the Lord's coming, believed in the promises and prophecies which announced His arrival; and they were accepted by faith; their sins committed during the time of God's patience, and which He bore with because He knew what He would do later on, are forgiven; and God's righteousness in forgiving them is manifested, now that Christ has died. But now God's righteousness is manifested, and the power of divine life is shewn forth in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. All is new in our relationship with God; the veil is rent, and we enter freely into the holiest. "The righteousness of God without law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets." Behold Moses and Elias; but the glory in which both Moses and Elias appeared is the fruit, not of the law nor of the prophets, but of the work of Jesus Christ; and one can only possess it in the resurrection state. The Lord's resurrection too was absolutely necessary, as being the power of life beyond death, and as a proof that God had accepted the death of Christ as having answered to the question of sin. The glory belonged to another world, gained for those who believe by the sacrifice of Christ, the Son of God, although this had to be fulfilled in this world. It belongs, therefore, to the state into which Christ, the second Adam, has entered by resurrection, and is based upon accomplished redemption.

Thus, although this was well-suited to strengthen the faith and increase the intelligence of these three,

columns of the future church, it was not to be talked about before the Lord's resurrection, and Jesus forbade the disciples to tell the things they had seen until the Son of man should be raised from among the dead. Notice the expression, "The disciples kept these words to themselves, asking one another what the rising from the dead should mean." This indeed throws quite a new light upon the resurrection. Christ rose alone from amongst the dead, and left all the others in the grave; and His resurrection is a proof that the God of righteousness has accepted His work—His sacrifice—as a full and entire satisfaction given to His righteousness and His holiness; and the man who believes in Him is accepted according to the value of Christ's sacrifice.

The resurrection of the faithful also takes place, because God is fully satisfied as to them because of Christ's work. These alone will be raised when the Lord comes, to be for ever with Him. All the disciples believed in the resurrection of the dead, having been taught thus by the Pharisees; they were not like the Sadducees, but believed that all the Jews would be raised at once; and they did not understand the meaning of a resurrection which should separate the good from the bad, and should leave the latter behind for a certain time. Christ is the firstfruits of the resurrection of the saints, not of the wicked. Those who are Christ's shall rise at His coming, and their vile body shall be changed and made like unto His glorious body. There are many Christians who, like the disciples, do not understand the Lord's words. One finds many Christians who have a faith like that of the Pharisees; they believe indeed that there will be a resurrection, and, like Martha, that all will rise at the last day. The only difference is that Martha and the

Jews believed in the resurrection of the Jews only; and these Christians believe in a resurrection where good and bad will be raised together.

It is quite true that all will rise, but true faith in Christ (notice, dear reader), true faith makes the distinction already. The unbeliever remains in his sins, and will rise for the judgment, and the true believer will rise for the resurrection of life; he will rise (as we find in 1 Cor. 15) in glory. When the Lord comes, He will change our vile body and fashion it like unto His glorious body. Christ is the first-fruits of the resurrection, but certainly not of the wicked: in no part of the word do we find a common resurrection of good and bad: we find in Luke 14:14, a resurrection of the just, and again (20:35), “they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from among the dead.” Thus we find expressly in 1 Corinthians 15, “Every man in his own order, Christ the first-fruits, afterwards they that are Christ’s at his coming.”

Thus also in 1 Thessalonians 4, “The dead in Christ shall rise first”: it is always thus. People quote Matthew 25, but in that chapter it is no question of resurrection, nor of raised bodies; it is not a universal judgment, but a judgment of Gentiles upon the earth, of those to whom the everlasting gospel of Revelation 14 had been sent at the end of the age. There are not two classes only here, but three; the sheep, the goats, and the brethren of the Judge. The principle of the judgment here is not the principle of a universal judgment. It is just according to the manner in which they have received and esteemed the Judge’s brethren; that is, the messengers of the everlasting gospel, called in Matthew 24:14, “this gospel of the kingdom.”

The principles of the general judgment of the nations are explained in Romans 1 and 2; these are quite different. I speak of Matthew 25 because it is the only passage that is quoted as a reply to the uniform testimony of the Holy Scriptures to a distinct resurrection of believers, according to the declaration of John 5:24: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment; but is passed from death unto life.” We shall all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, certainly, and every one will give account of himself to God. But when the believers shall stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, they will have been glorified already, raised in glory, and made like unto the glory of Christ, as man. “When he shall appear, we shall be like him” —it is for this that “every one who hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as he is pure.”

The first coming of Christ put away sin as regards judgment; for believers He will appear the second time unto perfect salvation to receive them to Himself, to glorify them. Their spirits are with Him in heaven, whilst they await this hour— the resurrection of their bodies will take place when He shall return, and then we shall all be for ever with the Lord. When glorified however, we shall give account of everything; we shall know as we have been known. There is thus a resurrection from among the dead.

The difficulty of which the scribes talked (that Elias ought to come before the Messiah) presents itself to the disciples. Now the scribes still exercised great influence over the disciples. And in truth, this is to be found in Malachi’s prophecy; it will be surely fulfilled, whatever

the manner of fulfilment may be, before the Lord's coming in glory. But He came first in humiliation, and hidden, as it were, as to His external glory; He entered by the door as the shepherd of the sheep, in order that faith seeing through the darkness of His position and of His daily life, might discern not merely a Messiah, come to Israel according to the promises, but the love and power of God Himself—and might find itself in the presence of His holiness.

The Jews would have received with joy a Messiah who should liberate them from the Roman yoke; but the presence of God is unsupportable for men, even when He appears amongst them in goodness. To the coming which is still future, the Lord alludes when He says in Matthew 10:23, "For I tell you ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel until the Son of man be come." But now He appears in humility, made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death; that is, in order to be able to suffer. Thus also John the Baptist comes in the spirit and power of Elias, according to Isaiah 11 and Malachi 3, to prepare the way of the Lord. Thus the Lord answers; John must come; the scribes are right; John shall come and restore all things. But it was necessary too that the Son of man should suffer, and that He should be thoroughly despised. "But I tell you that Elias hath already come, and they have done unto him whatsoever they listed."

But if the Lord was manifested in His glory before the disciples' eyes in the transfiguration, He occupies Himself now with the misery of the earth; and that which took place is very remarkable for the display of His patience, and of the ways of God. When He comes down from the mountain, He finds a great crowd, and

the scribes reasoning with His disciples. It is blessed to notice that if the Lord is recognised as Son of God, and will be manifested in glory, and we with Him, He nevertheless comes down into this world—as He does still by His Spirit—and meets with the crowd and the power of Satan for us; and again (it is well for us to notice it) He speaks as intimately with His disciples as He does with Moses and Elias. Oh, how great is His grace! But the exercise of this grace develops the position and state of man and of the disciples.

A poor father has recourse to the Lord for his suffering son, who is possessed of an evil spirit, and cannot speak. He tells the Lord that he had brought him to the disciples, and that they could not cast out the unclean spirit. This is their position; not only does the Lord encounter unbelief, but although divine power be in the earth, believers even do not know how to use it; it was in vain then that the Lord was present in the world. He could work miracles, but man did not know how to profit by this, or to use it by faith. It was a faithless generation; and He could not stay down here. It was not the presence or the power of the devils that drove Him away, for indeed it was this that brought Him down here; but when His own do not know how to profit by the power and the blessing which He has brought into the world and placed in their midst, the dispensation characterised by these gifts must be drawing to its close. And this, not because there is unbelief in the world, but because He own cannot realise the power placed at their disposal; and in consequence the testimony of God falls to the ground destroyed, instead of being established; since the followers of this

testimony meet with the power of the enemy and cannot do anything—the enemy is too strong for them.

“O faithless generation,” says the Lord, “how long shall I be with you? How long shall I suffer you? “His service upon earth was finished. But see the patience and goodness of the Lord; He cannot deny Himself. All the time He is down here upon earth He works according to His power and grace, and that notwithstanding the unbelief of His own. He finishes the sentence in which He reproves their unbelief in this manner— “Bring him to me.” Faith, however small it be, is never left without an answer from the Lord. What a consolation! whatever be the unbelief, not only of the world, but of Christians—if only one solitary person were left in the world who had faith in the goodness and power of the Lord Jesus, he could not come to Him with a real need and simple belief without finding His heart ready and His power sufficient.

The church may be in ruins, as was Israel, but the Head is sufficient for everything, knows the state of His own, and will not fail to supply their needs. The child’s state was very dangerous, and the devil had possessed him from his infancy. The father’s faith was feeble, but sincere; he says to the Lord, “If thou canst do anything, have pity upon us, and help us.” The Lord’s reply is remarkable: “If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.” Power connects itself with faith; the difficulty is not in Christ’s power, but in man’s believing; all things were possible if he could believe. This is an important principle; Christ’s power never fails to accomplish all that is good for man; faith, alas! may be wanting in us to profit by it. However the Lord is full of goodness; the poor father says with tears,

“I believe, help thou mine unbelief”: sincere words from a moved heart in which the Lord had already awakened faith. It was the anxiety for his son that weakened this faith.

Now the Lord, avoiding the empty curiosity of the people, thinking rather of the needs of the father and son, commands the unclean spirit with authority to come out and not to enter again into the child. And he comes out of him, shewing at the same time his power (tearing the child, so as to leave him as dead), but absolutely subject to the Lord’s authority. It is very beautiful to see that the Lord upon leaving the glory went to meet the unbelief of the world and of His own, and the weakness of the faith of those who have need of it, and that too in the presence of the enemy’s great power. The Lord does not keep at a distance from us, He takes part in our sorrows, He encourages our weak faith, and with a single word drives away all the power of the enemy. Neither His own glorious state, nor the unbelief of the world which rejected Him, prevented Him from being the refuge and the remedy for the poorest faith. He interests Himself in us, thinks of us, and helps us.

Although the Lord be placed in glory according to His rights, these do not weaken His love for poor human-kind. But again we find an important lesson at the end of this history. Energetic faith which works (whether the miracles which happened at that time or the great things of the kingdom of God) is sustained by intimate communion with God, by prayer and fasting. The heart comes out from God’s presence to drive away the enemy’s power; but whatever might be the Lord’s grace, whatever His power, a greater work had to be accomplished, a great work for the Lord Himself, a work

of which He alone was capable—difficult indeed for the heart of man to learn, but absolutely necessary for the glory of God and for our redemption and salvation: a lesson which one must learn in order to walk in the Lord's ways. This is the work of the cross; and the wholesome lesson it teaches us is this—that we must bear our own cross.

Now that the future glory, the glory of the kingdom, has been revealed;—now that the Lord has shewn forth His power and His perfect goodness in spite of the unbelief of the world, and of His departure after having been rejected by the world—He takes His disciples aside, passing through Galilee to make them understand that the Son of man would be given into the hands of men who would put Him to death. He speaks of His title as Son of man, because He could not any longer remain upon earth as the promised Messiah, but He must accomplish the work of redemption. However after that He should have been put to death, He would rise again on the third day. Behold then redemption completed and everything made new: man is put upon an entirely new footing, at least the believer in Jesus.

Risen man does not stand upon the same footing as Adam in his innocence. I do not speak now of the lost, although it be true for them, but it is quite a different thing. Adam was in the natural blessing of a creature, but his faithfulness was put to the proof, a proof in which he failed. True enough the sinner is not in the condition of the redeemed; but in Adam's case all depended upon his responsibility. In Christ risen man had been fully tried and shewn to be perfect, proved even unto death, where He glorified God Himself. Further, He bore our sins and put them away for ever;

He submitted to death, but has conquered it, and has come forth out of it; He has borne the stroke of God's judgment against sin. Satan had already employed all his power as the prince of this world, in the death of Jesus, although it was not possible that He should be holden of death: so that instead of being under trial where He had placed Himself in His love for us and in order to glorify His Father, Jesus risen (and we in Him by faith and by the hope which the Holy Ghost who unites us to Jesus inspires) is beyond the reach of all these things.

Death, to which Adam subjected himself through sin, is conquered, our sins are abolished before God; we are perfected for ever as to our conscience; a new state of life has begun for us, a life which is entirely new and heavenly; and heavenly glory at the end, already realised for Christ there where He was with the Father before the foundation of the world. "As He is," says John, "so are we in this world "(that is, as in the presence of God's judgment)—and we await the resurrection of the body. But Christ's position as a glorified man, is the fruit of having fully glorified God; and we, sharing His life by the operation of the Holy Spirit, participate in the fruit of His work already at this present time, as to our position before God; and later we shall be like unto Him perfectly. Adam's state when innocent was happy, but it depended upon his obedience. Christ's state as man is the fruit of an obedience perfectly complete, after it had been proved even to the point of drinking the cup of death and of malediction, when He was made sin for us.

The first state was exposed to change, and complete ruin came in by the fall; the other remains unchangeable, established upon a work that can never

lose its value. We are already brought, by participating in the life of Jesus, into the relationships into which He introduces us with the Father. “I ascend,” said He after His resurrection, “to my Father and to your Father, to my God and to your God.” Only in order to accomplish all this it was necessary for Him to pass through death, to bear the cross, in order to drink the sup which His Father had given Him. He engages them then with the cross, and teaches them to expect it. But what a thing man is! We learn it in what follows.

The Lord, having the consciousness of His glory in which the Father had recognised Him a little while ago as His beloved Son, and knowing at the same time that this glory made the cross absolutely necessary to bring many sons to glory, speaks of it to His disciples; He insists that it will be necessary for them to carry it. Such was the path of the glory of which His own death was the foundation. The Lord’s heart was full of the thought of the sufferings which accompanied it; of the cup He had to drink, and of the necessity of His disciples’ understanding this path, and of taking up their cross. But of what were the disciples’ hearts full? They were thinking who should be the greatest. Alas, how incapable our heart is to receive God’s thoughts, to think of a Saviour humbled unto death for us! It is true that the Spirit of God puts in contrast here the reign of Messiah which the Jews expected, and the glorious heavenly reign which the Lord was establishing, and for which His death was necessary; but the contrast comes out strongly thus in the heart of man. He would like to be great in a kingdom established according to man’s glory and man’s power; he esteems it a good thing that God should condescend to this; but that His glory should

be morally exalted and established, and the vain glory of man brought to nought, the manifestation of what man is; the love, holiness, and justice of God brought to light —all this is what man neither seeks nor desires; and when the Lord's heart, full of these solemn truths and of the sufferings by which He must needs pass to fulfil them, speaks of them to His disciples, the latter dispute as to who shall be greatest. How poor and wretched a thing is man's heart!

What incapacity to understand God's thoughts, and to feel the tenderness and faithfulness of the heart of Jesus, and the thoughts passing through it; divine love manifesting itself in the heart of a Man, and as a Man in the midst of men, in which is found a moral incapacity to enter into His thoughts; but this opens the way at the same time to the manifestation of our thoughts which are in full contrast with those of Jesus. May God grant us in His grace to hold the flesh so entirely subject, that the Holy Spirit may be the source of all our thoughts and of the movements of our hearts. Nevertheless the conscience does not keep silence if the Lord's word touches us: we know well that the desire of vain glory is a bad thing, that it is not meet for Christ, for Him who speaks, and we are ashamed. The disciples are silent because their conscience speaks.

Now the patient love of the Lord sets itself to teach them; He sits down (v. 35), and calls the twelve: He always thinks of us. He then teaches several principles, in which we see the consequences of the world's opposition to Christ, and the introduction of a new relationship with God in Christ risen; these principles demand some explanation. The important point here, the foundation of ail the Lord's exhortations, and of all He

says is this, that the glory of the kingdom to come has been revealed, and with this revelation comes the cross. It is the end of all the relationships between God and Israel, and indeed between God and man, except indeed that of sovereign grace, and the principle of a new and heavenly relationship by faith. But Christ, the Messiah according to the promises in Israel, God manifest in flesh, the last hope for man as he was upon earth, was rejected. The relationship between God and man was broken. Could one seek glory upon an earth of this kind? What kind of disposition is fitting for a disciple of Christ? Humility: he who would be first shall be the last and servant of all. Then He takes a child and declares that he who receives such an one in His name receives Christ; and he who receives Christ receives the Father who sent Him. The name of Christ is the touch-stone, the only thing upon earth really great by faith.

Then we find a reproof for a thing which in itself was love, though rough and coarse, but which dresses itself in very deceitful forms, and seems to consider Christ's glory; for love in itself is not upright: it is quite disposed to maintain the glory of Christ's name, if it can attach itself to this glory. "We saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us, and we forbade him because he followeth not us." See here the word "us" betrays the most subtle love of self: subtle, it is true, but none the less dangerous. But the Lord's answer shews how absolute is His rejection: "He who is not against us is on our part," because the whole world in its natural state was against Christ, and is still against Him; and no one could perform miracles in His name and at the same time speak evil or lightly of Him. The name of Christ is

everything. Let us avoid this wretched “us,” and hold fast to Christ.

Verse 41 shews how the name of Christ is everything in a world which has rejected Him.

But what a testimony to man’s state, and to his inward opposition to God revealed in Christ! If any one was not against Him, he was for Him, otherwise he was completely God’s enemy. Some important consequences follow this state: first of all the least manifestation of love for Him, which interested itself in Him, having the power of His name at heart, should not be forgotten before God. What a picture of the state of things and of the patience of Christ, who humbled Himself even to being rejected and despised, yet does not forget the least token of affection for Him, and of desire for His glory! Now we see another consequence of this position. The Lord does not wish that a little child who believes in Him should be despised; He esteems these, because their hearts recognise His name, believe in Him; and hence they have a great value before God. Woe be to him who despises them and who places a stone of stumbling before their feet; it would have been better for such an one to have been drowned in the depth of the sea. And nevertheless, as regards themselves, all depends upon the faithfulness of Christ; and on this account they need free themselves from all the things which tend to separate from Christ, which lead into sin, and bring on apostasy in the heart as well as outward apostasy. God will keep His own, I believe, but He will keep them in making them obedient to His word.

However much it may cost us, if it should be an eye that offends us, we must pluck it out; if a hand, we must cut

it off; in a word, the most valuable thing possible; for an eternity of blessing with Christ is better than to keep a right hand and to find oneself in eternal torments, "where their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched." Besides this, God puts all to the proof: the fire of His judgment is applied to all, both to saints and sinners. In the saints, it consumes the dross, in order that the pure gold may shine in its true lustre; in the case of sinners, the fire of God and the eternal pains according to His just judgment, fire that is not quenched. "Every sacrifice must be salted with salt"; this refers to Leviticus 2:13. The salt represents the power of the Holy Spirit, not exactly to produce grace alone, but to keep us from all that is impure, and to produce holiness in a heart devoted to God, and which introduces God into its path; and in the heart there is a link with Himself which keeps us from all corruption. We are called to keep this in the heart, and to apply the sense of His presence to all that passes within us, and to judge by this means all that is within us.

But observe that the believer is the true sacrifice offered to God. "I beseech you," says the apostle in Romans 12, "then, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." Here we see the true sacrifice, a reasonable service: and besides, this holy grace, which keeps us from all that is evil and impure, makes good its influence within us; and the Christian filled with practical holiness is a witness in the world. This indeed is the true state of Christians in this world; a witness in the midst of the world of a power which not only purifies but which keeps from the corruption in it. Salt influences other things and is apt to produce this

effect; but if the salt itself lose its savour, wherewithal can it be seasoned? If Christians lose their practical holiness, what can they be good for? “Have salt in yourselves,” said the Lord. He wishes us to exorcise diligence in order that our souls, in our walk, may be thus sanctified before God, and then manifest themselves before the world; that we should judge in ourselves all that might diminish in us the clearness and purity of our testimony; and that we should walk with others in peace, governed by the spirit of peace in our relationships with them.

Chapter 10.

We find some important principles in this chapter, which terminates the history of Christ’s life. In the first three Gospels the account of the circumstances attending His death begins with the healing of the blind man near Jericho, which we find in verse 46 of this chapter. The first principle we find here is the corruption and ruin of that which God created down here; and in the relationships which He has established sin has entered and exercises its pernicious influence. The very law of Moses was obliged to permit things in the relationships of life down here, which are not according to the thoughts and the actual will of God, for the hardness of the heart of man.

But if God bears with men, incapable as they are to live up to the height of their relationships with Him, in things which are not according to His will and the perfection of the relationships which He has established, He does not condemn them, nor does He ever cease to recognise them as being that which He had established in the beginning. That which was established from the

beginning by God Himself always holds good, and He maintains these relationships by His authority. Creation itself is good, but man has corrupted it; nevertheless God recognises that which He has made, and the relationships in which He has placed man, who is responsible in maintaining their obligations. It is true that God has brought in a power after the death of Christ which is not of this creation (that is, the Holy Spirit); and by means of this power, a man may live outside all the relationships of the old creation, if God calls him to this: but then he will respect the relationships where they exist.

The Pharisees, drawing near, ask Jesus if it is permitted that a husband should put away his wife. The Lord takes the occasion to insist upon this truth, that that which God had established from the beginning of the creation was always valid in itself. Moses had allowed a man to put away his wife in the law; but this was only the patience of God with the hardness of man’s heart; but it was not according to God’s own heart and will. In the creation at the beginning God made that which was good—weak, but good. He allowed other things when He ordered provisionally the state of His people, of fallen man; but He had made things differently when He created them. God had united husband and wife, and man had no right to separate them. The bond is not to be broken.

Again they bring little children unto Him;. and the disciples forbid those who bring them. But Jesus is displeased at this. Although the root of sin be found in the children, nevertheless they were the expression of simplicity, of confidence, and of the absence of the craftiness and of the corruption caused by the

knowledge of the world, of the depravity of nature. They present to the heart the simplicity of uncorrupted nature, which has not learned the deceit of the world. And the Lord being a stranger in the world recognises in them that which His Father has created.

Now is there really any good in man? The remains of what God created are found in that which is purely creature; that which is beautiful and pleasant; that which comes from God's hand is often beautiful and should be recognised as coming from Him. Nature around us is beautiful; it is God who created it, although thorns and thistles be found in it. We find that which is lovely sometimes in a man's character and also even in the disposition of an animal. But it is a question of man's heart, of his will, of what he is toward God— and not of what is natural, the fruit of creation: there dwelleth in him no good thing. There is nothing for God; but all is against Him; and this was manifested in the rejection of Christ.

This is the lesson we learn in the account which follows of the young man who runs and kneels at Jesus' feet, asking Him, "Good master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He was amiable, well disposed, and ready to learn that which is good; he had witnessed the excellence of the life and works of Jesus, and his heart was touched at what he had seen. He had all the fine ardour of youth, he was not depraved by the habit of sin, for sin depraves the heart. Outwardly he had kept the law, and believed that Jesus could teach him the highest precepts of the law; for the Jews even believed that some commandments were of greater value than others.

The young man neither knew himself, nor the state in which man really was before God. He was under the law; and Jesus sets forth the law first as the rule of life, given by God as the measure of righteousness for the sons of Adam. The young man does not ask how he may be saved, but how he may inherit eternal life. The Lord does not speak of eternal life, but takes up the young man at the point where he places himself; the law said, “Do these things, and thou shalt live.” The young man declares that he has kept all these things from his youth up: the Lord neither denies nor disputes it; and we read that He looked upon him, and loved him. We see here that which is amiable and loved of the Lord. But what is the true state of this young man? The Lord draws the veil, and man stands before God in his nakedness; and God stands before man in His holiness. Doing anything is out of the question: how to be saved is another thing.

Let us examine what the Lord says about the state of man. The young man addressed the Lord not as Son of God, but as a rabbi, that is, as a teacher in Israel: he calls Him “Good master.” The Lord will not admit that man is good; not one righteous man can be found amongst men—no, not one. He says, “Why callest thou me good? No one is good except one: that is God.” Certainly Christ was good, but He was God, although He made Himself man in His perfect love. He was always God, and God became man without ceasing to be, or being able to cease being, God; only He had hidden His divinity in human nature (at least His glory) in order to come nigh unto us; for by faith divine power and love are more clearly manifested than ever. But here the young man comes as to a human teacher, a rabbi; and the Lord answers him in the same manner as he asks;

but He establishes this important principle, that no one amongst the sons of fallen Adam is good; it is a humiliating truth, but one of immense weight. We cannot now find a man who is good by nature; we have seen that certain qualities remain of the first creation; but that which God had created good and declared to be good has been corrupted by the fall. Man goes in quest of his own pleasures, of his own interests, and not of God and His glory; he may seek these things honestly or dishonestly in the quagmire of sin, but he always seeks to satisfy his own will; he has lost God, and looks after himself.

Then the Lord, after having presented to him the commandments of the law, in which a man has life whilst he keeps them, adds in an exhortation the commandment which made Paul feel what the law produced, in the state in which man was—in death. “One thing thou lackest,” says the Lord: “Go, sell that thou hast, and come and follow me.” Here we see the lust of the heart exposed, the young man’s true state laid bare by the Lord’s powerful but simple word, which knows and tries the heart. The fine flowers of the wild tree are worth nothing; the fruits are those of a heart alienated from God: the sap is the sap of a bad tree. The love of riches ruled this young man’s heart, interesting as it was as to his natural disposition: the base desire of gold lay at the bottom of his heart; it was the mainspring of his will, the true measure of his moral state. If he goes away grieved and leaves the Lord, it is because he prefers money to God manifested in love and grace.

How solemn a thing it is to find oneself in the presence of Him who searcheth the heart! But the thing that governs the heart, its motive is the true measure of

man’s moral state, and not the qualities which he possesses by birth, however pleasing these may be. Good qualities are to be found even in animals; they are to be esteemed, but they do not at all reveal the moral state of the heart. A man who has a hard and perverse nature, who tries to control his bad disposition by grace, and to be amiable to others and pleasing to God, is more moral and better before Him than a man who, amiable naturally, seeks to enjoy himself with others in a pleasant way, but without conscience before God; that is, without thinking of Him; loved by men, but displeasing to the God whom he forgets. That which gives moral character to a man is the object of his heart; and it is this the Lord shews here in so powerful a manner, that it touches to the quick the pride of the human heart.

But then the Lord goes father; the disciples, who thought that men could do something to gain eternal life, like all the Pharisees of every age, and that man ought to gain heaven for himself, although they recognised the need of God’s help, were astonished. What! a rich man of a very good disposition, who had kept the law, and who only sought to know what was the most excellent commandment from their Master in order to perform it—could such an one be far from the kingdom of God? Could it be extremely difficult for such an one to enter into it? If we do not understand that we are lost already, that we need to be saved, that it is a question of the state of the heart, that all hearts are naturally at a distance from God, and that they seek an object, the object of their own desire far from Him, that they do not wish Him to be present, because the conscience feels that His presence would hinder the

heart in following this object; if we do not learn this truth by grace, we are altogether blind.

At the moment at which we have arrived in this passage, it was too late to keep concealed from man (at least from the disciples) the true state of his heart. This state had been manifested; man had been unwilling to receive the Son of God. Thus it had been proved that with the best natural disposition, man, even whilst preserving outward morality, preferred to follow the object of his desire, rather than the God of love present upon earth, or a master whom he had recognised as having the highest knowledge of the will of God. Man was lost; he had shewn this fact in rejecting the Son of God; and he must learn it, and that with all his most excellent qualities he cannot save himself. “Who then can be saved? “The Lord does not hide the truth: “With men it is impossible.” Solemn words, pronounced by the Lord, pronounced by Him who came to save us. He knew that man could not save himself, that he could not emerge from the state into which he had fallen, without the help of God. With men it is impossible; but then God comes in His boundless love to save us, not to conceal our state, and the need of this free salvation.

We must know our state; it is not a thing to be lightly esteemed that the glorious Son of God should have made Himself of no reputation, and have died upon the cross: the only means of redeeming and saving lost man. We must know ourselves, and know that we are condemned, in our hearts, in order to be able to understand that Christ has borne this condemnation in our place, and that He has accomplished the work of our salvation, according to God’s glory: let the state of condemnation and sin be proved, and let the love, the perfect

righteousness, and the holiness of a God who cannot tolerate the sight of sin (however patient He may be) be brought out clearly and glorified. “With men it is impossible … with God all things are possible.” By the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by this work alone, a work which the angels desire to look into, all this can be done; salvation is obtained by faith—by faith, because all is accomplished. To God be the praise! The Lord is glorified as man in heaven, because this work has been done, and because God has recognised its perfection; it is on this account that He has placed Christ at His right hand, because everything has been done. God is satisfied, glorified, in the work of Christ.

With men it is impossible, but with God all things are possible. But what an immense grace which shews us what we are and what God is! “Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” Think of this, brethren. This means that we must expect a cross in this world. Be ready to receive the Lord’s words, to take up the cross, in order to have the true knowledge of yourselves; that is, that you are lost in sin, that salvation is purely of grace, impossible for man; but that the work of salvation is perfect and complete, and the righteousness of God is upon all men who believe in Him who has accomplished it. In no part of scripture is the fundamental truth of the need of God’s salvation and of man’s state more clearly stated.

Now the Lord adds His teaching about the path of the cross, and the promises which accompany it: let us look at these. It is easy to see how much this story resembles that of the apostle Paul; only grace had changed everything in him. As to the righteousness which is by law, he was blameless; but when the spirituality of the law had operated in his heart, lust was discovered. Then

he found out that in him, that is, in his flesh, there dwelt no good thing. But being convinced of sin, God revealed His Son in him, and then he understood that what was impossible with man was possible with God; God had done for him that which he could not do himself (that is, to gain a righteousness according to the law); and this sin in the flesh is found to be condemned in the cross of Christ, and a sacrifice for sin accomplished by Him. Instead of finding himself to be lost in this state of sin, he becomes a new man.

But the young man remains in his former state, and abandons the Lord in order to keep his riches; whilst in Paul's case the things which he counted gain he counted but loss for Christ. "Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ." See here the difference between the effect of grace and human nature. There was wisdom to be found in Paul; and, notice, he did not only count all things as dung for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ from the outset, when first Christ was revealed in him, but he continued, whilst walking in communion with Him, to count all things as dung for Him.

Now follow the promises made to those who have walked thus, and the path itself, as the Lord Himself represents it. Peter suggests that they had left all in order to follow Him, as He had proposed to the young men: what should they have? The Lord declares in His answer that no man who had left house, or brethren, or sisters, etc., for His sake and the gospel's, but should receive an hundredfold such in this life, and in the world to come life everlasting. They should enjoy much more

than the wretched things of this life, but with persecutions; and thus they have the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come; not of riches, perhaps, but the true enjoyment of all that is in the world according to God's will, and as gifts from God; but they will have to do with the opposition of a world that does not know God. But those who were the first in Judaism shall be the last amongst Christians.

The Lord now sets Himself in the way going up to Jerusalem. The heart of the disciples was full of presentiments of the danger which awaited them in this city. They followed the Lord in fear and trembling, because the flesh fears the malice of a world, which, if it cannot do anything against God, can persecute those who serve Him down here. Here again we see the difference of the effect of grace in Paul, who, having given up everything for the love of Christ, rejoices in the thought of the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death, knowing and wishing to know the power of His resurrection. This the disciples did not know, and the flesh can never understand. But the Lord does not wish to hide the truth; He wishes the disciples to understand the place He was just going to take, and which they would have to take. He begins to tell them the things that should happen to Him, and what should be the lot of the Son of man. He should be given into the hands of the priests, condemned, and delivered into the hands of the Gentiles, who would treat Him with the greatest ignominy, and would put Him to death; but the third day He would rise again. Thus ends the story of the Son of man amongst men. His own people were the first to condemn Him; and the Gentiles, by their indifference, were ready to complete the

terrible act of the Saviour's rejection in this world. The people of God (the Jews) joined with sinful man to cast out the Son of God, come down here in grace. It was important for the disciples to know what should be their Master's end. The Son of man must die. This is the teaching, the foundation, of all blessing; but it was a foundation which destroyed all the hopes and all the expectations of the disciples; which shewed also that man was bad, and God infinitely good.

Now these thoughts of the disciples manifest themselves at once, and are put in contrast with that which the Saviour solemnly announces. Indeed the disciples seemed to be impenetrable to the truth up to the last; by grace they loved the Saviour, they rejoiced in the thought that Jesus possessed the words of eternal life (for even the Pharisees' system spoke of eternal life). Now all this was not enough to drive away thoughts of a kingdom which they believed would be established upon earth, nor a carnal desire of a high position close to the Lord's person in this kingdom. The Lord could not find a single person who could understand Him, who could enter into the thoughts of His heart, and could be touched by His sufferings; or could comprehend what He was explaining to His disciples about His death at Jerusalem, when He had led them by themselves apart.

James and John ask to sit, one at His right hand, and the other at His left, in His glory. There was faith in this, for they believed that He would reign; but the desire of the flesh was always at work. But the answer of the Lord, who is always full of goodness for His own, turns the fleshly question into an occasion for instruction for His disciples. He was not the only one who was to bear the cross. He alone could accomplish redemption by the

offering of Himself: the Son of God who gave Himself in His love to be the Lamb of God. But as to the path, it was necessary that the disciples should enter into the same path in which He was going, if they wished to be with Him. Here the Lord shews His deep humility and submission to the place He had taken. He had made Himself of no reputation; and He accepts this place with a willing heart, not insensible to the humiliation and the sufferings of the cross, but accepting everything from the hand of His Father, and submitting to all that should be found upon this path.

“To sit at my right hand and my left is not for me to give, but for those for whom it is prepared.” He does not possess the right of preferment in His kingdom. He leaves to the Father the right of choosing, and gives the special glory appointed to special work to those for whom it is prepared, and whom grace has prepared for this glory. His portion is the cross; and the cross can give the glory, if any one will follow Him as His disciple: this is now the lesson which His people must learn. He was subject to His Father, and received from His hand all that was prepared for Him according to His will; and if the disciples wished to follow Him, they must take up the cross which was in this path, and which is always in it. Besides, to follow the Lord Jesus, the disciple must humble himself like the Lord; not to be like the great of this world, which makes itself great apart from God, but to be the servant of all in love, as the blessed Saviour was, although by right the Lord of all. Love is the most powerful of all things, and loves to minister, not to be ministered to. It is thus that God manifested Himself, in the Man Jesus, in this path: it is our duty to follow Him. He who is smallest in his own eyes is the greatest.

Here ends the history of the Saviour's life upon earth: the account of the events attending His death begins. He presents Himself again, and for the last time, at Jerusalem both as Son of David, the object of the promises made to Israel, and also in order to be received by His people, and by the beloved city: but in fact to be rejected, and put to death. Up to this time (v. 45) He spoke of "the Son of man who had come to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." But now He presents Himself in the only relationship in which He could be with His people according to the prophecies.

He enters by Jericho, the cursed city, but He enters it according to the grace which surpasses the curse; indeed He was going to bear it Himself. The Son of David comes in grace, with divine power, able to accomplish all things, but in humility and lowliness. He answers, therefore, to this name of Son of David, shewing forth His power in grace in healing the blind man. The crowd accompanying Him does not wish Him to be disturbed, but He stops and listens to the needs of His people in His grace. He orders Bartimaeus to be brought, who runs to Him with joy. His felt needs make him run to Christ, who is just the One to meet his needs, and to apply an effective remedy.

The blind man was a speaking picture of the dark state of the Jews; but in that which took place we see the Lord's work in producing by His grace the feeling of need in the heart of a Jew at that time. No doubt it is true for every time, but especially in this case, of the Jews in their state at that moment. The crowd, when Bartimaeus asked what the noise was, said to him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. This was a name which did not convey any idea to the Jews; Nazareth was

rather a name with which reproach was connected. But there was faith to be found in the blind man's heart, according to the place that Jesus took with regard to His people: the man says, "Son of David." He recognises the truth that Jesus of Nazareth had the right to that title. Jesus responds to his faith, and heals the blind man. He receives his sight, and follows Jesus in the way.

This is a touching picture of Israel's position, and of the work which was going on in the midst of this people. The Son of God, the Son of David according to the flesh, the fulfilment of the promises was come in grace, and was able to heal Israel. There, in the place where the Son of David was recognised, the power which He brought with Him, and which was in Him, took away blindness. Israel was totally blind; but divine power was present to heal; and if there was faith enough to recognise the Son of David in Jesus, the blindness vanished. It is beautiful to see grace enter there where the curse had fallen; but it is grace which works there where Jesus is recognised as Son of David; grace which opened the eyes of the blind man, from henceforth made His disciple.

Chapter 11.

We have already seen that the Lord assumes here the title of Son of David, a name which spoke of the accomplishment of the promises and constituted Him true king of Israel. The name which He took habitually and by preference was that of Son of man. This name had a much wider signification and announced the right to a power and a lordship much more extensive than those of the Son of David; it put Christ into strict relationship with all men, but asserted His right to all the glory that belonged to the Son of man according to

the counsels of God. In Psalm 2 we find the two titles, of the Son of God—the one which was given to Jesus as born down here in this world, and that of King of Israel, though in rejection. Then in Psalm 8 (after shewing forth the state of His people in Psalms 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) we see His glory, the extent of His power, as Son of man, who is set over all things. In Daniel 7 we find again the Son of man brought before the Ancient of Days, from whose hand He receives dominion over all nations.

In chapters 11 and 12 of the Gospel by John, Christ being rejected by man, God wills that a full testimony should be rendered to Him in the three characters of Son of God, Son of David, and Son of man. The first is the resurrection of Lazarus; the second at the entry into Jerusalem, seated upon the ass; the third when the Greeks come to ask to see Jesus: then the Lord says, "The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a grain of wheat fallen into the ground die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." In order to take possession of these titles, He must have His co-heirs with Him;—He must die.

In our chapter He takes the second title, and presents Himself to the Jewish nation for the last time upon earth according to the prophecy of Zechariah. He will present Himself later in the glory and take possession of the throne of His father David; but now all He does is to present Himself to His people as the One who fulfils all the promises made to them. He knew well what would be the result, and that He was about to take the larger title of Son of man; and this in order to have His co-heirs with Himself; when, according to His Father's counsels, He should take His great power and reign. But it was

necessary that this last testimony should be rendered to the people on the one hand, and to the Lord on the other, on God's part; that is, by the mouth of little children and sucklings He would take His glory, anticipating thus the establishment of the kingdom in power.

Now this king was Emmanuel, the Lord Himself, and Jesus acts here in this character. He sends His disciples to bring an ass' colt from a neighbouring village, and when its owners asked what the disciples were doing in taking it, they answered according to the Lord's command: "The Lord hath need of him"; and the man sent him at once. All was done in order that the word of the prophet might be fulfilled; because in this Gospel we have always facts presented not only as the effects of sovereign grace, as indeed they were, but as the accomplishment of the promises made to His people. Notice that a part of the verse quoted is left out; that is, two expressions which have to do with the Lord's coming in power to take possession of His kingdom. These are the words, "just" and "having salvation"; as the "just," Christ will execute vengeance upon His enemies: as Saviour, He will deliver the remnant; it was not yet time for these two things.

The disciples therefore brought the colt to Hun; and then the Lord Jesus entered into Jerusalem as king. A very great multitude, moved by the power of God, having also seen His miracles, and especially the resurrection of Lazarus, go before and surround Him, spreading their garments in the way, and cutting down branches from the trees in order to cast them upon His path, giving Him the place and glory of a king, and in fact recognising Him as the royal Messiah. An admirable

scene in which it is not the cold reasoning of man's intellect which is in question—nor is it merely the effect of His miraculous deeds, although a fruit of this—but the mighty working of God upon the minds of the crowd, compelling it to give testimony for a short time to the despised Son of God. The testimony also of Psalm 118 is cited; a remarkable prophecy of the last days in Israel, often quoted. The Lord Himself spoke of the verses which precede those which God put into the mouth of the crowd, "The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner."

There the crowd used the verse which announced the recognition of the Son of David by the remnant of the people Israel: "Hosannah!" (a Hebrew word meaning "Save now!" which becomes a kind of formula for asking the Lord's help when the true Christ or Messiah is recognised), "Hosannah to the Son of David: blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; hosannah in the highest." Now this cry recognised Jesus as the Son of David, the Messiah. Such was the will of God; that His Son should not be left without this testimony, without being honoured in this manner. Now He acts in Jerusalem according to this position.

All the city was moved, asking who this could be; and the crowds said that He, Jesus of Nazareth, was the prophet who was to come. Jesus enters the temple, and purifies it with the actual authority of Jehovah, driving out those who profaned it. He judges the nation and its rulers, saying, "It is written, My house shall be called a house of prayer, but ye have made it a den of thieves." But if He is Jehovah present in the temple, He is always Jehovah present in grace for all the needs of His people: He heals the blind and the lame. But no testimony is

sufficient to penetrate the hard covering of unbelief which envelopes the hearts of the chief of the people, when they see the miracles. Hearing the children crying “Hosannah!” they become indignant. The Lord teaches here that the time for convincing them is past, and appeals to the testimony of Psalm 8 as to this. God had foreseen and foretold these things: “Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained praise.” If the people refused Him, God took care that He should have the praise which became Him.

But all is over for the people, until the sovereign grace of God shall act to awaken a part of it in the midst of the tribulation which its unbelief will have brought upon it; and this remnant, awakened to repentance, will cry like the children, “Hosannah to the Son of David!” but then all will be grace.

According to man’s responsibility all was over, and the people judged: and this is what the Lord shews in the incident which follows. He will not stay in rebellious and unbelieving Jerusalem, but goes to Bethany where the power of the resurrection had been manifested; where He can find an object and a refuge for His heart amongst men, after that His people have rejected Him.

Then when He returns to the city, He is an hungred, and seeing a fig-tree upon the roadside, He seeks fruit but finds none at all upon it—nothing but leaves. He curses the tree, saying, “No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever”; and the fig-tree is dried up at once. This is Israel according to the old covenant, man according to the flesh; this is man in the place where God has spent all His care and employed all His means—man for whom God could give up even His only-begotten Son, in order

to get some good from his heart, and to reach him to gain him over to that which is good, and to Himself. All was in vain; He had spared the tree this year also, upon the intercession of the dresser of the vineyard (Luke 13); He had digged about it and dunged it, but it had produced no fruit. What could He have done to His vineyard which He had not done? It is not all that we are sinners; we are still sinners after that God has done all that is possible to gain man's heart. This shews us the importance of Israel's history, and our history as told by God, and that of His patience and of all His ways, except that we have afterwards the supreme testimony of His love in the death of Christ, so that we are still more guilty. Plenty of leaves, but no fruit; pretence to piety—religious forms, but the true fruit according to God's heart, that which He seeks in His own, is not to be found in man.

Israel according to the old covenant, that is, man according to the flesh, cultivated by God's care and set aside for ever, will never bear fruit for God. It has shewn itself to be useless and to have been unable to repay all the care God bestowed upon it. Man, naturally, is condemned to everlasting barrenness. This miracle is all the more remarkable, as all Christ's miracles were not only signs of power but a witness of the love of God. Divine power was there, but to heal, to cure, to free from the power of Satan and from death, to destroy all the effects of sin in this world. But all this did not change man's heart; on the contrary, by the manifestation of God's presence, it awakened the enmity of his heart against Him—too often hid from man himself in the depths of his heart. Here only do we find a miracle which bears the character of judgment.

Now all is brought out clearly; man can be born again, can receive the life of the second Adam. Israel can be restored by grace according to the new covenant; but man in himself, man in the flesh who is judged, after all that has been done to bring forth fruit, is shewn to be incapable of bearing anything good. God saves men, God gives them eternal life. Man in receiving Christ receives a life which brings forth fruit; the tree is grafted, and God seeks fruit on the grafted branch; but He has done with man in the flesh, except as concerns the judgment which must come upon him for his sins; and thanks be to God, He is free to liberate him from this state by grace, to save him by the blood of Jesus Christ, to beget him again, to reconcile him with Himself, to adopt him as His child, and make him the first-fruits of His creatures. Israel is left, and man judged; but the grace of God remains, and Christ is the Saviour of all those who believe in Him.

But what a scene is this in which Christ, the Messiah, the Son of David, Emmanuel upon earth, enters His house, there with His holy eyes looks upon all that which man does in it, and shews His indignation against the sacrilege which had made it a den of thieves. He vindicates the glory and the authority of Jehovah in driving out those who desecrate the temple. Then He finds Himself face to face with all His adversaries, who come, one set after another, to condemn Him: but they find the light and wisdom which shew clearly their position; so that, in wishing to condemn, they find themselves all condemned; and the Saviour is left free to follow up His work of grace and redemption in the presence of His adversaries now reduced to silence. But before judging them by His answers, each class of the

people shews forth the fundamental principle which would give His disciples the power to overcome the obstacles which these condemned classes of Jews would bring up against them; since outwardly the power and established order were in their hands.

“Have faith in God,” says the Saviour, when Peter wonders that the fig-tree is so soon dried up. All the power which presented itself to the weakness of the disciples would vanish before faith. A most important principle in a Christian’s walk and service: only this faith must be exercised without any doubt at all, bringing God into the scene; and must not be the motion of the will, but the consciousness of the presence and of the intervention of God. Thus it happens that, where faith is found, and that requests are made by faith, the effect follows surely. Yet with all this, the presence of God is the presence of a God of love; and when we pray asking that our desire may be accomplished, we must be in communion with Him, and then we realise His power in answer to faith, and then the spirit of forgiveness towards others is found in the heart. For example, if I were to cherish revenge upon my enemies, I could not hope that my prayers should be answered; and even if I were heard, I should be punished. God would not intervene in this manner, for He would refuse such an evil desire; or even if He found it well to answer the prayer, we should draw down the chastisement upon ourselves. For God in His government always acts according to His character.49 Now He enters again into Jerusalem; He will not lodge in the city now given up by God. Here He begins to pass in review, to examine all the heads of the people, of which I have spoken; and first of all we find the examination of the authority which

sets itself up against His own. He walks in the temple, where the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders come, and ask Him by what authority He does these things, and who has given Him this authority. Thus we see them set one against the other; the authority of either is questioned. The official authority, that which is outward, was in the hands of the priests; the truth and obedience to God were in Jesus. If His power had been manifested already, it shewed no sign of avenging itself at present: it was useless to shew any more signs of power; they were already condemned; having seen sign after sign, and having hardened themselves in unbelief, it was now high time for judgment, not indeed of its execution, but of moral judgment; they were left without an answer.

The heads of the people ask by what authority He had purified the temple. There was no zeal for the holiness of God to be found in them, plenty of zeal for their own authority; and this is characteristic of prelates—they think about their own authority and not about God. The Lord Jesus thought only about the authority of God; and that which He did was the effect of it. If the conscience of the rulers had not been hardened, even though they had not been pleased with that which the Lord had done, they would have kept silence, ashamed of the state in which the temple was found to be whilst under their care. Having rejected the Lord, they could not recognise His authority; proofs were useless, from this time forth. But the Lord’s divine wisdom makes them recognise their own incapacity to resolve questions relating to authority and divine testimony.

He asks if John the Baptist’s mission were divine. If they said, Yes, then John had witnessed to Jesus; if no, their

authority was compromised before the people. Where was their right to ask, “What is the truth?” They knew it; yet they were glad enough to have the honour, long lost, of having a prophet in the midst of Israel. To own their sins did not suit them; and so the light was soon put out for their hearts; but the people always accounted John to be a prophet. Thus they dared say neither Yes nor No. This was their confession, that they were not able to judge of the claims of a man who professed to have a mission from God; because they could not say whether John was a prophet or not. If this was the case, Jesus need not answer them, nor satisfy them about His mission, as persons armed with God’s authority, to which one is bound to tell the truth.

Chapter 12.

The incapacity and incompetency of the governors among the Jews is clearly shewn forth. They had pretended to judge the Lord, but the word of divine wisdom in His mouth had judged them and compelled them to confess their incompetency. Now the Lord begins in His turn to shew all the classes of the Jews the state in which they were, and first that of all the people. Israel had been Jehovah’s vineyard; He had let it out to certain husbandmen in order to receive its fruit in due season. He had done all He could for His vineyard; it was impossible to do more than He had done. Israel enjoyed all the privileges which a nation could enjoy. At fruit-time, the Master sends His servant to receive the fruit of the husbandmen.

The prophets sought these fruits from the people on God’s part, for He was Master of the vineyard; but the husbandmen took one servant and beat him, they killed

another, and rejected all of them. Thus Israel treated all God's servants sent by Him to call them back to their duty. At last, having yet one Son, His well-beloved, He sent Him also to them, saying, "They will reverence my Son." But they took Him, killed Him, and cast Him out of the vineyard. They wanted to take possession of the vineyard by killing the rightful heir.

Let us look a little into this parable. With what dignity and calmness the Lord exposes the past conduct of the people of Israel, and also their conduct at that very moment! He was ready to suffer, He had come to die; but His enemies' acts must be clearly shewn forth; they filled up the measure of their iniquity with their eyes open. Poor Jews! God in His sovereign grace will have compassion upon them, and will restore His people (by a new covenant) to its place of the people of God owned by Him. Mark always narrates everything rapidly. The consequence of Israel's sin is shewn; but we know from the other Gospels that the Jews in their answer were obliged to pronounce their own sentence; and that they understood well what the parable meant. Here the simple fact of their ruin is told, and that of the rejection of the Christ, the Son of God. The Master of the vineyard, the Lord of Hosts, would come and destroy the wicked husbandmen and would give His vineyard to others.

Then He quotes once more Psalm 118, and asks the chief of the people (a question which applied directly to Himself), "Have ye not read this scripture?—The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner: this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes." What a plain prophetic declaration of the position of Israel and its consequences! All Israel's

history, presented in brief, perfectly described in a few verses: all their conduct from Moses' time till the cross set forth in a few words; their sin towards Jehovah, towards Christ, towards the prophets, and the fearful consequences for the nation, and God's ways towards it. God takes away all its privileges, and gives over His vineyard (where He would seek for fruit) to others. Thus with this great fact of man's sin and Jewish unbelief—that is, with the rejection and crucifixion of the Lord—He would be exalted to the right hand of God, and would become the head of the corner. Here also we have the key of Old Testament scripture by prophecy; for with a single glance we see all God's ways communicated to spiritual intelligence. It is only divine wisdom and divine revelation which can reveal to us God's thoughts and man's deeds, and which can announce them to us.

We have seen that all classes of the Jews come, one after the other, to judge the Lord; but in fact to be judged. The Pharisees and Herodians present themselves first to catch Him in His words. They did not dare to lay hands upon Him, although they would willingly have done so, because they had fully understood that the parable of the vineyard and husbandmen had been spoken against them; but the people were still under the influence of His words and His works. The rulers feared the people, slaves not merely to their own passions and unbelief but to the people itself; and they feared still more to do anything against the Lord, believing that the people would favour Him, since they had neither the power of faith, nor the freedom which is the result of uprightness; but they were dependent on the favour of the people.

The Lord's hour was not yet come. They sent certain spies to catch Him in His words. The Pharisees, rilled

with pride as to the privileges of the people, and ever ready to stir up it against the Romans, flattered its passions. They were subjected to the Gentile yoke on account of their sins, and were no longer recognised as God's people. The promised Messiah had been sent in the person of the Lord, and they had not been willing to receive Him, because He manifested God upon earth, and their hardened heart did not wish for God; they wished to possess the glory of being God's people, but not to receive God and submit themselves to Him. The rebellion of their heart against God was united to the rebellion of their national pride against the Gentiles.

The Herodians, on the contrary, accepted the Roman authority, and did not trouble themselves about Israel's privileges: but they were ready at all costs to seek the good favour of that powerful people, who held the people Israel under its heavy yoke by God's judgment. Now if the Lord had said that they ought not to pay tribute, He would shew Himself hostile to the Romans sway, and the Herodians would be ready to accuse Him; if He said that they ought to pay, He was not the Messiah who should free His people from the hated Roman yoke. They did not think of any other deliverance: and hence He would have lost the favour of the people. The Herodians and Pharisees were reconciled for the purpose of getting rid of the Lord: but divine wisdom answers to every difficulty.

The Jews ought to have submitted to the yoke which God Himself had placed upon their neck until the time when grace should free them, and they should receive the Deliverer who should come according to God's promises; and until these should be fulfilled they must humbly render to God His due, always accepting their

chastisement at His hands. But they did neither the one thing nor the other; they were hypocrites before God, and rebellious towards men. The Lord asks them to give Him a coin with the Emperor's head upon it, and asks, "Whose image and superscription is this?" The Jews reply, "Caesar's": and Jesus says, "Render to Caesar the things which be Caesar's, and to God the things which be God's." And the Jews go away astonished. A just reply, which not only answered their accusation, but which recognised at the same time Israel's true state and the judgment of God.

Next come the Sadducees, another sect of the Jews, which did not believe in the invisible world, nor in angels, nor in the resurrection: God had given a law to His people Israel, that was all. Accustomed to the arguments of men, they did not expect to meet with divine wisdom, nor the irresistible force of the word of God. They present a case which (supposing that to be true which their folly imagined) rendered the resurrection ridiculous and impossible: for they suppose that the relationships and state of this world continue in the other. This is what men do: they mix up their thoughts with God's word, and since these thoughts do not agree with it, they think it unintelligible and reject it. But in this case a vital and fundamental truth is in question: and the Lord not only reduces His enemies to silence by the wisdom of His answer, discovering their hypocrisy, but clearly reveals the truth itself which is taught in a hidden manner in the Old Testament, and furnishes it with His own authority.

Everything depends upon this truth; it is the evidence that Jesus is the Son of God, and that God has accepted His sacrifice. It is the victory over death: all that belongs

to man's wretched condition is left behind; it is the entry into man's new estate according to God's counsels; the introduction into the eternal state of glory and full conformity of Christ. It is true that the wicked will be raised for judgment, but the Lord looks upon His own and their state, as also does 1 Corinthians 15. The Lord means to say that the Old Testament contains the revelation of this truth. As to His person it is clearly taught in Psalm 16; but it is said that the Sadducees only received the law of Moses; now this law first of all has to do with that which God had established upon earth for His earthly people: and life and incorruptibility have been brought to light by the gospel and by the resurrection of the Lord Himself. And although this light was clouded in Old Testament times, nevertheless it was not wanting to those who, pilgrims and strangers upon earth, sought a better country and a heavenly city. The immediate teaching referred to God's government upon earth, but by faith the hearts of the faithful could amply find in it that which they needed to point them towards an eternal and heavenly country.

The Pharisees believed in the resurrection, and, as to this, they had the understanding of the truth; but the Lord wished to shew that if the Sadducees only received the law, the law itself, God had at all times given that which was enough to lead the spiritual understanding to expect better things than the earthly, and by faith to bring it into closer relationship with God than could be enjoyed in His government either of the world or of His people, however real this government might be. The Lord then condemns the Sadducees entirely; they were quite ignorant of the scriptures and of the power of God. The Lord first reveals the truth; as soon as a person is

raised from the dead, he is like the angels and it is no longer a question of marrying or giving in marriage. Then he shews that in its first elements the first expression of the relationships of God with men (when God spoke to Moses) contained a life beyond death, and consequently the resurrection; since man consists of body and soul, according to God's counsels. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, had been dead a long time, but God was always their God; and yet they were still alive; and they would not consequently remain always under the power of death, but would rise again.

The Sadducees, who only believed in the law, needed a clear proof of the truth taken from the law itself. And whatever may be the truth as to the Sadducees, it is important for us to understand that from the beginning, when God enters into relationship with man, sin and death having entered, God always takes resurrection ground. There is no other true foundation of blessing. The very promises made to Israel are founded upon this truth; at least the fulfilment of them (Acts 13:34). Thus the first thing which the gospel reveals is rooted in the first distinct manifestation of God in relationship with men, a relationship founded upon redemption (an external thing in Israel, it is true, but eternally accomplished in Christ). But as the great truth of Christianity, the new state of man, is established by the Lord's word, so also the perfection of the law, as the standard of man's duty, is brought into fight.

One of the scribes, who had heard the Lord's reasoning with the Sadducees and perceived that He had answered with true and divine wisdom, drew near and asked Him, "Which is the first commandment of all?" The scribes believed that the commandments differed in value, and

that some were worth more than others to make up the sum of righteousness to which a man ought to attain. The Lord answers again in this instance without turning back the question upon those who asked it to their confusion, but He establishes the two great pillars of man's responsibility: the unity of God, and man's duty towards Him and towards his neighbour. This was Israel's faith, and his duty towards all. The Lord does not quote the ten commandments, but the great principles of the law as to the whole duty of man. The Lord knew how to bring them out, divinely hidden as they are in the books of Moses; Deut. 6:4, 5; 10:12; Lev. 19:18.

The sense of duty was perfect in Him, as also grace and divine love; One greater than these. It is beautiful to see this perfection in the Lord: the grace and the love of God were manifested in all His life; we have seen them. But here we find also the perfect rule of walk and of the duty of man upon earth according to the law; not that which was evident to ail men (that is, the ten commandments, which are the first thing to come to mind), but principles scattered here and there throughout the books of the Old Testament, which shone out everywhere for Him—for a heart which understood and possessed the perfection of manhood before God; for He shewed forth divine perfection before men. His heart saw the one, and understood it, whilst the expression of the other sprang naturally from the same heart. The conscience and heart of the scribe are touched; he gives testimony to the perfection of the Lord's reply, adding that to do thus was worth more than sacrifices and burnt-offerings. He was not far from the kingdom of God. A heart which understands God's thoughts about man loves that which

God loves; the moral difference of that which is good is far removed from the capacity of receiving that which God reveals for the blessing of His people. Now from this time forth they durst ask Him no question. The Lord's wisdom was too great for their hearts.

But the Lord in His turn asks them a question, and all the truth relating to His and to their own position depended upon its answer: "Whose son is Christ?" The Jews said, "David's." It was true, but then the Lord said, "How then doth David call him his Lord if he is his son?" Jesus was the Son of David, but He must sit upon the right hand of God as Lord in man's nature. This was the key to the situation. But the Lord's relationships with the Jews were at an end; each class had presented itself before Him and had been judged.

Verses 31-40. Here the Lord denounces the scribes who corrupted the word of God which they pretended to explain; they took the form of godliness, and sought their own glory and other people's money, even that of widows, to whom they obtained access under the pretext of piety. For this cause their judgment would be all the more terrible; but God does not forget His own in the midst of the hypocrisy of the seeming religious. They may make mistakes: perhaps the widow's mite helped to pay Judas; but it was given to the Lord, and the widow's heart which was occupied about the mite did not escape the Lord's eyes, nor the notice of His love. The rich had given much, but the widow offered herself as a living sacrifice to the Lord; she gave all her substance. Perhaps she might have employed better means, but she gave her mite from the bottom of her heart to the Lord, and it was received on His part: we should think of this.

Chapter 13.

We have seen the people judged, each class brought by God's hand into the Lord's presence to receive their judgment; we have seen them morally condemned by the word of God and by the blessed Lord's wisdom. But the iniquity which drew forth the execution itself must cause many difficulties to the disciples. They would have to walk in a way full of dangers, and they are warned themselves here how they may escape the judgment which was about to fall upon the beloved people for their sins. The Lord would no longer be present to guide them; but His heart could not leave them in ignorance either as to the path or as to the difficulties they would have to encounter. And the testimony which Jesus gave of it would make the difficulties and dangers a proof of the truth of His words, and an encouragement for their hearts when they should find themselves in the trouble.

But the Lord does not stop at the fulfilment of the judgment soon to be realised, but opens up the ways of God up to His coming, when Israel shall be blessed again after having passed through such a judgment that a little remnant only of the people will be left; and the power of the beasts (that is, of the Gentile empires) will be destroyed, Satan bound, and the world will rest in peace. Nevertheless it is more as a warning to His disciples that the Lord speaks here than as an announcement of the peace and rest of the world after the execution of judgment.

The disciples, accustomed to see in the temple the house of God and the glorious centre of their religion, full of wonder, point out to the Lord the beauty of the buildings and the size of the stones, and, as often happened, they

give to the Lord the opportunity to communicate God's thoughts to them about the times and the state of the guilty nation. He announces to them clearly the destruction of the temple as a certain fact; but when the disciples asked when that should happen, He speaks of the people's state up to His coming, as far as this history has to do with the service of His disciples. In general that which is said is similar to that contained in Matthew's Gospel; but the Holy Spirit here presents the Lord to us as being more occupied with teaching His disciples.

As in Matthew we have general teaching here, which goes on to the end of the period of the proclamation of grace; then the especial sign of the final ruin of Jerusalem, which immediately precedes the Lord's coming in glory. This interest in the disciples as to their testimony and service answers to the character of this Gospel, which gives us a history of the service of the Lord Himself. The Lord does not immediately answer the disciples' question, but warns them of the dangers they would encounter in their service, after His departure. Satan would raise up false Christs to deceive the Jews, and many should be deceived. They would have to be on their guard. Wars and rumours of wars would take place, but they were not to be troubled about this; these things must happen, but the end should not be yet. These were the beginning of sorrows, but not the end.

He does not speak of the mission of the apostle Paul, but of that of the twelve in the midst of the Jews; only the gospel must be preached to all the nations before the end. The fact is asserted, without its being said how it ought to be fulfilled. We know that it will be the gospel of the kingdom, as it might have been preached during

the Lord's lifetime. Here is the simple announcement of a testimony of the gospel sent to the nation before the end should come. But the consequence of this testimony, as far as the disciples were concerned, would be persecution; they would be beaten in the synagogues and accused before kings and governors for a testimony to them. This is the means which the Lord uses to carry the gospel to kings and to the great of the earth. The preachers are not the great of the earth, and His disciples would have always to preserve their true character; in this they would appear before kings and rulers as prisoners to give an account of their faith.

Thus the apostle Paul appeared before the Jewish council, before Festus, Agrippa, and finally before Caesar. But the possible result of the preaching of the gospel was not all. The revelation of God in the person of Christ, or in the preached word, awakens the enmity of the human heart. So long as God is not revealed, everything is tolerated; but when He is revealed, man's will rises up against His authority, and against the pressure which this revelation exerts upon a conscience not at rest; and the closer the relations are, the greater is the hatred. This hatred breaks all the ties of nature: brother would give up brother to death, and the father his son; the children would rise up against their parents and would put them to death; and the disciples would be hated of all men for the Saviour's name.

What a testimony to the state of man's heart! If one speaks of the name of Jesus and of His love, of the love of Him who came to save us, the hatred of man's heart breaks all barriers; it refuses to recognise and tramples down all natural affections. But the time of deliverance will come, and here it is an earthly deliverance that is in

question. It is still better for us; if we are killed, we go to be with the Lord; if He comes, we shall be glorified with Him. But here the Lord speaks of the testimony and service of the apostles in the midst of the Jews. In whatever way we look at it, there remaineth a rest for the people of God. But there is more; God would be with them in the way. When the disciples should be in the presence of the magistrates, they were not to meditate upon that which they ought to say; it would not be necessary to prepare discourses; the Holy Spirit would be with them; and it should be given them what to say at that very moment.

Here is the picture that the Lord draws of the service of His people in the midst of the Jews up to the end; He adds that the gospel shall be preached to the ends of the earth. But now in verse 14 He comes to a more precise and definite notice of the events which should happen in Jerusalem at the end. “When,” He says, “ye shall see the abomination of desolation standing where it ought not (let him that readeth understand), then let those who are in Judaea flee to the mountains.” Here we must look at Daniel’s prophecy which speaks of this abomination: we find it in chapter 12. The word “abomination “simply means idol; and it is called abomination of desolation because it is the cause of the desolation of Jerusalem and of the Jewish people.

The Jews will receive the Antichrist. The Lord said, “I have come in my Father’s name, and ye have not received me; if another come in his own name, him will ye receive.” Then under the influence of Antichrist they will turn to idolatry again. The unclean spirit which came out of them after the Babylonish captivity will enter into them again with seven spirits worse than

itself, and the last state will be worse than the first; Matt. 12:43-45. They will then set up an idol in the most holy place, where it ought not to be placed, and God's judgment will fall upon the people and city. The desolation will be complete: "There shall be trouble such as never was." And Daniel says, "At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people, and there shall be a time of trouble such as never was…" This trouble must last for a time, times and a half, that is, three and a half Jewish years, or 1,260 days, or 42 months. Then those who are written in God's book shall be saved—those who shall have endured to the end in spite of the difficulties, sufferings, and the oppression of the Antichrist and Gentiles as the Lord had foretold.

In the meantime, during the time of their general service, the Holy Ghost would give them all wisdom, and even the very words they would need. The Lord's goodness here is very remarkable; we find the Lord thinking even of the weather in the midst of this terrible judgment, so terrible indeed that nothing like it has been known in the world's history. He tells them to pray that their flight be not in the winter. He does not speak here as in Matthew of the sabbath, because Jewish things are not so much in view here as in that Gospel. He thinks of those who are with child and of those who give suck in those days. Ah! how great is the Saviour's compassion; nothing escapes His gracious memory. Whilst warning His disciples of the most terrible judgment, He thinks of all the difficulties they would meet upon the road He teaches them to take.

But the Lord has shortened these days, or no flesh could be saved; but He has shortened them for His own elect's

sake. Then to give a hope of deliverance and of escape from sufferings, false Christs and false prophets would arise and would perform miracles and signs (so great is Satan's power when God permits) to seduce if possible the very elect. But they had been warned; and now after this unparalleled tribulation which should come upon Jerusalem, the end of the dispensation would come; all established authority should be overturned by God's judgment. The order which He had established for the government of the earth shall be thrown into confusion. The signs of His judgment appear.

Then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. The Lord appears to take possession of the earth, which He not only has created, but which He has acquired as His own as Son of man by His death. But that which is specially announced here is that He will send His angels to gather together His elect from all parts of the world. It is always a question here of the land and of Israel: the blessing of the Gentiles and of the whole world will take place, but it is not the question here. Our place is a far higher one: when Christ shall appear, we shall appear with Him; Col. 3:4. The Lord will have already gathered us to Himself in the air, He will have glorified us already and made us like Himself, according to His boundless grace which has acquired this glory for us according to the eternal counsels of a just God; we shall be like His Son and with Him for ever, the firstborn among many brethren; but here He speaks of the elect in the midst of Israel, dispersed amongst the Gentiles.

All here has to do with the earthly people. "This generation," of which verse 31 speaks, is the perverse and unbeheving generation of the Jews, which indeed

remains even to our day a race separated from all the others. They dwell amongst the nations, but they remain ever a separate people, kept for the fulfilment of the counsels of God. We find this fact and the force of the word “generation “in Deuteronomy 32:5-20: “It is a perverse and crooked generation.” And as regards the judgment under which the nation lies, after that the Lord has pronounced these words, it is said in verse 20, “I will hide my face from them, I will see what their end shall be: for they are a very froward generation, children in whom there is no faith.”

The three times and a half make up the time which the goodness and mercy of God have shortened, the last half-week of Daniel which remains still unfulfilled. After that the abomination shall have been set up in the most holy place, where it ought not to be, there shall be three years and a half; and after that, some days to purify the temple. Thus the remnant of the Jews will have the consolation of knowing in the midst of the great tribulation that it will only be for a short time. But we are quite ignorant as to when this solemn moment will come; it is not revealed; God alone knows when it will be. The Lord sends out the disciples in connection with the Jews; and when they should see that these events were beginning to be fulfilled, then should they know that the time was drawing near.

“Heaven and earth shall pass away; but my words shall not pass away.” The destruction of Jerusalem under Titus the Roman emperor was something like this, but the Lord’s prophecy was in no wise accomplished. First of all, the Lord did not come after this event; then also that about which Daniel had spoken had not come to pass. Whether we count 1,260 days or 1,260 years after

the destruction of Jerusalem, nothing happened at that time; and then there cannot be two tribulations “such as never were.” In Luke’s Gospel we find first of all the destruction of Jerusalem and the present state of the Jews; nevertheless he does not speak of the abomination of desolation; but he distinguishes very clearly the siege under Titus from the coming of the Lord much later on. Mark’s Gospel speaks first of all the disciples’ service up to the end, and then of the final tribulation, beginning with the fact of the setting up of the abomination of the desolation where it ought not to be; this begins at verse 14.

We find this time of tribulation in Jeremiah 30:7; but in the trouble which came upon the nation at the destruction under Titus the Jews were not saved. In Daniel 12 we find again deliverance and the intervention of God by means of Michael; and this will happen at Christ’s second coming. The only passages which speak of the great tribulation such as never was are Jeremiah 30:7, Daniel 12:1, Matthew 24, and Mark 13; all these refer to the last days terminated by the manifestation of Christ.

Lastly the Lord exhorts them to watch and pray, for they know not the hour when this time should come. He was like unto a man going upon a journey, who left His house (we see that the earth and Jerusalem are in question), and who gave authority to His servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. This is a picture of the manner in which the Lord has left His disciples in the midst of the Jews. But that which He said unto them He says unto all, Watch. This is the exhortation for us; we are called to wait for the Lord, not knowing when He will come back, lest He find us

sleeping. May grace work in our hearts, so that we may be expecting His coming with real desire to see Him; may we walk in such a manner as to be able to rejoice always at the thought of His coming! May it never be too soon for us!

Chapter 14.

Let us go back to the history of the Lord's life, and to the last days of this blessed life. Two days after was the passover, and the chiefs of the Jews sought to kill Him; nevertheless they feared to stir up a tumult amongst the people, because they felt that His doctrine and miracles had produced a powerful effect in their hearts; they said, "Not on the feast day, lest there be a tumult among the people." This was their opinion, but not God's. The Lord must die as a true paschal lamb slain for us. Besides, He must die the very day of the passover, to surpass the sacrifice of the law, which commemorated the deliverance from Egppt, and which prefigured an infinitely more precious deliverance; that is, the deliverance from guilt before God, and from the dominion of sin.

The Saviour's death drew near, and feelings of affection and of iniquity developed themselves on one side and the other. Here we see Mary, who used to sit at Jesus' feet to listen to Him and to understand His words. There her heart had drunk in the instruction which flowed from Jesus' heart; and Jesus, the source of all blessings, was the object which had fixed her heart, and she had felt it in her affections. The grace and love of Jesus had produced love for Him, and His word had produced spiritual intelligence. Now this love for the Saviour made her sensible of the increasing hatred of the Jews.

The disciples knew that these sought to kill Him, but Mary felt it; not that she was a prophetess, but her heart felt the presentiment of that which man's hatred desired, and she did what she could as a witness of her contrary sentiment; and the Lord makes this act of love speak wherever the gospel is announced in the world.

It is sweet to enter into the house where this family dwelt (here this was done in the house of Simon the leper), this family beloved of the Lord, for it was the refuge of His heart when, rejected by the people, He could no longer recognise the city which He had loved so long: He was accustomed to live with this beloved family. Martha, who seems to have been the eldest of the sisters, occupied with much serving, faithful and beloved of the Lord, but not very spiritually-minded, understood but little of that which filled His heart. Mary used to sit at His feet to hear His teaching; and the Lord had raised from the dead their brother Lazarus. Thus Mary's heart attached itself to the Lord, and became the expression of the little remnant which, united to Jesus Himself, followed the progress of God's ways; it did not stop at the hopes or thoughts of the Jews, but although the intelligence which the Holy Spirit would give was still wanting, it followed the Lord closely, and thus was ready to receive all when the revelation should be made.

It has been remarked that this Mary was not at the sepulchre seeking a living Saviour among the dead. It is always thus; hearts attached to Jesus for the love of being near Him receive from Himself the revelation of His wisdom and glory, when the time comes for it. It is blessed to remark also that the Lord, although He were God Himself (all the fulness of the Godhead dwelt in Him) was really a man, perfect and holy in everything,

and in every thought: nay, He was the source of every good thought. He was not on this account insensible to these intimate affections; there was the disciple whom Jesus loved, and He loved to speak of it; the Lord loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, and their house gave a rest to His heart when an ungrateful world and a rebellious people had rejected Him. A fruit of His grace without doubt, but none the less dear to His heart on that account.

But alas! that which is a savour of life unto life is a savour of death unto death. That which Mary expended in love to the Lord awoke the avarice of Judas, for it was a loss to him. Others also fell under Judas's influence, led away by his evil thoughts; but the Lord justifies the woman. "She hath done what she could," says the Lord, full of grace; and her devoted-ness to the Lord should be recognised in all ages. When the Lord in His divine love gave Himself, she by grace did all that a heart consecrated to Him could do, and her name must accompany the Lord's in the act which is the most powerful testimony to His eternal love. Although that which she could do were but little, a little is never forgotten of the Lord when the heart is faithful.

Verses 10-12. Now all hastens on to the end. Judas, urged on perhaps by the force of the bribe, but in reality urged on by the devil, goes away to betray the Lord. Good and evil are accomplished; they are accomplished at the cross. No conscience, no fear of God arrests the chiefs of the Jews on their way of iniquity and opposition to the Lord of glory; they consent together with Judas to give him money to betray the Lord. He seeks occasion to give up the Lord into the hands of the priests without too much noise—a wretched employment truly!

Verses 12-16. But in the meantime the Saviour must explain to His followers the manner in which He gave Himself for them, and He institutes the precious memorial of His death, in order that we may always think of it; and that not only we may believe in the efficiency of this sacrifice accomplished once and for ever for us upon the cross, but that our hearts may be attached to the Saviour who loved us and gave Himself for us; thinking of Him and shewing forth His precious death till He come. We Christians are placed between the cross and the Lord's coming, securely founded upon the finished work of the former, and looking forward always anxiously to the moment when the latter shall take place.

Although the Lord had now arrived at the time of His deepest humiliation, the glory of His person and His rights over all things remained always the same. He tells His disciples to enter into the city, where they should find a man bearing a pitcher full of water. In the house where he would enter, they would find a heart prepared by grace to receive the Lord. To him they should say, "The Master saith, Where is the chamber where I shall eat the passover with my disciples?" He knows all circumstances and all hearts: the disciples find the man as He had told them, and prepare the passover.

Verses 17-21. The Lord, when it was evening, came with the twelve. It was the commemoration of the deliverance of the people out of Egypt; but the Lord was going to accomplish a better redemption, and He institutes an infinitely more excellent memorial. But for this He must die. They were all at the table together, and the Lord Jesus, full of love, looking upon His disciples felt deeply the fact that one of them who had lived in His holy

presence should betray Him. He knew well who would be the traitor, but He expresses the anguish of His heart when He says, “one of you shall betray me.” He wished to prove their hearts again and to bring to light that which was within. They believed the Lord’s words, and each one full of trust in Him and of holy distrust of himself said, “Lord, is it I?” A fine testimony of upright and tried hearts thinking of the fact and of the possibility of such a crime with more confidence in Jesus’ word than in themselves.

But the Lord must suffer all these sorrows—He does not proudly hide them, but desires to lay His sorrows as a Man in human hearts; love counts upon love. There were sorrows which could not be poured into the hearts of men, and nevertheless it was God’s will (blessed be His name for ever!) that we should know the sufferings of His Son; which, although beyond our reach, are nevertheless presented to our hearts. Thus we hear the Lord crying, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” And if we cannot reach the depths of His sufferings, we can understand that they were infinite. Now at the table the Lord announces to them His departure from the world according to the scriptures and the terrible judgment of Judas; for the accomplishment of God’s counsels does not take away the iniquity of those who fulfil them; otherwise how could God judge the world? For all work together to accomplish His counsels. Men’s evil will too is always active in doing evil. The Lord’s object, as we find written in this gospel, is not to point out the person who should commit the crime, but to make them feel that it was one of the twelve who should do it.

Verse 22. Now the Lord institutes the supper, a precious sign and memorial of His love and of His death. Up to that time, the passover had been the commemoration of the deliverance of the people out of the captivity in Egypt, when the blood of the Lamb was put upon the doors of the houses where the Israelites were. Now the blood of a more excellent Lamb has been sprinkled upon the mercy-seat in heaven, before the eye of God; when Christ, the Lamb of God, accomplished everything for the glory of God and for the salvation of all believers. The work has been done ". in the sacrifice of the cross Jesus drank the cup of malediction and cannot drink it again; He perfectly glorified God about sin; it is impossible to add anything, as though anything were wanting to complete the perfection of this work. He has borne the sins of many, and can never bear them again; He cannot offer Himself again, He is for ever seated at the right hand of God; Heb. 9:24-26. He would have had to surfer often, if His one offering upon the cross had not taken away for ever all the sins of all believers; without shedding of blood there is no remission.

The forgiveness of sins for believers is full, perfect, and eternal through the work of Christ. If we sin after having received the forgiveness of our sins, Christ prays for us and is our Advocate in virtue of this propitiation and appears in God's presence for us, as our righteousness (1 John 2:1, 2); and the effect of His intercession for us, is that the Holy Ghost works in our hearts; we are humbled, we confess our faults to God, and our communion is re-established with the Father and the Son. But the sin is not imputed as a crime, for Christ has already borne it—it has been imputed to Him. As was the case in the passover in Egypt; God said, "When I see

the blood, I will pass over you." The blood of Christ is ever before the eye of God, ever present to His memory. Thus Christ washes our feet with the water of the word, as He has saved us by His blood, when by grace we have believed. But if God does not ever forget the blood of Christ shed once for ever, He does not wish us to forget it. The Lord Jesus in His boundless grace wishes us to think of Him, to remember Him. Precious manifestation of love for us, that the Saviour should delight in our remembrance of Him, and that He has left us a touching memorial of Himself and His love. Oh, happy thought that Jesus wishes us to think of Him, because He loves us! The sacrifice cannot be repeated, but its value is ever the same before God; and Jesus is seated at God's right hand awaiting the time when His enemies shall be set as a footstool beneath His feet; and we await Him until He come to take us with Him to the Father's house; and in the supper we shew forth His death till He comes.

It is important to remark that there is no sacrifice in the present time, and that the Lord is not personally present in the bread and wine. The church of Rome says that the Lord's supper (or rather the mass, as they call it) is the same sacrifice as that which was accomplished upon the cross. But when the Lord said, "This is my body … do this in remembrance of me," He was not yet upon the cross. His blood was not yet shed, and when He broke the bread He did not hold Himself in His hands, still less Himself crucified, for He was not yet upon the cross. There is no such thing now as a crucified Christ; He is seated at God's right hand, and there is no shedding of blood now. It is a blessed fact that there is a sign, a commemoration of this, but that it should be so really

and substantially is impossible; there is no such thing now as a dead Christ.

We shew forth in the supper His death and His blood shed for us: but a glorified Christ cannot be a sacrifice; cannot come down from heaven to die; and if the bread be changed into His body, and there be a soul in it, it must be another soul; this is absurd. They say that the Godhead is everywhere, and that the substance of the body is there; but the soul is individual: this lives, feels, loves, is a single individual soul. According to Romish teaching the soul of the Lord Jesus leaves heaven; but it cannot be the same soul, and if it is another, it is absurd. The Lord says in Luke, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood”:—that is, it represents the blood—for the cup itself is not the new covenant. Thus the bread presents to us in the most striking way the body of the Lord crucified upon the cross, and the wine His blood shed for us.

Lastly, the Lord gives to His disciples of the fruit of the vine to drink; and it is called this after that the Lord had said in verse 24, “This is my blood of the new covenant.” It is quite clear that when he says, “I will drink no more of it,” He speaks of wine in its natural sense. After Supper they sing a hymn, the Lord being perfectly calm in spirit. They go out to go to the Mount of Olives. The Lord warns His disciples that this night they shall all be offended because of Him, and that they would leave Him according to Zechariah’s prophecy, “I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.” But He announces to them His resurrection, and that “after he is risen, he will go before them into Galilee.” We find a difference between the Lord’s appearing in Galilee and in Bethany: the latter is related in Luke’s gospel. It was

from Bethany that He ascended to heaven. In Galilee the Lord is always looked upon as being on the earth, although risen from the dead; and He gives to His disciples the commission to preach the gospel to, and baptize all nations. This service was not accomplished by the apostles—later on they left it to Paul (that is, the preaching the gospel to the nations) having recognised the Lord's election and sending out for this work.

We see that the commission in Mark is still different; it is connected with the Lord's heavenly power. The Lord's own work was done chiefly in Galilee; and the Jewish remnant is recognised as gathered together and accepted; then it is sent out to bring the Gentiles into the blessings which were expected from God. The announcing of heavenly blessings, salvation revealed by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven when Christ ascended there, is quite another thing. But whether the blessings be earthly or heavenly they cannot be brought in by the first man; the second Man is the only possible foundation of everything.

Now the Saviour must be quite alone in His work and sufferings, and man must shew what he is when he is not kept by God. The disciples were warned, but Peter, full of confidence in his faithfulness (and he was sincere), trusting to his own strength, would not believe the Lord's words. But the flesh cannot resist the power of Satan. The Lord would find Himself abandoned and denied; and man, however sincere he might be, would have to recognise his utter weakness: a humbling lesson, but a very useful one, and one which makes the Lord's grace and patience shine out. It is very important to recollect—and we learn it clearly here, that sincerity is not enough to keep us right; it is quite a human quality!

and we need as well the Lord's strength against the wiles of the devil, and the fear of the world. If the Lord be not there, a young girl can upset an apostle. The fear of man is a dreadful snare for the soul; and this fear worked mightily in Peter's heart. Even when he had received the Holy Spirit, he dissembled at Antioch, when some Jewish believers had come from Jerusalem.

Remark how the Lord prepared the two greatest apostles for His work! Paul tried to destroy the name of Christ from off the earth, and Peter denied Him openly after having known Him, and after having done miracles in His name. Thus it was not possible for them to talk of anything but grace: and all the false confidence in self was destroyed in their hearts. They could strengthen others by the consciousness of the Lord's grace which had borne with them and forgiven them; also they had learnt by experience what the evil of the human heart is, and how weak man is, even the Christian, without the help of divine grace. Thus the Lord says to Peter, "When thou art converted [that is, repented of thy fault], strengthen thy brethren." He failed again afterwards in such a manner that Paul had to resist him to the face; and Paul himself had to have a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to buffet him, lest he should be exalted. The flesh is never improved: how necessary then is it for weak Christians to watch, to have ever present the consciousness of their weakness, and to seek that strength which is made perfect in weakness, that precious grace of the Lord which is sufficient for us. It is not necessary that we should fall, for God is faithful and will not allow us to be tempted above that we are able; but we must watch, that we enter not into temptation.

In the scene before us, whilst the Lord was praying in agony, Peter was sleeping; when the Lord submitted Himself like a lamb which before her shearers is dumb, Peter used the sword to strike; when the Lord confesses the truth calmly and firmly before His enemies, Peter denies Him. This is what the flesh is, and the fruit of false confidence in self! Peter, too, had been fully warned. The Lord had said for the second time that, before the cock should crow twice, he would deny Him thrice. But Peter trusts in himself: “If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise.” We know that Satan’s wiles were there, for Satan wanted to sift Peter like wheat; but the Holy Ghost here directs our attention to the false confidence of the flesh of the human heart. But let us turn our attention towards the blessed Lord, the example of perfect faithfulness, just as Peter was that of false confidence and of the weakness of the flesh. We see in Jesus a true Man, although divine power were necessary in order that the human nature should endure all that He suffered without failing.

The Lord desires three disciples (those who were especially with Him and who were to be pillars in the church later on) to be with Him, and to watch while He prays. The anticipation of the cup which He was to drink, weighed upon His spirit; death, the expression of the judgment of God against sin, was before His eyes, and Satan made all this to lie heavily upon Him in order to prevent His accomplishing the work of salvation, if it were possible. The Lord felt all, and was faithful in everything; He began to be sore amazed and to be very heavy. There was no agony in Stephen’s death; it was a triumph full of peace and love; he goes to his Lord who was expecting him at the right hand of God in heaven,

praying all the while, like his Lord, for his enemies. The Lord is full of anguish at the prospect of death; and here we see what death was for Him; the reality of His work, when He bore our sins in His body upon the cross. At this moment (in the garden of Gethsemane) He was not yet bearing them, but the feeling of that which was before Him weighed upon His heart; the weight of sin and of the curse was being felt by His spirit with God, for He was still in communion with His Father. He must not only submit Himself to the righteousness of God as made sin for us before Him, and bear the penalty of it; but also He had to suffer "for His piety," in that the anticipation of the penalty weighed upon Him before He bore it. He offered Himself willingly but in obedience, for the glory of His Father, and for us in grace; He was obedient unto death. His name be praised! and it shall be eternally praised.

Stephen rejoiced, because Christ had suffered and had opened the way into heaven for him by bearing the judicial punishment of death for him; and He has done so for us also. We can understand the value of His death in the eyes of God, and we can look up to Him as Stephen did when full of the Holy Ghost, looking steadfastly into heaven.

The Lord had left the disciples, except Peter, James and John, at the entrance into the garden; but He had taken these three with Him, and told them to watch whilst He prayed. He prays that the hour may pass from Him, if it be possible. He had borne all the cups of suffering from the hand of sinners without complaining of them. His Father's favour was sufficient for Him! But this cup, was the being made a curse; the just One made sin, the finding Himself (who had always been in the Father's

bosom the object of an infinite love) forsaken of God. On account of His piety, He wished to draw back from this if possible. But if we were to escape the penalty of sin, He must bear it for us.

This penalty, however, was but an occasion and a proof for the Saviour of perfect submission and obedience. But still He says, “Not that which I will, but that which thou wilt.” He felt all, He lays everything before His Father, so that He goes through all as a trial in perfect submission to His Father. As a trial, all was over: the will of God was manifested, and the Lord’s obedience was perfect, although the work itself was still to be accomplished. The disciples were unable to cross even the shadow of the trial; and all men His enemies. Satan was there in all his power, and above all, there was the curse to be borne for sin, before Him. All was trial, but He, in subjection to His Father’s will, shewed forth His love to Him.

We are allowed to witness the exercise of heart of the Saviour, and to take part, in our weakness, in the anguish of His heart, although He was alone in the trial itself: immense grace! In the work He must be quite alone: and here too He is alone, but with adoring hearts we can listen to the Saviour’s cry when He opens His heart to the Father about His sufferings. Ah! may our hearts be kept watchfully attentive by the Holy Spirit to the holy sighs of the Saviour! We are invited to look upon Him, to understand what He has done for us, to enjoy the feelings of His human heart and His perfection, as a true Man for us. Thus, in John 17 we are permitted to hear Him when He presents Himself to the Father, placing us in His own position of favour before Him, and of testimony before men. If the peace which

we possess belonging to this new position founded upon His finished work is so great, the privilege of hearing His cry of anguish is no less so.

Remark with what gentle words the Lord reproves His disciples. He shews Peter in the kindest way the difference between fervent courage when the enemy was not present, and the incapacity to watch one hour with his agonized Master; and He excuses the disciples with loving words— “the spirit is ready but the flesh is weak.” At the same time being full of the solemnity of the moment, He warns them also to watch and to pray lest they enter into temptation. We never find the Lord’s own sufferings preventing Him from thinking of others. On the cross He can think of the thief, just as though He were not suffering Himself: If He had not time to eat, still He always had time enough to announce the truth to the crowd which followed Him; tired at Jacob’s well, His heart does not grow weary of speaking of the living water, nor of looking into the poor Samaritan woman’s conscience. He was never tired of doing good; and He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.

But the time was come: the last time He finds them sleeping like the other times. He must experience that moral solitude in which He found Himself amongst men even in the midst of His own disciples. There is a solitude in the which one is quite alone morally, although others be there actually. The traitor was coming near; “Sleep on now,” says the Lord. “Rise up, let us go, he that betrayeth me is at hand.” The Lord must receive the last witness to the weakness of man’s heart when left to itself, and hardened by Satan. Judas betrays Him with a kiss, so terrible is the hardness of his heart! “Take him,” says he, “and lead him away safely.”

But the Lord, who had gone through all in His soul with God, is in perfect peace before men in these unparalleled circumstances. He speaks to the crowd which had come out to seize Him: He had been with them daily in the temple, and they had not taken Him—but the scripture must be fulfilled. The Lord wishes to bear witness to the authority of the scriptures; if these announced His death, He must die. The scriptures are the revelation of God's counsels and purpose as well as of all His thoughts. The Lord too, as a man upon earth, took them as the rule and motive of all that He did and said, although He was always in unspeakable communion with His Father. They are the revelation of God's thoughts for the earth and for man upon the earth; and they reveal too, his heavenly destination, and what heavenly things are. What an immense blessing to possess them!

The disciples all forsake Him, and flee. Later on, Peter followed Him afar off, and was brought into the high priest's palace. The Lord submits in perfect calmness; all had been weighed already in His Father's presence; His will made everything simple for the Lord; but no one could follow Him into the valley of death, nor stand up before the enemy's power, except the faithful Saviour Himself. It was the hour when the wicked one was allowed to have power, that the Lord might give Himself into the hands of the impious for us. The disciples fled, a young man wished to follow Him, but the more the will ventures in this path, the more it is obliged to retreat with shame. They wished to lay hold of the young man, and he fled naked. Poor Peter went further, to fall still lower, learning at the same time for his own good, what we all are. It is a good thing to think of the Lord's

anguish before God, when He opens all His heart to His Father; and we see His deep sufferings, His perfect calmness before men, the fruit of His perfect submission: men counted as nothing in it; Satan could do nothing—for the Lord had taken the cup from His Father's hands. This is most important teaching for us.

We must understand that the Lord's condemnation was a determined thing: the chiefs of the Jews sought but the means to consummate iniquity and murder under the show of justice. They sought witness against Him to put Him to death; but it was false, and the witnesses did not agree together. Many were ready to give witness, but their testimony availed nothing: the Lord must be condemned upon His own witness. It is grievous to look upon the enmity of the human heart against the Lord, who had never done anything but good to men; who had healed the sick, given the hungry to eat, raised the dead, cast out devils, and manifested divine power in doing good.

When the Son of man came, divine power, which was sufficient to drive out all the consequences of sin upon earth even to death itself, was manifested; Christ worked according to this power: He bound the strong man in the wilderness, and plundered his house: there was a power upon earth sufficient to drive away all the effects of sin; for the power of God manifested itself in goodness. But this only awakened the natural enmity of the human heart against Him: there was no motive for the death of Jesus: this enmity was the only cause. That which took away the grievous effects of sin, did not take away the sin itself from man's heart, but manifested God enough to awaken the natural enmity of the heart, and thus to shew what this heart is.

In Luke it is said also (chap. 4:13), that “the devil departed from him for a season”; but then he comes back again as the prince of this world; he had nothing in the Lord, but that the world might know that He loved the Father, and as the Father gave Him commandment, even so He did; John 14:30, 31. The devil could say to Jesus, ‘If thou dost persevere in sustaining the cause of men, I have the right of death against thee.’ Indeed the curse of God weighed down upon them, and the Lord must pass through death, and drink the cup of God’s curse upon sin, if He is to liberate man. Did He draw back from this terrible penalty of death and the curse? He felt it, but He drank it for love to His Father and us, and in perfect obedience. He entered where we were in sin and disobedience, in obedience and grace; He who knew no sin was made sin for us; the Lamb without blemish offered Himself to God for us.

Here in this chapter we find the Lord as a lamb who is dumb before her shearers. He does not answer to the accusation of His enemies; they were there with the intention of putting Him to death and He knew it; and He was there in order to give His life a ransom for many. He does not answer the accusations full of malice and falsehood, but when the chief priest asks Him if He is the Christ the Son of the Blessed, He gives full testimony to the truth. He is rejected and crucified for His own witness to the truth; but although He recognises the truth according to the high priest’s question, nevertheless He does not go beyond His position of Messiah amongst the Jews.

He added again His testimony to His position as Son of man, the position He was just going to assume at that time. We have seen that He had forbidden His disciples

to say that He was the Christ, telling them that the Son of man must suffer. Now we find the fulfilment of this, for Christ is recognised as the Son of God according to Psalm 2, but from this time forward He takes the new position of Son of man according to Psalm 8. They should see—no longer the promised Christ amongst them in grace, rejected as He is in Psalm 2, but—the Son of man sitting at the right hand of God, coming in the clouds of heaven, and manifesting His power in judgment. Only He waits, seated at God's right hand according to Psalm no, until His enemies be placed under His feet as a footstool.

We now see Him in heaven, having accomplished the work which the Father gave Him to do; we see Him at God's right hand, our sins abolished, waiting until His enemies shall be made His footstool.

The Lord confesses the truth when superior authority demands it, He is absolute perfection—the truth itself. Satan can do nothing in this case, except indeed to bring the truth into evidence in the Lord's mouth, and to be the instrument of accomplishing the work of redemption which God wished to be done: eternal thanks be to Him! As to men, the Lord is held to be guilty of death because He speaks the truth, and the truth as to the work of God's love in the sending of the Son. God's truth, as well as the person of the Son of God, and God Himself are the objects of hatred of man's heart; but the truth came by Jesus Christ, and grace in the sovereign power and wisdom of God was fulfilled by means of this hatred, a hatred in which man shewed himself to be a slave of Satan. What a contrast between religious, ecclesiastical man, and the truth and grace of God!

But let us think of the blessed Saviour who submits as a sheep which is dumb before her shearers, to the outrages which men heap upon Him without offering any resistance; He might have had twelve legions of angels, but He did not use His power. He was in a state of patient love and obedience. The most painful thing for Him was to find Himself denied by His disciple, and this was far more so than the outrages heaped upon Him by brutal and ignorant men. But whatever His suffering might have been, the weak disciple's failure did but draw down upon him the Lord's look to encourage his faith, to sustain his confidence in Him, and to produce in his heart tears of repentance instead of despair. The Lord's sufferings, however great they were, did not hinder the action of His wondrous heart. May His name be eternally blessed!

Chapter 15.

The Gospel by Mark relates very briefly the circumstances of the Lord's condemnation: this is an important fact. As soon as He has been rejected by the Jews, Mark speaks of that which took place before Pilate, to relate again that which is necessary, and to shew that the Lord is condemned here too for the testimony which He bore Himself to the truth (although it was really through the malice of the principal Jews); for indeed Pilate strove to set Him at liberty, but having no moral strength, and despising the Jews and all that belonged to them, he gives the Lord up to their will without conscience. When Pilate asks, "Art thou the king of the Jews? "Jesus answers, "Thou sayest." To the accusations of the chief priests, He answers nothing: His testimony had been given.

The Lord Jesus was soon to be a victim. All these accusations were nothing, and Pilate knew it; but the Jews must manifest the spirit which animated them. Pilate tried to get rid of Jesus and of the difficulty, by a custom which seems to have been introduced at that time, to set free a prisoner at the Passover, to please the Jews. He also sought, in making this appeal to the people, to ward off the blow of envy and malice of the priests: but in vain, for the Lord must suffer and die. The priests incited the people to ask that Barabbas should be released, and the Lord crucified. Pilate tries again to save Him, but to satisfy the people he gives Him up.

In all this the Jews are guilty; of course the Roman governor ought to have been firm, and to have acted justly, and not to have left the Lord exposed to the priests' hatred; he was careless and without conscience, and despised a poor Jew who had no friends; also it was important for him to satisfy the turbulent populace. In Mark's Gospel however, all the hatred and animosity against the Lord are found in the priests; they are always and everywhere the enemies of the truth and of Him who is Himself the truth personally. Pilate's resistance had no effect; it was God's will that Jesus should suffer: He had come for this, and it was for this that He gave His life a ransom for many. In that which follows we find the story of the brutality of the heart of man which finds its pleasure in outraging those who are given up to its will without being able to defend themselves. Besides, the Lord must be despised and rejected of men, both by the Jews and Gentiles. This proves that man would not have God in His goodness.

Again, the Jewish nation had to be humbled—and the soldiers mocked the whole nation in mocking its King.

The Lord was dressed in purple as a king, smitten and mocked with pretended honours, and then led away to be crucified. Upon the cross was written “King of the Jews”; the Lord was numbered too amongst the transgressors. What is especially brought out here is the humiliation of the king of Israel. “Let the Christ, the king of Israel, come down from the cross,” say the chief priests, “and we will believe.” Those who were crucified with Him railed upon Him: we know that one of them was converted afterwards, and that he confessed Jesus to be the Lord.

Up to verse 33 we see the Lord’s humiliation and the apparent triumph of evil. Man generally, and Israel as a nation, shew their joy in being able to get rid of God’s faithful witness, of His presence, and of the true King of Israel: but they lowered themselves in trying to degrade the Lord, whose love continued to accomplish the work which the Father had given Him to do, in the midst of the outrages, the blindness, the folly, and the wickedness of men and of His people Israel, which alas! filled up the measure of its iniquity. The Saviour’s love was stronger than man’s perverse hatred—blessed be His name for it! But from verse 33 we find a deeper work than the Lord’s outward sufferings, however real and profound they were to Him. He was left alone; there was no one to have compassion upon Him; we find nothing but desertion and cruelty. But there is a great difference between the cruelty of man, and the penalty of sin executed by God.

At the same hour all the country (or perhaps the earth) is covered with darkness. Christ is alone with God, hidden from things visible, in order to be entirely with God. He bears the penalty of our sin, He drinks the cup

of malediction for us; He who knew no sin is made sin for us. In Psalm 22 we see that the Lord, feeling fully the pressure of man's hatred and malice, turns to God; He had foreseen what was to happen, and His sweat had become, as it were, drops of blood in thinking of it. He turns to God and says, "Be not thou far from me!" but to the anguish of His soul He is forsaken of God. And never was He more precious to God—He who was eternally precious to Him—than in His perfect obedience! But this obedience was fulfilled in His being made sin for us. Never had He so glorified His Father in His righteousness and love; but being made a sin-offering, and feeling in the depth of His soul that which God is against sin, He bore the penalty of it.

Thus God had to hide His face from Him who was made sin for us. This was necessary for the glory and majesty of God, as well as for our salvation. But who can sound the depths of the Saviour's suffering? He who had always been the object of the Father's delight is now forsaken of Him! He who was holiness itself finds Himself made sin before God! But all is over, all God's will about the work which He had given to Jesus to do has been accomplished. Blessed thought! the more He has suffered, the more He is precious to us: and we love Him as we think of His own perfect love, and of the perfection of His person. All suffering was over for Him at His death; and in His resurrection all is new for us! all our sins are forgiven, and we are with Him in God's presence, and when He comes we shall be like Him in glory. But though He died it was not because His vital force was exhausted. He cried with a loud voice and gave up the ghost. All was over, and He gave up His spirit into the Father's hands; He really died for us. He

offered Himself without spot unto God, and God laid upon Him the sins of many. He must die, but no one took away His life; He had the power to lay it down, and to take it again! He gave it up Himself when all had been accomplished.

Then the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and here we see the way of the holiest opened to all the believers who were under the law. The curtain between the holy and most holy places signified that man could not enter into God's presence (Heb. 9); the death of Christ has opened a way of entry into the holiest by His blood; Heb. 10:19, 20. Immense difference and precious privilege! By this blood we can enter into God's presence without fear, as white as snow, to rejoice in the love which has brought us into this place. Christ has made peace by the blood of His cross, and has brought us to God Himself—He, the just One, who died for us unjust ones.

And again by one offering He hath for ever purified them that are sanctified; He cannot offer Himself again: if all our sins had not been cancelled by this one offering, they could never be, for Christ cannot die again. It is not a question of sprinkling— "Without shedding of blood there is no remission." The apostle demonstrates this solemn truth, saying, "Otherwise he must often have suffered since the foundation of the world, but now once in the end of the world he hath appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself," Heb. 9:26. When a man believes, he enters into the possession of this blessing, and he is for ever perfected in Christ before God: sin cannot be imputed to Him, because Christ, who has borne and expiated it, is always in God's presence for him, a witness that his sins are already put away; and

that he who comes to God through the Saviour is accepted in Him.

People say, “Then we may live in sin.” This was the objection which was made to the gospel which the apostle Paul preached: the answer to it is found in Romans 6. If we really have faith in Christ, we are born again, we have a new nature, we have put off the old man and put on the new one, we are dead to sin, dead with Christ by faith; crucified with Him, so that we live no more, but Christ liveth in us. We are new creatures: there is a divine work in us, as well as a work for us. If Christ is our righteousness, He is also our life, and then the Holy Spirit is given to us, and we are responsible to walk as Christ walked; but this does not interfere with the work of Christ for us—a perfect work, accepted of God, in consequence of which He sits at God’s right hand as a man in that glory which He had as Son with the Father before the world was. Before Christ came, God did not shew Himself, and man could not enter into His presence. Now God has come out and come to us in love, and man has entered into His presence according to righteousness in Christ.

Then the centurion’s conscience speaks, whilst all stand afar off (v. 39); all, except the disciplb who have fled, are enemies. But the loud voice of the Lord without the least sign of weakness, and the fact that He gives up the ghost to the Father at once, act powerfully upon this man’s soul, and he recognises in the dying Jesus the Son of God. Now the work is finished, and God takes care that if His death has been with the transgressors, He should be with the rich in His burial, honoured and treated with all reverence. The women who followed Him occupied themselves with Him, looking upon Him

afar off when He was crucified: and some of them, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, the mother of Joses, saw the place where His body was laid in the sepulchre. For Joseph of Arimathea had gone to Pilate to ask for the body of Jesus: more courageous at His death than during His life. This often happens; the greatness of the evil forces faith to shew itself.

But the women, notice it well, have a more blessed position still; they had followed him “from Galilee, and had ministered to Him of their substance; and we find them near the Lord when His disciples had left Him. They had not been sent to preach: but their devotedness to the Lord, their faithfulness and constant love for Him when dangers present themselves, shine forth in the Lord’s history. We find another proof that the Lord gave up His life, and that it was not taken from Him, in that Pilate wondered that He was already dead, and that he called the centurion to assure himself of the fact. When he knew it, he gave the body to Joseph, who put it in his own new tomb till the sabbath should be past.

Chapter 16.

The history of the resurrection in Mark is very short and simple. There is no doubt that more than one troop of those women who followed the Lord visited the sepulchre, one after the other. It is clear that Mary Magdalene arrived before the others, and that the other Mary and Salome were together; then came the others. Each Gospel gives us what is necessary for our faith, and that according to the special teaching which God desires to be presented in that Gospel. For instance, in John’s Gospel we have the story of Mary Magdalene, and that beautiful story is fitted to the doctrine of that

Gospel. Verse 9 of this chapter speaks of it also; she came whilst it was yet dark; here in Mark we see her at sunrise. Other women had bought spices to embalm the Lord; perhaps they had already bought some before the sabbath began, in order to rest during the sabbath day; and certainly after the sabbath was over, that is, at six o'clock, they waited till the morning to embalm Him.

But when Mary Magdalene came to the sepulchre, the stone, which was very large, had been already rolled away from its mouth by an angel come down from heaven; and the Lord was no longer there. He was risen, in divine power, in perfect calmness; all the grave-clothes which were left in good order in the sepulchre. That which God did to awaken men's attention is related in Matthew 28:2-4; but Jesus was not there. The great stone did not present any obstacle to the Lord's egress; the divine power which raised Him from the dead and the spiritual body which He then possessed, made His disappearance from the sepulchre easy.

Mark only speaks of Mary Magdalene's first visit to the sepulchre in verse 9; in verse 2, the other Mary and Salome are spoken of. Mary Magdalene had already gone away from the sepulchre to announce to Peter and John the fact of the sepulchre's being empty. These enter into the sepulchre, finding the stone rolled away from its mouth; they find an angel seated on the right hand of the place where Jesus lay, who encourages these timid but faithful women, "Fear not, ye seek Jesus… he is not here…" and then he shews them the place where He had been. It is blessed to see the goodness of God: there was still some unbelief in the women, for they ought to have understood that Jesus was risen; the angel had told them so. But this was too much for their faith; they

believed in His person, and that He was the Son of God, but His resurrection was as yet too glorious a truth for their faith. Their heart was sincere, but they sought the living amongst the dead: and here the grace of God, full of compassion, reassures them.

These women did not find Jesus dead, but the blessed testimony that the beloved Saviour was alive. They are made the messengers to the disciples of the word of the Lord from the mouth of the angel. It is the consecration of the heart to the Lord that brings light and intelligence to the soul, if we are seeking the truth and Jesus Himself. Mary Magdalene shews more consecration of the heart to Christ than the others; and this is why she is seen at the sepulchre before sunrise, and is the first of all of them to see the Lord. Moreover, a more excellent message is confided to her; she was to go to the apostles themselves to announce to them our more excellent position, our higher privilege. The Lord says to her, “Go to my brethren and tell them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father; and to my God and your God.” The disciples are here called the brethren of Christ for the first time, brethren of the risen Christ. His God is our God; His Father is our Father.

These women, although honoured of the Lord, have not yet so great a privilege; another message is confided to them. The risen Christ assumes two characters: His relationship with the remnant of Israel, and His new position as a glorified Man before the Father. In the first He appears to His disciples in Galilee, where He used to be with them habitually; in the second relationship He ascends to heaven from Bethany. The mission of the disciples too is different. Matthew presents to us the first; and, in consequence, we do not find there the

history of the ascension; Luke gives us the second, where the Lord ascends and is received into heaven. The message to the disciples is given to Mary and Salome; they are commanded not to depart from Galilee. That which happened there is not told here: the women go away afraid.

Then this Gospel gives a summing up of the other part of the story of Jesus risen, of that which is found in John's and Luke's Gospels; of Mary Magdalene's case, and of the two disciples who went to Emmaus; after that, the general mission of the apostles, who were to go and preach to the whole world. Whoever should believe and make public confession of Christ should be saved. Miracles should be performed, not only by the apostles, but also by those who should believe by their means; they should manifest, by the wonders they should perform, the power of Him in whom they believed.

Finally the Lord is received up into heaven, and sits at God's right hand. The apostles go out to preach in the world, and the Lord works with them, confirming the word with the signs which accompanied it. Salvation depended upon faith and the confession of Christ, and the Lord, when the word had been planted, bore witness to His truth by powerful signs; this facilitated faith, and left unbelievers without excuse.

49 As this thought may be a little obscure for some, it may be presented thus in other terms: "Faith, which finds an answer to its prayer, must have found God, and be in the enjoyment of communion with Him; but then God is love; and in order to realise His power to get the answer, one must know what it is to be in His presence, which faith has discovered; but this communion cannot

be known if there is no love. Consequently, when we present ourselves in faith to ask for the fulfilment of our desire we must forgive our brother that which we may have against him; otherwise, we are in God’s presence as regards His government and thus subject to the effect of our sins.”